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Kieryn:

I'm Kieryn.

Eve:

And I'm Eve. This is Kitchen Table Cult.

Kieryn:

Where two Quiverfull escapees talk about our experiences in the cultish underbelly of the religious right.
Hey, Eve.

Eve:

Hey, Kieryn. How's it going?

Kieryn:

Good. I got the gender marker on my driver's license changed.

Eve:

Woo! Yay, California.

Kieryn:

I'm so excited. Yeah, it was so easy. I've had this on my calendar since the governor signed it into law in 2017. The senator whose office that I stayed in to testify for AB 2756.

Eve:

The homeschool bill.

Kieryn:

Yeah, the homeschool bill, was the person who co-authored the bill in the first place. That was a really fun, full circle thing, and I wrote up a guide. If you live in California and want to get your gender marker change to M, F, or X, it's super easy. I'll link it in the notes later.

Eve:

Yay. That's awesome. So great that you can do that.

Kieryn:

I'm so excited about it.

Eve:

I've been wrapping up some revisions on my memoir. I've got my thesis due on the 11th of February. And so, I'm like, in hardcore edit and revise mode, just trying to put together all these things. And I realized I have homeschooling riddled throughout, but I haven't focused on it at all. And so, I'm like, oh, I have to read a chapter about what the fuck this is.

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Kieryn:

Yeah, all the background for it.

Eve:

All the background for it, but it's coming together. I'm feeling really good about it.

Kieryn:

Yay! That's super exciting.

Eve:

We've talked a lot about how our former selves would never have recognized us and who we are today, right?

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

What would your former self say about where you're at right now?

Kieryn:

I feel like they'd be really confused, but also there would be a huge part that just made sense. It would be jarring and upsetting, because I would be everything I ever wanted to be, but not in a place where I could accept that as something that I was allowed to want.

Eve:

Right, right. Yeah, having those desires actually be acknowledged and being okay with that is a huge part of it. I think my former self would be deeply offended and also deeply curious and very torn between those two things.

Kieryn:

Yeah. Depending on how old I was, if I saw myself again, which age I was, I would be probably terrified or really worried about my eternal salvation.

Eve:

Yeah. Well, and I mean, your family wasn't Presbyterian. You didn't have this perseverance of the saints doctrine growing up, did you?

Kieryn:

No.

Eve:

We didn't either. I didn't have that until I was in high school and our church was switching from strictly charismatic to more of a Reformed theology. And one of the tenants of Reformed theology is like God

chooses who gets saved, and you never know who it is, but it's kind of one of those proof is in the pudding situations. Like if you leave later, leave the faith later and then come back, you were always meant to be saved. You were one of the chosen. And if you leave later and you never come back, you were never meant to be ...

Kieryn:

You were obviously.

Eve:

... saved. You were obviously just pretending. And so, there's this sense of predestination, both entitles you to do whatever you want, but also makes you super scared because you never know if you're one of the ones that God has picked to save. So, you can't do anything to earn it. You just have to be afraid and believe.

Kieryn:

Yeah, yeah, my parents didn't ... They didn't believe in predestination, because they felt like that defeated the point, which was obviously to suffer and work and be as Christian as possible. But they did believe, which was really uncommon in our circles that your salvation was something that could be lost. So, we went to a lot of churches that preached that once you were saved, you were always saved, and that was that my parents believe that you could sin so much that you're you became unsaved, regardless of ...

Eve:

So ... Okay.

Kieryn:

... whether or not you left the faith. I think it could be a passive thing.

Eve:

Well, okay. So, there's this legendary theological item of the unforgivable sin, and it's hotly debated and never really clarified in any particular denomination about what that is. Did you guys have a particular thing that you believe the unforgivable sin was?

Kieryn:

Yeah, yeah. My parents were hard set on the unforgivable sin of being divorce, but also occasionally being gay.

Eve:

Yeah, so I think that being gay was less of an unforgivable sin than divorce in our world.

Kieryn:

You could, you could scare the gay out of people, so, that was unforgivable.

Eve:

Yeah, you could beat the gay out of people, but you couldn't fix infidelity.

Kieryn:

Right, apparently.

Eve:

Funny, haha, but ...

Kieryn:

We say, as polyamorous people.

Eve:

Wow, wow, wow, so fun, so logic. The other thing that I remember, I don't know if you ever read Shūsaku Endō's book, Silence. But I read it in college, and it's this beautiful novel. They made a movie out of it a couple years ago and it ... I haven't seen the movie, but the novel is intense and gorgeous. And it's about this, I believe, is a Jesuit priest who goes to Japan before they close their borders to all foreigners for that certain period of time. And he is there, and he's working as a missionary, and he has his doubts. And then the borders closed, and he's stuck.

Eve:

And he's like, basically, all of the Christians are supposed to denounce their faith. And what they have them do is they have them step on and spit on an image of Christ, which any true Christian knows that images of Christ aren't real, because no graven image and all that shit. But obviously, evangelicals don't consider Catholics to be real Christians because of this, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So much bullshit prejudice. So, the idea was like ... So, he was like, he did it to save his life, because he was trying to protect some of his disciples, but he was also having some doubts of his own.

Eve:

And if I remember correctly, he died in agony thinking that he had cursed himself with the unforgivable sin by doing that. And because he saved all these people, he condemned them to death. So, did he actually do ...

Kieryn:

Oh my god.

