

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / A Holiday Treat with David Sedaris!

Hey there, it's Candice, the producer of this show.
Before we jump into today's episode,
which is one of my favorite interviews we've ever recorded,
I just wanted to say real quick that,
as a mom of two small children,
one of whom is old enough to be dangerously curious,
that this is not one of those episodes
you want to listen to with small ears around.
So if you're on hour six, that car ride to Florida
for the holidays and you want to pull your hair out
or throw your body out the moving window, I get it.
And great instincts to put honestly on.
Just maybe switch it from the car speakers to your headphones.
Okay, here's the show.
I pushed that button and everything was Chinese.
What? Yeah.
You might have like a hacker in your phone.
I'm not a big, terribly attached person to my phone, but...
A hacker.
Why would your phone be in Chinese and locking you out?
I don't know.
What else could that be? That's a very odd thing.
I thought maybe it had happened to everybody,
so I was trying to get up here,
but the elevator wouldn't come to this floor
and I couldn't call anybody.
So you're stuck on the elevator in your phones in Chinese
and you're locked out. And there were these two people
and I was asking them, and if I were them,
I would have said, you know, let me make a call for you,
but neither of them did it.
A few days before Christmas,
I met David Sedaris at a studio in New York City.
This was after he got stuck in the elevator
on his way to the studio,
but couldn't call me because he'd gotten locked out
of his iPhone, which he says he barely uses anyway.
Oh, and somehow the phone's language
had suddenly turned into Chinese.
Can you think of a more fitting way
for me to meet David Sedaris?
Sedaris is a humorist and the author
of many best-selling books.
Calypso, Theft by Finding,

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Let's Explore Diabetes with Owls,
Me Talk Pretty One Day,
Naked, Holidays on Ice,
Barrel Fever, Dress Your Family in Corderoi,
and most recently, Happy Go Lucky.
And he's also one of my favorite writers of all time.
Maybe he's one of yours too,
and you've read lots of the books that I just mentioned.
Or maybe you just remember him as The Elf Guy.
David burst onto the scene
and into our ears several decades ago on NPR
with his now famous essay, Santa Land Diaries,
about the time he worked as a Christmas elf at Macy's.
Or maybe you've heard him over the years
on This American Life,
or read one of his many essays in The New Yorker,
or seen him read live on tour.
But perhaps you've never read anything
by David Sedaris at all,
and today is the first time you're hearing of him.
To those in that group, strap in.
Also, I'm very jealous
that you're about to spend your holidays
tearing through his books for the first time.
What makes David's essays so mesmerizing and funny
is his ability to find something meaningful
and true in the utterly mundane.
His ability to find humor
in the darkest moments of our lives,
and his commitment to the lost art
of making fun of ourselves.
Nowhere is that more clear than in his new book,
Happy Go Lucky,
which like all of his books is about his beloved,
but also crazy family.
But I think maybe for the first time,
he also takes on some of the most contentious social issues
of the last few years.
For the guy who so many think of as a public radio darling
and with good reason,
this book sounds nothing like the public radio of 2022.
David writes about the summer of 2020,
observing the Black Lives Matter protests
and COVID lockdowns with no agenda and no moral ideology,

which results in something not just hilarious,
but also extraordinarily refreshing.
For those who find yourself tuning in today,
stuck in an aisle seat on a plane
where the person in the window seat
is crawling over you to go to the bathroom,
something that David stridently objects to.
This is the perfect episode for you,
and I hope the perfect escape.
So without further ado,
I'm happy to bring you the man
who walks at least 10 miles a day,
who owns one Picasso,
whose hobby is picking up litter on the side of the road,
who collects taxidermy,
who has never seen a therapist,
and who absolutely hates the word queer.
David Sedaris.
David Sedaris, thanks for coming on, honestly.
Oh, thank you for having me, Barry.
It's a little bit of an odd thing for me
to be sitting here with you
because I'm used to seeing you on stage
in the nosebleed seats,
hearing you talk about going shopping in Japan,
and then at other times,
I'm used to walking with you
and having your voice in my ears.
I will say that my sister waited for hours in line
in Ann Arbor,
and she had you make out a book to me,
and you called me, quote, a disgusting whore.
So David, thank you for the memories.
She just probably said,
can you make it out to my sister, right?
It says, dear Barry, you are a disgusting whore,
and it is a treasure of mine.
So you've written-
That's always a good inscription.
That's incredible.
You've written so many books that I've treasured
and read and reread,
like Me Talk Pretty One Day,
like Naked, like Holidays on Ice,

and over the past few days,
I've read your new book, Happy Go Lucky,
and you opened that book with an epigraph,
and I wondered if you would mind reading it to me.
It's by Sigmund C. Monster.
You know, I found this online somewhere,
and it wasn't in the New York Times.
I think it was, was it New York Magazine?
It was in the comment section.
It was signed by Sigmund C. Monster,
and I tried to find out who that really is,
and my editor tried finding out.
Everybody tried.
Nobody could find out who it was,
but I thought it was so good.
Ban everything, purify everything,
moral cleanse everything,
anything that was bad or is bad, destroy it,
especially in the forest
where you live your life as a tree, wielding an axe.
Why did you decide to open the book this way?
I've never had a thing like that in a book.
Yeah, I know.
But I don't know, I saw it, and I just,
you know, if every book that I put out
is kind of a time capsule,
this just seemed the perfect way
to open this particular time capsule.
I think I started writing this book in 2018.
I don't know, it just, it just seems like
the sun that's shining on everything.
Or casting a shadow on everything.
But there's something about that last line,
like the prophecy.
Especially if you were right, in a...
That you're the tree wielding the axe.
It's just brilliant.
So this latest book sort of tackles two subjects
at the same time.
One, the subject you always come back to,
which is your family, your father, Lou,
who died at 98, your long-term boyfriend, Hugh,
and of course your sisters, Lisa, Gretchen, Amy,
and what you touch on Tiffany too,

and I want to get to them.
The other half of the book
speaks really exactly to that epigraph you just read,
which is sort of meditating
on this really strange place that we're in as a culture.
It feels broken, sometimes it feels schizophrenic.
It often certainly feels divided.
And you have essays that touch on
really contentious social issues,
like school shootings and BLM protests
and race and the pandemic.
Talk to me about how you married
these two topics in your mind.
Well, I mean, I think, you know,
if you were going to talk about the last four years,
I mean, you couldn't really not talk about the protests
and you couldn't really not talk about COVID,
which, you know, I usually go on tour twice a year, right?
So every fall and every spring, I go to like 44 cities,
but I couldn't go on tour
because theaters were closed.
But then when I could go on tour again,
it was interesting to me to travel back and forth
across the country, because I would be,
let's say in California,
where you had to wear a mask in the hotel
and, you know, in all the common areas of a hotel,
and of course on the plane and everything like that.
But then I would go to Montana
and so I'd wear a mask into the hotel
and I'd be looked at like I was wearing
a Hillary Clinton t-shirt to a clan rally.
And the mask became a campaign.
It became like the MAGA hat
for the other half of the country.
But, and, you know, sometimes during an election,
you would see someone at the airport
and you would approach them and you would smile at them
and then you would get up close
and you would see their campaign button
and you would think, oh my God,
I wasted a smile on that person.
But here you could tell from a greater distance, right?
And so it just felt so divided.

