

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Sohla El-Waylly

JVN: Hey, curious people. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and welcome back to another episode of Getting Curious. Do you feel that chill in the air? Have you pulled out your favorite cashmere sweater or cardigan or like soups? Are you already thinking about Christmas shopping? If you answered yes to any of these, then you know, it's fall. I've been curious about how to throw a better dinner party, how to cook for a crowd better. Obviously, it's Thanksgiving season and obviously Thanksgiving has a lot of stuff tied up in it too that you know, that the people love to come out on, on, you know, Instagram and shame you for your Thanksgiving food. But I'm curious, how can we make a better Thanksgiving meal? How can we like diversify our Thanksgiving meal? How can we throw like a better dinner party generally? What do we need to know? Because I have so many memories um around the Thanksgiving or around the holidays with loved ones, but every time I try to cook, I just turn into a nightmare and I just, I don't throw a good dinner party because I get too stressed out. So there's no one better for us to have on Getting Curious to learn how to throw a better dinner party, how to be like that main girl energy that can just like cook really well. And everyone loves to come over to their house. Then Sohla El-Waylly, we got to interview Sohla a couple years ago. I'm so excited for Sohla to come back on. Getting curious. I loved our conversation. Let's hear her bio. Sohla El-Waylly is a culinary innovator and passionate food educator known for her vibrant approach to cooking and her ability to bridge cultural flavors with creativity with a background in both restaurant kitchens and digital media. Sohla has captivated audiences through her engaging videos and thoughtful recipes, emphasizing the joy and accessibility of diverse cuisines. A former lion cook turned culinary star, she champions the idea that food is not just substance but a powerful medium for connection, and expression, whether sharing her latest culinary adventures or advocating for inclusivity in the food industry, Sohla inspires home cooks everywhere to embrace their own culinary journeys with enthusiasm and curiosity. And today we're asking what's on the menu for Fall and how can we throw a better dinner party for Thanksgiving and beyond? Sohla, oh my God. Welcome to Getting Curious!

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: You're so excited **laughing.**

JVN: So because you guys, it's me and soul's first time meeting in real life today.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah, it's crazy.

JVN: I can't believe this because I have literally been watching you since a 2020. Then just to give the people a recap, since then we had our one virtual meeting when you were doing your ancient cooking show –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Uh huh.

JVN: And I think that this was 2022. Then I stay cheering. I stay loving. We stay obsessed. Now it's 2024. And you've can we tell everyone what we were talking about?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah. Yeah, of course. Yeah.

JVN: So, Sohla had the, if you guys have like current babies, we apologize ahead of time. Sohla had the cutest baby on the planet of all time. Baby is a year old. What's her name? Do people know her name? Is it –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: No, people don't know.

JVN: No, no, no. We're very like sorry we're exclusive.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: She's baby girl.

JVN: She's baby girl. Oh my God. I love baby girl headed girl. She's so cute. She can't help it.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I do believe she is the cutest baby in the world and I don't think that this is just because that's my baby.

JVN: Sohla I think the baby is so cute. I think baby girl is so cute that you need to get your agent to get her a literal Gerber baby contract or something because she's giving you like baby food model baby. Just a perfect little baby.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: She is and she's the world because my husband is from everywhere except where I'm from. So combined. She's everything.

JVN: I'm obsessed with her.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: So I feel like if we all just keep hooking up, we're all going to end up looking like her.

JVN: I feel like there was this national geographic article about how that is kind of happening and it was like saying what we're going to look like in 2050 we were so gorgeous.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Baby girl. That's the future.

JVN: Yes. Ok. No, wait, now, I know like, I love Jesse Taylor Ferguson. I got to do this podcast once dinners on me, but you did bring us a treat, but I do just think that we need to show because it's stunning. You literally brought us cookies. I haven't seen these cookies. This is the big reveal. You guys, it's very asmr because you can hear the box ready. Oh oh Fuck.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: **Laughs**

JVN: Oh my God. Is this a sea salt? Uh Walnut chocolate chunk cookies?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Exactly. You nailed it.

JVN: Wow.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: It's also like the listeners should know. It's like early in the morning we haven't had lunch yet. It's the perfect way to start the day. Some chocolate chip cookies.

JVN: Oh my God, **chewing** I'm beside myself right now. One second, everyone. I'm not to start. This interview was a hard hitting question –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Uh huh –

JVN: What your go to salt? Like flaky salt?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Oh Jacobson. Flaky salt for when I want like a big flat flake. And then I like Salinas Crystal Salt when I want like chunky rock style.

JVN: Oh what's this one?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: This one's Jacobson so flat. It's flat. But I like the, the chunky one when I'm putting it on like a sauce, like finishing like a hot fudge sundae or like caramel, something like that. But I think that, you know, salt keeps forever. So just like when you see a cool shape, go for it, explore the salts.