Eve:

... any good as a missionary. There's this tightly wound knot of ethical implications of like, yes, this is a problem. You should be thinking about this before you go and bring your colonialist imperialist ass into other cultures and impose stuff on them. I think the idea of the rapture and the end times was very present to me as a kid. And so, I believed that if I denied Christ, that would be the end, the unforgivable sin.

Kieryn:

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I think that was also assumed that if you deconvert or abandon the faith, that you're not saved. But my parents always felt you could come back from that, you could become resaved once you learned the error of your ways. So, if you denied Christ and then had a change of heart and repented, you could come back from that ...

Eve:

Did you guys ...

Kieryn:

... but not divorce.

Eve:

Did you guys talk about people backsliding?

Kieryn:

Yes, all the time.

Eve:

Okay, so did you ever have anybody in your circle who had this testimony of like, oh, I backslid and then now I'm a pastor and look at me, I'm so great?

Kieryn:

Yup, yup. And usually, it was because of porn or something.

Eve:

Which we're going to have to have an episode like ...

Kieryn:

Yeah, we'll have to talk about that later.

Eve:

Spoiler alert, porn is not addictive and ...

Kieryn:

Oh my god, yeah.

Eve:

... the evangelicals don't know what to do.

Kieryn:

Yeah, yeah. We need to talk about your relationship to your body and porn and masturbating and all of that sometime.

Eve:

Yeah, we really, really do. I think I have a sex therapist who's willing to come on and talk to us about that. That'd be fun, but yeah. So, backsliding.

Kieryn:

Backsliding.

Eve:

Yeah, so, okay, because I grew up both evangelical and Reformed or charismatic and then Reformed. We have elements of both pieces. So, I got the hardcore end time rapture stuff when we lived in California. I got one warned about backsliding and losing your faith and weaving the Lord and being afraid of that. And then when I was in high school, it was like, but also, God chooses things and freewill is not real. And so, before that, when we were in California, I was in a non-denominational church. I was going to a Baptist Awana setting. I was very involved in that.

Eve:

I was doing competitions and stuff. And I was attending some of their Wednesday night church services. And then Franklin Graham came through and did a revival service in town, in Visalia in ... It was like '97, I think. When I was a little kid at a vineyard church, I wanted to take communion. And my parents were like, "Well, you can't, unless you're saved." Like, what does this mean? And so, that's when I asked God into my heart or whatever. I was probably like seven. And then I kept being mean to my siblings, so I'll be getting angry at things.

Eve:

Obviously, I wasn't saved, so I had to do it again. And I did it at Awana. I walked up the aisle and said the Sinner's Prayer. And people are like, "Oh my God. Wow, we didn't know you were saved before. We thought you were." And then later, at the Franklin Graham crusade, they were having people come down to the football field from the stadium, from the stance to pray the Sinner's Prayer, and they were giving them a devotional or some pack. And I was like, I need help. I'm still getting angry at my siblings. I'm still reacting to things. I'd already been baptized.

Kieryn:

Being a human.

Eve:

Yeah, I'd already been baptized at that point and like ... I'm backing up a little bit. But getting baptized in the environment we were in, because we were charismatic, and not just Baptists, we believed that the gifts the Holy Spirit were valid for everybody. So, praying in tongues was supposed to happen if you were actually saved. And so, when I got baptized, I was like this massive baptism in somebody's backyard pool and a bunch of people from church were there. And so, it was like five or six people getting baptized all the same time. And almost everybody came out of the water and start praying in tongues.

Kieryn:

Oh my god, yeah.

Eve:

And I just looked around and was like, the fuck. I was like, I don't want to fake this. I feel like faking it would be wrong. And if I start doing this, I would be faking it and I have a problem with that. Did I do something wrong? Is this it? Maybe I'm not really saved. And so, that ate at me and I kept having nightmares about it. And so, when Franklin Graham came into town, we went to this revival meeting. I was like, "Hey, Dad, I want to go down to the field and say the Sinner's Prayer again." And he's like, "But you've already been baptized, you're already saved." I was like, "Yeah. Well, I just wanted to rededicate my life to Christ. It's fine." But I was paranoid. I was like, what if I'm not saved and the world's going to end tomorrow, clearly?

Kieryn:

Obviously, at any point. I mean, [inaudible 00:13:23] case coming up.

Eve:

Obviously, because Franklin Graham is in town telling us that it is going to be done.

Kieryn:

Yeah, yeah. My parents also ... They started out as Baptists and we're pretty mainstream. And then as they became more charismatic, baptism also became more of a thing and speaking in tongues became a huge symbol of whether or not you were saved. And I remember my brother also did that. I remember him being very anxious when he was a child about being saved. And I remember a bunch of my other siblings feeling that way too, and I didn't. And because I didn't, people thought I was weird. I was looked at skeptically, because I didn't go to the altar multiple times out of paranoia and anxiety.

Eve:

What's some ... But I don't know. You have imagine this.

Kieryn:

And I wasn't. I was the only one of my siblings who wasn't baptized more than once, because I was like, I feel like it counted.

Eve:

Baptized more than once.

Kieryn:

Yeah. My parents were very much into ... Well, they decided, after they became charismatic, that all the baptisms that we had when we were Baptist-ish suddenly didn't count.

Eve:

That's ... I mean, there's like ...

Kieryn:

I was like, no, I feel like it counts. So, I'm just going to keep it.

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Eve:

It's one thing to get baptized as an infant and not remember it, and want to get baptized as an adult when you feel like you're able to consent to it. It's an entirely different thing to get re-baptized twice when you're both old enough to know it's up.