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I don't think it was good for us
to have the symbol of our division
that to have it on us, like for that length of time,
I think it just created an us and them.
And for me, the us and them shifted.
I was in New York City
and then I would go to North Carolina
where nobody had a mask on.
You know, the coast of North Carolina is very conservative.
It's a lot of retired military.
So it was really, I was going from like one extreme to another.
But yeah, I mean, it was just a big part of our lives
for the past four years.
And there's the division between like the red state
and the blue state, but then there's also the tiny sort
of narcissism of small differences,
even on the upper East side.
I was wondering if you could read on pages 149 and 150,
I think are just like perfectly starting
at more irritating.
More irritating still was the new spirit
of one down'smanship that seemed to have taken hold.
A year earlier, had I written in an essay,
I woke up and washed my face.
No one would have thought anything of it.
Now though, I would immediately be attacked
as tone deaf and elitist.
Oh, how nice that you could just wake up and wash your face.
Someone would write in the comment section
or tweet and in New York, no less.
I meanwhile, don't even have a face anymore.
I had to sell it so I could feed my family
during the worldwide pandemic.
You obviously never heard about.
Now when I try to eat the food falls into my lap
because I don't even have any cheeks
to keep it in my mouth with.
Think of that when you're holding your washcloth,
you fucking privileged prick.
A previously beloved talk show host began broadcasting
from her home and people went nuts.
Hold on a minute, she lives in a mansion.
Well, yes, I wanted to say a mansion bought
with money that you gave her.

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Everyone was angry and looking for someone to blame.
Trump, Fauci, China, big pharma.
This had to be somebody's fault.
Back off, a certain type of person would snarl
if you stood only five feet and 11 inches away from them.
Your mask isn't completely covering your nose.
A middle-aged woman informed a much older one
in my neighborhood Target one afternoon.
Miss, she called a second later to the cashier.
Miss, her mask isn't completely covering her nose.
It was a golden era for tattletales,
for conspiracy theorists, for the self-righteous.
A photographer came one afternoon to take my picture.
I was standing in the middle of East 70th Street,
posing as instructed when a woman with silver hair approached.
She was on the sidewalk, a good 20 feet away,
but still she felt the need to scold me.
Cover your face, she screeched.
Oh, for God's sakes.
This is for the times, I shouted back.
I saw a guy in a t-shirt
that read deadliest virus in America, the media.
I saw a woman in a t-shirt that read,
you'd look better with a mask on.
You know who I hate?
I said to Amy over water buffalo,
Swedish meatballs that night, everyone.
I love that because it summarizes everything in two pages.
And I'm wondering in my own life,
I feel like COVID was among many other things
over the past few years, a kind of dividing line.
Like it created fissures and friendships
and did it for you?
Were people judging you?
I mean, I did everything they told me to, right?
I mean, I wore masks whenever I left the house.
I mean, I started going out after midnight
because on the Upper East Side, there was nobody out there.
And I thought, you know what?
I bet I can take my mask off
if I'm not even passing anybody on the street.
And I'm going out super late at night
and not seeing anybody.
But otherwise, you know, whenever I went somewhere

wearing my mask, I did whatever they wanted me to do.
But we had people over two, three, four times a week
and anyone was welcome really to our house.
And I don't know.
I mean, I know people who were very,
didn't see anybody who stayed at home
and they didn't get sick.
And I traveled as much as I could
and I saw people three or four times a week
and I didn't get sick.
Like no one deserved it more than you.
Right, and I did get it.
But I don't know, when I look back on it,
I think, well, I'm glad that I did, I saw people.
I'm glad that I did as much as I did during that period
instead of just sitting at home.
I mean, the thing is too, when you write,
you think, well, if I get it, I can write about it, you know?
I mean, it's always different when you write, right?
Because you've got an outlet for something
for a lot of people just might be just a horrible thing.
I mean, like I had to, I went to a doctor who said,
oh, it looks like you have bladder cancer, right?
So they stuck a camera down the hole in my penis, right?
And-
You write about that and it sounded horrible.
Yeah, and I thought, and I thought, well-
It's material, it's coffee, baby.
At least I can write about it.
And whereas somebody else maybe couldn't.
So at least I had, I mean, it turns out
I don't have bladder cancer.
And if I could go back in time and not have that done to me,
I would have not had it done, but it was done.
So I might as well write about it.
One of the things that you write about so brilliantly,
not just in this book, but always are questions of etiquette.
And I love how strident you are in your views.
You think it's appalling when people don't write handwritten
thank you notes, I agree with you.
I'm having a huge fight with my wife about this.
You don't like people who are pushy.
You think it's unfair to request a window seat
in an airplane and then have to get up

and go to the bathroom constantly.
You don't look at your phone during conversations
with people, which everyone else seems to do these days.
And over the past few years there have been not just shifts
in like etiquette etiquette, but shifts in moral etiquette.
And one of the shifts that you notice a lot in the book
is the way we talk about race in America.
You find yourself physically caught in the middle of the road
during a Black Lives Matter protest
after the murder of George Floyd.
And I see it as a kind of metaphor for where maybe you are
and I think where a lot of people are politically,
which is sort of somehow uncomfortable
and betwixt and between.
And I wondered if it isn't too annoying
if I could ask you to read a little bit
from that section.
When I was in seventh grade,
I acted as campaign manager for Dwight Bunch,
one of the three Black students at Carroll Junior High.
He ran for class president and won with my brilliant slogan,
we like Dwight a bunch.
Two years later, our school was desegregated.
Fights broke out in the parking lot.
My friend Ted had his nose broken with a Coke bottle.
In our twenties, we both dated a number of Black guys,
which I always thought made us the opposite of racists.
I didn't have sex with them because of their color,
but just because they were there and willing.
Now I was reading that sleeping with Black guys
meant that you were a racist,
that you were exoticizing them.
Everything was suspect and everywhere you turned,
there was an article titled blanks race problem.
It could be about anyone,
an actor who'd never had a co-star of color,
a comedian who'd used the word Negro 20 years ago.
The articles were always written
by white people in the early twenties.
I saw the phrase POC white passing
in the signature of an email someone sent.
I wondered how long that had been a thing.
Reckoning was a word I kept hearing.
It was time for a racial reckoning.

