



Vanessa:

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-Music Intro-

Hi listeners, welcome back to Heart to Table! The podcast where we approach food and cooking from a different angle. I'm Laurie March. Remodeler, on camera host, producer and now, explorer of the culinary arts.

Laurie

You guys, today's guest, Vanessa Cantave, won a Bravo cooking show, was class valedictorian at the French Culinary Institute, and is the owner of Yum Yum Catering and Chefs in Brooklyn. Hey, thanks for joining us, Vanessa.

Vanessa

Hi!

Laurie

Hello! This time of year, this February, we hear the word "love" all the time. But I feel like in the kitchen and around food, there's this one phrase that I hear over and over and over. Just trying to get across that complicated feeling we all have when you're making food for somebody else. Food is love. How many times have you heard "food is love?"

Vanessa

All the time. It's a very chef-y thing to say.

Laurie

Yeah. What does that mean to you, food is love?

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Vanessa

Well, for me, I chose food as a career because I'm passionate about it, and it sort of feels like my craft, my art, my thing that I give to the world, so definitely it comes from a place of love. And if my heart wasn't in it, I don't think I would do it. It's not just like a technical thing for me. I really overthink everything. But food is love is just thinking really... almost probably meticulously and just... even if I'm making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for my kid, I want to cut it in cute shapes and all that sort of stuff. I don't know, it feels to me like a gift in a way.

Laurie

Yeah. I was reading this NPR article, and it was talking about how, ages and ages ago, and today in the wild, animals sort of offer the best part of something juicy to their offspring, or their family members, and it's just this connection where we're sort of strengthening alliances... there's just so many ways, primitively speaking, that food was a part of our connection, that nourishment and happiness connection. I just find that so interesting.

Vanessa

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. Cooking for my family is a certain kind of love, but also it comes from [inaudible 00:12:40] I think cooking for your family and the people around you that you really care about, you kind of do go a little over with them, because you want them to love it. Even if they're two years old, you really want them to love it.

Laurie

Yeah. It makes sense too, because one of the other things in this article is really talking about how where babies, children cannot disconnect the feeling of love from the feeling of receiving nourishment. so, from our earliest connection, there's that link between getting food from someone you love and love. So literal.

Vanessa

It's so true. Your kids come to you when they're hungry, and they're looking at mama like "What's for dinner?" Yeah, from the minute they're born, and you're nursing and all of that. For me, I want that to kind of last forever. My kids are six and two. But I have this dream of them loving my food, and coming home from college on the weekends, and wanting... they love their mom's cooking. We are not there yet, but I hope that we get there one day. Yeah, that would be awesome.

Laurie

Interestingly, I was looking at your bio, and you started out in advertising, among other things. So I want to hear, how does this leap happen from advertising into absolute culinary?

Vanessa

So, I always wanted to be a chef, I mean always. As far back as I can remember, being eight or nine years old and going to the library with my mom and my brother, and we'd all kind of go our separate ways, and I would park myself in front of the cookbooks section, and they'd be all around me, and I was looking at the pictures. I mean we're talking like in the 80s, this is crazy, right?

Vanessa

And then throughout school, I always wanted to take the home ec classes and stuff, which I don't even think they offer that kind of thing in school anymore.

Laurie

RIP.

Vanessa

RIP home ec. In tenth grade, I was named home ec student of the year, which is as cool as it sounds.

Laurie

Yeah, why is that not on your bio? Come on, girl.

Vanessa

I was like, oh my god. And they gave me an award at the same award ceremony that they give like... the captain of the football team who's getting a scholarship to college. I'm like, "This is so embarrassing."

Laurie

What? Fabulous.

Vanessa

But yeah, and I told my parents I wanted to go to culinary school, and they were just kind of like, "Eh..." I think then they thought, "Well, that sounds like a trade school," and they really wanted me to get a bachelor's degree. And they were just like, "No." So I went and got an undergraduate degree in political science, minored in French, got into regulatory banking, pivoted into advertising and marketing, all of that led me to New York for an advertising job.