JVN: Do you really feel like it makes that big of a difference? Like the type of – it does just –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: It's just a texture thing. I think that they, I think there was a scientific study and someone, Jeffrey Steingarten, he got a whole bunch of salts, dissolved them in water to equal percentage did like blind tastings. And once you take the texture out of it, they all basically taste the same. But I think the texture texture is so important to food.

JVN: It really – because, you know, once you said textures, like that's because like people like and don't like food based off the texture.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah, yeah.

JVN: Oysters.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I love oysters.

JVN: Me too.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah, I do. I like them cooked. I like them raw.

JVN: I, that is so oysters Rockefeller is like the only cooked one that I know it's like basically the baked oyster with like parmesan stuff on it right?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah. Like spinach and bacon.

JVN: And I like this. Is there another way to cook an oyster?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Well, there's one in my book.

JVN: There is? What is the oyster recipe?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: The broiled oyster recipe.

JVN: Can you tell us about it on the top of your head?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Well, the idea is shucking an oyster is pretty tough –0

JVN: Yes.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: And if you pop them on the broiler, they just kind of like, loosen up because they just die.

JVN: Oh, yeah, it's ok. I mean, it's like whenever I see like an animal die on Instagram or tiktok, like, because sometimes I get that not like, you know, Discovery Channel, Nat Geos type stuff. My husband always tells me because I get so wrapped up and I get so sad. He's like Circle of Life, honey.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah.

JVN: That's what he always just says. And I'm like, but if someone ate my – never mind, I'm not saying that I freaked out.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: What?

JVN: No, I just, well, just, it's like some like just those videos of like, did you see that? Like, who is that man? And he was like that guy's wife like this coyote tried to come for his puppy –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Oh.

JVN: That's not circle like that's coyote dinner, honey. I'm going to chase that coyote down with my bare hands.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Did you hear there was one where there was? I think it was like an eagle picked up like a French bulldog from a backyard and then dropped it like two miles away.

JVN: Did it live?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: It lived?

JVN: Oh my God! I love that. That's so good. We have chickens in Texas and these fucking eagles are always circling –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: In your backyard?

JVN: Yeah.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Oh, that's amazing.

JVN: Like a coop.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: So you have your own eggs? Wow, you're like Martha Stewart.

JVN: Yeah, we have like seven chickens and we eat our own eggs and um you know, I don't bake a lot with our eggs which, or just in general, but I feel like baked goods with homemade eggs must be really good.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah. The only thing is when you buy eggs from a grocery store, the size is really standardized and when you get them like from a market or your own, the sizes are different. So you need to weigh it to make it work in the recipe.

JVN: This is why I told you when we met like 10 minutes ago in real life that I didn't want us to talk about anything before we got on or on microphone because your wisdom was going to be coming out in unexpected places just like all over the fucking place. Because at first you're like saying something, I was like, oh yeah, that's true. And I was like, I got all these different. But then for baking, that's like a big fucking deal –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah, yeah.

JVN: Because you can, you can just be like measuring with your fucking heart when it comes to baking.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: No, not, it's not ideal if you care about how it comes out at the end.

JVN: Yes. Yeah. But like, but cooking, you kind of can't like cooking, like not baking things like you can kind of do it more like with your heart can't you?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Totally, I actually don't really like recipes for savory cooking. I wanted to not put measurements for the savory but my publisher, was like, can't do that.

JVN: Like, you can't re-invent the wheel like this.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. But like I feel like my mom cooks every day. She's an amazing cook, she's never measured a thing. And when you look at like professional chefs and restaurants, they don't measure anything. You just, you just learn the intuition.

JVN: Um, I also was just so excited to meet you in real life that I like, didn't even get into the questions or in the order because I just like, freaked out. So I had to like, reorient myself just so, you know.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Ok.

JVN: So, ok, we're, how big of a like how important is it to like literally eat by season? Do you do this?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I do.

JVN: Because I don't, I guess, yeah, that's true because it's like how you're gonna like get it. Ok, so eating by season is important, we're entering like fall pumpkin spice. It's Thanksgiving, it's like we're entering into holidays. Um, I do feel like with Thanksgiving, I mean, look complicated holiday, I get it. There's a lot happening there and I also have binge eating disorder. So any time we get to like make a bunch of food at once, I can get into a little bit of duality there.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Uh huh.

