

Love What You Love Podcast

Episode 4: Disney with Monica Eeg

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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. I'm an author, creator, and enthusiast; and I've always been fascinated by the things that people are super into because they're always a unique expression of curiosity, and joy, and wonder. Every other week I'll introduce you to another fascinating human who's 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](#). If you'd like to support the podcast - and of course I'd appreciate it very much - consider subscribing and leaving and rating and review on Apple Podcasts. Or tell your friends, or post about it on social media. It all helps. We're also on Patreon at [Patreon.com/LoveWhatYouLovePod](#).

So, I've got a confession to make. I've never really understood Disney. Like, I get the concept, and I appreciate the impact it's had on culture and people around the world, but I never really *got it* got it, until maybe now. Back in February, before the lockdown, I sat down with Monica Eeg in my living room to chat about her passion for Disney. Since we were sitting in my living room, I hope you'll forgive a little bit of background noise as we're chatting.

During the week, Monica molds minds as a seasoned and dedicated high school history teacher. On weekends and school breaks though, she's all about Disney. Maybe, right now, hearing all about the Happiest Place on Earth is exactly what you need. So let's find out why Monica loves Disney, and why you might learn to love it too.

Julie: Hello!

Monica: Hi.

Julie: Thank you for coming on the podcast. I'm so excited to have you here.

Monica: Absolutely! Thanks. Me too.

Julie: So Monica, I've known you for a long time.

Monica: A long time. 14 years!

Julie: I know!

Monica: How has it been that long? I'm still 21!

Julie: [laughs] I don't know! Me too! Isn't that crazy?

Monica: How's that work? [laughs]

Julie: And as long as I've known you, you have been *super* into Disney. So, what's that about? What is it about Disney that draws you so much?

Monica: Well, gosh, that Disney, its marketing genius. [laughs] I feel like maybe I like Disney because it's a way of having entertainment that's enjoyable, it makes me happy. Well, there are scenes in movies that make me cry like a baby, but... I think it elicits all these different emotions when you're watching their movies, or... One of my favorite things

is going to Disneyland. For me, just in a nutshell, why I like Disney and Disneyland is that it provides this great opportunity to escape everything that's real life, and adult, and responsibility, and you know, "That doesn't have calories in it when you eat it at Disneyland." I think that's really at the core, is that it's a way of escaping and feeling like a kid again.

Julie: You teach high school, and you've taught high school for a while.

Monica: Yes, 18 years.

Julie: Holy crap. I don't know how that's even possible. Did you like Disney before you started teaching, or has your like for Disney increased since you've been a teacher?

Monica: I think it's increased since I became a teacher. I grew up watching Disney movies, we went to Disneyland here and there, sporadically, as a kid. A long time ago when I was in elementary school and junior high I did dance competition, and every year was down at the Disneyland Hotel, and so we would stay at the Disneyland Hotel. Of course, you know, 8, 9, 10-year-old me had no clue what that really entailed. I do now that I'm paying for it to go. [laughs] But as kid, going and staying at the Disneyland Hotel was like, "Oh it's just any other hotel." It's not. But, I was exposed going then, and we'd always go to Disney for a day or two. In junior high I went, and I think I went a couple times in high school and a couple times in college.

But it was really after I started teaching that I could actually afford to go on a vacation, and Disneyland was great because it's close, I connected with characters and movies that were on there. And as I got older and older, I had friends who could go, and that's really how it snowballed too. I think it's a combination of needing the escape but also having friends who could go and escape with you too.

Julie: Right. We're in California; if you lived in Utah or, like, Missouri, would it be the same kind of thing? Would you make the time to go out to Disney the way you do now?

Monica: I don't think so. As a kid growing up, I lived in Southern California until I was about 6 years old. All of my dad and my mom's family lived in Southern California. It was just really... I spent a lot of time... It was there. I think if I'd grown up somewhere else, I'd probably really like the movies, and I'd probably really like the stuff, but I probably wouldn't be like, "I need to go to Disneyland," or, "I miss going to Disneyland."

