

Love What You Love Podcast

Episode 3: Food and Cooking with Yangsze Choo

April 28, 2020

Hey, I'm Julie Rose and this is *Love What You Love*, a podcast about the wonderful, and sometimes weird, things people are absolutely passionate about. They're always a unique expression of curiosity, and joy, and wonder, and the world needs a hell of a lot more curiosity, joy, and wonder. Every other week I'll introduce you to another fascinating human who is into really interesting stuff.

Before we get into it, a quick note that you can find the podcast on Instagram [@LoveWhatYouLovePod](#), on Twitter [@WhatYouLovePod](#), and the website is [LoveWhatYouLovePod.com](#).

Yangsze Choo is an author of historical fiction and a self-professed foodie. She knows the best places to get Korean fried chicken, and the best hole-in-the-wall South Indian restaurants in the South Bay where we both live. She's skilled in cooking a whole range of different cuisines.

But you know, these days, in the midst of a global pandemic, food and cooking have become even more meaningful for everyone, so let's find out why Yangsze loves cooking and food; how they're giving her comfort, connection, and escape; and why you might learn to love food and cooking in a new way too.

Julie: Hello there! Thank you so much for joining me.

Yangsze: It's my pleasure. I've been really looking forward to it.

Julie: Thank you. I'm so excited! So, you have two *New York Times* Best Sellers; *The Night Tiger* was also a Reese's Book Club pick, and your book *The Ghost Bride* was actually made into a Netflix series, which is awesome! Very exciting.

Yangsze: Pretty unbelievable.

Julie: Yeah! But what I want to talk to you about is food, because I know that it something that... You're an outstanding writer, and you love to do the research, and the writing, and all that, but food is where your passion is at.

Yangsze: That's true. It's one of the few things that's keeping me sane these days. The news is sometimes so crazy, and I've been soothing myself by looking at beautiful pictures of food online, and people doing this and that. It's quite a consolation.

Julie: What is consoling about it for you?

Yangsze: I think... You probably know this as well, but when one works from home, there are very few milestones. There's lots and lots of ways in which you can distract yourself, so I do too. Sometimes I'll be like, "Today I didn't get any writing done, but I did make some new dishes!" And my kids have actually gotten wise to it over the years. They'll be like, "Wow, I have a really fancy school lunch. I guess you didn't do any writing today, mummy." [laughs] "Why are we having Persian food tonight? I guess you didn't do any writing today!" No, no, I went to the Persian market!

I think it's definitely... it's a clear, psychological, direct line to feeling like, "I've got to be productive" to, "Hey look! Spaetzle!" It's a giant red herring, but it does make one feel slightly good about oneself. Like, I put food on the table! Although, that's hard now. I think it's hard to get lots of ingredients.

Julie: Yeah, because we're talking during the lockdown right now. So, looking at pictures of food online, things like that, besides the productivity part of it, there's got to be some kind of an emotional payoff for you, looking at food or thinking about food. What is that about?

Yangsze: I think that's just, like, the ultimate comfort, right? At the heart of it, all of us are... I believe the 'Hamster in Me' wants to feel like, "Oh, I've got enough sunflower seeds in my cheek pouches to last another day." It's a very visceral response as well, right? That's certainly true. I like looking at food, I like to read cookbooks. So when one is writing, I try not to read too much other fiction unless it's fiction I've already read, and in between I read cookbooks.

Nowadays cookbooks are so beautiful. When I started reading cookbooks as a little kid, my mum had all these cookbooks from the '60s and '70s, which had almost no photographs. Now I see, like... Cookbooks are just amazing. They're visual feasts. I used to go and borrow cookbooks from the library, and just read them, and return them, and mostly not make any of them.

Julie: [laughs] So, is it a feeling of, like, armchair travel for you? Or potential? Is it the process or the aesthetic? What's so attractive about it to you?

Yangsze: Absolutely. I think it's the armchair travel. I have a rather defunct blog, which I haven't updated because somehow I broke the WordPress... I don't know, the WordPress has done something strange so I haven't been able to update it. But the idea behind it was eating and reading. You know, sometimes you read books and you feel like, "This was the perfect snack to have with that book." For example, when I read Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red*, which is set in historical Istanbul, and I thought, "I would like to eat pigeon pie with flaky pastry and delicate raisins, maybe drink a glass of Shiraz or spiced wine."