Vanessa

But once I got here I was like... I'm getting to go to all these amazing restaurants because my job was to take clients out and manage client relationships, so I would just pick all the restaurants I wanted to eat at, and I would just be so focused on what was happening... if there was an open kitchen it would be even more interesting, because I could be looking over the client's shoulder trying to see what's going on over there.

Vanessa

And then finally I was just like, "This is what I want to do." So I suck away, in went to an open house that they were having at the French Culinary Institute, and right then and there I applied, and got accepted, and quit my job, and I went to culinary school. My parents were so, like... "What are you doing?" And I really did leap without looking, because I don't know what... I had no idea what I thought. I was like, sure... I ended up waiting tables throughout the time that I was in school, which is super hard. Like, super hard. Tip your server for real, because it's a hard job.

Laurie

Yes, it is.

Vanessa

Yeah. It was just bumpy along the way, but I loved culinary school. I never, ever to this day, ever looked back. Never thought I made a mistake going to culinary school. I enjoyed the time I was there. But right away in the beginning, it was definitely like... oh, okay. It's not glamorous like you think. You have to really love it. I think you have to really love it to be successful.

Laurie

Yeah. And I think you have been successful. I feel like, in my brain, as you were talking, I was hearing the banking, and the advertising... I feel like those things all kind of roll together when you create your own business. There's a little bit of math over here, a little bit of advertising, and marketing, and connecting to clients, and then suddenly you have a catering business. Do you see a thread there? Is there a thread there?

Vanessa

There's totally a thread there. It's funny because I remember thinking, at the super old age of like 25, that all these other kids in my class who were 18 and getting to go to culinary school right away, I felt jealous. "Oh, they just got to go straight to culinary school, but I went to university and I did all this other stuff first." And I felt like they had a leg up. And of course, later, when I graduated and then subsequently started my own private chef company, which became also catering and all of that, I had that aha moment where you realize that life is actually really cumulative, and all of the marketing, and banking, and advertising and all of that gave me the tools to not just be a chef, but be a chef owner of something, and be able to do all the other things that you have to do if you're going to own a business.

Vanessa

It would be great to just get to cook, but you got to pay people, and order supplies, and make sure you're profitable, and all these other things. It all definitely ended up making sense later.

Laurie

It's funny how the perspective flips from, at the time, thinking "Oh no, I'm behind a little bit," to coming out and realizing that all that wealth of life experience went so far and you actually had your own leg up. One of the things that we talked about previously that struck me was talking about people's food preferences, and how everybody and a family and everybody... people, we just get picky about stuff, we get particular. There's a way people like things chopped, or there's a way... people want the edges cut off the sandwich sometimes. Do you feel like all of your absolute culinary experience has led you to be kind of a ninja at all the small things? At home, in the wild...

Vanessa

Yeah. It's so funny because I'm very... first of all, I have barely any dietary things. I'll try just about anything, and I'm only allergic to a couple of things. So I'm not this way. But I find myself being really sensitive to anybody's dietary restrictions or preferences or whatever, in such a non-judge-y way, which is not my normal... I'm a whole different person in the kitchen, I feel like, than in real life. Not to say I'm normally judge-y, but...

Vanessa

Yeah, I may not remember your birthday, but I will remember that you don't eat eggs, but you do like cheese, but you're a pescatarian, but sometimes you'll... I'll remember the craziest list of a person's

dietary preferences over just about anything else, and it's bizarre. It's all stored in just this one part of my brain, of anyone that I know or care about.

Vanessa

It's also one of the first questions I ask a client when we're creating a menu together. Because at the end of the day, I want you to like it, and I care so much. And it's not like I want you to like I because I love it, you have to like it, I want you like it because you like it. Some clients that I've had over the years who, maybe they were ill, and they had specific... I've worked with nutritionists before. I had a client once who couldn't have any salt... like any salt, which is very, very hard to find any foods that don't have any salt, because it's a preservative.

Vanessa

So it was a challenge, but of course I did it. And he really liked the food, so that was really great. But I'm weirdly into knowing everybody's preferences, and I want everybody to love the food.

