

Episode 80: Ricky doesn't buy groceries

I want to take you back a few years, to 1994, and the TV show Seinfeld. This show was extremely popular. Everyone watched it. It was Season 6, episode #6. In this episode, George Costanza has a new girlfriend and he's at a luncheon at her mother's house, which is attended by several of her mother's friends.

George is doing his best to make a good impression. His jokes are well-timed, he's very complimentary to all the older ladies, he's really doing great. They love him. But if you remember George, he always seems to find a way to mess up. As he's bringing some dishes into the kitchen, he happens to notice in the trash can, sitting on top of the other trash, is a partially eaten eclair. This is a type of pastry, with delicious cream in the middle, and topped with chocolate icing. He sees it, thinks about it for a second, and then he reaches into the trash can and picks it up.

And of course, as he does this, his girlfriend's mother comes in and sees him take it out of the trash and take a bite from it. You can guess where it goes from there – lots of backpedaling, explaining, rationalizing. George explained that it wasn't really IN the trash, it was more like "on top of" the trash. And it was still in its little paper doily so it hadn't even touched anything else. And he knew the person who had already taken a bite from it! It's the kind of comedy you'd expect from a TV show, and what made it funny is that it would almost never happen in real life.

But...just for a minute, put yourself in that same situation. Would you be a little bit tempted to just pull out that delicious pastry and take a quick bite, especially if you knew no one would ever find out? I would guess that for most people, the answer would probably still be a "no".

But my guest today is not like most people. You're about to meet Ricky. Ricky is well-educated, fully employed, married, and he can certainly afford to buy food. But he doesn't spend any money at the grocery store, because he gets his food for free. By now you might be able to guess where it comes from.

Scott

I have lots of questions, but I want to start with this one. How many bags of potato chips do you own at the moment?

Ricky

That's a good question, it's relevant. Between my pantry, which I have completely filled up, probably 30-40 snack size bags of potato chips in there of different varieties. I like variety. I had to move some down to my basement area in the laundry room to my wife's chagrin. There's an entire box filled with about 40 bags. I started getting a bigger overflow downstairs and had to hide those from her.

Scott

You are never going to run out of chips, that's for sure.

Ricky

I don't think so, no.

Scott

I want to talk about how this whole thing began. I understand it started when you were working in a restaurant.

Ricky

Yeah so throughout college, like most people, I got into the restaurant industry. What happened was sometimes I'd get to work a little bit hungry and then you get even hungrier while you're working. So you're bussing tables and you're taking plates away and you'd be surprised at the food waste of people. Just leaving all this good stuff on their plate. As long as it wasn't like a soup, for some reason I do have boundaries with that. If it was like a steak I'd cut off the part that the customer was enjoying and then I would have it. So I was starting to eat things like shrimp, chicken, salmon, even burgers or leftover fries, for free.

While I was working in the restaurant industry, it was pretty good money tip wise anyways, but then I was starting to not have to buy food. So that was great, I would be around people after shift and they'd be paying for their food and here I am eating off people's plates for free. So it was kind of satisfying in the sense that I'm pretty frugal so I was able to save money, but it became this weird sense of adventure which I also linked to diving. It's almost like, for lack of a better term, you're hunting for food. You're looking around and you're trying to find stuff, and it's kind of fun. I know some of the listeners can understand what I'm talking about because I was not the only one who did this in the restaurant industry. I thought I was and I thought I was weird. Then when I started telling people or people saw me, I would say more people eat off plates than you think.

Scott

I would not have guessed that. Really?

Ricky

Yeah and definitely when food comes out to your table, and maybe there's french fries on it. Maybe a french fry or two will go missing on the way to the table, but of course most people see that as different since it just came out of the kitchen.

Scott

Do you remember the first time you did that? Like was it something that just looked really good and you thought, "Man, I'm just gonna go ahead and do that"?

Ricky

Yeah. It was a burger. It was a person who took a couple bites out of it and said they don't want it. So I was taking it to the back and was about to throw away what I perceive as a full size burger. I was thinking, "You know, if I was sitting down with a friend, and they were gonna say they didn't want this burger, would I eat it?" The answer was yes. I don't really know this customer that well but I had a little bit of rapport with them, I'd met them and they don't look too dirty. So I ended up trying it. I'll say this, full disclosure, I did this for years. I was in the restaurant industry for 5 or 6 years. I never once got sick, at least food poisoning wise, and it got pretty bad near the end. I was eating a lot of food. That was the introduction with that mindset of, "would I do this with a friend or family member?" If it was 'yes' then I'd do it. That's what I mean, not to be redundant, but take soup. I probably wouldn't eat my friend or family members soup. I don't know why, there's something with the liquid.

