

# In A Bite with Charlotte Mei

Season 2 Episode 1 - Sarah Huang Benjamin

Full Transcript

## **Charlotte Mei**

Welcome back to In A Bite!

And I'm thrilled to have you back for season two, because this time we'll be spicing things up a little. In each episode you'll be joining me in a conversation with a special guest. And I'll be speaking to an array of experts in the field of health, food and beyond. Whatever it is, you can trust that each episode will nourish your mind, satisfy your curiosity, and leave you hungry for more.

Our first episode is with a really good friend of mine, whom I'm sure many of you already know. She is a cook, content creator, host, food writer and someone whom I used to watch on TV even before I entered the media industry. Sarah Benjamin is our guest for today and we chat about what it means to be a kitchen hoarder, our relationship with ourselves as recovering perfectionists, and why it's important to cook for oneself. I hope you enjoy this episode.

Hi Sarah. Welcome to In A Bite! I'm so excited to have you on, finally.

## **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Hi Charlotte, I'm so excited to talk to you. I mean, we talk all the time, but this time someone's recording.

## **Charlotte Mei**

I know, I know. Sarah, the first thing I want to talk about, actually, is how we first met. Do you remember that? Because it really left a lasting impression on me.

## **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

I remember actually, very clearly you were at the time you had either finished or you were in the middle of your "Eat List Star" competition, right?

## **Charlotte Mei**

I think I just finished. Yep.

## **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Just finished. And a mutual friend linked us up so we could talk about the industry doing this as a job, which is still quite kind of out there, you know, making food content as a job, I think. Yeah, so we had a really great conversation that day and we've been friends ever since, which is like quite a while back already, right? I think 7 years?

**Charlotte Mei**

I know. Oh that's nuts. I didn't even realise that. But you're absolutely right. I remember wanting to reach out to you and because you've been in this industry for a while and I remember growing up like watching you on TV and being like, my gosh, like someone who sort of looks like me and I can like, resonate with and you know, we have the same interests. And then I was like, you know what? I'm just going to give it a try and see if she wants to, like, meet up and chat with me. And I remember thinking, "Gosh, you're like one of the most generous people ever".

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Thank you!

**Charlotte Mei**

I think for people who give their time... I think time is such a valuable asset. And when people give it to another person, I just it means a lot. So and then we've been friends ever since. And then I remember I also interviewed you on radio in 2018. For Christmas, remember?

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Oh yeah, that's right.

**Charlotte Mei**

So this is not our first rodeo.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

No, no, no, that's true. But this time we are. We are running the show fully, you know?

**Charlotte Mei**

Oh yes. Very different. But yeah, that was really cool as well. Which brings me to my next question. Your handle at that time and your website still is 'Kitchen Hoarder' and I love that name. How did that come about?

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

So actually this entire thing started because I started cooking a little bit more seriously when I was in university and I didn't - I don't know if this is a very Singaporean thing, the same thing as taking photos of our meals before we eat it - but I was like, you know, I'm putting all this work into cooking. I don't want to "waste" it like, quote unquote "waste" it. So I started a food blog to kind of immortalise some of the food I was cooking. And it was, you know, I was like, what should I call it? And at the time, even though I had just kind of started on my cooking journey, I really love buying cookbooks. I have always loved cookbooks since I was a kid. That's actually how I got into cooking. So I was like, oh my gosh, I'm a hoarder of cookbooks. But then I also like kitchen things. So I was like, "Okay, Kitchen Hoarder". That's the only place in my life where I, I guess I'm a hoarder and I don't feel bad about it, you know what I mean?

**Charlotte Mei**

And that's really funny as well. I love my cookbooks and I'm like, I used to have them by my bedside as...

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Me too!

**Charlotte Mei**

...my night-time reading...

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Oh my god, 100%.

**Charlotte Mei**

Right? And I read them like, like storybooks. And I guess that's one way to, I mean, that really goes to show that you enjoy what you do, right? And you really read it. I mean, I'm such a nerd when it comes to cooking as well. And I just yeah, I just like to soak it all in before bed. It's more interesting than any other book, But yeah, that's so funny how we both do that. I'm a sucker for kitchen items as well. Now that you mention it. Yeah, I probably hoard in the kitchen as well.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Yeah, see you're kitchen hoarder too.

**Charlotte Mei**

A healthy form of kitchen hoarding. Bia, of course. I remember when I moved homes, I think my kitchen items took up the most number of boxes, and it was embarrassing.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Me too. I mean, when I was in uni, I bought like a stand mixer because I wanted to bake...

**Charlotte Mei**

Oh wow, that's...

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Yeah, I had a stand mixer, I had a rice cooker, all sorts of things, pots and pans and I ship them back.

**Charlotte Mei**

You invested, girl.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Well, honestly, I thought I was going to stay in the UK but when I came back I was like, okay, everything's coming with me.

**Charlotte Mei**

Yeah. I mean, I grow such a strong attachment to my kitchen appliances. It's crazy. Like even when brands want to send me new things, I'm like, "Well, I already have one and I've been with her for a couple of years. I don't want to replace her."

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

It's true. Sometimes you...I feel like. I mean, I know this might sound crazy to people because we're talking about machines, but you actually develop, you kind of get to know your kitchen appliances, whether it's an oven or a stove. Like you know how to spark the flame in that correct way or you know exactly how much-how many degrees to take off the written temperature on the recipe for your oven, you know, and you kind of get to know these things. So it is actually like building relationships in a way.

**Charlotte Mei**

Yeah. That's so well-put. And I don't know about you, but I get low-key anxiety when I cook in someone else's kitchen because I don't know my way around. I'm way slower.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

For sure. Yes.

**Charlotte Mei**

I had to do this two weeks ago when I was travelling in France. And, you know, I wanted to thank some family friends for hosting us. And I said, okay, you know, I'm going to cook something. Number one, there was no Asian grocer, so I didn't have my usual ingredients. Number two, I did not know the kitchen. And I just kept like I was like, okay, major disclaimer before everyone digs in, like, these are the things that are not going according to plan, etc.. And yeah, it's like you really do build a relationship with your kitchen. It's crazy.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

I totally understand. A few months ago, I went to Australia with my family and we stayed with some of my parents' old friends and their only request was for me to cook them Hokkien Mee because they used to live in Singapore. I've never cooked Hokkien Mee before. I love to eat Hokkien Mee, but you know, it's something we can get, you know, cooked by a professional. So I've never tried, but I was like, okay, I'll do it. I put a lot of preparation and thought into it. I planned which Asian supermarket to hit up in Sydney before we went, because they live in the country, like really in the country. So I went to the Asian supermarket, I bought all the ingredients. I need it from, from the Asian supermarket, from the fishmonger, bought the prawns, everything. I said they have to buy a wok so they went and bought a wok which they even seasoned themselves and everything. So everything was kind of like, wow, I was well prepared. We got there. The wok is massive. It's like a proper, you know, stir-fry wok, but they're stove... It's a four burner stove. You know, a lot of Australians have a full burner. It's right next to the wall. So I could put the wok directly on any one of the burners because the work was huge. So I had to turn on all four burners and put the wok somehow suspended in between all the four burners and let the heat

come from the side and stir-fry like that. So it's really a weird experience cooking in someone else's house. You have to really drop your standards of yourself. You can't be a perfectionist about it, you know?