Laurie

Yeah. Remembering people's food preference is definitely a love language.

Vanessa

Love language, yes. That's my love language.

Laurie

Yeah. Do you think that that translates to feeding kids? You're talking about it at the adult level, whether it's somebody's chosen diet or... all the reasons that we have our preferences. But kids, man, they're a whole other story, right?

Vanessa

They're so frustrating, because yes, that's my love language, but at the same time with kids, you're trying to get them to expand a little bit, right? And sometimes they're like, "Oh, I don't like that." Well, you've never really tried it. It's definitely harder. My son who's six, he's really picky. And I'm just like, ugh, because I... your mom is a chef! But at the same time, I work within what he likes, I introduce things slowly and when I can. If he like something new, I get super excited.

Laurie

What's something new that he's recently fallen in love with, or open to?

Vanessa

Let me tell you, this blew my mind. So I have a classic six-year-old, like chicken nuggets, spaghetti, pizza, quesadilla six-year-old, his favorite things.

Laurie

Yellow. He's eating yellow, right?

Vanessa

Yeah. Cheese sticks, yogurt, the same stuff that every six-year-old likes. And then over the holidays, my dad got super fancy, and he roasted duck and made like an orange sauce, like a Grand Marnier orange sauce. So fancy, and also like duck, duck is kind of gamey, and dark meat, and fatty, and it's duck. Girl, he loves duck. He won't stop asking my dad when he's going to make it again. I was sitting there with my jaw on the ground like, "Duck? Duck? Seriously?"

Laurie

He couldn't just fall in love with broccoli.

Vanessa

Right. I can't put the tiniest amount of spinach in his Alfredo, but duck. Okay.

Laurie

I mean, his mom is a chef, maybe that's actually what's up.

Vanessa

It gave me hope. It gave me hope.

Laurie

I feel like with kids too... the adage is we eat with our eyes. But I feel like with kids it's especially important. If something looks familiar to them, or it looks interesting... do you find yourself falling into the very Instagram-worthy habit of making an attractive presentation for the small people in your life?

Vanessa

I make an attractive situation on every single plate for every single everything. Me and my sous chef, who's also one of my best friends, we say that we are hashtag never not plating. I don't know how not to slice my banana and fan it out. Everybody doesn't do that? We can't stop. So yeah. All of their food, my food... I'm making something for me, I'm the only person that's going to see it and eat it, and I will still... I can't not make it pretty.

Laurie

Give me some examples. I want to hear what you're never not plating. What's on the plate? Tell me what's happening.

Vanessa

There's nothing that I'm not plating. So if I'm making literally a cheese sandwich for the kids, I'm cutting into cute shapes. In the beginning... I don't really do this as much for Christian anymore, but I used to slice his oranges where you take all the skin and everything off, so it's really easy to just eat, put it in your mouth. I always have a variety of colors and fruits, vegetables... all of the different kind of food groups represented if I can.

Vanessa

But even if I'm making something for myself, a salad in a bowl, I'm going to crumble the feta, get a nice dusting of black pepper, whatever it is. Drizzle the salad dressing in such a way. It doesn't make any sense. I can't stop.

Laurie

The salad dressing is real. I find myself doing that too, where it's like... can I get the perfect application? It's like a squiggle. Do they teach you that in culinary school, the squiggle?

Vanessa

Of course. And my refrigerator is filled with squeeze bottles and stuff. Because I make a lot of sauces myself. Salad dressing I don't usually buy, because that's really easy to make. So I do have my own squeeze bottle of salad dressing.

Laurie

What's your favorite dressing?

Vanessa

That I make?

Laurie

That you make.

Vanessa

Oh. My favorite is Meyer lemon if I can find it, because they're the best lemons, they're a little less tart, they just have this incredible lemony flavor, so I'll use the juice and the zest, so that's my citrus. And Dijon mustard, honey, or agave, or maple syrup, whatever I have so it's a little bit sweet. And then olive oil, but what I do with the olive oil is I buy the garlic cloves that are already peeled, and I'll put like a cup of them in a sauce pan, and then cover it with olive oil, cook that down. So what happens is you end up with just a large amount of roasted garlic cloves that you can use in recipes, you can blend it, it's nice, they're soft. You know, roasted garlic. And then the olive oil that's left over has like a garlic infused flavor, and then I use that in my salad dressing.

