

Julie: 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.

Julie: Hi and welcome to episode 268 of the Love Food podcast. I'm Julie Duffy Dillon, registered dietitian and partner on your food peace journey. I am so glad you're here. Thank you for connecting today. I was taking a stroll through my neighborhood recently, and I ran into a neighbor, a neighbor who was carrying two huge bags of laundry into her house. She was someone who had just left for college a few months ago, and was home, of course, to do laundry. And so I had a chance to catch up with her and hear all about going to college. I get a little, you know, misty-eyed, nostalgic and honestly envious of people every fall as they go to college for the first time. For me, it was a really great experience. I still remember the joy and freedom and excitement the very first few days of living on a college campus for me. When I talked to my neighbor, though, she was not as excited, she was actually a bit down. She was someone who I had talked to over the last few years about diet culture, and she was someone who naturally gravitated toward that. She had a lot of social justice values, and was just so disheartened to hear all the diet talk on her college campus. The freshman fifteen shit, it's still going on. It's outrageous. Well, when I got a chance to talk with Ayana Habtemariam a few months ago, actually, I think it was a few years ago now. Uh, we talked about just that. So when I talked to my neighbor about our experiences, I was like, I need to do a rebroadcast of this episode, because there may be some people listening who are new to college, or new to a different work environment where diet culture talk is just all around and so pervasive, and what can you do? So, I'm excited to share this episode's letter, and also hear from our outstanding guest. But before we get to all that, a quick word from our sponsor.

Julie (ad break): Do you have PCOS, and you are ready to divorce that dumpster fire also known as PCOS diets? Check out my free PCOS roadmap. I include ways to start off rejecting diets while living with PCOS. I get down to some tools that I find that have helped so many people over the years, including really naming who's to blame, and how do you actually interact with these cravings? Are they useful? Should you ignore them? What should you do with them? This is what I explore in the road map and so much more. If you are interested, go to juliedillonrd.com/freebies and you'll get right to it. Again, my free PCOS roadmap is at juliedillonrd.com/freebies.

Julie: All right enough of all that. Let's get to this episode's letter.

Julie (as letter writer): Dear food, I have battled with you for almost three years now. This weekend actually marks one year of choosing recovery. Choosing to fight anorexia nervosa was the best decision I have made. But I did not realize it was going to be so hard and long. I was a senior in high school when I began recovery, but I knew no matter what, I had to go to college. My parents talked about me taking a gap year in between high school and college to focus on my relationship with you, food, but that is not the usual thing to do in my town. Thankfully, I am in college now at a university just down the road from my house. I thought my battle with you would be completely over once I left home. But honestly, it's just gotten worse. Living on my own means making my own meals and keeping myself accountable. Diet culture is so loud here.

I feel like I find you to be a part of every single conversation. It makes me feel hopeless in such a challenging and lonely environment. The school gym is just steps from my dorm. I usually find myself there after a bad meal with you or hard exam. Why do you attack specifically college students? College is already difficult, and adding fear of food and fatphobia makes it even harder. I know it's not just me to that has the struggle, but no one speaks about it. I'm at a loss of how to keep motivation and pushing forward in such a challenging community. Sincerely, confused college freshman.

Julie: Hey there, confused college student, thank you so much for your note. And whether you are in college or recovering from an eating disorder, I know for you, the listener, you can relate to so much of what this person is bringing up. And I am excited to bring on a guest expert to help me with this letter. I'm going to give Ayana Habtemariam a call. She's a dietitian that I've gotten to know over Instagram, and I think she's going to have some important words of wisdom.

Ayana: Hello?

Julie: Hey, Ayana, this is Julie Dillon. How are you?

Ayana: Hey Julie, I'm doing well. How are you?

Julie: I'm doing so great. Thank you so much for chatting with me. And did you get a chance to look at this letter?

Ayana: I did. I did look at the letter.

Julie: Awesome. I'm excited to dive in. And what was your, what was your impression about what this person is experiencing?

