

## BUT HER LYRICS...EPISODE 007

### SHOW NOTES:

This episode of But Her Lyrics... tackles track 6 of Wonderful Hell, "Big Words" with Emily May of Hollaback! Host Shawna and Emily talk through some of the best advice they've gotten from mentors, lessons learned in activism, knowing when your anger no longer serves you, fucking up as a white woman (and learning to do better), and the words Emily shared with Shawna to help her get through the personal conflict that inspired this song. This is a good episode for the music nerds, too! The band gets deep about the drum beat Dave wrote at a soundcheck in Toronto.

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### EPISODE TRANSCRIPT:

**Shawna Potter:** Welcome to But Her Lyrics! The show where we delve into the meaning and politics behind each song from the new War On Women album, Wonderful Hell. I'm Shawna Potter, singer and lyricist for War On Women and your host. This episode, my dog will be licking herself. No, Rosie, chill. You

done? Okay. This episode we're tackling "Big Words", the seemingly obligatory personal song on the album, right? There's always one. And I mean personal, not like, oh, the personal is political. More like I can't even get political because I'm so upset at this one person that it's distracting me from doing good work. In my previous bands, my previous life, I was a person that wrote songs about relationships and feelings or well, more accurately, I wrote about feelings other than anger, right? Reminder, anger is an emotion and so is the joy you experience when you tell an angry man to stop being so emotional, so give that a try sometime. But anger, rage, that's what I'm mostly tapped into with War On Women. But a running theme through this podcast which I did not really expect is how at some point, our anger no longer serves us. This was first mentioned on the pod during an interview with vegan activist and author Carol Adams-- I think episode two, the Milk and Blood episode, and you'll hear it on this episode too. You might even hear it on the album Wonderful Hell overall moving from anger and despair to a place of hope.

But I wasn't feeling a lot of hope at the time of writing this song. I was, to put it politely, in a disagreement with a friend and feeling hurt and confused, wondering if all of this was in my head. Maybe I should give a synopsis of the situation before I go any further, but I don't know. I don't really want the details to be public. [Shawna laughs] I want to keep it super vague. And it's not some terrible tragic thing, it just is a situation that totally sucked at the time. So, if you think you might know who or what I'm talking about, even if we're friends, please assume that you're wrong. Just drop it. It's not worth it. I'm just trying to explain how the song was written. I'm not trying to stir any pots. The band doesn't even know who the song is about, so no tweeting at Sue to see if she'll spill the beans, okay? Here's the story. A long time ago, I worked on a project with someone that I didn't know beforehand. Everyone involved worked really hard on it, had their own roles to fill. Mine being more hands off, I wasn't involved in the day to day. And at the end of the project months and months later, this thing that I thought we built together, well, this one person believed that it was all theirs. I thought it was my future and when it was too late to change anything or even discuss it, it felt like my future was being taken away from me. So, I was pissed and probably not writing the nicest emails explaining my point of view, but I was totally surprised by this turn of events and certainly wasn't getting nice emails in response. So, I had that feeling of not knowing if I misinterpreted the entire experience. I was going through every email and text that I could, trying to find proof of, I don't know what, that my feelings were valid. Of course, most important decisions were made over the phone or in person, so there was no evidence I could point to. It was just my word against theirs and I didn't know what to do anymore. I didn't know how to feel.

Coming up in this episode, I speak with friend and mentor Emily May, executive director and co-founder of Hollaback! who helped me deal with this personal conflict at the time. I called her looking for advice and I still reference what she told me today. In our interview, well, it's more like a conversation because she keeps asking me stuff [Shawna laughs] too which I didn't expect. So, you're going to hear two activist pals on a Zoom call. But we talk about getting and giving good advice and how growth can hurt but it's also necessary and how to recover when you're the one that fucked up. So just some good life stuff as well as the advice she gave me at the time. And in case we don't talk about that clearly enough, I want to share what she told me back then. She said to think of the best-case scenario, the best possible outcome and write it all down. And then after you're done, consider - okay, but what could you live with because that's what's going to give you the space to figure out where you're able to compromise. And that might not sound like much, but it was transformative for me at the time. It basically allowed me to let go, to

stop holding on to something just because I felt that I was right. I ended up deciding the scenario I could live with was dropping this project in order to get this person out of my life. I certainly couldn't keep working with them after discovering these huge fundamental differences and how we view reality. And even though it wasn't my preferred outcome, I was able to recognize that this thing was over, which enabled me to focus on the future and work to build something on my own without the baggage. That's not always going to be the right choice for everyone and I'm certainly not saying, oh, if things get hard, give up. This was a difficult decision and it was best for me at the time.

Interview time!

**Emily May:** Tell me about your podcast.

**Shawna Potter:** Okay, I will. [Shawna and Emily laugh] Hi Emily. Thanks for joining me on my podcast that you don't know what it is about or what we're doing here even probably, right? I just wrangled you into this interview. [Shawna and Emily laugh]

**Emily May:** But I'm happy to be here. I love you. [Shawna and Emily laugh]

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah, this podcast is called But Her Lyrics and it's.... (Hey, it's Shawna. Let's not listen to me explain this podcast for two full minutes. What do you say? Let's skip ahead)

Who are you, Emily?

**Emily May:** Hi, [Emily laughs] my name is Emily May and I'm the co-founder and executive director of Hollaback! living right here in Brooklyn, New York.

**Shawna Potter:** Now, for those that maybe have never heard of me, [Shawna laughs] what is Hollaback! I assume anyone that knows me or my band would know that I'm all about Hollaback! [Emily laughs] But what is Hollaback! all about?

