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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 259 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, and you look exhausted. Obviously, I can't see you right now. That's creepy. But I have a feeling if you are in the space of rejecting diet culture, recovering your relationship with food, trying to mend your body image, and living amongst all those things that are so hard. You're really tired, and wondering if you're doing it wrong because you're so tired, and it's just not feeling productive. Well, here's the thing: diet culture is fucking with you. And I have a letter today from someone who is in that really exhausted space of trying, trying, and trying to recover the relationship with food, but it's trying. It's really trying on them, and they're wondering if they're doing it wrong. This episode's letter writer has a history of trauma and also a family who is just so knee deep in diet culture. It's certainly not helping things. We get to hear from Alyssa Scolari, who is a therapist and trauma expert, who has some really important insight that I know you're going to really appreciate. But before we get to this episode's letter and get to hear from Alyssa, a quick word from our sponsor.

Julie (ad break): This episode of the Love Food podcast is brought to you by Ovo Folic. What is Ovo Folic? Well, I had that question too, but Ovo Folic is a new to me inositol supplement. If you have PCOS and you have listened to podcasts on PCOS that I've been interviewed on, or you have done my course, you know that I talk all the time about inositol supplementation. We know that people with PCOS probably have a defect or deficiency with certain inositols, and that's what leads to insulin resistance, issues with ovulation, and higher androgen levels. Adding an inositol supplement to your PCOS regimen is something that for many people, helps to improve ovulation, lower androgens, and lower insulin blood sugars, and even improve symptoms of anxiety. Recently I jumped on the phone with Dr. Pari, one of the founders of the small company called Elan Healthcare that makes Ovo Folic. She also sent me samples to try. I was so impressed with all that Elan Healthcare is doing. It's a small women owned and led company, not a big corporation. They love providing a personal touch. Dr. Pari responds to all customer emails herself. She also oversees every aspect of the manufacturing and the ingredients of Ovo Folic. So I know not all inositol ingredients are the same. I really like knowing there's a choice in good quality inositol supplements with the recommended 40:1 ratio. Ovo Folic has no taste or smell. I can totally vouch for that, because I tried it myself, and of course has these really high-quality ingredients. Ovo Folic comes in easy to carry single dose packets with, again, that 40 to 1 ratio so you can feel rest assured that you're getting the recommended amount for the maximum therapeutic effect. So, Ovo Folic has a special offer for Love Food listeners. Use the coupon code `foodpeace` at checkout for 15% off. Go to Elanhealthcare.ca and click on their product, Ovo

Folic. It's spelled O V O F O L I C, to learn more. Use code foodpeace, all one word, to get 15% off.