Kieryn:

Right, yeah. And my parents never did infant baptisms because that's Catholic. They did dedication. And then after my siblings and I all became, however old enough that we felt, we were to decide that we wanted to be Christians or whatever, then we would be baptized.

Eve:

Interesting.

Kieryn:

Yeah, or and then baptized again after the first round of salvation wore off.

Eve:

I mean, I guess like I spend a lot of my leader years in groups that really valued sacraments. And so, to get rebaptised is violating a sacrament that's fucked up.

Kieryn:

Yeah, everyone, like most people thought, it was weird to be baptized again. But my parents were like, "Well, we understand more now, so we have to do it again as ...

Eve:

Interesting.

Kieryn:

... like reaffirmation of our faith or whatever.

Eve:

Did you ever speak in tongues? Did you ever pretend to speak in tongues?

Kieryn:

I did not know, for the same reason. I felt like if I faked it, that I would be faking it, and that would be more egregious than not speaking in tongues. Faking a spiritual gift seemed the worst idea.

Eve:

Right, it's [inaudible 00:16:11].

Kieryn:

Well, and my parents also were very life and death about communion. They made it a huge thing. And every time communion came around at church, they always were okay, we're going to sit down and

we're going to have this conversation where we explain the gravity of what this is to you, which is literally drinking the flesh and blood of some dude who died 2000 years ago.

Eve:

Wait, so you guys believed in transubstantiation when you weren't Catholic?

Kieryn:

Well, not quite, but close. It wasn't as literal, but it had that weight, if that makes sense. It was about as weighted as it is in Catholicism, I would imagine, but without any of the other things that come with Catholicism. Which now that you make that connection, it makes sense since my dad grew up Catholic.

Eve:

Okay, that makes more sense. My dad, because he didn't believe in that, now, the Episcopalians ... Don't ask me to explain the difference. But the Episcopalians believe in this consubstantiation, which is halfway between the transubstantiation where it becomes literally the body and blood of Christ to this like it is a consecrated substance that represents the body of Christ. And then there's the purely allegorical mainstream evangelical where this is merely representative and it doesn't change anything. It's not a sacrament, because we don't believe in sacraments as such. And so, the Episcopalians, because they were that one step closer to transubstantiation, my father, every single time we visited my grandmother's Episcopal Church, he wouldn't take communion.

Kieryn:

Wow.

Eve:

And that was two or three times a year. And my mom would go up, because she was like, "I don't have a problem with this." And my father would be like, "Alright kids, you have to understand what you're doing there." And I was like, "Yeah, cool. I'm going ... It's fine." A part of me is probably ... He's also a germophobe, and it was probably just that he didn't want to share the cup. Because it's one chalice, but also there's this theological reason that he was using to back up.

Kieryn:

Right, obviously, yeah.

Eve:

I always believed that I was saved after I got into Reformed theology. As soon as I understood that, I was like, oh, cool. I don't have to worry about this anymore, me fucking up with my siblings and being angry and reacting to things, this is normal, and I can just progressively get better. And that's the Holy Spirit working in me, and I don't need to worry about it. Because this is on God's timeline, not mine.

Kieryn:

Yeah, that makes ... Yeah.

Eve:

Because as a kid, I was paranoid all the time that I was like had lost my faith and was like go now.

Kieryn:

Yeah, I was really nervous about that, too. That I would randomly make a mistake and do the thing, that was the worst thing, the most unforgiveable or whatever. I don't remember when that stopped. It eventually did stop. And I think it was after I got older and realized that the unforgivable sin would have to be so egregious and not anything being mad at my siblings, that helped.

Eve:

I often tell people when I talk about my past in fundamentalism, that I thought I was a really terrible kid and then super rebellious. I was actually the most straight edge asshole ever. I was such a tightwad.

Kieryn:

Yeah. I didn't realize that until I was 22. I felt like I was a horrible, horrible child, a horrible daughter, the most cruel, a rebellious person ever. And then I grew up and I talked to people and then people started telling me about things they did when they were kids. I was fantastic. The worst I did was sigh and forget to do laundry. I was ... Wow.

Eve:

Wow, you are just going to hell. The laundry ...

Kieryn:

I read ...

Eve:

... and go folding stuff.

Kieryn:

I read Elsie Densmore and compared myself to that standard and ...

Eve:

Yeah. Well, she's just a basket case.

Kieryn:

Yeah, and she has no feelings at all and like ...

Eve:

Well, she's also being groomed by pedophiles.

Kieryn:

She's abused and repressed. And there is a lot going on in that book. But as a child ...

Eve:

There's a lot going on in there.

Kieryn:

... given that book as something to emulate as a girl, I felt like I was the worst because I had any feeling at all and needed anything at all and ...

Eve:

And I wasn't immediately cheerful about being told to give up something I wanted.

Kieryn:

Exactly.

Eve:

That meant that I was like a piece of shit.

Kieryn:

Right. And waking up and feeling bad one day was a mark on my moral fiber as a person and not just bodies.

Eve:

Yeah, that character house is going to fall apart if you don't keep working on it.

Kieryn:

Right, exactly.

Eve:

I did this one thing this one time. I must have been eight or nine. I think it was probably closer to nine. I had a ballet recital in this theater in Downtown Visalia. If you're ever in Visalia, California, you can go to ... It's the old Fox Theater, I think. And they have this balcony that has this cutout that looks down into the foyer, which is a really weird design and obviously, is really bad for sound stuff. Acoustically speaking, I'm like, this is dumb, but hey, whatever. So, I had a ballet performance in the theater. It was an end of the year thing. We're doing Sleeping Beauty.