**Emily May:** Yeah, so Hollaback! is a global movement to end harassment in all of its forms. So, on a fundamental level, we believe that people should be able to be whoever they are wherever they are no matter what.

**Shawna Potter:** Do you remember us talking on the phone the first time?

**Emily May:** I do. I absolutely do. When you sent me that email, I was like, when was this conversation? Because it was a minute ago, but I absolutely remember it.

**Shawna Potter:** Well, I talk in interviews a lot. People ask me a lot about my political awakening or my journey into activism and it is always about Hollaback! It is always about finding that first blog and reading story after story after story of street harassment and finding out that I am not alone, that there are people out there experiencing the same things as me and basically giving me permission to feel all my feelings about harassment, to feel okay about feeling frustrated or angry or whatever. And it was so inspiring to get that validation that... I don't know if I saw it somewhere that you all were starting chapters all over or what, but I just remember just reaching out and just telling you like, I got to do this in my town. I got to have Hollaback! in my town. That's how important it was to me. That's how important that validation is to not feel alone in something. And yeah, do you remember anything about that?

**Emily May:** I do because I remember around that time, I had stepped up as executive director, I was thinking about stepping up as executive director, but we had an influx of folks from around the country around the world reaching out having similar conversations with me and I was just like, this is amazing and then I was like, shit, what are we going to do with all these people? [Shawna and Emily laugh] So, at the time, we were just like, great, you want to launch? Great, go for it. [Emily laugh] And then you were like a rock star right out of the gate and have been for what was that? 10 years now? 11 years ago?

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah, I think that might be the surprising thing for anyone listening is 10 years ago, we did not have the same environment, the same thoughts about harassment that we do now, the same awareness and so it really was a big deal to find someone else that had also been harassed that felt the way you feel.

**Emily May:** Don't you feel like you've witnessed a tremendously massive culture on this issue? Do you remember when we started and people were like, "Street what? What? Isn't that just compliments? Are you just being sensitive? You're so emotional." [Emily laughs] You remember that?

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah, literally. Yes, talking to my friends about launching the Baltimore chapter, they're like, well, what are you up to? Oh, well, I'm going to do this thing, you know? Just shooting the shit. And for the most part, the women being like, "Oh, yeah, that's cool. Yeah, tell me more." Or they'd say, "Oh, I was just harassed yesterday. Let me tell you about it." And then some of the men were like, "But is it a big deal? Does it warrant an entire website? Does it matter?" It is really incredible. Yes, so incredible. And yeah, to think that that's where we started about 10 years ago until today, huge difference now but it still happens. But I think the majority of people are at least aware enough that you and I are able to do bystander intervention training. People want to know what to do to help, which is a beautiful thing.

**Emily May:** When we started doing bystander intervention training in 2012 or something, people were like, what are you even talking about? First of all, newsflash, harassment, not a problem. [Shawna laughs] And to the extent to which it occasionally happens, it is not in any way significant, right? We've already addressed harassment. Haven't you heard of Anita Hill [Shawna laughs] move along lady, right? We took care of that. And then they were like, "And bystander intervention, what the hell is that?" We were pulling teeth to train maybe like a few 100 young people a year and now in the past six months, we've trained 25,000 people. It's such a wild shift in landscape and I just remember growing up and looking at the civil rights era and just wishing that I lived in that, it was like the '90s, nothing like that was happening. [Emily and Shawna laugh] And I was like I want to be a part of something like this. And I feel like this past, it's been 15 years that I've been doing Hollaback! now I feel like I've witnessed the most profound and unthinkable shift. And now we're at a point where we get to talk about the ways in which it impacts people differently, we get to talk about how it disproportionately happens to people of color, to LGBTQ folks because we talked about it then, people were like, whoa, I don't even think it happens. [Emily laughs] Much less do I think it happens to all those folks, right? I mean, it was too much, but it's very validated I think [Emily laughs] 15 years later.

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah. And yeah, I feel very happy that people are receptive to our messages and our guidance, like hey, thanks for acknowledging this happens and not only that, you can do something about it and it's actually not that hard. It's not a big scary thing. And I love that people are really wanting to take ownership of that and maybe in part because they know that no one else will, [Shawna laughs] that people in power are not helping [Shawna laughs] in keeping everyone safe and so it really is on every community member to do it ourselves.

**Emily May:** Yeah. I mean, even back in the day when we would talk about it, if people would venture so far as to acknowledge that it wasn't okay, then they were like, well, should the police be dealing with this? And we're like, could you even just take away every single social justice analysis we have of that of that like the police state and the criminal and justice system and all of that. Just logistically, [Shawna laughs] can you imagine walking into the police station [Shawna and Emily laugh] being like, excuse me, this strange man that was like eight blocks away and has now totally disappeared just told me that he wants to rape me. [Emily laughs] They would be like, "Huh, so what?" [Shawna laughs]

**Shawna Potter:** Or, or, they'd be like "Well, you know what, ma'am? I would too. [Shawna laughs] That's what you would get. Hello!"

**Emily May:** Well, that dress is very nice.

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah, well, who wouldn't feel that way? Thank you, bye.

**Emily May:** Well you are, you know, voting on the Democratic ticket. [Shawna and Emily laugh]

**Shawna Potter:** So, we've had another conversation that's been really important to me that helped influence this song that we're talking about in this episode, Big Words. And I know I threw you off. When I asked to interview you, you're like, "I don't know what the fuck conversation you're talking about." [Shawna and Emily laugh] Since scheduling this interview and now, did any memories of that conversation pop up? I can definitely describe it if you like.

