TRANSCRIPT



Here Be Monsters

An independent podcast about fear, beauty, and the unknown. Since 2012. <u>https://www.HBMpodcast.com</u>

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Jeff Emtman 0:06

From the heights of heaven to the depths of hell, this is Here Be Monsters Podcast.

So it's about 1230 in the morning here. I'm trying to fall asleep and it's not going so well. I get nervous sometimes when I'm trying to fall asleep. So I keep a recorder by my bed here. And I talk into it. Yeah, and I'm having trouble falling asleep time because I'm thinking about the future. And I really do think that like social isolation has gotten to me a bit. And it really hit me when I started looking at the prices of houses and all the cities that I want to live in, someday, kind of spun me off in a tailspin of wondering if I was making the right choices in my life. I've heard that's a fairly common experience to have while looking at houses on Zillow. So yeah, I need to find some other thoughts to fill my mind. Now. You know, on the other hand, I'm really proud of the fact that this show has lasted nine years. You know, that's longer than almost anything in my life. I've been making this show longer than I've had a lot of my friends. This show has outlived all of my relationships to date. I think I counted it right. I think I've moved five times. Since this show started in 2012. Twice across the country. And I started this show in a in a basement in Colorado. And now I live in a basement begin in Washington State. It's a basement homecoming. And the thing is, is that I can have like basements. Yeah, sometimes I call this a basement podcast, because here be monsters and basements often share a lot of the same traits, in that they can be quiet and dark and safe. And sometimes a bit unfinished too.

So anyways, you know, the seasons going to start the same way all the seasons do with the story. And this story picks up where the last one left off. The last personal story episode that I did was Episode 121, which was an episode called True North, which you know, you can go back and listen to it's about a lot of things, but kind of ends with me sleeping on the roof of a library with someone named Holly who played a really outsized role in my early adulthood. Holly was someone that I, I very, very much wanted to date. We weren't dating at the time. That eventually changed. But yeah, this episode kind of picks up around there. And it's about a couple things. It's mainly about this like Collision Course between these two sides of my personality. And one of those sides is the side of me that's just intensely afraid of breaking the rules. And the other side of it is my intensive version to spending money. And they kind of meet together

in the middle,

in these like blue food waste bins behind a produce stand in my college town. And I'm also going to tell you about how to get free chocolate and the biggest block of cheese I've ever seen in my life. So stay tuned after the break. Because Lucky for you I didn't record this entire episode lying down.

Oh my god.

I'm going to try and go to bed now.

Bethany Denton 4:43 Here Be Monsters the podcast about:

Jeff Emtman 4:47 chocolate in my shoes.

Bethany Denton 4:49 The podcast about the unknown.

Jeff Emtman 4:58

The sponsor for this episode is called free beer of Portland, Oregon. Coffee beer is a coffee shop and beer bar that sells coffee and beer and actually quite a lot of groceries too. They're open seven days a week, and they currently offer pickup in the store, which is at the corner of Southeast 42nd Avenue in southeast Boise Street. They also deliver, you can order online at coffee beer delivers.com. If you live outside of Portland, like I do, I recommend their t shirts, which are great. The merchandise though it's at a different URL. That's coffee beer.me You can find these links to coffee beer in the episodes show notes and also on our website. HBM podcast comm that's where you also find a picture of me wearing my favorite coffee beer t shirt. So yeah, coffee beer of Portland, Oregon. They help you get to and from the best parts of your day.

I've talked before about the unusual joy I feel when I ride my bike at night. Holly and I used to take these long bike rides after dark and we'd go through the city down into the industrial district on the water. And we get lost in these giant mazes of parking lots and cannery warehouses. We were usually truly alone down there and we'd look for fences and ladders and we'd be damned if we didn't find our way over, under or through. These night bike rides at the time were a useful part of a complex courtship, a demonstration of a shared willingness for adventure. We did start dating that winter, and for a long time it was good.

