

[SOUND: The gentle hum and bleeps of space machinery. A thin metallic foil is peeled back from a container.]

Joy

Ooh, peppermint rations! Mission control sure knows how to spoil their personnel.

[SOUND: A plastic utensil moves around the container.]

Joy

Mmm...this reminds me of those cooking shows we'd listen to during the holidays. Mom and I would try to follow along, but we mostly ended up with big piles of goop. Yummy goop! But still goop.

(They pause for a moment, reflecting on happy childhood memories.) I wonder if I could tune into one of those right about now. Ooh, maybe I'd be able to talk to a chef!

[SOUND: A radio-style tuner goes through a few stations.]

Joy

C'mon...there's gotta be a cooking show on somewhere, and I've always wanted to ask a chef about the exact melting points of poultry...

[SOUND: The tuner steadies. Noah and Claire's voices come in from the transmitter.]

Noah

Hey, for the ham glaze, are we supposed to add the sugar before or after the honey?

Claire

I mean, if we mix it together anyways, does it matter?

Noah

Uh, obviously!

Claire

Oh c'mon, it's all going in the same pot anyway, right?

Noah

Yeah, but...but there's gotta be more to it than that! I mean, there's a reason-

Joy

Oh jeez, this is a really intense cooking show.

Noah

...What did you say?

Claire

I didn't say anything.

Joy

(They gasp, then to themselves) Plot twist! Ooh, maybe it's a mystery ingredient! (To the transmitter/radio) Hey! What's the mystery ingredient?

Claire

Okay, I definitely heard that!

Noah

Did you turn on the speaker?

Claire

No... oh no, do you think one of the neighbors connected to the bluetooth again?

Noah

How do we disconnect?

Joy

Oh...Oh! This isn't a cooking show, is it?

Claire

What? And also, who are you?

Noah

Don't answer, just disconnect!

Joy

Wait, wait, wait!

[SOUND: A moment of silence after the above chaos.]

Claire

Yes?

Joy

Can I ask what you're making?

Noah

What?

Joy

You're making ham glaze, right? I wanna see how it comes out! I just love home cooking so much, even if I'm not particularly good at making it myself.

Noah

Uh...what?

Claire

Sorry, but...we don't even know who you are?

Joy

Oh, uhm...yeah, I probably should've started with that. Right, well, Hi! I'm Joy, and I work on the international space station!

Claire

(Skeptical)

Do you really?

Joy

Yep! If you'd like some proof...Wanna see a cool trick?

Noah

Okay?

Joy

Yay! Okay, step outside for a moment, and take the radio with you, please!

[SOUND: Claire and Noah step outside to their front porch.]

Joy

(Slightly distracted, speaking while they're working)

Now that I'm locked onto your frequency, I can triangulate your location...okay, look up...now!

[SOUND: Distant magical whooshing in the air.]

Claire

Is...is that a meteor shower?

Joy

Kinda! It's actually a few larger bits of space debris! I had a few of the remote satellites do a bit of hydraulics to push all the chunks in your sector towards earth with just enough velocity to visibly burn upon re-entry! Isn't that cool?

Claire

I don't think I caught all that.

Noah

Me either... but who cares?! That was so super rad!

Joy

Oh gosh, I'm glad you think so!

Claire

Well, we definitely know you're legit now.

Noah

Right? Oh man, this is the coolest night of my life!

Claire

Sorry for doubting you. Wait...Joy, right?

Joy
Mhmm!

Claire
You mentioned something about a cooking show?

Noah
Ooh, ooh, do you get tv up there?

Joy
No...well, I mean, yes, we do get TV up here! But I actually wanted to see if I could find a cooking show on the radio and maybe talk to a chef? It's a long story. Anyway, I think some wires got crossed in the transmitter and now I'm talking to you guys. ...Sorry about that.

Noah
Are you kidding me? We're talking to a real astronaut! This is the opposite of intruding! This is awesome!

Claire
But why a cooking show?

