



Simple, with Tsh Oxenreider

Episode 205

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## Segment One

Tsh: This is Simple; I'm Tsh Oxenreider.

Hi friends. We're continuing our summer series 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 Cindy Wang Brandt, based in Taiwan, who runs a widely popular Facebook group called Raising Children Unfundamentalist, and has a book and podcast both called Parenting Forward. She's based in Taiwan and as she says on her website, she sees faith in the irreverent miracles in the ordinary and beauty in the margins. Let's get right into it, here's Cindy sharing with us her good list.

[00:54](#) Hey Cindy, thank you for being part of our series for the summer called My Good List that our listeners know of but just to recap really quickly, this is four little things that are making your life a little bit better. That's a thing, a habit you've adopted, a work of art, and a philosophy. Let's start at the top. Cindy, what is a thing big or small in your life that's just making life a little bit better for you right now?

Cindy: Well, for a while I was going to share about my hairdryer, which is the Dyson hairdryer.

Tsh: Fancy.

Cindy: I feel little elitists sharing this thing, but because it's \$400 and everyone always says, why do you need a \$400 hairdryer? But when it first came out I just thought it was such a beautiful machine. Have you seen it?

Tsh: [01:39](#) I am looking at it up as we're talking right now. I have a Dyson vacuum, so, oh yeah, I see it. That's very cool looking.

Cindy: Yeah. And they're really fun colors and I always wanted it, but it's super expensive and I couldn't justify it. But for my 40th birthday, my sister wanted to get me something special and so I asked her to get that for me. I'm 41 now, so I've had it for a year and I think it is worth the money.

Tsh: Okay. What does it do that's different than a regular hairdryer?

Cindy: Okay. Well supposedly, and this is probably an upsell, but supposedly it dries your hair at a temperature such that it doesn't harm your hair. A lot of times people don't want to dry their hair because it hurts your hair quality or whatever. With this you don't have to worry about it. I feel like after I blow dry at with it, it feels like I just walked out of a salon.

Tsh: Wow. That's pretty impressive for a hairdryer, I wouldn't think there'd be that big a difference because we're talking about blowing air, so that's really interesting.

Cindy: Yeah. I mean it could just be mental because I want to justify the cost, but I feel like it makes a difference.

Tsh: You know what? I think that's cool. I like that you got it for your 40th birthday. I'm 41 as well. It's a milestone. I think that's cool you did that.

Cindy: The choice was that or a fancy bag and I'm not really a bag person.

Tsh: You made the wise choice because that's unique and different. My guess is because I have the vacuum and I got it almost 10 years ago and it's still working perfectly that you'll probably have that the rest of your life.

Cindy: I still really enjoy it.

Tsh: I like that. We have never had a hairdryer as the choice for the first thing on a good list, so you win that award.

Cindy: Everyone is always curious whether or not it's worth it because people know about it and they just can't imagine paying that much. I want to vouch that I think it's worth it.

Tsh: Okay, I'm glad to hear that. All right, so number one is your very fancy schmancy hairdryer. Then number two is a habit you've adopted. Now we're talking about anything from just a routine you have while you're cooking dinner or driving to work all the way to some huge, monumental life changing thing. Cindy, what's a habit in your life you've adopted that's making life just work better?

Cindy: [03:54](#) I've been doing it this for a few years, I'm a writer. My life is, I work at home, I'm a creative and I'm always looking up productivity hacks and stuff like that. A few years ago I read this article that said, a lot of people assume that creatives are disorganized and chaotic. That's the stereotype. But the more you actually systematize the parts of your lives that can be systematized, that opens up your mind space to be more creative. That was the advice and one of the

things that I try to do, which I don't know if this is most healthy habit, but I try to eat the same breakfast every day.

Tsh: I have actually heard that there is some science behind that. Tell me more.

Cindy: [04:45](#) That's what I started started doing. I think it helps, it's just one less thing that clutters your mind in the morning and it's just becomes automatic. I go to the fridge, I, I take out what it is that I eat for breakfast and then my mind starts going and I'm very much a morning person. Almost even before breakfast, I'm already starting to think about work that's been helpful, but I've decided that it might not be the best because we do want to feed our body different kinds of foods. I've been trying to adjust that a little bit, but I think the principle still applies. I think if you want to diversify your diet, then maybe systematize other parts of your lives, what you're wearing and just really try to get a routine down in whatever ways possible to free up that space, to be creative. It was a paradigm shift for me because you do imagine that creative people have to be creative in every part of your life and it's just not true, I think. I don't think our brains are wired that way. I think it's important to be boring and mundane and the reality is, you and I both know that there is a lot of mundane work in creative profession.