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

Julie (as letter writer) : Dear Food, I am not sure if you and I can ever have a peaceful relationship. Lately, I am exhausted with recovery and the daily struggles of trying to eat intuitively, feeling like I am failing, and wanting to change my body. It feels like there is too much stress in my life that I do not have any energy left to try to go against the mainstream's ideas on food and dieting that on bad days I wish that I had never heard of intuitive eating and embarked on this journey. I realized that we had a complicated relationship after reading *Intuitive Eating* for the first time. I bought it on a whim, looking for an end to the food and exercise tracking madness, but still desperately wanting to change my body. I wanted to teach myself the "right" way to eat. I thought I was doing well, eating intuitively, and generally feeling at peace. This was until it was pointed out to me that I was following the "intuitive eating" diet, and this realization launched a pretty steep decline in my recovery. I know that the behaviors I had were not healthy and that at one time I realized that I needed help with them. But since I am not able to separate Intuitive Eating with the "intuitive eating" diet, I am so confused and apprehensive to try to re-learn it. Was everything I had learned the last 3 years completely wrong and how could I have missed the mark so much? Part of me wants recovery and the other part of me knows it will continue to be very challenging and I do not feel like I have it in me to stay on this path. I don't think I can go back to how I was before, but I continue to be in what feels like a half-recovered space. Working through my disordered food behaviors illuminated that I have a lot of personal trauma and feelings that I was using disordered behaviors to cover up and deal with. As I work through those, I notice the disordered food behaviors creeping back in like an old friend, wanting to help me cope. I realize diet culture is everywhere. And because it is everywhere, I feel exhausted by constantly defending my position to people and not giving in to the allure of what I know now to be another diet. My extended family gatherings that involve food consist of comments about amounts of food, "good/bad" food, needing to "work off" the food, or some special ingredient that will save us all from disease. Yoga has been a refuge but walking into the studio I might read a flyer for a weight loss cleanse, overhear conversations about diets, hear body negativity from other yogis and even some of the teachers. I attended a yoga teacher training informational session, thinking it would be a good challenge for myself to take my yoga practice to a new level and left feeling completely defeated after learning that one of the training modules was around "how to eat like a yogi". Sharing my own baked treats with co-workers inevitably invites a litany of body and diet comments, as well as their own personal justifications for eating or not eating the food I brought. I created an Instagram account for my dog because I thought it would be a fun way to share the funny things he does. Do you know how much diet culture permeates Instagrams about dogs? A lot. I cannot shut off the continuous diet culture that is everywhere in my life. Something has to change. Perhaps I am not fully on board with Intuitive Eating and HAES and that there are still pieces of diet culture I am hanging on to. All I know right now, food, is that I am mad. I am mad that I know that my food behaviors aren't healthy for me but that I want to keep doing them because it felt like I was in control. I have so much shame for having this problem at all that I can hardly admit it to myself. I justify this by fully embracing that I hate my body and that, of course, then the disordered eating makes sense. I am so tired of starting over with different therapists, finding yet another book that I put

my salvation into, hoping that, yes, maybe this one will click and I will magically love my body and I will become a true Intuitive Eater. Will I ever feel normal around you, food? Will I ever want to take care of my body instead of punishing myself for making a mistake at work, getting into an argument with a loved one, or accidentally reading a diet message on a magazine cover and feeling self-loathing? Can I enjoy you, food, without feeling an intense desire to want to exercise or restrict later? Can I trust you, food, knowing that my IBS may cause days or weeks of intense intestinal pain and fear of you, food? Will I be able to go to my doctor and not be completely obsessed for weeks after accidentally seeing my weight (and shame for feeling good that it was lower than what I thought)? It all feels too much, and I feel entirely un-grounded. I realize that this letter is even contradictory, stating that I wish I could have my old food behaviors back and also knowing that I have learned and made progress. I am just not sure, food, that I am on the right path, or even what the right path is. Sincerely, Wanting to Check Out

Julie: Thank you so much, letter writer, for sharing with us the details of what you're experiencing. Thank you for trusting us with all this information, and we're going to handle it with care. And in particular, I'm going to give Alyssa Scolari a call. Alyssa's a therapist who specializes in helping people with trauma who are also recovering from eating disorders. And she's going to have some wisdom for us. So, let's go ahead and give Alyssa a call.

Alyssa: Hi!

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

Alyssa: I am wonderful. Thank you. How are you?

Julie: I'm doing well. Thanks for asking. And I am hoping that you got a chance to read through the letter I sent you. Did you get a chance to do it?

Alyssa: I did. I have read it several times because it just resonates. It resonates so much with me.

Julie: Oh my gosh! I can't wait to dive in, then. Um and you know something about this letter that I think it's important to mention to the listener is this letter writer, I don't have this person's pronouns. So we'll reference this person um, without pronouns, then, with like letter writer or this person. Um, but we just want to make sure we mention that as we're kind of going forward. And when we, when you read through this letter, you know what- what was your general impression? Because I know for me there was lots to it that I know many listeners are going to be like, oh yes, that is me. So, what was your general impression about what this person is experiencing?

Alyssa: Oh my gosh! Yes. I- as I was reading this this letter, I was visualizing this person just being like, pulled in opposite directions and feeling a sense of like, despair, and being in the state of cognitive dissonance where like, you know, what they know isn't necessarily matching with their behavior sometimes, or isn't necessarily matching with what the rest of the world is saying and it's like, I feel like this person is just like, feels like he she or they are at the end of their rope. Um, and I just, you know, as I, as I alluded to earlier, it's just reading this letter, I saw so much of myself in this. And I also agree with you that I think so many people feel this way, where they

get to a place of like, okay, I have done almost all of the research I possibly can on intuitive eating, and I still feel helpless. So, it's like, now what?