Joy
This might sound a bit silly, but...I'm actually a little homesick. My mom and I used to listen to cooking shows and try to follow along every Christmas. And then I heard you two, and I got excited, because cooking shows make me think of my mom.

Claire
Oh, Joy...

Joy
I don't get too many chances to talk to her while I'm up here, so it was nice to hear something that reminded me of her.

(A pause)

Noah
We can still be your cooking show.

Joy
How do you mean?

Noah
Well, we are cooking things!

Claire
And if we can remind you of home for a while, we'd be more than happy to!

Joy
Really?!

Noah
Heck yeah! (He clears his throat and begins in a silly announcer voice) Tonight, we'll be preparing the signature family Ham Glaze recipe for Honey Glazed Ham, with a side of Green Bean Casserole.

Joy
Ooh, is that what you two are working on?

Noah
(Dropping the voice)
It is! It's part of our big Christmas dinner!

Claire
Have you got anything good up there?

Joy
Nothing as good as what you're making...all I have are space rations. But the ones they packed for Christmas have little reindeer on them!

Claire
Well, hey, that's something, huh?

Joy
And all the ones for this week are flavored! Yesterday was gingerbread, the day before that was chocolate, and today's peppermint day!

Noah

Christmas space food...I wanna try that some day.

Joy

Ooh, I know a few places that could send you some! I'd have to shoot off a few emails, but they'd love to get them out to you. They have crates full of rations, and it is the season of giving, after all!

Noah

I get to eat real astronaut food... this is super the greatest day of every day that has ever happened.

Claire

(Amused)

I believe you were in the middle of hosting a cooking show?

Noah

(Right back into the silly voice)

And in the kitchen, along with special guest Astronaut Joy, we have amateur chef Noah, and his assistant Claire.

Claire

Assistant?!

Noah

(Dropping the voice)

Well, yeah. I actually know how to make the ham glaze.

Claire

I thought you didn't remember the order.

Noah

Yeah, but at least I remembered that there is an order.

Claire

But if you're mixing it all together, why would that even matter?

Noah

I dunno. But we gotta get it right!

Claire

Joy, you're a scientist. What's your expert opinion here? Does the order we put the ingredients in really matter?

Noah

It's gotta, right? There's gotta be a chemical reaction or something based on how you put the ingredients or something.

Joy

Sorry, but I actually wouldn't know. Most of what I studied doesn't really translate to the, uh...the culinary arts. Plus I'm not a really good cook.

Claire

So I take it your mom did most of the cooking too?

Joy

No, no, we did it together! We were both terrible at it, and we always got take out afterwards. It didn't matter that we melted the chicken-

Noah

You can melt chicken?

Joy

Yep! But after we poured it down the sink, we'd get out take out and sit by the radio to hear how the recipe was supposed to turn out.

Noah

Aw, that's kinda like us and our mom.

Claire

We've never melted anything, though.

Noah

No...but Claire and I mostly did a few small things to help out, like wash the veggies and prep the oven and stuff.

Claire
Ma did all the real cooking.

Joy
Where is she now?

Noah
She's out at the holiday market!

Claire
We told her to treat herself and have a little fun, and we wanted to surprise her by making the Christmas dinner ourselves this year.

Noah
And it turns out we're also not so good with the whole cooking thing.

Joy
Oh...oh! That's why you two were arguing about getting the recipe right!

Claire
Exactly. Ma works so hard to take care of us, and we just wanted to return the favor.

Noah
That's why we have to do it right! So she knows she doesn't have to do so much, you know?

Joy
Oh, that's so sweet of you two!

Noah
Yeah, but I think we might need to re-evaluate our skills here.

[SOUND: A kitchen timer goes off]

Claire
Ah, that's the casserole!

[SOUND: Claire removes a casserole dish from the oven. It may be sizzling slightly.]

Noah

Is it supposed to look...charred?

Joy

It's not melted, is it?

Claire

It's just the edges! I'm sure once we...scrape it off, it'll be fine.

[SOUND: Distantly, a door opens and Mom walks in.]

