

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 269 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. Have you ever wondered how your relationship with food got so complicated to begin with? Like, have you ever wondered like how did it all start? Like why, why did it happen? Well, I have a letter from someone today who was wondering just that. And for you, why did your relationship with food get messy? Did someone make a comment about your body when you were young, or did you experience a trauma that you can pinpoint as the thing that started at all? Or is there no clear line? Like it just has always been this way. Honestly, I've seen all three of those scenarios and all three together in my 20 years of working as a dietitian, and the letter that we get to hear from today has all three of those scenarios in them. And this person is just wondering like, what is up? And I'm really excited that you get to hear from registered dietitian Liz Brinkman. Liz is a delight. I love talking to her every chance I get. She is a dietitian that practices out of Arizona. She's someone I got to know when she did the PCOS and food peace provider training program, and she is especially skilled when it comes to trauma work and eating disorder recovery. But before we get to hear from Liz, and also get to hear this episode's letter, 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](http://juliedillonrd.com/freebies) and you'll get right to it. Again, my free PCOS roadmap is at [juliedillonrd.com/freebies](http://juliedillonrd.com/freebies).

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

Julie (content note): Hey there. Quick content warning before we get to the letter: this letter mentioned sexual assault, and also some specific eating disorder behaviours. I want you to be aware of that and decide for yourself if this is something that you want to listen to. Please take care of yourself, and if you would not like to hear about these particular things, please skip ahead three minutes and thirty seconds, and then you'll get to the meat of the show. Take care. And now here's the letter.

Julie (as letter writer): Dear food: I know things have been kind of rough lately. We've had some serious ups and downs, but I'm glad our relationship is starting to heal. I'm still confused, though, so I wanted to chat. As you know, our relationship was great when I was little. I remember eating watermelon and popsicles on the front porch in the summer, juice boxes and orange slices at soccer practice, and ice cream after dinner almost every night. We had our brief ups and downs, but everything was pretty much okay. Until the year I graduated from college. On graduation

day, my grandma looked concerned and commented that I had gained some weight. Nothing else was said about it, but that stuck with me. I couldn't find a job, so I moved back in with my parents. I worked at a restaurant and got drunk almost every night. One of these nights, I went home with a guy I was interested in - it turns out I wasn't his type. I announced I was going to sleep on the couch, but his roommate laughed and said, "don't be silly, come sleep in my bed." I really thought he was going to just let me have his bed, but he ended up getting into bed with me. We had sex. I don't remember if I was into it the first time or not. I definitely didn't want it the second time. The next day, he insisted on walking me to my car and said, "see? Chivalry is not dead after all." This experience was so confusing. All I know is that I didn't want it, but he didn't think he did anything wrong. Soon after this, I started purging. It wasn't because I felt fat. I don't really know why I did it. It wasn't after every meal, just when I felt sad. It made me feel safe. I stopped this behavior when I got a full time job and left restaurant life. Four years have passed since I was assaulted. I still never told my family, and it took me a year to tell my therapist. I've been seeing her for a couple of years. I'm on medication for depression now, and I feel much better. Then this January I started purging again. I had started counting calories to lose weight, and I would always go over. Then I would feel anxious and upset and purge again. My friends noticed and confronted me. I was able to stop after a few months of struggling, and sometimes failing to resist the compulsion, but I still have the urge to do it sometimes. I've been working to heal our relationship, food. I've been listening to podcasts about eating disorders and reading about health at every size and intuitive eating. I've stopped counting calories and started exercising just for fun. I'm starting to love my body again, but I'm still frustrated. I feel like our relationship is so complicated, food. I don't know what the heart of the problem is, and I feel like I need to figure it out. Was the assault the root of all of this? Was it even earlier? Is my more recent behavior even related to the assault? Or is it just because I was anxious about dieting? I really want to solve this mystery, because I think it's the key to healing our relationship for good. Do you have any insight, food? Love, hurt but hopeful.

Julie: Letter writer, thank you. Thank you so much for your vulnerability. I don't know if you want to hug, but I'm offering one to you. If you want one. And thank you for sharing your experiences and how you are connecting them over time and how you are questioning how they're all related. I am excited to give Liz Brinkman a call. Liz is a registered dietitian who has such a wealth of experience, and also has a lot to say about how our body responds to trauma and our relationship with food. So, letter writer, I know she's going to have something different to bring to you. So, I'm curious what it's going to add to your experience for you, letter writer, and also for you, the listener. So, let's go ahead and give Liz a call.

Liz: Hello?

Julie: Hey Liz, it's Julie Duffy Dillon. How are you?

Liz: I'm great, Julie. How are you?

Julie: I am so excited to talk to you. You are always one of my favorite dietitians to talk to. Did you get a chance to look over the letter I sent you?