Some nights my mind takes me back to the bends behind the produce stand on their elbow deep and food, wrestling oranges with clumsy hands. Everything feels heavy and I realize I'm lying down. Incredibly sleepy. I look for my bike but all I can find is pillows. There's a big fence trapping me and I'm as quiet as can be but I'm tangled in a tangle of sheets and I hear the screen door closed across the alleyway. And then I hear yelling. It's angrier than I've ever heard it before. And I see a man there through the fence. faceless is always his headlamp is impossibly bright and he's made out of numbers and he pulls out his gun and shoots me right there.

It wasn't long after I met Holly that she moved out of the dorms and into a big house on Alice Street. It was falling apart in the way that college houses do. A house that had been fixed and updated so many times over the years that it was this beautiful, terrifying patchwork of quick fixes to drywall and plumbing and electric. Their doors were always unlocked and no one ever knocked. No one even carried keys. The living room of that house was full of amplifiers and empty beer cans and the lights didn't work in there. And in the ceiling of the entryway, there was this access panel for a crawlspace and there was a ladder there that was always leaning against the wall. And each night one of Holly's roommates would climb up that ladder and sleep on a piece of plywood on the ceiling joists. As far as I know he never fell through. Around the time that Holly moved in a local bowling alley got torn down. Shortly after that the neighbor dropped off a huge and beautiful cutting board that he cut from one of the lanes. The kitchens messy cabinets contained every spice known to humanity and the refrigerator was beyond overflowing. Every flat surface in that house had a jar on it with something fermenting, either intentionally or not. And every time I went to that house, they always fed me. It was the first time in my life that I'd ever had people my age like cook for me and it was good.

Some of Holly's roommates smoked a lot of salvia and some of them smoked a lot of weed and some of them did a lot of Whippets too. didn't do any of the above back then. But they didn't judge me too much for it. And they let me ask them questions about what being high was like. And they told me that it could either be terrifying or tolerable. And when you got lucky, your body might feel like a giant zipper, zipping up the two halves of the universe.

in the backyard, there was a big pile of bikes and outdoor couch and the pickup truck with a canopy where an older man left with his least trained cap, an orange shorthair named bonkers. And next door there was another older man who played the marimba all day and cooked us

Caribbean stews, and used to tell us stories about how he had once been married to the heiress of the U haul fortune.

It's safe to say that a lot of people who came through the doors of that house on Ellis street were wildcards but friendly ones. And the way I'm essentially using them here is, of course, unfair to say the least. But it would take ages to tell those stories correctly. And it's actually beside the point for now. So I'm just gonna focus on kind of the main people here. And you already know Holly who I was dating. But there's one other name that I want you to remember for later. And that's Jesse. Jesse was one of Holly's roommates. And he was and still is one of those rare and wonderful people who somehow managed to be both popular and nice, even to me. Even though back then I didn't smoke. I didn't drink. I certainly didn't do Whippets. And I still secretly listened to jack Johnson. And I always felt like a bit too uptight and conservative to be even let through the door of the house on Ellis Street. But Jesse, he was always kind to me. And he was always welcoming. And I appreciate it that

one of my favorite things about that house though, was the feasts. And about once a week everyone would spend all day in the kitchen making as much food as they possibly could. And I remember pizzas and salads and soups and big pots of curry. And when everything was ready, neighbors and friends and strangers would all show up. Early comers got plates with silverware and everyone else just improvised with jelly jars and mugs and whatever else was lying around. I couldn't figure out how all these broke 20 year olds could afford to feed half a neighborhood. It was a mystery to me for a really long time until I eventually worked up the courage to ask Holly's acts. Now Halifax was one of the roommates at the time, and he was the one responsible for really disproportionate amount of the feast ingredients. And he was the sort of person who was kind of an alchemist with with food. And you would see him floating around the kitchen frequently. I remember he used to dye his hair neon orange with turmeric. And I think he also briefly experimented for a while using dead kombucha scobys to replace the soles of his shoes. That was a failed experiment. But he was brimming with ideas all the time. He was like kind of like a wizard. Anyways, Holly sacks he knew that I was interested in the source of the food. And I've kind of shamefully and quietly suspected for a while that he had been somehow stealing massive amounts of food. And it was just too much like it was too much to ever buy. But this is something I wound up being completely wrong about because one night that winter, he actually invited me to come get food with him for the feasts. And he told me to wear dark clothing to bring a flashlight, some gloves and a backpack. And so I showed up that night on my bike ready to learn. And he and I and Holly and Jesse and a couple other people. We all rolled off down the street on our bikes headed towards the grocery stores.