JVN: Like I'm, I can acknowledge that it's like, like, you know, controversial. Uh America is controversial, but I am going to make a feast and I'm gonna eat that feast with my friends, but I will acknowledge so just once we do our acknowledgment, how can we like diversify our Thanksgiving palet? Like what's like a Thanksgiving thing that we can like do? That's like different?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Well, you know, I feel like the standard meal is, is a roast turkey stuffing gravy, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce. But like, I don't, ok, I'm currently doing research on this. So I'm not, I don't remember the details because I'm working on a story. But all of that, that whole spread was just like one woman in one book, wrote this and, and then, you know, Thanksgiving's not real like the government came up with it. It's like propaganda to bring the country together after the civil war. And they just decided that this should be the meal. There was no real –

JVN: Queen, that's how it happened?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: It's just like some old man in an office was like, that looks good. Let's make that our Thanksgiving spread. I don't think we need to stick to it. You know, I think, I think it's really just about coming together, having a big meal together, being with your loved ones, you know, but it should be whatever you want. Because since my husband and I both work in food, there are some years that by the time we get to Thanksgiving, we have made hundreds of turkeys.

JVN: Why?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Either for developing recipes or in my husband's case, he works in restaurants. And like there was one year he worked at a corporate restaurant. So they did

Thanksgiving for that whole week. And by the time we had our Thanksgiving meal, he had already cooked 500 turkeys.

JVN: Oh, shit.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: So the last thing on earth he wants is a turkey. So for us, Thanksgiving is whatever meal we feel like having.

JVN: I love that.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah. Oftentimes it's fried chicken.

JVN: Oh, so you're, you literally, I mean, I feel like I know this from following you but it's nothing I've ever gotten to get you in the same room to chat about you fry your own fucking chicken.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Oh It's like our favorite like when we really want to feel festive, we do skillet fried chicken.

JVN: Skillet, fried chicken. Because yeah, because the bowl of frying oil overwhelms me like I'm scared of burning myself. I'm scared of like tripping over a dog and like just fucking myself up really bad –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah, yeah.

JVN: So there's a way that you, you can achieve that like fried chicken, like look crunch and feel on a skillet without a big vat of oil or do you do kind of have to do that?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: It's still a vat of oil. Yeah. Yeah, I just like it in a skillet because then the chicken sits on the bottom of the cast iron and it gets like extra crispy. But um I feel like whenever you fry, the intrusive thoughts, like jump in and I always imagine that I trip and fall into the oil.

JVN: So that's natural?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I feel like that's natural, but it's something that you should be cautious around. I always make sure the dogs, the cat, the baby, they're not in the room

JVN: Frying the chicken, pour the oil in a skillet. You, it literally boiling hot.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: No, no. See if your oil is boiling, it's about to catch on fire.

JVN: Well how come it's like that on Tik Tok and the internet when people are doing it?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I, well, it starts bubbling once you put something in it but when it's heating up and there's nothing in it, it won't really move.

JVN: Oh!

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: It might shimmer a little if you start to see movement and smoking, it is way too hot.

JVN: And you're about to cause an oil fire?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: It, they just like, spontaneously combust if it gets too hot.

JVN: What does that mean?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: It, it will just push like a torch but it has to get so hot.

JVN: Have you ever seen that happen in like a professional kitchen?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yes. Yes. But it's very easy put out. You just put a lid on it. No reason to panic.

JVN: And aren't you not supposed to fire or extinguish it because –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah, it just spreads it around and then makes everything catch on fire. Frying at home like my mom. So my family's Bangladeshi. So frying is like a primary cooking method. So my mom fried almost every night. So it's, it, it is very easy to do safely at home. You just gotta, you gotta, I recommend get a thermometer. Pay attention, you know, if it's your first time and don't get nervous because I think a lot of the big mistakes happen when you get scared and you throw the food in there from far away, you got to get close. It's not going to jump up at you. It's not going to bite you.

JVN: And you just put tongs in there?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I like to use my hands whenever I'm putting anything into a fire because you have the most control because you don't want accidental slippage and get as close as you can, it can to the oil without getting too scared. You don't want to plop, you want to just place. So it doesn't splatter at you. You want to keep an eye on the temperature because it's going to go up and down as things are cooking –

JVN: Ohh.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I think the best thing is to make sure you get a thermometer if you're new to it. But once you get good at it, you don't need a thermometer anymore. You can kind of tell how hot the oil is based on how it bubbles once you put stuff in there. But I love fried chicken dinner for Thanksgiving. It feels so festive, so exciting. I, I actually developed a fried chicken Thanksgiving for New York Times.

JVN: Well, we need to hear about it, but I also have like three follow up questions. Do you have a drying rack?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yes.

JVN: Ok. So, and then you like put a paper towel down, put the little rack on there that's got like space between the counter and the rack and then you put it there –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yes.

