

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 270 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. Almost six years ago, I released the Love Food podcast for the first time, and I have to say, 2021 is proving to be finally having more access to conversations about fat positivity and rejecting diets. When *Intuitive Eating*, the book by Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch is trending as a best seller, well, I think the world is onto something, you know, they finally are catching on that diet culture is the biggest asshole, and you know, there is another way to connect with food. Well, I know so many of you have been listening to podcasts like mine, scrolling through Instagram and really absorbing all of this information, but yet maybe feeling like, well how do I actually apply this? What do I do? Because it can be scary to take some big steps to rejecting diets. Well, I have a letter from someone who's in that space. They have been reading and listening and learning and unlearning, but they feel like they've been in a place of inaction. And I know this space of feeling like you're not really doing anything about your recovery, I know you can feel stuck there for a really long time. So, I called up on Hannah Howard. She is a person who wrote the memoir *Plenty* and has her own lived experience recovering from an eating disorder. I'm so excited to share her wisdom with you, and before we get to that interview, and before we 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 (as letter writer): Dear food, Our love and hate relationship has been ebbing and flowing. It all started really innocently wanting to opt for healthier options, until it led me to an unhealthy place - a place where I feared you. A place where I felt guilty after eating you, and a place that took away all the pleasure and freedom around guilt. I've been recovering from an eating disorder for almost two years now, and although our relationship is relatively better, we could say that we're not in peace yet. Diet culture has made me believe that there are quote "bad" and quote "good" foods, that I should fear some of you, that some of you are evil. I really want to change that. I want to make peace with you. I'm trying to unlearn all the lies and myths diet culture has taught me, but it's hard, you know? I've been really trying hard to reject diets, the mentality of good and bad, and surround myself with anti diet, body positivity, and food freedom content. But I'm struggling to take action steps to have a better relationship with you. It's easier to consume and motivate me with a lot of inspiring content, but it's overwhelming. I mean, there

are so many fear foods I need to face, unlearn diet myths, change my mentality around food, learn to brush off diet comments, re learn how to listen to my body, and treat it with respect, and so much more that I need to do. I don't even know where to start. Also, I'm afraid. I feel alone, and I'm afraid of what will happen if I let go of control and food restriction. I really want to have a better relationship, but things like diet culture, fear of weight gain, or eating disorder thoughts get in the way. I won't give up, food. I'm positive I will get to a place where I no longer fear you but embrace you. I know I will get there one day. This girl needs a little guidance. Love, struggling and overwhelmed while recovering.

Julie: Hey there, letter writer. Thank you so much for this note, I hear your struggle, I hear you're overwhelmed, and I'm excited to introduce you to Hannah Howard. She is someone who has similar lived experience and has recently published her second memoir about her own eating disorder recovery and journey to connecting to more joy with food. So, let's go ahead and give Hannah a call.

Hannah: Hello, this is Hannah.

Julie: Hi Hannah, this is Julie Duffy Dillon, how are you?

Hannah: I'm doing well, how are you?

Julie: I'm great. Hey, it's great to connect with you, I'm excited to talk to you about this letter. Did you get a chance to read through it?

Hannah: I did, and I really resonated with this person's kind of feeling of overwhelm and like, this journey ahead feels really big.

Julie: Yeah, yeah, you know, that was the feeling of overwhelm was like, the thing that I was taking you away from it, like, the piling of all the things to do uh, well when, when you were reading through it, what was your impression about all of what this person is experiencing?

Hannah: Well, first of all, I just really related to so much that I think also as we're kind of uncovering our own relationship with food and it um, leaning into own experiences with this sort of curiosity, it can be intense, and it can be a lot, and it was for me and just, I'll share a little bit about my own experience. So, I struggled for quite a while with eating disorders in various permutations, um, definitely was just someone always who on the one hand really did love food, loved cooking. Um, the kitchen was the heart of my home, and my mom was an amazing cook, but at the same time from this really young age, I got this message I was the tallest girl in my class, I was the first person to get breasts, and I just kind of felt like there was something wrong with me, like I wasn't right, and that food and my body had something to do with that. And yeah, this sort of diet culture was in the air, air that I- that I breathed like it is for everyone, and I don't think I could um, yes, I didn't have the, that term for sure, and probably didn't have that vision either, but I did really get that message that being smaller was better, and if I could somehow restrict my food and shrink my body, that you know, my life would be happier and all would be well in the world, and spoiler alert, it didn't work out like that. [Laughs]

Julie: [Laughs] Yeah, I mean, that's the big lie, like the big bullshit lie that diet culture sells all of us is like, hey, oh, you feel out of place or like something's wrong with you? You know, torture yourself with- with food and it'll fix it all up, right? And that's the big total lie.