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We stayed at the beach for two weeks
and we turned to New York just as the protests
had petered out into bike riding opportunities.
Flash mobs of predominantly white people
would pedal up the avenues,
3,000 strong, blocking traffic,
chanting who streets, our streets,
and occasionally Black lives matter.
But strangely, in the sing-songy way,
a fishmonger might call fresh caught haddock.
Do I keep going?
That's perfect.
I was looking at a headline from earlier this month,
actually, in the Washington Post
where it said, discovery shark week needs diversity.
Which I thought was peak of what you're describing there.
Were you nervous to write about this subject at all?
Well, I don't know.
I just felt like, I read out loud a lot, right?
And the one thing that really hangs an audience up
is anytime you're talking about race,
and the audience is predominantly white, you know?
And if you mention a Black person
who's not Morgan Freeman in every movie he was ever in,
people freak out and they think, wait a minute,
if I laugh at this, does that mean I'm racist?
If I laugh at this, am I supposed, what's he doing?
What's he doing?
Like they can get the idea that I'm toying with them, you know?
So they can't, they just can't handle it.
It just makes them so uncomfortable.
But then, I don't know, this was something
that everyone in the United States went through.
And I think especially if you lived in a big city,
you know, maybe when you, if you lived in,
where our house at the beach is,
it could come and go when you wouldn't even notice it.
But in New York City, you certainly noticed it.
And I thought, well, there has to be a way as an American
that I can write about this without anyone feeling
like I'm being dismissive or I'm,
I mean, there were a lot of things.
I just remember this white woman one day
getting right up in a cop's face and saying,

stay their names, stay their names.
And I just thought, I just, it just felt false to me.
False to me.
There I mean, like it just felt performative to me.
And I, and I saw a lot of that.
And I don't know.
I thought, well, there's gotta be a way to write about it.
What do you understand?
Like as someone who watches people essentially
for your work, how did you understand
what motivated the woman you just talked about
to get up in the face of a cop and scream,
say their names or the young people that you talk about
in that essay and others throughout the book?
Well, she wasn't alone.
I mean, she was with her friends.
And so this meant something to her.
But I guess one of the things that I noticed about it,
I noticed it's the same way that it used to be,
you know, going to an art museum is ruined for me
when people had got cameras on their phone.
And then everybody was taking a picture
a photo of every picture
and see you were forever in somebody's way, right?
And then something changed.
And then people started taking selfies
with the picture in the background.
So it wasn't about the painting anymore.
It was about them.
They were more important than the painting, right?
The painting was in the background.
They were in the foreground.
And that was what I noticed about this quite often too
was people taking selfies.
And I thought without you being able to document
and to kind of broadcast yourself,
like if you didn't have that tool,
how would this be different, right?
Like if you were just,
this was just something you were doing
that nobody knew about, right?
How would that be different?
Would that be different?
I mean, yeah, and you can say that about

if there was no technology and there was no smartphone,
we never would have seen the video of George Floyd.
And I mean, everything in a way
that has happened over the past few years
comes back to that technology.
And I guess the selfie in some way.
Well, you're right, that fits in there too.
I mean, in that that became doing something, right?
Like I get the feeling.
The selfie became the doing.
Yeah, I was on the bus in London and this guy,
this young man, he was fumbling for his bus card, right?
And this guy in his late seventies came up behind him
and then tapped his card and went ahead of them.
And the young guy went off on this old guy, right?
How dare you?
We don't do that in this country.
We cue in this country and started threatening him, right?
And so something had to be done, right?
But what people did was they took videos, like that's,
but it's like, no, what has to be done
is somebody has to stand up and say, look.
Stop yelling at him.
Yeah, you're taking this too hard.
He apologized, he cut in front of you,
you need to let this go, right?
But now the new doing something is.
Like being a little stusy, I find it so creepy.
I see it all the time.
I was on a plane a while ago
and somebody was secretly filming the flight attendant.
And they were across the aisle from me
and it just seemed. Why?
I don't know.
I apparently they thought she was doing something wrong
or I don't know, but they were doing it in such a sneaky way.
But then I asked myself, look,
here I am with this notebook in my hand.
How am I any different?
Except I'm writing it down.
I'm not taking a picture of it.
I think the difference is the amplification systems
that exist that you're not on,
which is someone can take that video

of the flight attendant doing something
or editing it in a way that makes it look like
she's doing something wrong.
They can put it on Twitter or on Snap or TikTok.
It can rock it around the world and ruin her life
before the flight has landed.
And I think that that's the difference
between the paper in front of you
and what like the, it's just an unbelievably potent
and powerful weapon.
And when you read before, and I just love that part
that the whole moment that we're in is like ripe
for conspiracy theorists and tattletales.
And I feel that way so strongly
that like everyone is ready to grab their phone
out of their pocket and catch someone doing something bad.
One of the things I was thinking about
before I came in here today was
how I first heard you on public radio on NPR,
like so many other people.
And yet a lot of the things you write about in this book
are things that you would never find
on public radio these days.
Or at least you would never find them
in the way that you talk about them.
In your book, you question the seriousness
of the slogan, defund the police.
And meantime, NPR runs a headline in June, 2020.
How much do we need the police?
You question why sleeping with black guys
and that means you're racist.
Well, NPR runs a story saying, there is no neutral.
Nice white people can still be complicit
in a racist society.
And not racist is not enough
putting in the work to be anti-racist.
And you wonder aloud sort of with skepticism
why everything is suddenly tinged with race
and about a reckoning while public radio
is launching a series called
America reckons with racial injustice.
And I wonder if you could reflect a little bit
about the shift that you've seen in public radio
or maybe legacy media more broadly

toward what I see as a kind of moral homogeneity
that seems to like flatten people into two dimensions.
And I wondered if you had noticed that change
or if you had any thoughts about it.
Yeah, I mean, you know, like I'm a Democrat.
Do you know what I mean?
I've never voted for a Republican in my life.
You know, I can look back and I can see how angry
and how Mitt Romney was this horse
this horrible villain.
And I look back and I think, oh, Mitt Romney,
like I just embarrassed it myself
that I couldn't have said like, you know what?
I'm not gonna vote for him,
but he doesn't seem like a terrible person to me, you know?
Right.
But I find myself getting really irritated by NPR
and it was like the phrase men who have sex with men, right?
Like monkey box is a danger for men who have sex with men.
You know what?
I just feel like if you put a dick in your mouth,
you know, we're just gonna call you a gay man,
whether you wanna, because it takes so much time.
I mean, I had so many things cut for time on the radio,
you know, now everyone has two last names on the radio,
right?
And then we use phrase like men who have sex with men
and persons who are unhoused.
And it's like, you're eating up all this time
with this stuff, you know what I mean?
Like, I hate the word queer, I hate the word queer.
And it's not that, it's not because it used to be a slur,
it's because it's a fourth time in my life
that I've been rebranded
and no one ever asked me about it, right?
And so now like NPR people, it's like, well,
it was a queer writer and it's like,
it's just like, it's like, oh, it's a Latin X
in the Latin X, I mean, it's like,
I don't know a single Latino who accepts that word.
And I, it just sort of drives me crazy.
And so every time I walk into the kitchen,
like last night, they were interviewing someone
with the Rockettes, it was some kind of a thing.