Ayana: Well, my first impression was that it's a really difficult situation to be in, especially when you've, you've been there before and you know what's going on, and you know what it feels like, um, to have those old thoughts and patterns come back. And you may feel like you're wrong or you don't have control because you're wondering, um, why this is happening again. But also, in addition to that, I, I thought the letter writer was really brave. Um, that was something that also immediately came to my mind and, and self aware, and also had a really- or a pretty good sense of um, the environment and an- an awareness of their situation. Um, so that was, that was what came to mind, and I would say bravery for choosing to fight anorexia, and also recognizing, um, that that was a good decision, but leaving what sounded to me to be a supportive family environment, even if it's just down the road. So, initially when I was reading the letter, I said, well, you know, they have all this stuff going on. It sounds like they have a supportive family at home. Um, and they're still ready to go out and, and, and take this on, and not knowing what, you know, they would have to deal with. But I think that self-awareness to recognize now that things are more difficult because of diet culture, you know, being so loud and being the norm, um, and also recognizing that they're using, you know, exercise to cope with a bad meal or to cope with a hard exam, I just think that's, I think that's brave, and I think that they need to um, give themselves credit for that. For- for still being aware of, of the anorexia, and being aware of how it's affecting them, and how it's normalized even more on college campuses.

Julie: Yeah. Yeah. You know, I was really, really impressed with this person's awareness. And I think- I agree with you so much, I think it's so brave, and it's such hard work to tease apart why there's like this craving for certain behaviors to kind of check out. Um, and to be aware that like, okay, this is not about me, this is also about our really crappy culture that hasn't recovered from its own eating disorder, and how it's so normalized to um, want to be smaller and to- to diet. So yeah, I totally agree. I'm like, this person is so brave. Um, and I- and I think about people too who may not always identify- maybe someone listening who's like, why I've never experienced an eating disorder or anorexia, but may really appreciate that struggle to like, move away from dieting if they've always dieted. And you know, we may even have a conversation of like, well your dieting may have actually really been an eating disorder, because I think sometimes people think it's so normal to diet, so it's not. But just like trying to stay in your body and um, go to college, or go on with whatever is the next step in your life and not use like exercise to check out or dieting to check out and just stay in your body, I think that's so um, how do- I think it's like a part that's really important for recovery in this way is like, sometimes we can't just go from like, oh, there's something going on that's harmful. Let me stop doing it. Like, it seems like this person is in that space of, like, building that self awareness, and like, that's important. And such hard work. So kudos to you, letter writer, and anybody else who's going through that. That is hard, but also important. And um, you brought up something I didn't think about, about like, the supportive piece. I'm like, duh, of course, like, like, she- I think, it's been so long since I went to college, I forgot about, like, that really big step in particular, but then to be also experiencing this really scary kind of illness and expected to, like, just recover um, at the same time, that is a really big piece of this, you know? Like, the change in support is dramatic. Yeah.

Ayana: Yeah.

Julie: Yeah. So that thanks for bringing that up.

Ayana: Yeah, you're welcome. And to me, I would be- I would be scared if I was in recovery for a year and went to college. I'm thinking about, you know, when I was in college and I would never- I don't- I don't know, I may have had an eating disorder. Now I say I've experienced disordered eating since I was about 16, so when I was in college, I had a roommate and we would, it was basically a competition between who could eat the least, you know? And thinking about that and, you know, getting- not being in that, you know what I mean? And, you know, this person being in recovery and then going into an environment that- where, where people might be competing, um, to be the smallest or to eat the least amount, I just think that, um, it's scary, you know, so leaving that supportive environment, going to an environment, and I'm- and I'm pretty sure the letter writer didn't realize it would be this hard. I think they acknowledge that, that they didn't think it would be this hard, but with diet culture being so loud, as they put it, um, and so normal, it probably was a shock like, oh gosh, I'm thrown back into it. So, um yeah.

Julie: Yeah, definitely, like thrown to the, to the lion's den, you know? And yeah, especially when we're in that place of um, leaving high school and um, being on our own for the first time, like, how would we know what to expect? You know? It's like, this new thing, and it may even be exciting, and it sounded too like this letter writer was like, their own expectation for themselves was like, I'm going to college, like-

Ayana: Yeah!