I know that, having gone to Disneyland a lot, we would run into people there. And one of the really nice things about going into the parks is that the people there are just so genuinely nice. You talk to strangers in line, and "Oh, I see you're..." people wear shirts from where they're from or whatever. So, I would see a lot of people from Washington and they would say, "I'm an annual passholder." And I'm like, you're an annual passholder and you live in Washington?? That's a commitment, because then you have to fly, and you have to plan a block of days to be able to go.

Julie: So the movies and everything, it's like a nice extension of Disneyland, in a way, for you. It's like having that mini escape. And it sounds like the experience in the park, it's kind of like you're taken out of regular life. Like, people are super nice to each other. People are friendlier.

Monica: Yes. Oh yeah.

Julie: I haven't been to Disneyland since I was 16, and that's a long-ass time ago.

Monica: Well you know, we're 21 so it's only five years ago.

Julie: [laughs] That's right. So, what is the Disneyland experience?

Monica: For me? I'll give you this: I went to Disneyland, Veteran's Day weekend of 2016. Veteran's Day is not too long after the election. So, having come off the 2016 election I was a little discombobulated in terms of my world, and what's happening, and people were very freaked out and whatnot. The whole ride down there, it kept swirling in my head. But once I get through security at Disneyland, it just becomes its own little world. I don't check my phone nearly as much. I don't go on Facebook nearly as much. I'll Instagram while I'm in the parks, and I'll text with people, but I'm not paying attention to my news updates or anything.

When you walk into the parks, even when you get through security and you're in the section that's between the two parks, there's music going, and there's families, and balloons, and it smells good. And you're wearing all your pins, and you've got your spirit jersey on... It's a bubble. I mean, without actually having a plexiglass dome over it, it's truly a bubble. It creates this escape of not dealing with all the outside stuff.

Several times, when we're getting ready to leave, I'll tell whoever I'm with, like, "I don't want to go! Don't make me go back! Can I move into the Grand Californian?" When's that lottery winnings coming in? Because I would be there way more.

Julie: So, what is a typical Disneyland trip for you?

Monica: So, when I had an annual pass... Disneyland is almost like Vegas to me. You can do too much. They have five-day park hoppers, four-day park things, and things like that. For me, that's too long. For a family that's coming out, their first trip, they've never been, absolutely do the four or five-day thing because you want to soak it all in. But for someone like me that was an annual passholder, you know you're going to come back so you don't feel the rush that you have to do everything, every trip. Being a passholder definitely alleviates a lot of that stress. Disney stress. "Do it all!"

Typically when we would go, we would maybe fly out. My favorite was to fly out. First flight out of San Jose, and we could get to the parks by the time the gates open. The park opens at 8 or 9:00. We could get there by 8:30. Getting there early was really great. Sometimes, the first day, if we only get there, like, at lunchtime, I was totally fine with that too.

My favorite is to do a half day, a full day, and then a half day, and then bail. With having a pass you don't worry about, you know, "Oh I paid \$105 and I'm only here for half the day." With your pass you go when you can.

Julie: How much is an annual pass?

Monica: Oh god! [laughs] So, when I first started going with my annual pass, I think it was \$700.

Julie: Holy crap!

Monica: I know! But, what you would do is you would put a \$100 deposit, which is essentially, like, a day in the park, and then you can do a payment plan, and it was \$30 a month or whatever the math is. But then, as long as you went into the parks seven days within a calendar year, you were getting your money's worth. Plus, you would get discounts on food, and merchandise, and sometimes hotel.

You can get the upper-tier passes now, and I want to say... There's no black out days on those, and I think they give you this MaxPass, which is like the equivalent of being able to order all your FastPasses on your phone.

Julie: What's a FastPass?

Monica: So, say the ride Space Mountain, the line is like an hour wait. Yeah, no. I do not wait that long for a ride. So, you would try to figure out a way to get your FastPass. You would go and put your ticket into the FastPass machine, and it would say, "Okay, you can't go on it now," which is fine because I don't want to wait an hour, "But you can go do other things, and your window of time to come back is, say, 12:30-1:30," or something like that. Then you come back between 12:30 and 1:30, and you would wait maybe 10 or 15 minutes. It makes the system a lot... so you're not flooding everybody into, like, one spot. Then you can go do other things while you're waiting for your reservation.