Tsh: Yes, very true.

Cindy: I remember Krista Tippett talking about this and one of her interviews on On Being, how her life, so many people think her life is glamorous but it's just filled with paperwork and emails and all this stuff. I do think that as creatives we have to embrace those mundane things.

Tsh: There's a reason Steve Jobs wore the same thing every day, right? I have heard there is real science behind having either a uniform or some other decision made for you, like your breakfast because it eliminates decision fatigue. I think that's a real thing a lot of us face.

Cindy: [06:36](#) Seriously. The clothing thing is hard for me because I do like to wear different colors and have fun with my wardrobe. It's a struggle for me to figure out which parts of my life I can systematize. That's why I started with breakfast because that felt easy.

Tsh: Yeah, that makes sense. I'm going to just go ahead and ask, even though I feel, should I ask this? You are in Taiwan and most of our listeners are not in Taiwan and so I'm curious what's your typical breakfast then? Would people in the western world consider it different or would we be surprised at how universal your breakfast is?

Cindy: Well, this is really embarrassing, but the one thing that I was having every day was actually a Costco chocolate muffin, which I found out has 700 calories and now I no longer eat that.

Tsh: [07:25](#) Funny.

Cindy: Americans do eat muffins for breakfast. But in Taiwan, a lot of people eat cake for breakfast, it is not unusual which I think is unusual for Americans. You don't think of cake as breakfast.

Tsh: That is true. I'm actually surprised. I've traveled quite a bit, but most of the Asian countries I've been to, it tends to be more of a savory breakfast.

Cindy: Right. Taiwanese people don't like sweet things. It's just one of these quirky things. They do sell cakes at breakfast shops. One thing that I really like for breakfast, and I have this once a week when I have to take my kids to their bus stop. I stop by the breakfast shop and we have something called a dan bing, which is a little bit like a burrito but thinner, a thin flour burrito. Then you put egg on top of it and then you roll it up. You could put ham and corn or cheese.

Do you know pork floss?

Tsh: No, tell me more. That sounds a little weird.

Cindy: Okay. It is one of those exotic things that people are afraid to try. But pork flosses basically dried pork and it's hairy. I know it sounds really gross but it's a very popular item here. Different things that you could put in it. It's really good. It's one of my favorites.

Tsh: It actually sounds pretty good. I'm here in Austin and we have breakfast tacos several times a week. That is a thing that we just have all the time. In fact, until I married my husband who is not Texan, I did not know that people didn't have breakfast tacos all over the place and all the time because that was just food to me that wasn't anything unusual.

Cindy: [09:07](#) I love Mexican breakfast.

Tsh: Me too. I'm all about food variety and foods from different parts of the world. I think they're really interesting and especially when you get into breakfast because we have these pre-conceived ideas of what is breakfast sometimes. I love seeing breakfasts from different cultures around the world because it's always so insightful and different.

Cindy: I just said one of many, many things that we love for breakfast. Every meal is important to us. We're a very food centered culture.

Tsh: Yeah, I would believe it. Would you call yourself a good cook?

Cindy: I don't cook anymore, my husband cooks. I don't know if I love cooking. I love food in Taiwan, a lot of people don't cook because it's very easy to access street food and food from restaurants and it's cheap, so a lot of people don't cook. I don't know if it's a huge culture, cooking culture, but I like cooking shows and I do like food, but I don't know if I love cooking.

Tsh: The little bit I've been in Southeast Asia, we've been there probably for a total of several months, not long, but we are always eating out because it's literally cheaper than us trying to do the same thing at home and not as well. Why would we do this to ourselves? Let's just eat out all the time because it's so good there.

Cindy: It's getting easier and easier to eat healthy too because restaurants are catching on that people care about health. It's not even that hard to eat healthy. I can get good salads and good noodle soups.

Tsh: [10:45](#) I have to ask, because you're a writer like me. Do you work from home or do you go somewhere to an office and work?

Cindy: I work from home.

Tsh: Is that a challenge with you? I don't know how old your kids are, but is that a challenge to divide work at home?

Cindy: I have teens, so it is a challenge. When the kids are home, it's still challenge, even though they're teenagers, they'll come in asking for things. I think the hardest part about working from home, and this is not unusual, is the boundaries between work and family life. I work through the weekend and also as a creative, my mind, I can't shut it down. That's the hardest part, is drawing those boundaries. I haven't figured out a great way to do it because I always say, this is just a season. Right now I'm launching my book and right now I'm doing this and that but I'm realizing that there's always something.

