

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Padma Lakshmi

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by Padma Lakshmi, where I ask her: What are you cooking up this fall? Welcome to Getting Curious, this is Jonathan Van Ness. I'm so excited to welcome our guest. She is a literal Emmy-nominated food expert, television host, producer, and New York Times best selling author. But she's also someone who I'm lucky enough to get to call a friend. Welcome to Getting Curious, Padma Lakshmi. How are you?

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:00:35] I'm good, Jonathan. How are you?

JVN [00:00:38] Good! People can't see, which is their loss, unless they follow the social media. So they might get to see a little video of us. But this center part that you're serving us today. I was also try to do this thing where, like, I don't compliment all of my guests, like physically I'm trying to be more of a journalist or something, but it's not going well. I'm still a hairdresser, and it just is what it is. And how are you? What's going on? How's your summer been? I just thought that you were in Paris.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:01:01] I just got back from Paris last night. My summer's OK. It's going by really fast, and it's really busy and I'm thankful for that. But I'm also really overwhelmed, to be honest. I feel like I didn't even get to enjoy Covid kind of receding before this Delta variant is going full steam ahead, and, you know, one of the reasons I went to Paris is, you know, I would never go to Paris in August because everything is shut, but we just felt that it might be exactly right for us because we did want to be careful and we did just want to lay low but go somewhere that wasn't New York, because that's where we have spent most of the pandemic.

And so my daughter Krishna, who is 11, and I went to Paris. We skated, like, in front of the Louvre and down the Île Saint-Louis. And we had a great time. And I just feel like time is slipping through my fingers like sand. And I want to try and enjoy every moment that I have doing something, whatever that is. It can be as simple as making a grilled cheese, which is what I did 20 minutes ago with Krishna. But just making sure that I stop, I enjoy what I'm doing or I focus really hard and concentrate on whatever is important to me, because I do think that we're all getting we're all trying to get back to normal, whatever the hell that means. But we're not normal.

We just been through, collectively, a very traumatic, fraught time. So even if we were all in status and staying really still, we still went through something that was very anxiety-

producing and very adrenaline-producing. And so I'm sure that other people are feeling like I am. I'm usually a very motivated, productive, ambitious person. I want to be. I always want to feel like I'm being productive and useful. But, but lately I just feel like how I can be better is by doing less, but doing it with more meaning. If that makes sense.

JVN [00:03:19] I'm hearing, like, a more quality over quantity message. OK, not to get sidetracked. However, you mentioned that you just made a grilled cheese 20 minutes ago. What kind of cheeses? What was your method? How does Padma make a perfect grilled cheese? Now here's the thing, everyone. I'll tell you this much. There is this one really exciting project that Padma and I got to do together. But I cannot tell you what it is yet, and neither can Padma. But I can tell you this. If, and obviously you don't need to hear from me because you're a literal food expert. And I'm sure most people listening to this do know that. But you know your stuff when it comes to food, you are not playing around on the food knowledge front. So please tell me what did you, like, what happened on this grilled cheese? Like, how do we, how do we make the perfect one?

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:04:09] So this is a very simple, basic but sublime grilled cheese. I like using San Francisco sourdough. I like the company Bread Alone. But there are many companies. I get sliced sourdough bread. I butter one side of the bread very luxuriously and then I put it in a hot pan, in a nonstick pan, and then I put shredded cheese. I don't like the cheese slices, I like shredded cheese and I like the fine shred. I think it's Organic Valley has a brand that's Mexican blend or Stonyfield Farms or something like that.

JVN [00:04:51] You have just rocked my world. I'm so sorry, but I'm freaking out, like, this is breaking news. No one's ever told me to do sprinkle cheese on that makes so much sense, though. It's going to give you more of that pull. It's going to give you more of that, like, it's more quesadilla style.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:05:06] More ooey-goey delicious!

JVN [00:05:07] Yes!

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:04:08] Yeah. And so, so I put the bread in. I turn it on medium. Don't turn it too high, but you want a good heat, a good amount of heat. Then I cook this, I sprinkle the Mexican blend, which is really just Jack, and Cheddar Jack will melt really well. So Cheddar, Muenster cheese will also melt really nicely, and then Gruyere as well, if you want to be more grown up. And then you can cut helping us on that. Any mustard on the inside of that, you can put sautéed mushrooms or pickled onions on the inside of that.

JVN [00:05:41] So if you are going to do that, though, would you do that? Like, do I do that, like, when it's not melted yet?