So, you can actually physically go to kiosks and get FastPasses, but now you can do it just on your phone and the MaxPass allows you to do that. It's an extra charge, but the convenience of not having to physically run around the park to go get your FastPasses makes it really worth it. Plus, Disneyland also has *tons* of spots all over the park where they have PhotoPass people. And they have employees where that's their job, is PhotoPass. They have these beautiful cameras with this giant flash on it. They have them in front of the castle. Just everywhere. You can do it with characters...

Julie: And so this is where they take pictures of you, for you, and that's part of the MaxPass deal?

Monica: Yes, that goes in with MaxPass. They'll all download to your phone, to the app, and then you can screenshot them and save them.

Julie: So they're really good... To your point about marketing, they're really good at an entirely immersive brand experience.

Monica: Oh, absolutely. Disney+ right now has this incredible series called *The Imagineering Story*, and it really takes you through the whole, like, history of Disneyland and how it was built and stuff. But there's this one spot where they talk about how the people that work for this company, Walt wanted them to look at things at three levels. One, from like, you step back and see things, like the big picture. And then you get closer and you can see, "Oh, there's characters, and food, and things like that."

And then if you go to Disneyland and, say I'm waiting in line for Peter Pan or something, they have lanterns. Okay, cool, but you go closer and there's... The detail in those lanterns, it lights up and Tinkerbell's in there! So there's this completely immersive experience. There's things hidden all over the place. The detail, the intricacy that goes into people planning the stuff for the guests, the thought that goes into it... At least in

Disneyland proper, there's nothing that's not overlooked or there wasn't a great amount of time, or detail, or thought that went into it.

Julie: And it's, like, super clean. It's not real life in there.

Monica: Oh my god! Yes. One year we did... They used to have Mickey's Halloween Party, and people dress up. The year we did it, all of us dressed up like *Monsters, Inc.*, and my friend was Boo. And in the movie she's wearing, essentially, pajamas with socks. The whole movie. So, you can't just wear socks to Disneyland. You have to wear shoes. So what she did was she wore shoes but then she put her dad's, like, old, white athletic socks over her shoes.

Now, if you wore those white socks out in the world, your feet would be black underneath. Her socks were barely gray! That's how clean that place is. It's like, the two-second rule applies everywhere! If you drop something, "Oh no! Brush it off!" I would still eat it.

Julie: So, on an ideal day you would get there at 8:30.

Monica: Sure.

Julie: What would you do?

Monica: Well, usually when we would get there... We always have a plan of like, "We're starting in this specific park," and based on whichever park we started in we would have, "These are the rides we're going to do in this order." We had a *great* system. If you had said, "I've never been to Disneyland," or, "I haven't been to Disneyland in forever, take me with you and I'll just follow along," you would get on almost everything in a two-day span, because we just know the system at this point so well. We're so efficient with our time. We sit down to eat, and we don't feel like we're rushed to go to the next thing, or running to lines, or whatever.

So, we really mapped out, like, we're going to start with this ride, we're going to do this, I have this FastPass for this. While we're waiting for this FastPass to be available we're going to do this ride. Okay we have a break, let's eat. We always stopped to go to the bathroom, to get water refills. It was like, ride, ride, ride, eat, ride, ride, snack, ride, eat again, snack in line while you're waiting.

And we know where to go for, like, "We want to watch this parade, we need to go over here..." We were very good about getting in everything everybody wanted to do.

Julie: So, do you have a favorite ride at Disneyland?

Monica: I love Peter Pan. That's probably one of my favorite classic rides. I would say Space Mountain is another one of my favorites. I think it was one of the first rides I went on that was, like, a roller coaster, as a little kid. I remember going on it with my dad and just being terrified. It's pitch black, and you think you're going a million miles an hour. Space Mountain and, probably, Peter Pan. That's on one side of the park. Then on the other side, I probably like Haunted Mansion and Pirates.

Julie: I know you're an extrovert. You know I'm an introvert.

Monica: I know. [laughs]

Julie: So if I were to go to Disneyland, when would I go so it's the least peopley?

Monica: I would say September after schools go back in session.

Julie: Oh, okay. But before Halloween stuff gets ramped up.