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And I waited for it and I heard the word diversity.
And I thought, oh, please tell me
they have Rockettes and wheelchairs, please tell me.
And it's just, I just feel like it's become too easy
to parody.
Okay, I wanna ask you about coming out as straight
now that you've brought it up,
which I just absolutely loved.
You know, David, you're a gay man
or a man who has sex with men,
but you recently came out as straight
in a segment that I adored.
Author David Sedaris has been thinking about
what's in a name.
I never liked the term coming out.
Still, I did it.
That was back in the 1970s.
Now I'm having to do it all over again.
I'm 65 years old.
I've been with the same guy for 31 years.
And on this day, I am announcing to the world
that I am straight.
I haven't met anyone else.
I haven't fallen in love with a woman.
I've simply done fighting the term queer.
What bothers me is not that it used to be a slur.
I just don't see why I have to be rebranded
for the fourth time in my life.
I started as a homosexual, became gay,
then LGBT, and now queer.
And for what?
Why the makeovers?
And what will it be next?
I read an interview with the woman.
Tell me about this latent life realization
that you are a straight man.
Well, I've been doing these commentaries
on CBS Sunday Morning.
And the essays are a page and a half long.
So there's not a lot of room for nuance,
but it's a really good assignment
to write an essay that's a page and a half long
and it can't be longer, you know?
And so I wrote about how much I hate the word queer

and that now I'm identifying as straight
because that word doesn't change.
And so, yeah, so now I identify as a straight man.
What was the response you got to that segment?
I have no idea.
You don't know?
You didn't get letters about it?
I haven't gotten any letters.
I know that they were, like a woman came up to me very,
I don't know, she seemed very pleased with herself.
She's probably in her late 40s.
You're queer and you know what?
My daughter just came out to me as queer.
My 12 year old daughter just came out to me as queer.
And I said, how is she queer?
And she said, she's asexual.
It's like, that's what you want in a 12 year old, you know?
She's, she's not asexual.
She's 12, yeah.
She's a child.
Like, why are you indulging her?
Like, I just felt like she wants to be
a misunderstood outsider, then go do something
I don't understand, you know what I mean?
Go do something that I, your virtue signaling mother
cannot wrap my head around, you know what I mean?
Go throw rocks at Mexicans, you know what I mean?
Like, do something that, that I don't get.
No, here's my thing.
When this mom said this to you, right?
And she's obviously totally pleased with herself.
She's inclusive.
Maybe she's joined whatever the new fangled P flag is.
That's what the parents group and I was growing up.
You have no hesitation as far as I can tell
to say to someone, and you do in the book,
you tell someone, a reader to her face,
you're a horrible person.
What did you say to this mom?
And what do you say to the moms that come up to you?
As I'm sure they do at every event
to declare to you that their child is pansexual
or in a polycule or asexual or whatever,
or demi, whatever the thing is, sapeosexual.

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Well, you know, I played with dolls when I was young,
but sometimes I think like, what if I'd had
the kind of mother who's like, oh, you know what?
I bought you a dress and you were gonna,
and it's like, no, but I just wanted to play with dolls
if you, you know, a few times.

Like just, it's not the kids I wonder about
so much as the parents and the, you know,
they're thirst to be approving and to be,
I don't know, I mean, I'm 65, so,
and I don't, sometimes I worry, you know,
I don't wanna be somebody who's just out of it.
Right.

And just rejects everything that's new and all of that,
but at the same time, you're also like,
we need to bring a little homophobia back.
Yeah, or when I hear, I just, it's too easy.
I just, I grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina.
There were no books about gay people at the public library.
At my school, of course not.

And even at the public library, there were no books.
So when I read books, I never saw myself in those books,
but I identified with the books I read
because the characters were humans and I was human.
And I'm grateful for that.

I'm grateful that I grew up in a time
when I didn't feel like, well,
there are no books in the library by openly gay people,
but I didn't feel held back.

I didn't feel like, oh, there are no books by gay people.
I guess there's no point in me writing.
I didn't, I don't know.

It just didn't, I don't feel handicapped,
that I was handicapped by it.

A book is not a mirror to me.
I don't need to see, I mean, a good book,
I'll see myself in everything,
but I don't need to see a straight man my age
with a boyfriend who lives in my apartment.
I don't need to see that.

And I think I was okay with exclusion.
I really, when my first book came out,
and I would see my book in the gay section of the library
of the bookstore, I was like,

fuck, I didn't wanna be there.

Right.

You know, I just wanted to be in the bookstore.

So maybe we're just going through this thing right now.

And then all the books will be everywhere.

And this is just something we have to get through.

And then people get so exhausted about hearing what somebody, all the details of what somebody is that they just won't give a fuck anymore.

And just, we can move on.

When you have that many hyphenates before your name, people do, so one of the essays in this book that I loved is this Oberlin commencement address that you gave in 2018.

And you told graduates in that speech to choose one thing to be offended by.

The goal is to have less in common with the Taliban, you said, not more.

And I have to ask, if everyone has one thing they're allowed to be offended by, not a million little things as the culture is now, what's your one thing that you're really offended by?

Dogs with sunglasses on.

It just drives me crazy.

I just feel like it's teaching children to be mediocre.

Nothing offends me.

How do you feel about a sweater, a chihuahua and a sweater?

I don't care.

My one thing is dogs with sunglasses.

And I don't like dogs.

So it's not like, oh, you're hurting the dog.

I just can't stand.

And there's a lot of things I don't like, but that's the only thing that offends me.

Like you could get up and you could call me whatever you name you.

I won't be offended by it.

I'll be fascinated by it, I think.

But dogs with sunglasses, yeah, that's mine.

One of the things that's happening right now in the comedy world is this idea of punching down, that it's in bad taste to make jokes about someone who has less money or power or privilege than you do.

And that's something that Dave Chappelle, your alter ego, has been accused of doing when it comes to trans people.

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / A Holiday Treat with David Sedaris!

What do you think of the idea of punching down?
Is it a real thing or is it bullshit?
I just wrote an essay about this.
You did?
When I first moved to New York, I didn't know anybody.
And so I wanted to make some friends.
And there was a writing class being taught at the Y
on the Upper West Side called Writing Funny.
And it was taught by this woman named Frida Garmes,
who used to be a commentator on Saturday,
all things considered.
And I thought she was really funny.
And so on the first day of class,
she said, what are the rules of comedy writing?
And I raised my hand and I said,
you should never make fun of anyone
with less power than you.
You said that.
And she said, where on earth did you get that idea?
She said, no, no, no.
She said, the only rule is that you should be
as tasteless as possible.
And that's what I learned in school right there.
That's what I learned.
So yeah, the punching down thing, I don't know,
it's used everywhere now.
And it's like, well, okay, how do you,
the person who's accusing me of punching down,
like, would you have a picture of me?
Do you have like, how much money I make a year?
Like, how do you decide who I'm allowed to talk about?
And like, where you rank on the privilege scale,
they must have some Excel spreadsheet,
but like downgrades you for not being tall,
but upgrades you for having four houses.
But I mean, there's always some,
I mean, there's something funny about just about everything.
Right?
So, you know, if you see a homeless person on the street
and they're doing something funny,
there's a way to talk about it
without denigrating them and without demigrate them.
You know, like, just wait till the end of the fucking joke.
But I feel like nine times out of 10,