Scott

Yeah, yeah. There's the potential for a little bit of backwash there, right?

Ricky

There we go, yeah.

Scott

I love that your standard for approval was that 'they didn't look that dirty.'

Ricky

Exactly. Oh yeah.

Scott

(laughs) Did the restaurant have a policy about this? Is there anything stated like 'don't do this' or 'do it'?

Ricky

It's a health code violation. So say the restaurant didn't forbid it or whatever, you're definitely not supposed to. The thing is, the people who enforce health codes come around once a year, and they're not looking for things like that. You know when they're there and they are looking for things in the kitchen. They're not following employees around watching them. Since you know that they're there, my goodness are you just asking to both have the restaurant shut down and get fired and fined if you were to eat off a plate while they were present. Again though, it's like a one day event and you would never do that.

One time, I went to the back and my manager saw me in the hallway and I was trying to slam this food before I went back to my table and he just stared at me. He said, "Come here." He pulled me in his office and said, "Look, I don't ever want to see you doing that again. We could get shut down if you do that." He gave me the whole spiel, and I just nodded politely. I just didn't do it when he was around or waited until he wasn't in the area. It didn't scare me enough to make me stop, but management is not a fan of it. Like I said, I don't know how you feel about it hearing it, but people are usually grossed out as it is, let alone seeing their employees doing it.

Scott

How did you get the first idea for dumpster diving? What was the leap in logic from eating the food left on the table to eating from the big dumpster out behind the restaurant?

Ricky

I think to at least link kind of conceptually what I think is similar; it became very satisfying to eat for free. I can say with confidence, on my work days, my grocery or food bill was nothing. I didn't mind doing some intermittent fasting or if I had an early shift I would just eat at work. It became a consistent thing that I knew I could eat at work, so that was satisfying at least for me. Again, I'm a frugal guy so I was able to save money. Sometimes I would use to-go boxes and take food home. So my grocery bill was just dwindling, which again was satisfying. Getting this variety of food, it's kind of the sense of like, "I don't know what's coming next." It's a nice surprise if you will.

Then I was on a sub reddit that happened to be for dumpster diving. It just seemed so weird to me I thought this was for like thrown out furniture and what not. Sure enough there is a group of people that refuse to do what I do, but then they still dumpster dive. They consider themselves divers, but they only go for furniture or items they can resell or refurbish. They think what I do is disgusting. Then there's people that kind of do both. I would like to. I just don't know where to

find the furniture, it seems a little bit more difficult. So I was on the sub reddit and I thought, "You know there are some dumpsters near the gym I go to," because it was in a shopping center. I thought, "I'm just going to take a peek and see what's in there."

So I was walking to the gym and there's a dumpster that's associated with a pretty big chain grocery store and there was no lock on it. I will share in a second that that can become one of the frustrating things about this. So I went over and opened it up and there was an entire bag of bagels and donuts. It was full, there was no other trash around it or in it. It's as if somebody had literally put all of their pastries in a plastic bag. Well, a trash bag, but a lot of this is just mindset. So I reach in there and grab a donut and take a bite and it was delicious, and it was free! I also just happened to find this. It kind of feels like treasure hunting, finding this thing that you didn't expect. So that was a pleasant surprise. I ate it and that was my pre-workout for the gym. As I was walking away I thought, "That thing was full of donuts and bagels."

Then I just left and thought no biggie. I didn't feel grossed out because it wasn't touching any other trash and these are pastries not like raw meat. Have you ever eaten a pastry or bread that's been sitting out on your counter for a week? I know that I have. I didn't see any mold on it, and it wasn't stale. That is the shocking part about this, is the amount and types of food that these companies throw away. It is frustrating to be honest. So that's how it started.

Scott

I'm just picturing reactions to people that are hearing this. Like you said, there are people who would think, "Man, there's nothing wrong with this food and it's free and tastes great. I can eat it and it's ok." Other people are thinking if they were to get something out of the dumpster and eat it, it would be like a little bit of their soul just died (laguhs). Like, "Where am I at in my life right now that I'm eating out of a dumpster?" But everything you're describing, you're right, it's a mindset. If somebody didn't know the difference between that and something somebody handed them inside the restaurant or inside the bakery, they really wouldn't know the difference. It's just mental.

Ricky

It is funny, especially being in the restaurant industry for so long. Again, if you get a plate full of fries, a couple of those probably went missing to the kitchen staff before they reached you. It goes back to what I said, that satisfying feeling that I get overall; that's why I do it. Saving money is nice, don't get me wrong, but right now I can afford groceries so that's not the issue. I think that's pertinent because some people might be picturing me-

Scott

Well of course! You're doing this kind of like a game sort of. Other people may be doing it because they really need the food. Do you ever run into people like that?

