

## WE ARE FAMILY - Season 3, Episode 3: Phil Rosenthal

Phil Rosenthal: You find your personality. It's an amalgam of everything around you and all your influences and everything you've experienced filtered through the way you think.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: That's why I tell everybody, you should write. Write things down just for yourself.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: Because you think, "Oh, I have nothing to say, or I have nothing to offer." But you do.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: We're all different. And everybody's point of view is different and everything that's happened to everybody is different.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: So, all we are is everything that's happened to us filtered through the way we think.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Rosenthal: But that's enough to make us individual. Hi there, my name is Phil Rosenthal. And to me, family is everything.

Julia Dennison: Hello, and welcome to *We Are Family*. I'm Julia Dennison. And if we're talking about family and food, I don't think there's a more perfect guest than Phil Rosenthal. He's the award-winning creator, executive producer, writer and host of the Netflix culinary documentary series, *Somebody Feed Phil*, where he takes us all over the world spotlighting amazing eats and the equally amazing people who make them. And if you've seen *Somebody Feed Phil*, I think we're all in agreement that it sets itself apart from other food programs simply because of the- the pure joy, Phil, that I think that you exude in, whenever you're interacting with anybody,

whether it's discovering bagels in Montreal, crawfish in New Orleans, tapas in Madrid or almost an iguana in Wahaca.

Julia Dennison: That was the episode that I just watched almost, not quite. And then this is all without mentioning, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, the long-running hilarious sitcom that Phil created and executive produced for all nine years. You've also got a new podcast, an upcoming book, which we're get into today, amongst the family and food talk. Please welcome to *We Are Family*, Phil Rosenthal. Hi, Phil.

Phil Rosenthal: Hello.

Phil Rosenthal: I'm so lucky to have done those things that you just mentioned, that I continue to get to do them. And now, to get to meet you on this nice podcast.

Julia Dennison: Yay. We're so happy to have you.

Julia Dennison: So, we're recording this in the late afternoon.

Phil Rosenthal: Mm-hmm.

Julia Dennison: Have you thought about what you're having for dinner tonight? Uh, do you plan ahead with your eating?

Phil Rosenthal: Oh, absolutely.

Julia Dennison: Or are you spur of the moment?

Phil Rosenthal: When I wake up in the morning, and sometimes days before, I work backwards from dinner, I know what I'm going to have for dinner. Like, uh, right now I'm in New York, so it's a little bit of a vacation.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: And so, I want to hit all the spots that I love in New York. I'm from New York originally and I want to make sure I get to my favorite places or try the new places that I want to try. And so, if I know, like tonight is going to be somewhat, uh, Chinese, then I'm not having Chinese for lunch. So, I'm working backwards from that.

And then for breakfast, you know, it- it depends. Do I want to go lighter because I'm going to go very heavy later?

Phil Rosenthal: All these things factor in. These are the important choices, Julia.

Julia Dennison: I love that. So, well, is it going to be Chinese food tonight? Any-

Phil Rosenthal: It's going to be a place called ... Have you ever heard of Momofuku?

Julia Dennison: Uh-huh.

Phil Rosenthal: Uh-huh.

Julia Dennison: Just that little place on the corner. Just that, you know-

Phil Rosenthal: That's right. Are you in New York right now?

Julia Dennison: I am, yes.

Phil Rosenthal: Okay.

Phil Rosenthal: So, this is the one that's in the, uh, Time Warner Center.

Julia Dennison: Oh, okay.

Phil Rosenthal: It's in the, it's in the ... On the third floor there. And it's, you know, uh, one of their smaller ones. It's a- one of the noodle bars, but-

Julia Dennison: Oh.

Phil Rosenthal: They have nightly specials and all these beautiful buns that are either filled with uh, pork, or shrimp, or mushrooms, or ... Oh my God, it's delicious.

Julia Dennison: Magic. I love those so much.

Phil Rosenthal: Yeah.

Julia Dennison: I know. I'm over here in Queens

Phil Rosenthal: Yes. Also, speaking of Chinese food, you're in one of the-

Julia Dennison: Right, Flushing.

Phil Rosenthal: Chinese food meccas of the world in Queens.

Julia Dennison: Uh-huh. Yep, very

Phil Rosenthal: And guess what else is from Queens?

Julia Dennison: Oo. That's what we're-

Phil Rosenthal: Me. I was born there.

Julia Dennison: That's a perfect segue. So, where in Queens were you born?

Phil Rosenthal: I was born in Jamaica Hospital.

Julia Dennison: Okay. I live in Sunnyside. The benefit, I feel like-

Julia Dennison: I love raising her in Queens because she gets exposed to so many different foods and cultures. And I feel like you-

Phil Rosenthal: Yeah.