Eve:

I was in this gorgeous little outfit, and I really loved it, but all the girls in my group were bitchy and knew each other from school and just weren't hanging out with me. So, I was really bored. And then, we went first or second in the lineup because we were younger. And we had to wait in the greenroom for all this time. And I was just going stir crazy. And my dad was supposed to come to the performance. And I guess he was late and missed it, or was late to pick me up because he met someone he knew.

Eve:

I can't remember what, but I was waiting in the greenroom and the theater is empty. The performance is done. I should be out of there. There's a handful of kids milling around in the greenroom still waiting to be picked up. And so, I'm like, fine, we're going to go find our parents. I, Pied Piper, lead these little kids

out. And by little, I mean, they're all my age, maybe one was younger, some of them were older, but we're all around the same, three or four years. And we go into the balcony, and we see this cutout. And we looked down and we can see all the people milling down the foyer, and we're like, oh, can we see our parents? And then I realized that I can spit on people.

Kieryn:

Oh my god.

Eve:

And I had a pretty good aim at that point. I was like such tomboy. I was obsessed with it. And so, I aimed for this bald guy's head.

Kieryn:

Oh my god.

Eve:

And I got him. And he looked at me and he like ... That's when I docked and laughed. And all the kids were like, whoa, this is cool. So, we all started doing it. I can't remember, but it's me or someone else, we got this lady and her cleavage. It was great. And then I looked down and it's my dad, and he looks up.

Kieryn:

Oh my god. Oh no.

Eve:

I was just like, oh, fuck. And apparently, he was going to get me flowers and ice cream after the show. But now he's not going to get them and he'll just get them from mom and I can't have any and I'm in trouble.

Kieryn:

Oh my god.

Eve:

He comes up and pulls me out by my ear from this crowd. And I just remember ...

Kieryn:

Oh my god.

Eve:

... sitting in the car on the way home being like, that was really fun. I didn't really do anything that wrong. And also, am I going to hell? Because that was worth it. That was my like I'm a bad kid thing for a decade. I'm like ...

Kieryn:

Oh my god.

Eve:

... didn't do anything worse than that ever until I went to college and put my first all-nighter, and that was on par with spitting on people, in my head.

Kieryn:

Oh my god.

Eve:

I was such a good kid.

Kieryn:

Yup, yeah. I had this moment where that was just such a huge revelation to me, when I realized that I was not actually a bad kid.

Eve:

What was it that made you realize that you weren't a bad kid? What was the thing that you thought made you bad and what change that?

Kieryn:

The thing that I thought made me bad was, well, one, running away, abandoning my siblings, but also not taking care of them as well as I was told that I should be taking care of them and ...

Eve:

Because you're clearly their parent.

Kieryn:

Right. And the thing that changed that and made that light bulb go off was telling other adults about that experience and watching their faces and have them tell me back, "No, you were not bad. You should never have had that obligation put on you. That's wrong. You didn't do anything wrong. You did amazing." And it was enough of that, for me to realize, oh, so I'm not a horrible person for forgetting to do 10 loads of laundry that day when my mom set me up to fail.

Eve:

Is it even physically possible?

Kieryn:

It is if you do it all day.

Eve:

Okay. So, the thing you were saying about people reacting is really interesting, because that story I just told you about spitting on people after the dance recital is the only story that I've ever told anyone from my childhood, where they thought I was bad. Every other one, I've been like, hey, look, I've got a joke. Or like, wow, I was such a bad kid. And they listen and they're like, "Oh my god, I'm so sorry that happened to you." And I'm like, "No, it was supposed to be funny."

Kieryn:

Right. Oh my god. I tried to tell stories and that happens all the time. I eventually just stopped telling those stories.

Eve:

Yeah, me too.

Kieryn:

Because everyone was just horrified and I was like, no, but my dad made the butchers angry by murdering the pigs.

Eve:

Yeah, exactly. I'm like ...

Kieryn:

Everyone is just horrified that that was the thing that happened. And I'm like, but it was hilarious.

Eve:

Yeah, yeah. Dark humor only works on people who actually suffered. If you don't get it, you're lucky.

Kieryn:

Yeah, consider yourself lucky.

Eve:

Oh my god. Yeah, see, I just had to stop telling these stories. Because it's like, eh, eh.

Kieryn:

I like ...

Eve:

I'm making myself seem out of touch and I guess I am.

Kieryn:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I would try to talk to people. This is when I was learning how to socialize with other people my age. And I would just watch people's reactions and I was like, alright, I need to not do that because that is not the reaction that I'm going for. I'm just going to rewrite some of these things to make them not as jarring to people.

Eve:

Did you ever put out a fleece?

Kieryn:

Well, my parents wanted to.

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Eve:

You know what the term means like ...

Kieryn:

I know, yeah.

Eve:

Let's explain it because I feel like not everybody knows that. Let me just see which prophet it was. I'm going to have to Google this.

Kieryn:

I want to say it was either Elijah or Elisha. I want to say it was one of them.

Eve:

Yeah. It was one of them and I want to get it right. I want to say ... No, Gideon. It was Gideon.

Kieryn:

Yes. I remember that now.

Eve:

I'm glad I looked it up. Look at us forgetting the Bible.