Ricky

Yeah. That can be the embarrassing part, because I'm pulling up in my car. Time of day can be important. Sometimes it's better to do it during daytime hours or the middle of the day. People seem to be less suspicious if you can imagine that. They aren't really looking for trouble. If they see you and you look presentable and you're near a dumpster, they really just think you're throwing something away, so they move on. They don't stop and talk to you. I actually have never been talked to yet by a company or the people. I've gotten some weird looks, but when I'm doing it during the day nobody says anything. I'm being practical too, workers are busy, they're in the store doing things, that's also why I do it at that time.

At night though, it can be a better haul. Usually in these places, restaurants and grocery stores, they throw their food out at the end of the day. When I go at night, I'll pull up in my car and I've encountered some people who aren't in the same circumstances I am. They are homeless, they literally have shopping carts or bicycles. They usually have a headlamp. I use the light from my cell phone. So that illustrates the differences there. They are clearly homeless, so if I see them there I will just give them a nod and move on. I don't want them to think I'm security, and I'm also not trying to overstep, because they probably need it more than I do. Like I said, it's not a need for me. So when I encounter homeless people I try to be respectful and I don't engage with them. I don't want them to be freaked out, and I don't want them to think I'm overstepping on their turf. I'll either come back at a different time or go to a different spot.

Scott

What are the actual legalities of this? Is it against the law or is it based on the local ordinances?

Ricky

Here's what's tricky, and that's why I'm not telling anybody to do this. I think a lot of people have heard of certain case law where lawyers or attorneys have gotten documents out of trash cans and it's been upheld in court. My understanding with things like that is if the trash can is out on public property, then legally anybody has access to it. I don't know the verbiage that well, people will have to look it up. Here's the problem though, what I just described at that shopping center, is that public property?

Scott

No it's not. Right.

Ricky

So these dumpsters, to be honest, are almost entirely on public property. I at least wanted to clarify that. I'm not jumping gates or going over fences, there are dumpsters behind gates and fences, and I'm not going to go to those ones. That's another level of security and I don't want to put myself in a position where I could get in legal trouble. Essentially if the dumpster is out in the open, but again it's on the property of the shopping center, I think legally it's trespassing. It's not stealing because they are throwing it away, it's probably the trash companies at that point. I wish I had better answers for you. You'd think someone like me would be more well versed in that, but my understanding is that at the most it's trespassing.

However, that needs to come from the property manager. I do know that. Let's say a cop does come by and stop me, they're not gonna cite me because there is no victim in the crime. They will probably tell me, "You need to get out of here. This doesn't belong to you. This isn't yours." But their time of day is important so I think when you do it during the day there is less of a risk. If I'm pulling up in my car past midnight and rummaging through a dumpster, I'm probably going to get told to move along. That hasn't happened yet. From the stories I've read online, that's what happens. From what I've read, sometimes if you run into employees, sometimes they'll feel bad and they'll go get more stuff for you. They think, "Man this guy's dumpster diving, I've gotta go get him the good stuff from inside." So that can happen too. When I say it's a gray area, it's probably more black and white than what I'm saying. The best advice I saw online is, "It's only illegal if you get caught." That's why you've got to be careful.

One big thing I'll say about it, is there are lots of security cameras. I try to go to places that don't have security cameras in the back. It's kind of nice with Covid, we have to wear masks all the

time anyway, so my face is usually covered. I just don't really want to be reported. Not even just for me and my sake. Maybe loss prevention is watching and they call the cops; I'm just trying to lower my risks as much as possible. I almost entirely avoid spots that have cameras out back, whether they're working or not, I just don't want to deal with them.

Scott

I like the idea of going during the day. It seems to me if I were going to do this, I would carry a clipboard around all the time, you know? That way people think, "Oh that guy's doing something official. He's supposed to be there carrying a clipboard."

Ricky

Oh there you go yeah! I should have a disguise.

Scott

Yeah, yeah. I've heard some people say on Youtube videos that they experiment with this. If you're carrying a ladder, you can get in anywhere. I saw these guys that walked into a movie theater carrying a ladder because they went anywhere they wanted to go because people assumed they were there to fix something. So sometimes hiding out in the open is the best concealment. When you do this, the phrase is "dumpster diving," do you actually get inside the dumpster? Or do you use some kind of grabber thing? How do you get all the stuff out?

Ricky

Sometimes I just kind of jump and my waist will teeter on the edge. I'll do a balancing act if you will, and I'll reach it if it's high enough. Sometimes it's so high you can just stand outside and reach up for stuff. What I've found though is some of these dumpsters are rather large and the difficult part can be getting the stuff out. If you don't have a box or shopping bag, you're carrying all that stuff out. You can imagine, the lids on these things are already 4.5 feet high, you can't set it down on the ground, then you have to climb out. It takes what I think of as some skill, but it probably doesn't really look graceful when I'm doing it.

