

Episode 116 Transcription

Say goodbye to the food police and hello to peace. Welcome to the Love, Food Podcast, hosted by dietitian and food behavior expert Julie Duffy Dillon. This authentically engineered series is in the form of a love letter welcoming you to reconnect with food. Now pour a cup of coffee, or a margarita, and let's begin.

Transition/Music overlay

Hi and welcome to episode 116 of the Love, Food podcast. I'm Julie Duffy Dillon, registered dietitian and partner on your food peace journey. I'm so glad you're here. Thank you for connecting today.

I'm wondering how your food peace journey is going. Is it smooth sailing, bumpy, twisty and turny? Well, I know for so many people, as they are trying to make peace with food and their body, they get to a place where they really work on the idea that there's no good or bad foods. As a dietitian, I certainly believe that through and through. There are no good or bad foods. The only exception I teach my kids are things like moldy foods (*laughs*) or something like that. And, sometimes, I talk to people who are really connecting to that and feel really free with that yet they get to the place where they crave something that may be related to their diet culture days or maybe considered a quote on quote good food. Maybe they crave a salad or eating some fruit or they crave movement. Does that mean that they're going back to their old ways? Certainly for some people that I've talked to, connecting to those types of cravings, can feel very scary, can feel like an all-or-nothing experience and some magical thinking of, "well maybe this will make my body go back to a thinner kind of appearance." It's a really complicated nuanced conversation and it's so important.

I have a letter today from someone who is experiencing that and many other parts of moving away from diet culture. How it affects your family and your relationship with your parents when they are still either entrenched in diet culture or trying to recover from their eating disorder. I can't wait to share the letter with you *and* I have a really awesome special guest. Her name is Sarah Thompson. She is someone I got to know at um the BEDA conference and also on Instagram as The Resilient Fat Goddess. She is going to help answer this letter and I can't wait to hear it.

Before we get to this week's letter, a word from our sponsor:

This episode of the Love, Food podcast is brought to you by my PCOS and Food Peace course. I am opening up enrollment again today, April 23rd. Yes, I'm opening up enrollment for the PCOS and Food Peace course. I'm not planning on closing it down, so I hope you're not getting that angst feeling of, "Oh, shit, I need to hurry up and get to it." It's going to be open for a while and I hope you can check it out, see if it's a good fit for you. You can get to the information about the course by going to pcosandfoodpeace.com. You can also get access to a download where maybe you just want to learn more about my way of treating PCOS and this thing called food peace by

going to the same website, pcosandfoodpeace.com. You'll get a free download and get access to my newsletter which I send out usually once a week, and I send things in that newsletter that I don't really send anywhere else, so it's a good way to stay connected and also just get more access to opportunities and findings that we are discussing as people are making their food peace journey. If you enjoy this episode of the Love, Food podcast, I would love it if you could share this episode with someone who may benefit from its message or leave a rating or review. You can get to that by clicking on it on Apple podcast and scrolling just a little bit and you'll see a place to leave a rating or review. You can also share the episode by touching the three little dots on the right if you're listening on Apple podcast and you can send a text to someone or an e-mail of the episode. Every time you do these types of things for the Love, Food podcast, you're really giving back so I appreciate it. It helps the algorithms in the mysterious Apple podcast-land for more people to find it and I don't know about you, but I want everyone to feel at home in their own skin no matter who they are, no matter what their body looks like, and no matter their experience. I want everyone to feel at home in their own skin, so thank you advance for doing that and helping the show grow. Alright, enough of all of that. Let's get to this episode's letter.

Transition

Dear Food,

When I was growing up, I learned of your power and place. Deeply rooted in my culture and upbringing, you had the power to bring people together and were always the center of our celebrations. You were also central to our concerns. Chronic disease and eating disorders were the elephants in the room that no one talked about, but they tainted our time together, Food. They cloaked you in shame and guilt. Conversations around the table often led to talks about how bad we were, but how good we would be tomorrow.

