

Buffering the Vampire Slayer  
Episode 0.35: Willow + The Use of Magic

[CHIME]

**Jenny:** Hey there!

**Kristin:** Hello!

**Jenny:** We are here with an extra episode for you this week, and please be warned—sirens going off in the distance!

**Kristin:** [makes siren noise]

**Jenny:** This episode—[snorts] [Kristin laughs] contains spoilers—spoilers!—through the end of Season 7 of Buffy the Vampire Slayer. In this episode, we sit down to have a more in-depth conversation with Natalie Muskin-Press, who you met here in our Bufferingverse, when she did a segment in our episode for Tabula Rasa.

**Kristin:** Yes. We will be, as you probably have guessed, taking a deeper look at Willow's arc with her use of magic in this season. There is a ton to be said and there's no way for us to say all of it, even in the span of one complete episode. But since Season 6 digs into some really massive themes, we want to do our best to create some space for more conversation than we're able to have within the episodic discussions themselves. A little information for you on Natalie. She is a licensed clinical addictions counselor who's been working in higher education for the last decade. And before that, she spent three years working in her community, providing intensive outpatient treatment to adults and adolescents, and running a residential recovery home for women. It's also really important for us to note that Natalie works within a harm reduction framework, with a focus on prevention, intervention and education.

**Jenny:** Our hope is to bring you a few of these very focused, thematic episodes this season. And we want to thank our patrons who have it made possible for us to produce large conversations, in many ways, over the past year. Thank you so much for your support of this space. In conjunction with this episode, and each of our larger thematic episodes this season, we will also be encouraging our listeners to donate, if they are able, to an organization doing work in this field. Natalie has recommended the organization Project Neighbors and has asked our listenership to specifically send funds toward the Solar Conversion project for their housing. Project Neighbors is an Indiana-based organization that works to strengthen the community by addressing issues of race, class and poverty, striving to create

healthy families and neighborhoods where diversity of all kinds is welcomed and cherished. You can learn more about their work and donate at [projectneighbors.org](http://projectneighbors.org).

**Kristin:** Yes, and we are doing a pretty awesome giveaway of Buffy gifts, many of which have been provided by a listener, Jenna. Thank you. One of these gifts that Jenna has and is going to send out is an authenticated, signed Buffy the Vampire Slayer cast photo. It rules. If you're able to donate, head on over to [bufferingthevampireslayer.com/projectneighbors](http://bufferingthevampireslayer.com/projectneighbors) and let us know that you contributed. Filling out that form will enter you into the giveaway and there'll be more information on our socials, of course. Or you can opt out of the giveaway if you just wanna let us know that you donated. We love to kind of, you know, find out what our Buffering community is able to do together. So go on over there, let us know if you're able to donate. Again, [projectneighbors.org](http://projectneighbors.org) to send that donation, specifically to the Solar Project. You can see that on the little drop-down on the site. And then if you wanna be entered to win something very fun, you can fill out that form at [bufferingthevampireslayer.com/projectneighbors](http://bufferingthevampireslayer.com/projectneighbors).

**Jenny:** And—[makes siren noises] [Kristin laughs] one more reminder that this episode's conversation will include spoilers through the end of Buffy Season 7. It will also contain conversations on themes of substance use, the prison industrial complex, sex work and mental health.

**Kristin:** Alright. Let us do this thing.

[Buffering theme plays]

**Jenny:** Hello and welcome to Buffering the Vampire Slayer, a podcast where we are usually discussing the entire series of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, one episode at a time, spoiler-free. But not today. Not today!

**Kristin:** You're right, Jenny. We are not talking about one episode and this is surely not spoiler-free. We're talking about any damn episode we want, as we're ready to talk about them and full of spoilers. And we're here with Natalie, and you might remember Natalie from a few episodes ago, when we talked a little bit about Willow's arc. We were safe in that space from spoilers. We are not anymore. Hello, Natalie.

**Natalie:** Hello! Thanks for having me back.

**Kristin:** Listen, literally any time.

**Jenny:** [simultaneously] Thanks for being here.

**Kristin:** Any time. [laughs]

**Natalie:** Stop, I'm gonna just start crashing your Zooms. [everyone laughs] Is this link still live?

[Jenny laughs]

**Kristin:** Yeah. It is just one link that Jenny and I use every time, so if we give it to you once, you can just see if we're in there.

**Natalie:** Just randomly.

**Jenny:** Yep.

[laughter]

**Natalie:** "What are you guys talking about?"

[laughter]

**Kristin:** So we are—we've talked a little bit, moving into Season 6, about some big themes that we're gonna be attempting to unpack here. And today's episode is us digging into Willow and Willow's arc with the misuse of magic and what magic is used to parallel. And how that's done well or maybe not so well. As we go into *big* topics like this, right, it's not on anyone's singular shoulders to do and say all the things, so I just wanna acknowledge that. As much as, you know, this conversation is so important, you can't say everything and do everything. And you know, we're gonna do our best to talk about things that have come up in our prep for this episode. But you know, this isn't the last episode of Buffering the Vampire Slayer, god willing, so. [laughter] We're happy to continue the conversation.

And before we—like, before we also start talking about Willow specifically and Buffy specifically. For those of us—you know, myself included—who aren't as familiar—and I know this is a changing landscape. We're gonna date ourselves. In ten years, we're gonna come back and say, "Oh no. [laughs] What have we done here?" But for now, words like "misuse" versus "abuse," or referring to somebody as an addict versus—like, I would love to just get a bird's eye view of some of the terminology you might be using today. [laughs]

**Natalie:** Yeah, absolutely. So I'll generally say someone who may or may not be misusing substances, right? Because, like, I'm reluctant, one, to diagnose in any

way, shape or form, you know? So, like—and “misuse” does not have anything to do even with a potential diagnosis. You’ll hear, like, you know, “physical dependence,” right? Which could be something just related to how your body is reacting to a substance, versus, like, someone saying, like, “oh, you’re an alcoholic.” Right, which has a completely different, you know, framework but it’s also something that’s out there. And it’s even something—you know, like I said, I’ve been working in this field for a while and I catch myself. Because when I came out, it was like, you have to say you’re an alcoholic, you have to say you’re an addict. And then if someone, like, at all came into it and was like “no,” we were like, “oh, that’s your denial talking.” [laughs] Right?

**Jenny:** Mmm.

**Kristin:** Mmm.

**Natalie:** Like, and never once given that opportunity to be like, no, that’s you rejecting the fact that we’re trying to tell you, in order to be taken seriously, trying to help yourself, you have to accept this label right off—like, right off the bat. Right?

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Natalie:** Like, here we are. So you know, I know some stuff will still occasionally slip out, because that’s—words that have been in our head for so long and been in, you know, our mouths for so long. But I tend to just go with if someone may or may not be misusing substance—

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** Or if they are misusing substances, that tends to be when I’m trying to talk about what I consider, like, use that maybe isn’t healthy for them, in that moment.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Natalie:** So—

**Kristin:** Just pings in my brain how much we all so desperately cling to binaries, you know?

**Natalie:** Yes. Yeah.

**Kristin:** Like, even outside of this particular conversation—

**Jenny:** Mmhmm.

**Kristin:** Like, you either are this thing or you are not this thing.

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** And then there's just, like, no flexibility in that conversation.

