

Julie: The Love Food podcast is brought to you in partnership with my PCOS and Food Peace course. Finally free yourself from endless PCOS, fatigue, frustration, shame, and guilt. For PCOS sufferers who are tired of ineffective diets and unhelpful advice, join me on a PCOS and food peace journey that will change your life forever. Grab all the details at pcosandfoodpeace.com. Say goodbye to the food police and hello to peace.

Julie: 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 240 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. And as I think of connection, this episode is for those of you who feel broken on your food peace journey. Feel chaotic, disconnected, and sometimes relieved as you experience food behaviours that get really complicated living in a world with unchecked diet culture. I know many of you have let me know that you often feel broken. And I have a letter from someone who describes their experience beginning in the like, the beginning parts of their rocky relationship with food, and as they moved through into a place that started to feel really chaotic, and just feeling hopeless. We're lucky we get to hear from Fiona Sutherland, who is a dietitian and a dear friend out of Australia that has so much wisdom on this conversation. I can't wait for you to hear from her, and before we get to hear from Fiona, and hear this episode's letter, a quick word from our sponsor.

Julie (ad break): Early on as a dietitian, I learned that PCOS carb cravings were not like anything else when it comes to cravings. Cravings already can be complicated, but when you have PCOS, they can be so much more intense, with every cell in your body screaming to eat that plate of brownies. But yet, you're also told you have to cut out the very foods you crave. It's really complicated. And I know you're told that you're supposed to just ignore them or trick them, but I have something different for you. What if you said hello to the cravings and goodbye to the shame? If you're puzzled on how this even can work, or you want to know more, check out my pop up PCOS podcast. It's going to have a limited run, the end of April 2021, you can get to it at juliedillonrd.com/popup. What's a pop up podcast? Well, it's a podcast that's still free, and you can get to it on the same app that you're listening to right now. But you just need to sign up for it first and get a very special link so just you can subscribe to it. So, if you want to get to it, and I hope you will, go to juliedillonrd.com/popup. There, you will get access to the link, and you will get five special um, private episodes, just for your ears and everybody else who signs up, delivered right to your app when they are live. They are going to be just around for the week of April 24th, so as they come up in your feed, make sure you listen to them. They will be quick, informative podcasts. But you need to listen to them that week in order to get to them. So again, if you want to check it out and get access to this podcast, go to juliedillonrd.com/popup.

Julie (as letter writer): Dear food, the high school version of me would have been the last person on Earth to ever believe that my relationship with you would end up causing me so much heartache and pain. I was fine until college. Backtracking to childhood, I always loved you. I was a foodie, never overthought, and wasn't obsessed with the idea of what I would eat next. Food was wonderful, especially treats or junk food type items that I didn't get to eat often. I know

there were times when my eyes were bigger than my stomach, but maybe this is a thing that many young kids also experience? High school was normal. I was active, playing a sport that I love, busy with school, and spending time with family and friends. Senior year, I found myself with more freedom than ever. A lot of it was spent watching TV, or cooking and eating with friends. Then came college. After a particularly sad and confusing breakup with a boy, and a betrayal by a friend, my college friend group disintegrated. In retrospect, I think I may have retreated into TV and snacks, and there was no one to tell me to do differently. Then, during Thanksgiving break, I realized that I had been too free with you, food, and my cute little body was quickly becoming something I was ashamed of and disgusted by. I never had anything but a small body, and lived in a family of small people. I decided I would pay more attention to what and how much I was eating. I figured this would help me get myself under control. And from the moment I became aware of your presence in your power in my life, things really have never been the same since. Fast forward through five months of increasingly difficult and dreadful exercise regimens, and increasingly restricted intake of food, I left school early to move home and enter outpatient treatment. My junior year, I finally transferred into XYZ College. I was ecstatic, but the restriction started almost right away. This time, though, my body was far more resistant with-to restriction, and it was increasingly difficult to not give in and binge. I returned home after only three months, and didn't return to school until the next summer. Now my fourth year of college is almost over. This means I've been bingeing for a year now. It's hard to believe that I ever was able to restrict at all, because bingeing is such an everyday part of my life now. Over these past years, I have had consistent therapy, and I've also met with dietitians. But it seems like nothing is able to help me. In fact, the bingeing seems like it's getting worse and worse. In the past two months alone, I have gained X pounds. I think I've lost hope in ever being normal with food or body image. I feel so abnormal and wrong. In recovery bingeing, was always my biggest fear. And now it's my consistent reality. I have all the tools and resources I should need to help myself and change, but I'm still doing this. How did we get this far? Love, Secretly broken.