It was always hard to enjoy you without anxiety. In my house, you were counted, measured, evaluated, commented on, compensated for, and ultimately, hidden. Bodies, as well. They weren't celebrated. They were controlled. Favorite foods were hidden or not bought at all. Financial incentives were given for pounds lost and minutes exercised. Something was wrong and out of place if I wasn't trying to be better and better always meant smaller.

My mom loved you too. She was my dessert buddy and when she asked me to hide wrappers or pastry boxes before going into the house, I internalized messages that you were meant to be hidden. Cycles of restriction, bingeing, and purging were common for her. I grew up attuned to these cycles and spent many years trying to convince her that she did not need her eating disorder.

As I reflect on this, years later, I realize I tried to convince both my parents in subtle and not so subtle ways that a person's worth extends beyond their bodies. I actively put myself at odds with my dad when he would comment on my body or eating choices. For him, it's always been about

health, but I knew what he meant. I made sure my mom heard me when I confronted him, but I was a kid and their influence was strong.

I remember the day my mom told me that she was going to get healthy. I knew she meant she was going to try and give up her eating disorder. I felt so much relief when she stopped making herself sick every day. It was like I could breathe again. I didn't want to carry the worry. Dieting was a part of her recovery or so she framed it. We joined Weight Watchers together before my 15th birthday. To this day, I don't know if she's fully recovered. For her, dieting is a way to control her naturally without compensating in other ways, but it keeps her stuck. Always feeling like she's failing. For me, it was a way to get out of the spotlight. If I was demonstrating a commitment to bettering my health, my family laid off. Even if comments persisted. They were manageable because I had evidence to support my belief that I was ok. Simply saying it was not enough. I had to prove it. Once I proved it, I was no longer the center of attention. Dieting provided a way for me to hide. That is, until I started to benefit from being in a smaller body.

By the time I was 20 years old, I had been dieting for about 5 years. Most of the time, weight cycling with the same x amount of pounds. Bigger bodies were meant to be smaller bodies after all and that belief was modeled in everything growing up. When you attained a certain body, you were seen as a better version of yourself. I believed this too. I felt like I was a better person for being a smaller person. For taking up less space.

I learned to distrust you quickly, Food. Any food other than non-starchy vegetables, became a red light or gateway food. I didn't trust any food in my house. Foods as boring as fat-free Cool Whip or cottage cheese became irresistible. Any sense of fullness or hunger were ignored and instead replaced with meals timed to workouts and meal plans with points attached. I became this beacon of life. Gleefully sharing my accomplishments, I was praised and celebrated. It was a lot of pressure.

I decided to pursue a career in nutrition because I wanted to help people heal their relationship with food. It took nearly a decade longer for me to realize that I was just continuing to put people on diets. Giving food rules like I had been given to empower them towards behavior change. It didn't work. It never worked for me. It never worked for my mom. Why would it work for my patients and clients? I was at an impasse and I felt like a fraud.

I have since found a home within the non-diet, Health At Every Size community and I once again feel excited about my job. I'm a dietitian who has experienced life both in a smaller body and now in a larger body. I believe my small body was a product of restriction and over exercise. However, there are parts of my life during that season that I miss. I miss running and I had some really delicious meals in rotation for a while. Eating regularly wasn't challenging for me then like it is now. Eating enough on a regular basis was but I prioritized meal time and I struggle to do that now. Being celebrated at a lower weight, but not at a higher weight does something to you. It makes you feel like something is wrong with you. Like your life is less and unworthy in a larger body.

People don't talk about my body now or my eating habits or movement preferences. They obsess over them if they think it's what has led to or is keeping you in a smaller body. They talk about "those people's bodies" and their lack of balanced nutrition and movement. There is something both infuriating but also comforting about not being in the direct line of fire of their attention.