**Natalie:** Yeah. And you know, I think one thing is because substance misuse, substance issues—you know, however you wanna say it—have been, like, relegated to this, like, little, you know, dark seedy corner of the, like, healthcare—even that, even the healthcare industry. People were only really offered this, like, one type of treatment and it was really rooted in, like, self-help stuff. And so what would happen is, that would work for some people. And so then those people were like, “It worked for me.” And so then they became—you know. Which, good for them, right? What—like, for me, I'm like, what helps. Right? If it helps you, perfect.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** But then they populated a lot of the more substance abuse treatment situations. And so then you have, like, housing that you *have* to be in AA and NA and you *have* to do the steps, right? Like, there's no ability to be in recovery that doesn't—

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** You know, or there'll be people who—they went to jail and that's what got them, you know, sober and that's what put them on the path. So they feel like, no, maybe you need to go to jail to get that experience. And because you were either recovered through this path or you weren't, there was nobody to really push back and say, like, why aren't there more paths?

**Kristin:** [laughs] Right.

**Jenny:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** You know? It just became this, like, really rigid, “this is the way, and we have all these people who can tell you it's the way because it worked for them.” Even though we were definitely not helping people at any level that would be considered successful for a lot of other health areas.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** We wanna give the people time to get to where they need to be, but a lot of the treatment options we have are so rigid and so “this way or no way.” You’re giving people an ultimatum, right? Like, it can get really...bad and frustrating and horrible and all of those things.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm. Well, before we turn the corner into the land of Sunnydale. Is there anything else that you wanna say up at the top, framing-wise? Or do you think that we are set up to dive into all things Willow Rosenberg? [laughs]

**Natalie:** You know, I just think there’s gonna be times when I feel like it speaks really well, and there’s gonna be times where I’m gonna be frustrated. The storytelling choices that they made, I think, are different than, like, whether or not those individual moments they choose to show for her are true for someone or not.

**Kristin:** Mmm.

**Natalie:** Like, it’s—it’s not about, “this isn’t how it looks.” It’s more like, why did they choose to show it this way? And was that—is that helpful?

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** You know?

**Jenny:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** Or did that reinforce, like, this very...did they do it in a way that reinforces stigma, even if they were honoring how it felt for some people? You know?

**Kristin:** Mmhmm. Yeah, and I think that that’s really—you know, that’s why we’re having the conversation, is to look at this story with you. Because Jenny and I can only do so much in looking at this and, you know, our experience here is notably limited. So I suppose we should journey forth, and start—start really with Willow and Willow’s journey. And I say that because we’re gonna look at—outside of just Willow and how the show tells Willow’s story, we’re gonna look at Rack, and I think we’re gonna talk a little bit about Amy, and certainly Tara, the Scoobies, Giles. You know, we’ll hit some of these things, but we can start with Willow.

**Jenny:** Natalie. [Natalie laughs] As the anointed expert among us, in broad strokes, if we wanna start kind of, like—

**Natalie:** Mmhmm.

**Jenny:** Backed way out. What's your observation or what are your observations about what's working here and what's not?

**Natalie:** So I think what works here, right, is the underlying reasons between why Willow makes some of the choices she makes. So I think, like, we all met Willow, right, drinking out of the water fountain in her lovely outfit. And, like, she was—

**Kristin:** [laughing] From Sears?

**Natalie:** Right? Like, you know—and like, looking back, her outfits weren't that bad. [laughs]

**Kristin:** No. No. Cordelia was just a—

**Jenny:** They got, actually, worse.

[everyone laughs]

**Kristin:** It's true.

**Natalie:** They really have. Like—

**Kristin:** Yeah. What are—what is Willow's wardrobe a metaphor for? I actually joke, but I know—

**Natalie:** Don't—

**Kristin:** We are gonna talk about that.

**Natalie:** Yes! No, I had a—I was like, ba-pa! It, like, popped into my head when I'm like, man, that's a lot of Willow stomach. And then I was like, ha-ha!

**Kristin:** Yeah.

[laughter]

**Natalie:** But...you know, she's always been insecure but wanting to help. And just having, like, this earnestness about her. And I think, like, even like...[sighs] you know—and we—when she got with Oz, right, we all love Oz. But like, there was also

this, like, oh, good for Will—like, Willow—there's always been this, like, little sweetness around Willow that we want her to have good things. Because we almost kind of—you know, we bought into this idea that, like, she's sweet and she's kind and she's too nice for this world. And you know, let's make Willow cry if we wanna make people feel bad. [Kristin laughs] And then she gets to be kind of, like, powerful and she gets to be her own person and she gets to grow. And like, she gets to, you know, like, explore her identity and do all of these cool things that we were, like, super excited for Willow.

But like, that's still, like, all that other stuff. All those insecurities and things are still right there. And I think that, you know, they loved to explore Xander's insecurities, at the beginning, for like, obvious reasons. Some that have become even more obvious now, like—[laughter] in light. But like, Willow, I think, we always just assumed, like, her insecurity was almost this weird little quirky personality trait of the—you know. As opposed to something to something that was deeply rooted within her.

**Kristin:** Mmm.

**Natalie:** And I think there are these moments when she speaks. And it's—I think that's what has always frustrated me about this, is because there are these really deep moments when she's sitting on the bed and she's talking to Buffy. And she's like, "Why wouldn't you wanna be...this?" You know, and you realize that Willow's narrative about herself was not nearly as warm and loving as our narrative about Willow was, right?

**Jenny:** Mmm.

**Natalie:** Like, Willow was...you know, meek and she didn't stand up for herself and people walked all over her. And she just desperately wants to be able to, like, give as good as she—you know, like, punch back or fight back. But that's not in her nature so she doesn't know how. And so when she does, like, it's almost like she goes too far because she's, like, try—she's not really—that's not in her nature. So like, that's why I think some of the, like—the dialogue in the magic shop when her and Buffy are fighting feels so weird. Because it's like, that's not really what Willow sounds like. [laughs] That's not really, like, how Willow would talk. But it's almost like she's just trying so hard to be the powerful, tough girl that she thinks the magic should make her be.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** And so I think that—



**Jenny:** Mmm.

**Natalie:** That's always really painful when I watch it. 'Cause I'm like—I just want her to be sweet Willow, but she obviously kinda hates sweet Willow.

**Kristin:** Yeah, and the show's been playing with that for a while. I mean, you know, we—we talked all the time—like, Jenny and I, just behind the scenes—on like, Willow may have the most jingles by the end of this show. Because we start with, like you're saying, you know—

**Natalie:** Mmhmm.

**Kristin:** Water-fountain, math-loving Willow. And then we have vampire Willow, which I think is the first time that the show plays with this idea of her being, like, wow, look what I *could* be. Like, that's a possibility, that's another thing that—another option—

**Natalie:** Mmhmm.

**Kristin:** Or what have you. And then, you know, we haven't fully gotten to Dark Willow—to use the show's terminology—yet—

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** In our journey. But you know, we know that's coming. And that is exactly what you're describing, right? This...

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** And I wonder, too—'cause as you were saying that, I'm like, is this—this whole conversation is gonna be, like, let's look at Willow as the character, as like, a real person, Willow and what she's going through. But then also, let's take a step back into the writers' room and think about what story they were telling. And so I do wonder if there's any irresponsibility or accuracy, or both, in—this person is misusing—in this instance—magic, as the substance. And their appearance is changing and the way they talk is changing and the way they look is changing.

**Natalie:** [sighs] Yeah, and like, let's talk about this—you know, getting darker. Right?

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Natalie:** Like, oh, now look at how dark her hair is and look at how dark her lips are. And like, ooh, you can tell she's bad because physically, we are making her dark. Right? Like, and that—

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Natalie:** In and of itself has those, like—the racial undertones of that are alarming.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** And then...you know, I think it's this thing. Like, doppelganger Willow, right—that's the fun—that's the fun version of what happens, right? Willow gets to be bad! But she's just, like, sassy and like, you know, she wears a bustier that's made out of leather. [Kristin laughs] It is kinda like when Buffy and Spike, in the one where they—Willow does magic—

**Jenny:** Something Blue?

**Kristin:** Something Blue.

**Natalie:** Yeah, Something Blue. When Willow's—you know, again, messes with magic [laughter] and you know, like, just takes everything over. That was fun, that was fun Buffy/Spike kissing.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** And then we get, like, what happens when real Buffy/Spike kissing happens. And ooh, ooh...it's not like—egh. [laughter] It does not go as well as—

**Kristin:** We've already lost a house, so.

**Natalie:** Yeah, right? [laughter] Like, they're just knocking—you know, like, they're just taking out city blocks and...[laughter] it's bad.