Scott

Once you've had a little bit of practice it probably feels like second nature.

Ricky

It feels like it, yeah.

Scott

So you tried out this one and found these bagels and donuts, how did you expand from there?

Ricky

That happened and I had my gym session. So when I was going home I was thinking to myself, "Wait, I'm in the shopping center pretty often throughout the week." I started thinking about the different food shops there. I realized there were more than I thought. Especially when you're not thinking of buying the stuff, you're looking for free stuff. So I would check behind pizza shops too. The place I found the donuts was outside a grocery store, but there is a specialty donut shop too which is my favorite spot now. Then there's the quintessential Starbucks and other various places like that. So I thought, "I'm going to check this out the next day and see what I can do with this." I went back the next day and low and behold the grocery store dumpster was locked, and I thought, "What the heck?" We were talking about the legality before, if something is locked, don't try to get in it. That is definitely saying, "We don't want you inside this."

I thought, "I'm not going to tempt fate, I'm just going to walk away from it. That donut was pretty good yesterday. I wonder what the donut shop does with their donuts." I felt like I had hit a goldmine, that's why I keep saying this is like treasure hunting. I pulled out a similar looking trash bag, and I opened up and this thing is filled to the brim of any kind of donut you can think of. Maple frosting, powdered sugar, jelly filled, all this stuff. I struggle with binge eating as it is and I just went to town. I think I had 8 donuts until I realized what I was doing to myself. If you can picture it, there were like 50-60 donuts in there. I had to ask myself an important question. I may have hit an unlimited food source. That's how I was feeling even just in that moment. This was a lot of food.

Scott

That's more than one gym workout for sure.

Ricky

There you go. So I thought, "I'm going to pack some of these up for later." What's nice about these donut shops is there is parchment paper and stuff like that too. So I wrapped a few up and then I still went to the gym. It sounds so bad because I'm eating donuts, but I went and got my workout in and then I left. Then I thought, "Wait a minute I only checked 2 dumpsters. There are more here." There happens to be a barbeque spot that smokes their own meat. I thought, "Man barbeque sounds amazing." I didn't think I was going to get anything, honestly my mindset was that beggars can't be choosers.

I went over to the barbeque spot and looked in their dumpster and there was a bag full of aluminum foil. My first thought was that it was trash. Then I remembered that when people smoke meat they usually use aluminum foil. So I hopped in there and opened that up and it was all of their burnt meat. Like meat that's overcooked and dried out and now they don't want it. I'm telling you again, I used to eat off restaurant tables, but this was untouched meat. It was full slabs of ribs, pork shoulder and brisket. It's as good as it sounds, but it's definitely overcooked. I could tell that this was essentially stuff that was thrown out with that intention. The food was still warm though, because it was wrapped up in aluminum foil, and it's delicious.

I was still full from the baker's dozen that I just ate earlier. I thought, "You know, I'm just going to wrap this up and take it home." Now I'm going home with a handful of donuts and honestly probably a pound or two of good barbeque meat. I brought it home and I knew I wasn't going to get through all of it so I put some in the fridge and some in the freezer. I was sitting there thinking, "I don't need to go grocery shopping for the next few days." That hit me early on, within the first 2 days of me doing this.

Scott

That's part of what I was going to ask you is what your theory is on why this stuff is thrown out. In this case with the meat it was because it was overcooked. With prepackaged food or donuts and bagels, is it because they've expired past the date? Or is it something else?

Ricky

It's fascinating to me because of the range of food I get. I could probably stock shelves with the amount of chips that I have. The reason those chips were getting thrown away is because they have a 'best by' date. I don't know how familiar people are with some of these dates, but 'best by' does not mean expired. It literally just means that the quality of the product is the best by this date. I've actually heard of other countries actually selling this food at a discounted price. Even

your bigger chains will have their discount shelves. When you look at the dates, whenever it reaches that date or past they get rid of the food. Usually those discount shelves are approaching a couple days of that date. With the chips that I have, yeah full disclosure, they're past the 'best by' date. They're also sealed and highly processed. So when I open them, you can't tell the difference. So that's at least the case with those.

When it comes to other things- and Starbucks has become one of my favorites, and I actually worked there when I was younger- they put stickers on their packaged food items. That's more of a 'best by' date but they treat it like an expiration. So they will throw out their food that has just not sold. It's packaged and sealed. I'm talking about a sausage sandwich or something like that. So if they don't sell by the date they throw it away, and it's not expired in the sense that the food hasn't gone bad. They're just afraid of selling it to somebody, then eating it and getting sick and then suing them. So rather than deal with that they just get rid of it.