I feel safer in a larger body like I somehow be a better advocate for clients and patients, but I feel like my body is marginalized. Some days I look down on myself and long for when I was more disciplined. I'm actually afraid of incorporating more movement and balanced nutrition into my life because of the potential weight changes that may result. My natural tendency is to associate all healthy change as dieting and that makes me miserable. Beyond that, I don't want people to talk about me in the way they did when I was smaller. I don't want to be their before and after poster child. I resent the high horse that I rode as a thin nutrition student and I refuse to be that type of dietitian again. In some ways, I feel like I'm not living my best life right now. There are changes that I want to make like building up endurance and stamina to run again, but I feel like something powerful is holding me back. I want people—clients, patients, students, my family to look at me and think, "she's in a bigger body but she's successful, beautiful, and capable and so I know I can be too." I almost feel as though I'll be betraying some more evolved part of me if my body changes. I almost feel as though I'll be betraying my mom who has never found peace with her body. If we both continue struggling in our own ways, at least we have each other.

Diets have a voice in my head. It's the voice of my family members telling me that weight loss is about health. That its okay. That voice is quiet, even silent until I start making healthier choices and start exercising. There are parts of my life that I feel like I'm missing out on, but how do I find peace and make changes without falling into the diet mentality? How do I let go of the past and the family that I know I can't change? Please help.

Sincerely,

Old Habits Die Hard

Transition

Hey there letter writer and fellow dietitian. Hi there, thanks for your note. It meant a lot to me that you wrote to me about your experiences and dug deep and put it all out there. You bring up some really important points that I know someone else listening has experienced the same thing. Actually, more than some *one*. There's been many people that I've talked to along their food peace journey that have struggled with this conversation and this type of history with food and I can't wait to talk to Sarah Thompson, eating disorder recovery coach and I think she's going to have some insight that, letter writer, you are going to find really helpful along your food peace journey. So let's give Sarah a call.

Transition

Sarah: Hello?

Julie: Hi Sarah! It's Julie Duffy Dillon. How are you doing?

S: Hi Julie. I'm great. How are you?

J: I'm doing fantastic. I'm excited to talk to you.

S: Same.

J: Well, did you get a chance to read this letter?

S: I did. It's a really great letter.

J: It's like meaty. There's lots of stuff in there, right? *Laughs*

S: Yes, very much so.

J: Lots of stuff. Um, you know when I read it, something that I was mentioning in the intro was there are some things this letter writer brings up that other people can really connect to and relate to, they've experienced that kind of feeling of confusion, not knowing what to do next so I'm excited to dive in. So, when you were reading it, was there like a general impression you had of what this person was experiencing?

S: You know, a lot of it seems to all come back to internalized weight stigma and diet culture. That's really the biggest sense that I got from reading the letter. And just how—how hard it is to heal that voice and how hard it is to um—let me change that, not hard, it's challenging, it's challenging to uh let go of the voices and let go of the very long pattern especially when it's stuff we've been dealing with since we were kids. Um, of the internalized weight and food ideas that we've had growing up with.

J: Umhmm. Yeah, the thing that I circled and wrote a few times is fat phobia is so entrenched in all of us, and and it hurts everyone, you know, no matter what type of body or lived experience, it hurts everyone. It's going to hurt other people more than some people but it's just like something that affects everyone and um this letter is a great example of that. And the complication and the bullshit that comes from all of it (*laughs*)—S: Yeah, absolutely—J: Even when you see the other side, it's like—S: Yes—J: it's still, it's not easy. Yeah, yeah I'm with you there for sure. Um so when you're like, when you're reading it, and if you could picture that person in front of you, is there anything that you would say that would be some first steps in the direction this person is wanting to go?

S: You know, I wasn't thinking this when I first read it, but now talking about the person being in front of me, uh, it really makes me want to let them know that I'm sorry that this was the way that their family operated and the messages they got growing up. Um, just to be able to have

somebody say that, you know, it wasn't right and uh that it's unfortunate that our families couldn't have done better when we were growing up. Um, and I also think, you know, I don't want to place any blame on family um because we're all affected by this. You know, our parents' generation and um everyone is affected. And it often, um, especially with people who are socialized as women, we often don't have a voice in the matter. It being indoctrinated into the diet culture. Um, and I want to recognize that for this person, um. I think it's just so important to acknowledge that.