Tsh: That's very true. It's very easy to get into a project mindset as both a solopreneur, freelancer, someone who works for themselves, but even maybe more so as a writer because our work is so project based writing a book or the thing you're launching that it's easy to suddenly realize, oh, I'm not actually taking a break because I'm going from one project to the next.

Cindy: I know. I'm just now learning this as I've jumped from one project to the next. I don't know, do you have any tips for me for drawing those boundaries?

Tsh: Well, what's funny is, as we are talking, as our episode is going out into the earbuds of listeners, I am taking a break. The reason I've taken a break is because I've been writing for 12 years now and I've been doing this routine for a while where I'll take a break and I'm doing air quotes right now that you can't see. What I'll do is I'll say I'm taking a break, but really I'm still either mentally thinking about my work or just going online to check one little thing or doing little things here and there. Before I know it, it's not actually resting and it's not actually being okay with leaving things undone. This year for the first time I'm doing a legit break whereas I've told my assistant, slap my hand virtually somehow if you see me online. I might do things just for fun. I might post a photo while we're traveling and that won't be work-related. I'll let you know when I get back if it's worth it, but I've heard nothing but good from people who really and truly take several weeks off from the Internet just because you get a healthy perspective. Not only do you get a fresh reset button and maybe have some new ideas, but you also get this nice perspective of, oh yeah, the world goes on. It's okay. It's not the end of the world. People aren't going to miss me that much. I'm really looking forward to that.

Cindy: For a long time, my motto was work Monday to Friday, everything, this is the most important work in the world. Then Saturday and Sunday, act like none of it is important.

Tsh: Yes. That's a good way to put that. I like that.

Cindy: That that helped me for a while until I started at working Saturday and Sunday too.

## Segment Two

Tsh: [18:04](#) You have a really popular Facebook group that I'm actually part of, Raising Children Unfundamentalist. Is it hard because it's social media to decide when to be on and when to be off or do you have personal boundaries of I'm not posting on the weekends or whatever?

Cindy: I do try to be on social media less on the weekends and it helps because everyone else is too so I don't feel like I'm missing out as much. The Facebook group is 24 hours. I've seen some Facebook groups take breaks. To me that just feels like even more work because they're always posting, "We're on a break now," and then "We're back now." I can't be bothered to do that. It is a 24 hour thing and it's always happening. My group is really engaged, people are fast to comment. It's been three years now, so I've just incorporated it into my life. RCU is like my third child. My family are even used to it. They hear me talk about RCU like its own entity in our family.

Tsh: I would see how one of the reasons it's really engaging and engaged just because it seems pretty global. I was just looking at the recent, well maybe from the spring, the post where you did a little check in of where is everybody, a location thread. I'm really impressed with how global it is. I bet that has something to do with it.

Cindy: I think because I'm not living in America, right. I think maybe people feel like, oh, it's okay for people outside of America to be part of this because the founder is herself. I do think I bring that perspective that's a little different, more global.

Tsh: Most of my listeners know I'm not on Facebook anymore, on a regular basis. I check in about once a week just for a few minutes. Yours is a group I always just at least peek in on and scroll and read. There's fewer than five groups I check in on in years as one of them because I do find a lot of useful information and support and links and stuff like that. You're doing really good work with it and I think it's important work. I'm glad it exists so thanks for doing it.

Cindy: [20:18](#) Thank you.

Tsh: Back to your good list. We've got the first thing which is you're a Dyson hairdryer and your number two thing, which is having the same thing for breakfast every day, that's your habit that you've adopted. The third one is always my favorite category, is a work of art. Of course that's really broad. That can be everything from a TV show to even a YouTube video to a musician, to a literal piece of art hanging on your wall. Anything and everything. What's a work of art right now that's making your life sweeter?

Cindy: I would love introduce your listeners to my friend A'Driane Nieves. Do you know her?

Tsh: I know her from Twitter, but I've never met her. Talk about her because she seems fascinating.

Cindy: I got to meet her at the Evolving Faith Conference, which we were both speakers at in October of last year and I didn't know her at all before this and we just really clicked and got along. Since I met her, then I started following her work. She's an abstract artist. I can't draw, and I'm not really into the art world and so I felt a little bit ignorance and outside of it. But when I saw one of her paintings that she posted on Instagram, I was just moved by it. I can give you the link to it so your audience can go look at it. But the particular piece that I fell in love with is called The Vitreous Body. She actually used her body to paint it.

Tsh: Really?