Julia Dennison: See that a lot in *Somebody Feed Phil*. But, what was your upbringing like? I think you've joked before about how growing up was like a lot of bland cooking, but what was your childhood relationship with food?

Phil Rosenthal: I was exposed to nothing.

Julia Dennison: (laughs).

Phil Rosenthal: I was exposed (laughs) to- to my- my family and the friends that I had, uh, in the neighborhood and- and maybe in- in school. And that was it. And- and, uh, we did not have delicious food or- or any kind of diversity in the food. My parents both worked. Neither of them valued or had time for cooking with any kind of, uh, deliciousness attached to it. There was a comedian who once said, "My mother takes the food, puts it through the deflavorizer and then it's ready." The cuisine was by necessity, uh, cheap.

Julia Dennison: Right.

Phil Rosenthal: And- and, you know, I used to joke that in our house meat was a punishment.

Phil Rosenthal: Because it was usually just the toughest, cheapest piece of meat and it was cooked beyond recognition, gray. I didn't know what medium rare was.

Julia Dennison: Right.

Phil Rosenthal: I knew ... I didn't have delicious food or food with any flavor, really. Until I, you know, went to college and I- I think I went out with some kids and I had some pasta with sauce. That's all I could afford.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: But it blew my mind at how delicious it was. I'm like, "What is this?"

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: They were like, "What? It's just pasta and sauce." I said, "No, no, no, what are these like chopped up little white bits in the sauce?" "What do you mean, garlic?" "Yes, garlic."

Phil Rosenthal: I never had garlic.

Julia Dennison: What's this flavor explosion in my mouth right now-

Phil Rosenthal: Yes.

Julia Dennison: That is garlic?

Phil Rosenthal: I never had ... Imagine being 17, 18 years old and living that many years without garlic.

Julia Dennison: Wow. Well, you're making up-

Phil Rosenthal: Yes.

Julia Dennison: For it now.

Phil Rosenthal: I sure am. I sure am.

Julia Dennison: But you had, such a sweet relationship with your parents and I loved seeing that on *Somebody Feed Phil*.

Phil Rosenthal: I mean, they were just the greatest, most supportive, funny, great parents. You know, not everybody's great at everything. I can't cook either, by the way. People say "Hey, you have this food show and you can't cook?" I'm like, yeah. I meet a lot of great chefs around the world. They can't write a sitcom.

Julia Dennison: Right.

Phil Rosenthal: So, we all contribute in our way, right?

Phil Rosenthal: My parents were phenomenal in every other way.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: Just cooking wasn't the strong suit.

Julia Dennison: Right. I think you were making mole in your Wahaca episode and you were like-

Phil Rosenthal: Yep.

Julia Dennison: "Does anybody need somebody to write a sitcom, because that I can do." But-

Phil Rosenthal: That I can do, yes. I stink at this, obviously.

Phil Rosenthal: But maybe if you need some- something, some funny jokes or something maybe.

Julia Dennison: Did comedy or being creative in general come- come naturally and easy to you as a kid? Were you always entertaining your family early on?

Phil Rosenthal: Yes. In- in our house, if we weren't yelling, we were laughing.

Julia Dennison: Okay.

Phil Rosenthal: So, that was just the currency of how we communicated. My father was very, very funny. In fact, I think the first time my mother saw him, he was telling jokes, in a kind of amateur stage thing. He wasn't a professional comedian, but I think ... I- I think he was so funny that he could've if he really, if his heart was in it, you know?

Julia Dennison: Mm.

Phil Rosenthal: But he grew up as a tailor, and that's what his father did and his father before him. But, he- he was truly funny

Phil Rosenthal: This type of humor. And I'm sure he passed this on to me genetically. And- and it's just in the blood.

Julia Dennison: Yeah.

Phil Rosenthal: And I imitated him. And I imitated, you know, the way my mother, uh, spoke. And I imitated the people I saw on TV, which is the way most people get started. You imitate.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: And you're, uh, an amalgam of all the influences around you and then one day, you taste the soup, and it's you.

Julia Dennison: Yeah.

Phil Rosenthal: And that becomes ... You find your personality. It's an amalgam of everything around you and all your influences and everything you've experienced filtered through the way you think.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: That's why I tell everybody, you should write. Write things down just for yourself.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: Because you think, "Oh, I have nothing to say, or I have nothing to offer." But you do.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: We're all different. And everybody's point of view is different and everything that's happened to everybody is different.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: So, all we are is everything that's happened to us filtered through the way we think.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: But that's enough to make us individual.

Julia Dennison: Yes, I love that. It's a little bit Plato's Cave also in some ways. I-

Phil Rosenthal: A little bit.