Kieryn:

I feel so proud of myself right now.

Eve:

I'm so proud of myself every time I forget Bible stuff.

Kieryn:

Me too. When I can't remember where a verse is that I know, I'm so happy.

Eve:

It's really great. I've just gotten to the point in my memoir where I need to find a Bible to have on hand, and I think I got rid of them all.

Kieryn:

I turned mine into origami.

Eve:

Oh, good.

Kieryn:

Yeah. I'm good. But Gideon, fleeces.

Eve:

Okay, Gideon and fleeces. Okay, so what did he do? He was called by God to save Israel, and he didn't believe that he was supposed to do that job. So, he put out two pieces of wool outside of his house overnight. And he's like ... I don't know, it would look it was supposed to rain or something. And he's like, look, God, if you want me to do this, you're going to make these completely dry in the morning and all of the ground around them are going to be wet. And sure enough, that happened. And he was like, whoa, whoa, whoa, that's totally a fluke, we got to do this again. So, he was like, alright, looks it's going to be dry overnight. So, I'm going to put out two new fleeces. And if they are wet ...

Kieryn:

Wet.

Eve:

... and the ground around them is totally dry, then I'm really supposed to lead the Israelites into battle and saving the nation. And that's what happened. I think there are a couple other tests that he put out, but it was basically ...

Kieryn:

Yeah, I think there was like three or four.

Eve:

Yeah, one involved a well and one involved a tree, I think. But the gist of it is that at the end of the day, he was like, okay, I can't deny this anymore. I had to do this job because God really clearly wants me to do this. That was kind of a metaphor for asking God to give you a son. And so, I knew there were a lot of decisions, big decisions people would have to make where they would put out a fleece, metaphorically speaking, and they'd be like, alright, so God, if I run into traffic on the way home, then I'm supposed to ask my wife, we're supposed to move for this church or whatever, something that. Where it's like, normally, this thing doesn't happen, but make it happen and I'll believe that this is real. So, did your parents?

Kieryn:

They did. I'm not remembering what all that they did that for, but it was something that was pretty common. I think they did it to figure out if they should tithe more, probably. I think that's what it was. Is there like, well ...

Eve:

The answer for them is always yes, right?

Kieryn:

Well, yeah, exactly. I mean, when I left, I think they were giving 50% or 60% of their income to the church, which is ridiculous.

Eve:

Talking about that progressive tax rate.

Kieryn:

Yeah, right. It also took leaving and becoming an adult for me to realize that the poverty that we were in was completely self-inflicted. If my parents hadn't given over half of their income to the local nondenominational church and every crisis pregnancy center in the area, we would have been fine.

Eve:

Yeah, ours was a lot of that, too, and it was mostly just if you guys hadn't had nine fucking kids. We might not have struggled.

Kieryn:

Right, you can't stand in the way of God.

Eve:

Other people in that same job were able to put their kids through college.

Kieryn:

Right, yeah. My parents also believed very much that if something was supposed to happen, that you would do literally nothing to make it happen, and it would just fall in your lap. And if you had to work for it to happen, then it wasn't supposed to.

Eve:

Interesting. I had some of that early on. And then later on, there was this other point of view where it was like, if God wants it to happen, we're going to receive resistance. And if it's really difficult, then God clearly really wants it to happen. I remember this woman, the ... We'll hear about this in another episode about the worship dance team I was in, but the woman who ran it, at one point, wanted to get ... We had a bus that belonged to the group for touring. And she wanted to get a second bus, I think, or a better bus or something. But it was like ... and she wanted to have us travel abroad and dance in Europe. And these two things that she really wanted us to do, she's like, we're going to go to Romania.

Kieryn:

Wow.

Eve:

And she was trying to raise money for it and we're trying to get visas and logistics worked out, and it was really difficult, and it kept going wrong, kept going wrong, and kept going wrong. We kept going like, "Connie, this is a bad idea." And she kept being like, "No, because we're having resistance, that makes me more sure that God wants us to do this."

Kieryn:

Clear.

Eve:

This is just the devil throwing up snares. This is like the devil thwarting God's plan. And we just have to stay the course.

Kieryn:

Yeah, I think my parents also had some of that. So, if it was something that it was just normal everyday stuff, they believed that we were supposed to suffer and everything was supposed to be really hard, like existing at its base level was supposed to be really difficult and really hard. But if we were supposed to move, or change jobs, or something big life altering were supposed to happen, that should just happen by falling out of the sky and into your lap.

Eve:

Right. Like if you're not supposed to starve, God's supposed to put that money in your mailbox on Friday.

Kieryn:

Right, yeah. Or like ... I don't know. My grandparents bought an angel food box that was like, that's God providing. It's like, sure. Or it's your parents making sure you don't starve their grandchildren.

Eve:

I think it's so interesting that that mindset coexist with the bootstraps mentality where you're lazy and entitled and welfare queens exists and you shouldn't ask the government for help.

Kieryn:

Yeah, yeah. But intentionally making these decisions and saying that God is trying you or testing you or you're being persecuted or whatever. It's totally different and definitely valid.

Eve:

In terms of being okay with doubt in faith and the consequences there of, like I am okay with being wrong about Christianity because ... Okay, so I'm agnostic, I don't necessarily believe that Jesus is the higher power, I believe that a higher power is possible and I'm happy to be wrong, but I'm just going to live my life according to the best ethical code that I can come up with and appreciate my small place in the universe. And that's about as far as I'm willing to go. But beyond that, I'm really happy to be wrong about faith because I have seen Christians ignore abuse so much.