**Jenny:** I wonder if there's something from a narrative, story-creation perspective—and this may be a tick in the "less responsible" column, for what we're talking about today. But I wonder if a big part of leaning into these changes in appearance for Willow, as her behavior is changing, is in part to make the show's job easier when Willow swings back around. You know what I mean? Like—

**Natalie:** Mmhmm. Yeah.

**Jenny:** We talk about Angel and Angelus like they're two different people. And really, the main difference is eyeliner. And like, more velvet, I guess. But with Willow, the same kinda vibe. Like, she takes this very severe wardrobe alternate path. And then when she comes back to herself, she comes back to looking more like she looked before. This detour.

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** I loved your parallel between Willow's midriff equals Angelus' eyeliner—

**Natalie:** Yes.

**Kristin:** Like, in this story. But I think that the reason, too, that—not that there's not complicated things to talk about with Angel and Angelus and what have you. But like, Angel doesn't know how to button his shirt and Angelus doesn't know how to button his shirt. You know? They both struggle with buttoning shirts.

**Natalie:** [laughs] Yes.

**Kristin:** But I think that, you know, with—when we're talking about the use of drugs and the stereotypes and the stigmas that are placed on that. And also, communities who are—who have been literally set up to fall into the misuse of these substances. I'm thinking specifically too of, like, sex workers and drugs. And so like, when you're having a character go down a path of the misuse of magic and one of the ways that you're showing that is by having her show more of her stomach, there's just, like, probably way too much for us to even unpack.

**Jenny:** Mmm.

**Kristin:** But it does seem more irresponsible than what we see with Angelus.

**Natalie:** It starts off, I think, making a lot of sense for Willow's character. And then for Smashed and Wrecked, I think it's like, "Or what if we just did Requiem for a Dream for a couple episodes?" And like—

[Kristin laughs]

**Jenny:** [laughing] Oh, god...

**Natalie:** And call it—and call it a day, right? Like—[laughs] and it's one of those things, right, where...it's all true, but it didn't feel true to Willow's story in that moment. Right?

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** Like, I think that, like, if you know someone who's struggled with substances or if you know how the family dynamics and how people who love them—like, how they handle it. Like, I think there's nothing about the story that doesn't necessarily ring true in some way, shape or form. For me, it was just, like—it's really disconcerting 'cause I feel like they chose to ignore the deeper emotions, and like, go like, "let's do this trope and let's do this trope. Like, how do we make sure people know she's addicted to magic? Let's have her cry and ask for help. Let's have her to go to a—you know, like, let's have her go sell her body. Like, that'll really make—like—

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** It's like, no, we know Willow is in trouble because she loves Tara and she violated Tara's mind.

**Jenny:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** Like, do we need any more proof than that—

**Kristin:** Right.

**Natalie:** That Willow is struggling with ma—and—which I think, again, is like, what does it have to look like for people to take it seriously? And then by the time they take it seriously, it's usually coded in all of these, like, ways that make people then really push back and reject.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** You know? I mean, even just, like, they're all talking about it like, "Willow's using too much magic." But never once are they like, "Yeah, like, she wiped all of our brains for like, an entire episode." [laughs]

**Jenny:** Dude. Dude!

**Natalie:** You know? I—[sighs]

**Kristin:** I think it's reflective of our own inability as human beings to recognize things in the world—

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** Unless they are painted in, like, these stereotyped ways. And right, like, to your point, it's not that there aren't—it's not that there isn't truth to the experience. It's not that some people are not having these experiences. It's just that, if we only see it—this reminds me in a—I don't know if this parallel makes any sense. But it reminds me of some of the conversation around, like, understanding what it is to be trans. And like, if the narrative is only "I had a kid and they were playing with the toys of this gender and that's how I knew." Well, sure, that happens. But if that's the *only* story that we're seeing, then there's all these other experiences of being trans that are, "well, but you played with the right toys." Hard quotes, as you all, I'm sure, know.

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** You know, and so then what? And so if we're not taught to recognize that wiping your girlfriend's memory of a fight is reason enough to have a conversation, then what are we doing?

**Natalie:** Yeah. Well, and I think it's also this really big thing. 'Cause, like, there's so much exploitation that happens when someone is using a substance and they're getting, like, shamed for it and they're getting, like, shoved out, right? And a lot of times when people are put into a situation that may resemble Rack's, right, like, they usually don't have as many supports as they need—right?

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

Natalie: Like, it's something that—these things become, you know, like...Willow was taken advantage of in that situation, right? Like, it was—like, she didn't know where she was going. She didn't know what he was going to do to her. He didn't explain himself. [laughs]

**Kristin:** Yeah.

Natalie: He just, like, took. And I think there's a lot of, like, harm and exploitation that can occur. It's not all things that, like, people are eagerly seeking out for themselves, or even like, mean to do or mean to have happen. And I think that sometimes it can be like this. Like, "yeah, did you see? This is what drugs do to you. They turn you into someone who will, like, sell their body."

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** And like, besides the judgment of sex workers that's interlaced with that, there's also this, like, thing that ignores that, as—because we push away people who misuse substances, especially if it's a drug and it's not, like, alcohol. We're actually pushing them out of the support systems that they need. So.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm. Like, one of the—there's so many problematic things about Rack. Since we're talking about Rack—

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** And we're talking about Wrecked. Wrecked and Rack. The—an issue that really, like, just pops out at me is that...the major reason that people might turn—it's like, sex work is a valid job. That's a valid job and a valid way to get income. But it's also something that people turn to when there is no other way for them to get the income they need.

**Natalie:** Yes.

**Kristin:** And so I think it's just really problematic to have that just thrown in here. Like, Willow is not a character and has not been a character that has ever had financial need, that we have seen or heard about. And so this is very much throwing this, like, sex work trope into a bin, as though anyone who is misusing a substance also has a proclivity toward sex work. It's like, you don't have to demonize sex work and you don't have to demon—but throwing them all in a bin together is very complicated.

**Natalie:** It's always—like, I think a lot of bad choices that, like, they show people making when they're using substances. It's always implied that it's because they're substance. And it never is—like, it's stripped of all context of, like, other things. Like, you know, exploitation or lack of social support. And social stigma that prevents people from coming to someone and saying, I'm struggling with X or I'm struggling—or no real treatment resources for people. And so I think it creates this, like—it's very Reefer Madness. Like, you're going to smoke this weed and then you're going to, like, shoot someone 25 minutes later. [laughter] Like, which—you know.

**Kristin:** Right.

**Natalie:** And I think that's—you know, I think that's what bothers me, too. Because, like, it goes—she goes from, like, having a problem—a clear problem that has lost her her girlfriend and has caused her to—you know, who she loves, and has caused her to violate her friends. And, like...I just think they could've just, like, done a little bit less with it and still gotten the message across.

**Kristin:** Right. And I think that we'll probably have some similar conversations when we talk about Seeing Red and we talk about those stories that are told. Like, why do we choose to tell the stories that we tell, the way that we tell them?