Of course, nobody's making this for me, just imagining. So, it's the second part of the armchair travel; not only are you reading about places or things, but you're literally travelling there through your taste buds.

Julie: And you're learning something about the culture, and what they have available, and what's important to them, right?

Yangsze: Absolutely. I just read Attica Locke's... She wrote two wonderful mystery novels set in east Texas: *Bluebird*, *Bluebird*, and *Heaven, My Home*. She was writing about this roadside diner and how people were eating oxtail stew, and I thought, "I want oxtail stew too. Now!" So it really is... The taste of the south, which I have never been to East Texas, and I thought, "This is all the things that people eat... These are the kind of pickles they make..." Pickles is actually a really interesting subgenre. All the preserves that people have put up over the years in different parts of the world. Indian pickles, for example, that was in Arundhati Roy's novel.

Julie: What is it about pickles? Understanding how they do it, and what's available, and what that says about the locality?

Yangsze: Yes, I think so, and what kind of food was available, what kind of weather they had. All the Korean pickles that you could dig into the half-frozen ground because they have such cold winters. And then the really quick pickles that you make in places like Malaysia where it's hot and things will ferment really fast. These are all part of life that we don't really have to do because most of the time... Well, not now, but most of the time you can go to the store and buy some pickles. And now we're all, like... For example, today for lunch I made turnip top soup. Which is... My kids are like, "What are we doing?"

And it's like, we ended up with a CSA... a farm box, and you know, you get random stuff. So this week they gave these little Japanese turnips called kabu, and they come with their green turnip tops. I was looking at it and thinking, "Oh, I think I'll make potato leek soup, and then I'll chop up all the turnip tops and add the little turnips in too." Then you can run it through a blender and have cream of turnip top soup.

Julie: I would have never even thought of that! Was it good?

Yangsze: It was very good, because this kind of turnip, this small, young turnip, they're white and about the size of a ping pong ball. Normally you can simmer them, or you can make pickles with them, for example, like yuzu, which is a kind of citron. And a kabu, which is this Japanese turnip, you can make these thin, delicious, citron quick pickles using vinegar. But I just thought, "Let's just turn it into soup." And it was good. My children were like, "Mummy, what is this??" Ta-da! Look at this green, suspicious, turnip top soup! [laughs] I am grateful for that.

Julie: Yes, and I've seen the pictures of the lunches, to your point about procrastination; pictures of the lunches you've made for your kids. So they're probably pretty used to you being adventurous in your food choices.

Yangsze: That's very kind. I have to tell you; the lunches are one-offs. When they look nice, that's when we get a picture. Most of the other times, it's like, stuff that's put into a Tupperware. Last night's leftovers is your lunch! So, I don't want the misleading impression that every day's lunch is... It's like, once every three months, "Oh there was a good lunch!"

Julie: Fair enough. It's funny, because when you look at food bloggers and you get this impression that, like, every day they make these amazing meals.

Yangsze: Absolutely! I've got to tell you, I found this category of Instagram which is, like, Japanese food Instagram, and it's so beautiful. It really makes me feel happy and soothed. For a while... last week or so I realized I really should not do this, but right before I would go to bed I would google, "Bay Area Coronavirus."

Julie: Oh honey!

Yangsze: And my husband was like, "Stop it!" So, I've been looking at Japanese food on Instagram and that's been so much nicer.

Julie: Yes! So have you noticed a different aesthetic take by region? Is there a theme for each kind of region?

Yangsze: Not a theme, but I would say in general, Japanese food photographs are just... They look good. I don't know why. Even people randomly taking pictures of their lunches. First of all, the lunch body looks good too, but I'm like, "Wow, these all look really good." You can follow lots of other things. There's another hashtag which I accidentally ran into called, I think, #beautifulfoods or something like that. It's kind of, like, relaxing.

Julie: You mentioned that you'd moved around a lot when you were growing up, is that the origin of your interest in different kinds of foods? That maybe you had that exposure?