Julia Dennison: That's, that's a really good way of thinking. I love also on the show how you have your son Ben pay tribute to your dad by-

Phil Rosenthal: He-

Julia Dennison: By telling jokes. And it's like, just that like, I don't know, that like passing along, that, that the torch, in a, in a really fun way.

Phil Rosenthal: I said, "Your grandfather's force is deep within you my son." He's got the funny gene.

Julia Dennison: Your own family, your kids Ben and Louie growing up.

Phil Rosenthal: Yes.

Julia Dennison: And your wife obviously, the wonderful actress Monica Horan. What was your kind of approach to food as your own family?

Phil Rosenthal: Oh, well by the time I had my own family food was very, very important.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: And so it ... they didn't really have a choice. We were gonna eat everything. And we were gonna try everything. I don't care if they liked it, they just had to try it.

Julia Dennison: Mmm.

Phil Rosenthal: Like to me, to me that's what life is, the tasting of everything in life is its own reward. Just like they say, "The journey is its own reward." Right?

Julia Dennison: Right.

Phil Rosenthal: So the tasting is the journey.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: And one of my proudest moments as a father was we took Ben, he was three years old, we took him to our favorite little Chinese restaurant, and we'd get all the things for the table. I look over and little 3-year-old Ben has his hands in the clams and black bean sauce. We weren't watching him, and he's putting it in his mouth. And I look and I see him, I said, "Ben, you like it?" He goes, "I do." I said, "That's my boy." That's my boy, clams and black bean sauce at three.

Julia Dennison: Yeah.

Phil Rosenthal: Very impressive.

Julia Dennison: I love that. And I love how large a feature family is in *Somebody Feed Phil*.

Julia Dennison: I feel like you don't really get that in a lot of food documentaries.

Julia Dennison: Can you talk a little bit about the idea for the show and like did you go into it thinking, "My whole family has to be involved in this in some way?"

Phil Rosenthal: I just thought it was who I am.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: You know? It's naturally part of who I am. Here's how I sold the show. I said, "I'm exactly like Anthony Bourdain if he was afraid of everything."

Phil Rosenthal: So that defined my personality, and, who I am-

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: As a guy. And the other things that come along with that are my parents, and my wife, and my children. My parents, I had put them in a movie. I made a movie called *Exporting Raymond*, it's a documentary. When *Raymond* was over, the Russians called and asked if I would help them turn my sitcom into something called *Everybody Loves Kostya*.

Julia Dennison: Oh my gosh.

Phil Rosenthal: Meaning they were gonna do the Russian version of-

Julia Dennison: Version.

Phil Rosenthal: Our show.

Julia Dennison: Wow.

Phil Rosenthal: And they invited me to come and help. And I said I would on one condition, that I could film the whole process. And I did. But the best part of that movie is, I was at a Russian family's house for dinner and I was talking to the grandparents, and I asked them what they do, and they like to use the computer. I said, "You know how to use the computer?" "Yes." I said, "You know how to, uh, uh, Skype, or, or Zoom, or ... " Skype at the time. Right?

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Rosenthal: They said, "Yes." I said, "This I have to see." Because I came from the world where my parents didn't really know about this stuff, so to see these older Russian people, they knew how to Skype.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: They said, "Who should we call?" I said, "Call my parents."

Phil Rosenthal: And they called my parents (laughs). My parents just happened to be up in New York, and it's the best scene in the movie.

Julia Dennison: Oh my gosh, I gotta see that.

Phil Rosenthal: It's the funniest, greatest thing. Luckily the Russian people spoke English and luckily my parents were awake when they called.

Phil Rosenthal: And they did it and it was hysterical. And when I saw this in the movie theater, and the laughs that it was getting, I never-

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: Forgot this.

Julia Dennison: Mmm.

Phil Rosenthal: So Skyping with my parents in *Somebody Feed Phil*, I was gonna do that for a couple of reasons.

Phil Rosenthal: One, if you come from the world of sitcoms and comedy, you never forget when something got a big laugh and you want that again.

Phil Rosenthal: So they're good. Second, you're doing a show, you want funny characters, right?

Julia Dennison: Yeah.

Phil Rosenthal: You just want ... you look for that.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: You don't want a formula, but you want little touchstones through the show that, you know, people can look forward to.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: And you know, the Skype or Zoom home is the modern day equivalent of the postcard.

Julia Dennison: That's true.

Phil Rosenthal: So it makes sense. If I'm doing a show for you to get you to travel on your family vacation, right?

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: This is gonna be part of it. You're gonna Skype home. "Hey, ma, look where I am. Look what I ate today."