**Jenny:** Mmm. I don't know if this is something that, like, you experience from this arc and also, like, in film and television at large. I kind of, like, am wondering if it's like, when I see somebody get onto stage, in a TV show or movie, and the microphone, without fail, feeds back. [Natalie laughs] No matter what's going on, every single time. I feel like what we see in Wrecked, with Willow meeting Rack, returning to Rack, being reckless, lying and endangering Dawn pretty significantly. That, to me, represents—right—what we would maybe commonly think of as the trope of, like, reaching rock bottom.

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Jenny:** And I don't know if that is an acceptable—if that's, like, a term that is use—it's probably a term that's avoided?

**Natalie:** I don't think so, because I think it's really helpful for how people kind of tell—have the narrative for their own use. And like, as we know, for people—like, having our own narrative and understanding our own narrative is, like, super important for healing and understanding. And so, like, "rock bottom" is a thing, right? Like, in that people will have a moment where they feel like their motivation shifts or their desire to change shifts. Or you know, like, this is no longer work—right, a clarity moment. Like, whatever you wanna call it. I didn't—I don't like "rock bottom" when it's advice given to the loved ones of people who may be misusing substances—

**Jenny:** Mmm.

**Natalie:** As something they just need to experience. There's been a lot of reckoning about what enabling is in the substance use treatment community. 'Cause before, it was like, "don't enable them, don't enable them, don't enable them." And like, literally, enabling meant, like, don't treat them with care. [Kristin laughs] A lot of times—

**Jenny:** Mmm.

**Natalie:** For lots of people. Right, like—I mean, I was told, like, sometimes you just need to tell them to call the cops. Because their son's gonna be dead and they might—better to be in jail than to be dead, right? [Kristin laughs] Which is like, yeah, better to not be dead, though there's lots of other ways we can get to that point, right?

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Natalie:** Like, this idea that, like, if you know that your kid's gonna go out and steal because they're so desperate for money for drugs, like, give 'em 20 bucks!

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** You know, like, I'm not saying you're, like, condoning their habit. But like, there's this idea that, like, the only way—it's still really—and there are people in recovery who probably heard me say that, like, "naahhh." [Kristin laughs] Because, like, everyone's journey is different—

**Kristin:** Right.

**Natalie:** And I'm aware of that. And there are plenty of people who sobriety really is the option for them, is—the only option is the best option. And I'm not taking anything away from that, that finding rock bottom or that, like, going to jail or something wasn't someone's true journey. It's just, it doesn't have to be everyone's journey. And I think that's the piece. So for me, yeah, this idea of "you have to hit rock bottom." You know, this idea of "they don't want your help. You can't help them. There's nothing you can do." And like, there are some truths to that. Like, I always used to tell, like, parents when they were trying to support their kids. You know, they'd go these, like, elaborate things, like, "I'm gonna search all of their bags and I'm gonna do—" you know, like...and I would be like, I'm gonna just explain something to you. [laughs] Which is that they are always gonna—if they wanna use, they're gonna use more than you wanna stop them.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** And I know you can't imagine that right now, because you want—

**Jenny:** Mmm.



**Natalie:** To keep your kid safe with every, like, ounce of your being. But like, you don't—if they are really in a place where that is the thing that they feel like they need to do, they're gonna do something you're not gonna be able to imagine. And so, like, I would tell them to be less about, like—do less with this, like, "I'm gonna search your bags." And do more about offering to let them come, like, sit in your bed and just, like, you know, be in that room with you until—and they don't have to talk, right? Or—like, giving them that space to come to you. Or if they say, like, "I need to do X, because otherwise I'm gonna do Y," like, let's go do—you know, like, letting them go to X, right?

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** Like, if they—not "X," the drug, per se. But, like—

[laughter]

**Kristin:** Right.

**Natalie:** That—I should clarify that. [laughter] You know, like, and—but because we have this sobriety—and you see it with this Willow story, right? Like, you have to stop using magic, like, cold turkey. But it's like, let's not act like magic hasn't been useful. And she—how can she stop using magic? Her best friend is a vampire slayer. She's in a magic shop all—it's like, "don't drink beer, but by the way, we're all gonna hang out at the local sports bar, all the time." [laughs] Like—

**Kristin:** Right, right.

[Jenny laughs]

**Natalie:** *You* just need to be really strong about it. Like, it is—magic is literally embedded in everything that they do. And like, in the—

**Jenny:** And in this analogy, like, beer is really helpful in fighting evil.

[Kristin laughs]

**Natalie:** Yeah. Right! Like, you know, maybe we're in medieval times and the water is bad. We need the beer!

[laughter]

**Kristin:** Right. [laughter] Well, and not to get too far ahead of ourselves, but this is the way this conversation's gonna go.

**Natalie:** Yeah, it's—

**Kristin:** We're just gonna bounce around. Because, you know, there's been conversation that we've had off-air about this. And I would love to bring it in now—of the larger arc of Willow and her relationship to magic. Right? And the fact that Willow has been using magic almost since the start of the show. Yes, she was—she had less powers in the beginning. But magic has been there and since we can spoil things, magic is going to be there. And so, you know, I just wonder what your thoughts are on that. Because Willow—and this has to do with—you know, we can talk about access and all these things. But Willow's arc is very much that she is misusing magic. And then she is rehabilitated—her relationship to magic is rehabilitated. And so I wonder what your take on that is, in a general sense.

**Natalie:** So, like, I really like the beginning part of the Willow story, right? And then I like where it goes, right, with this, like—the magic is inside of you. Like, this isn't something that you can make go away. Like, that—so you have to learn how to, you know—because I think, like, magic is the behavior for the emotion. Right? And so, it's...it's like, you're always gonna have this option to use magic. You can never, like, make magic go away so you have to learn how to cope with your emotions in a way that, you know, in this case, magic isn't harmful, right? And so for her, it's literally like, you need to stop trying to control the world when things go badly for you. [laughs]

[Kristin laughs]

**Jenny:** Mmm.

**Natalie:** Like, literally. Like, oh my god—and it's just at this point where if they understood anything about why she was doing what she was doing—like, of course when she felt everyone's pain, she was gonna be like, "ha-ha! Let's all be dead, that'll be better."

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Natalie:** No one should feel like this.

**Jenny:** Oof.

**Natalie:** Because that is literally Willow's whole thing, is like, "I'm so sick of pain. I'm so sick of feeling out of control. I can now do something about it. Let's do something about it."

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** So that's why I really hate that they moved it from, like—I don't know if it's metaphor or analogy, whichever one works better, to like, direct comparison of addiction to magic.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** Because—but she should be able to use magic! Demons are attacking. Let her use magic!

**Kristin:** Right. Right.

**Natalie:** And I think it's just partially, the show never really defines magic. Like, I feel like compared to most fantasy things, Buffy doesn't do a lot of, like, deep lore into what magic is. And there's always—every once and a while, it has a cost. You know, sometimes they bring a demon back, sometimes they don't. [Kristin laughs] Like, sometimes it's sparklies and it's fun. [Jenny laughs] And sometimes it's like these deep Latin incantations, like. [laughs] It's just—there's no consistency to the magic. So I think that's also where—why it makes it hard. It's just whatever the need it to be in any given moment, for the story.

**Kristin:** I know, Natalie, that we're gonna get to Tara and the Scoobies.

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** I mean, not that Tara isn't a Scooby, but Tara has a very specific relationship to Willow.

**Natalie:** Different, yeah.

**Kristin:** But before we sort of turn that page and go there—

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** I wanna read a small segment of a listener email. Because I think it relates a bit to some of these, like, metaphor/analogy things that we've been touching on.

