

Pigeonhole Episode 55

[melancholy music plays throughout the episode]

Introduction

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

CHERYL NARRATING: Taped to my computer are two stickers. I taped the stickers instead of peeling off their backing and sticking them because I intend to keep them forever, and I want to be able to move them without tearing them once this computer needs replacing in a few years. There's a Tarot deck-inspired gray cartoon tabby cat with her eyes closed and front paws stretched out. She's doing downward facing dog. Her tail points straight up, and she's floating in a baby blue sky. Two soft, lumpy, pink clouds sail by. An orange sun in the upper right corner has long, feathery rays. The other sticker is a black circle with a vibrant burnt-orange tiger face staring right at me. The tiger has that characteristic, "fuck off if you're not going to scratch my cheeks" expression that cats tend to have in photos and drawings even if they may not be feeling that energy at all. The orange is punctuated with wavy black stripes and bright white accents. Beneath it in yellow, all caps, "Tiger Power." The tiger sticker came with Alice Wong's book, *Year of the Tiger*. The sun tarot card sticker was in a gift package from her. Alice Wong loved to give gifts, and until her death on November 14, 2025, every fucking thing she did was a gift, in my mind.

My other Alice Wong memorabilia is scattered throughout my home. There's the gold cat paw-patterned masking tape, the various notepads and Post-its and other things with cats or shaped like cats. The snake plant, which is great because you don't have to water them hardly ever, but they grow so beautifully, who I named Alice. I know we Ashkenazim aren't supposed to name our children after someone who's still alive, but I assume exceptions can be made for houseplant offspring. Alice the plant has lived in my kitchen for the past four years where my cat, RouRou, can't get to her because snake plants are toxic to cats. But for a short time, RouRou and Alice the plant occupied the same space, and he never once tried to bite her. This is the only plant ever that he has not tried to bite. Fierce, fierce Alice Wong, fending off my little house panther simply by sending out your don't-fuck-with-me vibes from thousands of miles away and cross-species. Of course she had that kind of power.

There's the beautiful red and gold cards and another pop-up paper friendship card of two cats sitting next to each other that Alice sent and then told me was, "You and RouRou." This is so Alice! She sends a friendship card and says the card is about friendship, and she puts herself in the background. She was a mover and a shaker, and she put herself up in the front a ton anytime she wanted or needed to. And she stepped back to let other people shine all the time. I know this when she was my boss for a couple of years on a project, but she let me do my work in my way, to my tastes. She came at the world with her Tiger Power, and she will be forever and ever and ever missed. Thank goodness she left so many archives, so much evidence of her being here, so many stories in her words and voice and images and the platform to share so many others' words and voices and images.

Alice Wong was the queen of snacks, of snark, of unrelenting righteous rage balanced with an unending supply of love and care for others. She had zero tolerance for hate and for policies

that put her life at risk and the lives of people in the many communities she occupied. She collaborated and cooperated all the time and very well across many artistic and political movements and initiatives, whether Disability Visibility Project, #CripTheVote, Crips for eSims for Gaza. My god, the list goes on forever.

Alice was not predicted to live to 51 years old, and every second that we had her made the world a better place. My most recent conversations with her were about our strategies for dealing with menopause, about POD Access, which she conceived of and provided the seed funding for, and of course, about cats, hers and mine. I will be only one in a massively long list of people posting about her and making every attempt to document her with the care and sweetness that she documented the vibrant, diverse, intersectional disability community publicly and through her many and deep friendships that unfolded behind the scenes.

Alice Wong has died, and nothing about her legacy or her impact ever will.

Wrap-up

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

Music track: *Awake the Light* by Borrtext.

https://freemusicarchive.org/file/music/ccCommunity/Borrtext/Awake_The_Light/Borrtext_-_01_-_Awake_The_Light.mp3