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / A Holiday Treat with David Sedaris!

people don't even wait for the punch line.
People don't wait for that.
But the thing I wrote was saying how,
I feel like a lot of people who say,
I was really hurt by that, you know,
you said that thing and I was really, really hurt.
And I feel like the thing is that people
don't hit their kids anymore.
And so a lot of these kids,
they don't know what pain is, you know?
And so when they talk about their pain,
it's like you would never whipped at the belt
or you would never slapped across a face.
So I think the thing is,
if you don't want to hit your kids, that's okay,
but other people should be allowed to.
And so because kids have gotten to be like animals
with no natural predators,
like I was in a restaurant a while ago
and there was a kid running back and forth
across the room, it was rush hour,
dimly lit restaurant, servers carrying trays.
You know, that's not cool.
And they're not going to go to the parent
and say, please stop your kid
because they're afraid they're going to get trashed
on social media.
But I feel like someone should be able
to just slap the kid across the face
and go say, go now, go sit down.
And that's punching down.
That's what I, a notion of punching down
that I want to introduce.
After the break,
why David thinks his family is better than anyone else's.
Stay with us.
Freedom of speech is a fundamental human right
and no American should fear exercising it.
But only one in three Americans believe
they can fully exercise their free speech rights in 2022.
That's why FIRE,
the foundation for individual rights and expression
is stepping up to protect your freedom of expression
no matter where you're from or what you believe.

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / A Holiday Treat with David Sedaris!

After more than two decades
spent advancing the rights of students and faculty
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and America's culture of free expression
because FIRE knows free speech makes free people.
Join the fight for free speech
at thefire.org today.

Let's talk about your childhood and your family,
which is really the running theme through all of your work,
without which I'm pretty convinced
you would have very little material.
For anyone listening who's unfamiliar
with the Sedaris Clan, there's six of you.

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / A Holiday Treat with David Sedaris!

There's Amy, famous second city comedian, Lisa Gretchen.
There was Tiffany who died in 2013 and your brother Paul.
And you grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina
and your mom, you describe as funny and cheerful
and a drinker, died in 1991.
And your dad, who had a less than pleasant relationship
that we'll get into, just passed away last year,
passed away, I know you hate that,
died last year at 98.
And you write about your family, David,
with this kind of excruciating detail and honesty
that I imagine if I were one of your siblings,
I might find really hard sometimes.
And I wonder if there's a tension
between your obligation to the reader
you have in mind when you're scribbling in that notebook
and the obligation to them is to be as excruciating
and vivid as possible in your observations
and the virtues or the obligations you have to your family,
which is to be loyal and kind, I guess you might say.
And how you square these two things
that seem to be in conflict in your writing?
Well, I think, I mean, there's a lot of things
that I've never written about.
I mean, everybody has their secrets, you know,
like that they don't,
things that they don't want anybody to know.
So I've never written those things, right?
And also, I think it makes a difference
that I've been writing about my family for so long.
So it's not like I'm introducing somebody
and then saying bad things about them.
You know, chances are like, you know,
if it's my sister Amy, Amy's been in probably,
I don't know, 30 or 40 essays.
So if there's this little drop of something,
do you know what I mean?
But back in the beginning,
when you started writing about them,
when you tortured, like, did you feel
I have to get their permission to say this?
Oh, I did get the permission.
You did.
Yeah, and I gave, and people read everything

before I published it.
And I said, is there anything you want me to change
or anything you want me to get rid of?
You know, when these years have passed,
people's attitudes have changed.
Like my brother's like,
I don't want you to write about me anymore.
But at the same time, my brother has a business, you know,
and what's central to my brother lately
are some of the things that he believes, you know.
Like what?
You know, things you might find like on,
you know, conspiracy theory website, you know,
but he has a business.
So now people are more inclined to like,
well, if that person believes that,
I'm not going to hire them to work in my house.
You know, I have to respect that about him.
And it's true, you know, at the same time.
I mean, other people,
that's not the central thing about them or that's not,
to me, that's really fascinating that, you know,
somebody in a family can be,
can think so differently than the other people in the family.
And I know there are tons of people in America
who have that same experience.
It's literally, it's every family.
Yeah.
And then they could really relate to it.
But again, I don't want to put anybody on the spot
and I don't want to embarrass them.
But I mean, nine times out of 10,
you know, or nine and three quarters times out of 10,
it's stuff that they think is funny, you know.
I mean, they know they're funny.
They're not, you're not,
they're in control of the joke.
You know, you're not laughing at them.
They made you laugh by saying what they said.
Reading your books over the years,
and my sister feels this way too.
I'm maybe, there's four of us.
And I think we all felt this way,
which is jealous of your family.

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / A Holiday Treat with David Sedaris!

Because it just seemed like everyone was hilarious.
One of the things I came away with from this new book,
Happy Go Lucky,
was a much darker sense of certain relationships
in your family.
You know, you have talked candidly before
about how your dad didn't like you.
But in this book, you revealed that it was more than that.
He made you and your sisters,
especially really uncomfortable.
And that's the focus of this one essay
that I want to talk a little bit about,
which is called Lady Marmalade.
And you talk about moments throughout your childhood,
where he made inappropriate comments
about your sister's appearance.
He said, one time on a beach about Amy in a bikini,
if only I were 35 years younger.
I have to say, I laughed hysterically.
Or God, she's got a great set of pins.
One time about your sister Gretchen.
Or one time, and this is where I sort of stopped laughing,
asking Lisa, when she was 17 years old,
if she would go with him to the woods behind your house
and pose topless for a photograph.
And you kind of wave it off a little bit in your writing.
And most of it is so funny about it being a different time.
And it's just kind of the way dad is.
He's a little creepy.
But I think most readers are gonna come away
with the idea that it's more than that,
especially when you reveal that your sister Tiffany
claimed before she killed herself,
that your father sexually abused her as a child.
I wonder if you could help me make sense
of this discrepancy between your view,
as you've said in interviews before,
that you felt like you're better
than everybody else's family.
And the actual things that went on.
Because I guess I feel like if you really went
into everybody else's family, they have stuff too.
It might not be that stuff,
but there was this family that I grew up with

and I always thought they were perfect,
that they were so perfect.
And then I found out years later
that dad was a horrible alcoholic
and that girl got pregnant in high school
and was sent away.
And so that just always led me to believe
there's something going on in every family.
I mean, my dad, I mean, we were talking about this recently.
I was talking with Amy about how every parent I know now,
right, says everything has to,
they have to drop everything
because they have to go put their kids to bed, right?
And that takes an hour, that takes an hour and a half
to put their kid to bed.
We were never put to bed.
We were never, we were ordered to go to bed.
And then the last words my parents said every night,
we're shut up.
They'd open the door and say, shut up.
And it's like, this is my own room with anybody.
But we were saying, can you imagine mom and dad saying,
I love you?
Like, it would have been gross.
Or if they kissed us, we would be like,
ehh, what are you doing?
So we just wasn't that kind of a,
you know, in that regard, it was a different time.
Now, that said, it doesn't mean that you would ask
your 17 year old daughter to post-homeless, you know?
I mean, my dad didn't said a lot of stuff
that was really creepy.
So when Tiffany said later that he had sexually abused her,
it wasn't, we couldn't dismiss it out of hand
and just say like, oh, do you know what I mean?
Like, there's no way.
I mean, instead we really had to wonder.
And the thing is, at the same time, it was,
you know, it was our sister Tiffany,
who when you said like, what did he do?
She would just say, never said he fucked me.
Okay, what did he do?
I never said he fucked me.
All right, then what, I never said he fucked me.