Yangsze: Yeah, I think that's very true. We did live in a lot of different countries when I was a kid, including Germany, and Japan, and Stockholm. My father was also posted in Mali in West Africa for a while. And I'm originally from Malaysia. We also lived in Thailand but that was when I was very small. But my mum is actually the one who's really adventurous. Wherever we lived, she liked to eat local food. In my memory, we pretty much always ate local food.

Also, in those days, the '70s, the '80s, the world was not so cosmopolitan. They didn't have as many international grocers. My dad used to make tofu wherever we went, so we just ate whatever we... And my parents loved to eat. I think you'll find that fairly common throughout a lot of Southeast Asia, that there are tons of people who are devoted to food blogs and will drive to some special fishing village far away to go and eat fresh crab.

Julie: Oh yeah. Why is that? What drives that?

Yangsze: I think it's foodie culture. Also, in Chinese, the way to say, "How are you doing?" is: Have you eaten? In Cantonese it's like, you'll meet somebody and they'll be like, "*Sik jor fahn mei ah?*" Have you eaten yet? I think food is basic hospitality, and that's probably true around the world.

Julie: Now, based on all these travels, did your mom have a signature dish from Malaysia or from any of the places that you had lived? Is there one thing you remember from your childhood that she made that you're like, "Oh, that's my childhood."?

Yangsze: She made a lot of dishes, and I cannot think... She made a lot, and like I said, she was an adventurous cook. I actually remember when we were little she tried to make... Wherever we went she took cooking classes and used the local fruit. When we first went to Japan I saw persimmons and I thought they were tomatoes, but they weren't. We were like, "Oh!"

And when we were in Germany I saw kiwifruits, and I thought they were this other fruit that we have in Malaysia called chikoo, or sapodilla. And I said, "Look, they have it!" I was so happy and my mum was like, "No. Sorry, dear. These are something else called kiwi." And we were all super disappointed. [laughs]

But my mum actually... from time to time things would change. When we were in a certain place she would bake a lot of this or a lot of that. I do remember in Germany we ate a lot of cold cuts. German cold cuts, to my mind, are really great. Delicious, well made. When I moved to American I was just horrified at the ham! The ham here is mostly rather sweet.

Julie: Which is weird.

Yangsze: Yeah, it was weird. But it's like, what are you used to, right? As I said, in Southeast Asia people are very crazy about food.

Julie: So, do you have a favorite kind of cuisine?

Yangsze: You know, actually, at home I cook a lot of Japanese food, and that's probably from living in Japan during my childhood. School in Japan, lunches were just wonderful. They were really delicious, tasty lunches that were cooked by all these, like, middle-aged aunties, and they were really cooking. You'd see them cooking rice, cutting potatoes, chopping vegetables. And you'd get this little set, whatever the meal of the day, with a vegetable, or potato salad, macaroni salad, a dessert like pudding. I really loved those lunches. So I think one tends to enjoy the food of one's childhood, and we were in Japan until I was about 15. So I cook a lot of Japanese; home cooking, nothing too fancy. I also cook... Southeast Asian food is sometimes hard because I can't get all the ingredients. And I like to cook European food. All kinds of food.

Julie: Now, what's something that you've never tried but you really want to?

Yangsze: Guinea pig.

Julie: Guinea pig?!

Yangsze: Yeah! This is terrible but I get a lot of recommendations off NPR. And NPR will be like, “This blah blah book...” and I'll rush off and buy it because I'm a big NPR fan. Or they'll play something like, “This Brazilian artist...” and I rushed off and bought this Brazilian artist's album. One day, they had this special on... I think it was Peru. And it was all about the delicious, roasted guinea pig. It's a specialty in Peru. And you know, the way that NPR does their reporting, they made it sound wonderful. And then I, kind of... I know it does sound a bit cruel, but you know, pigs are very sentient too, right? So they just made me feel like I would one day like to try it.

Something else that I also wanted to try when I was a kid, I read this book about silkworm cultivation, and how when the silk factories... there would be this aroma of silkworm pupae, which after taking the silk off they would roast and fry the pupae. They said it was delicious. So I thought that... You know, eating insects, and eating things lower on the food chain is probably good for us in the long run. But I've always wanted to try that. Though I have tried crickets.

Julie: And?

Yangsze: They were... spiky. [laughs]

Julie: [laughs]

Yangsze: But I think most anything's good when it's roasted or deep fried with a lot of salt. Mealworms are pretty good too.