Phil Rosenthal: "Look at this. Look, I turned the computer to show you. I show you the outside, look where I am. Look here, so-, here's what I ate. Look at this."

Phil Rosenthal: Right?

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: And then you check in with them and you get their news from home too.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: That's part of travel.

Julia Dennison: Yes-

Phil Rosenthal: The fun part.

Julia Dennison: I love that. In real time-

Phil Rosenthal: In real time.

Julia Dennison: You don't have to wait for the postcard to arrive.

Phil Rosenthal: That's right.

Julia Dennison: I love that.

Phil Rosenthal: But my parents, you know, they, what's funny is that all the years that they did the show with me, I would say, "Ma, you wanna, you wanna hear what I ate today?" She said, "Not particularly."

Phil Rosenthal: I said, "You understand what the show is, right?"

Julia Dennison: You're like, "It's literally called *Somebody Feed Phil*."

Phil Rosenthal: It's no-, "Do you know what the show is?" By the way, she didn't know the name of the show either.

Julia Dennison: Oh, she just never heard it or, or did she think people were just like throwing around the phrase? "Somebody's gotta feed Phil over here."

Phil Rosenthal: She would just forget. She would just forget. I think we did a promo once for Netflix-

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: And we thought the, the funny part would be them, uh, trying to find the show on Netflix. Like, doing the search.

Julia Dennison: Oh yeah.

Phil Rosenthal: Right? Just trying to figure out how Netflix works. We thought that was gonna be the funny part.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Rosenthal: No, the funny part was they don't know the name of their son's TV show.

Phil Rosenthal: "Who's feeding somebody?"

Phil Rosenthal: "Who's Feeding Phil? Who's uh ... What does Phil want?"

Julia Dennison: "Someone give something to Phil. Phil has a need."

Phil Rosenthal: "Phil will starve if nobody feeds him."

Julia Dennison: "Everyone loves Phil." "Oh my God."

Phil Rosenthal: Yeah, that they're familiar with.

Julia Dennison: Oh my goodness, that's so funny. But it's such a metaphor, I feel like we're always trying to be seen by our parents, right?

Phil Rosenthal: You got it. You got it.

Phil Rosenthal: But you know, I leave it all in because I know it's relatable.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: After doing *Everybody Loves Raymond* for nine years, you start to hit on things almost by accident-

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: That you realize are relatable to the audience, and that turns out to be the most important part. Because if the audience relates to you, that means they're connected to you.

Julia Dennison: Yeah.

Phil Rosenthal: And they're connected to the show, and to the situations. And once you're relatable to them, once they believe you as real people, right?

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: And identify with you. Doesn't matter, they could be from ... I would get letters during *Raymond* from Sri-Lanka that said, "That's my mother."

Phil Rosenthal: Because the more specific you get in your writing and your characterizations, the more specific it turns out, the more universal it becomes. Not the opposite.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: It's not that if you write vaguely and try to appeal to everybody. No.

Julia Dennison: Right.

Phil Rosenthal: We relate to specifics in life.

Julia Dennison: And be vulnerable about it.

Phil Rosenthal: Yes, and even if your specific isn't mine, I'm gonna relate to you just because you have a specific.

Julia Dennison: Right.

Phil Rosenthal: Because I have specifics.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm. Right, right, and you know that they're being, you're being honest with each other, which is that honesty. And I feel like you touch on this in the show also, just that connection that people make over food.

Phil Rosenthal: Yes.

Julia Dennison: I think you sort of say there's sort of a beautiful way of putting it, just that like everybody needs to eat and everyone needs to kind of come around a table.

Phil Rosenthal: It's the great connector. Food is the great connector and then for me laughs are the cement.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm. Right, so food plus laughs.

Phil Rosenthal: Right?

Julia Dennison: That's the chef's kiss.

Phil Rosenthal: You got it. That's it. And so if you and I are meeting for the first time, here we are over Zoom, but wouldn't this be so much better if we were at the table eating something?

Julia Dennison: Can I tell you, my stomach literally just growled? I feel like my stomach's like, "What are you doing?"

Phil Rosenthal: Yes.

Julia Dennison: "Talking to Phil Rosenthal and not eating?"

Phil Rosenthal: Because n- ... And, and I find when I meet someone new, it takes a little bit of the awkwardness away from the new meeting because we're eating.

Julia Dennison: Yes.

Phil Rosenthal: And not only is it-

Phil Rosenthal: Did something that everybody does and can relate to.

Julia Dennison: Right.

Phil Rosenthal: We like it.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm. Totally.

Phil Rosenthal: Listen, we all have to do other things that we don't like.

Phil Rosenthal: You know? The show's not called Somebody Fold Laundry with Phil, that wouldn't be fun.