I didn't say that.

Okay, and then what did, I never said he fucked me.

So it was, and she would accuse people

of all kinds of things, you know?

And she would not take her medication and she would,

what I'm saying is it would have been different

if anybody else in the family had said that, you know?

It would have, but then at the same time,

she acted like somebody who had been sexually abused, right?

So I don't know, I just wanted to write about what that does

to a family or in a family when that charge is leveled,

because it just, it changes things, you know?

Did your sisters fall in the same place that you have,

which is sort of a belief that your dad was kind of

inappropriate or maybe even creepy,

but that he didn't sexually abuse your sister?

Did they land in the same place as you?

Yeah, yeah.

And again, I know how harsh that can sound to people, right?

But at the same time, kind of had to know Tiffany, right?

Like I wrote this essay once about the last time I saw Tiffany

and she and I weren't speaking

and she came to a show I did in Boston

and she just showed up and I asked the security guy

to close the door and he closed the door in her face.

And I know how awful that sounds.

And I know that a lot of people got really angry with me

for that, the people I don't know.

But at the same time, it wasn't,

when somebody was like my sister Tiffany,

it could take you months to get over

and encounter with her, right?

I mean, it was brutal, you know?

And you were, you had to prepare yourself for it.

You couldn't just, it was sort of like

if you're arguing with somebody over something

and consequential, you know, and then they immediately

pull something out that just like,

it just disembowels you, you know?

You've got to be prepared for that.

And you've got to, it's going to take you a while

to get over it.

And you didn't always, you didn't always have that time

that it took to get over it, you know?

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / A Holiday Treat with David Sedaris!

And so you'd, well in this case
I had someone shut the door.
I didn't think that I would never see or speak to her again,
but that's what happened, you know?
She killed herself and that was the last time I saw her.
I remember when I saw you read that,
I was like, this is the first time I'm seeing
David Sedaris, I'm gonna laugh and I did of course,
but you read that essay and I was sitting next to my sister
sobbing, even now when I think about it,
it could bring me to tears.
Do you think that you could have written this essay
about your dad when he was alive?
Yeah, because my dad didn't read anything I wrote.
Never.
No.
Was he proud of you though?
You talk about him being in spring more,
his assisted living facility and saying to you sort of,
it's unclear if he's in a haze or just old age
and says like, David, you won.
He would say stuff behind my back,
but he would not be the kind of person
who would say something to my face.
You never said I'm proud of you.
Not that I, maybe he maybe said it a couple of times,
but it wasn't, I don't know.
I was reading this biography of George Michaels.
And I don't know why I wasn't like his biggest fan,
but this biography came out and I thought, okay,
I'll read that.
I guess I was interested because he was Greek,
you know, but he was saying that people don't become
like well-known for what they have,
but for what they're missing.
And I thought, I mean, I think that's a,
that's particularly true in comedy, you know?
I mean, it's just a lot of people basically
just getting on stage and saying, love me, please,
please love me.
And there's no amount that will ever satisfy them.
You know, I mean, it's pathetic, really.
But again, that's good if you've got something
you can channel it into, you know?

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / A Holiday Treat with David Sedaris!

David, on the one hand, you seem to have
this extraordinarily disciplined routine life.
You know, you talk in this book,
and maybe this has died down since COVID,
but changing the sheets three times a week,
vacuuming your sober, you walk at least 10 miles a day,
but sometimes up to 15.
And then on the other hand, you have this kind of like,
you love luxury and glamor,
you buy these expensive French candles,
you have at least one Picasso painting.
So help me make sense of your life.
You spend a lot of your time, it seems to me,
on the edge of a highway picking up litter.
So can you just like drop me in to a day in your life
and what it actually looks like
when you wake up in the morning?
I mean, I used to be really, really tied to my schedule,
right?
Like if I didn't do my laundry at the exact same time
on Sunday, then the world would just spin off its axis.
There was no way I could not do that at that particular time.
There was no way I couldn't clean my house
at this particular time.
There was no way I had to be at the IOP at a particular time.
So like what a millennial would call OCD,
that's just your personality.
And I've loosened up a bit,
but still I get up in the morning and I work
and I work until like one or two o'clock in the afternoon.
And then I go out and I start walking
and then I come back at night
and I work for another hour before dinner.
And you always walk alone, never with you?
Never with you, but I have an old friend named Dawn
and we, she and I met in college.
And Dawn is like me in that I often bring Dawn
to join me on tour and all we care about is walking.
That's all we care about.
And so Dawn will have, she and I walked 42 miles one day.
Where?
In England, I had it all planned out.
You walked 42 miles?
We started at midnight and then we came home

like at six o'clock in the morning,
we rested for an hour and a half.
We went out again and we came home for lunch.
We went out again and we came home for dinner.
What was the concepts?
What was the concept?
We were trying, I think we were trying
to get 80,000 steps on our Fitbits.
And then we got to 80 and we said, let's go 90.
And then we wound up getting 92,000 steps.
What did that do for you?
Like, what is the feeling for you when you reached the-
I felt so, Dawn and I felt like, you know,
like we had really accomplished something.
I mean, and we had, you know,
but I'm pretty much ruled by my, I guess you'd call,
I don't know, call it OCD, I guess.
And so yeah, I have a Picasso painting,
but I also, when I'm in England,
I spend between four and eight hours a day
picking up trash on the side of the road
because it drives me crazy and I have to clean it up.
I can't not do it.
So yeah, on the one hand this, but on the other hand that.
So I, and I, there's absolutely nothing I can do about it.
Don't I mean, I can't not-
You have to do it.
I have to do it, but that's the way writing started for me.
You know, I started writing one day and then the next day
I had to do it at the exact same time
and I had to do it and I had to do it.
But again, I can see for a lot of people, you know,
like if it's like I gotta pull 300 hairs out of my head a day,
that's a problem, right?
But I thought early on, I thought maybe I can channel this
into positive things that I do.
It's almost Christmas in New York
and the way that a lot of people got introduced to you,
of course, was in 1992 with your Santa Land's diary essay
about being an elf at Macy's.
I wear green velvet knickers,
a forest green velvet smock
in a perky little hat decorated with spangles.
This is my work uniform.

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / A Holiday Treat with David Sedaris!