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:05:46] Yeah, you put it on top and then you butter one side of another slice of sourdough bread, and you make sure the butter side is up. And then you cover it with a lid and hopefully a glass, once you can see what's going on. But even if not, that's why you don't want the heat too high. But you, you want to cover it so you contain the heat. And that's how you melt that cheese. Then, when you see the cheese melting. From the sides, lift it up if you can't see and then you flip it, and then on the second side you leave it open because if you leave it closed the whole time, then you won't get crunchy on the outside of the bread. You need that crunch. So you don't, you know, you don't want to trap the moisture. But for the first half, before you flip it, you need to contain the heat because the cheese will melt faster that way. And again, and you're doing this on medium heat.

JVN [00:06:49] And then, and then what happens? Like, how do you serve it? You, like, then you bring it out when it's like perf.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:06:56] Yes. And you put it on a big plate and you bring it out and you just cut it in half, but you leave it closed so then when you open it, that's the big reveal. And, like, twice as much cheese as you think you're going to need. OK, I'd rather have one good grilled cheese than for mediocre grilled cheeses. So the way to make your grilled cheese yummy is to put extra cheese in it.

JVN [00:07:18] Can I just say, it's, like, I feel like there may be some listeners right now. When I first ask that question, we're like, "Oh, come on. Like, a grilled cheese." But it is harder than you think. I feel like some of the basic things, there's a total method to it and you have to, like, follow or it doesn't turn out. It's got in. Grilled cheese is totally one of those things.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:07:34] It is.

JVN [00:07:35] And I've been doing it wrong, apparently, because I've been using, like, the dang slices. And I also feel like I heat it up hotter than Hades because it doesn't melt because it's, like, a big slab of cold ass cheese.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:07:46] Right, that's what happens because we usually take the cheese, like, cold out of the fridge and then you've got those slices, which are nice but won't give you as much melt as quickly.

JVN [00:07:58] I honestly, I didn't mean to, like, I took such a hard right on learning about grilled cheeses in my question. I didn't mean to go there. I didn't know it was going to happen. I could get back into my flow of questions. I'm so sorry. OK, wait, so you guys were in Paris. I really was looking for that content. It was gorgeous. I saw some very good food that was, like, being consumed on this trip. What was, like, the standout, most amazing dish while you were there?

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:08:21] Honestly, we ate really healthy and it was so hot that we didn't want to eat anything really heavy. So, I mean, Krishna did have confit of duck one day, because she's fabulous. I mean, literally, she was like, "I really, you know, I'm going to get the poussin, I'm going to get the poussin," which is a baby chicken or young chicken. But then she saw the person at the next table get the duck and she regretted it. So the next day we went to get confit of duck.

JVN [00:08:52] Why am I hallucinating? Did I not see some sort of, like, was there one dessert on your Stories? Like, why do I feel like there was, like, I think there's, like-

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:09:02] There were lots of desserts, there were lots of desserts. And there, there was one with, like, these peaks of meringue.

JVN [00:09:07] Yes.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:09:08] And then, was, like, literally looks like a banana split with whipped cream and sliced bananas. So we were ordering everything. And we ate healthy too. Like, there's one right on this place. It was called the, The Art of Fruit. But, it was weird, but it was so good because it was really healthy. And they have these, like, gorgeous salads. You know, you go to France and whenever you order salad it always has, like, a really rich dressing on it. It's like, where's the sweet greens? Where's the toss? There's none of that. There's none of that, thankfully. But, like, there was this one place we just found in the Bastille and we just saw it, you know, we were trying to also be safe where we were eating. So we saw everyone else kind of spread out. So we thought, "OK, that's a good place." And these salads came, and they were gorgeous. And the French do know how to do salad. If you just ask them to go easy on the dressing.

JVN [00:10:12] Ah! I wish, like, I feel like salad is kind of like working out for me in the sense that, like, once I do it, I feel amazing. But I've never, like, "Mmmm, I want to go work out!" Like, I'm never, like, you know, it sounds like I have to have done like a bunch of really unhealthy stuff for me to, like, crave a salad. Otherwise my body just wants, like, processed shit. I hate it. It's a nightmare, it's because I'm Midwestern or something. I don't know. My problem is. But I want to utilize more of your culinary expertise. Do you mind?

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:10:44] No!

JVN [00:10:45] Oh, OK. So, like, my husband's really into gardening and now we're like the queens of like this, like Texas garden. We have like the most plentiful okra you've ever seen in your life.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:10:55] Oh, yeah! Texas okra is a big deal. It's the season right now, too.