Julie: Is there anything that you've tried that you would never want to get near again?

Yangsze: Hmm... No, I can't think... A long time ago when I was a kid in Japan, we were served one day – I don't remember where it was – some kind of meat which I later found was either whale meat or horse meat. And I would not eat either of those on principle. If I had a choice I would rather not.

Julie: I seem to recall... I don't remember if it was *The Ghost Bride* or *The Night Tiger*, that your editor said, “You have so many feast scenes! You've got to cut a couple.” Was it both books?

Yangsze: Well, it was actually *The Ghost Bride*, because when I was writing that book I just, kind of... I had no idea how long novels should be, and I wrote a lot of it really late at night when I was feeling hungry. It's the only time when the house is quiet, and you think, “Okay, and now I shall eat something.” So, I did write it... and when I was stuck... And this is actually terrible, but it's the same kind of, like, when you're feeling bored then you start looking for pictures of food or looking for recipes, and I wrote a number of dinner scenes. And when you've set yourself a daily word count, you can be like, “I just wrote 300 words describing dinner! Yeah!”

Julie: It's done!

Yangsze: Yeah. “I did my word count for the day!” But I did enjoy it. One of the things that I've enjoyed, actually, for both books is to look for historically accurate meals of the times; what they might have eaten in the late 1800s in Malacca. And *The Night Tiger* is set in the 1930s. That was really fun, looking up old cookbooks, colonial era cookery, what the British might've eaten, things that were fashionable and popular at the time like curry tiffin.

And they also liked to eat things to eat things out of tins. It was, like, very high class to have asparagus from Europe served at your dinner party because it came out of a can. So, that

was really fun. Honestly, both books actually had extra scenes which I had to cut. It's like, "We didn't really need another dinner party, did we?"

Julie: Are you sure though? I think you did. [laughs]

Yangsze: And then, I actually put in these... Because, you know, one has done all the research already, then one feels like, "Now I shall put in exactly how to make this dish."

Julie: Did you ever try making any of those dishes you found, yourself?

Yangsze: Absolutely. I made pretty much all of them. Most of all the food mentioned in both books is food that I have made.

Julie: Did you feed it to your children?

Yangsze: Yes.

Julie: And how'd they like it?

Yangsze: I mean, they liked it. What's left in the book is only, I think, two or three dinner scenes for both. So I tried to choose things which are quite, you know, well known, which would be representative of the times. I tried to put in food that I've had as well as the past that people would find interesting.

Although, I did find this incredible recipe for duck which, like, you had to start cooking it 24 hours early, and you had to stuff it, and do this and that. And I thought, "This is, like, a test of the daughter-in-law," like, how devoted are you to start working on a dish 24 hours ahead? But maybe in those days, I think, there were some wonderful cooks and there were probably lots of women who had little creative outlet other than to cook, which is also their work.

Julie: Right. There's like a 40-year difference or so between the first and the second book, in terms of time. Did you find a huge change in the kinds of food that was being made?

Yangsze: Well, not a huge change, but the bigger difference was that *The Ghost Bride* is set in a Chinese household in the town of Malacca, and at that time there was a lot of Peranakan food, which is mixed Chinese and Malay food, so that was a lot of the food from the first book, *The Ghost Bride. Night Tiger*, set in the 1930s, half of it took place in the household of a British doctor, and so then you get the colonial cuisine, which would be things that people served at parties. They did an enormous amount of drinking from what I can tell.

Julie: Do you have favorite scenes, or just entire books, or movies that involve food? Like, other movies, other books, that you just... like, *Babette's Feast* or...

Yangsze: That was what came to mind right away, *Babette's Feast*. The thing that I remember most about that movie is the sound of people eating. Which now I realize has become a thing. My kids tell me, like, there's things whole series of things you can watch on YouTube called Mukpang in which people... I think it started off in Korea, in which you watch people eat. Part of it is the sound, "nom nom nom..." and there's something so very convivial about it. I actually asked my kids, "Why is this YouTube video of someone eating? Why is it, like, 35 minutes long?" And they said, "I think it's that if you're eating alone at home you can play that and you feel like someone's eating with you," I think.