Liz: Yes, I did get a chance to read through the letter, and I just want to be really upfront to say that the issues that were brought up in the letter are really familiar to me, as many of my clients come to me with stories of body shaming from relatives, perceived failure at dieting attempts, as well as a history of sexual assault.

Julie: Yes. Yes. Yeah. The- this person's um, letter. I mean, I'm just so appreciate that they shared this, um- I mean, I- I- it's a very- it's something that I'm like, right now, nobody can see it of course, because we're in podcast land, but I'm like holding my hands to my heart. Like, this is something that is like, so close to them, and like, thank you for sharing something so vulnerable and um, we're holding it really close to our hearts too. But also, so many people who are listening or like, yeah, I know this, like this- even if they didn't experience the same thing, but some parallels, many parts of it, or maybe the same thing. So, um, these relationships with food, they're so complicated and twisted. And um, I hear this person is like, what is up? Why did this happen? Help me like, understand. And I know not everyone is a why person, but I get that this person wants to understand why. So, what do you- what is your general impression about what's going on with this person?

Liz: Sure. To me, this letter is a story of the response to threat. And in fact, I picked out three, three experiences of attack. Do you mind if I give my insight?

Julie: Yeah, sure! Yes, I would totally want you to give your insight. Yes.

Liz: So, first, on an important day in this writer's life, graduating from college, my thought is she's walking around on cloud nine, and she was blindsided by an unsolicited and hurtful attack from a family member, and maybe even an authority figure, like the matriarch of her family, the grandmother, this attachment figure, and this type of comment is what I call familiar costuming of diet culture's favorite form, which is criticism cloaked as concern. And it's so confusing and it's so just- just completely surprising to a person to be the recipient. And- because it sounds like it comes from a place of protection and love, but it just drapes on a person like this itchy clinging garment that's really hard if not impossible to shake off. So, the writer didn't share her immediate response, but my hunch is she just froze and didn't even know how to respond. The second is another moment of vulnerability: the writer was again the target of an unwanted and hurtful attack, but this time in the form of sexual assault. And this time instead of a family member, it was a stranger. And then the third less overt experience of aggression in this letter was this story of attacked- attack leveled by diet culture. And our writer, like all of us no doubt, has received constant messages of her worth being tied up in her body size, and she, like all of us, have been conditioned to bend to the pressure of dieting and in the pursuit of weight loss. So, she takes on this set of rules and expectations that will eventually end in a sense of failure and unworthiness. That's just how diet- diets are. And again, so she's this target of an unwanted and harmful attack in the form of constant persistent messaging from a faceless disembodied system of oppression. So, the common thread in these three incidents was that a person or system in power overstepped our writer's boundaries enacted without her consent. That's- that's my overview.

Julie: Yes. And that common thread, it's itchy, because I'm thinking about that cloak that you talked about the beginning. I'm still itchy feeling it. Um, yeah, your words have um, your words have feels to them, you know, like just um, as you're describing them, like I can feel that cloak,

oh my goodness. Ah, and it's- that was such a picture for us to examine as you're painting it. And um, why it's so complicated. And I hope for the listener, it helps to give them some compassion as why this is so complicated as you are along your food peace journey. Like, why, it's not snap your fingers, why can you just not like- just make it all better? You know? Like, this is so complex, and we're also like, living in this culture that is not going away. Like you said, like it's like this rigid, um, constantly kind of assaulting system, especially, you know, depending on what type of body you're currently living in, it's going to have different degrees of um, um, layers or different- what are the words I'm looking for? Like, it's going to be harder for some people compared to other people.

Liz: Right.

Julie: Yeah.

Liz: Right. Different- different degrees of impact, I would say.

Julie: Yes, that's- that's it. Thank you. Well, and so considering all of this for this letter writer, for anybody who can relate to this letter, what would you recommend as some steps forward?