Laurie

Sneaky. So you're using it two ways, I love that.

Vanessa

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Laurie

I feel like it's all about efficiency sometimes in the kitchen, this is one thing I'm learning through this podcast and in life, lately. There's something to be said for efficiency.

Vanessa

Definitely. You know chefs don't like to throw anything away. We figure out a way to use all of the ingredients.

Laurie

I think that's super important too if you're not cooking for a lot of people. We talked about this before. You are currently single, yes?

Vanessa

Yes, I am. Yes. Yes.

Laurie

Through the pandemic, I feel like it's a hard time to date, anyway. Feels challenging. But if you're cooking for one, tell me a little bit about the efficiency and just how you manage cooking for one.

Vanessa

When I'm cooking for myself, I tend to... usually during the day I eat a salad, so that's easy. But when I'm cooking for the kids, I really try to let them know this isn't a restaurant, we all eat the same thing. Because they'll look at something like "Oh, I don't really want that, can I have this instead?" And I'm like, "No, no, no. This is what we're having. This is what's for dinner tonight."

Vanessa

For example, kids love pasta. So if I'm making pasta with marinara sauce for the kids, and they love a lot of Parmesan or pecorino, a lot of cheese. So I'll do that, and I'll give that to the boys. And then for me, I'll take the same pasta with really good marinara and pecorino, then I put it in a saute pan, add a little bit of pasta water, maybe a pad of butter, some Calabrian chilies... I'll take the same thing and completely just re-engineer it with maybe four or five other what I call "Mommy ingredients."

Vanessa

And then it doesn't feel like I'm eating kid food, which can honestly, after a while... everybody loves pizza until you eat it all the time. So then I kind of feel like I've sort of elevated this dish a little bit, and so I'm not making something different for myself, I'm just kind of taking it to a different level of that... I want to eat it, and I want to be excited about it. And then I plate it really nicely for myself.

Laurie

Yeah, back to that plating. That seems efficient, A, back to that word, where you're not actually having to bust out totally separate dishes, totally separate everything. But also it strikes me that that would probably address some food waste too, where you're not generating separate things for each of you. You're able to start to teach your kids, this is what adult food looks like, and this is what we're eating, set some boundaries around some of that. But then there's nothing wasting away in the back of the fridge, or maybe not quite as much wasting away.

Vanessa

Yeah. And then you're sitting down at the table and we all have the same thing. It really reinforces like, we are having dinner together, and all three of us are eating the same... your brother's throwing his across the room, but that's fine. Yeah, we're all eating the same thing. And sometimes the elevating is

like fresh herbs, because kids don't like that sort of stuff, they're like, "Ew." But sometimes it's just like chopped chives or fresh basil, or whatever it is, putting that on whatever. Taco night, same thing. He wants meat and cheese, that's it.

Vanessa

Well, that's super easy, because then I can just have a variety of other toppings that I want, and everybody's having the same thing, or I might turn mine into a taco salad, or whatever. But those are easy tricks.

Laurie

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. I've been poking around the internet, as one does in a pandemic, and one of the things that I keep coming across is, I don't know what it is for me, I really struggle with leftovers. I really have this mental aversion. We joke about it in my family, but I think it goes back a long time ago to one time I got sick from something I ate in the fridge, and I have this mental connection to it wasn't stored properly, something. I don't know.

Laurie

So leftovers in our household have this negative association for me. But I've been reading a lot about meal prep and a lot about the ways that people make their kitchens a little more efficient, and I keep coming across this term, and I don't know if you've heard of it. But instead of calling them leftovers, it's a more deliberate creation of food in advance called "Nextovers." And so, as you're making any one ingredient, you are doubling it, you're tripling it. So maybe it's that ground turkey or ground beef that's in your tacos, right? So you're doubling or tripling that. Or salad greens, or something else. So it becomes the raw material for the next meal or two. What do you think about that?