**Emily May:** Yeah. No, I mean, you had called and were distraught and trying to balance this. I think this thing that we're all trying to balance or I try to balance all the time is like, where is the line between wanting the revolution to go down so hard that you're like, give it away, take it, take it, do it, anybody, adopt these ideas and the line between wait a minute, I'm a person, I'm a human and I want you to see me inside of this and inside of this moment and see that I created this and I put my love and blood and sweat and tears in this in a moment that nobody gave a shit about this stuff [Shawna and Emily laugh] before it was cool to do so? So, I'd really love it if you could acknowledge my humanity in here. And it's funny because I used to think of it as almost these two like an either or like a binary, you know? And over time, I've started to think about it like, no, of course, the revolution acknowledges your whole humanity and your contributions inside of it. It is a whole system, but it's hard to carve out those boundaries for yourself when you just want the work to happen so bad.

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah, I remember the advice you gave me. It was just so helpful. And I remember the advice was along the lines of, it was like an exercise. You were telling me to think about my ideal outcome, right? And then think about what outcomes I can live with knowing that that's probably [Shawna laughs] what will be settled upon in the end, you know? And so, it almost seemed at the time, maybe you were passing along this problem-solving method that you maybe got from someone else. Is this something that someone else has helped you with before? Have you used these exercises before? And if so, what exercises have really helped?

**Emily May:** Yeah. So, I have had the benefit, the amazing gift of two mentors in my life, Adria Goodson who is now at the Ford Foundation and LaWanda Thompson who is currently the co-chair of our board. She works at Johnson & Johnson. She's over there getting the cure for COVID-19. And both of them really pushed me and I think helped me to move out of that binary thinking that I was very much in which I've since learned is very much a symptom of White supremacy, by the way. And secondly, to just create

space around these problems. I think when we get stressed, we lock down and we lock in and how can we find space around our problems? How can we find space around ourselves, our lives, our conversations? I think the past five years in particular has been a tremendous transformation for me and my leadership away from that kind of fuck you, if you don't think it's a problem. [Shawna laughs] I'm going to do it anyway kind of activism [Shawna and Emily laugh] that was necessary to get through the beginning to a more spacious, I think a little bit more generous, maybe a little bit more space for myself, space for others in it, position where I now look at harassment not just as a problem of what's wrong, what needs to stop, but also as a failure in our ability to have meaningful relationships with one another and looking at relationship whether it be that low key relationship with the person you see every day on the street corner, or that in depth relationship with your partner, right? The ability to hold those relationships is like the antidote to harassment. I don't think I could see that when we started. I thought the antidote to harassment was just like no more harassment. [Emily laughs] That was our cure. We're just going to stop the harassment. I didn't know what else was going to come. [Emily laughs] Just everybody shut up. [Emily laughs]

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah, that's actually really interesting that idea of like, yeah, it's like to start something big and me starting the Baltimore chapter is like my little version of big, right? But to start something like that, you got to have some fire, you got to have some fuck you attitude. It seems very punk to me to be like this is a fucking problem and I'm going to let everybody know. But that attitude is not sustainable when you want to grow that big thing.

**Emily May:** Yeah. And in my personal transition, Adria and LaWanda were constantly telling me what worked for you to get you here, right, may not work for you to carry you forward. And it was having to like let go because a lot of those traits, those habits, that anger, right, a lot of the ways I had been shaped as a result of my own trauma, all of that were helpful. These habits that I came up with were helpful. They'd gotten me to where I was until they weren't, right? [Shawna laughs] And then I was like, oh, damn it. Yeah, I guess I got to grow. I could do some work.

**Shawna Potter:** How do you deal with interpersonal conflict, like what's your style?

**Emily May:** I took a conflict assessment [Emily laughs] from LaWanda. Again, we take a conflict assessment and my natural God given style is very conflict averse. However, I have bit it multiple times in my life as a result of that style. So, now I have gotten to a point where I spend a lot of time practicing what does it feel like when somebody steps in on like a boundary that I have, like somebody steps past a boundary that I have? What does that feel like? And then second of all, I learned how to do that and that was good. But the thing was it was like people would come in on my boundaries and I just wouldn't sense it until they were so far in that I was like a crazed monster at them, right? And so, I had to learn how to feel it earlier before they were so far in that I was like the crazy attack lady and then I had to learn, okay, now I feel it, how do I gently set that boundary with you instead of like ignoring it, ignoring it, ignoring it, and then you're so far in and then I'm like, I hate you. Die in the hole. [Emily laughs] So, that has been a big learning curve for me that I'm still on. I'm still on, you know? And so, now my process is like really trying to, okay, you're doing something that's not working or you're stepping over my boundaries. How can I come at this problem gently? How can I not stop making all these assumptions about you, about how you secretly hate me, [Shawna laughs] or you're secretly a terrible person, or you're secretly out there voting for Trump, you know? How do I not go down that rabbit hole [Shawna

laughs] and just let it be what it is? Like you stepped a little bit over my boundary, you probably didn't know what it was, right? And send you back where you came from gently.

**Shawna Potter:** I love it. Have you gone to therapy? Is that what's helped you get there? Okay, yeah, probably. [Emily laughs] Same for anyone listening, therapy is the only reason why my partner will still be with me, [Shawna and Emily laugh] is still with me today because we all have stuff to work on.

**Emily May:** Right. And the other thing is cymatics was a big help. And cymatics if you're not familiar with it, it's like how therapy is more like you're thinking about your problems? Cymatics is more about how your problems sit in your body, how your life experiences have shaped the way that you move through the world and your reflexes.