Julia Dennison: You're making me laugh, 'cause... You can't see it, but off camera I have my big old basket of laundry that needs folding right now, so I could-

Phil Rosenthal: Well you could do that.

Julia Dennison: I could start folding right now and make it Somebody Folds Laundry with Phil.

Phil Rosenthal: You know what, you are not nervous at all, you've done this for a while. But if you were nervous, I would tell you go fold that laundry and talk to me, because it's an activity that you're familiar with and you concentrate on that, and you don't worry about, "Oh, I'm on TV, or I'm on a podcast, or I'm on-"

Julia Dennison: Right.

Phil Rosenthal: "... or I'm meeting something new."

Julia Dennison: That's true.

Julia Dennison: I love that. I'm gonna start folding laundry in, in more life situations. (laughs)

Phil Rosenthal: (laughs)

Julia Dennison: Just hol- hold on, let me go get my laundry. Hold the phone. Um-

Phil Rosenthal: Yes, you got a job interview, you're nervous, bring your laundry!

Julia Dennison: Bring the laundry.

Phil Rosenthal: That's my advice. Yes.

Julia Dennison: So now you have a book coming out this fall, appropriately called-

Phil Rosenthal: I'm excited.

Julia Dennison: *Somebody Feed Phil The Book*. Um-

Phil Rosenthal: *Somebody Feed Phil The Book*.

Julia Dennison: I love it.

Phil Rosenthal: The publisher said, "Th- you left out the comma." I said, "No. No, you left out your sense of humor."

Julia Dennison: I love that.

Julia Dennison: So what, what can we expect from the book?

Phil Rosenthal: The book is a nice companion book.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: It has all the stories that you would want-

Julia Dennison: Hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: Of how we got started, and what we do, and what we look for, and how we make the show, and what the show's about, and all the places. And I have something to say about every place that

we went, my real feelings. So all that, but here's the best part of the book.

Julia Dennison: Yep.

Phil Rosenthal: The most requested of recipes from the first four seasons of the show, there's 60 of them from around the world. I think this is the best cookbook ever-

Julia Dennison: Oh my gosh.

Phil Rosenthal: Because of that. Yes.

Julia Dennison: Oh, wow. It has recipes?

Phil Rosenthal: Oh, it's mostly recipes.

Julia Dennison: Ah, cool. That's awesome.

Phil Rosenthal: With, with photos.

Phil Rosenthal: And if you get the audiobook it's me reading what I can read, all the stories, and then the recipes you get on your computer with the pictures.

Julia Dennison: What? Okay.

Phil Rosenthal: So it's m- it's multimedia.

Julia Dennison: I like that. I've, I wanna try that out.

Phil Rosenthal: I like it too.

Julia Dennison: Yeah-

Phil Rosenthal: Yeah.

Julia Dennison: That's a cool idea. That's really cool. Um, so do you have a particularly memorable meal that you've had with your family? That you think back and think like, "That was just wonderful." I feel like you've had so many meals this... You're like, "The one I'm having tonight."

Phil Rosenthal: There's one that's springing to mind. I wanna say it's, uh, like a 20th anniversary dinner.

Julia Dennison: Mm.

Phil Rosenthal: In Paris.

Julia Dennison: Ooh.

Phil Rosenthal: And the kids were with us and, and it was just magnificent.

Julia Dennison: Oh my God. What did you eat? Do you remember?

Phil Rosenthal: Uh, I think roast chicken was there.

Julia Dennison: Mm, that-

Phil Rosenthal: I think big plates of french fries that only, you know, a Paris bistro can do perfectly.

Julia Dennison: I know. They do, and fr- and roast chicken. They just... The simple stuff they do so perfectly.

Phil Rosenthal: The simple. That's my favorite stuff. I-

Julia Dennison: I know, yes.

Phil Rosenthal: It's the thing... Here's my favorite kind of food.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: The food we know very well from childhood, maybe, even-

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: Elevated to the best of that you ever had.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: That's my favorite food experience.

Julia Dennison: Yes. Like, the best hotdog you've ever had in your life-

Phil Rosenthal: That's right-

Julia Dennison: Kind of a thing.

Phil Rosenthal: You remember that.

Julia Dennison: Yeah.

Phil Rosenthal: I used to have... It then takes a special place in your heart, because-

Julia Dennison: Right.

Phil Rosenthal: You loved it as a kid, or you loved it your whole life, even. And now you're having the best one.

Julia Dennison: Right, and sometimes I feel like the best hotdog could be the best hotdog because you had it at a, at a memorable moment in time. Watching a specific baseball game, seeing the Mets win, whatever. Or it's something really fancy and, like, there's a lot of these kind of, like, I think Korean, hotdogs shops popping up with, like, really elaborate toppings. I feel like-

Phil Rosenthal: Yes.