Liz: Mm. Well, I guess I really, I am paying attention because she- she comes to- to this letter and writes that she wants to understand the heart of the problem, and she has some real insight that her complicated relationship with food and her purging behavior are just symptoms of a bigger problem. She- she's getting that, which I think I agree with. And I think it's- it's really important that we- we point that out to her, that she had developed some insight here. So, she's like, okay, these are symptoms. So, what's behind the symptom? And one possibility regarding the heart of the problem here is that in the moments of attack, her natural fight response was blocked or thwarted. And I think it's important to name that you and I can sit here and even you know, she and I could sit here and have a conversation in our seats in an office or over zoom of what one might do if verbally assaulted and what one might do if physically assaulted. We can discuss systems of oppression that are pressing in on us with these unachievable beauty standards. But because we're human, there may very well come a time in the moment of attack that all of our best laid plans for defense will be thwarted. And we might wish we had clawed and bit and kicked and verbally sparred and you know, you know, defended ourselves, but we simply cannot do that based on how our nervous system responds to a surprise attack. And so, what I want to say is that this blocked fight response is also common in our culture. Like, it's not acceptable for a granddaughter to fight back with her grandma- grandmother. And it's not acceptable for women to fight back against her assailant in the hours, days, weeks, months, and years after the attack. In our culture, it's encouraged to go along with dieting and the pursuit of weight loss. No questions asked. So, when I think about solutions for her, I want to name those things how- how- I want to say, this isn't your fault. This was not a lack of intelligence on her fault, on her behalf, and just really validate that things happened to her that she never signed up for. And that purging is an effective strategy for completing the need to fight. And her inner critic that has developed that's created this may be self shame, self criticism is always pointing a finger at her. And sometimes that finger is used to enact fight against herself in the form of purging. So just to name like, the problem here, I think this is the first thing, is let's put the problem where it belongs. The problem is not food. The problem is not her body, or her weight

fluctuations, and I'm going to go out, this feels a little bit kind of out on a limb to say, that the problem isn't even purging. But the problem is the absence of consent and the misuse of power. And the problem is a culture that works hard to condition the natural fight response out of women. And the problem is the lack of intentional skill building about how to care for our feelings. So that would be my first, my first care for her, is putting the problem where it belongs. And I think that's why she wrote this story, or this letter to us, that she's like, I feel that I'm being told this is the problem, but there's a problem here behind the problem.

Julie: Yes, I want to be on that limb with you, by the way. Because I agree. I agree. One hundred percent, like that- that's what I would see as the problem too. One hundred percent. Like, it sounds-

Liz: I guess-

Julie: Yeah, go ahead, go ahead.

Liz: I was just going to say, you know, the best way to stop purging is not to white knuckle your way out of a purge, it's to care for and change the environment that makes purging a necessary and effective strategy for coping.

Julie: Mhm. Yeah, I know it feels really, um, what am I trying to say? Like it's- for you and me um, as clinicians who have done on a lot of conversations or talked a lot in the um, clinical setting with people who are in the throes of eating disorders, these are conversations we've had a lot with people, but it's also not conversations that often times people in the public will hear, and they may be surprised to hear people say this, you know, but like, but this is it, you know, like this- this is something that is really important to know. Um, and especially right now, um, I- I just got an email this morning from someone who is like, can you help me find a clinician for my friend who's struggling with their eating disorder. They cannot find a clinician right now. I'm like, I'm not seeing clients anymore, and I know there's like, nobody basically left in the state of North Carolina that has openings, you know, um, they're- and so they're, these conversations need to be happening however people get access to them. So, I'm so glad that you went on the limb, or out on a limb, what you said, and said it, because this is really important to, to name, you know, and um, we need to be changing the environment and really name what the problem is. And um, I appreciate you saying that.

Liz: Thank you. I think that just saying that out loud gives us a little bit more space to look at our options, you know, to undo the aloneness. I feel like that is what I'm doing in almost every session, is undoing aloneness. Because it is such a lonely place to feel that you're doing a behavior that is so labeled as wrong or bad. But it feels like such an effective and necessary strategy.

Julie: I um, wrote down and um, just like, circled a lot- "undoing aloneness." Would you be willing to say more about that?

Liz: Yes, I would. And actually, that leads to the second component of healing that I wanted to talk about for the, for this letter writer.

Julie: Ooo, yes, tell more!

Liz: It's the power of safe relationship. So, we need a safe relationship with a person, a pet, the natural world, a spiritual being to whom our yes, our no, and our not now will be enthusiastically acknowledged and received. Because relational safety is both the goal of intervention and a major resource in the healing process. So, start to look for relationships with something or someone who is trustworthy and enduring, that offers predictability, that helps you to regulate your emotions, um, that helps you ground yourself in a bodily experience of comfort. A relationship with which to create new memories of care and trust. Relationships that create new narratives that make the world feel less dangerous and help you feel more capable, because we cannot do this alone.

Julie: Love it, love it. Well, before we move on to the next section, the next thing I want to talk about in the food peace syllabus, um, are there any other steps that you had in mind? Those are plenty. And sometimes people have more, so just wanted to check in.

Liz: I have more. Just one more, one more.

Julie: I'm glad I asked, then!

Liz: Okay. Of course. Yeah. The third is practice. So, knowing something doesn't mean that we actually embody it, that we know it in our movements. Healing doesn't happen by being able to explain the problem or even explain the healing process - we have to practice. And so, I think the other solution here would be practicing naming emotions and learning how to sit with these big feelings, these big urges, not for the purpose of, like I said, white knuckling through not doing the eating disorder behavior, but by sitting with it long enough to understand where, why it's- why it's coming up. So, practice being a witness of your emotions. Uh, practice noticing your external environment. So, the company that you keep. Practice being aware of the rules of diet culture. Practice in getting to know your values and what you stand for. And so, I think it's really, it's just one of those things where you can listen to the podcast, you can read the books, but until you have someone guiding you and putting these- these new- this new knowledge into actual practice in your life, healing is a little bit stunted. And so, I guess practice would be my last recommendation.