Julie: Yeah, and I know people can be stuck in that “now what” for years, you know, they can really feel that.

Alyssa: Absolutely. Yes, and I was, I was one of those people, you know, when I, I have- I spent 20 years of my life just emerged in diet culture and when I started the journey to intuitive eating, there were several years where you know, that consisted of several meltdowns on my bathroom floor, just saying this doesn't work. I can't fight the majority of people who are constantly talking about their diets. I too, as this letter writer mentions, was always around family members and friends who were obsessed with like, working food off as soon as they ate it, and like you know, all the dinner time lunchtime breakfast conversations were centered around “how can I work off these potatoes, pancakes, you know, french fries”, whatever it may be.

Julie: oh it's so hard, and it just reinforces that cognitive dissonance that you mentioned, and you know, that phrase has been a really important one for me in my own relationship with food and and like, learning about diet culture, especially as a dietitian who trained to put people on diets as a dietitian. Um, cognitive dissonance was like really um, once I really had a phrase for what I was experiencing, it was what helped me to really shift- like move through the shit, like move through the cognitive dissonance basically, and um, which honestly was like such an exhausting space to be in, but also like, super formative, but as I'm talking about that I'm like, I have a feeling there's going to be many people listening who are like, what the hell is cognitive dissonance? Do you have like, a good definition for it?

Alyssa: So I, I always equate cognitive dissonance for just being this fancy term for feeling torn. To me, it's like the same thing where it's like, you know, you're out of alignment, you're not aligned, like, what you feel and what you're doing aren't matching up or, you know, your head and your heart are pulling you in two different ways. I feel like it's just, no matter the circumstance, the cognitive dissonance boils down to “I'm being torn in opposite directions” essentially. Um. Does that make sense?

Julie: Yeah, for sure. Yeah. Because I, I uh if someone's listen to the podcast before they'll recall like my like, one of the most important stories for me, it was like, when I was teaching, um, I was helping people with eating disorders recover and then I also was helping higher weight people to lose weight. And part of my job was teaching these classes for this unnamed super intense diet company that I will never name, because I'm like, they should not make another dime. But the place that I was working made so much money because we help people use this diet and I was teaching a body image class and helping people in this body image class to like, accept their bodies and avoid the binary with good and bad foods. But then I was also like, putting them on this diet and I was like, this is such a mind fuck, I can't, I can't do it. And I was- it was supposed to be a 30 minute class and it was three minutes long and I just said “the class is over” and I got called into my boss's office and I burst into tears and I was like, I can't do this. And she was like, well, if you want this job, you basically have to keep teaching this class. And so I eventually figured out a way to quit.

Alyssa: Yeah.

Julie: Um it was, it was, I didn't sleep for weeks at that point and I- as I'm like saying this, I'm like, I appreciate that that time was not really that long. Um, like we said, people can be stuck in that torn space for a really long time and that is exhausting, totally exhausting.

Alyssa: Uh gosh, it's so exhausting. And I have found that, you know, for folks who, who are, who are heavier, or for folks who identify as being fat, or who struggle with more binge eating disorder, going to treatment- So I, I went to a treatment center when I uh, when I was in my twenties and wanted to start this process of recovery, and I was one of the few people with binge eating disorder, also with folks who were struggling with more anorexia. And I remember I never felt a deeper state of like, that cognitive dissonance than when I was in that treatment. Because everybody around me was being told to eat and to put on weight. And I was sort of like, the only one that was being told like, you need to take weight off, you know, to the point where I was actually discharged from the program because they were saying that I was noncompliant with treatment, um, because I was continuing to gain weight.

Julie: Wow.

Alyssa: Because I- yes, yeah.

Julie: I'm sorry. I'm just reacting to like, how fucked up that is, because I'm thinking about you as a person trying to recover your relationship with food and how that would just hammer in more disordered eating and, and violence, you know, like, more trauma with your relationship with food.