Eve:

And Jesus wouldn't have done that. Jesus would not have allowed children to be abused the way we were abused. Jesus would not have been okay with women being abused the way that we've seen women abuse in the church, the way power has been treated, and the way that church systems have enabled these abusers to thrive, really has sealed the deal for me in terms of like, if Jesus is real, there's going to be a contingent of followers who were not going to enable that stuff and I'll be right there with them, but I haven't met them yet.

Kieryn:

Yeah. That's the thing for me, too. And the way I see myself is, honestly, I'm following more of Jesus' teachings than every Christian that I met and knew growing up and every exposure to Christianity that I've had. I'm just looking at the Beatitudes, I'm doing those things. I am working for justice. I am feeding the hungry and the poor and the meek and the downtrodden. I am taking care of my people as much as I can, as well as I can. I am doing all of those things that Christians are supposed to be doing. Because as

a human being with empathy, I think that is important. And I don't see Christianity doing any of that, and I'm fine with it.

Eve:

I stopped going to church in 2014. Yeah, 2014. And I had been going to church in Episcopalian, Liberal Episcopalian churches for a couple years. And I was in a position where they were super affirming, they were super open, they were super anti-capitalist. It was great in all of these ways. And I still was having panic attacks when I tried to go to church. And I was like, okay, so if I'm wrong, that's fine. It's worth it to just save my sanity. My body literally refuses to let me go to church and feel safe. And I can appreciate it from a distance. And if I get to the point where I stop having these panic attacks, and I miss it, I'll go back. And if God's a thing that can control that, he/she/it/they will allow me to get to that point. And I've just never gotten to that point.

Kieryn:

Yup, yeah, exactly.

Eve:

Every year or every six months, I've tried to go back for some service to some church somewhere, and I always have to leave during the sermon because I'm just like, oh, God, I can't breathe. This is not working.

Kieryn:

Yeah. There are events in politics things that happen out here that happen in churches, and I can't go to them. Because even being in a church building, despite it not being for a service gives me a panic attack. I went to a community planning meeting that was in a church and I had to leave halfway through, because I was having an anxiety attack and I just couldn't deal with it. Because something about being in those spaces just triggers me so much and I just can't think or focus or do anything, I just have to get out of there.

Eve:

Well, I mean, I was in a position in my first few months at site in my village in Kyrgyzstan for Peace Corps where it was Kurman Ait, which is the Ait celebration that's happening in the fall and it's all about feeding all your neighbors and being generous to the community and to the poor. And there was this huge dinner and that was happening where it was on a recreational football field that was like with AstroTurf in what looks like ... Had like 12, 15 foot chain link fence, and it was this huge field. And they like spread out tables of food along there.

Eve:

And everybody came for dinner. It was like the whole town was invited for dinner. And so, everybody was going, people from my school, my host family, community, my mentor. And so, you're supposed to have dinner and socialize, and an imam was going to basically give a short sermon and ask for donations for a charitable fund for the community. And the imam, bless him, I could barely understand most of what he was saying, but the mannerisms were the same. He was the same like sermon, posturing and tone of voice and like, I need money from you.

Eve:

And I was so triggered. I was just like, oh, look, my family is calling me, have to go. I made up an excuse, and I left. And I felt really bad about that. Because that's a high holy holiday. This is an event that is not from my culture or from my religion of origin. And I'm supposed to respect this and participate in it, but I'm having a panic attack. Even though it's not church, even though it's not in the church, even though it's not even Christian, there was something about that like ... It felt like a pastor asking for money and was a very similar dynamic.

Eve:

And I later went to that event, about a year later, and I was fine. I had gone through some more therapy, and it was great. And I was able to sit through it. It's all like your mileage may vary, but I was just so raw at that point that I just couldn't do it.

Kieryn:

Yeah. What was the thing or things that started unraveling your faith?

Eve:

I was part of this blogging community where we were all trying to reconcile what we were learning about gender roles and oppression, privilege, and feminism, and systemic racism. And it was a very baby intro. Not even 101 levels of stuff. I was in this blogging community, and people were talking about this stuff. And the word privilege was being thrown around. And I remember researching it and having this big blowup fight with my husband at the time about like ... I was like, "Oh, you've got male privilege. That's why you always think you're right and I'm wrong."

Eve:

And he was like, "Privilege isn't real. It's all in your head." I was like, "That's what a male chauvinist would say." And he's like, "But I'm not a male chauvinist." It was a parody of our fight. That's not what we actually said, full disclaimer. That was this sense of it. That was the gist of our various fights in that. And I remember just being like, wow, this privilege thing really defines a lot of my experiences in the church where I didn't have time or money or resources. Basically, I was an upper lower class kid in a middle upper class church community.

Eve:

People had free time and free resource and they were getting college paid for and cars given to them. And I was like, "Please, mom, can I have \$12 to get new shoes at Goodwill?" "No." "I have to be your slave for another week." "Okay, cool. I'll do that." That kind of stuff. And as I said before, earlier, my family on paper looked like upper middle class. We should have been able to provide for everybody's needs. But because we had nine kids, the way it was distributed was really bad, but privilege really started coming through. And then I heard the term gaslighting.