I have spent the last several days sitting in a crowded windowless Macy's classroom undergoing the first phases of elf training. You could be an entrance elf, a water cooler elf, a bridge elf, train elf, maze elf, island elf, magic window elf, usher elf, cash register. And so I think a lot of people associate you with this holiday in a certain sense. His reading of an excerpt from his Santa Land Diaries has become a Morning Edition holiday tradition. His account of working as a department store elf for two Christmas seasons was immediately one of the most popular stories ever broadcast at National Public Radio's Morning Edition. Only the coverage of commentator Red Barber's death generated more tape requests, I've been told. But you've spoken about how you can't bear to go back and read that essay, that it's clunky and it's horribly written. So why do you think it works so well on audiences? I think it worked because everybody has to deal with Christmas. You know, it doesn't matter what religion you are. If you live in the United States, you simply can't escape Christmas. And I think in retrospect, I think it also rang true to anyone who works with the public. I'd never worked with the public before. But I think you have a certain amount of time where your eyes are open and then they fog over, right? So if you got a job at Kentucky Fried Chicken, I think your eyes would be open for, you know, a month or two. And then if someone said, what happened at work today? You'd be like nothing. And then it'd be like, well, you know, that person did throw that hot cup of coffee in somebody's face. Whereas if it was your first week, you super notice a thing like that. And because San Juan, you only work for a month, right? You started Thanksgiving and your Christmas day, you're fired, you know, or you laid off, right?

And I did it for two years.
So that was just two months when my eyes were open.
And it was just exactly what it said it was.
It was my diary during that time.
But I was looking for something in my diary this morning
from a year 2020.
And even when it's not about anything,
my diary from 2020,
I feel like it's pretty well written, you know,
like it's melodic.
I don't have four sentences in a row that start with he.
And part of that is that I have a laptop.
And so as opposed to a typewriter where you think,
I'm not gonna type this whole page over again
because I have four sentences start with the word he.
Yeah, so partly it was that
and partly it was just maturing as a writer, I think.
I kind of can't think of a better description
for your role in the world and your vocation
than keeping your eyes from fogging over.
So how do you do it?
If your job as David Sedaris is to keep your eyes
the way that they would be on day one
of the job at Kentucky Fried Chicken
or the job as an elf or the job as the guy picking up litter,
how do you keep your eyes open every day?
What's the secret to it?
I don't know.
I mean, I guess after a while they just are.
I mean, I went through a phase a couple of weeks ago
and I thought, God, my diary's boring, you know?
Like, what am I doing wrong?
But there's only something in the newspaper
that you can write about.
I'm obsessed with this real estate advice column
in the New York Times.
Somebody wrote a letter a couple of months ago
and they said, my building, we hired a new doorman
but he's on the phone all the time making personal calls.
He doesn't open the door.
He doesn't collect packages.
Which, what should we do?
And the letters were like, open your own fucking door,
you know?

It's like, well, in my building, I can't.
We don't have a key to the door.
The doorman opens the door.
We don't have a key.
And if you're leaving the building,
if the doorman isn't right there,
you don't open the door yourself.
That's like fucking with this job, you know?
So, and then somebody said,
it's people like you who brought us COVID
and oh, you fucking trillionaires, you know?
Who brought us COVID and something else
that they were blaming on people
and it's like a trillionaire.
You don't have to be a trillionaire to have a doorman.
And so, in the real estate advice column,
the other day, somebody was saying,
they have a pied-a-tear
and they would give the keys to friends and say,
go stay there.
And it's a co-op and a co-op just changed the rules
and the new rules are no one is allowed
to be in your apartment if you're not there, right?
So, the responses were like, you know, you need,
how dare you like have a second home?
You need to give that to the homeless.
And it's like, oh, right.
So, in a co-op building, right?
You have to go, you have to pass the board, right?
So, if you went to them and you said, okay, this is Trina
and I've given her the apartment
and so she's gonna be living there now.
Like, they wouldn't approve Trina
and Trina would have to pay the maintenance, right?
So, it's just stupid.
I mean, it's just such a stupid thing to even propose.
I mean, it doesn't make any sense.
You know, like if you said,
we'll sell your apartment and give the money
to someone's house, that's a bit different,
but this is just some work that way.
You should do it.
I've been thinking for a while
that advice columns have gotten so psychotic and insane.

I read one the other day.
It was also in the times different section
where someone was writing in saying,
I'm going on vacation with my parents.
I need to bring, I think it was three additional people,
like the significant other
and then the secondaries in the poly relationship.
And rather than the response being,
what the fuck are you talking about, bro?
The response was like,
how you can negotiate with your parents.
And I think you should have a column called second opinion
where you give people the actual real advice
that they should follow.
Because I've noticed that lately.
Like if somebody said...
The advice is insane.
Yeah, there was another,
this man was taking his grandchildren to Europe
as a gift, right?
And one grandson, his wife is having a baby.
So he said, so we can't go.
So I just wanted to write me a check for the money
that it would have cost for us to go.
And it's like, you can't do that.
It doesn't work that way.
You either go on the trip or you don't go.
But you can't have him...
Did the advice giver in this scenario
pummel this person or entertain this?
That's insane.
Most of the people who were writing in
were completely on the,
he said to the grandfather,
you need to disinherit this kid now.
You need to cut him off now.
But a lot of times the advice givers
are they're just on the fence.
They're like, you could do this or...
It's way too milk, no, it's way too milk toast.
Someone needs to actually tell people
what they need to do.
And that's you.
But I always felt like satirists.

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / A Holiday Treat with David Sedaris!

You can't write satire and not have a very clear idea of how the world should work.

Like people who were just in the middle like that, don't write satire.

They don't feel strongly about...

They have a plan for the world that involves beating your child, not all the time, but just...

But just sometimes.

Yeah, when your child deserves it.

Okay, after the break, why the New Yorker censored the word whore?

Stay with us.

Santa, baby, just slip a sable under the tree for me.

Been an awful good girl, Santa, baby.

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Now, back to the show.

Freedom of speech is a fundamental human right, and no American should fear exercising it.

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that we can fully exercise our free speech rights in 2022.
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Okay, David Sedaris, very quick lightning roundup,
and then you can go to your miles.
What's the last thing you bought at Come Dicker Song?
I bought a ridiculous pair of blue coolants,
but they're made out of really thick felt,
and so they make you look like a cartoon character.
They're like what maybe Mickey Mouse would wear them,
and I wore them to a Christmas party a few weeks ago,
and I'm going to wear them on my sister Amy,
who lives with me, and she can talk me into anything.
They sound horribly unflattering.
Oh, incredibly unflattering, yeah.
But all...
Yeah, all Come Dicker Song clothing pretty much is...
Well, it's not unflattering, it's just not...
Slimming, it's not slimming.
No, it's opposite of slimming, yeah.
If you had to choose England or France?
I am going to go with England because in France,
when you get on the train, you have a reserved seat.
There's always somebody in your seat,
and you say, excuse me, this is my seat,
and they're like, well, you know what, I'm here.
Find yourself somewhere else to sit.
Always, always.
Now, that never happens in England.
In England, you get on the train,

and there's garbage in your seat.