Alyssa: Absolutely, absolutely. Which is why it's even hard seeking treatment, right, when you're- you're trying to go on the path of intuitive eating, because some treatment centers truly are not intuitive eating based despite the fact that maybe they say that they are, so I'm like, really relating to this person's sense of, like, almost like, who in this world can I trust that actually is an intuitive eater?

Julie: Yes. Yeah. And has the lived experience that you're talking about, like, um you know, has been in the depths of that cognitive dissonance and felt so torn, been on the bathroom floor sobbing, you know, like, you get that kind of pain, and um that I, yeah, like you sharing that has been really important for me to hear because, and I, I know there's um, a listener or two right now who are also like, I'm so glad that she can relate to what I'm experiencing right now, because yeah, there's a lot of mixed messages that are really um, rationalized, you know, in treatment centers and you know, you're going to treatment and any listener who's gone to treatment, that's a really big deal. Like it's, you give up, you know, you- you go somewhere else. You live in another, oftentimes another state and you're there for weeks, months, and it's expensive, and um, you give up your rights basically to access a lot of things that are- we like to access in our day to day. So it's a really big deal. But then also to be told you're noncompliant because you're not pursuing the thin ideal anymore.

Alyssa: Yes. Oh, it was uh, fucking infuriating. I mean, to this day, I can't even, the, the amount of times that I've rolled my eyes just sharing that story is, is off the charts.

Julie: They're rolling out the door.

Alyssa: They're rolling right out the door. I'm disgusted the way that all of that went down.

Julie: That's awful. Oh my goodness, well, thank you for sharing that. I really appreciate it. And and, you know, considering what this letter writer's going through, or, you know, you when you were on the bathroom floor, or anyone who's listening and can relate to those experiences, what would you recommend as some first few steps forward?

Alyssa: Yeah, so, I you know, I feel really, really grateful for the opportunity to be able to respond to this letter writer, because I think so much of what I'm about to say is what I wish that somebody had said to me, you know, a few years back when I was in this space, and I think the first thing that I would like to say to this person is, you've already done so much work. Like, you know, in this letter, there's so much like, you know, how did I manage to get this so wrong? And what I want to say is you have not gotten anything wrong. You've already done so much work. The research, trying, you know, trying to learn the basics of intuitive eating is so hard. Even being open to stepping into the intuitive eating world is a huge choice in itself. So, I feel like this person needs to give his self ,herself, their self, a little bit more credit. And I'm going to give this person some credit on the podcast, because this is incredible. This person is already like, come so far in my eyes.

Julie: Yeah, that's so important because it's otherwise, it's like um, continually, like putting a pile of crap on yourself because of like, not doing it right. And in reality, like this person has made so many huge steps like to reject diet culture just in asking some of the questions and noticing these things, like these are really powerful things that this person is connecting with and yeah, I wish they could, I don't know, give himself that like, pat on the back, you know?

Alyssa: A little pat on the back, especially because this person has already linked, right? "I turn to my eating disorder more when my, my trauma symptoms are exacerbated" or like, this person has already made that connection, and that in itself is monumental. And it doesn't feel like that for that person, right? For this person, it's sort of like, well, okay, now what? I've made these connections, now what? And I think that this is the part where intuitive eating gets very tough, because we are looking for ways, I think when we start out on this journey, we just want to get it right. And that thought pattern in itself is still like in a diet culture frame of mind, because we want to you know, just as we would on any diet, we want to get it right, we want to abide by the rules of the diet. And the thing that I think makes intuitive eating so difficult is that the rules are different for everybody, because all of our bodies are so incredibly different.

Julie: Oh, that's so important, that is so important. I think it's taking like the intuitive eating diet that the letter writer mentions and, and going deeper with it. You know, like really shining a light on some of the trapped spots of like, as, as long as it's continued to be framed as like a right or wrong, it's going to lead you in the direction you're not wanting to go.