Eve:

And once I understood the term gaslighting, it was another big like, aha, this is how my father has treated me and this is how my husband has treated me forever. And also, my pastors and the church and every single time I've been like, hey, something is wrong here, they've been like, "Oh no, it's just your female hormones. You can't handle it." No, I mean, that's an exaggeration, but that was, again, was

the gist of it. And so, as soon as I start going through that, I was like, okay, but Jesus is the advocate of the downtrodden.

Eve:

Jesus is here for the victims and the marginalized and the underprivileged. And Jesus is brown and this system is really not reflecting his teachings. So, there's got to be a way to incorporate all these things. So, I started looking into liberation theology and more feminist theologians. And a lot of the arguments came down to semantics. And then I started seeing like ... So, there were some feminists who were fundamental for starting me thinking about these things, who were not willing to take these ideas all the way.

Eve:

And as soon as they started realizing where they were willing to stop to preserve either their marriages or their familial relationships or their marriages, and I was in the position of like, I was losing my marriage, I had lost my church, I had lost my family. I had nothing left to lose, basically. And they still had stuff left to lose that they were willing to protect. And so, you have ... I mean, this is why, personally, I don't really enjoy seeing Nadia Bolz-Weber on my Facebook feed or Rachel Held Evans anymore.

Eve:

Because while both of them were really formative for me to get out and understanding how feminism can intersect with Christianity, both of them sided with Tony Jones and his wife was like, hey, he's somebody abusive asshole. And he's like, keeping my kids for me ...

Kieryn:

So [inaudible 00:46:41].

Eve:

... and using all of his money to gaslight me. And all of these feminists were like, yeah, sure, we'll do a conference with him, because it'll make us rich. Like, okay, maybe it wouldn't make them rich, but they were all like, it's too complicated.

Kieryn:

There's no solidarity. It's just like, ah.

Eve:

They were willing to throw a woman under the bus when it came down to their personal careers, and they were not willing to consistently stand up for the things that they talked about, which every fav has problems. All of us are learning this is a process. But as soon as they start seeing stuff like that, I was just like, it's not worth it for me to keep trying to save this faith that is wanting to throw us off in the gutter.

Kieryn:

Yeah, yeah. There are a bunch of factors that led me to deconvert. And the first thread that undid everything was realizing that my parents lied about whether or not the stillborns would have been able to have been saved, because they would have been if they'd been in hospital and it would have been

fine. And my parents' belief about doctors being evil and faith healing only was such a huge fundamental part of Christianity the way I was taught it and the way it was expected with my family.

Kieryn:

When I found out that the babies could have lived, that really started to unravel everything else in my head, because I realized I'd been lied to. And I mean, I knew I'd been lied to before that, but that was just something I couldn't shake because it happened at such a formative time in my life.

Eve:

How old were you?

Kieryn:

I was nine when the first one happened, and then 13 with the second.

Eve:

And you were supposed to be involved with both ... Because they were home births.

Kieryn:

They were home births.

Eve:

You were present [inaudible 00:49:00].

Kieryn:

I was there. Yeah, I was caretaking the kids and the baby in between, was the one that I delivered, or cut the umbilical cord of. All of that is wrapped up in my parents, basically, how they understand salvation in Christianity. And then when that started becoming unraveled, I started thinking more about other things. And I started writing about Christianity in 2010. I wrote about how Christianity is supposed to be based on love, but that's not how I was seeing it being done anywhere at all ever. And my parents replied to that post chewing me out for suggesting such a thing. And all I got ...

Eve:

That the kids could have been saved if they had been willing to go to the hospital?

Kieryn:

Well, that, but also that Christianity was about love. They hated that idea. And everyone else that I talked to was like, well, yeah, but also with this caveat of sometimes it's abusive, and that's fine, too. And I got to the point where the cognitive dissonance was just too much for me. I couldn't hold that Christianity was supposed to be empathetic and loving and kind and caring for people who have less than you, and was being implemented the other way.

Eve:

That term cognitive dissonance was also really ...

Kieryn:

That was huge.

Eve:

... warm and everything. When did you encounter that term for the first time?

Kieryn:

I think I ran across that in like 2011 or so?

Eve:

Yeah, I think I ran across it in like 2012. And I remember being in ... Maybe it was 2011. Because I remember encountering it in terms of my father, because he was holding me to the standard of like, you're not an adult and I have to decide your relationship decisions for you. And I was leaving my Sovereign Grace church to go to a Presbyterian church that was local. This is the Indigo church that I mentioned before. I don't know if we're recording it or not, but I ... So, I was going to this church that a guy who was teaching in Sovereign Grace's pastor's college, was running out of my town where my college was.

Eve:

And so, it was a bonafide approved church, but it was a different denomination. And my father was like, you're an adult, I trust your judgment. God will tell you where to go. Your discernment is sound. We've trained you well. And I was like, cool. Okay, so I can pick my new church. Cool. This is where I'm going to go. And then fast forward, like four months later, and he's like, "Yeah, but you're not actually an adult, your judgment is all flawed and you can't decide who you're going to date." I was like, hmm, this don't match.

Kieryn:

My parents pulled that too. But when I was like, they pulled that on me in 2008 when I was courting.

Eve:

The other thing, and I'm like, this is still very upsetting. I've been trying to read about this, and I still don't know how to. So I really loved the church I was going to Washington, D.C. And I still feel really fondly about it. The pastor there was really kind to me, and my ex was being paid to sing in the choir. He was getting like, I don't know, \$50 every Sunday, because he's an operatic vocalist. And he was getting paid to sing in the choir. So the traditional service was like 11:00 and the more contemporary service was at 9:30.