**Shawna Potter:** [Shawna laughs] Is this like Reiki, what is this?

**Emily May:** No, it's similar like you talk, you know? [Emily laughs] It's not just like body work, you're talking. You don't just have somebody releasing your energy, although that sounds nice too. [Shawna and Emily laugh] But it's a little bit more actionable. It's like, how do we figure out how we're moving through the world and then how do we start to practice moving in a different way, if that makes sense? A little more meditation in there, a lot of awareness building into figuring out well, how do I show up in these situations, right?

**Shawna Potter:** I haven't heard of that. I'll look into it because I'm not into like, oh, I see your aura stuff. But I do acknowledge that things are complicated and there's a lot of different ways to heal and come to conclusions that you need to get to and so, however you get there is fine if it works for you.

**Emily May:** I mean, you think about LaWanda, the woman who is the scientist at Johnson & Johnson, who is coming up with a cure for COVID-19, I mean, she's like a legit PhD in science and she was the one who really introduced me to it and taught it to me initially because it's like you look at it like an animal who's been through trauma. They show up in a different way, right? Same thing with humans, you show up, you move, you cower, you fight differently, right, when you've been through stuff and then we've all been through something, right? So, how do you start to see how your life has shaped you and then be intentional about making different choices? I think this is broadly my summary of it. And there are like little physical exercises. You'll ask people to sense like, when do you feel me coming too far into your boundary, right? You give people options like, okay, I want you to step aside. How does that feel in your body to step aside when I'm coming straight at you, right? How does it feel to turn me around, right? Which for me, when somebody is coming straight at me, I turn them around, I push them [Emily and Shawna laugh] the other way. I'm just like it's not enough just for me to send you along your way. I'm like "bye". [Emily laughs] It's like how dare you? Fuck you! [Emily laughs]

**Shawna Potter:** Amazing, amazing. You have to notice that physical manifestation of what you're feeling might make it easier to recognize it and deal with it. That's fantastic. Now, you and I are both white women. I know the answer to this most likely, but has there ever been a time in your activism when you realized you're really fucking up? [Shawna and Emily laugh] Like you were not seeing past your experiences, your privileges. I assume the answer is yes. Yeah. What's your process for moving from that initial defensiveness which I assume is what happens first to acceptance?

**Emily May:** Yeah. I mean, I think my response to the fuck up is like an overarching sense of shame, almost more than like defensiveness, right? It's that shame of caring so much, wanting so hard to get

right, trying so hard to get right from dedicating my life to getting it right [Emily and Shawna laugh] and yet still falling short, right? At the end of the day, [Shawna laughs] I can and have gone as hard as I can on racial justice and still fall short, right? Still at the end of the day, I'm a white woman, right? I'm walking through the world with these particular lanes, these particular privileges. I think that the process around that for me has really been in a broad sense, first of all, understanding myself, the nuances of myself, the nuances of my own bias, taking time to dig in to what are my implicit biases, where are they showing up so that I constantly have them on the radar as I'm navigating the world, right? I'm constantly questioning my decisions when I know that implicit bias could show up as part of it.

And so, because of that, I do I think walk through the world with a little bit of confidence, not that I'm going to get it right but at least that I'm trying as hard as I can [Emily laughs] to get it right. And I also think the other thing that has come to me is that when people tell you that you got it wrong, in many ways, it's a gift because it's an opportunity to apologize, right? It's an opportunity to correct. But it's also a gift because you and I both know people who get all kinds of things, sexist, racist, homophobic wrong all the time and we're making an assessment not to approach them about it because we don't think that they're going to be able to hear us.

So, in some ways, right, when somebody approaches you about it, it's like, oh, I actually think you're going to be able to receive this. Now, it's my job to actually fucking receive it [Emily laughs] and to integrate it into how I show up in the world but ultimately, I think looking at it as not a... I think I believed it to be like a destination earlier on in my career. I would just get to like destination WokeVille and then I'd be like good to go, right, and then I just had to work harder to get to that destination and then I'm done, right? Yeah. And now I'm like, oh, no, no, this is like a process. This is something that I'm going to have to walk through every moment of every day of the rest of my life especially doing this work, aware of my white privilege, aware that I'm probably going to fuck up lots often in ways that are small, hopefully not so often in ways that are big and that I'm just going to have to try my best and keep going, right? Because the worst thing you can do is to give up or to say, oh, I can't do it or it's not worth it or I'm throwing my back out to do this, nobody else is unpacking their white privilege every day of their lives, [Emily laughs] you know?

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah. I think that's a lovely way to look at it that someone is finding you worth taking the time to tell you when you fucked up because I think there's so many folks in all different marginalized communities that just decide oh, that person fucked up? Fuck them. Right? I have thought that about people. I've thought that about men that are sexist where you just go you are not worth my energy. And so, to think that you are worth someone's energy to tell you that you fucked up, I think that's a really great way to spin it in a positive, potentially productive way. Yeah.

**Emily May:** And I think beyond that, inviting people too can help to get more of that level of feedback like inviting people to tell you what was wrong, you know? [Emily laughs] How you could have showed up better or what they were seeing because I mean there's all kinds of studies that when you are experiencing any level of marginalization, you're a lot more sensitive to it because you're seeing those patterns throughout your life. A White guy might not be sensitive to it if somebody scoots away from them or doesn't want to sit next to them on a bus, right? [Emily laughs] But a man of color, a woman of color, right, may be a lot more sensitive to that because that happens a lot, right? You aren't safe, or I don't want to sit next to you, or you smell bad, or whatever the people's assumptions are bringing all of that. And so, you just have to accept that you're not going to be able to see yourself all the time, but that



that's what other people including especially your white [Emily and Shawna laugh] friends can do too, you know? And hopefully, your white people will take on the brunt of that because it is work.