Julie: Hey there, letter writer. Thank you so much for your note. I hope that my conversation that I'm gonna be having in just a few moments will be helpful for you, and especially, especially to know that you are not broken. I know you feel that so much, but I don't think you're broken. And who we're going to learn from today is Fiona Sutherland. Fiona is a really good friend of mine and colleague out of Australia that has so much wisdom. I learn something new every time I talk to Fiona, so I am also selfishly really excited to chat with her. So let's go ahead and give Fiona a call.

Fiona: Hello?

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

Fiona: I'm great, Julie.

Julie: So, so nice to talk to you. And it's evening where I am. And it must be morning where you are. So how is the next day?

Fiona: The next day is looking surprisingly sunny. That's the outlook of the future.

Julie: Oh, good. Thank you. I appreciate that. Um, I love talking to you, and thank you so much for agreeing to talk to me with this letter. Do you get a chance to read over it?

Fiona: I did, yeah. Thank you so much for sending that in advance. That really helped me kind of get prepared and, and understand a lot more about this person's experience. So thank you.

Julie: Yeah. Yeah. And, um, this person's experience, you know, um, so many times when I read letters I'm, like, you know, everyone has their own experiences. But there are themes that I know um, so many people are gonna be able to relate to. I don't know if you've got that sense too when you were reading through it.

Fiona: Oof, yeah, absolutely. I mean, that's one of the main things I was thinking. Gosh, this is this, this writer is really telling us so much about their experiences, which I see interwoven in so many other people's experiences too. Yeah.

Julie: Right, well, so let's go into that. Yeah. When you were reading it, what was your general impression about like, what this person is experiencing?

Fiona: So the first thing I, if I was responding to this person and we were sitting in a room together and sharing space, then one of the first senses I got is that, that I feel a great sense of compassion for this person's experience. And, um, I would be communicating that to somebody. You know, I feel, I feel a great sense of compassion. Um, and the feeling, the feeling that we just mentioned, which is that they're not alone in this and that, you know, they're absolutely doing the best they can, and they always have. And as humans, you know, we draw on resources which are which, in some ways, are [inaudible], you know, things like food and eating or things like restricting or exercise, or even things like alcohol and other substances that as humans, we will reach for resources outside of us and inside of us, which can really help us to come back into a space where we can actually just be in the world, and longer term can also kind of be really tricky for us, can, can make body image problems, you know, tricky. Or it can create ongoing social problems for us and, and, you know, just really again, come back to this compassion piece. You know, one of the things Julie that really struck me in this letter is, is the letter writer's recollections of her most significant experience of loss or connection. And when we experience loss or connection in relationships with people, it, goodness me, it can really bring up so much. And for some people, it can also be a, felt as almost a trauma response, which reminds us about past losses or disconnections. And food, let's face it, it is such an effective mechanism when we're feeling lots of things like big, big feelings, you know, and we might not necessarily feel like we've got a space to put them. And so, turning to food or turning away from food is a really understandable and actually very effective mechanism. It's just that long term, it can cause us a lot of, a lot of hurt. So, the first thing I really want to say here is that all of this really makes sense, and you make sense.

Julie: I agree. I'm, I'm totally interrupting you. But that's something I just wanted to say. Like this makes so much sense, so much sense of this, that it would transpire in this way.

Fiona: Absolutely. And I think that one of the ways in which we can really develop a sense of compassion for ourselves is to remind ourselves, yeah, this, this makes sense, any opportunities

that we have to remind, especially our younger selves, you know, what you did made sense given this particular situation. So although the letter writer really didn't say much about her younger years, um, I'm guessing that some of the experiences that they're having now really are reminiscent of maybe something that they're trying to heal from their younger years. And all of that makes complete sense. As adults, we have resources that we don't have as children, and we're always, all through our life we're always just doing our best. And sometimes that can be really confusing. But you know, when we are able to make sense of things alongside somebody else who can witness, um, and be compassionate, and to hold space for us as we're kind of moving through some of these really tricky stuff, it can be, um, you know, that that can really be very soothing, soothing for people, especially when we're feeling really distressed.