Hannah: Right. And it was a huge lie for me because I just became more and more, I think like this, this letter writer expressed too, more obsessive, more fearful about food. Um, I think a lot in my recovery about food kind of taking up the right side- the right size and proportion in my life, and at this time in my life it was anything but that, you know, it was like 95 or 99 or, you know, some huge percent of my thoughts and feelings and um, everything I was just, you know, calculating and plotting and worrying and so fixated on what I was going to eat, what I wasn't going to eat, what I had just eaten, you know, it was just so, it felt so big. Um, and so I think that that's kind of uh, it maybe sounds counterintuitive, but something that helped me that I- that I hope could help the this letter right here a little bit, is to focus on the other areas of life that bring you joy, because I think for me it's like sort of counterintuitive that even though that this is an eating disorder and my struggles have been with food, you know, thinking more about food doesn't always help bring me peace. Thinking about other things, other people, other parts of life can be so much more restorative and fulfilling and fun for sure. So that's- that's one, I have a few, a few thoughts, and that's definitely one of them.

Julie: I think that's really um, I think that's really important, and you know, when you were talking about like that percentage, like 95% of your thoughts, like, were about food, weight, calculating, trying to solve this like massive math problem, and that's so- that's like a brain that's just so full, like how can you think about all these other things and part of the- the struggle that I'm seeing in this letter, and I know so many people can relate to it is like, like she's like, oh I see that this is like, taking up so much space, and- but I don't think I'm doing it right? So if I think about it less, then I'm going to lose control, but like, that's what I'm hearing from you is like, I thought I was in control, but really I was just obsessing over food and missing out of my life.

Hannah: That's exactly it. And it's come right- the bigger these food thoughts got, even though, you know, objectively look- I look back and I feel lucky because I- even in the- in the midst of this real struggle and real suffering that I was going through, I was lucky enough to have some amazing friends and families and opportunities and things in my life, but I didn't get to actually enjoy them or pre- or appreciate them because I'm just completely distracted by my own obsessions.

Julie: Yeah, yeah, it's too distracting, right? Like it's- it takes so much, so much space, and I think about too with your experience in the restaurant industry too while also struggling with recovery, that had to make it so messy. You know, just like food was everywhere too at the same time.

Hannah: Absolutely. And I think for me too, right, pursuing a career in food, first and restaurants and then in food writing, for me, was motivated in part by passion and joy and some really positive things. And then on the other flip side, also part of that, the things I've talked about before, this darker impulses of that like sort of fear and worry and obsession, that was part of it too. And so for me, recovery has been this very slow, long process of untangling those two things and kind of redirecting myself, sometimes it feels like a million times over towards that

joy and curiosity and appreciation for food, for the people who make it, for recipes, for the way the food can bring people together. Um, and kind of focusing on that side of the coin and slowly kind of turning that volume down on the other stuff that, of course, like I'm still human and I think, right, I still live in diet culture and I think I'm always gonna be someone who has to watch out for those thoughts, like I might still always have them, but they're so, they don't take over my life, you know, there- they're so much quieter, and I know when they come, another piece of advice too is just to find some people, you know, it could be one, one friend who gets it, or a therapist or whoever it is, just some support system of people too. Um, because for me also the eating disorder was a very lonely experience because I was really embarrassed and ashamed about it and didn't um, and didn't share and so it just was a huge weight to carry on my own. And such a big part of recovery has been finding people who get it and not being alone with it anymore and getting to commiserate and getting to have people kind of nod and smile and give me a hug and say they've been there too, and that's just, that feels like a huge weight lifted off my shoulder.

Julie: Oh yeah, you know, that's the reason why I made this podcast to begin with, because I was uh, I've been a clinician for 20 years, and helping people recover, and something that I noticed were like, even people who had completely different lived experiences, um, their eating disorder may even look different, but there were so many themes that were the same, and a lot of it was the shame and the loneliness that you describe and just feeling so alone in the burden, like this heavy, heavy burden um, and I was like, I wish like my clients, I know there's like this HIPA thing, they can't hear what my clients are saying, but like, I wish they could be a fly on the wall to like hear and feel this connection, this like theme that- and you're not alone, even though, like that's part of like the big lie that diet culture pushes is like, you're the only one that can't, you know, have your shit together, and no, that's like why we need to turn it on its head. And um, I think that's so helpful because hearing you talk about how like it's been a long journey, it wasn't something that was overnight, and like reading through this letter, I was getting the sense that this person was feeling really overwhelmed, like they just couldn't make it happen fast enough, like even um, they're like, well I've been reading all this content, but I feel like I'm not in an action phase yet, and my kind of like curiosity was like, I wonder what they're expecting out of action, you know, because it takes time because we live in this world that's like totally reinforcing this. Um, but yeah, finding one person who can say, yeah, I- I hear you, at least, you know? Yeah.

Hannah: And we've been doing this one thing our whole lives. So, by having this sort of [inaudible] change in in our perspective and our experience, it's right. It's not a sort of overnight thing for anyone. It's definitely a process. So, I feel like just having that sort of compassion for yourself and that expectation that it might be, right, a slow, a slow process, is okay. That's- that's part of it, I think.