J: Umhm. I agree. Yeah and some of the things that I was connecting with were some family dynamics that um were a really common example of what I've seen with other people where—how fat phobia and diet culture has seeped into our family dynamics and I can appreciate, basically Mom and Dad both wanting to protect their family with this information or this way of being and the mom doing what she needed to do to stay relevant in her family's eyes and in her marriage and thinking that's what she needed to do and I also could appreciate this letter writer was having to act like an adult a lot. Like I saw a lot of trying to save Mom and to root for Mom and uh and so that's part of, I guess that's the sadness I was picking up and feeling reading it of like wow, there was—I think of like ego states and how there wasn't a time to have—at least for this piece of the relationship—there wasn't the time to be childlike and playful and instead, had to swoop in and parent to the parent and that, that can be really complicated and I—I think about this person and besides the um acknowledging diet culture in this letter writer's life and one of the reasons it's so hard for *this* person to move away is even how it may feel like it's rejecting um her family and affecting Dad on some level or letting Mom just you know (*laughs*) spiral out of control—having that belief that there's that kind of control with this letter writer moving away from diet culture and um yeah, I don't know, that's some things I was thinking about as I was reading it and like wow, this is so um, such an important example and I have a feeling that other people listening can relate to it, just how that's such a complicated thing. So I don't know if that's something you've heard from other people or something similar.

S: Oh yeah, I mean, I think, even in my own family and I hear other people that have absolutely built a lot of their connecting and relating in their families around, you know, what we do with food. And, if somebody in that chain decides to take a step back and step out of that, you know, all those beliefs that everybody's been carrying for a long time, it disrupts things and it can be really hard to figure out how to relate and connect in a different way, when that's what you're so used to.

J: Yeah, and what do you think about the part that this letter writer's describing—I want to make sure I can think through these thoughts because I wanna make sure I'm verbalizing the way I'm thinking about them (*laughs*)—I got the sense that this letter writer was afraid of the rejection that could happen if the letter writer's body size ended up being smaller by eating and moving in the way that this person wants to move and communicating um going back to culture—there's even a part of it that she's afraid that it would go back, like her eating disorder would come back or that body would come back. The upside of it—the fear of, I wonder, the act of doing things

that are associated with diet culture, would that lead to people's feelings of rejection um—I don't know if that's something that you called onto or if I'm just in my own little world with that but that's one of the things that I was really curious if you um had opinions on.

S: I think what stuck out to me was where she talked about that she didn't want people talking about her body, if she did end up losing weight. I don't—I think- she didn't specifically mention it but I know that sometimes people in larger bodies, if they've gotten to a place of acceptance, that if they do end up—if their size does become smaller, feel like they're somehow betraying other people in larger bodies.

J: I think what you just said is a better way of phrasing what I was experiencing (*laughs*)

S: Ok (*laughs*)

J: Yeah, the word betrayal really hit me. I'm like that's what I—I, that's what I was—the fear of that, like I'm going to be betraying because um—I don't know if I was reading more into it and and inserting my other conversations I've had with people, but um almost like this visual understanding, I get you, um by being at a higher weight and afraid that um she would be betraying...yeah. So, it's complicated but that's kinda what I was thinking.

S: Yeah, it is so complicated. And, and, it's interesting cause I just recently had a discussion with someone about this because, you know, we work, especially with—well, no matter what body you're in but particularly with people in larger bodies, if you've worked hard to um come to a place of acceptance or love or appreciation and gratitude for your body, um, mostly that's done with like also, kind of accepting my body might not ever change and then there's things that happen in our life that might present us with our body changing and so, it's kind of like a, it kind of feels like a record scratch almost of well I accepted my body the way it is and now I have to deal with it changing again? (*laughs*). Like, and to go through all of the different emotions that might come with our body changing, and it not be in our control. I have a feeling that doesn't get talked about enough. J: mmhm, Yeah I think you're right. S: Yeah, yeah because people's bodies can change because of pregnancy, maybe because somebody starts a medication, it could be somebody goes from being super active to not active or, you know, somebody heals an injury and then you are able to be more active and like these are just natural fluctuations and—in our lives and in our bodies and-it's challenging.