Julie: Right? Right. And you know something that you were mentioning about the recollections and the connection to trauma, something that I was picking up in the letter too was that there were some, you know, typical kind of transitions that this person experienced. And when we go through transitions, oftentimes we need more support. And that's also when some of these behaviours were part of that support, and, um, and then trying to go back to school, the transition again and behaviour is kind of picking up again. And it almost was like this window into hey, um, I'm needing more right now and again. Of course you do. This is hard. This is a transition. Um, these things are gonna take more, and unfortunately, what I gather, um, on my side of the planet, I have a feeling you get the same on your side, is that whenever we go through transitions, the message that we get a lot of times is like, oh, yeah, just focus on eating healthier or go to the gym or get a face lift, you know, do shit like that instead of oh, you know, um, how about reaching out to a friend who may be able to connect with you, or find support in some way, and also have compassion with however you're through that transition too. So that was something that I was thinking about too with this letter.

Fiona: Oh, you're absolutely spot on. And I think times of transition can be unexpectedly hard for people. And you're right. There are so many pervasive messages out there of oh, this is framed as exciting to be going off to college. Well, yes, and for many people it can be really quite frightening to be leaving a secure social base and family support. And even if people don't relate to coming from families that they deeply connect with or that have felt universally supportive, it can still be very anxiety provoking. And people can feel quite scared moving away from that. So when this, you know, the pervasive message of what transitions are and how we quote unquote "should be" coping with it is really unhelpful. And then, you know, when it comes to food, eating, and the way we relate to our bodies, again, you know, when we turn to towards food to soothe ourselves, that, that's clever. That's actually very resourceful. We're not doing anything wrong, but what is wrong are the messages that tell us that we should feel bad. We should feel ashamed or scared of food in our bodies. You know, something that I know you and I share a lot with our clients and communities is there's no such thing as a good food or a bad food, a good body or a bad body. Actually, these are socially constructed messages that have been developed outside of us that we have internalized and that keep us scared and ashamed. And so, I think what this letter writer is really talking about here is that they're feeling kind of stuck between this is what I am feeling, and this is what I am experiencing, and this is what I have been led to believe I should be feeling, and I should be experiencing. So it's really it's so tough.

Julie: It's so tough. Well, you know, keeping that all in mind, if you were talking to someone who can relate to this letter or just some, anyone who can identify with some of the key points, what were some few steps forward that you'd recommend?

Fiona: Yeah. Thanks for asking about that. So, in terms of where to start or where to next, I hope it, hope it's okay for you and for listeners to offer some sections of my mini book, *Vitamin A to Z*. Uh, so this is a book which is broken up into small chapters and describes qualities we can use to, or we can build, to be with ourselves, like all of ourselves, the scared parts, and the nervous parts, and the fearful parts, and the ashamed parts, and also the confident parts, and the joyful parts, but also including our past selves too, remembering that we tend to carry our experiences right through life and, and to do so with compassion and curiosity. So, um, you know, so where, *Vitamin A to Z* is a little bit different. It's not a nutrition book, that's for sure. But what I have done is represented each of the vitamins as qualities. So, for example, vitamin A is awareness. Vitamin B is brave, and vitamin C is curiosity. So, if we were to start with Vitamins A, B and C for this letter writer, which is awareness, bravery, and curiosity, let's talk about all those in one just for the sake of brevity. So, developing awareness and curiosity absolutely requires bravery. It can be really scary to acknowledge what's going on, and also the depth of our pain and hurt and confusion, but interesting relationships. So whether that is a friendship or partnership, including partnerships and collaborations with a dietitian, or with a health at every size therapist, somebody who can really witness and be with some of these struggles without judgement and with curiosity really helps us to be able to do that for ourselves too. So, um, so when we're talking about, for example, awareness, what we're aiming to do is to bring a nonjudgmental sense of curiosity to more deeply understanding our experiences, because it is super super common. And I know that you will experience and observe this too, Julie, is that rather than view our experiences through a sense of I wonder what's going on here? You know, um, you know, what do I need, or asking some of these gentle questions, we tend to intellectualize, and we tend to go down that track of judgement and blame really quickly. So just to know that that is a very, uh, it's a Western thing to do. It's a very human thing to do, that we tend to want to fix ourselves, um, and to berate and criticize before we come back to awareness and curiosity. So I always start with kind of laying out the picnic rug and thinking about some of those really core qualities that we're trying to build, like awareness and like curiosity and self compassion. Which, yes, of course, that is vitamin S, um, and non judgement, which is, that is not vitamin N, by the way, vitamin N is no, as in the powerful no that is able to set boundaries for ourselves.

Julie: That's a good one to include for sure.