**Charlotte Mei**

100%. That was like the major lesson. But that's insane how you manage to do that. So how was the Hokkien Mee in the end?

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

I think it was good enough for the countryside of Australia, probably not good enough for our hawker centre in Singapore.

**Charlotte Mei**

But what effort though, and the fact that they actually got a wok for this. They really wanted their Hokkien Mee.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Yeah, they really did.

**Charlotte Mei**

Gosh, insane. Well, props to you for taking up that challenge in the countryside as well, on holiday. And speaking of cooking, what are some of your influences when it comes to your work in the kitchen?

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

So I really like I said, I love cookbooks. I really like absorbing a lot of influences. And so back in university, when I started kind of taking cooking more seriously, I had this little journal which was by my bedside alongside all the cookbooks of the moment, and I would read cookbooks and just like, let my mind kind of wander and think of strange combinations. I even wrote down...sometimes I would dream of food like recipes would come to me in a dream and I would write it down. And they're like, "oh last night I dreamt of salmon combined with burdock" or whatever. And so that was like really good practice just to, to kind of synthesise all the influences. Now, of course, everything just lives on my iPhone and my notes app, so I mean, it's easier that way too. But you know, it is a bit different than writing on paper.

I don't know that I have specific influences, but in terms of very early on, definitely my two biggest influences when I was growing up were probably Jamie Oliver and Nigella Lawson, because I really grew up watching cooking shows. That's all I wanted to watch. And just to, you know, I think up until Jamie Oliver and Nigella Lawson's kind of generation, that era of cooking shows, cooking shows felt very instructional and very kind of inaccessible like chefs or the idea of cooking professionally or cooking for people to learn. It felt like it had to come from a so-called expert or like a top chef or something like that. So especially with Nigella Lawson to see her, you know, she's just a basically a home cook and she just wants to share her stories and her recipes. And I think that was really kind of like a big moment for me growing up, because that was when I really realised that food can just tell stories and they can be very

small stories, moments, you know. And I really like that. But since then I, you know, absorbed a lot. David Chang is huge in terms of his cuisine. Just how he...

**Charlotte Mei**

Love his style.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

...How he kind of ties elements of this cuisine's culture with this one and he finds the similarities. I think that's basically also how I think about food. So that's a very influential kind of thinking.

**Charlotte Mei**

And I don't know about you, but I really enjoy like Asian American or Asian European sort of cooking. And I think that's something that I really resonate with because of, you know, just my personal cultural background as well. And I'm sure you too. And it's so funny that you mention Jamie Oliver and Nigella Lawson and just loving to watch cooking shows because that was the case for me too. But for me, it was sort of forced because my mom just cancelled all, like she cancelled all our cable channels and I only had two local TV shows like Channel 5, Channel 8, and then Travel and Discovery, which I loved. And immediately I was like, I want to be that person on the screen. Although at that time I was super shy and I didn't even think like the media was anywhere in sight. So was it similar for you or did you actually choose out of all the channels out there, even for kids, etc., that you wanted to watch these cooking shows?

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

We actually...we did have... So my dad was never very keen on cartoons, so I didn't really grow up watching cartoons. He would say like it was very infantilising. So I was, I grew up kind of watching documentaries or just films that my parents wanted to watch. So when the cooking channels came on cable, it was like, Wow. And I really don't know... People ask me, how did I get into food. I didn't really grow up in a family that.. we don't really talk about cooking very much. My parents don't really cook. I grew up with my grandmother and my grandma and of course they talked about food, but from a very kind of traditional Chinese perspective. So I don't know what it was, but when I actually suspect it's - I don't know if you agree - but I've always just like the kind of control and I know this about myself. I'm a bit of a control freak. I'm a recovering perfectionist. I'm trying to relax in life. But I think when it comes to cooking, that's something that I'm in control of the outcome. I control the steps. I control what goes in a control, how long I cook something for, and then I can make the outcome what I want. And I think that's such a nice feeling and I honestly think that it's a control thing. Do you think that?

**Charlotte Mei**

You know, before I answer your question, we have so much more in common than I actually thought. Yes, I do think that. I mean, sometimes and I guess this is why I get stressed cooking certain things, because I'm not sure of the outcome and because I'm not sure of it, it stresses me out. But when I know something and I go back to it, there's so much ease because like what you said, you know, you have

control over it. And that's why it's also very important to cook in your kitchen. It's like a familiar environment.

And also similarly to you, I never grew up in a household of cooks like I don't have that beautiful story of, I grew up watching my grandmother cook and I learned her recipes and I always wanted that. I always wanted to be able to tell that story. And so for you, I mean, who were the people preparing your food at home? And did you ever, like, stand next to them in the kitchen to watch them prepare your meals?

### **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

I totally know what you mean. I mean, I think that narrative is really nice, like I learnt from my mother and my grandmother, and it's when I've done interviews, you know, over the past ten years, the question I always get asked is, did you learn cooking from your mom? And I'm like, No, my mom doesn't really cook. And I definitely I mean, there are a lot of moments from my childhood that I link with food. Most days my nanny, our helper. I call her my jie jie. She cooked most of the food, but it was very kind of just functional. I don't know that she was much of a foodie either, you know, but I really tie food moments with kind of festivities. So Chinese New Year, that's the time when we cook specific dishes and my grand aunt would, you know, she would kind of take charge of the menu and stuff like that or Christmas or whatever it is. I tie those kind of big moments with family, with specific foods. And those are really core memories. But I will say actually, I feel very grateful that I didn't grow up in a family that's very intense about food, actually, because I feel that I mean, I know what you mean. It's nice to be able to see that you learnt this from your grandma and all this. And it's a nice feeling, but I feel that I've been given a lot of freedom in my cooking and I don't feel any pressure to produce, you know, like what my mother cooked and I don't have that kind of like stress of my mother over my shoulder. Like, that's not how you do it. You're adding the wrong thing. How come you cook it now? You know, I've never had that. And I think that's actually been very crucial in developing my style of cooking because I like to call myself cooking inauthentic. And it's basically about prioritising flavour over authenticity and how to bring things together that make things taste really, really good. And I don't think I would have come to this if I was feeling that pressure to keep things exactly the same as the generation before and the generation before.