Julie: Oh, that's- those are great. I mean it's an acknowledgement that this is something that's going to take time, and kind of like, a study of like, um, in a compassionate kind of curiosity, you know, having a study of like, what do you need in order to heal and move forward on your own terms? Um, I appreciate that. Well, and so, on the Love Food podcast, we have something called the food peace syllabus. And if you're new to the show, welcome. And the food peace syllabus is a collection of resources that we've been gathering over the last five or so years. And if you would like to get to the latest syllabus, you can go to [juliedillonrd.com/freebies](http://juliedillonrd.com/freebies) to get to it. And Liz, would you like to add anything to it?

Liz: Yes, I'm really excited to talk about this uh, new resource that Maria-Lourdes Aragon, who's a Phoenix dietitian as well. She and I have come up with this group. It's a- I guess you could call

it a support group of sorts, and it's called a Place to Land, and we are still working out the details. But the way we envision it is a place for people to gather, to press pause on their lives, to take a moment to be still, to look around, to tell stories, tell our stories, and have people witness them and hold them. These groups are geared for people who are working to recover from eating disorders, but that also have other experiences intersecting with that eating disorder behaviour, such as trauma, such as drug and alcohol abuse, such as growing up in toxic families, we care a lot about all of those things that make the eating disorder behavior so effective. We just want to, like I said, undo aloneness and give a place for people to rest safely and- and examine all the components in a really slow and as non judgmental of ways possible.

Julie: Oh, I love that. Well, we will put a link to that in the show notes. Is there a link ready for us that you could tell us right now? Or can we just put it in the show notes for later.

Liz: There is a link, and it's a google form.

Julie: Okay, we'll put it in the shownotes.

Liz: So it's filling out of form.

Julie: Yeah, that's probably harder to communicate verbally. So, if you are interested just pop over to the show notes right now. Yeli will have it ready for you. So, um, and if someone wants to find out more about your work, Liz, how can they find you?

Liz: I have a small presence on Instagram. My Instagram is @lizbrinkman\_rd, which stands for registered dietitian. I also write a weekly blog post. So, you can go over to my website, lizbrinkmanrd.com, and sign up for my weekly newsletter where I refer to the blog post and maybe give a little bit of background. That's where I give offerings of anything new that I am providing. I usually have a little section for some recipes for the week, how to get yourself fed. Uh yes, those are the ways.

Julie: Awesome. I love the things you've been writing and doing on Instagram. So definitely check her out, and thank you so much for all of your wisdom and direction today. I really appreciate it, Liz.

Liz: Thank you, Julie. It was a real honor.

Julie: So, there you have it. Let a writer, I hope my conversation with Liz Brinkman brought you some new, different clarity along your food peace journey. And listener, I hope it did as well. I always learn something new whenever I talk to Liz, and I hope you got something new out of listening to our conversation. I see that food has written back, but before we get to food's letter...

Julie (ad): This episode of a Love Food podcast was brought to you by my free PCOS road map. Get to it at [juliedillonrd.com/freebies](http://juliedillonrd.com/freebies).

Julie: If you enjoyed this episode of the Love Food podcast, I would love it if you could leave a rating, a review, subscribe, or share an episode. Doing any of those acts of kindness really helps the show grow. I appreciate it in advance if you do that. It's something that I have noticed over the last year, there are many, many podcasts. I'm sure you've noticed it as well. And at first, there were lots of people like me who just were making their podcast out of their home. But now, there are lots of people who are like, I don't know, doing it in like, total corporate areas who have lots of big budgets, and so they're filling up the podcast lists, and so it's harder to find podcasts that are just independent podcasters like me. So, the more you can share, the more you can review, and more you can subscribe, the more people can find access to food peace. So, thank you in advance for doing any of those acts of kindness.

Julie: Alright. So, until next time, take care.

Julie (as food): Dear hurt and hopeful, There's a common thread to our complicated relationship. Boundaries are crossed by loved ones, by strangers, and by systems. We are so sorry. You've been carrying this burden. We see you gathering insight and awareness. Please know you and the behaviors are not the problem. We, food, are not the problem either. Lack of consent is the problem. Continue to tend to yourself. And when the support feels safe enough, include relationships to promote healing. Connection will help you find the place where the mystery no longer exists. 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](http://juliedillonrd.com/signup). And I look forward to seeing you here next week for another episode of the Love Food podcast. Take care.