Alyssa: Absolutely, especially if you like this person, you know, is somebody who has sensitivities. Like this person was saying that they have IBS. And I strongly relate to this because I actually had multiple food and sensitivities and, and didn't know, and I became so sick that I had to cut out quite a few foods in my, you know, in my diet, which made intuitive eating even harder. Um, you know, because it's like no gluten, no dairy, and that was really tough for me. So, you know, I think that that's where intuitive eating, a lot of people stop. It's like, it's just, you know, read this book, learn these things, but then there's the second step where this letter writer is clearly on the journey to, which is, how do I take what I know and apply that to my body and learn what my body is telling me is right for me?

Julie: Yes. And you know, in order to do that, like one has to experiment, right? And, and um, make these experiments in a way that sometimes it's going the way you want to go and sometimes it's not and it's all and, keeping into that like black and white space, it's just gonna make it feel like, I'm doing it wrong because I'm messing up, you know? But in reality it's like, you have to kind of explore different options in order to figure out yeah, what- what is it going to look like for you? Um, yeah, that's- that's a that's a hard space, and yeah, IBS, of course, any- any kind of GI issue certainly complicates this. Of course. I know Alyssa is a trauma specialist, you know, like IBS is something that happens so frequently with people who are recovering from trauma, and um, I have a colleague and friend, her name is Beth Rosen who specializes in IBS using like weight inclusive, intuitive eating kind of strategies in case anyone listening to it is like, oh that's me, she's someone to look her up on Instagram or on her website. She has lots and lots of content for someone in that space, and you know, for someone who has like, you know, this person identifies a trauma history and also this like cognitive dissonance. Is there something that you have found to kind of help um, someone to kind of continue to move forward when they have that kind of history?

Alyssa: Yes, So right, this person has, you know, a history of trauma, we've got lots of cognitive dissonance and you know, from reading this letter, this person is clearly so overwhelmed with all of it, and the lack of, and feeling very isolated with the lack of support for intuitive eating. And when you get to this point in the journey, and I just want to emphasize that this is such a normal place to be, it doesn't mean that this process isn't working, because so many of us have been exactly where this person is, and when we get to this point where it all feels like too much, my suggestion is, let's slow down. Let's try to turn down all of the noise in your head and tune into your body a little bit. And what I mean by that- is it okay if I keep going? I don't know want to like-

Julie: Yes, for sure!

Alyssa: Okay, so what I mean by that is, you know, diet culture and trauma are two things that cause us to be very disconnected from our bodies. It causes us to tune out. And diet culture makes us think that if we just kind of use our brains to follow this certain plan, our bodies will be exactly what we want it to be. And nobody ever in diet culture says, hey, maybe you should let your body tell you what to eat what you need. And a lot of times we can't at first, like when, when we say like, well, what does your body need? I've had people come into my office that say, I can't even feel hunger and fullness. So, when all of this intuitive eating stuff feels so overwhelming. My, my first reaction is, then let's slow down. Let's stop reading. Let's tune into

our body, and that can look like something as simple as taking some epsom salt in the shower, scooping it in your hand and exfoliating your skin in the shower. It might take you all of three minutes. But that is a very simple way for you to even connect with some kind of sensations in your body. Does that make sense, where I'm going with this?

Julie: Yes, 100% like, um, it sounds like it's um, finding ways to connect with your body that are outside of food to like, those like connections and um, practice having connections in your body that feel more accessible.

Alyssa: Yes. And let's awaken your body signals. Because we've been taught to shut them at- we've been taught to shut them off. So let's awaken your body signals in, in whatever ways we can. And there are lots of ways we can do that. You know, I know this person has mentioned yoga, and unfortunately for this letter writer, it sounds like they- her- his, her, or their yoga experience was not so good.

Julie: Yeah, that stinks.

Alyssa: Um, but sometimes, yeah, I, I know sometimes yoga can really help with that. The epsom salt baths, or the epsom salt scrubs can help with that, or even just sitting for all of 30 seconds in a self-hold, so, you know, opposite arm, opposite shoulder, like you're hugging yourself, it might feel silly, but when you start to look at your body and say, hey, I'm ready for you to tell me what you need, those signals are going to start to awaken inside of you.