**Natalie:** Yes.

**Kristin:** This listener wrote to us and said, "The show uses magic as a vehicle to show how drugs can destroy not only the addict, but the addict's entire world. I remember saying to my sponsor in Narcotics Anonymous, 'Why can't you just hate me? It would be so much easier for you to just hate me' when I relapsed after seven months. But he didn't hate me, he kept loving me until I learned to love myself again. While his compassion didn't save *the* world—" [laughs] in capitals, to symbolize, of course, Willow and the world of her journey— "he did save my world." And so this is really in relation to Xander being the one who...like, his love is essentially what saves Willow and the world.

**Natalie:** Yeah. It's true. Right? Like, I think that listener email really hits on the head. Like, right, there's so much underlying truth to this with Willow. And that this love and support is what helps people get back to a place where they feel safe. And like, when you—and you know, we create stigma around substance use. And we create stigma around the behaviors that people do when they use substances, so that it just adds. So if someone's already struggling with feeling unlovable or feeling like, you know, bad. Then to—they don't love themselves or they're not loving themselves in this moment, and other people are still loving them, it can be really hard. And you know, I think one of the things that, again—like, I like that Xander saves the world with just being Willow's support, no matter what she did, right? Like, that seeing Willow as Willow versus seeing Willow as her actions in these moments when she's in extreme pain. And I think that one of the reasons I dislike the, like, addicted to magic—like, it's the magic that makes her do this. Like, it really denies Willow the fact that she's just lost Tara. And like, she made a—she made an active choice. Like, let her make that choice—

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Natalie:** And let her talk about—you know. And, like...and I think, like, you know, by the end of it, it's about, like, okay, Willow's now made a lot of choices that are gonna make it hard for her to come back. Because she's going to feel bad about them, because she is a good person. And so we need to make sure she doesn't feel bad about them.

**Kristin:** Mmm.

**Natalie:** We need to give her those supports so that our judgment and our punishment isn't this obstacle for her.

**Kristin:** Mmm.

**Jenny:** Mmm.

**Natalie:** And so I think that's, like, what Xander gets and that's what Giles gets. And it's what I wish everyone who struggled with some sort of behavior that can make them feel unlovable or that can make, like—create challenges in their life and in the lives of their loved ones—that, like, people can see past the behavior to find, you know, the compassion. And I think that's what this listener is talking about with their relationship with their sponsor, versus, you know, someone who is just gonna say, "Yeah, you did crappy things and you need to feel bad about them."

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Jenny:** Mmhmm.

**Kristin:** Yeah, and I think it goes without saying in this conversation. And if you listened to the segment that we had Natalie on in a previous episode, we talked about this a bit. But it's like, you know...Willow—right, by the end of the series—and sort of a massive turning point is the loss of Tara. But also, before the start of this season, she's lost her best friend. She's brought her best friend back to life. She's discovered that she yanked her out of heaven. There's just a lot going on. And so I say that—I think that's—we all know that.

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** But I just wanna sort of establish it in this conversation as well.

**Natalie:** No. And it's obvious how much it's been weighing on Willow, because she keeps bringing it up when she's talking to Buffy. Like, I ruined it for you. 'Cause *Willow* brought you back with magic, right? Like, she knows she's hurting people and she doesn't—but she doesn't know what else to do. Nobody was talking to each other. No one was offering that support. Because everyone else was dealing with their stuff, you know? And no one wanted to, like, stop and do that, you know, time. And Tara tried, but you know, one person can't do it all, you know?

**Jenny:** I'm curious—and I'm sure Kristin is curious too. What is your read on the way we see Tara kind of navigate Willow's treatment of Tara, Tara's reaction to that treatment, their separation, their reunion?

**Natalie:** Yeah. I think she does as good a job as anyone can do, right? Like, she—she struggles sometimes to say what she's really upset about. But who wouldn't? [laughs] You know? And I think she sets boundaries and she tries. Tara

does what she can to support someone she loves, without—but also realizing that she can't—she can't say, like, okay and that includes, like, violating my boundaries, right? Like, I can support you, but if you're gonna, like, literally do magic on me if I'm gonna be hanging around, I'm gonna have to leave. Right? Because that is traumatizing me in a way that's not healthy for me. And I think that's the hard piece, because it's like, to help someone, to support someone, doesn't mean, like, you literally have to give them the exact relationship with you that they want. But it doesn't mean you don't—you can do it in other ways, right? You know, and she's there for—she's there for Dawn, as much as anyone is there for Dawn.

[Kristin laughs]

**Jenny:** Maybe way more than anybody else is there for Dawn. [laughs]

**Kristin:** Yeah, right?

**Natalie:** Yeah!

**Jenny:** Okay, so...as of where we are right now. Giles has just fucked off to England.

**Natalie:** Yes.

**Jenny:** After...after, you know, noting that he had serious concerns about the amount and kinds of magic that Willow's using. I don't know, can you talk about how you see Giles' relationship to Willow and the ways in which she is misusing magic and the ways in which he is responding and trying to intervene?

**Natalie:** Yeah. So I mean, it's clear, right, like—Giles, of all of them, is—has a deeper history with magic, bad and good, right? You know, he raised the demon, people died. Ethan Rayne keeps popping up every once in a while, [laughs] like—and so—

**Jenny:** Mmmm.

**Kristin:** Miss you, buddy.

**Natalie:** The way Giles treats her when he comes back and then he takes her to England is very much a Giles—the Giles/Willow relationship, right? Like—and she did respect him and she did love Giles. That relationship makes sense. It's the, him leaving knowing that she's, like, delving into really deep things. And him never once being like, hi, do you remember that demon guy that came and found me? Like,

I—like, magic has cost. Magic can make you feel powerful, even—you know, like, even if you think you're doing it for something good.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** Like, I just wish at some point, someone would have said to Willow, like, I get that you think that this is helping people. But you're—but maybe it's not. Like, maybe you're just trying to refuse to accept, like, what is.

**Kristin:** It's complicated, too, because Giles—right—has a lived experience of using magic in a way that not only harmed but killed somebody. He has the history, and obviously, his relationship to it is healthy. We see his relationship to magic is one that is healthy throughout pretty much the whole show.

**Natalie:** Mmhmm.

**Kristin:** But he also is traumatized in other ways. And so, you know, I think that if Giles was just this person who had had this relationship to magic and was just talking to Willow about that, we might see something different. But I—not to, like, at all make an excuse for what Giles decides to do. But I do think that for Giles, there's this massive amount of trauma as well. And that it might be even more upsetting to him that he can't—he can't figure out the way to get through to Willow. Because he truly, more than anyone, knows what the dangers are of this and how serious it is. And so if you know that on the level that Giles knows it, and you can't figure out a way to get through to this person who doesn't yet know it, I have to imagine that that is terrifying.

**Natalie:** Absolutely. And I think, like, the thing is, is like, he does know what to do with her when it gets really bad, right? Like, he knows how to bring her back. He has a plan. He understands that, like, she's forgetting—you know, he understands that her rage is—like, this is coming from the loss of Tara, right? Like, he knows instinctively, like, something really bad happened to Willow. Otherwise, she wouldn't have done this. And so, like, he seems to understand that. And I—you know, and then he gives her the—when she's on the recovery side, right? He—you know, like—which we could talk about. Like, she gets the "good" treatment, right? She doesn't go to jail, she doesn't get punished.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** She gets to go to a coven.

**Kristin:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Natalie:** And learn how to use magic appropriately and, like—even though they're still, like, worried about her, you know, and scared of her a little bit. Because, like, it's with—and Giles is there for her. And he's supportive without, like, absolving her of what she did. And I just wish, like, Giles would have left because it was like, I'm a little worried about Willow. I'm going back to England. We need to figure this out.