JVN [00:11:00] I have okra coming out of my ears. So, like, do you have, like, a favorite okra? Like, do you love okra? Like, how do I make it? Are you into it?

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:11:06] So, okra is really interesting because a lot of people don't like it because it can be slimy, but it doesn't have to be slimy. Okay? The way to cook okra is also on high heat, and I would make, like, a sauteed okra with ginger, garlic and onion.

JVN [00:11:26] I'm literally taking notes. I'm, like, if you see me going to the right, I'm just taking notes. I'm not not paying attention. What was that again? Ginger.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:11:33] So heat some oil, like sesame oil or canola oil, like, a high smoking point oil. Like grapeseed oil is good, too. Once it gets hot, add some human seeds, but a teaspoon. And then once they slightly start to turn color, usually two to three minutes, add your sautéing onions. So, like, you know, if you chop 'em up really small, they'll take less time to crack each other much bigger. They'll take longer. But you just want to sauté onions and the cumin together and cook them down. Add some chopped ginger and garlic as well, once the onions get a little glassy and transparent. And then you can cut your okra and rings like about a quarter inch thick and you want to add the okra in there. And just like a really good curry powder. Oh yeah, just a smidge, like half a teaspoon of curry powder and salt to taste. And then just sauté, sauté, sauté.

JVN [00:12:35] For like two to three minutes, you said?

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:12:38] Yeah. At least, yeah.

JVN [00:12:38] Yeah, at least. But maybe even longer or no.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:12:40] Yeah. Yeah. You're going to need like 15 minutes for that 15. Yeah. For that okra to cook down.

JVN [00:12:50] Oh my God! Yeah. So, my friend Julie just been kind of, like, just frying on the stove with, like, some olive oil and, like, salt and pepper and it's, like, all right. It's, like, kind of spicy. But I was, like, I wish I could just like just this up with something. So this is perfect. Like a little, like, soy garlic, ginger moment with onions. Yum.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:13:13] Yeah. And you can also add chopped tomatoes and really let the tomatoes cook down, like, that is nice too. That's like more of a stewy okra curry that's nice.

JVN [00:13:24] I also threw it, I've also been throwing it in chili but it's, like, in the summer, you're just like not really craving chili, which, it's too the thing.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:13:30] No, it's too heavy. Yeah, I mean people put it in gumbo too, and that's, that's how they make gumbo. They also, they can use okra as a thickener.

JVN [00:13:40] Oooh, ahh! So, I think that's like all of my garden stuff. That because I feel like I've been like utilizing-, because I've been doing baba ganoush with our eggplants.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:13:49] Have you been growing tomatoes at all?

JVN [00:13:51] Our tomatoes were just, like, a total fail this year. They just, like, they were all just, like, did they, like, literally all felt like all of our tomatoes. Had really plentiful okra, eggplant, jalapeños, cucumber, watermelon. I had some really good pumpkins til they were murdered by these, like, evil borer vine moths but I don't wanna talk about it. These poor listeners have already had to hear me, like, scream about it for untold minutes. Have you ever heard of a squash borer vine moth, Padma?

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:14:18] No, but now I have.

JVN [00:14:21] They murdered my pumpkins. I will, I literally have, like, PTSD, like, pumpkin trauma. They were so pretty and youthful and growing and, like, great until these moths that are wasp imposters. So you don't kill them because you think-, I can't go into this again. The people are, like, "Oh my God I need to turn this podcast off because, because all he talks about are these borer vines!" We're fine. OK, so I feel complete. Oh yeah. One more question before I'm going into our next segment, but what is something that's always in your fridge, in your freezer that's, like, you always just have to have at home.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:14:56] Yuzu juice.

JVN [00:14:57] What's that!

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:15:00] Yuzu juice is a Japanese citrus fruit, and it's kind of pricey, but one bottle goes a long way and you can just use it in cocktails or salad dressings or you can toss icky with it or any kind of sushi-grade tuna or ceviche. And it's delicious.

JVN [00:15:23] Ah, I love that! And it's called yuzu.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:15:26] Yeah. Y-U-Z-U. You will recognize the taste. You've probably had it on, like, yellowtail carpaccio at the Japanese restaurant or something. And it's so floral. It's sour like lemon juice. But it's a little more sophisticated. It's great in a margarita, you have to get yourself a bottle.