JVN: Let it dry and then another question I have just about, do you like season the oil or do you just like, do you put, like, salt in the oil or do you just like, do oil?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I just do oil. Um, and I season the chicken. I don't even like to put the seasoning on the flour because, um, a lot of times when you season the oil it's not gonna, it's gonna degrade faster. Like, I've seen some people put herbs and stuff in there and that's ok if you're just going to do one quick fry and you're prepared to toss out that oil, but I want to make my oil last. So I don't put anything in there. Um, and also I put the seasoning on the chicken and not in the flour because the seasoning can burn and also, like, you know, fall into the oil because I wanna be able to strain on my oil. If you don't let your oil get too hot

and you're careful about what you're putting in there, you can strain it out and use it a couple times because the oil gets expensive, you know, so you wanna be able to reuse it.

JVN: Um, I can't believe this episode is turning into like, how do I fry stuff at home? But I'm kind of obsessed and we just have to stay here a little bit longer –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah.

JVN: So, can you tell us about your New York Times? Um, the fried chicken Thanksgiving dinner?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah.

JVN: What is the recipe and how that goes. And I need like, I just need it and it's like full entirety. I'm just really into this now because also it's just occurring to me, I don't even know the order of like seasoning fucking chicken to make fried chicken. And I feel like at 37 I should, I should theoretically know how to do this. Even if I don't do that.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: You don't, so many people you could like live a full rich life without ever frying.

JVN: I know. But fuck me, I want to know how to fry some goddamn chicken in my house. If I wanted to. Like what if I wanted to? And I'm over. So, so you take the raw chicken?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Um I like to, well, everybody has their own way. This is my personal way. I like to season right on the chicken or if I'm going to do a dry brine or I'll put it in a wet brine with all the seasonings in it and then

JVN: That's like a marinade, right?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Marinade. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, there's technical differences between a marinade.

JVN: Oh god, we got to know, tell us what it is! A brine is –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: So a brine, there's a wet and dry brine. A dry brine is when you just Sprinkle salt on the meat and let it hang out and a wet brine is when you mix the salt into water and then put your protein in there and let it hang out and the salt is really the key to a brine. The salt gets into the meat fibers, break some of them down into a gel. So it stays more moist when you cook it, it helps break down some of the fat. So it renders better when you fry it. And it also seasons obviously, but a marinade is not marinades have salt, but they often also have acid and other flavorings. So it, it, they do different things. Marinade is more about flavor, but brine is flavor and texture

JVN: That is really resonating and making a lot of sense to me now.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Is it? Ok, and then I typically like a dry brine for most things, but for fried chicken, I really want it to be juicy and a wet brine is a little bit juicier. So I like a wet brine or like a buttermilk brine or hot sauce. There's so many different ways you can go and then you go into your flour. You really got to pack it tight because I love, I love Popeye's.

JVN: Yes, that crunchiness. Like asmr.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I want that kind of crunchy craggy. So you've got to pack the flour. That's how you get those little bits, put it into your fryer. And then I do after it fries, I season it

again with the spices right on it while it's hot, the hot like steamy fried chicken that's still coated in a little bit of oil will bloom all your spices. And since it's right on the surface. It hits your palate immediately and I feel like you get more bang for your spice buck. You know?

JVN: I just have to say circling back to the top of the episode that cookie was the, I'm not kidding you. I'm not fucking around. That cookie was the best cookie of ever. Like everything about that cookie was, oh my God.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: You can make it the recipe in my book.

JVN: It is?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: It is!

JVN: Ok. Ok. Ok. We're getting into the book. We're going to get there. We're going ok. So. Ok. Ok. Ok. So, oh yeah. So find my strainer. You pour it back in a glass jar and then you just like put it back in the, do you keep it in the fridge?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: It's best to keep it in the fridge once you've used it, yup.

JVN: Ok. So wueen I'm obsessed. Ok. So now I do want to hear about the New York Times fried chicken dinner. But also what were your like, how did your family celebrate Thanksgiving growing up? Like where your like were your parents like into it? Were like, what were your guys is like Thanksgiving dinners?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Well, I, I love Thanksgiving like I know it's complicated but it's really special for us because when my parents first came to the US, they didn't know anybody, they didn't know what Thanksgiving was. And one of my mom's coworkers, I think their first year here invited them over. I wasn't born yet, invited them over. And she like, took the time to teach my mom all of her family recipes and was like, so welcoming and so kind. And uh it's going to make me cry.

JVN: It's like making me cry.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: We made those recipes basically my entire life. And it just reminds me of how, you know, they had a really hard time when they came here and there's a lot of shitty people. Sorry, can we say that?

JVN: Yeah, of course.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: But it reminds me that there's always good people who will welcome you. And that's what Thanksgiving reminds me of like, yeah, but so we mostly made those recipes and then when I got older and started getting into cooking, I started to take my own take on it. But it was basically her family's traditions woven into our families, which I thought was really cool. Why am I crying so much?

JVN: Because, Sohla, I love it. That really took me there too. That was really beautiful. Turducken.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Uh huh.

JVN: Have you ever had a Turducken?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I haven't.