**Kristin:** Right.

**Natalie:** And—like, just give him another reason to go. And like, I think it makes more sense.

**Kristin:** Right.

**Natalie:** And then he's back and he's ready to help Willow. "I was too late. Here's all the good magic."

**Kristin:** Yeah. [laughs]

**Natalie:** Or whatever.

[Jenny laughs]

**Kristin:** "I was on a quest to gather all of the tools you needed."

**Natalie:** [laughs] Yes!

**Kristin:** "I was helping!" [laughter]

**Natalie:** "I'm so sorry!"

**Kristin:** Yeah. But it's interesting when you think about—I don't know. Like, my lived experience is that if there is trauma that is in no way related to me or that I'm not also experiencing, I have so many tools and the ability to engage with it. Like, the loss of Tara—not that Giles isn't impacted by the loss of Tara. Of course, he is.

**Natalie:** Mmhmm.

**Kristin:** But that—not like the loss of Buffy.

**Natalie:** No.



**Kristin:** The loss of Buffy, for Willow and Giles I think, has equal resonance and bringing her back has equal resonance. And so I do wonder too if, like, his proximity to it makes him completely incapable of helping her through the trauma.

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** Because it's also his. You know, whereas Tara's is not as much.

**Natalie:** Yeah. And I think, like we said before, everyone's just traumatized. Like, they've been fighting demons for six years. People are dying. Like, there's loss, there's—and so, like, it makes sense that it all kind of comes to a head. It's just—has been—you know, it's frustrating for us to watch when we're like, just sit down and talk to each other!

**Kristin:** [laughs] Yeah. [crosstalk] Yeah, a little easier, I guess, for us. [laughs]

**Natalie:** Or just, like, leave everybody alone in a room with Anya and Spike for, like, 20 minutes.

**Kristin:** [laughing] Yeah.

**Natalie:** Just give them, like, 20 minutes—

**Jenny:** Yes!

**Natalie:** With both of those two. You'll get—

**Kristin:** Call Cordelia back. Throw her in the mix, too. You know? Just—

**Natalie:** Yeah!

**Jenny:** Yes.

**Natalie:** We'll get Spike's emotional intelligence, and then we'll get, like, Anya's clear, logical, rational response to things. [laughs] And, like—

**Jenny:** Yes.

**Natalie:** Just move forward. Let's move forward.

**Kristin:** Natalie, you touched on it and that's a place that I know we wanna go. The fact that Willow—and I'm gonna read Alba's words here.

**Natalie:** Mmhmm.

**Kristin:** Because Alba's been a huge part of the production of this episode. And you know, Alba said, she—Willow has been held accountable by her community, in this—not yet. Not yet, by Wrecked, but we're talking the whole season, right? She is held accountable. But she never has to—and this is what you were mentioning—deal with the consequences of her addiction in the, quote, "real world." She's able to return to school in Season 7 without having to jump through any hoops. She never has to deal with finding work or having to worry about housing, food, basic necessities. And that's what you're talking about too, of like, she's flown to England and she's immersed in this healthy coven relationship to magic. And like, how—viewing Willow as somebody with privilege, who is misusing magic, is I think really important. So I will let you speak a bit on that.

**Natalie:** Yeah, I mean, like, the reality is, like, we know that people get different treatment. We know that basically, white people use drugs as much as any other—any other identity. Yet they're arrested less often, they're—they have access to treatment more often. And so there is this piece—

**Jenny:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** Right? There isn't this, like, implied...criminality—immediate implied criminality when you talk about substance use. And we see how society reacts differently when we're talking about substance use that's coded as something that happens, right, like in the inner cities versus, like, you know, in a rural area.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** So we talk about, you know, the crack cocaine usage, you know, in the 80s versus the way we responded to the—you know, the opioid epidemic. And like, even if you just—if you Google, like, "crack epidemic" versus "opioid epidemic," like, the pictures that pop up are, like, startling.

**Kristin:** Mmm.

**Natalie:** Like, you know—

**Jenny:** Mmm.

**Natalie:** The criminalization of black bodies in one, versus people are treated with sympathy. And like, how we do that. And I think there is so much privilege in

Willow's story, because really, she is—she does something with her—especially with the way they project her, like, you know, the addiction storyline. You know, air quotes. Like, she has no contact with law enforcement, or anything like that. And so, this idea that, like, she's able to kind of go through this journey without outside societal forces, like the criminal justice system or something like that, pushing in on her, like, shows that it's a rough journey in and of itself. Let alone when you have other people jumping in to create even more obstacles. And to tell you you have to be sober and you have to go to jail and—you know, and like, yeah. It's just—it's completely different.

**Kristin:** Well, yeah, and I—you mentioned this. You know, we talked a little bit about this already, so I don't know that there's a ton more to go into. But I do think for somebody like myself, who I don't know a ton about what it is to be on parole and what the system tells people who are on parole for possession of drugs or, you know, X, Y, Z. But it sounds—based on what you've been saying—that there is absolute—and this is not surprising, in a governmental system—

**Natalie:** No, right.

**Kristin:** Especially if it parallels any other governmental system, in this country—that there's no nuance. That it is, this is the rule. It's probably from 1962 that the rule was written down, and this is what we do. But I would love to hear a little more on that.

**Natalie:** It's all bullshit. Right? [Kristin laughs] Like, we send people—

**Kristin:** And—period.

**Natalie:** Right? No, it's bullshit. So like, you get this dynamic—and I remember, I would get so frustrated, especially when I first started working in the field. Because I would be like, they're expecting people to do things that I can't do. And I'm not struggling with, like, dependency to heroin or, like—you know, like—I mean. We tell people—you know, we arrest them. And then we say, like, okay, we're gonna let you out but you have to have a job and you have to go to treatment. And you can't use at all and you have to have a place to live and you have to do all of this community service. And you have to meet your probation officer, and if you fuck up any way, shape or form, you're going back to jail. And then you're gonna get a violation on your record, which means that you're not gonna be able—

**Jenny:** [quietly] Dude.

**Natalie:** To get out again later. Right? Like, and it's just like, I'm looking at this and I'm like, okay. Intensive outpatient programs are twelve hours a week. And they operate during normal business hours, right?

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** So like, you're—nine hours or twelve hours a week, you can't work.

**Kristin:** Right.

**Natalie:** Plus you have to do community service. Plus, like, you know, you have to find a safe place to live. They're not gonna help you find a safe place to live, but you have to find one. And then, you know, the way the criminal justice system, like, embeds itself in treatment facilities is, like, really, really toxic. Because it's hard, because you want to help them. But you also are never 100%—it's really hard to help them when you also have someone else that they're, like—they have to answer to. So like, they get told to go to treatment. And then they are also told, well, you have to sign a release because they're gonna be drug testing you and they need to let us know if you fail a drug test. Right? Because this is court-ordered treatment, which means it's not really your treatment. Like, we're gonna be looking in on it, at all fucking times. You know?

Or we create these transitional housing for people, because they need it. They need a safe place. Maybe they need a sober house, maybe they don't have anywhere to go. But a lot of them are on probation, which means that the probation officer is going to demand that if they live in transitional housing, they want you to do drug screens. And there needs to be, like, requirements that—oh, by the way, they have to go to NA meetings. Doesn't matter if these NA meetings are filled with a whole bunch of people who are actively still fucking using, right?

**Kristin:** Right.

**Jenny:** Dude.

Natalie: Like, it makes no sense. Obstacles for obstacles' sake. And it can be—it's really frustrating. And as long as drugs are criminalized, you're not gonna be able to pull treatment away from the criminal justice system, the way it really should be for any other system.