Mom

(Distant)

Kids? I'm home!

Claire

Oh, no, no, no.

[SOUND: Mom enters the kitchen.]

Mom

Noah, Claire, you wouldn't believe it! I saw the loveliest meteor shower while I was at the market. It's like it came out of nowhere.

Joy

That was me!

Mom

Oh, is this a new friend?

Noah

They made the meteor shower happen!

Mom

(Humoring her son)

Oh did they now?

Joy

Yes ma'am. My name is Joy Fulton, and I work on the international space station!

Mom

Oh...oh my!

Noah

Right?! They did something with the space trash and then something happened with satellites or something, and then Boom! Shooting stars!

Claire

I think there was a little more to it than that, but yeah, they're legit.

Mom

Oh my goodness...well, Mx. Fulton, it's an honor to meet you.

Joy

You can just call me Joy. And it's nice to meet you too.

Mom

To what do we owe the pleasure of your company?

Joy

It's kind of a funny story.

Claire

They wanted to listen to a cooking show, and ended up connecting to our speaker.

Mom

A cooking show? Don't get me wrong, we're happy to have you, but what made you think my children were a cooking show?

Noah

So uh, about the Ham Glaze, we actually had a question...

Claire

Also, I burned the casserole.

Mom

Casserole? Claire, dear...were you making my Ultimate Green Bean Casserole?

Noah

Well, tried to. We were also trying to make the glaze, but we got stuck.

Claire

I only burned the edges, if that helps.

Mom

Can I see that casserole for a moment?

[SOUND: Mom picks up a fork and takes a bite of the casserole. She hums for a moment before coming to a decision.]

Mom

You know what, it's not too bad!

Claire

Really?!

Mom

Mhmm! The edges are a bit burned, yes, but a bit of scraping, and the rest is wonderful. Now, Noah, you said you were having issues with the Ham Glaze?

Noah

Well, Claire and I didn't know if the order we added all the ingredients in really mattered.

Mom

Well, I don't think it truly matters, but I do always have a special order I mix everything in, for good luck.

Noah

What's the order?

Mom

All in good time, dear. Joy, I hope you're eating well up there too!

Joy

I have Christmas rations! Today's is peppermint.

Mom

Peppermint rations? I didn't know space food came in seasonal flavors.

Noah

Joy said they could get us some to try!

Mom

(Excited)

Really? Oh Joy, that's so very kind of you! I must admit, I've never had a chance to try space food before. Sounds exciting!

Joy

Happy to give a little back; tis the season! And I'm glad the dinner's coming together after all. Claire and Noah worked really hard to make Christmas a little easier for you, ma'am.

Mom

Oh kids...I appreciate that, I really do. But Christmas is more than just stressful dinners, it's about all the time we get to spend together.

Claire

Aww, ma!

Mom

Joy, dear, are you all alone up there?

Joy

Yes, it's just me up here.

Mom

Well, next year, you're more than welcome to join us for Christmas dinner. I'm sure peppermint rations are a lovely treat, but what you really need is a warm meal.

Joy

Aww, thank you!

Noah

Woah...Christmas dinner with an astronaut...

Joy

(They laugh)

Well, I really should be getting back to my work, but it was so lovely to meet you all. Merry Christmas!

Noah, Claire, and Mom

Merry Christmas, Joy!

[SOUND: The transmitter disconnects. We hear only the beeps and boops of the space station now.]

Joy

They were such a sweet family. Ooh, I hope they like the rations! Let me get started on those emails, and hopefully they'll get sent over there before Christmas day. Then, once all my work is done...I should tell Mom about this during our next call. I have a ham glaze recipe to share!

[SOUND: Keyboard typing, and then everything fades away.]

CREDITS

This episode was written by Leslie Gideon and directed by Hannah Wright. Dialogue editing and sound design by Nikko Goldstein. Noah was played by Cole Burkhardt. Claire was played by Khalila Marie. Mom was played by Dany Ellett. Joy was played by Tal Minear.