### **Charlotte Mei**

Yeah, I'm totally with you there and I really like the term inauthentic cooking. I grew up that way too, and in fact, I feel a lot of pressure when I'm to do a traditional dish because I don't like that. I always call myself like a little bit... what's the word, not really like the stubborn cook, but like I don't like following a recipe to the T. I always tweak something sort of to also make it mine, right? And also from a nutritionist's point of view, if there's anything that I feel I want to balance out a little bit more, then I kind of like make that change. It doesn't always work out and I've learned many lessons there. But yeah, I really like that term inauthentic cooking as well.

And I mean, both of us, we come from different cultural backgrounds, you know, from both parents. Has that had an influence in your cooking?

### **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

For sure. I mean, I think it actually influenced my life path because I don't know about you, but I grew up... I'm mixed and my dad's British and my mom's Chinese. And I feel like I spent a lot of my childhood figuring out where I fit in or where I belonged because, you know, Singapore in the nineties was not exactly like Singapore now. People were a lot more like they had to kind of make sure they understood where you came from, if they maybe wanted to accept you as Singaporean or accept you as Chinese, Hokkien, whatever. So I think for me food was a very useful tool to understand kind of my heritage. And I use it a lot in kind of just cooking, eating, gaining that knowledge. It made me feel like I had a stake in those cultures. And I think so I actually ended up studying sociology at university and I think food has a huge part to play in that decision because for me, food is of course, food is about being tasty. Food is about, you know, just getting your sustenance. But I think food is also about understanding whether it's understanding yourself, understanding others. You know, when you travel, you eat food from that culture and you kind of gain a little window into that place. And I think food is the easiest, tastiest, most fun way to learn more about the other people that you share this world with. And that's actually why I love it so much. It's not is not about it being excellent or perfect or the best restaurant or all of that. It's actually that understanding, that kind of connection that you can build with other people and yourself.

### **Charlotte Mei**

Yeah, and that's why storytelling is so important when it comes to food. I'm with you. I mean, it can taste like the best dish in the world. But for me, I'm always after, like, the history behind it. Why do you use it? And when I travel, I always say I travel through my stomach because, like, that's really the best way to learn about culture, you know, when it comes to heritage as well, I'm a bit like you sometimes. Sometimes I feel I'm not Singaporean enough. And then when I'm in France, I feel like I'm not French enough. So I'm like, you know, screw it. I'll just create my own sort of like, you know, mix through the food that I cook. And I guess there's also less pressure, right, because people can't really compare it to anything.

### **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

You know, when I was growing up, my, you know, people always like to say like, are you half British? Are you a quarter... Are you a quarter this? Are you have this and all that. And I used to kind of tell my parents and figure out all these fractions. And my dad always used to say to me, you're not half anything. You are, you are British, you are Singaporean, you're Chinese, but these aren't halves or they're not fractions. And I kind of didn't understand when I was growing up because I was like, but it is half like one parent is like this, it is half. And only when I went to uni in the UK and I encountered... I encountered a situation where some of my British friends, they didn't see me as British. Do you know what I mean? And I think for me it was like, wait, in Singapore they don't see me as Singaporean, and then in Britain they don't see me as British, so what am I? And that was the first time I actually realised, I understand what my father was saying. It's not about, I kind of think of it as it's not like a cake where you slice like half, it's not like a pie chart where it's half is this and half is that. I kind of think of it as a layer cake. So you have a whole, you have a whole Singapore cake, then you put another layer in it, you have a whole British cake and they're all the same size. And actually that makes a lot of sense to me to think of it that way.



**Charlotte Mei**

Gosh, you're coming through with all these analogies. I love it. We are a layered cake.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Yes, we are the wedding cake, you know.

**Charlotte Mei**

Yeah, we're whole cakes put together. Oh that's so rich. I love it. I love it.

And how would you describe your relationship with food?

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

I think honestly I think it can be quite complicated because I love food and I've made food basically most of my life, which I'm very happy about. And I still approach food with the same curiosity and excitement even after working in the industry for ten years. But I will say that there I think I've had to learn along the way how to have a healthy relationship with food because I grew up... I was a teenager in the early 2000s. I mean, if anybody is kind of on TikTok or Instagram these days, you'll see nowadays people are pulling up all these magazine covers from the early 2000s and, you know, horrible things like, "competition of the summer bodies" and they circle out the thighs of these celebrities. And the young people today are like, wow, can't believe that this was happening just, you know, 20 years ago. That was the environment I became a teenager in. And my friends and I, we were very, you know, teenagers. You're very plugged in. There was the age of like MTV, reality TV. You're very plugged into all these celebrities, the culture. And I think that a lot of people my age, a lot of women my age, they have the same kind of influence in their brains, which is that there's always this pressure to like be thin. And being a teenager in that period, I picked up a lot of like unhealthy eating habits.

I went on my first diet when I was 14. And basically since then, I... It took me a long time to just say... because otherwise I was either on a diet or not on a diet. There's only two, you know. And I think that that was really damaging, even though I love food. And it's really ironic because I think people see the way I cook, the joy that I put into my food. And I think maybe up until a few years ago, I think there was still, in my mind, a division between the joy I put into the food that I cook for other people or that I cooked for public consumption versus the regiment or the discipline that I have to put into my own food, because I guess I didn't think that I deserved to eat like that. I don't know. I don't know what it was, but yeah, it was very, it took a while, but I think now I'm at a much better... I have a much better relationship with food and actually I have to say that having these conversations with you about your, you know, your principles in nutrition, they really helped me to like crystallise a lot of the kind of thoughts that I was already having. Like, I like what you say about instead of subtracting, you add and I really feel that... So I'm not saying that by having a good relationship with food means eat whatever, but instead of thinking of it as I cannot eat carbs, whatever it was that I was depriving myself of... Instead of it, I think of it like, okay, my body has...is my friend. My body is my friend! And I like, I love my friend. And what would I want someone that I really love to eat, you know? So I try to think of it that way.