Cindy: Yeah. You have to read the accompanying post. It's just a beautiful post where she talks about how as a black, queer woman artist, how she uses that to turn the inside of her body outside, which I think is what art is, what good art is, right? Is we're telling the truth of what's inside and putting it outside and that painting really is just visceral. I told her, I said, I can't even describe why I like it. I just feel it. Which I think is the point of abstract art. I can say that I love the colors, it's pink, which I love. It's beautiful. You'll have to go look it up.

Tsh: I think that's a sign of a really good, I don't want to say there's a definition of classically good and not good when it comes to art, but a sign of interesting artists maybe is one where you can say something like what you just said, I don't know why I like it, but I know I do.

Cindy: Yeah and it surprised me because I always feel a little low brow when I go to art galleries or museums because I'm just like, I don't really get this.

Tsh: [23:00](#) Sure.

Cindy: When I saw that, and maybe it's because I met her, I don't know. I just felt who she is, it was visceral and it's got lots of bright colors and it's just wild and it was moving to me.

Tsh: I think that's a good point about once you met her, you connected with it even more. I find that to be really true with just about any sort of art I interact with. Even if it's some kind of classic piece of literature that the author is long gone. If I go and read the bio of her and I learn more about who she is and what her life was like, I really appreciate the book more. I bet it's something very similar when it comes to art. Once you really know the human behind the work that we can look at then it just means even more.

Cindy: That's interesting you say that because I think some people don't like it. I know some people just want to consume the art. My husband was just telling me that he doesn't actually want to see actor interviews after a movie. It breaks the spell a little bit, right? It takes away a little bit of the magic. It's true, for some actors, I don't like to know their real personality because I prefer to remember them as their character.

Tsh: There is a point and maybe it's a personality thing, depending on what type of person you are, whether that connects with you. I've had this conversation, I taught high school English this past year and I always did a deep dive on the author our first day we would introduce a new book and about halfway through the school year I started reading up on how some teachers really suggest not doing that because I want the students to connect more with the book itself than the person. That's an interesting perspective. I've never thought of that

because to me I really like knowing about the human behind the work. I can see that being a case by case.

Cindy: I wonder if it's because we live in this era of memoirs? For us we are just used to authors writing their work in a way that's very closely linked to their life, their actual life. Whereas maybe back in more classical literature, it was really this creative endeavor that's outside of this person's life.

Tsh: That makes sense. I can see that. I really could see it either way. I think there's pluses and minuses, but that's really cool. I'm glad you brought her up because she's somebody I've watched from a distance. To be honest, a little bit intimidated because maybe that's the abstract art thing?

Cindy: That's how I felt.

Tsh: I don't know if I get this but she seems supremely talented, so I admire her, but I just feel a little like maybe this isn't for me, but I love that you just said that because now I'm thinking maybe her art is for me a little more. I'm looking at it right now and, oh my gosh, this is beautiful stuff.

Cindy: I know. Everyone needs to go look her up.

Tsh: Yeah. We'll put a link in the show notes for sure of her main website, but also the art that really resonated with you that you were just talking about. We'd love to put a link in that particular one.

[25:58](#) Okay, your good list so far. We've got a thing which is your hairdryer a habit, which is eating the same breakfast and the work of art, which is A'Driane. Am I saying Adrian Nieves right. Do you know if that's correct?

Cindy: Yes.

Tsh: Okay, good. Number four is a philosophy, which is a little bit similar to the habit but not because it's more about like just a way of thinking. It's maybe some advice you were given or a little mantra you have that helps your day. What's the philosophy right now that's just making your life a little sweeter at the moment?

Cindy: I think modern day philosophy is like Internet memes, right?

Tsh: Sometimes.

Cindy: I live by Internet memes because I work in the parenting niche and I feel like the parenting pages and all that have a ton of memes, which is great. I love memes. It's like Twitter, you're trying to instill big ideas into a small amount of words. I

think it's actually an art form. One of the parenting memes that I've run across, which I've used in not just parenting, but in my real life says this,

“When you feel better, you do better.”

Tsh: Okay, tell me more.

Cindy: It's really great for parenting because a lot of times when our children misbehave, our first impulse is to make them feel bad about it. We want them to feel guilty. We want them to feel like they need to change and do better. But the reality is people don't do better when they feel worse. They do better when they feel better. Instead of shaming your children or making them feel really bad about their misbehavior, connect with them, let them know that they're loved and that their emotions are validated. Then when they can embrace that and feel good, then that's going to compel them to do better a lot more effectively than if they feel bad.