Julie: I'm not pausing, like I'm doing it. Um, and so it's hard, yeah, so if someone is in a similar place or this letter writer, what they're experiencing, what would you consider to be some, maybe first steps for them to kind of just keep going in the direction that they want to go?

Ayana: So the very first thing I thought about was some sort of on campus support. And I immediately thought about peer support, so finding other students that might be going through a similar situation on campus. Um, but then I thought that might be- it might be hard to do, to just kind of bring up conversations about, oh, do you have, you know, issues around eating or challenges around eating or dieting or anything like that? So maybe even reaching out to um, the on campus counseling services or therapy group to see if they have something um, to find support, because I think that, you know, we say like, clean up your social media, I think that's definitely another important one, but on campus you're building new relationships and new friendships and that's your life. So, I think it is important to um, find some sort of support and make sure you're not surrounding yourself with people who are going to help you reinforce that- that behavior that you're trying so hard not to fall back into, you know? You're in recovery for a year, and you decided to go to college because you really wanted to, um, but I just think that it's, you know, you can fall back on those um, old thoughts and those patterns and it's- and honestly in certain environments, it's really hard not to, so you have to surround yourself with people who- who can support um, where you want to go.

Julie: Yeah, so like, this person is so aware of when their brain is drifting into the eating disorder patterns. So then, being aware in those moments, like, I almost can see like, those thoughts to try to, they're trying to be the support, you know? To like, help them get through this, and to seek out people who are doing something different, which it's so easy to say. And I know like, where I live, there are certain campuses that have lots of weight inclusive groups and like, easy to identify programs in that way, but then there's other campuses in my same town who have nothing like that, but they're- the thing that I do get with a lot of college campuses that I've been around is that um, it's really normal to need more support when you go to college for the first time. Um, again, you're leaving home, leaving support. So even if you're not experiencing an illness, like, it's really normal, and they're expecting people to need it, you know? So like, they're ready, they're poised to give you this, like, this is they're- people who do that work in the counseling center, like, that's what they're doing all day long, so it's gonna be really normal for them to hear like hey, um I need some support, you know? And um, I say that just because I can remember it being really hard for me to ask for support in college when I needed help, and um, now I'm like wow, like that was, I was so textbook, you know? [Laughs] It's so normal to need it. Yeah.

Ayana: That's so good to know. And I forgot about that, um, that there is a lot of support on college campuses.

Julie: I think even more now. Like, I was in college 20 years ago, but I feel like even now it's like more um, a part of it, you know, this like that, um, I don't know if it's just because of like the stereotypical helicopter parenting kind of thing that is evolved, but I think there's even just more an awareness that people are going to need that support because they've never had to do things

on their own before. And um, so yeah, like this person- especially like eating and body image um, concerns. These are all also like pretty common experiences in this age group, you know? And if someone's a traditional age going to college that's like, this is someone that's going to be like again, someone that they really used to seeing. And if you're not someone who's like, the typical age group going to college, it also um, is something that is expected just having that leap of like, you know, changing jobs or changing anything, any kind of change is something that's really normal before eating disorder behavior can become complicated, so. Well, before we move on, was there any other kind of steps that you find that you would recommend? Or is that sum up what you were, what you're thinking?

Ayana: Um, that about sums it up. And if you're on social media too, I would just say um, making sure you're following um, good recovery accounts, um, body positive, like, true body positive accounts, and anything that makes you feel crappy or anything that makes you feel bad about yourself or um, the letter writer, I'm saying you but, who are you?

Julie: Yeah, and I feel like uh, you- the generalized you works for me- for me too. Um and I like hearing the reminder to clean up the social media accounts. Um, and I think it's something that's an easy way for us to just get extra support, even just like visually, and is there a way that you have found to kind of cut through the crap, like, and get to like, truly body positive pages? Like how do you, is there a way that you've been able to decipher between like, ones that say they are but really aren't?