**Kristin:** Right, right.

**Natalie:** *That's my rant.* [laughs]

**Kristin:** No, it's—but it's so important. Because it's—and it's also that, like, tying it back to what we're saying about Willow. Willow doesn't set a foot in that system. That is so much because of her privilege, and that if—if people with privilege—I mean, that wouldn't happen, right? Because the system exists specifically because it is people without privilege that are in the system. But if people with privilege were in that system, the system would not be [laughs] the way that it is, at all. And so—anyway. It was your rant. I didn't mean to rant over it, but I'm angry too. [laughs]

**Natalie:** No. But it's—and it's fucking layered, right? Like, you arrest the rich college kid driving home from, like, the Robert Taylor homes in Chicago, and you're like, where did you get the drugs? Like, we'll give you probation if you tell us where you got the drugs—

**Kristin:** [whispers] Jesus.

**Natalie:** So we can go in there and we can go put somebody else—somebody who's probably black—away for, like, 20 years.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** And you get to be on probation and we'll—you know, like—and so it create—there's, like, privilege within the system of even being arrested, right?

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Natalie:** Like, who gets released on probation? Who gets dealing charges versus who doesn't? You know. Who's viewed as the victim? Like, dealers being charged for overdoses—

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** You know, like, homicide charges. Like, the odds are, most people are buying their drugs from someone else who they know who *uses*. You know?

**Kristin:** Right. Right.

**Natalie:** Like, it just really creates—it's just toxic. It's toxic all the way down.

**Jenny:** Something I'm really interested in is that, like, Buffy seems to be working overtime to equate what she's up to with Spike or what she doesn't wanna be up to

with Spike or what she really wants to be up to with Spike, but like, doesn't wanna want it, with what's going on with Willow.

**Natalie:** Mmhmm.

**Jenny:** You know, and I'm curious how that strikes you, within the context of the show.

**Natalie:** So I mean, it's messy. But it's like—I don't—Buffy's in pain and she's doing something that she knows isn't necessarily good, but she knows makes her feel better in the moment. Even if it makes her feel bad later on or even if it creates more problems for herself. And I mean, I think Buffy's got a lot of, like—she's stigmatizing her own behavior, right? Like, I'm dirty, I'm having sex with this, like, evil vampire. What's wrong—right? So like, Buffy's stigmatizing herself. She's not offering Willow that space and that graciousness to say, like, hey, people are worried about your magic. I think something else is going on, I think you're struggling. Because *I'm* struggling and I know I'm doing things that feel like—that aren't healthy for me, too. But instead, she's just like, projecting. Like, she's not using it to connect to Willow. And she tries. Like, she sits on the bed and they—she starts to have that conversation, right? And then Amy walks out of the bathroom and that's all blown to hell. But then you see how fast, like—all of a sudden, like, that projection—it turns to, like, anger, once she really is faced with what's going on with Willow. And how she—how it makes her feel and she gets very stigmatizing with Willow.

**Jenny:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** But I also think that's how she's probably talking to herself, too. [laughs] Internally.

**Jenny:** Oh, yeah.

**Natalie:** Which I think is just—you know, we're taught shame and stigma. We're taught, you know—we're taught that, like, love tough and things like that are things that we all need to go through. We're taught that we need a rock bottom. And so I think it makes sense when people talk to other people the way they also maybe talk to themselves. So I think, yeah. There's a lot going on.

**Kristin:** There's so much to talk about here. I mean, we've done a lot.

**Natalie:** Yes.

**Kristin:** We've talked about a lot.

[Jenny laughs]

**Natalie:** Like, we've been all over the place. [laughs]

**Kristin:** Yeah, well, I mean, it—but that's how—I mean, that's really how this arc is delivered to us, I think. You know, it is truly kind of all over the place.

**Natalie:** It is, yeah. No, I was saying, it is. It's really—and it's one of those things—'cause I feel like there are these moments where I'm like, that's so good. That's so good, that's so good. And then there are moments where I'm like, uh, just dial it back a little bit, guys? Like, we get it.

[Jenny laughs]

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Natalie:** We get it. It's like, we can't tell an addiction story if we don't hit all of these paths. But it's like, everyone's story looks different. And like, what if we just didn't feel like we had to focus on all these behaviors or all these, like, milestone moments—

**Kristin:** Right.

**Natalie:** To say this is what addiction is. Instead, just said, like, this is what happens when things are hard and we try to cope with them in ways that don't help us.

**Kristin:** Right.

**Natalie:** And I think that's—you know—and I think, like, taking the autonomy away from Willow sometimes was what really would bother me. Like, she's...she wanted to kill Warren.

**Kristin:** Mmm.

**Natalie:** So did Dawn!

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** You know, like...so she made a choice and that choice compounded on itself and compounded on itself. And she—at this point, she was kind of—you got the vibe that she was like, well, I'm just gonna have to be this person now. I'm mad. And like, you see these moments when she gets at the pain and she falters. And you know—

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Natalie:** Like, when she's about to—the bullet's going through Warren and she's talking about Tara. And you can tell, like, she's talking to herself about Tara and what happened. And you can see her...go back to—start to—almost, like, she starts to be a little more like Willow. And then she steels herself and it's like—because she so doesn't wanna deal with that kind of pain.

**Kristin:** Right.

**Jenny:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** It's just—she's been avoiding it for so long. And it's just so hard.

**Kristin:** The autonomy is just a really good point, in general, to bring up. I think that so often, we're told that when we're moving through trauma, we are not ourselves. Like, I hear that said all the time. Like, I'm not me. I don't—I'm not me. And it's like, well, this is still you. Like, you're not not you.

**Natalie:** Mmhmm.

**Kristin:** You are just you...moving through trauma. And like, that is echoed in what you're saying. Like, Willow wanted to kill Warren. Warren...is a piece of shit.  
[laughs]

**Natalie:** Yeah! I mean, I'm not crying over him at all.

**Jenny:** [simultaneously] Ha! Ha-ha!

**Kristin:** [simultaneously] And I'm not saying that pieces of shit deserve to be killed, by any means—

**Natalie:** No.

**Kristin:** But like, the desire—the desire to do something horrible to this person who has done the worst thing in the world to Willow, and to Tara.



**Natalie:** Mmhmm.

**Kristin:** But also has done horrible things to countless women, specifically—

**Natalie:** Yeah. Like—

**Kristin:** Since we met him—is like, not a desire that is complicated to understand.  
[laughs]

**Natalie:** Mmhmm. No. I mean, right? Like, I mean, even at the end. Dawn and Xander both were kinda like, mm—[Kristin laughs] you know. And Buffy has to—like, killing people or thinking you can kill some—like, it's—the killing of another human being is what I'm trying to save Willow from. I'm not trying to save Warren. Like, fuck Warren. [crosstalk]

**Kristin:** Right. Right.

**Natalie:** Right? Like...

**Jenny:** Yeah.

**Natalie:** No one—yeah. No one's gonna cry for Warren, per se. But like, we're trying to save Willow from doing something that we—since we know Willow, we know she's gonna regret. Right?

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** And I think it's...it's just all sad.

**Kristin:** Yeah. It's complicated too. Natalie, although we could talk forever...

**Natalie:** Mmhmm.

**Kristin:** I wonder if there's any—

**Jenny:** You probably have stuff to do.

**Kristin:** Yeah, like, one or two things to do.

**Natalie:** Yes.

**Kristin:** I know that your dogs are, like, really, really, really excited for you to stop talking to us and to start talking to them. [laughs]

**Jenny:** Yes.

**Kristin:** But is there anything that you wanted to hit in this episode specifically, in our conversation, that we didn't bring up?

**Natalie:** I think there's this moment where Buffy really gets it. Like, where they say something like...like, there should be limits. There should be limits to what we can do or what—but Willow doesn't believe that. And I was like, there it is! That's it! That's it. Willow believes that if you can—like, why would you live like this if you don't have to? Like, why would you live in this pain? Why would you live in this rejection? Why would you live in this insecurity if you don't have to?

