



Simple, with Tsh Oxenreider

Episode 204

thesimpleshow.com

Segment One

Tsh: [00:03](#) This is Simple;.I'm Tsh Oxenreider.

Hey friends! We're continuing our summer series here called My Good List where I've asked a few people I find interesting to chat with me about what four things in their life are making everything better right now, categorized into a thing habit, a work of art, and a philosophy. In this episode I'm chatting with Alia Hagenbach, a friend of mine who writes about mental illness and well, as she says on her Twitter bio, her feelings, which as an Enneagram 4w5 is complicated. She's also written a fantastic book that came out this year called *Glorious Weakness*. It's really so good. It's one of my favorites of the year so far. Let's get right into it. Here's a Alia sharing with us her good list.

[00:53](#) Okay, Alia, I am eager to talk to you about your good list. You are a friend in real life of mine from Central Oregon, so talking to you makes me mentally get back up there. And when this airs, I'll actually be up there. I'll probably be fully indoctrinated into the Pacific Northwest again. I want to hear from you the four things making your life a little sweeter these days. The first one is a thing, which is big or small, anything from like a favorite coffee mug all the way to some beauty product that you love. What is a thing in your life making things better for you?

Alia: [01:29](#) Right now it's flowers. It's peony season. Everything's blooming. This is the perfect time in central Oregon. I'm a big believer in buying flowers all year long. I'm pretty frugal for the most part, but even when I buy flowers, like the Trader Joe bunches and I'll make them myself, but I just love, I feel like it's a huge thing to have beauty and it's my one thing that I definitely invested in and this year is the first year, we've lived here for four years, this is the first year that I think our peony plants will actually bloom.

Tsh: Are peonies native to there?

Alia: No, we planted them here. I don't know. We bought a bunch and have planted them here. So far, none of the years they bloomed and so and I just keep watching them.

Tsh: I was curious, this sounds really weird that, but because you're bringing this up, I was literally googling central Oregon wild flowers yesterday because I was looking up some stuff. I actually want to get a tattoo of different wildflowers of places we've lived. I was looking up central Oregon wildfires and I was hoping that one was a native one because I love peonies.

Alia: [02:37](#) You're going to have to find a place, you're gonna have to move somewhere and live there for like six months. I know that they can get really big because there was a house that, it was a friend of mine that's in another neighborhood and some older house and they had giant peonie plants. She's said come cut them. I had peonies for days, like everywhere. I know that they can survive here and do really well, but I think you have to like work at it.

Tsh: Well, where you are is honestly great place for flowers and wild flowers. Especially this time of year. Honestly central Texas where I live now, it's great in the spring, but I remember loving summer in central Oregon largely because of the flowers.

Alia: [03:20](#) This is the perfect time. Everything is beautiful. They're giving me all the life.

Tsh: Good, I'm so glad. That's really fun that you're able to grow them to. We do the backyard garden thing, but it's mostly vegetables and I want to get into flowers and I'm a little bit nervous, honestly.

Alia: We've done vegetables, like when we were in Bend, we did vegetables. We had tons of stuff. But out here we've tried a couple of years and it's colder here, the nights are still way colder. Josh's building a greenhouse so we've got half of a greenhouse built. When that's all the way built, we'll do vegetables in there. He's great doing that with scrap wood and windows he's getting from random places. We have the hoop houses, but they don't have enough insulation. This year we didn't do a lot of, we did the lettuce and the cold stuff, but we didn't do tomatoes and zucchini and peppers and stuff. We mostly just have a cutting garden right now.

Tsh: Right.

Alia: We're doing the opposite.

Tsh: We planted lettuce knowing it was probably too late and Reed my middle guy, like everybody picks plants they want from the garden and I told Reed it's probably too late for lettuce, but he wanted to try it anyway. We planted it I think March 1st or something and it was too late which tells you a lot about the differences.

Alia: Well, yes, different climate.

Tsh: I love that you picked flowers for your thing.

Second on the good list is a habit you've adopted and that can be something as huge as like some big life changing mind, alternating thing you've added to your life. But it's usually something pretty small like a favorite drink while you're cooking dinner or something like that. What's a habit you've adopted in your life right now that's making things a little bit better?

Alia: One of the habits that I have done for a long time then I stopped doing, but I'm doing again is tracking my moods in my bullet journal. There's something about being able to see, well for me with mental health issues with bipolar disorder, it helps me to be able to see patterns. I find it very like relaxing at the end of the day too. I just dump it all in my journal. I'm one of those people that there's part of me that's like really practical. It's just jotted down, not pretty at all. And then the next page will be all artwork and lettering, so it's a mix of both things depending on how busy I am. But the mood tracking has been really beneficial for me to be able to see patterns of, okay, if I've been tired for three or four days in a row, overwhelmed and tired and stressed, I can be spiraling, I could be starting at the beginning of a depression or if I've had like tons of energy and been shopping everyday or do like I might be going into a hypo-manic phase. For mental health issues, it's really helpful. But even I've thought with my kids, even for them to just be able to be aware of like their emotions and how everything works together. For me, with my mood tracker, I also have sleep and food and so I can see I got four hours of sleep last night and I'm a hot mess today.