Now in this world, the first thing that anyone learns about dumpster diving is that there are vast discrepancies in the trash policies of different businesses. Some businesses waste very little and that's great. Some businesses donate their extra food to food banks also great and some businesses waste a lot of food and they just kind of dump everything into a big trash soup in their dumpster. And that's gross. And yeah, that's what some dumpsters are like, it's certainly not most, a lot of dumpsters are actually pretty clean and they don't smell bad. They don't get you dirty. And a lot of businesses also a bag for different types of trash in different ways. Like

bakeries, for instance. Those dumpsters usually smell amazing. And sometimes when you dumpster dive at a bakery, all you have to do is reach in, find the right paper bag, grab it, take it home, and you've got 10 loaves of bread. If you have a bit of patience, you can usually find dumpsters that have just about any kind of food you'd like. Is it safe? Truthfully, I don't know. I mean, I've been doing it for over a decade now and I've never once gotten sick from it. I'm sure others have though. Is it legal? It depends on where you live. But for my untrained readings of US law, generally it's fine with certain caveats and local jurisdictions. You know, take it as you will. I've never once gotten in trouble with the law for dumpster diving. And I haven't even heard of anyone who has. Is it ethical in my mind? Absolutely. Yes, it is, And I realized that on that first night, when we opened the first lid of the first dumpster, it was at a restaurant supply store in town, and there was just this mountain of blemished food in there. And it was just so infuriating to see what this business considered trash. So yes, absolutely. I don't think there was anything unethical about saving all that from the landfill. So dumpster diving, it's safe enough, legal enough, ethical enough for me. But despite that, I was really on edge at first night. I was constantly looking over my shoulder, ready to run or apologize at every moment. Because no matter what the front half of my brain thought, the back half of it thought that I was doing something wrong. I think I think it was the whole sneaking element. Right, It was like our quietness as we opened the lids, our burglar couture, the way we plotted our trips around the schedules of the employees to maximize our ability to browse uninterrupted. I had and still have a hard time shaking my own guilt around guote unguote breaking the rules, even if it's just trash.

The riches are real too. I mean, after that first night, my life changed, I pretty much stopped buying food. It's extremely common to find a dumpster with a carton of eggs with 11 good eggs and one broken or 23 good eggs and one broken, or sometimes 59 good eggs and one broken. I once found a block of monterey jack cheese the size of my arm one spot of mold on the end that I sliced off as soon as I got home. I once found a box full of 100 frozen pumpernickel bagels. And once found a miniature palette with like 50 individual cans of pineapple juice, which were great until I drank too much and it made my mouth itchy. And you can dumpster dive for anything. I've gotten clothes shoes electronics too. And and sometimes I dumpster dive at this other store that was on my way home. It was assigned store that made like exterior signs for big box stores. And the funniest thing I ever found there was the letter C. And it was so big that I kind of had to wear a sash over my shoulders while I was biking home. And when I got home. I showed my roommates and they told me that I had actually found a G and we argued about whether this letter was a C or a G and then we eventually realized that that's probably why this letter wound up in the trash in the first place. So we hung it on the wall of our living room. Even though dumpster diving for me started out as like this group thing it eventually became something I did more and more by myself into solitary night activity. Right. I'll never forget the night that I found out that Papa Murphy's often throws out whole uncooked pizzas wrapped in plastic. My freezer used to be full of pizzas. And I'll never forget the night when I found out that Trader Joe's throws out potted plants, and sometimes whole bouquets. As soon as one little leaf or flower starts to look wilted. They were still good enough to use his apology presence when I mess things up with Halle, which was pretty often. After I was done with my route, I would often go to Holly's house to clean my food. That house had a double sink, which made things easier for washing. And the cleaning of the food was this ritual that Hollywood helped me with. It was a

