

JUSTINE: I remember pretty accurately this one memory where one of my friends was like ... I had checked all of the cartoon stations and there wasn't anything good on, so I was like "Nothing's on", and she's like "Well, you didn't even check MTV," and I was like "Why would I do that?"

What, do I want to watch Carson Daly?" Then we kind of got into a fight and I was just so confused. It wasn't that I was felt bad or anything, I was just like "Why would you be so different all of a sudden?" We were friends, we had grown up together and all of a sudden our tastes were different, and I just thought that was so weird.

ADAM: When I was 14 years old, my brother left for college. I wouldn't say I was all that upset over it, either. We shared a room. So finally I had a room of my own. Plus, we didn't quite see eye to eye most of the time.

But my joy wasn't only because I had my own space to be myself or because the petty arguments over the remote control would end. While those things were nice, my favorite part of his departure was, perhaps unintentionally, inheriting his cassette tapes of music, bands like The Smiths and Trashcan Sinatras and REM... but the good REM. You know, before Automatic For the People.

Point is, we each took a drastically different path in life. He grew up to be a lawyer, I spent much of my teens and 20s needing one. But one area of life where my brother had a strong influence on my tastes and passions was music. Even with all our differences, it was there I found a similarity. I'll forever be grateful to him for leaving me those tapes.

Oh, and in case you're wondering, these days our relationship is better than it's been in a long, long time.

My name is Adam Greenfield, and you're listening to The People in My Neighborhood.

JUSTINE: My name is Justine. I live in Sherman Heights, San Diego.

ADAM: Sherman Heights is a neighborhood in San Diego that's in the... hmm. Southeastern part of town?

JUSTIN: Gosh, it's always hard to say. It's really such a small neighborhood. It's just right east of East Village. It's the next thing separated by the Five.

ADAM: That's an interstate, the Five. We Californians like to put a definite article in front of highways.

JUSTINE: If it wasn't for the Five it would just be probably East Village. It's one of the last places in San Diego. There's really no apartments, a lot of old houses, a lot of single-family homes. So, it's very kind of old fashioned honestly. It's like a weird little pocket of San Diego.

ADAM: And if you were to give Justine's job or title a name, whatever you do, don't say entrepreneur.

JUSTINE: Does that just mean somebody who makes money but doesn't have like exactly a job? I really don't even know. Is it somebody who discovers like how to slack off so they can get paid for it? I'm really joking, so don't use this part, but I guess that word is too vague and I wouldn't use it is really the reason why.

ADAM: She did, though, seem to settle on a title eventually. Sorta.

JUSTINE: I guess I would say a Bookseller, but that sounds really weird. It depends who was asking, like how much I really wanted to talk about it. But I guess I would say I owned a bookstore.

ADAM: And the bookstore, Verbatim Books, is one of the more successful bookstores in town. They specialize in used and rare books, and recently added more space for events, classes, and yep, more books. And if you think a bookstore adding more space in today's technological climate is no big deal, let me know if you need some help moving that rock that's blocking your view.

It's no surprise, though, that Justine owns a bookstore. Seems this infatuation with books and the written word has always been a part of who she is.

JUSTINE: I went to the library all the time. Books were just what I did. I don't know. I don't remember really, and until I got into maybe junior high school nobody even noticed that I read a lot, it was just fine. I think a lot of kids read a lot at that age, like it wasn't unusual yet.

ADAM: Yet.

JUSTINE: But as soon as I got into junior high then it started being like people noticed, like "Oh, you're reading all the time". I'm like "I guess". So that was awkward, and I think that actually made me read a lot less when it started being unusual, and I started hiding it a lot, I wouldn't read in public. It was weird. I was a weird kid honestly. I always felt like I was into stuff that was not the right thing, and then I couldn't figure out why and exactly.

ADAM: If you went into Verbatim Books, you'd think Justine's also really into dinosaurs.

JUSTINE: Well, it's funny, that's actually kind of a misconception. In the store we do have a lot of dinosaurs, and I did start that, but I couldn't say that it's because I like dinosaurs especially. I

didn't ever have that phase when I was young of dinosaurs or anything. What I really like about them is really only mostly the variation, interpretation of the style or the look of the dinosaur from different brand to different brand. I love the colors that are used, some of them. So, obviously not scientific. It's just wonderful to me, and a hot pink dinosaur like smiling and just ridiculous.

I go to the toy store all the time and I see new ones all the time, and it does remind me of that pleasure that I get from books too. It's like there's such weird books in the world and it's just really fun to see what people will come up with.

ADAM: And for Justine, seeking out neon dinosaurs and fantastically odd literature was something she could do at any point in her day when growing up.