J: Mmhmm, yeah, it is. And I think this letter writer brought up something that a lot of us talk a lot about you know in our own thin privilege and I get the sense that that's what the fear is around the corner and uh I've always been in a smaller body and I can't like stop ever like listening and learning from people at higher weights like I'm never going to understand their experience and I always need to keep learning about the privileges and um I know I'm not doing everything right, that's impossible I think, but I'm always going to try to and uh that's one of the things that I thought about for this person is if indeed the body changes, it's important to be aware of privilege and that's one of the things I remember learning in counseling school, you

know, it's not always saying something different of doing something different—the biggest piece is to be aware of how you're benefitting from your privilege and um so I encourage anyone with privilege, whatever kind, is to sit down and shut up a lot (laughs). That's what I feel I need to do most of the time and um, you know, so I don't know what's going to happen and, you know, another piece that's kind of turning the um—pivoting a little bit with that same part of the conversation was how the letter writer describes how like eating in a certain way and moving in a certain way, to automatically mean being a smaller weight and that brought up a lot for me too. It sounds like it did for you and one of the things that—it's kind of a surfacy part of that is that I get frustrated that salads and movement get to belong to eating disorders or diet culture—like that's bullshit to me like why can't those of us who are rejecting diet culture, opting out or in recovery, like why can't we enjoy those things too? They don't *belong* to diet culture umm those things and doing those things of course don't guarantee thinness either (laughs) so that's what I was thinking. Is that what you were thinking too?

S: Absolutely! I mean, I think it's so hard—it's challenging because um that's literally what we are taught to believe and we see it in everywhere we look and it's not true (laughs) like you said umm and it isn't fair umm and I think it really speaks to (sighs) how much room there is for healing our relationship with food and body. Um, because those are the, you know, those are the kinds of things we still put a lot of—put certain value on. And, the more that we heal, the less value of like healthy versus unhealthy foods, umm are talked about or seen and um the way that we approach food and then also with movement, umm you know, I follow someone on Instagram who is a consistent runner and she's also a fashion model and I think like the last time I looked, she wears a size 26 or 28 and umm we're so not used to seeing images like that or hearing stories of knowing people umm that talk about being active umm and being in larger bodies and their bodies not really changing.

J: Mmhmm yeah. That's another way that fat phobia's affecting this letter writer. It's like keeping those in such a black and white place—it's categorizing still and uh yeah and like part of that is because we don't see the presentation of different types of people doing things that many of us would label as healthy or good you know? (laughs) So much of what, I think, I know I see on TV um not on my Instagram feed cause I definitely have cultivated that to be like not (laughs) but like if I'm watching TV, it's like the headless or black bar over the eyes umm for people of higher weights and so umm yeah that's part of the way that it's keeping the idea that food no matter the type belongs to everyone and movement belongs to everyone not just people who identify as a certain way. Yeah, yeah. So, I have this thing on my podcast, Sarah, called a Food Peace Syllabus. If you're new to the podcast, it's a list of blog posts, and other podcasts or movies or anything under the sun that helps promote a um more positive relationship with food and and enhances the food peace journey. Did you want to add something to it for this letter writer?