Julie: That's so great. I love the permission too to slow down um, that you don't have to keep, like charging, charging, charging, like it's okay to turn the dial down and um kind of just be for a little while, and, and work on repairing that moment. I think that's so, so important and um, you know, there's something on this podcast, Alyssa, called the food peace syllabus, and if you're new to the show, that's a collection of resources that help us with our relationship with food, and it's things like blog posts, other podcasts, movies, books, and you can connect to the latest copy at juliedillonrd.com/freebies. And Alyssa, do you have any, anything that you would like to add to it?

Alyssa: So I, and this might not be something very tangible, but one of the things that I think can be really helpful for folks who find themselves constantly infiltrated with diet culture is to do a mental exercise and I call it like, the golden shield. So visualizing when you're walking in some place and it sounds a little hokey, but it truly is, I have found very helpful, is visualizing a bright golden shield around you. And when those diet culture comments hit you, let it bounce off your shield. And the more things come your way, the stronger your shield gets. And I have found that even just, you know, listen, your shield can be pink, purple, sparkly rainbow, whatever you want it to be. But I have found that that sometimes can help, is those visual exercises as well, to help you not absorb all of that, like diet culture banter.

Julie: Yes. Oh my gosh, that's like, that sounds like such a wonderful visual, that's right up my alley. But for sure. And Alyssa, I know you have a podcast. Um, do you have like a podcast episode where you talk about that, or a blog post or anything?

Alyssa: So I do have a podcast. I have a couple of podcast episodes with some really phenomenal, intuitive, intuitive eating, um, experts. One is with, her name is uh, her name is Colleen Christensen and she, her Instagram handle is @nofoodrules. And then I have another one with @dietitian.tianna and she talks about, that's her Instagram handle. So I do have quite a few podcasts episodes where we talk about like, intuitive eating and different, different ways to view intuitive eating. And I know there's some real, there's a lot of golden nuggets in there. I highly recommend those episodes.

Julie: Good. I will put those in the show notes and, the golden shield as well. We'll reference that in the show notes too in case someone's listening is like, I need to remember that part, and um, thank you for all that information and all your expertise um, on behalf of the letter writer, and any listener who can relate to that, and if someone wants to find out more about you, wants to check out your podcast, where can they find you?

Alyssa: They can head right on over to lightaftertrauma.com.

Julie: Alright. That will also go in the show notes. I'm writing it down right now. Um, and um again, thank you so much for your expertise, your wisdom, your compassion, sharing your lived experience. I know it's gonna be super valuable to this letter writer and, and the listener.

Alyssa: Of course, thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate it.

Julie: So there you have it. Letter writer, I hope my conversation with Alyssa Scolari was helpful for you. I hope it provides some respite in the space you're in right now. Like Alyssa and I said, we hear the cognitive dissonance and we know that is a super exhausting space to be in. But no, you're not doing it wrong. I see that food has written back, but before we get to foods letter...

Julie: (ad break): This episode of the Love Food podcast was brought to you by my PCOS and Food Peace course. You can get to all the details at PCOSandFoodPeace.com.

Julie (ad break): This episode was also sponsored by the Ovofolic, a new way to get your inositol supplement for those of you affected with PCOS. Would you like 15% off? Just for Love Food listeners, go to elanhealthcare.ca/discount/foodpeace. There's a link in the shownotes, and remember Elan is spelled E L A N. So go to elanhealthcare.ca/discount/foodpeace.

Julie: Alright, enough of all that. So until next time, take care.

Julie: If you enjoyed this episode of the Love Food podcast, I always appreciate a rating, view, subscribe, or share an episode. Seriously, I know you hear it in every single episode, but doing that really helps the show grow and I thank you in advance. All right. Let's get to food's letter, and until next time, take care.

Julie: Dear wanting to check out, Let's take a moment to pause and reflect. You've done so much work, even though you don't feel productive. Want to know some secret insight? Diet culture keeps you focused on an outcome and quote, "being productive". That's the trap. Yeah. Can you

slow things down and compassionately honor the pain from your cognitive dissonance? You are repairing and not doing anything wrong. Diet culture and trauma have you thinking you're trapped because of your weakness, when you've only been in your strength all along. 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.