Julie: Interesting. I wonder if there's an increase in views of Mukpang videos during lockdown. That'd be an interesting...

Yangsze: Yeah, that would be interesting. I don't know very much about the genre, but it does seem to be that it's often... it looks from a cursory thing that they're often eating fancy food, or not. They also eat large quantities of food, which sometimes feels a little off-putting. Like, I don't know how you can eat so many donuts! Or maybe that's straying into the competitive eating videos. I may have wandered around YouTube, like, one video to, like, "Oops. Now we're in the hot-dog-eating category."

Julie: Which, to be fair, it's impressive. It's disgusting, but it's impressive.

Yangsze: Yeah, I had never heard of this thing, competitive eating, until... Oh my goodness. It's somewhat disturbing.

Julie: Very. So, are there any, like, scenes in books involving food that you particularly love or think were particularly well done?

Yangsze: Oh yes, all of Haruki Murakami. I'm a big fan of Murakami, although one could argue that... I think I've read pretty much every novel that he's done. They all feel like the same novel. It's always this protagonist having some sort of mid-life crisis, and something strange happens. But I enjoy the world that he makes, and in many, many of his novels, you just get these little segues when the protagonist decides to make some spaghetti or something, and that's very... It just sounds tasty. He can clearly cook.

Julie: If someone was listening, and they're a little intimidated by cooking, where would you advise them to start? Especially, like, looking beyond their own borders?

Yangsze: What I would suggest is: think about what you like to eat. What sounds tasty to you? And go from there. For example, if you really like scrambled eggs or whatever, then start exploring the egg category. I would start with something that feels easy to access and then go on from there.

When I was younger, and I didn't have kids, and I just spent all my time reading really fancy cookbooks... some of them you'll find they're actually, like, restaurant cookbooks. They're done by famous chefs at restaurants, and you need to have an enormous amount of time and a lot of extra things. I think you would have things at a restaurant that you wouldn't have at home, like specialty stocks, or broth, or homemade oven-roasted tomatoes. They'll be like, "Now open your can of homemade oven-roasted tomatoes. See page 162." It's like, "Oops! Didn't make that!"

Another cookbooks author I love is Madhur Jaffrey. She cooks Indian food and all her recipes work really well. Over the years I've been slowly cooking my way through her books. She has a lot of great vegetarian Indian recipes as well.

Julie: And do you feel like reading cookbooks is the best approach? Or maybe, are there YouTube channels that people could check out? How would you recommend people go about it?

Yangsze: Probably that too. I don't know as much about YouTube as my children do. There's this lady called Maangchi. I know that's not her real name, but she does a YouTube Korean cooking channel. I actually went and bought her cookbook, and then I was like, "Oh, she's got a lot of YouTube videos up!" And that's really fun.

Julie: Is there, like, maybe one or two indispensable tools that a new cook should have? And maybe one or two indispensable pantry items?

Yangsze: I think it depends on what you want to cook. For an indispensable pantry items, I would say, for an Asian cook: Rice. And I'm actually quite picky about rice. I think lots of people already

have their favorite brands. I like to buy new crop Japanese rice. My favorite brand, at least right now, is called Matsuri, and you can buy it at a local Japanese supermarket.

Somebody did ask me... You know, Japanese short grain rice is different from Thai rice, or jasmine rice, or basmati rice. So, everyone has their favorite, but new crop I really like. When I was a child we would often just get random rice, and I realized there's a big difference between old rice and new rice.

Julie: What's the difference?

Yangsze: For something like a short grain rice like Japanese rice, you want new crop because that's, like, the latest year of rice, and it will be kind of chewy, a little bit sticky, shiny. It's delicious. But for basmati rice, the more expensive rice is actually aged. They prefer aged rice, and it gets nuttier, you need a little more water to cook it, but it stands up well for different types of cooking. Like biryani, you probably want an aged basmati rice. That all depends.

When this whole pandemic shutdown happened... I didn't realize this, but I went to the Indian grocery store, and I went to the Japanese grocery store, and people were just, like hauling rice off. I was in the carpark looking at these people staggering out with, like, three or four sacks of rice. That's when I realized, "Oh, this is serious." It must be so hard... Even for me, I feel like, "I don't wanna cook!"