**Shawna Potter:** Yes. And to plug my book to anyone that's listening right now, there is a large section about how to craft a good apology and it includes some tips on how to deal with the fact that you might be having feelings that someone said you fucked up and you need to put those feelings somewhere, but how to process those and how to deal with those without putting them back on the person that you actually caused the harm to. So, all the feelings are valid but you don't have to say I'm trying my best [Shawna laughs] in your apology to someone. So, if you need a tip, you can grab it in my book, Making Spaces Safer.

**Emily May:** Yeah. And I mean, you've been on a big journey too, yeah, for years. [Emily laughs] We've been journeying for years.

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah, I shed a lot of stress when I finally accepted that you never get to the end, that there is no destination. Like you're saying, there's no destination. You never get to the end of unlearning racism. It's just something you're always going to be doing. You're always going to be learning. And once you accept that, then I don't know, it just becomes easier to do. It's not like you're like, but are we there yet, you know? [Shawna laughs] You get rid of that and you just do your best on your way.

**Emily May:** And I think practicing, I mean like anything like learning music or sport, I mean practicing talking about it helps, right? Because when somebody does call you out, you're less awkward, you know? [Emily and Shawna laugh] You're like navigating your way around how to talk about the fact that you fucked up. I think that has been really helpful to me. I was in a like witnessing whiteness weekly white people group and I was very skeptical about joining it. I was like, oh, it's going to be a lot of white whine except not the good kind [Shawna laughs] and it was really lovely actually and provided - nothing that was mind bending or showed me some part of myself I'd never seen before, but just to have two hours a week to focus on what does it mean to be white? What does that mean? And who am I this white person other than just a liability, you know? [Emily and Shawna laugh]

**Shawna Potter:** That's a tough one. You and I both work in the world of gender-based violence, right? And disagreements between colleagues when we're doing this work can seem bigger than a random disagreement with a friend right? The stakes are higher. What have you learned in those charged moments that's helped you get to the other side with someone? And this might touch upon other questions that I asked, but to be able to keep doing the work in a healthy way for everyone, what are the things that have helped?

**Emily May:** It hurts more to get in those conflicts with people who are on your team because you are on the same team, but I think a piece of it is recognizing that conflict can be generative which is helpful, how to make conflict generative is a whole other ball of wax. But I think for me, the big thing is being able to fully and consistently see the humanity in somebody that you are in conflict with. I had this tendency when somebody would hurt me that was part of my shaping from very early on in my development, but just to drop them, right? Just drop them. You're dead to me, you know? [Shawna and Emily laugh] And I'm moving on, right? And there's enough people in the world so you could make it through [Shawna and Emily laugh] for quite some time. But ultimately, it's a challenge to continue to see somebody's humanity. But guess what? That is also I think important when it comes to talking about people who harass other people. We have to be doing the work to continue to see their humanity.

Through that, I was also very quick to want to drop all the harassers off a cliff along with all the people [Shawna and Emily laugh] that I disagreed with. I was like there's enough people without you, bye. [Shawna laughs] And that work feels really important as well. Like, how do we hold the humanity of those folks, too? Because ultimately, what we're asking for, the change that we're trying to make in the world is like, "Hey, can you do me a favor and just hold everyone that you want to harass? Instead hold them in their full humanity?" [Shawna laughs] That's what we're asking for. That's the change. And how do we actually get there when we can't do it, when I can't. You know what I mean? If I can't even do it to people in the space of gender-based violence [Emily laughs] or agree with 99.9% of things. It's my gut instinct which granted, we're all shaped in different ways, right? This is part of my shaping, but my gut instinct, if I'm not doing work to overcome it, is replicating that same harm that happened to me.

That to me has really been key. Now, that's not going to say just because I hold you and your whole full humanity that my whole humanity isn't still going to be really pissed off at you, you know? [Emily laughs] It's not to say that we're just going to smooth over all of my emotions and that I have magically transformed to the Dalai Lama. It is to say that yeah, we both get to be full humans and full humans who disagree and that that's okay. What about you? What do you think?

**Shawna Potter:** Oh, I don't know. [Shawna and Emily laugh] I mean you're right. It's hard. It's hard. It's hard to take a breath and really, you're saying basically just think about their perspective. Why are they coming at you like this, or why do they feel this way, and why is it so different from the way you feel, and can you see it from their perspective? Fuck, I lost it. Damn it. [Shawna laughs] Sorry. Tell me about Oprah. [Shawna laughs]

**Emily May:** I've been listening to Oprah's Soul cast and she talks a lot about this core question and in every interaction it's like; can you see me? Can you hear me, right? That's a core fundamental question that all of us are asking, right? And similarly, Jill Dimond who you know, she's our lead developer from Sassafras Tech collective, she talks about how most conflicts emerges out of people's basic needs on some level not being met, right, which isn't just the other person. Sometimes it's also your basic needs. It's oftentimes also your basic needs not being met. Your sense of safety, your sense of security, your sense of being seen and heard. I think that's the piece that we forget, you know?

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah. So, I think something I found to be very helpful is letting go of that idea that someone is right and someone is wrong, that we both have our own perspectives and experiences that we're bringing to it and if we can see each other and what we're really upset about, then it's actually easier to let go and find that common ground instead of digging your heels in and saying no, but I'm right, I'm right. And also, that idea that someone's basic needs aren't being met. Yeah, that's really hard to think about when you're like I told you to toss [Shawna and Emily laugh] the old coffee grounds and you keep leaving them in there and you're supposed to wash it out when it's like, oh, well, we're just arguing about coffee grounds, right? But the thing is you're not and you never really are. And so, to think about someone's basic need is always feeling like they're not being heard and that's why they keep repeating themselves and that's why I keep getting annoyed at them repeating themselves and I think they think I'm an idiot because they won't stop telling me about the fucking coffee grounds and it's like, well, they actually feel like you haven't heard a word they said and that's why they keep repeating it and they don't even know they're doing it.

