

Intro music: Bags are packed, are you ready to go?...This time tomorrow we'll be on the road...riding with you into sunnier days...I wouldn't want it any other way.

Julie: It's time to name the neglect from typical food advice. Welcome to the Find Your Food Voice podcast, hosted by me, Julie Duffy Dillon. I'm a registered dietitian with 20 years of experience partnering with folks just like you on their food peace journey. What have we learned? Well, cookie cutter approaches exclude too many people, and you don't need to be fixed. It's not you. It's not me. It's all of us. Only together we can start a movement and fix diet culture. And we will. Let's begin with now.

Transition music: I want to see how the world turns round...Let's go adventure in the deep blue sea...home is with you wherever that may be...home is with you wherever that may be.

Julie: Hi and welcome to episode 287 of the Find Your Food Voice podcast. I am Julie Duffy Dillon, registered dietitian and partner on your food peace journey. No matter where you are and how it's going, I am grateful to be partnering with you today. Have you ever tried to access ways to help your complicated relationship with food or explore ways to improve body image, but just found you just were kept out for whatever reason? Maybe you didn't see someone that looked like you, there was nobody who had your lived experience, or you were just minimized and told that you weren't doing it right. Well, I have a really important episode for you if you've experienced that, or if you haven't, I think all of us as we are exploring our own complicated relationship with food. And remember, this is not a, an individual kind of experience. The only way we're going to change diet culture, the only way we are going to collectively heal our own food voice, the only way we're gonna be able to do that is by coming together and making sure everyone can help, get help, on their food peace journey, and however that looks, and define it their own way. So I have an incredible expert today who is, I'm just so grateful that Lara Minges was willing to write her own letter. And Lara writes her letter to her body, and then sticks around and discuss it with me. So I'm excited for you to hear Lara's letter and our conversation, but before we get to all that, a quick word from our sponsor.

Julie (ad): This episode of the Find Your Food voice podcast is brought to you by my free download, my PCOS roadmap. I want to help you to go from Diet Rock Bottom to advocate of your own health and well being while living with PCOS. Did you know you don't have to diet? Yeah, there are many different ways to explore health without dieting living with PCOS. I have my first three steps to move away from diets in this PCOS roadmap, and if you would like this free download, all you need to do is go to julieduffydillon.com/voice. Actually, it's julieduffydillon.com/voice, and you will get to that free download. It is my PCOS roadmap. I also have some other downloads there in case you will, you're interested in having other tools along your food peace journey. But this PCOS road map in particular gives you my first three steps to help move away from dieting and promote health, all while living with PCOS. So I am excited to share this roadmap with you. And again, all you need to do is go to julieduffydillon.com/voice. Alright enough of all that, let's get to this episode with Lara Minges and first hear her Dear Body letter.

Transition music: Take the good and the ups and downs...I want to see how the world turns around. Home is with you wherever that may be.

Lara: Dear Body, I am beginning to see things from your perspective. To understand and feel that you were violated, wounded and judged before I even fully knew I had you. To feel what it was like to meet you on my own terms and then slowly learn that you were different and expected to be as close to non-disabled as possible. I did not understand that you were doing the best you could do, especially with the tremendous push to always improve and guilt if I didn't. I didn't know how to connect to you, and the idea filled me with silence, tears, frozen wishes and heavy words. I felt like petrified wood, ancient and buried in ash from the impact, forced to hate you even as there was support around me. Then I found disability culture, a whole tribe of people like me who were forging their own way through shame and tears, and my fire flared and my voice seemed invincible. And then I realized that for all its strengths, it left you out because at the point of you, disabled people are vulnerable and the things we can't do are still seen by many as things that are easy, so simple a child can do it. If many children can do it, but disabled adults are not children and not, despite what society says, children in adult bodies, I had to rethink how easy it is, how much we all believe it's easy because many times it just happens without thinking. And so I started to look at this, and you, differently, to find words for the pain of ableism. To tell you that I need you and am doing my best to live within you every day as honestly as possible. I am still learning the best ways to be your friend and to know those best ways change but still form a picture of self-love and acceptance. Thank you for always trying to be my friend and for your faithfulness to me. Love, Lara

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

Lara: Hello, nice to see you. I'm so happy to be here today.