**Charlotte Mei**

Well, I'm really glad that those principles have helped. And you brought up such a good point, which is to see yourself as a friend. That is something that I learned this year from a therapist, and it has been the most helpful thing. She said, "Speak to yourself the way you would speak to a friend or like a younger sibling." And that's I mean, it sounds so simple, but it really, really changed the way I spoke to myself. And I felt like that sort of pause to ask myself, look, what would you tell your younger sister that has really transformed the way that I speak to myself. And it's so interesting what you said about cooking for others versus cooking for yourself. I face that. I feel that till today, in many various aspects. I'm lazier with the food that I prepare for myself in terms of flavouring and making sure that it tastes good. It's when I cook for myself, it's a lot more functional. And whereas when I cook for other people, so much effort goes into it, I will actually go the extra mile. And it's so interesting. I've never really thought about that before. And whether it actually is telling of anything about my relationship with food.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

That's why I feel like it's very important for people to cook for themselves. I know a lot of people who actually are quite good at cooking and enjoy cooking or even baking, but they would only do it if it was for a reason. And the reason is usually people are coming over or you're going to cook for friends or whatever it is. But why can't the reason just be you? You know, why can't the reason for cooking just be that you want to eat something specific and you know that you can make it? And I feel like having that connection with food, it should be for everyone because it is a form of self-love. It's a form of caring for yourself, you know, instead of whatever, I'm hungry. Okay, I have 5 minutes. Think about it. Fine. Whatever, instant noodles. I'm not knocking the noodles, by the way, because I kind of notoriously love instant noodles, but I guess I don't feel like any food should just be whatever. If you're going to eat instant noodles, eat them intentionally because you really want to eat that, make it the best bowl of instant noodles that you can make versus damn, I don't have time. Whatever, you know. Don't treat yourself as "whatever".

**Charlotte Mei**

Yeah, I'm totally with you there. And going back to this whole conversation about diets, what was the turning point for you?

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Actually, I'm not really sure, but I think part of it was also kind of starting to change my inner monologue. I think I have been a very... I've always been very hard on myself since I was very young. Like I said, I'm a recovering perfectionist. I was almost quite proud of the fact that I was a perfectionist, I think. And I made that into a part of my identity. That's just who I am, right? And when I fail or when I fall short of the expectations I set for myself, then I deserve to be punished. You know, I deserve to talk to myself really badly or tell myself I am stupid or whatever. And I think it just got to a point where I really felt shitty, you know, for lack of a better word. And I think I just felt like it had to change. And I read a lot. I also, you know, I spoke to a therapist about how to kind of combat this and all those, same thing, like talk to yourself like a friend. That was a huge turning point for me because I think I'm a pretty good friend and I'm very... I love my friends a lot and I really care about them deeply. And to have someone

say, "Would you say the things you say to yourself, to a friend?" It was kind of like, I don't know. Like you said, it's so simple, but it's kind of revolutionary because you're like, wait, I would never say this to another person. Why do I say it to myself? And I think starting from that point, everything just kind of changed, including how I see food, you know, and it's how I see myself as well. I think that makes a very big difference.

### **Charlotte Mei**

Yeah, that hits hard. Like it's crazy how we have this filter through which we see ourselves and we don't do the same for our friends and our loved ones. And Sarah, you are one of the most empathetic people I know. You're one of the kindest, most generous friends. So, yes, I'm with you on that one.

To speak to yourself the way you would to your friends.

### **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Thank you. And I also, it's like almost like when I hear about other people speaking to themselves like that, I'm like, you don't even want that for your friends, you know? You don't even want them to speak to themselves like that. Yeah. So it is... I mean, life is really short, as everyone says. Life is short. And why would I want to spend my days just berating myself or feeling not good enough, you know? So I think that made a very big difference.

### **Charlotte Mei**

Yeah, that's good. Well, as you say, we are recovering perfectionists, recovering X-Y-Z. And the most important thing is that we're working on it and we're so aware of this. And this actually forms a lot of the conversations that you and I have with each other, doesn't it?

### **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Yeah, yeah, I think it is really interesting that we both are very attracted to food as well because I actually, I think cooking is a very good way to get over perfectionism. Although you can control, like I said, it's very appealing for control freaks because you can control the outcome, you can control the input. But in the end there are always going to be variables. You know, that day this potato could be more watery or, you know, or the temperature could be more humid or more hot. And then that changes the way a bread rises. There's always variables. And I think like learning to roll with the punches comes very easily in cooking. And I think that's super good practice for anybody who feels like they have to make their lives very disciplined and everything. So I really encourage everyone to just cook and if it fails or it sucks, never mind, just keep doing it, you know, and I think that's very good practice.

### **Charlotte Mei**

Yeah, I'm with you there. And it's funny, you know, like I mentioned earlier, you know, I do enjoy the sort of control that I have in the kitchen. But now that I think about it, cooking is one of the few areas where I'm not so much of a perfectionist, especially when it comes to presentation. I'm like, I'm a little bit like chapalang when it comes to like presenting my dishes. And I think it's also because I know I'm not great at it. So I'm like, heck it, whatever. It's almost as though I'm so scared to put in the effort because I'm so scared of the outcome that I don't do it at all. So that's something that I'm trying to train myself to do, to

just try because again, perfectionism, right? If I know that I'm not going to be good at it, I'm just frightened to try.

### **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Yes, exactly. And I, I think it was really, you know, as I got older when I read up on perfectionism and how it actually holds you back, that was really eye opening because in my mind, all perfectionism is good because it pushes you to be the best that you can be. But when I realise when I look back on myself how many things that I not try because I wasn't sure if I would be good at it. And how many opportunities could that have led me to miss out on? You know, there are things in my life that I always, you know, I always, since I was very young, I always wanted to surf. To this day, I still have not gone surfing because in my mind, I'm like, I could be really bad at it. You know, I could be horrible at it. I could hurt myself, whatever. But actually, why not just try. And I think that is kind of her. It's kind of a hill for a perfectionist to climb. But being bad at things doesn't mean you can enjoy them. And I think that was a very, very big moment for me to realise that you don't have to be good at every single thing in your life, you know.

### **Charlotte Mei**

What a revelation for us. Sometimes I still forget that I don't have to be good at everything. And sometimes perfectionism can be so paralysing. It's like me starting this podcast. The idea has been in my head for two, three years. I only finally started it last year and I was so hard on myself. And that's why when I said all this going on a little like seasonal break, the break was about a year. This is the first time that I'm recording since. So I think for us, having an external counsel of supportive friends is so important because the council in our head will push us in the total opposite direction.