JUSTINE: I was an only child, so I was not very used to having to compromise my time. If I wanted to do something then I wanted to do it and I wouldn't want to sit around watching ... I remember TRL was very popular and I would not have put up with watching that. I would just not have enjoyed it, so I didn't.

ADAM: I'm... actually a bit jealous of that.

JUSTINE: Yeah, gosh. There's pros and cons, but I think that really looking back, not having to compromise on everything made me really stubborn and probably a real pain in the ass, but also like now it helps me a lot because I don't really worry about what else might be something to do. I feel like I can probably figure out what I want to do and then just do it, and then it's going to be okay. That usually works out.

ADAM: You know, like more than doubling the size of a used bookstore in a downloadable world.

But Justine raises a pretty interesting point, that there's a lot of trial and error when growing up an only child, as opposed to experiencing something second hand and having that sort of buffer.

JUSTINE: I'm sure I wasted a lot of time on trying things I didn't like. I don't know, or I missed a lot of things that I would've loved, and I know. But at the same time, I don't know, it kind of evens out.

ADAM: Ok, so did any of that R & D as an only child have an impact on Justine as an entrepreneur, sorry, a bookstore owner? I mean, it seems to me that trying all those things on her own sharpened her vision of her likes and dislikes, and in turn, allowed her to see what was missing in her own neighborhood and town.

JUSTINE: You can't make something that everybody loves, it's impossible, and honestly that would be so strange if I could do that because I've never been able to do that in any other aspect of my life.

But what I can do is look around me and see what my personal community is asking for, and it's always been there, even when I was a kid, before I could go to bars. In this town all the culture does revolve around bars as you know, and so we were just relegated to Lestat's. We went to Lestat's, I hung out in Lestat's just all the time, because it's the only place that a young person could hang out, and they were 24 hours and there was music and stuff and it was fine.

A lot of the people I met there are the people I know now, are my friends now, are the people who come into my store now. It's a pretty small community here in San Diego, but it's really always been here throughout my existence or experience and I've only seen it get, not necessarily so much stronger, but more ... Yeah, like I guess more people are interested in it. It's never waned, it's only gathered more and more people, and you can see that with Lestat's success, they've expanded to multiple locations because John, the owner of Lestat's, picked up on that before I was even 18, and he's been doing it for years. So the idea that it was like "Oh, people don't need that, they have Starbucks", like "Well, yeah, you can get coffee at Starbucks". Like "Yeah, you can get a book on Amazon. That's really obvious and everybody does that, but you're missing the point very much if you think that way".

ADAM: To Justine, it's all about the experience.

JUSTINE: ... isn't that the only thing there is? Even when you drink the coffee what are you really doing? If you needed caffeine and that's all you wanted just take a caffeine pill, that's the best way. I'm sorry, there's nothing else in a coffee except for the experience of it and especially if you want a good coffee, and there's upping it and like "Oh, what if the coffee has art around it? What if the coffee is served to you by like a nice person who doesn't spit on you? What if the coffee ... and you can sit and hang out?"

You're just like adding benefits there, and it's the same with the store, you're adding cool things, that you don't even need to buy the fucking coffee. This is just what we're here doing and you can come and enjoy it, and people really want to, because that's what I would want to do.

ADAM: Alright, so Justine's seemingly got a good grasp on her passions and tastes. But is there something she can't do, maybe because she doesn't have that particular set of skills or knowledge or capabilities, that she wishes she could do?

JUSTINE: I'm always a very practical person, I'm really logical, like overly so, probably annoyingly so, and I would say that it would be great to just be kind of experienced like the act of making art, or writing, or music, in the way that the people who love to do those things ... Like I've known a lot of my friends are artists and musicians and I love watching them do their stuff, and they obviously enjoy it, but anytime I've tried to do anything like that it's just horribly frustrating and immediately do not care for it. It's just like I'm like "Why am I doing this? This isn't logically sound. It will take me so long to make anything good and I just want to enjoy it".

So, I would love to experience the pleasure that comes from that, but I don't think I'll even be able to really get to that point, and I don't really feel sad about that necessarily, but I do feel like there must be something I'm missing and I'm not quite sure what that is, that creativity. I don't know. It doesn't really come to me, but it's really cool. I enjoy seeing it though.

ADAM: Thanks for listening to The People In My Neighborhood, a podcast series just trying learn about the lives we live with that aren't our own. The music in this episode is by Blue Dot Sessions.

Thanks to Justine and Paul for letting me into their cool 19th century Victorian style home.

JUSTINE: It is a Victorian, but it's what they call High Victorian, so it's not fancy.

ADAM: Well, high or not, I think it's pretty fancy. Thanks for chatting with me.

JUSTINE: Well yeah, it was fun. My pleasure.

ADAM: So until next time, looks like they finally put in a stop sign in that intersection....