JVN [00:15:47] Margarita! I'm on, like, a month detox right now because I went a little too hard on my honeymoon, I feel. So just like having, like, a brief little detox. But when I come when I'm not, I'm a detox, yuzu juice and a marga-riri sounds amazing. Welcome back to Getting Curious. This is Jonathan Van Ness. We are talking to Padma Lakshmi, who we love so much. Now, wait, here's the thing. Correct me if I'm wrong. You, you've just written a gorgeous children's book, which is Tomatoes for Neela. But this is your first children's book, right?

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:16:21] Yes, it's my first children's book. I'm so excited. It comes out on August 31, and I'm really nervous about it because, you know, writing for kids is no joke. There's a real art and craft to it. And here's the book. I know your readers can't see it, but...

JVN [00:16:36] Oh, my gosh! This is such a beautiful illustration.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:16:42] Thank you. Thank you. And it's based on a story that I used to tell my daughter Krishna all the time. And, you know, she never knew when anything was in season. Why would she? Because she lives in America where you can go to the grocery store and get, you know, most grocery stores, you can get everything all the time. And so I realized that kids don't know about eating in season and what's good for you and why it's important to respect everyone in our food chain. So that's what the book is about. I chose tomatoes because they're such a common ingredient in everyone's cuisine and everyone's kitchen. And so, you know, it's just about teaching kids the importance also of writing recipes down and passing down recipes, because when you teach a kid to write a recipe you're teaching them spelling, you're teaching them fractions and math, you're teaching them sequential ordering, you're teaching them how to write things in an order that are clear so that other people will understand. So all of these developmental skills that kids learn when they're growing up can be utilized in a fun way through recipe writing.

And for many families, especially immigrant families, but not only, you know, food is how they connect with their family. Food is how they connect, especially with their elders, like their grandparents, that they're not from, they didn't, if their grandparents grew up in another country, it's a nice way to have a tie to your culture. So it's also an inter-generational story about three Asian women who cook together through Skype and things like that, because that's also a reality for many people now, is that we can't all travel to see our family right away. And so it's a way of bringing in members of your family that aren't necessarily there. It's a way of feeling closer to them. And so that's really what the book is about. But it also has a bunch of tomato facts and a couple of recipes in the back. And it gives you the history of the tomato and also some back matter about farm workers and, you know, respecting everyone who plays a part in our food chain.

JVN [00:18:49] I feel like I'm going to learn a lot from the book, and I'm thirty four. Like, this is an all peoples book, as it turns out, but it's just, like, really cute and has stunning illustrations.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:19:00] Yeah, I hope so. I mean I really am excited. I've been working on it for a long time. We were really lucky to get this very, very talented illustrator named Juana Martinez-Neal, she's Peruvian, and she's a Caldecott Honor recipient. And at first when we asked her, she was our first choice, she said no, because she was too busy with all these other projects. And then she called us back and was like, "Hey, I rearranged some things and I think I can do it." And I'm so happy we got her because, you know, the illustrations in any children's book are so, so important, but especially in this one, because we wanted to also get the skin tones right. You know, it's rare that you see different kinds of people in children's books. It's easier nowadays. But when I was growing up, all of the dolls, all of the toys, all of the books, would just have white skin, white skin. And there's nothing wrong with that. But it's nice to see a diversity of faces, you know.

JVN [00:20:00] Is there an illustration that really sticks closest to your heart from the whole book? I'm sure it's hard to pick, but...

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:20:07] It is hard to pick but I like this one because they're dancing around the kitchen. And this part of the book talks about how, you know, Neela loved it when her mom would shake spices into the stew or chop or use the box grater for carrots because she had bangles on her wrist. And that's a very Indian woman thing. You know, most Indian women, you'll see, always have bangles on. And, you know, she loved the sound that the bangles made, and she could tell what her mom was doing by the rhythm of the sounds. And so I think that illustration is beautiful because it's very active and alive and

there's a lot of movement which is hard to get in a static, you know, two dimensional illustration, but Juana did it beautifully.

JVN [00:20:56] She really, really did. And it's like this is so interesting because you are obviously really talented at conveying all things food on screen. You've also, because you've also done incredible cookbooks. But how did you, and you kind of just touched on it, but how did you generally, kind of, how did doing your first kids book compare to some of the other mediums and how they interact with food? Did that question make sense? It did, right?