ritual that was important not just for the safety of the food, but also as a way to signify the end of the day. Hollywood helped me wash and dry things, bag them up. And then we'd shove whatever we could shove into the overflowing fridge and freezer. And then we climb up the tilted stairs to her bedroom and fall asleep. Her sheets were of geometric plans, I eat well back then. Maybe the best I've ever eaten. But it was always on the hunt to find better sources of produce. It was easy enough to find rockhard tomatoes and oranges. But I knew I could do better. I don't know how I found out about the forbidden produce stand. It was a nice looking spot, an open air market with good lighting and selection. And their prices are super low. So they always did a ton of business. And I think these factors let them be pretty selective about what made it to the storefront and what wound up in the food waste bins out back. And so I got this tip and I don't remember who told me but I heard that there was a near endless supply of slightly ugly produce, sitting in those food waste bins just asking to be rescued. But there was a catch and it was a big one. You see the owner or so Employee of the produce stand. I'm not sure who he was, but he lived just across the alleyway from those bins. And he was a light sleeper, and he was no fan of people stealing the trash. But it was too tempting to pass up. So one night. I decided to chance that I wrote to the produce stand, turned off my lights and wheeled my bike quietly down the alleyway. I spotted those 50 gallon blue plastic barrels, each one piled high with food. I hid my bike behind some junipers, and I approached as quiet as I could. I hoped that I'd be able to use the street lamps nearby, but they were too dim. So I got my bike light, held it in my mouth, put on my dump string gloves, and I started browsing. It was miraculous, I found fancies tomatoes and cantaloupes and Ruby, red grapefruit and all kinds of squashes and more. At each type of food seem to be magically separated by a layer of collard greens or cabbage leaves. I filled up my backpack, I was delighted. But that back area wasn't just for discarded food. There were other boxes back there, too. And two boxes, they were cardboard, and they were the size of a wooden pallet and a couple feet tall. And inside each of them were that kind of watermelon, that the biggest kind of watermelon. You know what I mean? Like the kind that can feed 20 people. And these watermelons were not trash. They were incoming merchandise. And I didn't take any, I never would do that. And besides, it didn't make any sense for me to dump out a whole backpack full of all different kinds of food, just to fit a single watermelon.

And so I didn't touch the watermelon. So I slipped out the gate, retrieved my bike and went home to clean the produce, back it up and go to bed. For a while, I frequented that protest. And it was just so lucrative, and the food was so good. And I think I made it there without incident for a solid month or two. But I was halfway through a bit of produce one night when I heard the sound was screen door capture. And I looked up and I was immediately blinded by a headlamp across the alley. And there was someone there looking at me saying something to me that I couldn't understand. And from a mouth I couldn't see, the light was just too bright. I couldn't see his face. And I don't remember if he was yelling or whispering or something in between. But he said I was stealing. And I told him I hadn't touched the watermelons. And he said I was stealing. And I rebutted but he didn't care. He wanted me gone and quick. So I left. And that's about all I can remember about that interaction.

I can't think of another time before that that had ever made someone so angry. I didn't want to bother him. But it was the richest the richest. They were just too good. And so I made a bargain

with myself. I said I'd continue going there but I vowed never to get caught again. So I became extra careful, extra quiet, extra sure to clean up after myself. And I got away with it a few times again. But then he started catching me with increasing regularity. And each time he caught me from behind his headlamp from the mouth I couldn't see he became angrier and angrier with me, very angry but never violent. But it was that kind of anger my inability to see his facial expression, the falseness of the watermelon accusation. He rattled something deep in my subconscious made me question whether I might actually be a thief. And so I began having these night terrors about the produce down. Each one was different and how it started but it always ended up with my death. I suspect it was my subconscious relieving its karmic debt. And so I stopped going to the produce stand. It just became too stressful. And I eventually started feeling bad about that too. Like I wondered if there across the alley, there was ever a faceless man lying in bed, eyes wide open, shaken awake from a nightmare about a self righteous college kid wrestling a prized watermelon into his backpack.