Then there is food that has an actual expiration date and you have to be careful with that. Most people have eaten food past the expiration date and it's typically safe. However I do think some of those dates should be abided by; especially when talking about meat products. So those are the ranges of things that you get. You get familiar with the food and companies and their policies on dates on their foods.

Scott

Yeah. I think some people can place too much emphasis on an expiration date. It's not like at midnight that day all of the sudden it's bad. I think when they make those dates they probably pack a little bit of margin in there as well because some people are going to go and eat it past that date anyway.

So with all this food right off the bat, what's going through your head? You must be thinking, "Man, I'm never gonna have to buy food again."

Ricky

Right. Speaking from a frugal mindset I first thought that this was going to help my budget, which was going to be great. Fitness is very important to me and staying in good shape. So what I realized was that I almost have to be careful. So this kind of became just like another errand. At first it was like a game but now it's sort of this adventure but also with a sense of duty. I don't want to be just another consumer essentially just adding to that problem. Of course I have heard a story of somebody not eating their food and then grandma saying, "Finish your food, there's people starving in Africa." Then the person responds, "Well then send it to Africa." I don't live in Africa so I can't help those starving people, but we can still do something on our end. There's also the impact on the environment. If you can imagine that all this food getting thrown out was actually used, we could produce less food which would also help our carbon imprint.

Holistically, was that my mindset from the beginning? Absolutely not. I'm not trying to say I'm a great person, but as time has gone on and I've looked more into this, it's kind of become bigger in that sense. My mindset has expanded to different areas and it had become satisfying in those different ways as well.

Scott

Yeah I can see the socially conscious aspect makes it easier to rationalize doing something that you want to do anyway. As an educated person, you're kind of like me in that you like to strategize, and you brought a spreadsheet in to us. What's on that spreadsheet?

Ricky

It's a Google Sheet because I love Google Drive. So I noticed that some of these dumpsters were locked and I would think, "Well, I don't want to come back here." I said that I was just doing the shopping center but then I will also pull my car up to different places too. I will check out other establishments, primarily certain grocery stores that are better than others. Pastry shops are fantastic. I'll even go to certain fast food places, and pizza is also one of my favorite places that I go to.

Going to all these different places I realize the trash pickup days are all different from each house. The city doesn't contract trash pickup so we have to get it on our own. So cans get put out Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, any day really.

Scott

Oh so it's private companies and they go by their own schedule.

Ricky

Exactly. I've noticed all these spots throughout the area do that as well for the businesses. One day it'll be a jackpot and I'll have all the food in the world in there, but then other days it's empty. That can be frustrating because in some sense I'm just wasting my time. Then again it's a sense of adventure and when I roll up and they are empty it's such a disappointment, essentially blue balls from dumpster diving.

I didn't want to do that anymore, so I made this spreadsheet. I kept track of the company, where the dumpster was at, and then kept track of the good days. If Monday was a good day I would put 'M.' Then I had another column for when it's empty, so if it was empty on a Tuesday I would put a 'T' in that column. I also started jotting down what I was getting from each store. It was simple but it helped me stay organized and helped me streamline this to the point that I don't have to check out new spots now. I'm pretty self sustainable where I'm at and I don't have to waste the time of checking different spots and getting frustrated.

Scott

It's like somebody that fishes. Now that you've been to all the places many times you know where all the good spots are. No point in wasting time experimenting.

Ricky

I appreciate the positive spin because I will tell you that not everybody views this in such a good light.

Scott

Well, personally I'm not sure that I would do it, I do find it really interesting though. I wish I knew someone who was into it like you are that lived here locally in the Tampa Bay area. If anybody is listening and lives in the area, I'd like to just accompany you sometime just to watch and see what you find.

When you're out exploring, do you have guidelines like, one thing touching another or certain types of food? You mentioned soup earlier off the restaurant table. Are there certain foods like that that you just won't take?

Ricky

Yeah I do. Really quick though, when it comes to things like food waste, it would behoove some of the listeners if they just want to YouTube 'dumpster diving' or 'freegan,' seeing the amount of food that gets thrown out is pretty sad.

So when it comes to produce I usually stick to things with a skin. I am still going through an insane amount of bananas, I actually had to freeze a lot of them. A freezer is your best friend when it comes to this kind of stuff. So bananas are great since you have to peel them. I also do melons and even apples and stuff, because a lot of this is in the produce box still. What I'll do is I'll rummage around and if anything has a mark or a bruise on it I'll toss it. I'm going to tell you though, you would be shocked at how good of a condition these fruits and vegetables can be in. I'll get potatoes and all kinds of things. I'll scrub them and clean them really well before inspecting them. Those are the kinds of things I will get so long as it's on the top and packaged or obviously not touching other trash or the ground or the dumpster.