I read someone tweeted, like, "I discovered that my hobbies are: Eating at restaurants; going to non-essential businesses; and touching my face." And I was like, "That's me too!"

Julie: [laughs] So relatable!

Yangsze: I just want to go and eat someone else's cooking, not mine.

Julie: Yes. Oh my gosh. So, we talked a lot about cooking, but do you bake at all?

Yangsze: I do bake some, but not very much. I only make a few cakes that I like, and I like to eat pie, which is terrible for my waistline.

Julie: And I know you like chocolate too.

Yangsze: I do, and I like chocolate cake. Actually, it's very dangerous, because now that I'm quite middle aged, and my mum still calls me and says things like, "I saw your picture that you posted. Are you making cake *again*?" It's terrible! [laughs] I'm like, "No mummy, I made that cake two weeks ago. I just posted it..."

Julie: [laughs] That's terrible. That's hilarious. So, what is it about cooking versus baking? Is it just because it's too dangerous to bake?

Yangsze: That's a good question. I would almost always rather cook than bake.

Julie: Is it that there's more scope for creativity?

Yangsze: Yes and no. Probably. First of all, I like savory food too. But I just told you that I love dessert. So basically I'm a glutton. I hope my mother's not listening to this podcast. [laughs]

Here's the thing, when I was a child, and we lived in different places, we were always very mindful of the cost of utilities. So my mum would be like, "Don't turn the oven on for too long because of the gas." And in Malaysia, you would also have to go and buy... They didn't have piped-in gas. You would have to buy a gas tank, and if you ran out you would have to hope that the gas man would come by on the little lorry and be selling gas. And you'd run

into the street and shout, "I need to buy a tank of gas!" So, you're literally dealing with, like, tanks of gas, so if the oven is a gas oven it's going to run down your propane tank.

And then, also, when we were living in Europe, electricity, as I recall, was kind of expensive. So the idea of running the oven, to me, has always been like, "I won't turn it on until I'm ready and the cake has to go in." But I have to rush and get it ready, so I might start preheating the oven and I'll start putting the cake together as soon as possible. It's a good question. I always feel like I'm under some sort of timeclock for baking.

Julie: I want to just, kind of, step back really quick about *The Ghost Bride* series. Did you have any input in how they filmed feast scenes, or any comment on it?

Yangsze: No, no. It was a total surprise. I have to say, I think they did a really great job. When we went... First of all, they did a great job casting everyone. The story arc is different, so when we were watching that was really fun for us too, like, "Oh!" My family was bingeing it and I thought, "Did this happen in the book? Let me go and look." I had to go and check! "No, that didn't happen in the book, but it's fun."

And for the food, I found out later when we went to visit Taipei just this past January for the premiere, they had done a little walkthrough exhibit so you could see things; they had food and things. They actually used a lot of real food and it was painted, you know, for the underworld scenes. They apparently also used, like, real pig's heads, and maggots, and worms, and all kinds of stuff. It was... I really enjoyed watching the series because I like looking at the kitchens. I don't know whether you enjoy what too, but whenever you go to, like, historical museums, or old houses, I always like to look at the kitchen.

Julie: Yes! And then thank goodness for your electric stove, or your gas stove.

Yangsze: Because then the fear of not having fuel would be like, "Oh my goodness, go out and cut some firewood, now!" But I do think it's that sense of, like, running out, it's been with us always. My mum, when she was a little girl, she lived in a very small mining village in Malaysia, and she said that she had to collect firewood and she had to fetch water from the well when she was 6. She said a lot of children did not survive to adulthood because there were just, like, random misadventures. So, I think the whole idea... Imagine if you... And in many parts of the world, even today, women and children have to fetch water, and that would take half your day! It's so heavy! So then you'd be like, "Don't use up all the water or you can't have a bath because there's not enough water."

Those things are often on my mind. Water, the fuel, the simple act of cooking and running the house. When I moved to America I was just really blown away by how many simple luxuries are available in many homes. Like, a dishwasher is not uncommon, right? Even a garbage disposal. It's like, "Look at this grindy thing! That's amazing!" I'm used to, like, picking all the food out. My mum was really impressed by that too when she came. She's like, "What is this?" I said, "Look mummy, you never have to clean the sink drain again! Whoo hoo!"