So yes, basically, bottom line, the answer is always therapy. And there's a lot of [Shawna laughs] cheaper, inexpensive options out there. If you haven't done it yet, people, I highly recommend it because we are

not taught these healthy communication skills in school and we can't expect our parents to have had the time or wherewithal to do it for us to teach us and I honestly think that this relates to the work that we do teaching people consent and boundaries and bystander intervention and being able to speak up for yourself or on behalf of someone else, I feel like that's all just a part of healthy communication and so many bad things wouldn't happen. So much harm would be avoided if we learned early on how to communicate with each other in a healthy way.

Well, let's end it there. I'm right. I think that's the best way to end this interview. I'm correct, everyone else is wrong. [Shawna and Emily laugh] The scariest part about doing all these interviews right now that I'm doing is that every episode is going to be after the election and so always to constantly be thinking well, we don't know, but there's still work to do no matter what and oh, God I hope so and let's get wasted now until the fifth like whatever. Everyone's in a weird place right now, I tell you.

**Emily May:** Here, let me put a little vision out there for you. Biden gets elected with minimum kaffuffle. First of all, anoint Anita Hill to do something badass over there in Washington.

**Shawna Potter:** [laughs] This is a fantasy but I love it.

**Emily May:** And second of all, includes harassment as something that can be funded and worked on in the expanded and fully funded version of the Violence Against Women Act.

**Shawna Potter:** Love it. Love it. That's what I'm going to hope for, future pathway. Okay. You heard it here first, people. [Shawna laughs] If this comes true, everyone credit Emily May [Emily laughs] from Hollaback! And if it doesn't, blame Emily May from Hollaback! [Emily laughs]

**Emily May:** If it doesn't, blame yourselves for not voting enough, [Shawna and Emily laughs] not advocating enough, not doing enough bystander intervention. Take accountability.

**Shawna Potter:** That's fine. We can do it. We can do it. Yeah, we all play a part. Emily May, thank you so much for joining me on this interview.

**Emily May:** Thank you, Shawna. It's been a pleasure. It was fun.

[Music]

**Shawna Potter:** All right, Patreon time. Huge shout out to Gaalen, thank you for the birthday present and Zachary, Nick, Melissa, Stephan and Lauren, best patrons ever! We have a question from Recruit Stephan: Who, besides Jim Ward of course, would you like to sing a duet with? So, Jim Ward of the band Sparta and At the Drive-in, he just released a solo record and he asked me to sing one of the songs and we just put out a video. So, if you want to hear that album or see the video, it's all out there and on Patreon, I have some behind the scenes of filming the video. If you're interested in that, join.

So, Stephan asked, "Who, other than Jim, [Shawna laughs] would you like to sing a duet with? And what is the best duet out there in your opinion?" Islands in the Stream comes to mind. That's a solid jam. I once tried to sing in a karaoke with someone and quickly discovered that thing where you realize that you don't actually know the song as well as you think you do or it's not in the right key for your voice, and so it was a disaster so I'm no longer singing that at karaoke but Islands in the Stream is great. And I think it's called Islands in the Stream, right? Not of the stream. I should delete this if that's not true. I also recently rewatched one of my favorite movies of all time Cry-Baby from John Waters, so I'd say the duet of Please, Mr. Jailer is up there. That song is way sexier than it has any right to be and so that's a big

fav. Stop Draggin' My Heart Around, Tom Petty, Stevie Nicks. I'm realizing these are all old songs. [Shawna laughs] Modern music seems to have a lot of features, right? Like, not really duets. Duet kind of implies a back and forth, an equal sharing of the time spent singing. If there's something more recent that you all think I should check out, let me know. I'm clearly living in the past and I need a refresher.

Okay, modern stuff. You know what I'd really like to do? I'd really love to be asked to sing like a pop song or a dance song, a club mix of something out of my comfort zone. I think that'd be so fun. But again, that might not even be a duet thing. But hey, if you make songs, let me know. Maybe Dennis from the Refused. Maybe get on a Refused song, that could be really cool. I just watched that Pink documentary. I think our voices might sound good together. I think we both can sound very rock and roll and it might be really fun to sing. So hey Pink, give me a call. No big deal. But let's check in with the band. Let's see what the band has to say. What about Big Words?

**Jennifer Vito:** I love that. I love that song! I love that guitar riff in that. That's one of my faves and yeah, the lyrics are good too. It's one of the ones I love playing.

**Sue Werner:** What's the next song? Big Words? Yeah, Big Words. Ha-ha, let me listen just for a second. You got to listen to the China symbol. [Sue laughs] That's the thing that sounds like this [imitates symbol] in the drums, okay? [Sue laughs] That's the thing that made me cry during recording [laughs].

**Shawna Potter:** Now everybody knows. [laughs]

**Sue Werner:** [laughs] Just so you know. I love this song. This song had the working title of Night Rider [Shawna laughs] for a really long time and then there came this really amazing bass part that Brooks wrote for me which is the bass part like [hums along]. I love that part so much. I changed it a little bit from how he originally had it, but I really wish I could take credit for that part [Sue and Shawna laugh] because it's so good.