That's been a really valuable piece of parenting wisdom for me. I've also decided to apply it to my life and also life with adults and other human beings because I think that's the way we all operate. When you feel better, you do better. I think it's really important for our modern day culture of calling out and shaming that we remember this. If we want people to do better, make them feel better. I'm now talking about coddling fragility. I'm talking about humanizing and compelling people instead of shaming them into action.

Tsh: I like that. What I thought of when you said that was something I once heard Rachel Held Evans say. She said one time that whenever she's in a Twitter argument or debate with somebody, she imagines them playing on the floor with their kids.

Cindy: [28:51](#) Aww.

Tsh: I know. I heard that and it just about broke my heart. But just thinking about what a wise woman she was to say that and to think that, to go to that whenever she, because she definitely had her for people that went after her.

Cindy: She had to face a lot of criticism.

Tsh: Right. It just reminds me a little bit of that whenever you said that, like, oh, humanizing people. I get what you're saying. That does make a lot of sense for sure.

Cindy: Yeah. I do often think about the children of my enemies. Because, of course, what I do is advocating for children's full humanity and justice and I always feel like I would always give children more grace than I would to adult. When I

remember that my enemies online or whatever, people I don't like, that their children, I can love them much easier and maybe that will help with loving the actual person.

Tsh: [29:46](#) Sure. That's really good. I'm curious whenever you said when they feel better, they do better. That makes a lot of sense when it comes to Internet interactions in terms of being gracious and giving them not so much the benefit of the doubt like you said, but respecting their humanity. What about in person? What does that look like for you in your immediate sphere offline?

Cindy: I have had to use that on people. That sounds really bad. That sounds really mechanical.

Tsh: I know what you mean.

Cindy: That reminder has dropped into my mind when I'm interacting with people in real life because there is, and this is maybe like some childhood wound where I was raised to just shame people or to want to make them feel bad or if somebody is hurt me, you really hurt me, like to really drive it into them that they did something wrong and bad and to realize that that's not helping anybody. It doesn't help the person that is doing the hurting and it doesn't help the hurt person. I think it's always so much more effective and kind and more just to talk about the deeper reasons of why people have done hurtful things or said hurtful things and say what is going on deep inside of you? Let's talk about that. Oftentimes people just need to have their emotions validated. If they know that, I understand that you have this hurt because you're angry or you're sad or all those things, and they feel free. They feel a little bit more free. When people feel more free than they're going to give other people freedom as well, they're going to allow the other person to have, if you're loved, you're going to love others. I believe that.

Tsh: [31:33](#) Yeah. Do you get into that at all in your book? I have it right here next to me, I'm curious.

Cindy: I think so. You know how you write books three years ago?

Tsh: Totally. I'm just thinking through about parenting specifically and what that would mean in terms of just a mindset shift with our kids directly and not just necessarily outside of our home, but maybe even within it?

Cindy: I don't believe in discipline at all. A lot of people say we don't punish, but we discipline, I don't even believe in disciplining. I just think it's a relationship that we have with our children and a lot of times we say misbehavior when it's only misbehavior because of our adult expectations. It wasn't even misbehavior. It's

just normal development. If somebody treats you badly, of course you're going to respond badly and the problem is not the person who's responding badly. It's because they were treated badly. I just would like to even get rid of that vocabulary where people say this is misbehavior. I think that our children will do things that create problems, whether they're hurting people or themselves. There are problems, but don't think of it as misbehavior, think of it as this is a problem and we can solve it by working together with our child. Not us making them feel bad so they do better, but us coming alongside them and figuring out and exploring and being curious and validating one another and I just think, it just works better. Not to mention that I think it's the right thing to do.

Tsh: [33:13](#) Right. At the end of the day, it's definitely the better road to take, I think when it comes to interacting with all people. It's that idea of just, I don't want to say assuming the best, because that could be problematic for those that have been genuinely hurt with valid reasons, but a sense of the inherent goodness in people, remembering that at the forefront, I think is a healthy way to look at other relationships.

Cindy: I believe that, I believe people are good. I know that's so hopelessly optimistic, but I believe all people are good.

Tsh: That's a great perspective, and I think it's healthy and I think it spreads. I can just think of other people hearing this and thinking going inward and examining maybe how they approach their own relationships. That's a great way to end our conversation and touch on a high point. Thank you for sharing that. That's really wise.

Cindy: Ending the good list with that , people are good.

Tsh: That's right. That is a good, good list, my friend.

[34:22](#) A big thanks to Cindy 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](http://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 was produced by Chad Michael Snavely and Jesse Montonya. Thanks also to Caroline TeSelle, Andrea Debbink, and my furry intern, Ginny. Thanks so much for listening, I'm Tsh Oxenreider, and I'll catch you back here soon.