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:21:21] Yes, it totally makes sense. I mean, I had to remember my audience. I think that is the ethos of what I was trying to say is the same, right? Whether I'm talking to you or I'm talking to an eight-year-old kid, or my grandma, who's going to be 90, it's all the same. It's just the language that you use. I mean, I know you've written a children's book, too, so you must have had to consider this. I think kids are super intelligent and I think they are capable of much more than we realize. I think that you just have to speak in age-appropriate language for them so that they don't tune out. You have to give it to them in smaller little bites, smaller units. But I was worried about that. I was really concerned that I wasn't, you know, I was concerned that there wasn't enough going on in the story because they're basically just cooking tomato sauce for the winter, right?

They go to the grain market, they get a ton of tomatoes. And then in the course of the story, they make the tomato sauce and they save one jar at the back of the cupboard for the granny who's coming, the grandma who's coming in winter for her holidays, to spend with her grandchild. I was worried that there wasn't enough narrative and there was too much fat. So there's a lot of tomato facts, lots of history. There's stuff about farm workers. There's educational material. There's, like, an author's note, there's recipes. And then I was afraid, like, is this too much? But I figured that all the books that I and my daughter love reading always had a lot of back matter, always had, like, just a lot of different stuff that we went back to. Unlike adults, kids will read the same book 50 times and, you know, it just becomes this beloved story. So I'm hoping that there isn't too much stuff and even if there is that people don't have to bite it all off in one go, like, they can go back to me, like, look me today we're going to read about the farmworkers, tomorrow maybe we'll try a recipe.

JVN [00:23:27] Oh my gosh. And so I can't wait to get it. There's like so many kids who I want to get it for. It sounds so cute. It's so much fun. OK, but not to be, like, hashtag spoiler alert but, like, how many recipes are in there. Like did you have, like, a favorite tomato recipe that people should maybe try first in their, or no?

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:23:42] So if you, there are two recipes in the book, but if you buy it through Barnes and Noble, there's actually a third one for tomato rice because they did a special edition of the book as well. There's a very basic tomato sauce that's in the book that you have the recipe in the back for. That, I really recommend trying. It's so simple and it's so easy to do. But like, if you have that in your house, in your freezer, in your fridge, and you will always be thankful you can make a million things with it. It's just a basic tomato sauce. And then there's a tomato chutney recipe that I say you should swap out your salsa for. Because it's so yummy. And it's also good to use in place of just regular pizza sauce if you're making, like, homemade pizza toasties or something because it's already spicy and has more vegetables in it. And so you could, you know, the tomato chutney recipe. Actually, you could use that as a base, Jonathan, and you could just add okra to it.

JVN [00:24:49] My mouth is watering so hardcore right now, Padma, you do this to me every time I'm obsessed. So Tomatoes For Neela available for preorder now and it's available August thirty first, right?

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:25:00] Yes, it's available for preorder now and it'll be on sale everywhere on August thirty first for pick-up.

JVN [00:25:09] OK, so we were like a rounding third base, not to use, like, a weird sports term. I don't know who I am, like, some butch queen who uses, like, sports references? But we are rounding third base coming into home, honey. What are you, and what's happening for you this fall? Like, what's, what's happening after Tomatoes For Neela? What is ahead for you?

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:25:28] OK, so in October, I guess, edited Eating Well magazine. And I really did it. It's not just me on the cover and pretending. I really went to editor editors meetings that we pitch stories we did everything like the layout. I even just now signed off on all the layouts for it.

JVN [00:25:50] Wow!

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:25:51] I always wanted to edit a magazine I used to write for Harper's Bazaar and Vogue and I had a syndicated column in the New York Times syndicate for a while and it was always a dream of mine. I think I'm just, like, super bossy and controlling. The detail is the perfect job. So that's coming out as well in the fall. It's the October issue. I also have in October an anthology of, you know those Best American series? Best American Short Stories, Best American... And so I did. I edited the best American travel writing for 2020, and that will be out in October of this year.

So if you're ever in an airport again, you can go everywhere in bookstores. So there was some really beautiful, interesting writing. At first, when they asked me to do it, I was like, "Why? Who said no." Because it's a really prestigious gig to do, like, you know, Bill Bryson has done it, Tony Bourdain has done it, Cheryl Strayed, like, really high-end writers have done it. And so they're like, "No, nobody turned us down. We just thought you'd be great for it." And I was like, "Oh, OK." And I thought that there wouldn't be enough travel writing because no one went anywhere. But it is breathtaking. There's some beautiful, beautiful essays in there. And so that's coming out as well in October. So look for that best American Travel Writing.