**Shawna Potter:** That's kind of you to give him a shoutout.

**Sue Werner:** Look, I would love to be able to say that I wrote that part. Maybe one day, I'll have written a part that cool, [Sue and Shawna laugh] but I love your vocal melody in this song when you're like [Sue sings]. I remember hearing this at the studio in the control room like a rough mix while we were still tracking and you know that feeling sometimes you get it when you're making an album and you hear something that makes you realize that it's like really coming together? That was that moment for me with this album. I was like, this is fucking good, you know? I think I just like recorded it on my phone, but I didn't share it or anything. I just made a little video [Sue laughs] so I could just go back and check it to be like, yo, it's good. Chill, [Shawna laughs] chill, it's good, you know? [Sue laughs]

**Shawna Potter:** I think that's really nice for us and I've talked about this in a couple interviews before, but the process of songwriting and pre-production for Wonderful Hell felt so much better I think than our last album Capture the Flag. Capture the Flag I think we all felt a bit rushed which was a self-imposed feeling, we did it to ourselves for sure, but there was a time constraint on that and we were just doing our best to get it down on tape, right?

**Sue Werner:** Yeah, that was definitely a record that got recorded part by part because we literally weren't rehearsed enough on the songs to like play them together at that point and it's just because of a confluence of a number of issues regarding scheduling and stuff like that. It is what it is. I think that

record still turned out really good, you know? I feel like there's a feeling of liveness and cohesiveness in the new record that I really love, you know? So, I don't know, I hope that other people get that. [Sue and Shawna laugh] I don't know, whatever, who cares?

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah, I mean, it's the weird thing about making a record. Once it's out there, it's not for you anymore, you know? [Sue laughs]

**Sue Werner:** No, no, no, no, no. I'm going to relitigate how you should listen to this record [Shawna laughs] until sometime in January. I can't remember what the date of the inauguration is. Sorry. [Sue laughs]

**Shawna Potter:** Right, right, right.

**Dave Cavalier:** Big Words is a song that I had this weird idea for a 7/4 drum beat and I played it for Brooks at a soundcheck and then I recorded it for him just on my phone and I told him to write a riff around it, which he did. He wrote a really simple riff, actually. It just goes like [Dave sings] just literally like pulsing. But for whatever reason, that inspired him to write an entire song after that which does not stay with that drum beat at all. [Shawna laughs] It goes off into a bunch of different places, but yeah, that song all stemmed from that. Basically, the first drumbeat that you hear in the song, it all came from that which is cool.

**Shawna Potter:** Do you remember the show or what city it was in or?

**Dave Cavalier:** It was in Canada. It was in Toronto I want to say where we're famous for some reason. They love us in Toronto. [Shawna laughs] What's up with that?

**Shawna Potter:** I don't know, but it's very nice. Thank you.

**Dave Cavalier:** It's really nice. Thank you everyone in Canada. It's the best. [Shawna laughs] Always surprised.

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah, it's always fun to find those little pockets where it seems like everyone in town came to the show and is being really nice and supportive. That always feels really good and then makes up for the towns where everyone's like, fuck you.

**Dave Cavalier:** The towns where you get off stage and they're like "that was actually really good"

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah, it's like yeah, thank you. [Shawna laughs]

**Brooks Harlan:** Big Words, so this song is a real doozy. [Shawna laughs] Yeah, I have a lot to say about Big Words and a lot of it is probably pretty nerdy.

**Shawna Potter:** Let's try it. Let's give one to the nerds. Let's do it.

**Brooks Harlan:** I know you've probably already talked to Dave about this one.

**Shawna Potter:** Yes. Yes, he told the story. You could tell your side of the story and then maybe if there's discrepancies, I can put you guys against each other. [Shawna laughs]

**Brooks Harlan:** I might say I take all the credit. [Shawna laughs] I'm the one that was playing this drum part and Dave was like, show me how to do that and I was like, I don't think you're good enough.

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah, I don't have time to teach you how to play drums. We have to play a show.

**Brooks Harlan:** So, I remember being on tour I think it was the Cave In tour and we were playing Lee's Palace in Toronto and we were at soundcheck and Dave was like, "Hey Brooks, check out this beat. You got to write something to it." And it was this beat that plays at the beginning of the song which is a really cool 7/8 beat and I love odd meters where it... I mean, odd meters are tricky, but the real trick is to get them to be musical and not seem like they're odd meters, you know?

**Shawna Potter:** That you're not just counting to seven [Shawna laughs] every time. Yeah.

**Brooks Harlan:** Yeah. Because you could just go, [Brooks sings] right? But to go, [Brooks sings] you know, that's the basic rhythm there. But he messes around with the syncopation and where the accents are. Anyways, I really liked it and I had in a parallel development come up with an idea for a tonality for a song which is actually the chord that I play at the very beginning of the song before the drums come in and I was messing with that chord and that scale and that feel which has a nice dissonance in it. And so, those two ideas came together and after soundcheck, I wrote the song. And so, I liked the idea of moving from the 7/8 section [Brooks sings] to a 7/4 section. That's the [Brooks sings]. So, in one section, you're missing an eighth note and the next section, you're missing a quarter note. And that riff just came out of the chord that I play at the beginning of the song.

**Shawna Potter:** That part feels like a payoff. Like, okay, here's your rock part. You can rock out to this a bit.

**Brooks Harlan:** Yeah. And I think Dave did a good job because he's playing the snare drum on the downbeat or I think every quarter note, [Brooks sings] so it keeps it driving. Because again, he could have just gone [Brooks sings] [Shawna laughs] and then like "this is 7 4..." [Shawna laughs] Unless you're a real music nerd, I think you just listened to that riff then it feels cool and a little lopsided, but it's actually a really pretty melodic guitar part.

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah, it's lopsided but it doesn't matter. It doesn't feel off-kilter, it feels good.