JVN: I haven't either but I am. This is called Getting Curious, this podcast and I'm getting curious for a Turducken.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I mean –

JVN: It's a lot of foul.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I've, I've, when I was younger I really want to try making it. I was like, more curious before. I'm less curious as I age. I'm more cynical.

JVN: Because you just feel like, I mean, I like, well, duck is just like a little smoky.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Uh huh.

JVN: Right?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I just like what what is it? You take a turkey and then you put a duck in there and then you put a chicken. I feel like it'll all be bad.

JVN: It must have been like a duck inside a chicken inside a turkey.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Oh wait –

JVN: Tur-du, no, it must be a chicken inside a duck inside a turkey tur-ducken.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yes, I said it backwards, yeah, yeah.

JVN: So turkey outside duck, middle tur duck en, yeah, chicken on the very inside. So it must be like a little chicken.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Maybe I'll make one this year. I should just do it.

JVN: I think people want to see because I also saw that anyone can make a fucking delicious tur duck. You can figure this out. I know you can figure out whatever the palate is to get to get it to compliment each other.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I feel like if I'm going to do this, I should put a quail in there inside the chicken and then why not throw an egg in the middle?

JVN: Ok sidebar, we're crashing back into a topic that was in my original plan questions. It's a really important topic that I think that we get into macaroni and cheese.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Macaroni and cheese.

JVN: It's just so delicious. I, I learned how to make a roux because of you. I know because you like there, I can't remember what your content was that you made this like roux but it was on your Instagram and it was around 20. It was, you were making a roux at your house and then I did one because it was like, like mid pandemic. Like it was, I think it was maybe it was like right after, before our recording. But anyway, you made this roux and then I was like, that's how that's done and I, I didn't know about it and then I get into like cheese sauces. So let me just ask this question the way that we wrote it. What is, is not what, is, is there an alternative to Mac and cheese? Is there a way to dress it up? Dress it down, change it up?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: It's just about the quality of the ingredients because I don't really love when you put changed mac and cheese too much because I think at its core it's so good. So I don't know, I'm not like the kind of person that wants like a lobster in there.

JVN: Oh.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I like, I like mac and cheese as it is. So my way of leveling it up is I'm going to get bronze die cut pasta made with like heritage grains. So it has a really nice bite depth of flavor. Get like the best milk you can find to make that roux uh to make that sauce get really good butter. You know, that's the baseline and, and good cheese. And I think it's really, that's it and just focus on technique because mac and cheese is one of those things that's deceptively difficult. A lot of people like there's a lot of places to mess up. I actually had a friend SOS text me because he was making mac and cheese and, and really struggled with the sauce. So, you know, focus on just like nailing that technique. So when you're making that roux, make sure the bubble, the butter is bubbling before you add the flour to prevent lumps. That's the first place to prevent lumps. Then when you add your milk, make sure you add it gradually while whisking very thoroughly. Second place to prevent lumps. Once you add all of your cheeses, make sure you don't let it get too hot because you don't want to break the cheese and make the sauce grainy –

JVN: Mmm.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Once you add the cheese, I kind of like, I, I'll either lower the heat or even just turn it off because there's enough hot hot sauce, like there's enough warmth in the sauce to melt it and you know, don't overcook your pasta. So you don't end up with like a smooshy final mac and cheese. So I think it's really just about taking a lot of care in those little steps. A lot of times when something is so simple it, you really have to pay more attention to the details to elevate it and I don't think you need to do much else.

JVN: Ok. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. And I, I just, my brain is like, really annoying me today in the sense that I just had like seven unrelated questions to Thanksgiving, but we're going to stay on Thanksgiving a little bit more.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Ok.

JVN: My hand is like, almost broke, like writing down all these extra questions that I have. Ok. But if there was something, is there something that in your experience that just like fucks up a Thanksgiving meal? Like if you just like maybe like, leave it out, get rid of it because it's not worth it on like the timing or anything?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: The racist uncle don't invite him.

JVN: Get rid of him.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Get rid of him.

JVN: I mean, they fuck up the timing every time they really do. They are the worst. So there's not like a culinary addition that we need to get rid of. All are welcome. It's just like you need to make sure that you really like, hm Brine near Turkey, right? Like way before?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I think like the longer I've been doing this, the more I'm realizing that the key to a good dinner party is not the food.

JVN: What is it?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: It's just the vibes. You know what really ruins it when you walk into someone's house for Thanksgiving dinner is when the host is just freaking out over everything and constantly apologizing about everything. We're all just here to hang out. You know, I think the food is secondary, of course you want it to be delicious, but also just make sure you relax. Have a good time. If it helps you, I think you should prep stuff early. Just to chill a little bit. I even will set the table the night before.