### **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Yeah, yeah. Actually, I don't know. This is something I like to do. I like to watch things or interact with things that are not that good. I know it sounds crazy, but sometimes when I come across something that maybe doesn't meet my usual standards, I'm like, okay, I'll actually sit down and watch it, or I'll sit down and like, like I will indulge in mediocrity because it actually is a really great reminder to me that, look, someone did this like, you know, it doesn't matter. Like just do it. And like, I don't know, it takes the pressure off me. Sometimes I feel like if you only consume things that you think are amazing and excellent, like the pressure is very heavy because you are measuring yourself up against these people who are professionals or have done it for years and years. You know, sometimes you need to watch people at the start of their journey to remember it's okay to be like, not great at stuff.

### **Charlotte Mei**

Yeah, no, you're completely right. That really made me laugh. To indulge in mediocrity. But you're right. I mean, if you constantly watch great things, you're going to set the bar really high for yourself. And a lot of the time - we've also spoken about this - sometimes we scroll on Instagram and then we see these reels are performing exceptionally well and we're like, but that's all that they did, or that's the quality of the work. And it just, it blows my mind. And that's where I remind myself. Charlotte, you don't have to be where you think you should be.

### **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

It was actually a very big kind of moment for me because I, like you, I started off in TV, so my first kind of experience of sharing recipes came with a whole crew, like a big crew, producers, directors, script writers. Although the recipes are my own, like, there's always someone watching out for you, like, "Hey, smile more." You know, this part wasn't clear. Can you make it clear, all that... But I think that when I transitioned, I think it was actually mainly over COVID when lockdown first happened. And I found myself alone at home like, okay, what do I do now? And I think it was really hard for me to make the switch to just filming myself and just kind of accepting the quality, because obviously I'm not going to be a... I'm never going to be a professional cinematographer quality. I can't do the recipe, do the hosting, do the whatever, the writing, plus the make the... I know there are people out there who can. But I don't think I can. And I feel like for me realising that people still like seeing that was a very kind of a big moment for me because I was like actually, what are people getting out of this? They're actually getting that story, that recipe. They're enjoying what I have to say. They're enjoying watching me cook. They're going to try this at home or they've tried it at home. They like the recipe. And actually I realise it's not about the bells and whistles, it's not about the presentation, how beautiful the camerawork is necessarily. It's really about content. So realising that really kind of has been a guiding principle because now I'm like, okay, it's more about the content, what can I share with people versus how nice can I make it look?

### **Charlotte Mei**

Yeah, I'm totally with you. Producing during COVID really changed things for me. I mean, it was great because people were more forgiving. They're like, "it's okay, you're filming on your own now. Oh it's okay, don't worry. Oh you're using your iPhone? It's totally fine." And that has sort of set the bar now. And it's funny because especially with Gen-Z, it's almost like the more like rabak, you know, video looks, the more engagement it gets. And so I'm still trying to wrap my head around that, although I totally get it. And, you know, one of the best pieces of advice I got when I was working on the radio, because whenever I spoke to the microphone, it sounded very like presenter-like and I was always trying to make it more conversational. The best piece of advice I got was to put an image of someone or just imagine someone, you know, like your mom or your friend across the microphone and just pretend like you're talking to them. Again, it sounds so simple, but every time when I have my presenter mode on, I just picture a friend's face and as if I'm talking to them. So for example, when I'm like, you know, filming with my iPhone front camera and I'm just like looking at myself, I just sort of like, replace that with someone I know. And it really changes the way that I speak and it's more, it's more approachable, which I think is what people want nowadays. We don't want your Jamie Oliver and Nigella Lawson like presenter mode anymore.

### **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Actually, I think that funnily enough, I actually think someone like Jamie Oliver is actually very casual on camera. He's not super like put together, but I don't know whether it's also I think in Asia we want things to be polished. This is my suspicion in Asia, we like things to be really great. We look for excellence, you know, and I think that extends to the entertainment industry. We're not really at that point where people can just be like, yeah, let me just chat. You know, they want that polished, they want that. So actually I've always wanted to be like I've always, I just talk to people like this because I actually I like making friends. I

like treating people like friends, like what you said. But in my time when I was starting in TV, what I felt that people really wanted was that very polished, very high energy, you know, very kind of like girl next door. Let me tell you about this thing. And when I transitioned into doing my own content, it took me a while to kick. But once I kick that habit, it was so liberating because now I feel like I can just talk about what I want. And it's actually such a nice feeling to feel that I can connect with people on a level that I really think is important versus just let me show you how good of a host I am, does that make sense?

### **Charlotte Mei**

Yeah. Yeah, for sure. You know, like you mentioned earlier, we both started on TV and on TV, I mean, surprise, surprise, there is a script. Sure, you can go off script and, you know, sort of improv once in a while. But when I first started creating my own content because I started out with a script, I always felt that I needed one as well. But like what you said is so liberating when you can just roll off the cuff and talk about what comes to mind and be your own, not only host but also producer. And it was that like producer hat that I really enjoyed wearing because again, control, but probably in a good way, right? And in a better way because you can decide what you want to talk about.

### **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

And I find that when I'm filming on my own, I actually sometimes when I start filming, I'm like, actually I don't really know what I want to see today, so I'll just kind of roll and then I'll see what comes to mind and okay, maybe this stops and starts, but I actually get to figure it out as I go. So I'm like, okay, I kind of like what I said, here, let me start again and say it a little bit more smoothly. That's not a luxury you have when there's like ten people waiting on you to get the take, you know, on a set. So actually I feel that I'm getting to know myself more and like I'm giving my voice kind of more space, more space to take up.

### **Charlotte Mei**

Yeah for sure. So, you know, talking about these videos that we create and I'm sure a lot of people are very curious as to what it looks like behind the scenes. How long does it take for you to create one recipe reel, for example, for a simple dish?

### **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

I'm quite fast cause I don't know, I've been doing it a long time, so I can usually film reel in, like, maybe like 40 minutes or something like that. 40 minutes to an hour, depending how much talking there is to the camera. And then if I really sit down with no distractions, it takes me maybe a couple hours to edit or less. Depends. It really depends how what I want from it. If it's a very casual thing like that can happen really quickly. But if I have a specific idea going into it, like I know I wanted to start with this and that and like I do kind of not, I don't write a script, I kind of make a list. Then that will take longer just to get like the beats.

### **Charlotte Mei**

Your key points.

### **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Yeah, but for YouTube it takes way, way, way longer. It can take days to edit.

**Charlotte Mei**

Because of like the long form content.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Yeah.

**Charlotte Mei**

And I'm just like picturing you in your kitchen right now, especially after everything that was spoken about. Have you seen that video of I think like people have done several remakes of it, but where you're in the kitchen and every couple of seconds you're like rinsing your fingers.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Yes, haha!

**Charlotte Mei**

Are you that person?