Julie: Oh my goodness, I am so happy that we're finally chatting. I know we've talked about this for a long time. So it feels so good to actually get a chance to meet you and talk to you. And you know the listener in like, the process of like, recording the episode. The listener just heard your letter. I just read it. And I am curious, what was it like for you to actually like, write this letter?

Lara: It was a little difficult because it covers a lot of things that I usually speak about, but haven't written about for a while. But I think it's really important to raise those issues so people are more aware and also people with disabilities can see themselves reflected in this kind of work. And that's why I do what I do. Because I know that there's a lot of people who are now doing this kind of work, and I just want to add my voice to the conversation, because like 15 years ago when I began about that, there wasn't much going on. And now there's a lot of more.

Julie: Yeah. So 15 years ago-

Lara: And I just wanted to add to that, because it's so important.

Julie: Mhmm. Um, well and 15 years ago. What was, what were things, like how are things different?

Lara: People were not talking about body image. People were not talking about our bodies at all. Like me, we're just saying that we're just like everybody else. And there's, there's nothing really

wrong with that, except that it kind of cuts off the body. So we, we needed as a community to grow into it, and that was difficult.

Julie: Yeah. Well I, I mean I kind of laughed when you said that like it makes it like everyone the same, and I, I hope it doesn't come across as like I was laughing, but I was like, how ridiculous really is that, that, to think that everyone is the same, and I hope that everyone like, wants everyone to recover. Like, everyone should be able to like eat what they want to eat, have access to the food that they want to eat, to enough, and to not talk about all the different experiences. Um, you know, I, I, and I know you said that more people are talking about it, about ableism and eating disorder recovery-

Lara: [inaudible] of this, so I just want to shout out to them that people are doing a lot of work, and it's really, really important and, and, and it actually inspires me every day. Even though I've been [inaudible], I'm just very glad that there are more voices now.

Julie: Well I wish that, that, I wish there were more.

Lara: Me too.

Julie: So I, I appreciate you doing this. And um, you know, offering to um, talk to me. I mean again, we've never met before, so like, thank you for taking the risk with me to do that.

Lara: You're welcome!

Julie: And um, you know like thinking about 15 years ago and like, noticing that your experience was not something that people were talking about um, what did you wish that you saw back then, or what did you wish you'd hear?

Lara: I wish I saw more community among disabled people and less medicalization in disability, which is where we designed the disability as solely a medical issue, and that creates a lot of pain for disabled people.

Julie: Mhmm. Yeah. There's something about eating disorder recovery and also like, quitting diets. You know, for a listener, some, some people listening to this show are trying to recover from an eating disorder. Some people are trying to move away from diet culture, and the thing that so many people have told me is like, getting out of isolation is how they were able to recover. Connecting and community, and the types of community are so different. But um, tell me about like, yeah, like how has ableism, from your perspective, how is that contributed to like, blocking recovery for folks?

Lara: Well, when I was in eating disorder recovery, which was many years ago, there wasn't a lot that was specifically for disabled people, and just even getting in the door was difficult because the places were not accessible. And then some of the things that were said were not very helpful, because they didn't really focus on disability, because a lot of non-disabled people don't have the same experiences, like they don't need to be moved, for instance, like I need to be moved. So

that, you know, that, that affects my body daily, even though I've gone through recovery, and I just wish that there were more focus on them.

Julie: Well, yeah, me too. Yeah. And uh, the focus on the medicalization, I'm like trying to, I'm wrapping my head around that, like um, and I think my brain is still, it's like trying to really put together how that is so harmful. Like I, it seems really clear-

Lara: I think, I think it's a new concept for everybody because everyone is really used to, if you have a disability, you always need to recover, and you always need to be working at recovery or around your disability and around whatever else you may have going on. So I think it just kind of tweaks people's a brain to talk about this as a, as a thing for self acceptance. So, so I can understand why that's a difficult concept. There is going to be more information on that on my website.