This reminds me of this old thing. I think someone was asking, like, their grandmother or aunt, "If you had to have one amenity in the kitchen, what would you do?" And one person chose the fridge, which I think is a great idea, and someone said the stove, and then somebody's grandmother said running water. It's like, "Oh yeah. That too."

Julie: Mm-hmm. Good point. So, are you writing anything right now, and if so, what do you snack on while you're writing?

Yangsze: Well, I'm writing very little and snacking a lot. I must confess. I read somewhere, like... You know, when lockdown began there were lots of things, people going rah-rah and saying stuff like... What was the thing that was really popular? "When Shakespeare was in lockdown he wrote *King Lear*," or something like that. I was like, "Oh I can't do that. It's impossible." I think it's actually okay... Another friend of mine, a writer from, I think, Singapore, actually posted something like, "It's okay, you don't have to be productive." And I was like, "Yes!"

It's weird, isn't it, how often it feels that one needs permission to do or not do things.

Julie: Right. It's very ingrained in us that if you've got a block of free time you better do something useful with it.

Yangsze: That's true. I was talking to my dad... My elderly parents are in Malaysia. The borders are closed now, so I'm quite worried about them, which is why I've been WhatsApping often. My dad actually said, "You know, we just actually have to survive this. Getting through this okay will be a good thing." And I said, "That's right." He's totally right.

Julie: Yeah. Don't press yourself. Don't push yourself. But in an ideal situation, when we're not in lockdown and worrying about pandemics, what is your go-to snack while you're writing?

Yangsze: Chocolate. I ate so much chocolate at one point, that when I gave up... One year for Lent I said I would give up chocolate and nagging. It was a very ambitious year.

Julie: [laughs]

Yangsze: Now that I think of it, I think I doomed myself before it began because I was feeling super unhappy. My kids were like, "Mummy, do you want some chocolate?" And I said, "NO I've given up chocolate! Would you all go clean up the floor!" It was complete misery. [laughs] "Just have some chocolate and stop nagging us!"

Julie: That's hilarious.

Yangsze: Not a very clever thing to do.

Julie: It was well intentioned.

Yangsze: Yes, so I've never quite done... Another year I gave up Coca-Cola, and that was pretty sad too.

Julie: Yeah, there's... If I had to give up ginger snaps, it would be a challenge. That one's hard.

Yangsze: What are your favorite ginger snaps?

Julie: You know, just whatever we can get at the store. I'm not good at baking them, but I do like the ones that come from the store. I don't even know what the brand is. Like, dipping them in your coffee in the afternoon, it's just, "Ahhh..."

Yangsze: That's great. Have you tried the Swedish ones, like from Ikea? They do these, like... They're very thin. It's common in Sweden. They're very tasty.

Julie: Yeah, I like them to be really sharp, you know? Like, super spicy, not too sweet.

Yangsze: That sounds good.

Julie: It does. [laughs] This is just going to devolve into...

Yangsze: I'm afraid that your podcast has devolved into, like, Homer Simpson noises. "Mmm, good..." Sorry. It's my fault.

Julie: [laughs] You know what, I have not laughed this much in about a week and a half. This is great.

Yangsze: I'm glad.

Julie: Thank you so much for taking time to talk with me this afternoon. This has been an absolutely delight.

Yangsze: It's my pleasure. Absolutely mine. Hopefully we can do this again. Maybe one day in a time of great plenty, when there are so many eggs we'll be telling each other, "I just made a souffle last night, and a meringue."

Julie: Exactly. Let's make that our wish.

By the way, just before I recorded this, I baked scones for the first time in, literally, forever. Were they great? No. Did I feel accomplished and comforted? Yeah.

Huge thanks to Yangsze for chatting and sharing her love of food and cooking.

As a reminder, you can find the podcast on Instagram [@LoveWhatYouLovePod](#), and on Twitter, [@WhatYouLovePod](#).

What are you into? Drop me an email at LoveWhatYouLovePod@gmail.com, and maybe we can chat in a future episode.

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I hope this episode has inspired you to go out there and love the hell out of whatever it is that you love and then share it with other people, because we need a lot more love and joy in this world.

Thanks for listening. Let's hang out again soon.

Links:

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