JVN: Oh, that's good. Just like, yes, it's like one less thing.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: One less thing to worry about because I want to make sure I've had so many dinner parties where people are coming in and I haven't showered and I'm like frazzled and I'm like frizzy and you want to be calm and be like this welcoming vibe to walk into. So like, **grumbling sound** woah, my stomach's rumbling –

JVN: Oh honey, all is welcome here.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah, I think like make sure you plan things out, do things in advance so you can relax and I like to give myself two hours before people get there to make sure I can get ready, have some wine before your guests get there –

JVN: Yes!

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: And put some snacks out. So you don't feel rushed to put the dinner out, but I don't, don't stress so much about the food. It's not about the food.

JVN: It's not about the fucking food. Pumpkins, we're bringing it home.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Pumpkins.

JVN: Pumpkins. I am a big fan of pumpkin. I'm obsessed with pumpkins. So we talked a little bit about desserts. Is there anything else that we need to talk about when it comes to like fall desserts? Like best cookies I've ever had in my life? Is there something that's like kind of interest off the beaten path that the girls are sleeping on?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: You know, for me. Uh this time of year, I just I want things with like spices and molasses and I just want everything to be warm and cozy. I, I love, I recently got into the pumpkin spice latte last year after having the baby. It was the first time I had one and I never got it and like something in my brain just clicked. I don't know. Something about being a mom and having a pumpkin spice latte. Um, it's like the only joy in my life because I'm not sleeping.

JVN: You're still not?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: You never sleep again.

JVN: You don't? You never sleep even when she's one? Fuck!

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah. No, I'm never going to sleep again. I've asked everyone when do you sleep again? And they're like, I don't know when they're like teenagers.

JVN: Dang, do you do like because she cries?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: She cries, yeah.

JVN: I do, I'm not a parent obviously, but I do like those. I like that sleep training thing.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: No, we do that but you're still awake because you're hearing the screams.

JVN: Because they're crying. And is it like unethical to just put on like noise canceling earbuds?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I put on noise canceling earbuds and I still hear her scream.

JVN: Cause your maternal instincts just hear her blood curdling scream like through the walls.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: And I can feel my blood pressure going up, you know, like the cortisol spiking. And then I keep thinking about how I'm going to die because of all this cortisol and the more cortisol it's this never ending cycle. So in the morning that pumpkin spice latte hits but I feel like it's about the spices in addition to the pumpkin. But I think it's really about the spices. So I like to bust out all the warm spices for the holidays.

JVN: Hot toddies.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I love a hot toddy.

JVN: I think I was going through my hot toddy phase when we talked last time. But let's talk about hot toddies again really quick because it is about to be hot toddy season. I'm transferring out of my vodka martini with a twist season and heading into hot toddy season. Well, how do we do that at home?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Well, I mean, I think the traditional, most basic way, isn't it just like lemon, tea, honey, situation maybe?

JVN: With whisky or something, there's something alcohol.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah. I like to make like a ginger tea. So I'll slice up a bunch of ginger, let it boil, get it really spicy, sweeten it with a little bit of honey lemon and then add my whiskey. But I do keep it pretty simple. But I love the ginger burn with the whiskey.

JVN: I like when there's a cinnamon sticks are in it.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Oh, I have so many cinnamon sticks left over from a project.

JVN: You're going to do a hot toddie.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I'm going to have a hot to every night until I use all those cinnamon.

JVN: Yes. In your opinion. How much is too much of like people?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I think it's like when you have a middle amount of people, it's weird. Like, I like small or big. So, like eight or 30 because I feel like when you get into like 10 and 12, it's hard for people to break into little groups. When you have like more people, people can make their little pockets of friends. Um, and when you have a very small group, it's very intimate and everyone can mingle. But I feel like when you have like 10 or 12, there's always like two people that are just on the outskirts that haven't found a buddy. So I like big or small and I don't like medium.

JVN: That makes sense. That makes sense. I think I don't like, for me it's like 6 –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: 6 is the good number.

JVN: I mean, if I'm gonna like, cook it for, cook it then, yeah, that's like the abs, I mean, 30. I would have a nervous fucking breakdown. I would shave my head and run out screaming like Anna Ferris and, um, not another or in Scary Movie when she's like, I'm not crazy, ahhh! 30 is just a, that's just so many goddamn people. It's so many people. I can't talk to you about Thanksgiving without talking about leftovers. Is there anything that, that like, and even just leftovers generally? Like, are you a leftovers girly?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Not typically, but yes. On Thanksgiving.

JVN: How do we repurpose?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I really look forward to just eating that meal repeatedly. I know people always want recipes for doing stuff with it. But my favorite thing is just to re eat it and eat it. At Thanksgiving on repeat. But I think if you want to repurpose and you just have little bits and bobs a pot pie, like, it's just designed to be a pot pie or like a shepherd's pie. Like, mix the gravy with the turkey and your veggies, put your mashed potato on top and then broil it.