I don't think there was a specific reason why Holly and I stopped dating. You know, it's a long time ago. So my memories can get a little bit mushed maybe we grew apart or maybe something happened that felt really significant at the time, but I can't fully remember. I mean, I felt everything was significant at that time. And for me, my first feeling of reciprocated love was eventually punctuated by my first feeling of reciprocated heartbreak. I do remember that it hurt though. And it hurt in a way that I didn't know how to express. The night I knew it was over. I left her house feeling so sad and awful. And so I biked fast but aimlessly through the fog. streets were empty. And so I just tried to see how fast I could go. tried to focus the sadness into the burning feeling of my legs. Nothing lasts Of course, I knew at the end and I know it now.

I'm home again and I pedaled my bike slowly circling my legs through the sheets. This takes a lot of effort and something feels off tonight. But I pull into the alley anyways because I can see that the blue bins are brimming. Like we find a full haul of honey crisp apples and carrots and squash and maybe onions or beets or cantaloupe. In the moment the risk seems worth. It looks like a fresh shipment of watermelons has just come into their big catching curved reflections of the street light above. Maybe I should take one this time that show the faces man. I hide my bike in the junipers. But before I can even get to the bins I hear the screen door close hide in the bushes but somehow his headlamp finds me faceless as always, he's made out of numbers that don't make sense. For one five, I'm stuck behind a fence that I can't climb. His face is 416 my body feels so heavy and the only escape is to go closer to him. And then suddenly we're face to face this face and it's 417 and then he stabs me in the stomach and I fall downwards through the bed landing heavily in the hallway of my middle school. I'm naked now bleeding out on the tile trying to cover up as much as possible because even in death. I'm still incredibly aware of how bad this is going to look in the next day snooze. I believe sweat until my fitted sheet is soaked. It's a couple years later and I just moved to Seattle. I'm in my mid 20s now and feeling a bit adrift. So I sublet this place in the new district and I somehow managed to land a small grant doing some reporting about fishing rights in the Puget Sound. Incidentally, this is also the time when I was working on Season Two of the show while trying to find more paid work and audio. I'm sleeping on a twin mattress on the floor and I'm still having the occasional night terror where a faceless man tracks me down and kills me. I'm living frugally, but well. And I'm still a

shameless dumpster diver. And I'm new to the city. So I spend some of my evenings checking out the local bakeries and the local grocery stores until I find a couple good spots. I also asked around a bit too, and I eventually get a really good tip. It's a factory down by the ship canal Chocolate Factory. I don't know if you can even call this dumpster secret, since you can smell it from a block away. It smells like Christmas. They're all year round. And the dumpster is one of the biggest ones they make. It's so big that you have to climb up and jump in. And it's always at least half full with the shells of cocoa beans. But if you go at the right time of night, you'll find it full of chocolate to some bars are a bit scuffed up and some are a bit malformed and some are apparently flawless though those are the ones that really worry me actually. And they sit there totally unguarded, just basking in that familiar orange glow of the street lights. And the chocolate bars. They greet you when you jump in. And they asked you to take them home and bake them into cookies.

But first summer in Seattle, I went there a lot, always without incident. But you know things happen and I was there one night knee deep wrestling through that sea of Coco shells. There were piles of broken and imperfect chocolate bars and I was filling my bag. But without warning, the back door of the factory swung open and I heard some people come out and be a long time since anyone caught me dumpster diving. A long time since I had to navigate that potential for anger or danger. I poked my head out quietly and I saw two factory workers wheeling a cart towards me taking out the recycling or something. And I dropped my head back down below the edge of the dumpster. They hadn't noticed me yet. And they felt a bit of panic rising inside of me. I couldn't make out their faces. And I thought about hiding but there was nowhere to hide. And I thought about running, but they

were too close. So close that I could actually overhear their conversation. And then something very strange happened. Because I recognized one of the voices It was so familiar.

I popped my head over the edge of the dumpster again to confirm and the two workers jumped a bit when they saw me but yes indeed. I knew one of them. It was Jesse, Holly's old roommate Jesse. And I remembered then how he had moved out of that house on LS to finish school in Seattle. That was years ago. I'd never seen him since. And I can't remember another time in my life when I've switched so quickly from deep anxiety to relief. And he wasn't mad. Of course, I apologize for the surprise anyway. And he just told me not to blame him if I got poisoned from eating dumpster chocolate. And we got caught up on the last couple years of our respective lives. Yeah, it felt like a moment. And I think it was that sudden switch from anxiety to relief. That short circuit did something in my subconscious. I think it interrupted some deep cycle of dumpster guilt that I'd latched on to for far too long. And I've never had another dumpster diving nightmare since that night. You know, that summer, I have so much free chocolate that I actually stopped liking it for a long time. It became too rich, too sweet for me. But I moved away to the east coast for a couple years to places where they have no chocolate factories. But I'm back now. And I'm revisiting some of my old haunts.