Vanessa

I'm really into it, actually. It's not to say that I love leftovers, I just think that it's like a weird superpower that I've had way before culinary school of being able to turn nothing into something.

Laurie

That's a good one.

Vanessa

It's a weird one, because I was definitely the roommate in the apartment in college that you wanted to help you make something. I could literally turn nothing into something.

Laurie

What were you making? I want to hear this. What's in the college fridge and what did you call into action? I'm super curious.

Vanessa

Oh my god. I don't remember this as well as one of my best friends who loves to tell this story, where we had a little bit of some kind of Chinese food takeout seafood situation... this is, she describes this back to me, because I vaguely remember, she really remembers. And apparently a can of, have you ever

heard of Mexicorn? It's like corn in a can, but it also has little bits of pepper, like bell pepper or chili peppers in it.

Vanessa

So a can of that, maybe some stock or some sort of a little bit of half-and-half that we probably used for coffee or something. Whatever it was, she swears I turned this into some kind of like a seafood chowder, and I had a potato. And she said I turned it into this chowder, and she's like, "Can you make that again?" I'm like, "I don't know, no I can't."

Vanessa

But I do think ahead to leftovers these days. So making like a meatloaf for dinner, that's obviously a meatloaf sandwich for lunch the next day. I like to make too much rice, because you can do so much with leftover rice. If you're making just a dish and it's going to be served over rice, nothing makes better fried rice than cold rice from the refrigerator. So then fried rice is super easy because it's usually whatever you have. If you just have one carrot, you can just dice a bunch of little things and... fried rice is so easy.

Vanessa

I also like to take leftover rice, like day-old rice, and make little rice cakes out of it and fry it in a nice cast iron and get it super crispy on both sides, and then fry an egg and put that on top of my fried rice cake, and then drizzle that with like chili oil, maybe some sriracha, and then mix a little bit of sesame oil with soy sauce into that. And it's so good, such a great snack that costs like nothing to make.

Vanessa

And it also kind of requires you to have a few staples. I definitely always have eggs around, so that's easy. And a lot of condiment kind of things you can play with.

Laurie

What else is a staple for you? Because I keep coming back to this nextovers concept, which is that there are certain things that you can do, and one of the other elements of the nextovers thing is repetition, right? So you get used to making that extra thing, and you get used to what you did with it so that you can kind of do it again easily, and you start to have some of those same raw materials floating around, like you're saying, that come together to make what you wanted. So what else is in your must-have list?

Vanessa

In my fridge you'll always find store-bought pizza dough, just because it's really easy and you can make a million kinds of things, and it's not always pizza. I just made a flatbread situation with the pizza dough this morning with olive oil in a square pan, and threw some... I had a little bit of cheddar, and I had five grape tomatoes, so I put those on top. Anyways, really easy.

Vanessa

So, pizza dough, eggs, milk, half-and-half usually for my coffee, always just like salad greens, just baby greens so I can always just engineer a salad out of everything. And then, in the pantry, always just a variety of rice or whole grains. I like farro, cornmeal or polenta, grits, whatever you want to call it. Grits, I have pancake mix always, because it's so easy on the weekends, and I buy the mix, I don't have time

to... why? Why? The mix is fine. Why am I measuring baking powder and... I don't need that. So I have the mix, and you can turn that mix, it's like pancakes, it's waffles, then you're putting shredded cheddar cheese or maybe some diced ham in there, and now it tastes better. It's a ham and cheddar waffle. There's 1000 different ways you can just... pancake and waffle it up on the weekends.

Laurie

Is that something that holds... if you made extra of that mix, is that something that can kind of sit in the fridge and then come back later? Or would you prebake the waffle and then reheat the waffle and bring it back to life?

Vanessa

So good that you asked. I always make too many pancakes, and I put the leftover in a Ziploc bag. And I don't have a microwave because I don't believe in microwaves, but my in-laws do and they live downstairs. It's like a family-owned building. So I'll just send Christian down and he just reheats them. They reheat really well.