Julie: Mhm, for sure. Well, and you've given some really great steps and I- before I move on, I want to make sure I didn't skip over anything. Were there any other steps that you had in mind, or did we cover them all?

Hannah: I think those are the main- the main points. Connect with others, um, giving yourself a little- a little time and compassion and curiosity and, and kind of realizing that this is- this is a journey that's, right, that's gonna, that doesn't happen overnight, and that that's- that's okay.

Julie: Yes. Oh, good. Yes. 100%. And um, there's a- there's a part of the Love Food podcast called the food peace syllabus. If you're new to the show, it's a collection of resources that we've been putting together for the last five or six years now, and if you want the most recent copy, go to [juliedillonrd.com/freebies](http://juliedillonrd.com/freebies), and you can get to it. And I'm wondering um, what you would like to put on the food peace syllabus, Hannah?

Hannah: I hope it's okay to include my own.

Julie: Yes. 100%. That's why I wanted you to come on the show, because I want- I want you to tell us about it. It sounds amazing and super helpful for this letter writer and other people who can identify with it. Yeah, so tell us about it.

Hannah: So, I have two- two books, and my first one is really especially about my struggle with and recovery from my eating disorder while working my way through restaurants and falling in love with the food and hospitality business. It's called *Feast: True Love In and Out of The Kitchen*. And then my second book, which came out last month, *Plenty: A Memoir of Food and Family* kind of picks up the story and there's a little bit more about kind of creating this life in recovery, and a little bit more about- about the after, after what happens, finding my family and finding a community of women in the food world who are kind of making amazing things happen with food from a caterer to sommelier, to a cheesemaker, to a chef. Um, so yeah, I would be incredibly honored to include my books.

Julie: I would love that. And, you know, hearing about your second memoir, how it's kind of the next step for your recovery process and painting a picture of what that looks like. Um, and of course, I love your connection with cheese uh, [inaudible] about your love of cheese. I'm like, oh yes, I am totally down with this. But the thing that I think will be really helpful for a listener, many people have talked to me about just not being able to picture what recovery could actually look like. And so, sessions oftentimes would be even just like, well let's think about it and like paint that picture for yourself so your brain can have something to like, connect with as a reality, you know, like this could be the next step possibly. And so, um, I think about this memoir could be a really great example just for someone to be like, oh, this is what recovery could look like, this is what it was like for her. So um, looking at the different options and so I appreciate that and I will definitely put those both of those on the food peace syllabus, those are a welcome addition. And if people want to find out more about you, um, where's uh, where can people go to find out more about your work, your books, and um, all the things you're doing right now?

Hannah: You can check out my website, which is [hannahhoward.nyc](http://hannahhoward.nyc), or you can follow me on Twitter @hannahhoward, or Instagram @hannahmhoward.

Julie: Awesome, thank you so much Hannah. I appreciate your time, your expertise and sharing your lived experience. We really appreciate it.

Hannah: Thank you so much for having me. It's definitely an honor to get to chat with you.

Julie: So there you have it. Letter writer, I hope my conversation with Hannah Howard helped you to find kind of that bridge from consuming content to feeling like you are rest assured, making steps forward. We know you already are. Rejecting diet culture and recovering from eating disorders is something that I don't think people appreciate is really hard to do, and know that you are not alone. Hannah and I are rooting for you and everyone else that's listening who can totally relate to what you're experiencing is rooting for you too. I see that food has written back, but before we get to food's letter...

Julie: This episode of the Love Food podcast is brought to you by my PCOS roadmap. Are you affected by PCOS and wanting some non diet tools to help you to move forward? Well, I have a free resource just for you. Go to [juliedillonrd.com/freebies](http://juliedillonrd.com/freebies), and you'll get right to it.

Julie: If you enjoyed this episode of the Love Food podcast, I would love it if you left a rating, a review, subscribed, or shared an episode. Doing any of those acts of kindness really helps the show grow, especially for those of us who are independent podcasters. We don't have these big networks pushing us and getting us to different ears, so any time you can share the show or leaving- leave a rating review, it helps more people find the Love Food podcast and have access to food peace.

Julie: Well, I am excited to go and order Hannah Howard's book, *Plenty*. It sounds amazing. I love memoirs, and I will circle back around and let you know what I think about it, but it sounds like it's going to be a rich resource along the food peace journey, and until next time, take care.

Julie (as food): Dear struggling and overwhelmed while recovering, You are not alone. Let's say it again: you are not alone. Diet culture has persuaded you, us, and our culture that it can fix all our issues if we can just follow its arbitrary and ever changing rules. Let's call out it's bullshit. It is covering up access to connection, relationships, and joy. These will help you feel grounded in the overwhelm. Remember that recovery is a long process, and we encourage you to connect with at least one person who gets that. They can remind you of your wisdom and beauty and how it exists whether you follow diet rules or not. Compassionately turn toward those reminders, because that's the joy that will fuel your food peace journey. 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.