Julie: Oh good, good. We'll make sure we put your website in the show notes too. One thing that I have found myself talking a lot about, and like thinking a lot about, is the whole concept of health and eating disorder recovery, and how, especially, I'm trained as a dietitian. So, definitely medical-model trained, and lots of lots of healthism. And as I am trying to break down the bias that I have just, have in my brain from my lived experience, from my training, how the concept of health as this like pursuit, how that basically blocks whole groups of people from ever being accepted into like, certain communities or, or certain conversations. Um, yeah. What's your thought on that? Even the word health as it comes to like eating disorder recovery and as we talk about food and body weight and all that stuff.

Lara: Well, I think that eating disorders are also medicalized a lot. And to some degree, I mean, they are a medical issue when, I mean they just, they are. But you can also, you can also have a lot of medicalization around that. And when we're doing that, I think it does block people from just kind of accepting where they are and working toward recovery, whatever that looks like for them as they work with people, because there's just a lot of focus on, you know, you have an eating disorder, but you over here are healthy and fine. So that's really scary to me.

Julie: Mmhmm. Yeah. There's like a division, and kind of makes me think about what we talked about earlier about isolation versus community. Yeah. Yeah. So important.

Lara: And so I, I don't say that disabilities don't have anything medical going on. Like I have a chronic illness that's unrelated to my disability. So, I can't say that there's none of that. But I think it's over-focused on. Some of the things people tell me it shouldn't be focused on at all, but that hasn't really worked for me. I think, I think we just really need to be aware of how much we're doing that.

Julie: Yeah. You know, thinking about 15 years ago. And I don't know, when we've, we've talked about the number 15 a few times now. I don't know if that's when you were um, struggling with like eating disorder stuff, or if that's when you were looking for community. Um, but thinking about that time, is there anything that you wish a clinician would have said? Or, I'm thinking about someone listening to, who's like, oh, I want to help people um, with disability to be able to recover from an eating disorder too.

Lara: [Inaudible]

Julie: Yeah. Like is there anything that someone could have done that would have been helpful? I mean, we may have a captive audience right now.

Lara: I think- [Laughs] I agree. I think we need to understand that a lot of people with disabilities have been through trauma. Up to 90% of children with disabilities have been sexually abused by the time they're 17. So that's a lot of people. And then you add people who have had other experiences with chronic illness or acquired disability. So that is, most of us have gone through that. So I think when I was going through that there wasn't a lot of understanding of that, and trauma has moved forward 15 years, but you just really need to be aware of that.

Julie: Right. Right. And I think for many therapists and dietitians um, having a trauma-informed approach is kind of in vogue, you know?

Lara: Yeah, it kind of is.

Julie: It's like, yeah. [Laughs]

Lara: It kind of is, yeah. [Laughs]

Julie: I'm like, yeah, that's great, right? If people are like thinking from that modality and like, um, and then also appreciating like, oh, I may need to get extra training to make sure I help, but did you say 90%?

Lara: 90%.

Julie: Wow.

Lara: I can give you statistics on that, which I did not add, but, but absolutely, I can do that for your listeners because I think that's very important for people.

Julie: That's a really, really, um, I mean, my heart is heavy thinking about that. It's 90% are sexually abused by the time they're 18, is that what you said too?

Lara: Yeah. And that doesn't even cover adulthood, attendant care, [inaudible] that were otherwise vulnerable. So that's just, that's just for congenital disability.

Julie: Yeah. Well, and I mean, there's so many pieces to that, and, and part of this conversation with, like, food and weight and, and how I would imagine for many people in that experience, however they're experiencing their eating disorder, whether it's restricting or binging or both or whatever it may be, how that may have been like the coping, like that's how they survived all that trauma.

Lara: And also, that's, a lot of the ways that people survive, ableism, is to kind of disconnect from their bodies because ableism is everywhere. It's just like, it's ubiquitous. It's like the air. I say, it's like bad air quality, people don't notice bad air quality when they're just, when they're just hanging out in it. People don't really notice it until it gets really bad, or their lungs are bad. But otherwise you're not thinking about that air quality loss, you know, unless you have reason to. So just [inaudible] reason to.

Julie: So you're being like, so 90% of people with disabilities are sexually abused by they're 18, and then also experiencing like, consistent trauma just living in ableism.

Lara: Yeah.

Julie: Yeah. Oh wow.