JVN: And you're good. That's really, that's really, I don't know why my brain was wanting a fried sandwich.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: A fried sandwich.

JVN: Yeah. Ok. Because you talked about frying. I'm like, and in my, also in my imagination there was like homemade bread. Like, for some reason.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: You've already cooked so much though.

JVN: I know, but they're just, I don't know, there was already there in my imagination. I'm not saying for sure. Like I'm just saying like, that's like what my intrusive thought was and it was homemade bread with like turkey and stuff being because I want like a puck. I want like a hockey puck of a fried sandwich.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Do you want to like layer everything and then dip it in a batter and fry it. I mean, that sounds good.

JVN: It does, right? Like slutty, right? Like really like yum yum yummer tum. My dad makes John's festive holiday balls or John's festive holiday stuffing balls.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Wait, what? Is his name John?

JVN: Yeah, and he puts his name and then he puts all of the stuffing stuff in these like brown paper bags, like, like, like a grocery store bag and then he molds it into a ball and then bakes the balls and so it's like stuffing balls.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: One big ball.

JVN: No, like multiple baseball sized stuffing balls, like serving.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: And you just walk around handheld.

JVN: No, you just put it on a plate.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I mean, that sounds good.

JVN: It's nice.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Ooo, stuffing in a waffle press –

JVN: The next day?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: The next day.

JVN: I like those mini waffle presses on Tik Tok when they make, I think I see keto people or keto people doing that because they put cheese in the mini waffle things, like, for little carbless things – as a chef or you weren't out by that sort of thing?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Oh, I hate it. I hate what social media has done to food. And I think that we can't go back. We've opened this Pandora's Box and we just have to throw away our society and start over. It's, I, I'm, like, constantly mad at commenters on the internet and creators and like, there's so many people just doing so many bad things online making just ruining food.

JVN: Is there any just like, ah, ok. Well, first of all, I'm obsessed with you. Like I already was, but I just, like, get more and more at, like, I love that I got to see you in real life for the first time. Is there any other thing like my grandma? She used to put like a piece of bread and the Tupperware with cookies because she said that it, like, made it more moist or something? Is there any cute hacks that we need to know about or just like anything that you always are doing in your, like, in your food world that, like, it'd be cool if we knew.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Hmm.

JVN: Not to put the pressure on at the last minute.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I'm just, I'm thinking because, you know, a lot of times when you do things you don't even realize you're doing it.

JVN: Sort of like hot, sexy food hack?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Hot, sexy food hack. I feel like there's like no hacks –

JVN: There's no fucking hacks. I like, fuck your social media. Fuck your hacks.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I, I like, I like good old fashioned hard earned technique.

JVN: Go to Cordon goddamn Bleu for fuck's sake.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: No, you don't have to do that –

JVN: Or some other culinary school.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Well, give me a hair tip.

JVN: Umm –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I think I do really bad things to my hair.

JVN: Like what?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I wash it every day.

JVN: Well, if you're using like Embody by JVN Hair, then that's not bad.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I'm not, maybe I should.

JVN: I just need to be a gentle, I'm gonna send you, I'll send you but it just, it just needs to like a more gentle shampoo and conditioner. If you are washing every day.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I don't like, I don't like, I get very sweaty. I'm just a sweaty person and then the bangs get flat. I wash it every day. I blow dry it everyday.

JVN: That's ok. I use a little heat protectant.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah.

JVN: As long and, and also I think blow drying every day versus like curling iron or flat ironing every day is different. But as long as you have on heat protectant, it's good to go. I got to say the shine on your hair is stunning. The volume on your hair is stunning –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Ok.

JVN: I love your fucking fringe and I love this new length.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Ok! I know that last time we talked, you told me I should just keep the bob.

JVN: But I hate myself for saying that I retract it. I'm going back –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Ok, I think about it all the time.

JVN: No, I'm going back to that original. I'm editing that out.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Ok.

JVN: I hate myself for it –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I don't think it made it in the episode.

JVN: Thank God because that was the fucking worst fucking dumb gay bitch advice I've ever given this new length –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: As it kept growing. I kept telling my husband, I don't know if this is a mistake. JVN said to cut it.

JVN: I'm so attracted to this haircut on you. I think it's so pretty on your little baby face. And I just think, I think it's so pretty. It frames your gorgeous bone structure and you know what? Also it's randomly giving me, which is kind of weird because you would think that a bob would show your neck off more. It's kind of giving me like you have this beautiful long neck. I don't know if the girls knew.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I didn't know it.

JVN: You know, but it's almost, but it's having that length on the side that kind of like it gives more.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Uh huh yeah.