Tsh: That was going to be my next question. What specifically is it you're tracking, because I bet a lot of people are listening and thinking this sounds really interesting but I don't know what you mean by mood tracking. How you feel or more of the practicals?

Alia: Basically it's just one little box and I do it by color. I'll have anxious as one color, irritated or frustrated or like a high level of irritation because that usually signifies like I'm going into hypo-manic phase. If it's one day that I'm like, okay, that's a human response and everybody has all these emotions. I think a lot of people have asked me with mental health things, how do I know if I'm just sad, a normal sad or normal stress, normal worry, how do I know if it's that compared to an actual depression or an actual do you like struggle with anxiety? How do I know when it's gone past that level of just everybody worries and everybody's sad sometimes. One of those things is the duration. Depression is two weeks or longer of sustained moods that affect your wellbeing and your life. I track those things. If I'm sad, if I feel overwhelmed, if I feel irritated, if I feel frustrated, if I

feel euphoric, if I feel all of these different things. I also track on a different checker, I especially check sugar because sugar affects me really a lot. I don't really do sugar. Last week I was i traveling and when I travel a lot of times, all of my diet stuff at home that I can control really easily goes up the window. All the sugar. I was at a friend's house and I had coffee creamer that had the flavored coffee creamer and I was like bouncing off the walls. Oh yeah, I haven't had sugar in a long time. Maybe I need to slow my roll. And sure enough, the third day I had a raging migraine. Those kind of things too, like body things, how my stomach is feeling. I have food sensitivities so it helps me just to be able to see how everything is working together, how my sleep and how my food and to be able to adjust a little bit,, okay, this was an extremely stressful period. So I probably need to adjust by going to bed an hour and a half earlier so that I'm not, or, this is a period where I'm know I'm going to be eating bad, probably because I'm super busy or traveling, whatever. I need to adjust in these other ways. That just helps me.

Tsh: [09:07](#) I really like that you're doing that in a bullet journal, too. Kyle, my husband, he uses this app, it's called Mood Path and it does largely the same thing where he's tracking all the different things. I'm all for useful apps, so this is not totally to disparage that. In fact, I might start using it as well, but there's something I can see that's really methodical and almost like a mindful practice to do the old fashioned pen on paper process of this.

Alia: [09:33](#) It almost feels a little bit like the Examen when you're like going through your day at the end of the day. I used to do that. I have have gotten out of practice of doing that, but this almost feels the same where I'm looking at my trends over the day. I'm looking at how I felt and looking at the things that happened and looking at how I responded. Then I'm adding in the biological, how's my body feel? How's this feel? My stress levels, my energy, all of that. But it does feel cathartic like, okay, I'm putting this all in the journal and this day's done. And then the next day is a new day and we'll see.

Tsh: [10:11](#) That's really cool. I think there's such a tight mind body connection, whether we are dealing with bipolar or not, I mean no matter what it is, I find that to be true for me if I'm like, why am I the way that I am? I just stop and realize, oh I've had a lot of sugar or I have been going to bed way later. For me for example, screen time can really affect me. If Kyle and I are into a show and we're watching it right before bed, I'm usually not going to sleep super great. So I have to weigh that into the consideration whether I even want to do something like that.

Segment Two

Tsh: [14:54](#) We have got flowers and tracking your moods in a bullet journal. The third thing is a work of art. This is always my favorite category. It can be anything from an album or playlist all the way to a movie or book or even a literal piece of art hanging on your wall, anything and everything, right? What's a work of art in your life?

Alia: [15:12](#) You think of all like the pretentious things that you could say to make you sound like really educated and whatever. But my absolute favorite thing right now is *Always Be My Maybe* on Netflix. Have you seen that?

Tsh: No, but I checked the box to watch it.