And then Taste The Nation is back in November. Taste the Nation. It's not a full season. It's like a little mini seasonette because it was really, it's a very intimate show, as you know. So it was hard to film in quarantine, but we managed to eke out four special episodes and we didn't want to, like, wait a whole nother year before we streamed more episodes because we want the trail to go cold. It's already been a year since the first season came out, so we decided to put a holiday spin on it. And I think it works beautifully, because it's interesting to see how other cultures celebrate holidays.

So we have Korean New Year, Seollal. We have Nochebuena, which is a Miami Christmas Eve celebration with a whole roast pig. Because with communism, like, they could only have a silent Christmas in Cuba. So really, like, the authentic Cuban Christmas as it's been traditionally celebrated, is actually happening much more in Miami. So we were able to go there and meet with a few families and talk to them. And then we do Hanukkah with the Ashkenazi Jewish people of the Lower East Side, and then we go to Cape Cod for Thanksgiving with the Mashpee Wampanoag first peoples. They've been here in America for twelve thousand years and we don't know much about them. All we know is that they were there with the pilgrims, but that whole Thanksgiving myth is total and utter bullshit. And so we just break down the myths. And finally, we give these beautiful people and their culture to do that, they deserve and talk about them and what their ways are.

JVN [00:29:07] I cannot wait to see that. That sounds incredible. The first season was amazing, so I can't wait to see the special. It's going to be so good. And then it'll be on November 4th.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:29:17] On the fourth.

JVN [00:29:18] Hulu, still. So great, Yay for Hulu, can't wait for that. OK, and then because we got that. We got that OK. And then, is there, this is my last question. Well OK, so technically two. But is there some, like, you know, like, chin to, like, collarbone haircuts have just been, like, in for, like, three years. Is there, like, a food trend that, like, has just,

it's not going away like we haven't tried it yet. Like, is there just like is there just like something that like it's just like you're not like, "You're not a grown up until you have X," or is there like there's like the like food trend that like we need to know it's like not a trend, it's like classically was like we just need to know, you know?

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:29:58] Here's the, here's what I think. I think that you should, everyone should try black garlic. It's so delicious. And it's black, like, black garlic. When you get it, you almost have to, like, squeeze it out of its peel, right. And it's, like, kind of pasty and black and, and you can-, it gives so much flavor to anything. You put it in-, I put it now in my chicken stock. I do not make chicken stock without black garlic, and it is divine. It tastes like beef stock. It's so, so rich and so decadent and that deep, deep flavor and sweetness, weirdly, like a savory sweetness that it gives your chicken stock is insane. You will never make chicken stock without it again.

JVN [00:30:44] Oh my God. I love that so much. OK, so now, it's the last moment, is there anything that you would just be remiss that you didn't mention that you didn't say? Are you just, like, really vibing on, like, an issue you need to, like, it's your recess, it's your moment. You can say whatever you want. You can all say, like, "I feel really complete, not really needs anything else. And I'm going to go, like, make another grilled cheese cause I got hungry." Or you could literally say anything. It's your moment.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:31:09] Thank you. The thing that I will say is that there's a lot happening in our world right now and Americans are feeling a lot of pressure, you know, with Covid, with wondering what's going to happen with school, which is opening soon. So if you're a parent, you know, everybody's nervous about that, and the masks and all that stuff. But there are people who are much worse off than we are, in Central America, in Afghanistan, in different places in the world. And so I would just encourage everyone to be as open hearted and generous as you can, because that is the tradition of what being American is, of welcoming everybody here with open arms that needs it.

And every time we've done that, like, even after the Vietnam War, we took in a million and a half Vietnamese refugees and they have been some of the most productive, successful members of our society from the Gulf shrimping industry in Louisiana and Texas to all of the nail salons and all of the scientists and educators and everybody who we have welcomed in as refugees who have given this country that so much. You know, I just, I know it's a hard time for people. And I know it's hard to wrap your head around letting this person in our border and that person in our border. But I just want to remind everybody that there is plenty in America to share and giving something away is always most beneficial to the person doing the giving.

JVN [00:32:44] That was beautiful, Padma, thank you so much for your time, we appreciate you so much. We love your work. We're just such big fans of you and we really appreciate it. Thanks so much for coming on.

PADMA LAKSHMI [00:32:53] Thank you so much for having me on, Jonathan. And it's really nice to see you again.

JVN [00:33:00] You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was Padma Lakshmi.

You'll find links to her work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on.

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