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Jenny:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** And so I think that's really this—this important piece. And I feel like it's there in threads and I think it's underlying. I think it just sometimes gets lost in the, like, really direct, relational, like, "I'm so juiced" or whatever kind of thing that they say. That like, Willow really just—why do I have this power if I can't make things better? But also, like, what Willow thinks better is is not feeling pain and not having bad things happen. And—

**Jenny:** Right.

**Natalie:** And that's not un-normal. Like, a lot of us would do—I mean, that's why there's, like, things about the three wishes and the monkey's—you know, like—

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Natalie:** We always think—be careful what you wish for. And I think the whole point of this Season 6, right, is like...they're telling—they tell Buffy that, too—is like, living is hard. But the easy way isn't—it doesn't get you where you wanna go, like, the way you think it does.

**Kristin:** The way you think is the easy way is never the easy way. It looks—it looks like a bejeweled path.

**Natalie:** Yeah.

[Jenny laughs]

**Kristin:** Until you get to the bend in the path, and you're like, where the fuck did the bejewels go? You know? [laughs]

**Natalie:** Yeah. Right. Like, you're still living—you know. And so I think that's the piece and like, that's what happens. Like, bad things happen to us. We lose people or we have—our life takes a turn that we didn't expect and we have to find out how to adjust who we are in light of that new information.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Natalie:** And I think for Willow, you know, she was going on kind of this run, right? Like, she went to college. She was smart and then she—you know, she was a Wicca. And then, you know, she met Tara. And like, oh okay, this is it. Like, I—you know, I'm a lesbian and this is great and I love it. And I am me and I am fully me and I am ready for this. And then, like, life intrudes on it again, right—

**Jenny:** Mmm.

**Natalie:** With Buffy dying. And, like—but now she has power.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** And what does she do with that? Like, you know, she's not just upset, trying to cast little spells. You know, she, like, legit has power.

**Kristin:** Yeah. Well, and that's—I mean, that's a true—I think that that's something that the show does correctly, at least in my experience, is I don't feel that anyone set me up. And—nor any of the people I talk with...with the ability to understand that life would just keep coming at you.

**Natalie:** [laughs] Yeah.

**Kristin:** Like, you know. That was not the way and I don't know if that conversation is changing, for people who are young now. Maybe their parents are having different conversations with them. Maybe the media is telling some stories that are a little bit different. But like, certainly—

**Natalie:** Mm-mm.

**Kristin:** It was only when life kept coming back around to punch me in the face that I was like, oh, this just it. Okay, okay, okay, okay, okay.

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** It's like, it's real good and it's real bad. And both of those things are true.

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** It's not—it's never gonna be just, like, sparkles and bubblegum.

**Natalie:** Yeah. Well, and I guess when you're literally fighting demons. Why wouldn't you fight them at [inaudible]? [laughter] Why can I do that?

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Natalie:** I just make it go poof.

**Kristin:** That's true. That's true.

**Natalie:** [simultaneously] We literally make things go poof all the time. [Kristin laughs] That's literally what we do.

**Kristin:** They, like, break the fourth wall. They're like, the writers let us kill all the other demons. [laughter]

**Natalie:** Why can't we kill our inner turmoil demons too?

**Kristin:** Yeah, what the fuck?

[laughter]

**Natalie:** Not fair. How dare you? Yeah.

**Kristin:** Natalie, I have a feeling that our listeners will have a lot of feedback and questions and what have you. So I wouldn't be surprised to have another conversation with you in the future.

**Natalie:** Sure.

**Kristin:** Or to bring you into the fold in some other ways. But just can't thank you enough for being here—

**Natalie:** This has been—

**Kristin:** To help us unpack all that is Willow and magic.

**Natalie:** Yeah. Yeah, and I think the one last thing I would—like, thank you so much for having me on. And like, you know, I don't speak for everyone in the recovery community or everyone in the treatment community or the harm reduction—like, I am one person, doing one thing in this, like, broad tapestry. And so if I miss—if you feel like I misrepresented your experience, like, that wasn't my intention. And I know it's nuanced. Or if I said something in a way that was a little inartful, like, obviously I didn't mean to and I apologize if I caused any harm in that way. And I just feel like it's hard, because there's—there's so much built into talking about substance use. And it's really hard to do it.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** And it's really hard to struggle with it. And so I hope that I did the best I could and that people find value in the conversation.

**Kristin:** Yeah, and I think that...first of all, thank you for, like, being willing to have the conversation, for that reason specifically too. That it is...it's not one—it's not one conversation. And that's, like, where we try to start as well. That like, you can't—

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** It's not like we decided, like, we're gonna do this episode and then that's the end of it. But also, you know, Natalie, I think you approach conversations like this like Jenny and I try to approach conversations like this. Which is, let us know. You know? Like, I think—you know, Jenny and I are super—like, when we talk about Buffy and Buffy's mental health, when we do that conversation. That's gonna be a very different conversation for me to have. I'm gonna have a lot more to contribute about my personal experience and what have you. But I can still learn there.

**Natalie:** Mmhmm.

**Kristin:** There's no question that I have a ton to learn here.

**Jenny:** Mmhmm.

**Kristin:** And I don't think that anyone in this conversation thinks that they know everything there is to know. So please, you know, if you don't know our email already, it's bufferingthevampireslayer@gmail.com. And send us your email, send us your feedback, positive, negative, thoughtful, questions, whatever, you know. And we will take that in and process it and continue having the conversation. There's never an end. [laughs]

**Natalie:** No, like—and like you said, you know, who knows if we're gonna come back and, like, hear the way we're talking now and be like—and like, honestly, I hope so.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Natalie:** Because that means we've probably moved even further. Like, I would love for this conversation to feel dated in some ways, too. Like, I would love for there to be a whole revamped way of looking at this that makes even, like, my rant about, like, the criminal justice system, come back and be like, oh, she was thinking so small then. Like, please, please—

**Kristin:** Right, right. Totally.

**Natalie:** [simultaneously] Tell me if I'm thinking too small. Like, let me—you know. I hope I'm thinking too small.

**Kristin:** But that's the—you know, I think thinking out loud is the way that you get to bigger places. It's like, if we're not having the conversation at all then we're just gonna be where we are.

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** We're never gonna take a step forward from there. So...hopefully this was, like, informative for much of our listenership. And maybe sort of inspires more—I know that, like, this is really kind of a first step for myself, in like, learning how to have these conversations and understanding them a bit better.

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Kristin:** So I think that's important and also, you know, I'm hoping that some people feel seen and, like, cared for in this space.

**Natalie:** I hope so too. And I think it's—like, the show's maturing, so I think it's—that's why these conversations are happening. Like, it's getting—the show's getting harder.

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** Like, there's a reason I rewatch the first, like, three to four seasons. Because they're, like—90% of the time, they're fun. You know?

**Jenny:** Yeah.

**Natalie:** And then, like, Season 6 and 7, it's like...[Jenny laughs] it's not as fun—

**Kristin:** Mmhmm.

**Natalie:** But at the same time, like, it's deeper and it's...you know.

**Kristin:** Yeah. I think it goes without saying that you can find Natalie and the resources that we'll add to this episode in the show notes today. Truly, Natalie, thank you so much for having the conversation with us.

**Natalie:** Thank you so much. Like I said—

**Jenny:** [simultaneously] Yeah, thank you so much.

**Natalie:** Any time.

**Kristin:** Have a wonderful rest of your day.

**Jenny:** Please.

**Natalie:** Thanks. You guys, too.

**Kristin:** And we'll talk to you soon.

**Natalie:** Alright, bye.

**Jenny:** Thanks so much.

**Natalie:** No problem!

[CHIME]