JVN: Yeah. And I love, and I also love that your fringe is giving us like curtain fringe adjacent. It's not full frontal fringe. It's a little, it's like curtain fringe meets full frontal fringe together. Are you between, because are you still doing this fringe?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Well, I don't, I do that and then I just wait too long to trim it.

JVN: I like this between one too. It's like really good.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Ok, we're doing it.

JVN: Yeah. Ok. So I got that. Ok. I just love you and also congratulations on baby and we love following you. And if you ever want to get on or do you do secretly or do you have a tiktok?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I have one. So I'll repost the same things. So you're not missing anything.

JVN: Ok, ok, yeah, yeah. Well, I do think like an original TT from you would be major. Do you live in Brooklyn?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I live in the East Village.

JVN: Why did I assume it lived in Brooklyn?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Everybody thinks I live in Brooklyn and I'm like, offended by it.

JVN: It's your arms.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Ok. I guess that it gives Brooklyn.

JVN: No, your tattoos just like, I'm sorry they do. It's gorgeous.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: I always forget they're there until someone points them out.

JVN: No, like, really nice artistic ink just gives like, hi, I'm very affluent and I live in Brooklyn.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Ohh, you know, I got them because I wanted to not be sexually harassed in kitchens anymore. So I got the sleeves –

JVN: Was that a fucking gigantic thing just like having to deal with sexual harassment and fucking kitchen –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah, yeah, it's just standard. But after I got sleeves and then I got a pixie cut and no one bothered me anymore. It was like, overnight because people are stupid.

JVN: They really are.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: You can really trick them with just like cosmetic changes.

JVN: Well, honey, I'm coming right down. It's even closer.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: It's very small.

JVN: I just live on the west side, I'm gonna grab some balut and come down there.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Oh yeah, you're just across the way,

JVN: Yeah, and we're just going to get some balut and go fuck it up.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Yeah I like it.

JVN: What if we, what if I don't like it?

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: You have to be honest. People can tell if we're not being honest and I think it's fine. You don't have to like everything.

JVN: I just started liking pickles.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Now?

JVN: Yeah, like a month ago, two months ago –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: That's big.

JVN: I hated in my whole life. My gorgeous assistant, Anne, who I love so much. She left these hot spicy pickles in my fridge in a pouch and I saw them and I thought I'm gonna try one of those.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: You just needed to find the right pickle.

JVN: I, I, I am eating, I ate fucking pickles on my American Airlines fucking burger the other day.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Oh You didn't like it in stuff either?

JVN: No.

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Oh, it was that big –

JVN: Because I've always viscerally hated pickles. And also I've been getting a little olive curious which is unheard of for me. It's that one. I wrote it down on my notes. Oh, we have to go. Ok? I love you so much Sohla –

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY: Thank you so much for having me, this is fun.

JVN: Thank you for coming on, uh! Love you so much. Did we learn how to throw a better dinner party? Absolutely. We did. But before we go there, let's talk about these cookies, Sohla gave us the most gorgeous cookies ever had in my life. Oh my God. Those cookies. The salt, the chocolate, the homemadeness, the love. Wow. But here's what I learned, like, definitely make a plan. Like it's good to like write your plan down. But also it's like, have fun, like, enjoy the vibe. Like you're really going to vibe together not to have this like rigid ass culinary experience. So what I heard her say was like, definitely get some good appetizers that you can just kind of like throw out and prep was so important. Like do as much as you can beforehand. So that, that day it's kind of about just like heating things. She did say turkey, you need to slay the day of everything else. You could really make a lot easier with good prep work. And as my therapist says, when you have option anxiety, which is like what I have around where I should live. But it's like you gotta get it out of your head and get it onto paper out of your head, onto paper, out of your head onto paper. Same thing with the dinner thing. I think it's a good look and I love Sohla's advice on that. Also didn't know how, like, so salt. Yes, it tastes the same, but it's really like a textural thing. Like, how did all this salt get invented? And also, like, how do we make salt? I'm curious about that now. Um, oh, also Thanksgiving made up holiday made up by the government after the civil war. How did Thanksgiving start? I'm curious about that. I, I wanna know, um, why Thanksgiving started?

Oh, also like oil fires. Like I'm still overwhelmed by frying things at home. And will I always be um oh, also molasses on the turkey that was hot. Also leftover pot pie. Yes. Also things I'm curious about now. Death. Why, why are we so afraid of death? Because it seems scary. And Turducken, is there any other versions of Turduckens that we could make? Why don't Martha Stewart and Ina Garden not really like each other anymore? And what else? Pickling, jarring stuff, pickling and jarring stuff. How do I survive the end of the world? Ok. Or just? Oh, actually, how can I meal prep is something I'm really curious about? Like, what's a good meal preps without getting bored? Oh, so much curiosity and so little time. See you next time on Getting Curious.

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