Monica: Yes, before the Halloween stuff. It tends to show up, like, mid-to-late September if I remember correctly.

Julie: Okay, so like the first two weeks of September.

Monica: Yeah, after Labor Day, I think you'd be good. Then, I would say... It sounds like January after the schools go back, after the winter break, sound like it's been a really good time to go, and it's also not as hot.

Julie: You started taking your older daughter to Disneyland. Did she like it the first time? Did she "get it"?

Monica: She really liked Disney movies growing up. I think the first movie she watched on repeat was *Peter Pan*. So, she'd seen, like, all the Disney movies up to that point, except for some of the ones that don't get publicized as much, you know, in the parks even. So, my plan was that I wanted to take her when she turned 5, but that also... I have rules about going with children.

Julie: [laughs]

Monica: Like, you have to be tall enough to go on rides. You don't *need* a nap and I don't need to take a stroller. I mean, good for people who want to take their little kids. That's them. But for me, personally, I do not want to have to push a stroller and extra stuff. I like to go in with, like, a small backpack and that's it. If I had to carry her out of the park at the end of the night, then I was fine with that, but I don't want to push a stroller and worry about stuff getting stolen from it. So, there were all those kinds of stipulations when she went. And she was super excited about going, and she was so happy.

For me, it's one thing to go to Disneyland and share it with your friends, and you can go get drinks, and you can go sit at Trader Sam's, the Disneyland Hotel bar, and spend hours there doing that and stuff like that. But to go to Disneyland with my daughter and get her to see, like, Mickey Mouse in person, it was magical. And every time I've gone with her, it's been magical.

Julie: So, you've been to Disney a lot. You watch a lot of Disney. Is there anything about either the park experience or just Disney in general that surprises you?

Monica: Well, every time I go, it's different. I feel like the fact that you can have different experiences every time you go is kind of surprising, that's really cool. I really like learning the history of stuff, the shows, or the movies, or things within the park. And watching that *Imagineering Story*, I've learned a lot of things about the process and, "Oh wow, I didn't know that!"

I think part of it's because I do teach history. I've always liked history and learning about the Disney history stuff. I think that's what's surprising to me, is that I'm always learning more stuff too.

Julie: Now, is there anything... Besides it being peopley, is there anything that frustrates you about going to the park?

Monica: I know that some people say, "How can you like Disney?" or, "Disney's not for me." That's frustrating, and I think sometimes that might just be because that person didn't have a good experience the first time they went. My friends and I have a joke, where if people say they don't like Disney, you're doing it wrong. That part is frustrating. My husband likes Disney and Disneyland, but not like I do. Maybe that's a frustration. "Come on, why don't you like it??" Or at least as much. It feels more like I'm dragging him if he were to go.

Julie: But on the other hand, it gives you a thing of your own.

Monica: Yeah. Or it's a thing that's mine and my daughter's. I don't know that there's anything that frustrates me in terms of... I don't think I've ever had an unpleasant experience, aside from weather. Because I love Disneyland in the rain. I will do Disney in the rain, absolutely. But the heat, 100% I was frustrated that day because it was... The lines were long, it was crowded, it was hot, and I think that's really been the only frustration.

Julie: So if someone was, like, new to going to Disneyland specifically... I mean, Disney World... They're similar but a whole different thing.

Monica: Oh my gosh, that's a whole other ball of yarn. I'm afraid of Disney World, honestly.

Julie: Why?!

Monica: It's just so... I mean, Disneyland is peopley, but Walt Disney World is way more. And then you're throwing in the weather, and humidity, and I don't do well in humidity. Then, the fact that with Disney World, from what I understand, you have to plan your trip, like, months in advance. I mentioned the FastPasses; well, you can pre- get your FastPasses before you go to Disney World, like months before. And that whole thing scares me, because I don't know if I'm going to want to do that. And I feel like there's way more hotel options there, and there's five parks. Then just the daunting task of getting there. I have to fly far to get there. And once I'm there I want to be there for, you know, five days.

Julie: And that's exhausting!

Monica: Yes! And food for five days, and hotel for five days, in a room with my same family...