Ayana: Oh gosh, that's a good question. So, I stay away from um, the hashtag. I know that sounds crazy, but if you go on the tag, there's so much like, fake body positivity, and I go through other people's pages. So, when I see people um, share something in their stories or something like that, I'll then go click on it. But I have to stay away from the Explore page, and I have to stay away from the hashtags.

Julie: That's so good to know. That's good.

Ayana: It's because there's so much um, you know, people use the tag just I think to- to get clicks, it's like clickbait.

Julie: Yeah, I agree. Yeah. I think um, intuitive eating in particular, like that hashtag is going to be trending so much more in 2020, and I know you're an intuitive eating counselor and like, there are so many people who say they intuitive eating, but they're not, and they're just kind of using that as a way to get clickbait like you said. And actually, you bring up Instagram, and that's how I found you. And so, um, would you mind telling the listeners your handle? Because I love your page.

Ayana: Oh, sure! Thank you. So my handle on Instagram is @thetrillrd. And um, that's the same on Twitter and on Facebook as well. I'm not on either of those as much though.

Julie: Yeah, Instagram is my jam right now too. Um, so we have a food peace syllabus on the show, and if you're new to the Love Food podcast, the food peace syllabus is a collection of

resources, like books, um, blog posts, movies, documentaries, anything under the sun that helps to promote our food peace journey. And I'm wondering if you would like to add anything to it?

Ayana: Well, I have my website um, and I provide virtual nutrition counseling um, and nutrition coaching for non diet, and I have a 12 week intuitive eating program um, for- for individuals. And I'm also working on a project with another registered dietitian. Um, It is called Reclaiming Our Plate, and it is a collective of Black HAES aligned registered dietitians. We just want to provide more representation um, within the movement and within the HAES and non diet spaces. Um, and again, that's reclaimingourplate.org. Um, and at the time of recording right now, um, it's not up, but it should be within the next couple of weeks or so.

Julie: Yes, I will put all of the links in the show notes, which is easy to update as necessary. So we will do that. And yeah, if you get to it, if you're listening to this episode- episode right when it's released, it may not be quite there yet, but that's okay. Just keep searching for it. I'm so glad you're doing that. That's amazing. I- the more people that can see others that look like themselves doing work that's freeing them from diet culture, I think is awesome, because it's gonna make the world a better place. So, um so thanks for doing that. And um-

Ayana: You're welcome.

Julie: Yes! Well if anybody wants to find you, is your website the best place to find you?

Ayana: Yes, I would say my website is the best place, and that is trulyrealnutrition.com.

Julie: Awesome. Thank you so much for your time and your expertise, your compassion, and the letter writer is going to appreciate it, and anyone listening who's going through the same thing. So thank you so much.

Ayana: You're welcome. Thank you for having me.

Julie: So there you have it. Letter writer, I hope the conversation that I just had with Ayana Habtemariam was helpful to you and anyone listening who can relate, maybe you're also new to college or just to a different transition in life, and really just trying to survive in this world that is just so darn fatphobic and you know, normal eating is now dieting, right? And you're just trying to figure out a way to make it work for you to not diet anymore. I hope our conversation was helpful. I hope you find the support you need, and you are able to move along in the places that you want to go on your food peace journey.

Julie (ad): Before we get to food's letter, this episode of a Love Food podcast was brought to you by my free PCOS road map. Get to it at juliedillonrd.com/freebies.

Julie: All right. Like I said, food has written back, but until next time, take care.

Julie (as food): Dear confused college freshman, You are so very brave to move away from your eating disorder, and your life is moving along, and stressful as we would expect. Leaving home is tough on everyone. And losing consistent support makes that even harder. You don't have to

struggle alone. There is no shame and asking for help, and college campuses are ready to hold you up. Be warned – diet culture, restricting, and over exercising may offer a hand in support too. Keep calling them out as the tools you no longer need. Instead, seek out like minded eaters and rally with them. You can move forward with recovery, and the world is ready to see what is next for you. Love, Food.

Julie: 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 email 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.