**Brooks Harlan:** And then finally, when we get to the chorus section or the next part, we go into a four and so that feels really like we've arrived, you know? Basically, the whole song is just centered around that F minor chord, so tonally it's pretty simple. It never changes keys. It's another one where I just messed around with different layering and different ways of voicing the chord and I liked the idea of bookending the song with that 7/8 rhythm. So, it's almost like an opera or something where at the end, you come back to the refrain. It's the same part technically, but Dave changed the tones of the drums for the end, so it's a little less chaotic and a little more driving. I think that was a cool choice.

**Shawna Potter:** So, what does that mean? It's like the same drum beat, but played with different drums at different times?

**Brooks Harlan:** Yeah. So, at the beginning, it's played with individual drums hitting [Brooks sings], right? But when we get to this part, he comes in on just the snare. [Brooks sings] So, it's like marching and it gives it a little more of a focus like direction. So even though it's the same part, yeah, it's less yeah, because there's a cymbal here and a tom here and it's all focused to this snare drum marching thing and it opens up a little bit as it goes on, but I really like the way it comes down and gets focused and you're like, hey, remember this part? And then there's vocals there, so it's cool. This is one of my favorites.

**Shawna Potter:** Do you remember anything about recording it?

**Brooks Harlan:** I remember thinking it was going to be really hard to get it together, but then it wasn't.

**Shawna Potter:** What were you worried about?

**Brooks Harlan:** I think getting the sections to flow into one another because of the meter changes, we're going from a 7/8 part where the eighth note is clicking at 234 and then we go to a 7/4 part for the quarter note is at 148 and then we move to a 4/4 part where the quarter note is 153, so it picks up a little bit and so that's a little unusual for us to change not only meters, but tempos and songs and sometimes that can sound amateurish because a lot of times people don't know how to transition between those and so I was worried about that. But I think because we had been rehearsing it and I think we all liked the song, I think that came out and it just seemed to flow and record much better than I thought it would. I think when it came to vocals I thought we'd have more trouble getting through the vocals because it's a little more melodic, but it wasn't really that hard. [Shawna laughs] I remember being really pleased at how it turned out, you know?

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah, I'm trying to think if I had any struggles with oh, do I yell this or sing this?

**Brooks Harlan:** Yeah, I do remember that kind of going back and retracking some things where maybe you sung it and then we tried shouting it and then we went back and yelled it and just trying to see what actually seemed to fit best.

**Shawna Potter:** Yeah, yeah. And I guess that's the thing I feel lucky enough that I'm able to do all of those things, so I can do what's appropriate versus only being able to do one thing, but sometimes that means that you got to try a few things out to make sure that it hits in the right way. [Shawna laughs] Sometimes there's some extra singing going on, extra screaming just to decide how mad am I in the song? [Shawna laughs] How mad do I want to seem in this one? And you got to find the right spot.

[Music]

**Shawna Potter:** All right, that's it. Keep listening to hear the song Big Words in full. The album Wonderful Hell is available on vinyl from our Bandcamp only right now. It's basically sold out everywhere else, so snag it on Bandcamp where you can also snag it digitally and it's streaming in all the usual places. Thanks to Brooks Harlan for chopping up our song Her? to create the podcast theme song. If you'd like to support this podcast and this band, stop what you're doing right now and share, subscribe, review this podcast. It's free and it does help. Buy War On Women merch from b9store.com, shirtkiller.com and in the UK and in Europe, you can get stuff through Coretex Records and lhpmerch.com. You can buy my book Making Spaces Safer from akpress.org or your local independent bookstore. It's available in Spanish from Orciny Press and I'm currently on the lookout for translations in other languages. So, if you know of a local publisher that can help out in your country, put us in contact. You can also book me for safer space trainings or bystander intervention training. If you need a new overdrive or boost pedal designed and built by Brooks himself, head on over to bigcrunchamprepair.com to see what he's got for you and join my Patreon if you haven't already. Help me keep this podcast going. You can do it by just joining at the seeds level which is only \$1 a month or donate more to help me reach my current goal of 100 patrons! If I meet this goal by the end of this broadcast, I will be able to pay all my guests for appearing, cover all the supplies incurred and yeah, I'm going to buy a couple more dog treats for Rosie. But I think we're on the same page about that being okay, right?

Thank you for listening to me and my friends, the cicadas, who are outside making noise these days you might have heard throughout the episode. Just today, I drove by a woman. This is so weird. She was throwing her own shoe at her car. So, I stopped and I asked, "Are you okay?" Then she said, "No, there's a cicada on my car, so I can't get inside my car." She refused to get anywhere near it. She was so freaked out. So I got out, I shoed it away. I told her, "Hey, they just can't see where they're going. They're not trying to attack you. It's not personal." And she was grateful and the whole ordeal was super funny. I don't know. I just thought that was a good reminder for all of us that just like the cicadas and this woman who's terrified of them that we're all just out here doing our best and that's enough. Hey, you're enough. So, till next time, hang tough or hang tender... Just hang in there.

## **BIG WORDS**

I'm trying to collect my thoughts  
Recognize when I'm at fault  
But lately I've been feeling weak  
And that's not like me, not at all

So I'm a hypocrite or bitch  
I archived all the lies you sent  
I thought we built this to share  
If we're not friends where to begin?

Oh, so you just read a book?  
All those big words really took  
You just throw them in my face  
You're just begging me to look

I practice what to say  
If I ever see your face  
Reminds me of a summer lost  
I forced myself to move on

Could I rebuild this bridge  
Out of embers and ashes  
I'm not that inspired to try  
Since you're the one that lit the fire

Oh, so you just read a book?  
All those big words really took  
You just throw them in my face  
You're just begging me to look



Hurt people hurt people.

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