Alia: Oh my gosh. I love it so much. When we just recently at a retreat and and I was there with two of my friends, one is Korean, one is half Korean, I'm part Korean. We were like, we have to watch this together. Grace Cho brought a bunch of Korean snacks from the Asian markets. We had this whole spread of Korean snacks and lounged around and watched it. She had already seen it two times before us, but it was super fun to watch with them. For people who don't know, it's this romantic comedy. It's Randall Park and Ali Wong. Across the board, just as a romantic comedy, it's great. But the fact that it features Korean American, Randall in is Korean American and the Asian American experience that is so counter to what I've seen basically my whole life growing up. There have been shows that feature Asian-Americans, a little bit recently, but it was just such a normal experience. We kept watching it and they were cooking foods that we cook. There was a scene in it where there's like a party going on and the two little girls are running from the front of the house to the back and then they come to the front door, they slip off their shoes, they run through the house to the back and then they slip her shoes back on. It was just a nod to, oh my gosh, that's an Asian thing. Just these little things that weren't these huge, we're so different but that were just these nods to the way that our culture is. I was laughing and then at the end I was crying and then it all circled back around to food, which I always say, for Asians, I mean it's probably for everybody, but for Asian especially it's such a love language. Food is such a love language in the way that we do you community? Family and community. Then I came home and watched it with my kids.

Tsh: [17:39](#) That's so fun. I can understand. I can imagine how that would be because it's feels to me like so many movies, if they are "diverse" it's usually the Asian sidekick friend or the funny person or the nerdy person. But it's not the main one.

Alia: [17:56](#) Yeah, the stereotypical ones. *Crazy Rich Asians* was super popular, which is great, but it was still like they went to Asia, they still were overseas. It was this foreign experience that obviously I don't really, I am not a crazy rich asian. It was

so entertaining. It was still fun but it wasn't the same experience as just having regular American people that happen to have Korean heritage. I love that part. It was really fun. That's my work of art.

Tsh: [18:36](#) I love it. I love when work of art, that category is super accessible because we've had everything from an artists that you have to, I've even had somebody who talked about a specific wall of graffiti in their specific town that I couldn't even find online, which is fine. I love that. All the way to Netflix binges and those are usually my favorite because we can go watch them right after this.

Alia: Go watch it. It's so good.

Tsh: Very cool. I'm curious, just a side p.s., because your book came out this year and you're on lots of podcasts and you're doing all the things. Do you feel like you're at a stage now because it's been out a couple months where you can do things like watch Netflix and read books that you want to read for you or, or do you still feel really busy in the book launching season?

Alia: [19:21](#) That's actually my next thing when you were going to ask me. I am just deciding to take off the summer. My book came out in April. I did all the podcasts and I did all the article writing and all of the things, the launch team, the whole stuff, it's the same thing with like tracking my moods. I could just tell I am exhausted. I felt emotionally I was doing great, but physically my body was done. I was just tired every day. It's a lot for me because I also have chronic illness and things that I'm dealing with. I just decided after the retreat, after I came back from that retreat, I have three podcasts left, interviews for the rest of the month and that's it. When stuff started coming up or people have been asking me recently about podcast interviews, I'm like can we schedule for the fall? Everybody's been really great about accommodating that and trying to fit me in later. I am going to take the rest of the summer off and be a person. I could probably could still be busy if I wanted to but I just don't really want to.

Tsh: It's a very wise choice.

Maybe you are getting into that in this next category, so I have another question for you, but let's go ahead and you might be covering it. The fourth thing on our good list is a philosophy, which is a way of thinking and it can be something huge or mind blowing or could just be a bit of advice you heard from somebody smart in your life. What's a philosophy right now that's making your life better?

Alia: [21:01](#) I think it was Shawn Smucker, and if it's not, I'm not sure, but I think it was Shawn Smucker that said something like the book will never do for you what you want it to and as a fellow author, I think there's so much hype that goes into being an author, being a published author and all of this stuff. I know some

people view it as the holy grail of writing, like the pinnacle, I have arrived. I just have always known, I think part of it is to, that I've known a lot of authors and you just know it's not that so I went into it knowing that it's not going to be that. I think that that of way of looking at it has, has saved the book launch. I have really overall not been stressed almost at all about the book launch. It's been busy for sure. I'm tired physically for sure. But I haven't had any anxiety about it or checking numbers, all of that stuff. Even bad reviews. I worried that I would eviscerated if I had a bad review I'd feel like devastated inside. You just don't know. I realized I just don't feel any of that. I think that I'm at the point where you worked on this book forever and there's a part of book writing where I was like, I don't know if I'm ever gonna be able to release this. It feels so part of me. But then you have all this time in between when your manuscript is done and they're working on all the other stuff and for a long time, you don't read your book and you don't do anything with it. Before it comes out there's this lull period and I think during that period is the time when you're giving it away, it's separating from you in a way. I don't know. That makes sense. When it came out, I just thought like whatever it does is gonna be awesome. It's going to do what it's going to do. I think that's why, just knowing that the book is not the thing, the life is the thing. I love writing, I loved writing this book. I love that it's out in the world. I love the response from readers, but at the same time, I have kids in the summer and flowers in my garden the book is not the whole thing.

