

Ian:

Dina, you're a pacifier. And, you know, your gift is pacifying. It's calming, which is a very precious thing to be able to do. I wonder if it might be good if you could just... you know, there are people listening to this who might be angry, who might be agitated. Could we try just through listening to this, could you try to pacify them?

Dina, the Pacifier:

Oh yes, I can. I can certainly try an auditory pacification. Just imagine. Imagine yourself with me in your mouth, and you can wrap your tongue all around. Just gently wrap around the fine curves of my contours and just gnaw. Release the tension from your jaw and just gnaw. Now you can feel all the pressures of your day being released. Don't bite down too hard now. Just gently gnaw on the rubber. And now all your problems are gone.

Ian:

I feel calm.

Dina, the Pacifier:

Isn't that cool.

Ian:

Yeah, it is.

Dina, the Pacifier:

It's my gift. It's my gift and my curse.

Ian:

Well, Dina, describe a typical day for me.

Dina, the Pacifier:

A typical day ranges from hell to nightmare. I end up generally in a very wet and dark hole. That is the bulk of my day. And when it's not a wet and dark hole, it is a loud, loud shrieking torture room.

Ian:

So your baby, should I call it your baby?

Dina, the Pacifier:

I mean, I don't want to be associated with that.

Ian:

The baby. Your baby.

Dina, the Pacifier:

Yeah, go with the baby.

Ian:

The baby. Tell me about them.

Dina, the Pacifier:

The baby, you know, it's deceptive. These things are designed to be deceptive. They're very tiny. They don't look as though they can produce the decibels that they do. Just the amount of slobber that this creature can produce. You know, when they're not shrieking, I can see the appeal. But most of it is in fact shrieking. And that's my role, is to enter the baby and pacify this baby, whatever that means. I'm sorry, what is the word pacify?

Ian:

What does it mean?

Dina, the Pacifier:

Yes.

Ian:

You know, let me just, I will look it up and give you the dictionary definition. Okay. "Pacify: to quell the anger, excitement, or agitation of."

Dina, the Pacifier:

To quell the anger. Now I have a question. What do these babies have to be angry about?

Ian:

That's a good question. I think that they can't talk and they have similar desires to the older people who can talk. And so they're constantly frustrated by their inability to express themselves.

Dina, the Pacifier:

Okay. So they're dumb and it's my job to make peace with their stupidity. I just don't know what they have to shriek about. Everything is done for them. Everything is done for them. The larger adults, they do everything, everything for them. No one ever has looked out for me. No one asks, you know, where do I want to go? Do I want to go in not a dark slimy hole today? No one asks me that.

Ian:

No one babies you.

Dina, the Pacifier:

That's exactly correct.

Ian:

So do you know how old is the baby?

Dina, the Pacifier:

I mean, in pacifier years, or?

Ian:

Sure. Yeah.

Dina, the Pacifier:

It can be about 3000 years old.

Ian:

Okay. So is there a conversion for?

Dina, the Pacifier:

Well, pacifiers, we have a very brief lives and they range from roughly 30 seconds to I think I know someone who lasted about 10 days. Yeah.

Ian:

Wow.

Dina, the Pacifier:

More or less. I've seen many of my brethren and sisterens and others on the streets. They're left abandoned. You know, I noticed these adults, they treat us as refuse. I tend to fall out of the baby and where I go from there, it's anybody's guess. In one of these instances, this baby did fall asleep and I ended up on the floor. But before the allegedly responsible adult in the room could see to my well-being, this dog just slurped me up with that tongue, which what kind of God would make a tongue like that I cannot say. And the teeth. You know, the teeth, at least the babies don't have teeth. You know?

Ian:

Your baby doesn't have, sorry, the baby doesn't have teeth yet.

Dina, the Pacifier:

No teeth. Oh yet? Is that something I'm supposed to expect now?

Ian:

I'm sorry, yeah. Teeth are coming.

Dina, the Pacifier:

Oh God.

Ian:

But you were saying when pacifiers end up dropped on the street, I think it's true that a lot of times parents don't pick them up again because they're afraid of germs. And so pacifiers end up left on the sidewalk while other things get picked up. It's like a little rapture.

Dina, the Pacifier:

We do get left behind. You know, we end up on the street after the creatures drop us, and we're replaced immediately.

Ian:

You must, I guess, in just where you spend your days, you must be in the direct line of a lot of baby talk.

Dina, the Pacifier:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ian:

How does that feel?