Scott

I know some grocery stores in the produce department, if there's a fruit or a vegetable or something that is perfectly good and fresh but it's an odd shape, they'll throw it out. They know people will look at that and think it's different or odd and it won't sell. So there's no point in even keeping it, which is kind of crazy.

As a married person, I have to think of this question. What does your wife think about this hobby? How did you tell her about it?

Ricky

That would've been the wise choice I found later. Early on, at a specialty food store, I got off a late shift at work and I was usually home around 1 a.m. It was around 1:30 or 2 because I was rummaging around so it took me longer to get home. I found a few good things in there, which saved me, and I'll tell you why. So I get home and I'm unloading my finds, and my wife who is usually asleep by the time I get home, stormed out of the bedroom. I thought something was wrong. She comes out to the kitchen with her arms folded and she says, "Where were you?" I was so ashamed of where I actually was, I pretty much lied and said, "I don't know what you're talking about honey. I was at work tonight. You knew that." She said, "You're over an hour late. Where were you?" I was like, "I worked tonight, I'm home now. I don't see what the issue is."

So she and I happened to share our locations on our phone, not for a bad reason, we just like to know where each other is if we need to. She says, "I looked at where you were. What were you doing? Were you doing drugs? Were you with somebody?" For a second, letting my wife think I was cheating on her as opposed to dumpster diving, was kind of tempting and I almost left it at that. I said, "No honey, I can assure you it's neither of those things. I'm not doing drugs or cheating on you. I was just late at work." She said, "No you weren't, I saw where you were."

Then she looked down at the table and she saw that I had quite a few food products in front of me. She was really confused. Stores were closed, there's food products in front of me, I wasn't home on time and I was in a weird location. I said, "Ok, you know what, if you want me just to be honest. I'm sorry, I was looking through this store's trash." She said, "Wait. You were dumpster

diving?" I didn't like that she called it that because then I felt dirty. I said, "Well, I mean this food was getting thrown out and it wasn't touching other trash, but sure, it happened to be in a dumpster." She was relieved and disgusted at the same time. She was not thrilled but she said, "I'm going to bed. You can tell me about this tomorrow."

Thankfully I'm still married and she didn't file for divorce after that. She was not exactly happy that this was something I started doing.

Scott

I'm really curious about the conversation the next morning. You had all night to formulate the arguments as to why it was ok, but did she buy that?

Ricky

Yeah, I mean it's a lot of the stuff I've already said on here. You don't know where you get all your food from. I said, "If you were there you'd understand. I'm not literally digging through trash on trash on trash. This is fresh food touching fresh food." As I'm explaining it to her she said, "Whatever, it's disgusting."

Later however, what I said about the produce that has skins on it came into play. I started bringing home avocados and different things like that. You don't eat the skin of an avocado, so products of things that she is going to eat that may have touched trash she won't eat, but something like a banana she can peel off the outside and she knows it's safe. She's been open to having some of the things that I bring home. There are other things that she simply won't have. Although she doesn't find it the most attractive quality about me, she knew what I was doing in the restaurant industry and it was the same thing. She told me all the time, "You're disgusting. You're a trash panda, like a raccoon." She would still kiss me at night as long as I brush my teeth well. She knew what was happening at the restaurant and she knows what I'm doing now. She knows that I have those rough guidelines in place so she's ok with it. We don't tell our friends about it but it is what it is at this point.

Scott

I think she's a keeper.

Ricky

(laughs) I mean I don't know who else is gonna take me so yeah.

Scott

(laughs) You mentioned you don't tell your friend about this. That's part of what fascinates me is the social stigma. Do any of your friends know or your coworkers or anyone?

Ricky

I was actually going to open up and share with a couple friends who I'm both close with and I happened to work with in the restaurant industry. They have a similar mindset so I know they aren't going to look at me and think, "You what?!" They would at least relate, they may still judge me I don't know, but they're my best friends so they aren't going anywhere. I want to tell a few of them. Other people in my work circles and church circles though, no. I don't tell a soul. It's funny, it's not that I'm ashamed of it at all, I actually think it's fun and I feel like I wouldn't mind telling people. The social stigma though is to a degree that even though I'm not ashamed, if I feel like if anybody at work finds out I feel like I might get fired. Today with a lot of the society

having backlash over things like a social media post, where people can lose their jobs over an opinion on social media.