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Yeah, 100%. I don't know that I'm extremely a clean freak. And I wash my hands with soap. If I've done anything that's like, contaminate-y. So, yeah, my hands are very dry. Every time I've gone for a manicure, they're like, "Wow, your skin very dry. Why ah?" You know, because I wash my hands, like, 20, 30 times a day, you know.

**Charlotte Mei**

I'm with you. Oh my gosh, I'm so glad I'm not alone. When I used to live with my brother and when he so kindly decided to cook for me, he, like we had... we made this pact. We're like, I have to be out of the kitchen. If not, both of us are just going to end up really stressed because everything's all over the place. I don't even want to think which cutting board was used for what? Or like, I'll see water all over the place.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Yes! Oh my God, I hate... So my mom is like that. Like when she cooks. I don't know why the kitchen is so wet. Like everywhere is wet. I'll just be going around with a towel like "you see how much water is here! Can you wipe this? Why is it so wet? Do you know tha water carries bacteria." Like so annoying. Sometimes I'm just like, just close your eyes, you know?

**Charlotte Mei**

100%. I know I can have a whole frickin episode talking about bacteria. I feel like my eyes can see bacteria sometimes, and it's ridiculous. This sounds completely insane.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

No, it's true.

**Charlotte Mei**

And it's so amazing how you can do a reel in 40 minutes because what really stops me is every drop that I wipe... when egg white drops on the table, like the whole world ends until I clean it off kind of thing. That's what takes me ages.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

I'm not that bad. So anything that's like vegetable based... eggs are okay for the most part. But like, when it comes to meat, then I get very... any raw meat or anything like that. I'm very, very careful and clean. But as long as I know something, it's not like, likely to have a lot of bacteria. I'm okay.

**Charlotte Mei**

Okay. Okay. Yeah. Yeah. You're a lot better. You know, eggs and me. Like, there's just this thing also because you're so thick and gooey, and the minute they set, it's so hard to clean it. Okay. Anyway, this show is not talking about food safety. So we're all going to move on.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

You should do a cleanliness show. "How do you clean?"

**Charlotte Mei**

Haha. Okay, so moving on to this next part. And kind of also touching on what we spoke about earlier. You know, you and I have spoken about mental wellness quite a number of times. What are some of your strategies to maintain your mental health or cope with stressful situations?

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

I think what we spoke about is a really big one. Just going easier on yourself, being kind to yourself, if that is your kind of leading principle in life in all areas, I think that can only do good. You know, that doesn't mean just letting yourself off the hook, you know, never having consequences for anything. Of course, own up to the things that you do wrong or or take responsibility for the things that you want to make happen, but just be kind to yourself about it, you know? And don't expect... if you are like us and have a kind of... you maybe don't have the kindest inner monologue, don't expect it to change overnight. Sometimes I feel like with a lot of wellness practices, people then use that as a measuring stick for themselves. So they're like, oh my gosh, I didn't speak to myself kindly. I'm so, you know, it's like, don't use that as a stick to beat yourself with. Practise genuine kindness with yourself.

And for me, two things that really, really changed my life, I would say are meditation and journaling. And I will shout about them from the hills until forever. You know, I am kind of almost annoying about it. I'm always like, "Do you journal? Do you meditate?" And I think these are two practices that are very... can be very intimidating for people. But I'm very grateful that we live in an age where there are so many kind of accessible ways to learn about these practices.



For meditation, for example, I tried for years to meditate, you know, kind of just on my own, and it never worked. I'm just like, I have a very busy mind. And again, I'd be like, I suck at meditating, I'm so bad at meditating, I can't meditate. And I hear people saying these things very often. I can't meditate. There's no can or cannot. You are either meditating or you're not, you know, and it's okay to have thoughts come up. And the only reason I learn that these things are okay is because I started meditating with an app and these apps, you know, there's a few of them. I really recommend Headspace for beginners. They actually teach you, they guide you in how to meditate, how to be kind to yourself when thoughts come up, how to practise compassion and all that. And there's so many meditations there. Some of them are 3 minutes, 5 minutes. You can just start literally with like a 3 minute meditation. That was a huge thing for me.

And then journaling, same thing. I think people think journaling is just writing like "Dear Diary, you know, today I blah blah blah" and people like, I don't want to do that and you know, you can do that. Some people love doing that. Sometimes I also just write freely. But there are so many guided journals out there now, you know, that or even gentle prompts, you can buy like a stack of cards and it's just like answering a question. Just imagine someone is asking you this question and you write it down. And sometimes that just creates so much self awareness. Sometimes you don't even know how you're feeling. You're not in touch with your emotions. You feel something's not right. But I don't want to think about it. And actually not processing it is not healthy and you don't have to process it with someone else. Nobody's saying you have to call your friend. You know, these are tools that you can use to kind of go through things on your own and to really process, really feel then let go and move on. And I feel like these two practices are for everyone, really for everyone.

### **Charlotte Mei**

I really like that. And, you know, when it comes to journaling, this reminded me of another good piece of advice that I received. My boyfriend Kirun, told me this once because I, you know, I think a lot sometimes I overthink and especially when it comes to making decisions, I'm just in here. It's just in my head. And I'm thinking that, okay, I'm already weighing out, you know, all these different thoughts, be it the pros and cons, whatever. But the minute you write it down, the whole experience transforms because and I don't even know how to explain this. Is it neuroscience? Is it like the psychology? Whatever the science is behind it... when you write something down, especially when weighing out a decision because you're getting certain things out, like you're clearing the pipe and more thoughts can come through and it helps you make the decision. And so now whenever I make a decision, I have to go pen and paper and write it down or my notes app, whatever it is. But yeah, I've really learned to get out of my head with that one.

### **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

That's really great.

### **Charlotte Mei**

So I guess it's a form of journaling as well, isn't it?

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Definitely, definitely. I mean, basically journaling is whatever you want to make of it, you know, as long as it helps you to clear your mind. But I also will say one thing that I think really helped me and I think can help everyone is gratitude journaling. And it's not anything that's very complex. It's literally in the morning, just write down three things that you're grateful for that day or that moment. And I really feel like when you approach your day with that mindset, it really changes how you get along with your day because it's like a reminder that you have so much to celebrate and it can be the smallest of things. Sometimes in my gratitude journal, like I literally write "I'm so grateful for my mattress. It's so comfortable." It doesn't have to be big, you know? And then I was like, I'm so grateful for the peach I had last night. It was really delicious, you know what I mean? And it doesn't have to be. "I'm grateful for my career." It can be, and sometimes it is, but whatever small thing you're grateful for, it really helps you realise... It helps you focus on the good rather than the bad. That makes a huge difference.