All right, 2021. It's Monday, I can't remember if it's January 16th, or 17th, maybe 18th. That's Monday.

I'm biking to the chocolate dumpster. I'm just kind of thinking about the piece here. Now. It's like, I think there's always this temptation in storytelling, to over extrapolate and conclusions. Because kind of the conclusion is where you're like, this is why this is why my story matters. right? And the problem with that is just such a strong temptation to try and make the conclusion more astounding, more meaningful than it actually was. So I'm thinking in terms of the story, right? Like stories require change. And that's where we are tempted to lie, we're tempted to over exaggerate the change. So in this story, I'm gonna say the truth, which is that after Jessie caught me, at the dumpster, and we like, reconnected and never had dreams about the faceless man ever again. That's true. But it'd be really tempting to make a big claim and say, like, that's how I got over fear, or something like that. That's how I stopped internalizing my insecurities. And that would be very false. is absolutely not true. I think today I'm about about the same. On that measure. The thing that changed is the thing that changed nothing more than security. So just as strong. It's just the manifests differently now. I think the only story we have, right? It's the same story that it just exists no matter who you are, which is that you're getting older. So only story there is to tell really, it's the only one you can guarantee. So we're all getting older, right? Everything else is pretty much just a chapter in that story. It's just a subset. So I think that's the only personal story that exists. So I'm almost there. I'm just right around the corner.

Am I lost?

thought was gonna be....oh wait wait. I think it's up here.

Turning off my light.

I don't see anyone out here right now. I can smell it That smells like chocolate. There's plenty of chocolate in here. Cheers

I've got, I've got chocolate in my shoes. I think just guessing on the way to my backpack, I think I've got, let's say 10 let's say 10 pounds of chocolate in my backpack. And, you know, I'm not sure if it's gonna be good or not, it's definitely a little scuffed up. But that's not necessarily a sign that it's bad. I'm gonna probably take it home and kind of shake it through a sieve kind of get any like dust off of it, but we'll probably do is I'll probably check it, make sure it tastes alright. and break it down. So you'd use it in like cooking. You know what I mean? I'm not really a chocolate bar eater. So let's see how that goes. Yeah, it's time to go home.

Sounds good. I'm gonna stop this recording. I used to love riding my bike at night. And I still do. I keep wondering when I'm trying to find something that makes me feel as grounded as that does. And I'm still looking. And whenever I ride my bike at night now, I always stopped by the bakery near my house, and I checked to see what's on the menu. On the weekdays, it's Danish rye bread, and on the weekends and cinnamon rolls. And these days, I don't lose too much sleep about bringing them home with me.

My name is Jeff Emtman and I wrote and edited this episode of here be monsters. While I was working on this episode, two people helped me out so much by sharing their memories of the same time period with me. So I appreciate you so much, Hallie Sloane and Jesse Chapelle. Thank you. I also have been thinking a lot about the faceless man to us. I've been writing this piece. You know, he's of course a real person with feelings and I only ever met him in this one very particular context, and I should make it clear that I certainly harbor no ill will against him. Here Be monsters is an independent podcast about fear, Beauty and the unknown. It's supported by individual sponsors and donors. You can become a donor by visiting patreon.com slash HBM podcast. Again, that's at patreon.com slash HBM podcast. But of course, the nicest thing you can do for this show is absolutely free. Just spread the word if you can. Send the podcast to one friend and send the podcast to your most likeable enemy. They mean so much. And thank you. This episode's sponsor is Coffee Beer of Portland, Oregon. Thank you coffee beer. We have links to coffee beer in the show notes and also up on our website, which is HBMpodcast.com. Music on this episode by August Fris. Serocell and the black spot. Thanks for listening more episode soon.