Scott

That's right and it can happen so unexpectedly, then all of the sudden you're out of a job. What if you invited your boss or your supervisor over for dinner and some of the food served was from a dumpster. I guess the first question is do you serve that food to guests and then do you tell them where it came from?

Ricky

Yeah there are some ethical dilemmas that come from this.

Scott

That would be quite a dilemma. You know in your heart and mind that this food is safe, good and nutritious. If I were a guest in somebody's home and that was what was served I probably wouldn't want to know.

Ricky

Well that helps me a little bit. I will say, when somebody makes you a dish you aren't asking, "Where did you get this?" It's usually, "How'd you make this? Where's the recipe?" I have never served the produce that I've described. But I'll be honest with you, these pre-packaged things like the chips, I actually gave some of these bags of chips away to friends. The way I worded it, I hope I wasn't being dishonest, was to say, "Hey, these were bags of chips that my local grocery store was throwing out and I'm not gonna eat all of them." So I've actually been able to give these away to families in need. I'm part of a FaceBook group where we trade things for free and give things away for free. Full disclosure, I have given the chips away because I have too much. I felt ok about that. These are things that are packaged and sealed and they aren't expired so nobody's going to get sick from it. I do think I'm helping people out who need the food.

I have those boundaries in place there. I'm kind of in between, "What if I do have dinner and have people over? Do I use some of this food to cook with? I'm eating it and I'm fine. My wife eats some of it and she's fine." I don't know, I'm still kind of on the fence with that one. So don't come over for dinner, that's I guess where we're at.

Scott

I just find it so fascinating. Dumpster diving really is a subculture. I know there's a whole subreddit dedicated to it. Have you ever met, aside from the homeless people you encounter, have you ever met other people who do it on the same level as you do? Who maybe doesn't need to do it but just likes doing it?

Ricky

I haven't yet. I don't live in a big city. Some of these videos of people online, in New York specifically, there are groups of people who go out in small numbers and do this together and have a dinner party with the food that they find. Even that sense of community is endearing when I see that, it's pretty cool.

Scott

Everybody has to have their social circle right?

Ricky

We need friends. Nothing like that in my area, but I don't live in a big city. I don't live in a small town either. I think if I lived in a bigger city I would do that. With my schedule and the area I'm in I haven't found that yet. Again we go back to the stigma, my neighbors or friends that live nearby, I don't see me convincing them to come along. Or say I do get a husband to come with me, well my wife was open to it but I don't know what their spouse is going to think. That's a whole other can of worms, so I haven't done that yet. Those best friends I was describing though, if they want to join me the more the merrier. I can only take so much home and my freezer is full. I have no joke contemplated getting a chest freezer for this.

Scott

That was one of my next questions. What does your food inventory look like right now?

Ricky

I got a full stock of potatoes, berries. I just finished my apples. I'm eating, surprisingly, healthier than I ever have been. It sounds paradoxical or ironic. In my freezer I have lots of lunch meat and the barbeque meat that I talked about. At that specialty store I got some pre-made quiches and they look so good I'm excited to reheat them. You get really good at that by the way, finding ways to reheat things. Using the oven, microwave or stovetop. Our downstairs freezer has more of the sweets and pastries. I try to keep those away from me, if they're out of sight they're out of mind. If they're in front of me I'm going to eat them. I came across a lot of pizza that's in the freezer along with other products like that.

It came to a point where I have to slow down because I have to eat the food that I have. I've been able to get a slow rotation of refrigerated food and food that I freeze. My freezer is full right now though so I need to start eating it.

Scott

I gotta think about you in your mindset, when you think about your freezer or fridge or pantry are all full and you can't take anything in, you have to be thinking, "Man I know there is food in those dumpsters and it's just going to waste! Nobody is going to get it and I don't have room for it."

Ricky

Yeah that does go through my mind. It goes through both sides. One side is, "All this food is being wasted and there are people who are hungry and could use it." Then there's the other side of, "I could be getting this. I just don't have room for it." I don't want to create the same issue where I'm wasting things, but that's the dilemma. I wasn't the one who was initially causing the waste. You're preaching to the choir on that one, I definitely think that.

Scott

You're certainly doing more than your fair share of trying to save what you can, that's for sure.

Ricky

Thank you. You view me in such a positive light and I definitely don't feel that way when I describe this so thank you. I appreciate it.

I do try to look at every situation with an open mind. I like to think that I'm most likely persuaded by facts and evidence. But in this case, I don't think dumpster diving is going to be my new hobby. I love how Ricky has really gotten into it and looks at it like treasure hunting, because he never really knows what he's gonna discover. But, it's just not for everyone, and that's fine.

If you want to learn more about the dumpster diving subculture, and see pictures of what other divers are finding, I recommend the subreddit [r/DumpsterDiving](#), all one word. I'll link to it in the show notes. The people who post in that group, they are serious about this, and they love their dumpsters.