Julia Dennison: What makes it memorable could be a whole spectrum of things.

Phil Rosenthal: It's really fun, though, right?

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Phil Rosenthal: Uh, you know, sometimes your childhood memories are attached to terrible foods-

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: That you then love also.

Julia Dennison: Right. That's right.

Phil Rosenthal: And taste has nothing to do with it.

Julia Dennison: Right.

Phil Rosenthal: I'm using it as an example, the Dodger Dog.

Julia Dennison: Mm.

Phil Rosenthal: It's a terrible hotdog.

Julia Dennison: Okay.

Phil Rosenthal: It's actually terrible.

Phil Rosenthal: It's the shame of Los Angeles. It's a limp noodle of a hotdog with no snap.

Julia Dennison: Oh.

Phil Rosenthal: It tastes like kind of old bologna.

Julia Dennison: Hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: It's just a terrible, limp, terrible thing, and they'll never, ever change it, because it's so beloved by people because their dad took them to the ball game-

Julia Dennison: Right.

Phil Rosenthal: When they were kids, and that's what they ate.

Julia Dennison: It's nostalgia. Yes.

Phil Rosenthal: Yeah.

Julia Dennison: I love that memories are so kind of in-baked in-

Phil Rosenthal: That's right.

Julia Dennison: What we eat, and so talking a little bit about *Everybody Loves Raymond*, that is-

Phil Rosenthal: Yeah.

Julia Dennison: We are obviously a podcast about family, but that is so much a show about family.

Phil Rosenthal: Of course.

Julia Dennison: It's the whole thing. So what were some important things that you felt like you wanted to depict about family life, when you were making the show, would you say?

Phil Rosenthal: You know, when I was growing up, we had shows like *The Brady Bunch*, right?

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: And that to me was like, "Oh, what an idealized, beautiful family that is." Everyone gets along. They don't fight, and if they fight it's

for a second. And then mom comes in and everybody's sweet. They don't yell, right? They don't, they're just nice. And I thought, "Oh, that's so sweet." It's not my family.

Julia Dennison: Right.

Phil Rosenthal: So I thought, "What if we did a show that was more like my family?"

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: And there have been shows to... As an example, you know, All in the Family was one of the great classic-

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: As politically astute as it was and, and satirical as it was, the reason I think it connected with people wasn't because of the politics so much or the topical humor of the day, it really was you connected to it because the characters were so relatable and were a real family.

Julia Dennison: Mm.

Phil Rosenthal: With yelling and with, you know, arguments and all kinds of things. Then comes, you know, other things like Roseanne, which was the original Roseanne show.. It almost held up a mirror to America.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: That's what a living room really looks like.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: That's how people really are. I remember a season where the teen daughter didn't talk the whole season to them

Phil Rosenthal: Could that be more relatable? I mean-

Julia Dennison: Uh, completely-

Phil Rosenthal: That's real.

Julia Dennison: Completely.

Phil Rosenthal: So all these shows, you know, they influence me. And I just, you know, I based *Everybody Loves Raymond*. Obviously on Ray's family-

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: He really had, you know, twin boys, an older daughter, the family lived close by, the parents, the brother really lived with them. But what I didn't know about the characters of them, I filled in with the characters from my family. And because we were so specific-

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: About the characters and about the situations, 90% of what you saw on that show came from something that happened to me, or to Ray, or to one of the other writers.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: And if you worked for me, I would say, "Go home, get in a fight with your husband, come back in and tell me about it."

Phil Rosenthal: That's how the show worked. And so-

Julia Dennison: That's fantastic.

Phil Rosenthal: Because of that, we had dinner at home every night. We didn't stay late-

Julia Dennison: I was gonna ask you about that.

Phil Rosenthal: Because that's where the stories were coming from. That's where the stories come from.

Julia Dennison: And, okay, so, I'm a kid who grew up in showbiz, my mom's a costume designer, my dad's an actor. My mom worked on *Law & Order*, basically the whole entire run-

Phil Rosenthal: Oh.

Julia Dennison: But-

Phil Rosenthal: Yes.

Julia Dennison: We ate so late. And it would be like we'd be so lucky if she came home.

Phil Rosenthal: Right.

Julia Dennison: So, I know how hard that is in show business-

Phil Rosenthal: Yes.

Julia Dennison: To make sure that everybody's-

Phil Rosenthal: I planned it-

Julia Dennison: Home eating.

Phil Rosenthal: I planned the schedule so we could do it.

Julia Dennison: Obviously it must have felt like the show was better off for that, and there must've been much better, you know, it kind of fosters that feeling of family amongst the cast and crew.