**Charlotte Mei**

Yeah, it's one of my favourite practices, you know, and a lot of the time people say, okay, you pick three things to express gratitude towards. And the crazy thing is after three I can keep going on and on and on and it makes me feel so happy, especially on a bad day because you realise that there are so many other things you can focus your attention on rather than the one negative thing. And so yeah, that's definitely one of the things that I really enjoy doing. And I really actually wanted to ask you about journaling, even before you brought it up, because it's something that you speak quite a lot about on Instagram. From time to time you would share journaling prompts, and I wanted to know what are some of your go to questions when it comes to journaling?

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

I think it is really... like I said, the three things you are grateful for. It's just something you can do every day. Sometimes, I think it really depends what you need. So I think if you're someone who maybe is lacking self-love or you find it hard to kind of talk yourself up and I think everyone should have the ability to talk themselves up, this is really hard for I feel like it's also very tough on women in particular, but just writing down, what do I love about myself, it seems really like, sometimes you have a hard time saying stuff, you know, and when it's that when you start journaling, it can be really difficult and you can even see five things that I think are really great about myself. And I've done journaling workshops with friends and they're like, I can think of five. I'm like, I can think of 50 great things about you, you know, my friend. But you cannot think of five nice things to say about yourself, like, what's up? And I think these are actually muscles, like mental muscles that we have to, you know, practice and work out like loving ourselves, thinking well of ourselves. You know, for daily journaling, it can even be something really small. Like what's one thing I can do today that will make today really good, you know, and it can be something really small. I could take 5 minutes off work at 3 p.m., you know, but writing it down makes you more likely to stick to it. So although of course, you can have these thoughts in your head when you write it down, you're almost kind of making a promise to yourself. And I feel like people are more likely to stick with that.

**Charlotte Mei**

And you mentioned something that reminded me of another practice that I also do, and this relates to the whole bit about, you know, what am I good at? Five reasons or five things I love about myself. Whenever I receive a testimonial, it could be an IG comment or an email. I take a screenshot. I know this sounds so narcissistic, but I take a screenshot and I actually save it in a folder on my phone because on my really down days where I feel like I'm shit that everything or that I suck or my work sucks or like, why am I even doing this? I should go back to it. And I remind myself of, you know, either the great things that I've done or, you know, the things people have said about my work. And it's so empowering at times, especially when you feel that everything is just going wrong.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

I recently heard someone else say the same thing, that we have this little folder of all their successes, and I don't know why, but when I heard that, I was like, wow, It never occurred to me to do that. And it's really interesting because if I get negative feedback, it stays with me for very long, very, very long. And it can really make me feel like I'm not doing well, you know? So yeah, I don't... I've never done anything like that. But I think that would be actually very helpful, you know, if you especially, I think in our careers, you know, because with work I don't know about, I feel like a lot of people, they remember the things that they didn't do perfectly versus the things that they really excelled in. So, yeah, definitely want to start doing that.

**Charlotte Mei**

Yeah. I mean, another practice that sort of similar to that is because sometimes people may say, well you're just glorifying all the good things and you know, you're not really working on yourself is to build a mistake bank. And it's not to, you know, hit yourself with, but to write out all the mistakes that you've done and sort of reflect on them and see what could have been done better or what can you do in the future to try to improve. And I think that's a great way to also just improve the self and to grow.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Also for me, I'm kind of like chronically positive, so I always try to look on the bright side of things and, you know, a lot of people say this and it's true, every so-called mistake or every failure is actually something to be grateful for because it's a learning opportunity. And I really feel that life is about learning. So things that go bad, that don't go the way that you wanted them to. If you can approach them with gratitude first, it actually really softens, you know, softens how you take on the news or take on that negativity because every bad thing has... even even a really awful thing like it can still lead to something. I'm not saying that everything has a silver lining, you know, but what can you learn from that situation or what kind of positive outcome came out later from that situation, you know?

**Charlotte Mei**

Yeah, yeah, for sure. I think reframing is also really important and reminding yourself that the outcome, if it's a negative one, is not your intention and to always remind yourself of the intention. This also reminds me of something my mom used to tell me when I was a kid. I would, you know, do an exam, come home, whatever, whatever the score is. My mom would say, If you've done your best, then I will accept that

because that was your intention to do your best. Unless if you've, you know, just really went well, like, screw this. I'm just going to you know, I'm not going to care about this. I'm not going to study for it, then yeah, you had a negative intention and hence the negative outcome. But so long as there was a positive intention, there's always something that you can learn from it.

And so I want to talk about what's next for you, because I know that you recently took on a course. Could you share with us a little bit more about that?

### **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

I'm actually currently in the very early stages of a master's in psychology and neuroscience, which is kind of really scary still, but it's just something that I, you know, especially in the last few years, I've been really interested in mental health and particularly how to blend mental health with food, because food is still my first love and I think and I have thought for a while that food is an amazing opportunity for a mental health practice. We eat, most of us eat three times a day. How can we turn those three times a day into an opportunity to treat ourselves better and to approach the world in a healthier way? And I think mindful eating is one of those things. But I also think cooking is a great opportunity. You know, we've talked about how cooking can be a really amazing opportunity for you to learn more about yourself, to be more at ease with, you know, perfectionism and stuff. And I have this kind of ambition to blend mental health and food. So I felt that, okay, I need to... I must first be an expert to share with people. So I signed up for this course and yeah, I'll be done in two years-ish, hopefully.

### **Charlotte Mei**

This is so exciting. How have you enjoyed it so far?

### **Sarah Huang Benjamin**

The first module, which I'm still on, is a neuroscience technique module, which is... I'm a social scientist. I did sociology and politics at the university. This is like really, really out of my wheelhouse. You know, yesterday I was writing up an essay plan and I had to look at rodent animal models for brain development. And it was like, Wow. But it is very interesting and it's actually really nice to have a challenge like that because I don't know, but I'm 34. I'll be 35 in a few months, and I feel like sometimes at this age, we kind of settle into like our comfort zones, you know. We're at this point, where we're pretty kind of like far into our careers. Most of my friends are like doing things that they're very good at, very, you know, like advanced in their careers. And at that point, it is actually okay to coast, you know. But I don't know. I think it's really fun to keep giving yourself challenges like this. Like I said, you don't have to be good at everything. And it's nice to... it's really nice to feel like you can learn to be good at something still.