Dina, the Pacifier:

I mean, I do hear a lot of the adults degrade themselves for this thing you call baby talk, and it's amusing. It is amusing.

Ian:

I've heard some parents refer to their children's pacifiers by a name, like by a nickname. Do you get a=

Dina, the Pacifier:

Yes, I too have been degraded if this is your question. I get called all kinds of names. Slurs even, I would call them, ranging from Binky to Bippy. Binko, Binkerrific, Bibi, Baba, Bibber, Bite, Boola, Bobi, Bubba, Bubble, Budgie, Buggy, Buppie, Charlie, Chewbacca, Boko Haram, Cinderella, Alpha Beta Omega, Sally Ride, Golden Goose, Applegate Farms, Snoopy, Sleepy, Dozy, Darkling Duck.

Ian:

I mean, those are terms of endearment. Like for all the issues, you are important to this child, loved by this child. Do you ever think about what is going on with the baby? What it's doing when you're not there?

Dina, the Pacifier:

I imagine a lot of slurping, a lot of that tongue, that tiny little tongue, perhaps feeling, feeling around the gums. Maybe wondering why it's so mushy, and maybe even missing me. Sometimes I wonder.

Ian:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). I'm sure it does.

Dina, the Pacifier:

Think so?

Ian:

Yeah. Yeah.

Dina, the Pacifier:

That's a nice feeling. Yeah. Never thought about it that way.

Josh:

Josh.

Ian:

Hey Josh. It's Ian.

Josh:

Ian, what's up? How are you?

Ian:

I'm good. I wanted to ask you about something that you told me about a long time ago, and it has stuck with me. Can you tell me about what your parents did for you when you were teething?

Josh:

You're asking me about what they put on the ring around my neck?

Ian:

Yeah. I'm asking you about what they put around your neck.

Josh:

Well, it was actually a tradition that was passed among several generations. I don't know if it goes all the way back to the shtetl. My parents would freeze a bagel from H&H and tie a string around it and then put it around my neck. So I would gnaw on that all day until it became a soggy mess.

Ian:

So I'm picturing like little Josh Siegal, kind of like Flavor Flav except with a bagel instead of a clock.

Josh:

Well, you've just actually touched on something that I'd never thought of. I mean, actually actually there are decades of therapy that have gone into my wish to emulate Flavor Flav, and I never quite figured out why. And now you figured it out for me. Thank you. I'm not sure it was about teething so much as it was just as a way of amusing myself because I was a very oral kid.

Ian:

So it was a pacifier basically.

Josh:

Exactly. By the way, I just occurred to me. I just had another memory. It wasn't a frozen bagel. It was actually a stale bagel now that I'm thinking about it. They would just let it sit out for a number of days so it became hard as a rock.

Ian:

Is this really, it's really a tradition that goes back generations?

Josh:

I'm exaggerating slightly. I don't know how many generations goes back, but for sure it existed with my great uncle, my grandfather's brother's family. And I think that they themselves, my grandfather and great uncle, also had this experience in the 19-teens. So I think it's something that goes back to when they first arrived in the US in the Lower East Side and then the Bronx.

Ian:

And it was just, so I understand, was it one bagel a day or would a bagel last more than one day?

Josh:

That you'd have to ask my parents about. I think probably it was a pretty soggy mess by the end of the day. So I have a feeling... As depression era as my parents were, I think they were willing to toss the bagel and replace it with a new one.

Ian:

Okay. Have you ever heard of anybody else whose parents put a bagel on a necklace around their neck when they were a toddler?

Josh:

Only the parents I've recommended this to. So I'm trying to keep the tradition going, but I don't know. I don't know. I certainly was too young to remember at that point. But I do try my best to keep this tradition going. I mean, I don't know if you and Emily have carried it on for me, but you ought to.

Ian:

Dina, this feels like maybe it's a personal question, but can you tell me what you're made of?

Dina, the Pacifier:

Well, now we're made of rubber and a bit of plastic, but we used to just be a ball of meat wrapped in cloth.

Ian:

The first pacifiers were a ball of meat wrapped in cloth?

Dina, the Pacifier:

Meatball wrapped in cloth. Pretty hardcore, right?

Ian:

I guess it is. Yeah.

Dina, the Pacifier:

Yeah. We're a little softer now. A little more refined, sophisticated.

Ian:

I'm just thinking about if I went to the playground today and I saw one of the other parents holding their baby and the baby was sucking on a ball of meat wrapped in a washcloth. What would I think of that parent?

