

Pigeonhole Episode 46

[bright ambient music]

Introduction

CHORUS OF VOICES: Pigeonholed, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole.

[ambient music fades]

Trying to cook in 2018

CHERYL RECORDED: All right. I'm here in my little kitchenette, and I'm just gonna make kind of a typical dinner for myself, which is whatever I can find in the fridge or hovering around on the counter. [stuff shuffling around] Um.... [knife slowly slices onion on a plastic cutting board]

I don't know what this will become. But I do have somewhat even looking onion rings. [knife clatters on counter] Okay. I gotta take this keyboard out of the sink. It's in my way. My grip is terrible sometimes, and I knocked my tea over on the keyboard last night. At least take it out of the sink for now so it doesn't get more wet. [keyboard bangs something metal] So, I'm just gonna leave the keyboard on the toaster. Onions in the pan.

[bouncy Klezmer-like music plays for a while]

CHERYL NARRATING: That's me bumbling around in the kitchen in 2018 at the request of Dan Pashman from [The Sporkful](#). He didn't ask me to bumble. He asked me to record myself cooking. Nearly three years earlier, I emailed him to share this short semi-autobiographical comedy about how I couldn't cook anymore cleverly titled [Cooking With Brain Injury](#). Now, he was planning to feature me and my story on his show, and he wanted to get a sense of where things stood nearly a decade after I'd made the film. I had definitely improved in my ability to not completely fuck up while I patshke around in the kitchen. But I still mostly avoided doing anything creative or complicated.

For Dan, I tried to make some "tacos" based on whatever I had in my fridge on the day I was supposed to record. Did it occur to me to shop for the ingredients so I could make something I would like to eat or that would be fun for strangers to listen to me making? Of course not! Did I think to look up a recipe for something familiar? Definitely not. Never occurred to me to plan for the recording that I knew was coming and that I was genuinely excited for. I wanted to get good tape for Dan. I just kind of couldn't even find my shit, much less get it together.

So, tacos or something. I was chopping up stuff I had and putting into a pan that I had somehow managed to heat up by turning on the burner at some point later than I should have. And since your onions won't brown if you obsessively stir them, I took a break while keeping the recorder running so they could brown. Which they didn't. But anyway....

[footsteps across a creaky wooden floor, mouse clicks a few times, fast typing]

CHERYL RECORDED: I don't like this keyboard, but my better keyboard is on the toaster right now drying out. Oh! Oh! I shouldn't leave my.... Oh, my God. [running footsteps] Oh! [plastic and metal clanking] Oh, I left this plastic keyboard on the toaster. Oh, God. [clunk] Well, if I

wasn't just talking to myself right now about what I'm doing, I would have forgotten that the keyboard was on the toaster. So, thank goodness I'm narrating my life. I should try narrating my life...more often. Maybe I will not burn...keyboards on the toaster if I pretend that I'm talking to someone all the time. Okay.

[bouncy Klezmer-like music returns for just a little bit]

Current disabled food content that I love

CHERYL NARRATING: I love [Flavors of Diaspora](#), a food blog by an autistic Jewish blogger, Jonathan Katz. I devour the recipes and stories, connecting or reconnecting to food and food history. I feel extra Jewy every time I read it. I enjoy his autistic approach, writing very clearly and with all the steps to planning and cooking broken down as much as he can. It's filled with all sorts of goodies for readers and eaters and cooks with executive dysfunction. He reminds us to be forgiving of our difficulties in the kitchen and to never judge any hacks we use to get through the process like relying on pre-cut, prepackaged food.

He has a new site that focuses on safety while cooking called [Safe and Neurospicy](#). Listen to the intro to this site, would ya?! "[Neurodivergent folks](#) often get left out of food safety because writers assume you know things – which is not always the case! 'Common sense' can be both [wrong](#) and also not shared. So this site is your guide for various things so that you do not get sick, hurt, or injured from your own kitchen." I'm plotzizing over here! Can you imagine—because I am. I am really, really imagining—how much better my life would have been in the early days when the executive dysfunction was a fierce intruder into my every possible activity, if I'd had these websites to support me.

And while we're celebrating, Eater.com is releasing an evergreen series of essays by disabled folks talking about growing, making, and eating food over summer and fall 2023. It's called [Low and Slow](#). The series is curated by new cat mom Alice Wong, and I have the great good fortune to record the audio versions of most people's essays, with additional narration by Terri Hudson. These are incredible, honest, beautiful stories. Just like on Jonathan's websites, *Low and Slow* has disabled storytellers front and center, speaking their truths, rather than being filtered through a non-disabled person's interpretations. It really makes the essays feel special and welcoming, and for me, very relatable and enriching. And like Jonathan, s.e. smith's profile of Sonali Menezes for *Low and Slow* reassures me about how it's okay to cook or not cook, eat or not eat, hack how you gotta hack.

I can't remember now if I finished that email I had furiously started typing while I had one mic clipped to my shirt collar and another hovering on a stand by my loudly buzzing fridge. I totally don't remember that my hands already hurt even back then. And I for sure don't remember going back to finish cooking the meal, but the recording tells me that they did and that I did finish it.

CHERYL RECORDED: This spoon! I don't know why I've been cooking with a teaspoon. It is too small to move this stuff around, especially with the kale. Okay.

It is slightly less disgusting looking. Although I'm.... I don't know. I'm going to eat it because I don't like to waste. And as my mom would say, [fake New Yorker accent] "Oh, my Gawd, you're so skinny. Eat something, eat something, eat something." She only has that New York Jew mother accent when she's remarking how skinny I am and that I need to eat. [shuffling stuff around] Or call or write more!

CHERYL NARRATING: I piled some slimy but colorful mess from the cast iron pan onto a burnt store-bought corn tortilla and dug in. Did that sound too forced? I bit it, okay? I bit the thing.

CHERYL RECORDED: Ugh. [loud, slow crunching leading to a sad whimper] [speaking with mouth full in a quiet, despondent voice] It's not disgusting.... But I...I just.... [super sad sigh] Only the tortilla's burnt. The onions are about halfway cooked, and the frozen stuff is no longer frozen anymore! So, I would consider this a successful meal.

[back to the bouncy Klezmer-like music until the end]

A dedication and a hope to eat but not cook

CHERYL NARRATING: I'm back to making my own corn tortillas by hand, something I'd loved doing for many years before the injury. I've also since made some revolting banana bread, really yummy fried rice a couple times, and I even tried my painful hands at Hamantaschen this year. I made them the day after Judy Heumann died, so I renamed them Heumanntaschen.

I have a dedication for Judy, Jonathan, and all my disabled and chronically ill family (including my cat, RouRou, who is Jewish and hates the prescription diet he eats for his own chronic illness and insists on taking one dainty nibble at a time off my aching fingers). My dedication: I wish you nothing but deliciousness. The best gift I can give is to promise to never cook for you or anyone you know. But if you ever invite me to, say, a loud little park in New York City for a bagel or want to sip coffee over text message or you wanna help me realize that I actually do like eggs (when they're in a lovely shakshuka), I'll try to keep you the best company I possibly can so we can delight in the gift of enjoying something together.

[bright ambient theme music returns]

CHERYL: Every episode is transcribed. Links, guest info, and transcripts are all at WhoAmIToStopIt.com, my disability arts blog. I'm Cheryl, and...

TWO VOICES: this is Pigeonhole.

CHERYL: Pigeonhole: Don't sit where society puts you.

Music in the episode: "Lachaim" Kevin MacLeod (incompetech.com)

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