And if you're one of those people who maybe at some point has said, "Yeah, I'll try anything once" then you might be interested in one of my past episodes. It's episode 28, called "Shiny ate his own foot". It's the story of a man who invited his group of friends to participate in something that very few people have ever experienced, and most people would probably not want to. Here's a 23 second clip from that episode:

Shiny

I don't remember exactly how that conversation came about. I do remember I started texting people and saying, "Hey, remember how we always joked about this? What would you all think if we tried it out?" Much to my surprise I had a reasonable turnaround of people who were like, "Yep, let's do it."

We've had a LOT of new subscribers to the show recently, and I want to welcome you to the podcast if you're just now discovering it. My goal with this show is to never be boring. When you subscribe, and you look at your phone and see that a new episode is released, I want you to read the title for the new one and think "Oh wow, I HAVE to hear this story."

And if you want to actually get in on the discussion of each episode, along with other thought-provoking conversations, please come over to our private Facebook group. At the moment there are over 1300 people in there, and new listeners are joining every single day. You can get in at [WhatWasThatLike.com/Facebook](#).

And now we'll close out this episode with this week's Listener Story! Stay safe, and I'll see you next time.

Caller

It was early 1986 and my girlfriend and I lived in a very small town in northern Wisconsin. We decided to move to Minneapolis. We were musicians at the time and Minneapolis was in the Purple Rain phase, it was a global phenomenon and we wanted to get a piece of that action. We moved down there with my sister in south Minneapolis towards the inner city in the Steven's Park community in a big brownstone building. Steven's Park was a dangerous area, but we didn't know that we were quite naive little country bumpkins with no street smarts whatsoever. We were bulletproof and didn't know any better so we took a lot of risks, as we all do.

In that area it turns out there had been a couple murders. What the perpetrator did was ring the buzzer on these brownstone buildings and when he would get in he would get up to his evil deeds which was breaking into somebody's apartment and then murdering the people. Pretty nasty stuff. We moved about 2 blocks away towards the Museum Institute of Arts, a huge museum down there. The apartment complex we moved into was a small affair. Only 8 units, 4 on the bottom and 4 on the top. It was a 1920s or 1930s art deco building. The front was all plate glass, quite beautiful. The owner didn't want to put locks on the doors because they were solid glass. So we were the only building in south Minneapolis without security doors, which was very very unsafe.

As a result of that, the woman across the hall from us who was a nurse, when she would get home at night she would knock on the door of the woman that lived below us and they would walk up together. There were two sets of stairs going up to that story, one in the front and one in the back. On the night that this event happened, luck would have it that they showed up at the exact time this person who fit the description of the murderer was at our door.

It was the middle of the night, after 12 or 1 at night. It was the middle of summer and stinking hot. My girlfriend and I were fast asleep. We had the floor fan on high so we couldn't hear much. We did hear a very loud pounding on our door. I bolted up and ran to the door and looked through the peephole and it was the police. I opened the door and said, "Can I help you?" With concerned looks on their faces they said, "Are you ok? Is everything ok in there?" I said, "Yep. Everything is fine. Why what's happening?" They said, "Well sir, there was a gentleman at your door trying to break in. As luck would have it the woman who lived next door came home as he was trying to break in. He had a large screwdriver in his hand with a towel wrapped around his hand so no one could see it. The woman got home and saw him and said, 'What are you doing?' He said, 'I'm here to see the girl inside' then he turned and took a step towards her. Luckily she had a friend who had just come up the back set of stairs and startled the guy so he ran off."

This event happened 35 or 36 years ago and it's still fresh in my mind. It's actually haunted me for most of my life. Usually in the middle of the night I check the doors and windows. I have lived a pretty paranoid life actually. I'm getting better though. Sometimes it's the things that don't happen to us that can cause the night frights. I think about the event that would have happened, I think about all the things that take about a minute to do. That could have been the difference between life and death for me. Putting your dishes in the dishwasher, getting caught at a red light, washing your hands, putting on your shoes, talking on the phone, going to a convenience store and buying a coke. It all takes a minute. Imagine if that woman, whose name I don't even know even though she's my angel, what would have happened if they wouldn't have shown up at that exact moment. We were fast asleep in bed and wouldn't have heard him come in. We would have been at his mercy and by all accounts he didn't give much mercy. So I'm grateful but haunted by the randomness of that.

Some people have said that it wasn't blind luck but that it was divine intervention, that I have angels. I think maybe we all have angels. Or not, who knows; I guess that's a matter of faith. I want to thank you for listening to this. Please be safe and be well and don't live in a building without security doors and always be careful.