Eve:

And he lived across the street from the church, literally across the street from the church. And I asked him if he would be willing to give up that \$50 a week to go to the 9:30 a.m. service, so that I wouldn't have to fight Sunday morning traffic coming in an hour away, because I was living out in the suburbs, to go to the 11:00 a.m. service, so that we wouldn't have to see each other at church. This is such a silly, nonsense thing, but he refused to budge.

Kieryn:

Oh my god.

Eve:

And he wouldn't do that for me. And I was in this position where I really wanted to be able to go to church, but there was no other church that felt safe. And so, I would have to go up and if you've ever been in an Episcopal Church and the old style, like Cathedral style church, the choirs up by the altar, and he was up in it. So, in order to participate in communion, I would have to literally walk past my ex-husband and watch him watching me ...

Kieryn:

No, no.

Eve:

... to take communion. And I would have to pass him on my way back to my seat and try to not make eye contact, and I just couldn't do that.

Kieryn:

Yeah, no.

Eve:

And he wouldn't make room for me to allow me to keep going to church, so I just stopped. And that was really shitty. And I learned this summer, one of my friends, one of my very few friends who stayed in touch with him, he kept telling people I was abusive. And finally, this person had a falling out with him, where she was like, hey, look, you really have got your ex wrong. She's not out to get you. She doesn't hate you. She's never been stalking you. She just is really grieved that you've been spreading these lies, and that's about it. That's all. And could you just stop? He was like, wow, no one's ever said this to me before.

Kieryn:

Oh my god.

Eve:

I was just gutted because when we were getting divorce, we had our pastor who married us, we had our pastor at that church in D.C. who was involved. We had a family friend of his who was also a pastor. We had his dad. We had a Sovereign Grace Pastor Bob Kauflin, giving him advice. We had all these pastors.

Kieryn:

Oh my god.

Eve:

We had my father. Everybody was giving him advice. And no one told him, hey, she's not crazy. Hey, she's not abusive.

Kieryn:

Oh my god.

Eve:

Hey, maybe you should listen to her. No one called him out.

Kieryn:

Of course not, he's a dude.

Eve:

And he wasn't physically abusive. He wasn't violent. He was just twisted and gaslighting and really wrong on some things. But like, really? All of these pastors and no one could stand up for me. And that is when I lost that church, that's when I lost my real drive to even try, because what's the point? No one's willing to stand up for you. I have to do it for myself, and I'll just leave. So, you'll have to do it in a system that's already inherently ...

Kieryn:

Already against you.

Eve:

Inherently and historically misogynist, yes. Well, I just got into it.

Kieryn:

Yeah, good job.

Eve:

I now have to go write this crap.

Kieryn:

It's okay. You can just listen to this back and transcribe it.

Eve:

Point that way. Yeah. I will tell that story a lot better when I get the chance to read it out, but that's the bare bones version.

Kieryn:

Yeah, that makes sense. I just stopped going to church because I had been going to the churches that my ex in-laws were going to, and they were really far away and not what I wanted. And I just realized that I didn't have to wake up to go to church anymore, because I was an adult. And that was liberating. And so, then we ...

Eve:

That was great.

Kieryn:

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... stopped going to church, except for when my ex father-in-law preached. And at some point, I just stopped going to those two because I couldn't deal with churches, and I found myself like, I would take a flask of rum and just hang out in the bathroom during communion. And it was just like, why am I even here?

Eve:

I mean, I would do that for like ...

Kieryn:

I could be doing this at home playing games and it would be fun.

Eve:

Weddings that were ... I mean, I would do that for weddings where the minister was fundamental. Someone's giving the, now you may do serve your husband and there's no other purpose for you.

Kieryn:

Eh, eh.

Eve:

Those kinds of wedding sermons. That's the only time I ever brought a flask to church.

Kieryn:

I always brought one afterwards.

Eve:

Bless you.

Kieryn:

Because I just couldn't ... Well, and we would also go hang out with my ex's family afterwards and between church ...

Eve:

Yeah, that's hard.

Kieryn:

... and they're very conservative Christianity and my blossoming queerness, I just couldn't, so ...

Eve:

See, we would go hang out with my ex's family afterward. And they were like, wow, Sovereign Grace is being really bad about how they're handling this abuse scandal. Let's talk about it. And that was a relief, they were great.

Kieryn:

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Yeah, that's good.

Eve:

Well, thank you guys for listening. Please comment and tell us about your own struggles with Doubt and let us know if you have any further questions. If you want to support our podcast, you can join us on Patreon at Kitchen Table Cult pod or find us on Twitter. Where can you find us on Twitter, Kiernyn?

Kiernyn:

The podcast handle is Kitchen Table Cult pod. My handle is blue pup boi with an I. What's yours? What's changed?

Eve:

My name is Eve_Ettinger.

Kiernyn:

And if you love the music, which you should, it's Janet by the Heavens from their albums Love Songs.

Eve:

Yup, many thanks to Aaron Bechtel for being our producer and editing all of our sounds and ...

Kiernyn:

All of Blanche.

Eve:

Editing Blanche out of every episode. Bless his heart, and not in a sarcastic way. And where can you send questions?

Kiernyn:

We have a contact page on our website, which is kitchentablecult.com, and you can fill out the form or just email kitchentablecult@gmail.com.

Eve:

Thanks for listening.

Kiernyn:

Bye.

Eve:

Bye.