Phil Rosenthal: How can you write about real life if you don't have-

Julia Dennison: And crew.

Phil Rosenthal: How can you write about real life if you don't have one?

Julia Dennison: Yes, that's true.

Phil Rosenthal: Right? So that's ... That was very, very important to me. I worked on many shows before mine where that wasn't a priority, and we were there until 3:00 in the morning. Nobody saw anybody.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: Right? Except the other guys in the room.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: That's no way to live. I didn't wanna live that way.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: So we worked very hard so that we wouldn't have to work.

Julia Dennison: (laughs) I like that. How is the ... How is the craft service tables at uh, *Everybody Loves Raymond*?

Phil Rosenthal: Legendary. Legendary.

Phil Rosenthal: The craft service at Raymond was the best in the business.

Julia Dennison: Okay.

Phil Rosenthal: I made sure of that. Because first of all, you want to pay people a living wage.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: That's a good way of showing that you love them. Second ... And the whole idea is to create a family.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: A family of people that you, personally want to spend time with and because you're gonna see the, a lot of these people.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: So why not, why not be nice?

Julia Dennison: Yeah.

Phil Rosenthal: So, good salary, be nice, and, and what's the other way to show people you care about them? What if you had great food around the set?

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: And in the office? What if there was great food ... Because I worked on shows where there wasn't.

Julia Dennison: No.

Phil Rosenthal: I once worked on a show ... And this was a popular show.

Julia Dennison: Yeah.

Phil Rosenthal: I won't tell you the name. But it was a show you heard of.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Rosenthal: And the memo came around uh, "We noticed some of you are coming into the kitchen in the morning, and putting milk on your cereal."

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: "The cereal is for snacks. The milk is for coffee."

Julia Dennison: Stop.

Phil Rosenthal: "We do not provide breakfast for you, please do not put milk on your cereal."

Julia Dennison: Oh my God!

Phil Rosenthal: And this was a memo, sent to everybody in this office, of a hit show.

Julia Dennison: Oh my God.

Phil Rosenthal: And I look at it like, in disbelief. The way you are now.

Phil Rosenthal: And I thought to myself, then and there, " If I'm ever lucky enough to have my own show, we're gonna have milk on that cereal."

Julia Dennison: Yuh-huh! Like, I'm like, what happens if you, you eat the cereal snack, and then you drink a glass of milk? Like, doesn't that ... (laughs) Is that breaking rules if they come together in your mouth? Oh my God, that's ridiculous.

Phil Rosenthal: It's bananas. There was a show I heard about where if you were, had a title of producer or above ...

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Phil Rosenthal: You could have the name brand sodas.

Julia Dennison: Stop.

Phil Rosenthal: In the fridge. If you were below this title, you got the store brand.

Julia Dennison: Oh my God.

Phil Rosenthal: Knock-off sodas.

Julia Dennison: Oh my God. Oh my God.

Phil Rosenthal: How cheap is that?

Julia Dennison: That's ridiculous! No, at Law & Order, they had a vending machine with like, all free sodas. That basically made my childhood right there.

Phil Rosenthal: That's right.

Phil Rosenthal: By the way, my kids love-

Julia Dennison: I was gonna ask.

Phil Rosenthal: Coming to the set.

Julia Dennison: Yeah.

Phil Rosenthal: Because we were getting, you know, anything they wanted to eat.

Julia Dennison: Yeah, of course. Um, how old are they now? They're young adults now at this point, right?

Phil Rosenthal: They are 27.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: My son, Ben. And my daughter's 24.

Julia Dennison: Got it. So yeah, what kind of parent do you feel like you were to them? Were you and Monica very different on how you would parent?

Phil Rosenthal: You'd have to ask them.

Julia Dennison: That's true.

Phil Rosenthal: I think uh, we tried to be nice and good.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: But you know, you always feel like you're failing.

Julia Dennison: Yeah, that's true.

Phil Rosenthal: Always.

Julia Dennison: That's, that's the conundrum of a parent.

Phil Rosenthal: "Oh my God, he's crying, oh it's like that ..." What was that Pixar movie where the core memory is formed and you can't do anything about it?

Julia Dennison: Oh yeah, is that *Soul*? No.

Phil Rosenthal: What was the-

Julia Dennison: No. Um, yes.

Phil Rosenthal: *Inside Out*. Right?

Julia Dennison: *Inside Out*. Mm-hmm, yup.

Phil Rosenthal: I mean, what a brilliant ...

Julia Dennison: Brilliant.

Phil Rosenthal: Depiction of that, because every parent feels that way.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: "Oh no, we ..." Try as hard as you can, there's gonna be emotional scarring. You just can't do anything about it, they'll have to work it out in therapy later like we did.