### **Charlotte Mei**

Yeah, well that's for sure. And I'm so proud of you that you took this on. And I echo your sentiments as well. It's so important to constantly learn new things. You know, once we start working, we get so comfortable with what we know and we are afraid to start something new or, you know, pick up a new skill. One of the biggest things I always wanted to learn to do, so for you it was surfing. For me, it was

rollerblading because it scares me... I mean, I'm just, I'm so afraid of falling. And it's interesting because that's what my instructor told me, that most kids, they're great because they would just go, they're not afraid of falling. Technique may not be great. A lot of the adults, they have the technique, though they think that they don't and they're so afraid to fall. And that's what stops them from even going more than a couple of metres. So yeah, it's been quite the journey so far.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Well, not to put you off, but you're speaking to someone who actually broke their ankle skateboarding just a few years ago. Yeah. So I mean...

**Charlotte Mei**

I know. I still think of that. I still think of that, Sarah.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

I mean, I was like how old I was. I was like 32 and I was like, okay, lifelong dream to be a skateboarder. That was something my parents were like, no. They were like, no. And so I was like, okay, a lifelong dream. I'm an adult. I'm going to spend my money on skateboarding lessons. First one went really well. Second one, we went on the ramp. That was it. I was lying on the ramp waiting for the ambulance, and then, so I still haven't been back on a skateboard. But eventually I hope. I don't know. I hope I can find the courage.

**Charlotte Mei**

Yeah, no, but kudos to you for trying. I mean, I'm like, I'm a tin man. I'm a baby giraffe. Like, I'm super prone to, like, you know, twisting, breaking something. So, yeah, it's super scary taking on these sort of things.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

I'm a worst case scenario. I'm the worst case. And you know something? Talking about gratitude. Like even when I broke my ankle and like, whatever it all... like my life was really legit a mess at that moment. You know, I was like in between houses and, like, stuff. And like, even with that, looking back on it, actually, I learned a lot about myself. That was the period that I, you know, confined to immobility. I was really focussed on myself. It was actually in a way I think I'm actually very grateful for it. So yeah, there, there can always be positivity.

**Charlotte Mei**

Yes, I love that. And I remember us having this conversation. You were on crutches. We went for this like upcycling t-shirt workshop. And we were having this exact conversation.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Oh yeah!

**Charlotte Mei**

And talking about dreams just now you mentioned always wanting to write a cookbook. Is this something that's still in the pipeline?

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Yes. And I don't know why I'd do this to myself, but I'm currently planning on three cookbooks. I don't know. And I cannot. I cannot choose which one to focus on first because I have three different ideas for cookbooks. I'm like, oh man, I like. I like all these ideas. And I just simply don't know which one I should work on first. So I was like, Okay, why don't you just, like, work on them concurrently first and then like, you know, kind of like hopefully one will go forward. But yes, I am planning it.

**Charlotte Mei**

This is hilarious. I love it.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

I just really like all the three ideas. But yeah, I think for me, one of the ones I really want to write eventually is on cooking as a mental health practice so that one I will wait until I graduate so people will take me seriously, but for now, the first two, I think I will start on them. We'll see. But I want to really take my time and make them good, you know?

**Charlotte Mei**

Oh, I'm so excited. Well, look, it's now locked in. It's recorded. yeah. This is your accountability mechanism.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Oh yeah. Captured in 4K!

**Charlotte Mei**

I know! I'm looking forward to the trilogy of the Sarah Benjamin cookbooks.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Haha. What about you?

**Charlotte Mei**

Writing cookbooks? I don't know. I've always been asked this question. I find it daunting, so I don't know. But funny story. And this has always been a secret. It's still kind of. It's still a secret. Do you remember Tumblr? The age of Tumblr?

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Mhmm, yes of course.

**Charlotte Mei**

So I used to have a Tumblr account. I still have it, believe it or not.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Amazing! You still have Tumblr? Love it.

**Charlotte Mei**

But it has since day one been a private account. And I started it because I told myself it's my digital cookbook. Every time I have an idea, I go in there and I put it down. Or if I see an inspiration like, you know, a recipe that could be an inspiration, I can put it in there. So that's like my digital running cookbook. The only person that knows about this before I mentioned it here was my brother, and he always told me, No, you have to make it public, blah, blah, blah. And I remember for the longest time I was so scared that Tumblr was actually like not secure and that all of these would leak out at some point. But I don't know, publishing a cookbook. We'll see. We'll see. You got to come up with yours first. Inspire me. And then I'll think about it again.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Oh no, okay. Pressure is on.

**Charlotte Mei**

You've got a lot on your plate. Take it easy. Take it easy. I have one final question for you since we love talking about food. If someone could whip up a dish for you right now, you know, a dish that you really want to have they haven't had in a long time, what would that be?

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Right now? Probably chicken rice. I don't know. I've been craving chicken rice recently. Yes, I've been really craving chicken rice recently. But coincidentally, I'm having chicken rice for dinner, so yay!

**Charlotte Mei**

Oh amazing. I love this forward planning. Okay. Tick, tick. And any favourite chicken rice stalls in Singapore?

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Usually, I just go to Ah Tai at Maxwell, so I think that's like, you know, it's the offshoot Tian Tian, the very very famous chicken rice.

**Charlotte Mei**

Yes.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

But the difference is that Ah Tai gives soup, so that gets my points because I love soup.

**Charlotte Mei**

I love that as well. Yeah, I've got a neighbourhood chicken rice dude, and he's known for his soup and he makes them from scratch. He has two different options. It's crazy. Like soup is usually the side dish, but here it's a star. So I'm definitely with you on that one. Chicken rice with soup.

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Yeah!

**Charlotte Mei**

Yeah well cool. Thank you so much, Sarah!

**Sarah Huang Benjamin**

Thanks, Charlotte!

**Charlotte Mei**

And that's the first episode of season two for you. I hope you enjoyed that. You know, it's always easy to start off something like this with someone you know, someone you are comfortable with, like a friend. I'm really excited for you to see what the next couple of episodes are like. The next topic will be on traditional Chinese medicine, which I know a lot of you are interested in as well.

Now, just wrapping up this conversation with Sarah, you know. I think she comes up with some of the best analogies ever. And I also really like how she says that, you know, cooking is a form of self love. And Sarah, I am truly looking out for those cookbooks of yours. No pressure.

And of course, for all you listeners, if you enjoyed this episode, if you found it useful, please share a link to it on your Instagram stories or on your WhatsApp groups to your friends and family and of course, if you like the show, please rate it so that more people can get to know about it as well. And of course, if you want the show notes, the transcription, you can find all of that on my website, [thecharlottemei.com/podcast](http://thecharlottemei.com/podcast). I'll see you at the next one.