Laurie

Yeah. Okay. I love it.

Vanessa

It's crazy. They reheat really well. So yeah, you can totally make more and then eat them later.

Laurie

I feel like that's part of the key of all of this too, is you make the thing, and you made enough, and you put it aside, but then you just also have to really kind of learn a little bit more about how to bring it back to life. Like what is the proper... sometimes I think the microwave can kill some food, like pizza. Oh my gosh. I'd rather eat a cold pizza instead of putting it in the microwave. It makes me so sad. Do you think that's part of the nextover genre and the efficiency eating, is knowing how to bring it back to life?

Vanessa

Yes, yes, yes. Oh my god, I didn't even think about that, but for everybody who's given me crap for not having a microwave, which by the way I haven't had a microwave in like 20 years, whenever I reheat something, I use the pan or the oven, and it doesn't take forever, of course it doesn't take 30 seconds, but I promise it doesn't take forever. And everybody's always like, "Oh, you're right. This does taste so much better the way you reheated it."

Vanessa

Because usually I might add a little bit of water into the pan, which creates steam, and it's going to taste more like it originally tasted than if you put it in the microwave. Again, I'm not hating, but I also like to pop popcorn on top of the stove. To me, microwave popcorn just doesn't even compare. And it's so easy, and it's not expensive, and you can just do it on top of the stove. Yeah, I am a huge proponent of re-engineering. Re-engineering, I think that's kind of like nextovers. Re-engineering and cooking it on top of the stove or in the oven.

Laurie

Yeah. So if you had to go out today and teach somebody else about nextovers, what three or four things would you tell them to start with? Sounds like rice is already on your list, whether it's a coconut rice or what, but what else do you think people could start with in the nextovers category?

Vanessa

I would say the easiest thing to revamp leftovers into are going to be sandwich... that's pretty self-explanatory. I also love just about anything in a tortilla. So I take just vegetables and saute them, and if you have salsas or pico or whatever on deck, that's always great because you can kind of put a lot into a tortilla, and then you'll be surprised, it just always tastes better.

Vanessa

Having salad greens around, it's easy to throw something, especially protein, it's easy to just throw that on top of a salad. And then like a soup is really easy too, especially if you have a blender, you can turn a lot of stuff into a blended soup. Which all you need is usually some kind of a chicken broth, which you should kind of have on deck anyways, that's a good pantry item. Chicken broth, you can just like... and nothing has to be really pretty in a blended soup. So you can throw leftover corn, or potato or whatever, in a pot with some chicken broth, maybe throw some aromatics in there, onion or spices or whatever, and then throw that in the blender. And boom. You have a delicious blended situation.

Laurie

That sounds so easy and logical. Again, a comeback to efficiency. Just a good way to move through your kitchen, right?

Vanessa

Yeah. So, rice, sandwiches, tacos, soup, and salads. Those are good second-day options for leftovers.

Laurie

Vanessa, while we were talking, I keep coming back to this feeling that there's just so much sort of pragmatism and strength in you, and a lot of your core of your experience just sounds like you just have so much confidence in what you're doing. You don't sound like you're waffling around out there. Where does that come from in you? I'm super curious. Where does that core of confidence come from in you?

Vanessa

Thank you for saying that. I've never thought of this. I would say probably my parents instilled a lot of that in me when I was a kid. They're the kind of parents who just like, everything you did, they thought it was great, even if it... I'll actually never forget the first meal I made. I was in fourth grade and we had not yet... like real meal, not baking on the weekends with my mom. And we had not yet covered fractions. And it was meatloaf, and it was out of the Holly Hobby cookbook. And I had to ask my brother, like I couldn't figure out how to measure the ingredients. I was like, "What does this mean, when there's a one, and then a line, and then a two?"