S: I'd love to! Umm especially because she or he...I don't really know if the person talks about their gender—oh, yes she does, she uses she to describe herself. Um, she's a dietitian and um the

first thing that came to mind was *Be Nourished*, which is in Portland, Oregon and they have an e-course called *Promoting Body Trust in Your Work*. It's for helping professionals and it's really, it's a really really great resource and I think it's great for people that don't necessarily have time to commit to anything in person. It's also available in Spanish. Um if you don't--if you're not familiar with *Be Nourished*, *Be Nourished* was uh created by a dietitian and therapist. Their names are Hilary and Dana. Um and they also offer a 4—a 3 day retreat um called the *Embodied Practitioner: Reclaiming Your Own Body Trust*. And, I'm kinda going in the stages like least commitment to most commitment umm then the third thing that they offer for providers of all different types um is the Body Trust Provider certification and training and it's six months long and it's actually—I did about a year and a half ago, started about a year and a half ago umm and they are incredible. Uh predominantly, well for lots of reasons but I think the biggest one being that they don't look at providers as being these blank slates, that, you know, don't relate anything about their personal experience. It's very much um in addition to talking with how you can better work with people. They also see it as extremely important to do our own work and to um, you know, heal what we need to in our lives with food and body. Um, one because, you know, we need that as people and and two, that only improves our ability to help other people.

J: For sure. I remember learning that as a therapist. You can only ask your clients to do the work that you've done yourself. Yeah, yeah.

S: Yeah and I think that it can be hard in professional spaces to talk about whether or not we're struggling um for fear of what other people might think of you know, "oh that person's not recovered enough" or "I can't believe that they talked about that." And also just the culture of our society thinking that we have to have it all together all the time. And that's not true. (laughs)

J: It's not possible either. Right? (laughs)

S: No (laughs)

J: I never have my shit together. I dream of the day (laughs).

S: So they are a really incredible resource, whatever way you choose to work with them. I don't think you'll be disappointed.

J: Awesome and I think about the letter writer—the amount of richness and depth and passion that she is going to feel with clients that people who haven't had that experience—she can go to a place that other people can't and um by doing that work whether it's through these *Be Nourished* options or working with a therapist or doing something um that will help this person get to where they want to go, I think that's going to be such an amazing thing for the dietetic profession. I think we need more dietitians that have those experiences and are able to like put that into their work so I'm excited that this person's a part of our profession (laughs). And also for what they can bring now and in the future so letter writer, I hope that helps and Sarah if someone wants to know more about you, where can they find that information or what's the best way to find out about your work?

S: The best way to find me is through my website, which is resilientfatgoddess.com and on social media. You can find me on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter basically using the exact same name, Resilient Fat Goddess.

J: Mmhmm yeah. Awesome! Well, I'll put links to that and also the *Be Nourished* services and um, I'll put this all in the show notes so it will be easy to find and thank you so much for your time! I really appreciate it. It was so great to connect so thank—

S: Thank you for having me!

Alright, writer. I hope that discussion with Sarah Thompson was helpful to you. I hope it gives you some direction for your next steps.

This episode of the Love, Food podcast was brought to you by my PCOS and Food Peace course. Yes, if you have PCOS, you can move away from diets too. I can't wait to show you how. Go to pcosandfoodpeace.com. And thank you to our guest expert today, Sarah Thompson. If you would like to find out more information about her work, click on over to the show notes. You can also find it at juliedillonrd.com/lovefood116.

Alright, enough of that. I see that Food has written back. Letter writer, I feel like I'm left hanging. I would love to know how things are going. Keep us posted and until then, take care.

Transition/Music Overlay

Dear Old Habits Die Hard,

We are so very sorry, dear one. You've been mistreated, neglected, and misled your entire life by diet culture and fat phobia. You've internalized the body hatred and we hope you give yourself compassion and nurturing while you work on healing. Doing this healing is just that. Work. Hard work. Challenging work. And good work. As our travels continue, keep in mind how much you will bring to fellow food peace travelers. Your eyes that show your fatigue and hope will be a lifeline to others.

Love,

Food

Transition/Music Overlay

Thank you for listening. I am Julie Duffy Dillon and this is the Love, Food podcast. Do you want access to more food peace? Jump on over to my website and join my-mail list. There, I share exclusive content that I don't share anywhere else. Get access to these tips and strategies by going to juliedillonrd.com/signup, and I look forward to seeing you here next week for another episode of the Love, Food podcast. Take care.