Fiona: Oh, yes, yes. So you know. So on that note, you know, being able to know what's okay for us or for us and with us is different to the yes, you know, the yes might invite more curiosity or invite more spaciousness into our lives. And the no might be a boundary setting, saying what's okay with us and what's not okay? And so, although yes and no, linguistically is a bit of a binary, um, you know, there's a lot of nuance and a lot of shades of grey that we can kind of draw in towards ourselves when we're asking, you know what, what really, really meets our needs. So the only other vitamin that I would, I probably would introduce fairly early on if I was speaking with the letter writer is vitamin V, which is values, and that is, you know, identifying uh, what it is that really matters to us, like deep, deep in our heart and our soul, and, and then how we want to show up in the world, um, alongside our fear, alongside our anxieties, alongside our experience,

alongside our humanness. So it's not demoting or dismissing any of those very human parts of us, but seeking to understand them and standing next to them, as opposed to trying to eliminate or get rid of them. So values is a really powerful anchor point that we can come back to, which brings us back into more of our true selves, I guess we could say, and allows us to have compassion for all the different parts of us that show up. So, um, yeah, that's just a really quick step through, which I hope feels helpful.

Julie: Yeah, it does. And something that I was picturing as you're describing these examples from your book was inviting someone who's in this kind of tug of war to just consider, not demand, but just consider what it would be like to drop the rope and dance instead of fight. You know, just consider, I'm picturing the picnic blanket, blanket being laid out and examining all the parts, deciding what to do with it. And, um, for anyone who can relate to the letter writer, I hope that feels like an invitation, if it feels safe enough to kind of walk in that space and consider those things, because the fighting that at, which you mentioned the binary earlier in some other regard, but I can sense that binary in this like, this letter of like, good and bad. And I, um, like I was restricting quote "successfully", and now I'm not doing it right. And so what would it be like to stay with the grey? That would be, um, it's really interesting to see what could happen with that possibility. So, I really appreciate you bring up the book. I totally want to put it on the food peace syllabus. Um, if you're new to the Love Food podcast, the food peace syllabus are resources that we're collecting along the way, the food peace journey to help you, um, just along your food peace journey, I should really say, and you can get to the most updated list at juliedillonrd.com/signup. And I'm gonna put that on there. Fiona, um, I am halfway through it, and it is such a fun book. It's something that, like, is, um, I don't know, some, a lot of people that I talked to, um, have done things like intuitive eating or similar tools, and they're needing something to just, like, help them in the muck. And so, this is something that felt like, um, more at ease, you know, accessible in those moments. So, um, I don't know if that was intentional, but that's like, what I'm getting from it is like, something that someone can use in those moments when just again, feeling the drudgery and tired and needing something to get through the moment. So, um, I appreciate you writing it. I know that couldn't have been an easy thing, so thanks for doing that. And, um, yeah, we're gonna put on that food piece syllabus. So before we wrap up, if someone wants to know more about you, where can they go?

Fiona: Okay, so the mindful dietician is www.themindfuledietitian.com.au. Um, the most active platform I'm on is Instagram. I quite enjoy playing around on Instagram, and I am @themindfuledietitian. Uh, I have a love hate relationship with Twitter, but I am @fionabodyposaus, um, and then on Facebook as well under The Mindful Dietitian. So I would love to connect with more people from this community and stay connected.

Julie: Awesome. Well, I will put everything in the show notes. Thanks so much. Fiona, I really appreciate your time, your compassion, and your expertise.

Fiona: Thanks so much for having me, Julie.

Julie: So there you have it. Letter writer, I hope my conversation with Fiona gave you some different options. Some firmer footing on your food peace journey. I appreciate that at times it

feels so chaotic, and you may feel out of control, but just know you're moving forward, even when it feels like you're not.

Julie (ad break): So I see food is written back. But before we get to food's letter, this episode of the Love Food podcast was brought to you by my PCOS and food peace course. Also keep in mind that I have a very special pop up PCOS podcast happening very soon. It's a private podcast that you need a special link for. You can get to it at juliedillonrd.com/popup, and you'll get an email to sign up to get the link when it goes live.

Julie: If you enjoyed this episode of a 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, seriously, any of those, really helps the show grow. And I thank you in advance.

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

Julie (as food): Dear secretly broken, We have been on quite a rollercoaster, haven't we? You have endured trauma and loss so much, so that we wish you knew that you are a survivor and so very brave. As you went through transitions and didn't get support, we appreciate we have had more connection. That connection has felt soothing and troubling, relieving and chaotic. Let's bring awareness and compassion to this complicated connection. With nonjudgmental curiosity, consider you have not been doing it wrong. You have been brave, and witness your own triumph and survival. Acknowledging and giving permission for all of these parts is another way to fuel your food peace journey for another day. 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.