But I'm still going to go with the English way
because when the person refuses to give you your assigned seat,
then you have to sit somewhere else,
and you're on edge the whole time
because if you're actually not an asshole,
someone's going to come and say, excuse me, that's my seat,
you're going to say, I'm so sorry, and you're going to get up,
and you're going to be moving all throughout the journey,
and so I'm going to pick England.

What's the craziest thing you found on your litter walks?

It was a strap-on penis, but it was so small.

Like a micro penis.

Really?

It would be like what you would use to make love to a cabbage patch top.

David, what is your most treasured possession?

Well, I think it's that little Picasso painting.

It's just a little one.

I don't know, it brings me so much pleasure,
and it's a really good little painting.

What's something about yourself that you hate?

I don't like that I talk shit about people.

What's the thing about yourself that you most love or like?

Gosh, that's a hard question.

What do I like about myself?

I think I'm a good listener.

What's the biggest difference between the public persona of David Sedaris
and the private self?

Oh, well, when I'm on stage or whatever,
you have to be on.

So there's a difference between the on person and the off person.

I mean, it bothers me a lot.

You know, like some guy, a neighbor came to our apartment this morning
because he wanted to show him something,
and I just snapped up and turned it on, and it's like,
let me entertain you.

You want to be entertained?

And it's like, no, that's not what they were in the apartment for.

But I always think that that's...

Does it annoy you when you do that?

It annoys him when I suck all the air out of the room.

It has every right to be annoyed by that.

Can I ask you to read one last thing, and then we'll be done?

If you can read from here, David, until the end,

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / A Holiday Treat with David Sedaris!

I was cackling as I read the last pages of this book.
The America I saw in the fall of 2021 was weary in battle scarred.
Its sidewalks were cracked.
Its mailboxes bashed in.
All along the West Coast, I saw tent cities.
They were in parks and vacant lots and dilapidated squares.
And one stop after another, I'd head to a store or restaurant,
I remembered, and find it boarded up, or maybe burned out.
The plywood that blocked the doors covered with graffiti.
Eat the rich, fuck the police.
Black lives matter.
During my year and a half at home,
I had forgotten about the ups and downs of life on tour.
One night, you're at Symphony Hall,
and the next in a worn-out, once-grand movie theater
that is now overrun by mice.
Can you believe they wanted to tear this place down?
The house manager invariably asks,
fondly looking up at a gold plastered chair with one arm missing.
Um, yeah, as a matter of fact.
It's the same with hotels.
From the new four seasons in Philadelphia,
I went to a four-points by Sheridan
on the side of an eight-lane road in York, Pennsylvania.
It was a Friday, and all the guests had tattoos on their necks,
except for me and a very angry mother of the bride,
who had hers two smudged butterflies hovering above her right ankle.
My room was at the rear of the building,
and every time I looked out my window,
I saw people gathered in the parking lot.
Is there a fire drill? I missed, I'd wonder.
The following morning, I went out back to see what the fuss was about,
and found a pile of human shit beside a face mask
someone had wiped their ass on.
At noon, it was off to the Ritz Carlton in Washington, D.C.
The next day, at breakfast on the ground floor restaurant,
I watched as a woman at the table beside me asked for an extra plate.
This she loaded with bacon and eggs and set upon the carpet
so that her little terrier could eat from it.
Honestly, I thought, on the carpet?
After the dog had finished his breakfast, he strayed.
People's paths were blocked by his extendable leash,
but no one except me, who had remained seated
and thus was not actually inconvenienced, seemed to mind.

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / A Holiday Treat with David Sedaris!

Oh my God, my fellow guests cried,
as if it were a baby panda they had stumbled upon.
How adorable are you?
One woman announced that she had two fur babies waiting for her at home.
It must kill you to be separated from them.
The whore who'd set the plate on the carpet said,
Oh, it does, admitted the jismo tag who had started the conversation,
but they'll see mommy soon enough.
Was feeding your dog from a plate in the dining room
better than wiping your ass on a face mask?
Difficult to say, really.
Both were pretty hard to take.
That said, if it's a decent night's sleep you're after,
you're safe as bad as the Ritz,
where most of the guests have at least stayed in a hotel before,
and no better than to yell, Bro, you are so fucking high right now,
outside your door at 3 a.m.
Whenever the extremes got to me,
I'd comfort myself with the many interesting people I met
as I made my way across the country.
A woman, for instance, whose father had executed her pet hamster
with a .22 rifle.
But why, I asked.
Butterscotch had a virus that caused all her hair to fall out,
she told me.
Then there was a psychologist whose father's last words to her
croaked out on his deathbed were,
you are a communist cunt.
The most haunting person was one I never met face to face.
In the middle of my tour I was to fly from Springfield, Missouri
to Chicago, where I would have the night off.
I arrived at the airport early, checked my bag,
and was walking outdoors, getting some steps in,
when I received the message that my flight, that all flights to Chicago,
had been canceled.
And so I asked if a car could possibly be arranged.
One was, and while I waited for it to arrive, I got more steps in.
Because I had to keep an eye on my luggage,
I couldn't go far, so I walked circles around the baggage carousels,
none of which were in use.
Passing one of them I saw huddled in its gutter,
two pairs of soiled panties, a nearly empty tic-tac dispenser,
a brush with strands of long, strawberry-blonde hair caught in it,
three AA batteries, and a little sheaf of toothpicks.

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / A Holiday Treat with David Sedaris!

It was such an interesting portrait of someone,
a young woman, I assumed.
And I thought of her for months to come,
wondering as I moved from place to place in this divided,
beat-up country of ours, where she was,
and what she imagined had become of her panties.
This was in the New Yorker.
And you know, whenever you're being edited,
your editor's trying to help you.
Your editor only wants to make your work better.
I have a great editor at the New Yorker.
You've learned over years which battles you're going to fight,
but I lost, whore, and jismsoc tag.
They didn't put that in the New Yorker.
And I explained, I would never call a woman
who's giving guys blowjobs and cars for money.
I would never call her a whore.
Obviously.
I would only call someone who's clearly not a whore.
A whore, that's why it's so good.
What did they replace it with?
I think it was just woman and jismsoc tag.
David, just a hag?
No, I think we just went with that was a woman too.
David, David, that's the downfall.
That's it.
How could he censor that out?
It's the best thing ever.
I know it.
Well, David, from one disgusting whore
to an incredible straight man that had sex with other men,
thank you so much for making the time.
Thank you, Barry.
That came full circle.
Thank you to David Sedaris for joining me today
and thanks so much to all of you for listening.
If you like what you heard,
but you strongly disagree with David
about the need for more diversity in the Rockettes,
send this episode around and use it
to have a conversation of your own.
And if you appreciate more generally what you hear
on this podcast today and every other week,
there's one way to support the work that we do.

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / A Holiday Treat with David Sedaris!

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Happy holidays to one and all.
Straight, queer, gay, many who have sex with men.
See you soon.
Thanks for watching.