Julie: [laughs]

Monica: It's just very overwhelming for me. I think if somebody said, "Monica, I'm going to go to Disney World. I want you to come with me. Don't worry, I'll plan everything, just show up." Okay, then I'm in. But I just know that doing Disney World, I would have to plan it, and I know nothing about it.

Julie: So if someone was new to Disneyland, or they, like me, haven't been there in so many years, how would you tell them to start? What would you recommend?

Monica: I definitely would say, Disneyland has an app that you check wait times on, you can put all your tickets into that app too. So get the app first. When it comes to planning your day, what you want to do... I love the Disneyland Hotel, and I haven't stayed there since

I was in elementary school. I've never stayed at the Grand Californian. I've never stayed at the Paradise Pier Hotel. I just haven't because... not that they're out of my price range, it's just that I would rather spend my money eating, experiences, buying merchandise. Now, if I had all the money in the world, hell yeah I would stay at the Grand Californian. That place is nice, and it's right in the park.

So, if you stay on property in those parks, you get the benefit of getting in an hour before everybody else. If you're like, "We're going to Disneyland *once*." Then yes. So, they have Magic Morning. But if you were staying in a regular hotel, like, off-property, you're going to Disneyland for two days, I would say look at when the parks open. Start in the park that doesn't have Magic Morning. So if Disney's California Adventure has Magic Morning, start in Disneyland. Then the next day, switch it, because the next day Disneyland will have Magic Morning.

Julie: What is Magic Morning again?

Monica: It's for when the people who have, like, a three-day pass, they get a Magic Morning, they get in the park before everybody else. Or if you're staying in the hotels you get a Magic Morning as well.

Julie: So it's already packed over in that park by the time you get there.

Monica: Yeah, it's already packed and you're competing for FastPasses with people who've been in the park an hour already. So if California Adventure has Magic Morning, we start in Disneyland. And then if I'm starting at Disneyland I always get there... If the park opens at 8:00, they'll let you in before 8:00, but they hold you at a... They call it Rope Drop. They hold you at a spot where you can't go into the actual park. You're just really flooded into Main Street. So if the park opens at 8:00, I would say definitely get there by 7:15 to get through security, and then you scan your ticket and get into the park before 8:00.

When we go we try to get there for Rope Drop, right when the park opens. If we're in Disneyland we... Once you get scanned into the park, you can already get your first FastPass. So, we would usually get a FastPass for, like, Space Mountain. Then as soon as Rope Drop hits... They do this great intro. The guy says, "Welcome to Disneyland, blah blah blah... Please walk..." Nobody walks.

And then Rope Drop, and we just scurry fast to Peter Pan, because if you get to Peter Pan first thing... Also, look, I don't have a stroller so I can walk fast! People with strollers are like, "Come on, Timmy!" See ya later! So, we scoot back there and we get onto Peter Pan within 20 minutes. Like, we're on and off in 20 minutes. Then we'll go do other Fantasyland rides before our FastPass. And then there's windows of time... Like, if I get my FastPass for Space Mountain, the thing will say, "Come back at 8:35 to get your next FastPass." As soon as 8:35 hits, I get my second FastPass. And I usually get it for, like, Indiana Jones because it's another ride that gets a long line and their FastPasses will run out early too.

So, we'll do all those, and then we'll go do Space Mountain, and then we'll make our way over to do, like, Pirates, and Haunted Mansion. And then we'll do Indiana Jones with our FastPass and in the meantime get another FastPass.

There's been times when, like, I've gone on a Sunday morning, Rope Drop's at 9:00, and I have Alaina with me, and we were done with all the big rides by 11. And then we're like, "Okay, let's eat!"

Julie: Whoa!

Monica: And then we take snacks with us and water to tide us over until we get to 11:00 where we have breakfast. I can get a big chunk of stuff done, but you have to be willing to, like, hurry, walk fast, have a plan, know that after Peter Pan I'm going to go over to Alice in Wonderland because that one gets a long line too.

Julie: So does this app kind of tell you this stuff, or are there, like, Facebook groups that tell you what gets popular when? If I'm a total newbie, I wouldn't know that.