Tsh: [23:08](#) Similar to that, I felt like I had heard some really good advice at some point, which is yes we need your book, but more importantly we need the you who has written that book because writing changes us. The before and after of you having written is different because writing the book changes you and it's almost like that's what we need more than your book itself. Even though we do need your book because it's an important to have out there. I thought that was personally really encouraging for me. Whenever I get torn up and knots where my book is not, I'm not getting out on paper what I want it to be? Wait, it sounds like what we would say to our kids, it builds character, but it really does, you know?

Alia: It totally does. I'm happy to be done with that part.

Tsh: I'm in the thick of it.

Alia: [23:59](#) I've been thinking more and more about that with online presence. I am so happy to not to be consumed by any of it and it's easy to get, it's totally easy to get consumed by it, but I feel like just knowing how much space I need and being like I'm going to take that space and at being in partnerships with people that I feel like have respected those boundaries. I don't feel pressured, like you have to meet this thing or jump through this hoop or do these. I have not felt that at all for my publishing company. I have not felt that from the places that

I've written for. I feel like overall I've been able to set the pace. Right now when I'm saying I need the pace to slow down and I need to be a person for awhile, which means it won't be on Twitter all the time. I won't be on Instagram all the time. I'm not going to do a complete unplug, probably, I'd say probably because I don't know. Sometimes I think I'll just take a little break and then I'm gone for a couple months and it's probably not the strategic thing, but I just feel like you know what? That's okay.

Tsh: [24:58](#) You know what? You are a person and not a brand. This strategy is called living life.

Alia: [25:05](#) I'm really excited for this summer to just relax.

Tsh: [25:09](#) My question for you then has to do with your book, because I've written a couple of books, but I've never really written anything as vulnerable or personal as you have with your book, *Glorious Weakness*. Was that challenging, you and I are both fours, but we're pretty different in how we manifest our fours, was that hard for you to have so much vulnerability in your pages and then to have to do things like go on podcasts and write guest posts elsewhere? To talk about some of this stuff that is really deep and personal?

Alia: [25:40](#) I think I've been writing about this, I've been writing about mental health, I've written like pretty often about mental health in the last seven years. In my journey with mental health, I've written a lot about all of the things, suicidal ideation, sexual abuse and poverty. There's not a lot that I haven't already said online at some point. I think I built up a tolerance in a way, like cocaine powder or something. Over the years I can handle it. It hasn't felt as vulnerable as some people might think, in some ways. At the same time, when I was recording my audio book, I remember going in and I'm in Portland and I'm in the studio. I remember thinking like, oh my gosh, I'm going to read this book. There are these parts in the book we're talking about being sexually abused as a child or I'm talking about times when I was suicidal. I'm thinking, okay, this feels different. I'm reading my words to this person in the sound booth. It ended up being great. The guy was absolutely wonderful. He was a great sound technician, felt very comfortable. But in my head going into it, this is going to be so weird, reading these parts of my book to some dude over there. There have been times, I think all of the places that I've gone on, I've also been careful. My publicist sent me some places and this radio show and I said no. I respect my own boundaries and there's places where I don't feel comfortable. I'm all for talking across aisles. But then there's places that just feels hostile and I think this is not a good space for me. There are places that I've said no, I've chosen not to go on because things I've seen about their views on mental health or things that I've seen, their political leanings are extremely strong. I think my book is...

Tsh: Nuanced.

Alia: It feels like a trap a little bit. All over the podcasts and things that I've gone on to have been really respectful of, hey, is there anything you don't want to talk about? Or we can record over, whatever. That has never happened. I'm pretty open about everything, but this stuff needs to be talked about. I think just the more that we talk about it, like the more free we get, especially in regards to mental illness, because I'll see people that will write me. I was on Jamie Ivey's podcast a little bit ago and I'm still getting DMs from Instagram every day. People are like, oh my gosh, I just listened. They'd never heard anybody in church talk about being suicidal. There's lots of people that have faith and also deal with these other.

Tsh: [28:32](#) Yeah, for sure. We need these voices. I'm just grateful that you are willing, it feels weird even to say I'm grateful you're willing to write about this because to me this is so much a part of you and what you write about that it's almost like thank you for writing because this is what naturally is part of you and I love that about you. You do good work, my friend.

Alia: Thank you.

Tsh: [28:59](#) A big thanks to Alia for taking some time to chat with me. You can find links to all her things in the show notes of this episode at thesimpleshow.com where you can also find stuff to links like things we talked about, where you can sign up for my short weekly email called Five Quick Things, how you can become a patron and support the work it takes to create the show for just a few dollars per month, as well as how to connect with me and the people I chat with. The show is produced by Chad Michael Snavely and Jesse Montonya, and thanks also to Caroline TeSelle, Andrea Debbink, and my furry intern, Ginny. Thanks so much for listening. I'm Tsh Oxdreider, and I'll catch you back here soon.