Vanessa

He was trying to explain to me what fractions were and it was kind of going over my head. I, to this day... it could've not tasted good. But my parent came home, I set the table, and that was the first time I made food-food. And all I remember is their reaction and how great it felt that I made dinner for my whole

family, and I was like what, eight, nine? And that stuck with me. So they've always just been so supportive. Again, it could've tasted like dirt, and they were like, "This is so good, oh yay, thank you..."

Vanessa

So I think I was always really encouraged, and I think I'm a creative person so I tried a lot of different things. And all of the different things I tried, they always seemed pretty supportive about it. So I think that kind of helped build my confidence. But also, I work hard. So some stuff sometimes comes off looking effortless, it's not always. Sometimes there's a lot of effort to make it look effortless.

Laurie

I think there's so much strength in doing things by yourself, too. I find when you have your own business, I own my own business as well, but when you kind of get out there and do it for yourself, and sort of do it solo, I think there is a core of strength required to do that.

Vanessa

Yeah, for sure. Because you look around and you're like, "Can someone... oh, it's just me. Oh, okay, I guess that's me. I guess I'm going to build a website today. I guess I'm going to run this to the post office." You just start realizing like, oh man... it definitely falls on you a lot. And solo parenting is crazy too. It's so much, it's a lot to juggle. But you just kind of do it. You just kind of do it. I don't know. You don't consciously think about it, you just kind of do it, and you own your decisions. And then when you have wins, then you're like, "Oh, okay, I did that." And then sometimes when things don't work out, you're like, "That was me too," but you learn, and you kind of just keep going. I've learned a lot, but of course, I went to culinary school. At this point, this was 15, 16 years ago.

Laurie

I think there's sometimes a stigma around single, whether it's eating alone at a restaurant or... I don't know. There's something in our culture sometimes that just stigmatizes doing... the single person. Do you feel that, ever?

Vanessa

I can see where you say that, but I also revel in being alone sometimes. Like oh, man, time to myself is great. I find myself, sometimes I'll go run errands by myself and then I'll get home, and I've parked the car, and I spend an extra 10 or 15 minutes in the car by myself just listening to a podcast that I like, or some music, or looking at social media, because I'm like, this is so nice.

Vanessa

But yeah, I like certain elements of single, whether you're talking about being an entrepreneur, or being a solo parent, or whatever it is. And then there's times where you wish you had a whole team of people around, or a guy to help me with these babies.

Laurie

Or at least the dishes, right? Come on.

Vanessa

Just the dishes. Or like today it's snowing in New York, and I'm thinking at some point I'll go and pick up my son from school, and I'm like, "Ugh... it's cold." Like that's something I wish I could send somebody else to do. I had to fix the dishwasher yesterday, and I was like, ugh, again, I'm looking around. Is someone going to... oh. Okay, it's me.

Laurie

It's you.

Laurie

Yeah. But that takes courage, and that take guts. And like you said, you just do it. You're not looking around... nobody showed up when you looked around, so you just did it yourself, and I imagine that that is... it sounds like your parents started that, and it gave you a lot of confidence, and you continued. And I imagine your boys see that, and that is going to carry through for them, too.

and as we sort of wind this down I'm thinking about February and how this month is always so into couples, right? It's always about coupling up and Valentine's. But I just love the vibe of sort of being a pioneer and just taking care of things for yourself, and I feel like you really embody that. And it's been so much fun to talk to you for this hour, and I can't wait to go do 15 of the things that you just suggested with rice cakes. Thank you.

Vanessa

Well, I've changed Valentine's Day to Treat Yourself Day. So it's treat yourself, it's maybe do something special for someone you love. It doesn't have to be a partner, it can be your kids, it can be your parents, it can be whoever, it can be yourself. So it's just a day about love, and that includes self-love. So I encourage everyone to just look at it that way and not feel like, "Oh, it's a pandemic and I don't have anybody," or whatever, because that's not what it's about.

Laurie

No, it's Treat Yourself Day.

Vanessa

It's Treat Yourself Day.

Laurie

And that's how we pass on that food is love. So chef, thank you so much, it's been such a pleasure spending time with you, and I loved every minute.

Vanessa

Thank you, Laurie. I'll always talk to you.

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