Monica: I would definitely say, before you go to the parks, download the app, because you can see wait times. Even today, if I went on my phone right now, it's Sunday morning, I could look at the wait times and see Peter Pan's already 45 minutes. You just kind of learn how long the different rides are. There's definitely rides that are always longer wait times. I can also tell how busy the park is by how long the wait times are for some of the rides. Peter Pan's pretty solidly around 45 minutes, and that's pretty normal. But if it's 55 minutes, oh it's busy today.

Julie: And so, for a newb, what's the one place they should go to eat or the one thing they should eat?

Monica: Oh man, there's so much good food. If you're in for snacks, you've got to get the standard Dole Whip. It's a pineapple frozen yogurt, essentially. It's so good and refreshing.

Julie: The churros are good there, right?

Monica: Churros are amazing. And you know, within the last, like, five years or so I feel like they've really stepped up their churro game. Between Pirates and Haunted Mansion, kind of in the back, like near where the railroad station pickup is, there's the mint julep bar. Mint juleps are amazing, by the way. But they also have beignets! They have the, you know, regular beignets, and they do powdered sugar on them, but they also have seasonal ones. I'm not a fan of butterscotch, but they have butterscotch ones. They have a chocolate one right now.

Julie: Tell me they have a pumpkin spice one. [laughs]

Monica: Oh yeah, they do! And it's so good! They have a candy cane one. They have a lot of really good ones. They had a s'mores one recently that actually came with melted chocolate sauce you could drizzle all over it.

Julie: Oh my god, I'm so hungry. I haven't eaten yet.

Monica: [laughs] I know! Me either. That one sounds really good. They have lots of different... I would definitely say churro, Dole Whip, I love the beignets. Also, off Main Street there's a Little Red Wagon and they have the most amazing corn dogs.

Julie: Oh really?

Monica: Yeah! It's like the best corndog on the planet. Over in Tomorrowland they have Pizza Planet now, and I think they had... Now, it sounds incredibly wrong, but once you eat it... It was so good. It was, like, mac and cheese with bacon pizza.

Julie: Wait, it's a pizza with mac and cheese?

Monica: Yeah, like pizza dough with mac and cheese and bacon crumbles on top.

Julie: That actually sounds amazing.

Monica: It was so good. I felt so wrong.

Julie: But it's Disney so nothing counts!

Monica: It is! Nothing counts! And you're doing all that insane amount of walking anyway, so it doesn't matter. I'm trying to think of what else is super good. There are a lot of people who really love the turkey leg.

Julie: It's just like a...

Monica: Like, you look like a caveman eating it. It's one of those things, it's not just for one person. Multiple people should be sharing it. It's huge. It's like two fists.

Julie: That sounds disgusting, actually. [laughs]

Monica: I mean, I had a bite and it's not for me.

Julie: So when are you going back?

Monica: Oooh! Ouch!

Julie: Oh, sorry!

Monica: I have this week off in February and I was really contemplating, like, is there a way I could convince the husband to, like, "Let's just go one day so Alice can go." But I know that would be such a tease, for me at least, to do just one day. Alaina turns 10 in... I know, how does that happen?? She turns 10 in June and I'm super tempted to be like, you know what, it's your 10th birthday, we all need to go. At least me taking both girls.

While I love Disneyland, it's expensive. It's definitely... I realize fully that for the three years that Alaina and I had annual passes, like, we were spoiled. But every time I'd go I would try to do it as inexpensively as possible. You stay at a hotel that isn't crazy expensive. You bring snacks with you. You drink water while you're in the parks. You don't buy all the souvenirs every time you go. You buy, like, maybe a pin or two. So, I definitely had figured out how to limit my spending while I was there.

Julie: Well, I hope you get to go in June. I really do.

Monica: I do too.

Julie: Thank you so much for doing this. I actually learned a lot about Disneyland!

Monica: Yay! I am by no means a professional, but I do love it. I want everyone to drink the Disney Kool-Aid. I'm your Jim Jones.

Julie: [laughs] And on that note... Thank you so much! [laughs]

Humungous thanks to Monica for chatting with me and throwing down some seriously useful Disney knowledge.

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

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

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I hope this show added a little hope and happiness to your week and has inspired you to go out there and just love the hell out of whatever it is that you love. Please share that love with other people, because we need a lot more love, and joy, and hope in this world, especially right now.

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

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