Lara: Yeah I mean, because it's considered, it's, I mean we are a social minority, we really are. And then you add racism and homophobia, other things people may have going on. So that compounds, and that's just a lot of things.

Julie: Right, yeah. Yeah. Oh my goodness. And um, as you can tell, I'm like letting it like sit, it's like, go in the brain if you're not watching, it's like, wow.

Lara: I see that, yeah.

Julie: That's something that I would imagine takes a lot of um, care, compassion, community to really sift through the eating relationship then.

Lara: Yeah. And so it's really important for people with disabilities to be in community with other people with disabilities, but we're not really encouraged to do that. So getting over that is a difficult thing too, because we don't want to necessarily be seen as disabled. So that's, that's another hurdle for a lot of people.

Julie: Yeah. Yeah. And I love how your cat is like letting us know that they have something to say. I love that so much. And well, what do you see as like, and I would imagine this, this just depends on a person's own definition, but how would you define eating disorder recovery for you, or for anyone else who has a experiencing a similar lived experience? Like, what does that look like for you?

Lara: I think it was and is a process of just kind of coming back to my body, loving my body as is, you know, letting my body move in ways that I actually want to do instead of being part of physical therapy where, [inaudible] exactly how to move to reach a functional goal. So that has been really important for me. Also dance and things like dance therapy and things like that have been important for me. I can't really afford that at this moment, but there was a time when I went through that, and it was very helpful, and I'm actually going to become certified in dance for people, and even though I use a chair, because I think it's really important to show people that you can move in all kinds of ways.

Julie: I love that so much. That's amazing. Um, you know, and looking through your letter again, and I know the listener just, just heard it, but there was like a piece that I was taking from it of like, of being in the moment with your body, and having a space of compassion and um, like to me, I was like, that just seems like so beautiful, and it sounds like there was a lot that really um, kept you from accessing that those moments. The world is like not allowing that to happen, but there's been ways that you have found, and like you said, through community and through your own process, and you know, I, I when I was on your website I was like wow Lara can do a lot of different things, like you have a lot of training, and so it sounds like you're like making what you needed. You know, too.

Lara: Right, definitely.

Julie: I love that.

Lara: Because I figure if I need it, other people need it as well. So that, it really did inspire, everything that I do is kind of related to that period of my life, and what I saw that we needed to do. Because, and it's been, it's been a while to build to get all those certifications and certificates. But I think they all fit together.

Julie: I think they do too.

Lara: So I'm happy with that.

Julie: Yeah. Yeah. Well I mean, what an amazing thing to be able to provide for people who are looking for recovery, and feel left out of the conversation. You know? I love that. Well, so before we wrap up, is there any resources that you find to be super helpful in this conversation about ableism and eating disorder recovery, or just something that you found really helpful along the way?

Lara: I think that the, that the book list that I sent to you is very helpful for people getting an idea. And I also think, I used to use a website called Adios Barbie. I don't know if it's still around, but it was very helpful to me. And there, there, they also did a book on that, and I am going to do more content on this because I haven't seen books specifically related to eating disorders and disability. But when I was going through eating disorder recovery, I read a lot of Roxanne Gay, which was very helpful. So, I think that, I think that that could be helpful for a lot of people with disabilities.

Julie: Um, which, was there a particular book by Roxanne Gay that you got the most from? Or just all of them.

Lara: I think just all of them. I read all of them, and I just, I really, I really support that, because I think there's a lot of crossover between her experience and people with disabilities. So when we're not seeing ourselves reflected, we need to go outside of that to see if there are some parallels.

Julie: Yes! That's really um, I want, that's going to be a quotable right there. Like sometimes when we can't see ourselves represented, we have to look outside. And other communities and what they're doing. And Roxanne Gay's book, *Hunger*, was one of the most important books for me in the work that I do. Um, and yeah, trauma was a big theme, I mean, I think it was chapter four was the trauma like that described, and how it impacted Roxanne Gay's relationship with body and food and very, very important. So the book list that you sent my way, I will put in the show notes for listeners. Um, and I'm like, maybe someone is listening that's like, I don't know, like a literary agent or something like, you could write the book that we need.

Lara: I am trying, I'm working on a manuscript right now. So if there is anyone, I would be happy to um, talk to them.