Julia Dennison: That's what I say. It's like, our job to give them things to talk about in therapy.

Phil Rosenthal: Yes, yes.

Julia Dennison: They need something to talk about, so that's what we're here for..

Phil Rosenthal: I'm, I'm very sorry. I'm sorry for whatever.

Julia Dennison: Oh.

Phil Rosenthal: We tried.

Julia Dennison: Yeah. Can you tell us a little bit about your new podcast, *Naked Lunch*? It's co hosted with your friend, David Wild, right?

Phil Rosenthal: David Wild and I, yup, we've been friends for 25 years.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: He wrote the first nice review about *Everybody Loves Raymond* in *Rolling Stone* Magazine.

Julia Dennison: Oh, and so then you were like, "You're my new best friend."

Phil Rosenthal: Well, I just called him to thank him. And you know, we just started talking. We just felt like brothers from way back, right?

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: It's just, sometimes you have a connection with people.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: I said, "Let's have lunch." And we've been having lunch ever since. And the great thing is, you know, I have these friends in show business and comedy, and he has friends in show business too, but he has a whole side of himself that knows everybody in music. Everyone.

Julia Dennison: Mm.

Phil Rosenthal: And so, he'd bring some people like that to lunch. And, at the end of every lunch I would always say, "We should have been taping this."

Julia Dennison: Right.

Phil Rosenthal: And so now we are.

Julia Dennison: I love that.

Phil Rosenthal: And it is again, over food. It's over lunch.

Phil Rosenthal: So sometimes you'll hear the chewing, but it's okay.

Julia Dennison: Making those connections over food.

Phil Rosenthal: Yeah.

Julia Dennison: So we always ask everybody what ... You know, it's obviously been a really tough past couple years-

Phil Rosenthal: Yeah.

Julia Dennison: To be families.

Phil Rosenthal: Yeah.

Julia Dennison: And to kinda see each other, and you've been so great about mastering you know, connection through Zoom. What are you kind of like, hopes for your family for the next couple years would you say?

Phil Rosenthal: Oh, that's a great question.

Phil Rosenthal: Uh, I, I think if COVID taught us anything, right?

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: It's how precious every moment with people ... I was gonna say people you love, but it's people in general.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: That, that, that we need each other.

Julia Dennison: Yeah.

Phil Rosenthal: We're interdependent as a species.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: We need that. That was the ... you know, not counting the real tragedies of COVID, where you actually literally lost people ...

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: But you lost the connections to people.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: Zoom is fine, but it doesn't cut it, right?

Julia Dennison: No, I hear ya.

Phil Rosenthal: We know that. Uh, I ... It makes it all sweeter now, doesn't it?

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: My joke was, when, when this is over, when COVID's over, we're gonna be so grateful for life to be returned to us, right? And that gratitude, that feeling, is gonna last two weeks.

Julia Dennison: I feel like that's-

Phil Rosenthal: And then we're gonna take it all for granted again.

Julia Dennison: Sh- ... I think that's true.

Phil Rosenthal: Until the next terrible thing.

Julia Dennison: Oh God.

Phil Rosenthal: I'm saying to you, my message is, don't take it for granted.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: You see what can happen.

Julia Dennison: Yes.

Phil Rosenthal: We have to treasure these moments that we have where we travel.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: Where we eat with our friends. Where we eat with our family. Where we hug our family and our friends.

Julia Dennison: Mm-hmm.

Phil Rosenthal: That's the message. Right? Go out, explore, make friends. That's the key to life.

Julia Dennison: I love that. And now I'm very hungry and I feel like that's the perfect way to end a podcast episode with Phil Rosenthal. Thank you so much for coming on *We Are Family*. This has been so nice to chat.

Phil Rosenthal: Thank you, Julia.

Julia Dennison: And I hope your dinner is delicious tonight.

Phil Rosenthal: Oh, I know it will be.

Julia Dennison: Good, good, good.

Phil Rosenthal: I'm rarely disappointed.

---

Thanks so much for listening. Be sure to follow We Are Family on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you listen so you don't miss an episode.

And we'd love your feedback! If you could rate this podcast and leave us a review, we'd really appreciate it. You can also find us online at [parents.com/wearefamilypodcast](https://parents.com/wearefamilypodcast).

Tune in to all our episodes during this season with Michael Ian Black, Idina Menzel, Phil Rosenthal and Tamera Mowry-Housley. And if you missed any of our previous episodes in Seasons 1 and 2, they're waiting for you right now.

This season of We Are Family is presented by me, Julia Dennison, and produced by Jim Hanke. Editing is by Jason Mack, and thanks also to our production team at Pod People: Rachael King, Matt Sav and Danielle Roth.