



How did the two of you meet prior to working on the audiobook of together?

KC: I happened to meet Tavia in our 8 a.m. Wednesday Pilates mat class up here in Portland, ME, just a few weeks before she moved down to Brooklyn. And it just so happened that there was a big, splashy, front-page feature story about her career in the *Portland Press Herald* just as the audiobook team at Random House was getting in touch with me about *Blue Plate Special*. Only very rarely does everything align with such dovetailed precision.

TG: I am so glad we so serendipitously met at Pilates! It's funny that that newspaper article finally connected us after months side by side on the mat.

Many memoirists choose to read the audiobook editions of their books themselves. Kate, why didn't you want to narrate *Blue Plate Special*? Tavia, what was it like to narrate such a personal story?

KC: Although I love reading aloud, I felt vulnerable, too close to the material, too exposed reading it aloud. But I was so afraid of having it read by someone who wouldn't connect deeply to the material or understand many of the things I was writing about. So it was an amazing bit of luck for me that Tavia happened to be in my Pilates class. I had the sense, from our very first conversation, that she was exactly the right person to read the audio version of my autobiography. I grew up in Arizona, Tavia in the Idaho desert. We talk alike, with that particular twangy, open accent, transplanted to the East Coast and flattened slightly over the years.

Yes, we are close friends, it's true, and it was instantaneous. Is this a rare thing, this closeness between audiobook reader and book writer? My only other audiobook, *The Astral*, is narrated by another professional actor, Donald Corran. I love his rendition of the novel—it's sharp and funny and excellent—but of course I don't feel any of the intense personal connection to that audiobook that I do to this one. I have the sense that listeners

are going to feel something very powerful in her reading of this book. And I'll have Tavia narrate all my books from now on, of course!

TG: Reading and voicing *Blue Plate Special* was so pleasurable, and, honestly, so painful at times. I recognized myself so frequently in [Kate's] stories, and it made my heart ache to experience her mortification and awkwardness, which I felt daily as a child and still feel at times even as an adult. I think she found her place—her comfort and safety and her deepest sense of self—in writing, and I'm finding the same thing. Whatever you want, you work for it, and at it, and you keep open, and you never act blasé about it or about anything.

Kate, *Blue Plate Special* is a departure from your previous work—it's your first nonfiction book. How was writing it different from writing a novel?

KC: As someone who floundered gracelessly and struggled mightily for years before I published my first novel, I also say a big *amen* to the idea that having to work for something keeps cynicism at bay. I can never take any of the things I fought so hard for and long to achieve for granted—not love or security or sanity or success.

And writing about those hard decades of feeling so lonely and lost and anxious was both cathartic and difficult and always painful. Certainly my deep ongoing hunger made me act in ways that weren't necessarily dignified or in my own best interests. It made me feel untethered and crazy and angry. I made a lot of mistakes, caused a lot of trouble. Going back and revealing all of this with the painstaking honesty my editor demanded of me was not fun, but if my own experiences can provide any comfort for others who are going through similar trials, then it was worth it.

What I set out to do in this book was to repay the debt I feel to the food-and-life

writers who saved my life in those years: M.F.K. Fisher and Laurie Colwin. Their stories of their own lives in food were like warm blankets during those dark nights of the soul in my 20s when I didn't know if I'd ever be okay.

TG: You know, our losses have some parallels. To read Kate's book and recognize so much that was familiar, and to be comforted by her stories, reaffirmed why memoir matters—what is important about taking the time and having the courage to revisit those dark rooms behind closed doors.

Now that the audiobook has wrapped, how do you both feel about the finished recording, and what was the experience like?

KC: I was a little nervous as I hit "play" for the first time, realizing that my very personal memoir was about to be revealed to me in her voice, so it was a joy to hear it come to life in a whole new way. In fact, it made me teary-eyed to hear my own story read so beautifully. Her emphases and pauses bring out new nuances in the writing and reveal aspects of it to me that

I hadn't felt in writing it. And as I listened, I wondered, how was reading this book aloud for her? Was there anything she struggled with, any new kind of challenge she faced as a narrator?

TG: I was blessed to work with a great director, May Wuthrich, on this book, and she encouraged me again and again to just relax—to relax my diction, to just fall into the story without worrying

at all about my work. I've worked very hard to be expert at my craft, to remove any regionalism from my voice and to make my diction clear, so it was a pleasure that on this book I was invited and encouraged to ease up and soften my performance.

The book felt familiar, as if I were telling my own story. Because our lives have paralleled in some ways, it was particularly painful at moments to bring scenes from Kate's life off the page. But even when Kate was just setting place and space and time, those passages felt like home to me.

I was talking about Kate with my partner after the audiobook was complete, and I referred to her as a close friend. He said, incredulously, "You just met her! How can you call her a close friend?" I said, "We're both writers, and I've told her story, and I know her, and now I love her." —Stephanie Klose