Dina, the Pacifier:

I would think that pacifier got a day off and good for them.

Ian:

Something interesting about you. You are made to simulate a part of the human body

Dina, the Pacifier:

Am I?

Ian:

Yeah.

Dina, the Pacifier:

Which part?

Ian:

I mean really two parts. You simulate a nipple, but then also the baby's thumb.

Dina, the Pacifier:

Wow. I guess I never noticed. I just thought of myself as curvy. I didn't know that I was modeled after the shape of a nipple. I guess it makes sense now, because you know, sometimes I do see the baby on the mother's chest. I'm seeing the resemblance. You know, in a way I'm almost jealous.

Ian:

Jealous of?

Dina, the Pacifier:

I didn't know that I was merely a replica of another, possibly preferred, sucking object.

Ian:

Does the baby suck it's thumb?

Dina, the Pacifier:

You know, I try my best not to look at it, but on occasion I have witnessed this. Yes, the thumb in the mouth.

Ian:

How does that feel? Because the thumb is kind of doing the same thing you do.

Dina, the Pacifier:

Yeah. It's confusing. I don't know what the purpose of my existence is. It has a pacifier already on its hand, what's that about? You know, elephants, they use their own trunk as pacifiers.

Ian:

Like we humans thumb suck, and they?

Dina, the Pacifier:

Human suck their thumbs and elephants suck their own trunks.

Ian:

They trunk suck.

Dina, the Pacifier:

Trunk suckers. Now that's an elegant creature.

Ian:

You were one of many accessories that the baby has. I'm sorry. Is that okay, accessory? Is that?

Dina, the Pacifier:

Sure, why not? I've been called worse.

Ian:

I guess you've seen the diaper.

Dina, the Pacifier:

Oh, I've seen the diaper enough. You know, it is valuable to get perspective in life, and when I look at the diaper, I feel a rush of gratitude, and I almost feel spoiled in my life when I look at the diaper, I feel ashamed for even complaining about anything that I go through. If I had knees, I would fall on them in respect for what is only a thankless life. You know, I thought I led a thankless life, but that diaper, oh man.

Ian:

Dina, I realize something's been kind of bothering me. We talked earlier about how when pacifiers get dropped on the sidewalk, a lot of times they don't get picked up again. I think that's true, but I live in a neighborhood with a lot of babies. Why are the sidewalks just not riddled with abandoned pacifiers? Where do they go?

Dina, the Pacifier:

You know, one time I fell out of the baby's mouth. We were outside in the stroller on the sidewalk in the city. And I dropped on the street, which normally would be a grievance to me. But I got so close to one of these holes in the ground, I guess you call them a sewer. And I could hear as though putting an ear to a conch shell, the sound of rushing, rushing water. And while I couldn't see it, all I could do is imagine being swept away on these waves and wondering where they might take me? Where I might go? Who I might meet? Any face, anything other than the baby.

Ian:

You would prefer the sewer to the baby?

Dina, the Pacifier:

I dream the sewer. The sewer, a dark mysterious hall, a magical hall, perhaps not even full of slime, perhaps another substance, perhaps Perrier. Yes, an ocean of Perrier in the sewer. This is what I dream of, the gentle rocking of the waves. As I see the baby rock, rock and its crib, I imagine being rocked gently, gently to a state of peace, pacification even, on these waves And maybe one day we'll even all get to meet each other, all of us lost abandoned pacifiers.

Ian:

Living together.

Dina, the Pacifier:

Swept off to pacifier heaven, never to be unappreciated by another baby again.

Ian:

This is Everything Is Alive. The show is produced by Jennifer Mills and me, Ian Chillag. Special thanks to Emily Spievak. Dina, the pacifier, was played by Dina Hashem. Dina is a very, very funny comedian and you can find her on various social media at Dina Hashem underscore. That's D-I-N-A H-A-S-H-E-M _.

Ian:

Thanks to Josh Siegal for talking to us about his bagel necklace pacifier. We are grateful to the reporting of Jen Savage from whom we first learned that baby elephants do in fact suck their trunks. There are videos online, I suggest you find one. It'll cure whatever is wrong with you. There are limits to that, but they are adorable.

Ian:

We also are grateful to Evan Morris from whom we learned that early pacifiers were balls of meat wrapped in cloth, occasionally soaked in brandy. Everything Is Alive, is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, Julie Shapiro, executive producer, and the kind of person would always pick you up again if she dropped you on the sidewalk. You can get in touch with us any number of ways via everythingisalive.com. We'll see you soon.