Julie: Yeah, well, let's make it happen. Yeah. Like ooo, who can we make sure this podcast gets to? I, I love that idea.

Lara: Thank you.

Julie: Yeah. Anyway. Well, thank you so much for sharing your lived experience, your letter to your body. Um, and before we hang up, is there anything else that you were wanting to share or talk about? Um, or did we cover all the points?

Lara: I think it's really important that people with disabilities try to sort of reconnect to our bodies the way that we want to, and that is part of what I do, is just having that conversation with people and kind of guiding them through that process. So people who need assistance with that, they're going [inaudible] contact me.

Julie: Awesome. Well, where's the best place for people to go to find you?

Lara: Um, disabilityintersection.org. And my, my um, my email is disabilityintersection@startmail.com.

Julie: Awesome. Well, thank you. Thank you for even including your email address, that's so accessible of you. Thank you.

Lara: I really want to make a difference for people, and I see that this is a real need. So yes, I'm more than willing to do that.

Julie: Awesome. Well, thank you. I will put everything in the show notes for you, the listener, to be able to um, find out all the ways to connect with Lara, and thank you so much for your time, your expertise, your compassion, your insight. I really, really, really appreciate it.

Lara: Thank you, Julie. I have had a wonderful time.

Julie: So there you have it. I hope you enjoyed my conversation with Lara Minges. I was so grateful to have this time to learn from Lara, and also incredibly grateful that Laura was willing to actually write her own letter to her body and then stick around and discuss it with me. Are you

interested in doing the same? We welcome letters from any listener, whether you are a clinician or someone just experiencing some complicated relationship with your food, or body, or diet culture. And if you are interested in doing that, I am so excited. I want to include at least one episode a month from someone who's writing their own letter and then also discussing it while we're talking and recording it so other people can learn from your experience. It's part of why we changed the name. And so, if you are interested, go over to julieduffydillon.com/contact, and there will be, there's a way there to let us know your interest.

Julie: And this episode of the Find Your Food Voice podcast was brought to you by my PCOS roadmap. You can get to it at julieduffydillon.com/voice. There, you can find the free download, the PCOS road map, and all the other free downloads that I have that you may find helpful along your food peace journey. And last but not least, if you enjoyed this episode, I always appreciate a rating, a review, subscribing to the show or sharing it with someone you think that may actually like it as well. Doing any of those really small things really helps other people find us. And we appreciate your support of an independent podcast in advance. Alright, so we have the letter from Lara's body coming up next, but until next time. Take care.

Julie (reading letter): Dear Lara, We appreciate this letter was tough to write. Years have gone by since you started your body image rediscovery. While it was painful to reconnect with the past, we know you are continuing to make what you need. Know this - we see you. We see you just as you are. The way the world has kept you literally and figuratively out of rooms and conversations, kept you from accessing your body, kept you in isolation. We are glad you found a way back home to your body and rediscovered in spite of the world's bad air quality, aka, unchecked ableism, joy and movement on your own terms, and real community. Thank you for naming your truth. You doing so keeps others out of isolation and invites them into community by making what you needed without even having access to it. You are cultivating hope and food peace for more who have never had access. Love, your body.

Julie: Thank you for listening. I am Julie Duffy Dillon, and this is the Find your Food Voice podcast. Ready to join the anti diet movement and take the food voice pledge? Go to julieduffydillon.com and sign your name to the growing list of people saying no to diets and yes to their own food voice. The Find Your Food Voice podcast is produced by me, Julie Duffy Dillon, and my team of kick ass folks. I couldn't make the show without Yeli Cruz, Assistant Producer and Resident Book Fiend. And Coleen Bremner, Customer Service Coordinator and professional Hype Master. Audio editing is from Toby Lyles at 24 Sound. Music is Fly Free by Hartley. Are you looking for episode transcripts? Get them at julieduffydillon.com, where you can also submit letters for the podcast, give us feedback, and sign the Food Voice pledge. We need your voice to end diet culture. We literally can't do this without you. Subscribe to the Find Your Food Voice podcast to get weekly inspiration and education on how we can defeat diet culture and reclaim our own food voice. I look forward to seeing you here next week for another episode of the Find Your Food Voice podcast. Take care.