

## Wonderful! 159: The Mystery of Helium

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[theme music plays]

**Rachel:** Hello, this is Rachel McElroy.

**Griffin:** Oh hey, this is Griffin McElroy.

**Rachel:** And this is Wonderful!

**Griffin:** Ohh, hey. Hey! What's up? I feel like we're too proper sometimes, with our— like, we do a podcast, and it sounds a lot like a podcast a lot of the times, doesn't it?

**Rachel:** Yeah. I mean, yeah. Yeah.

**Griffin:** Where it's like, "Hello, greetings! Welcome!" I want it to be more like, we're in the hallway of high school, and...

**Rachel:** `Sup. `Sup.

**Griffin:** Yeah. "Oh, `sup, Reggie? Aw, man, I heard you failed the big... driving test again! Reggie, come on! I heard you ran into the principal's Jeep with your Jeep. Reggie, come on, man!"

**Rachel:** What if we, every episode, only talked to Reggie?

**Griffin:** That would be fun. We could do like those birthday videos on YouTube, where we do like, the whole episode, but then we go through, and it's like... [laughs] "We all like to eat candy bars. Isn't that right, *Deborah?*"

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Isn't that right, *Steven*? We could have like, a robot come in and fill it in. And people wouldn't even notice.

**Rachel:** No, they wouldn't.

**Griffin:** It's like those books, where it's like, they can— you can put a kid's name in it. And they're like, "Whoa, they wrote a book all about me?!" And you laugh like... [laughs] No. You're so foolish.

**Rachel:** I saw there, uh— I was looking— our son's birthday is coming up, and I've been looking at, uh, superhero themed gifts. And they have superhero books you can buy, where you insert the child's name. But from what I can tell, it just... that is all it does. There is no other personalization. It just says like, "Henry," comma, "Spider Man has climbed the building!"

**Griffin:** [laughs] Um, so this is Wonderful. It's a show we do where we talk about things that we like, things that we're into. Um... do you want to talk about something that you like, and something that you're into?

**Rachel:** Uh, yeah. I actually got this idea as I was walking into your office. There is a book by Emily Oster, uh, called *Expecting Better*.

**Griffin:** Oh yeah.

**Rachel:** And she has written other books and other articles, and she has her own newsletter. She is a, uh, like a PhD Harvard economist who looks at all the stats around parenting and pregnancy, and gives you kind of more realistic advice based on those. So instead of just these kind of blanket, uh, guidance suggestions, it's more like, here's— I looked at the actual studies, and here's what actually was discovered, and here's what is okay, and here's what... y'know, you might want to be cautious about. And it just— it feels very data-informed.

**Griffin:** Yes.

**Rachel:** Instead of like, y'know, great-grandmother informed.

**Griffin:** It's astonishing to me... it was the first time around, and it's astonishing to me this time around, too. For pregnancy and childbirth is a process that so many people go through, and literally, all people are the product of. And you would think that we would've really nailed down and codified like, what actually happens during that. It is buckwild to me how much of that is still informed by, essentially, folklore.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Like, essentially, things that our great-great-great-great-grandparents decided, based on literally nothing, and yet, we still kind of adhere to that. And this book is like, an answer to that in a way that I think is amazing.

**Rachel:** She also, uh, when the pandemic started, offered some great guidance on kind of developing a, uh, process to determine whether or not you are comfortable sending your child back to school. Which is kind of a way to weigh the pros and cons kind of more scientifically.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** That I know a lot of people appreciated, 'cause these are hard decisions you have to make. To have like, an actual process to do that has been helpful. So, I just wanted to give her a shout out.

**Griffin:** Yeah. I'm gonna say, tiny phone. I've had big— I've gone through a few phones over the last, like, few years. I did like a Galaxy... some big Galaxy big boy. And then I had a big, big iPhone. And I was so excited about the big, big iPhone when I got it, because I was like, "It's a screen I can watch a bunch of stuff on!" But then I didn't really do that very much.

And I just got the 12 Mini, and it's so tiny! It's so light! I can fit it— a lot of the times, I would struggle to fit the big phone in my pocket. And now I've gone back to the tiny little phone that was like, y'know, the original iPhone 4 size, like, little guy. And I'm like, aw, little guy, I missed you! I forgot how easy you are to hold and move, and if I drop it on my face while watching a video at night, it doesn't like, give me a black eye.

**Rachel:** [laughs] It's so darling to me, the way the trends cycle. Of like, it has to be bigger! Bigger is better! And then it's like, oh, well, we want small now!

**Griffin:** A little guy! I love him! Uh, who goes first this week? 'Cause I have proven myself a pretty unreliable, uh, tracker of that. I think it's me?

**Rachel:** I think it's you.

**Griffin:** It is me. Okay. Thank— thank you, Wonderful.fyi. Uh, my first thing this week, I'm really excited about, because it was something I'd had kind of stuck in my head for a while, but I couldn't really put, uh, a name on it. Uh, I want to talk about a like, primary school art class.

Does primary school describe everything, like, pre-colleg— I don't think I've ever really known what that term means.

**Rachel:** Uh, secondary is high school.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** And then post-secondary is college.

**Griffin:** Okay, so I guess, elementary through high school art class. Really, I guess, elementary and middle school art class. I feel like in high school, by the ti— if you're taking art class in high school, you have proven some level of proficiency with art, in a way that my elementary and middle school experience did not necessarily require.

Um, I... [sighs] I never was like— I was always wild about like, elective-style classes like this, I guess, to put it in sort of high school terminology. And it is a disaster that they are not taught or prioritized in early education anymore.

Because like, I was really academically-averse growing up. I did not really care that much about math and science and stuff. Like, I wasn't bad at

them, but I just like— they didn't light me up in a way that art class did, even though I don't really have an artistic bone in my body.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** And what got me thinking about this, what got me thinking about like, how dialed I was... dialed-in I was to art class was...

**Rachel:** Is uh, how much you want to paint me?

**Griffin:** How much I want to paint Rachel. I'm really good at that.

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** But really got me thinkin' about this was a dude named Mark Kistler. Mark fucking Kistler. Do you recognize that name? Do you recognize... his brand at all?

**Rachel:** I mean, no. I don't think I do.

**Griffin:** Okay. Mark Kistler was a... basically, an art educator who made a bunch of like, art lesson videos, and had a couple PBS series that we would watch in art class in elementary school. And middle school, I think. Where he would teach techniques.

Um, and he had two main shows that he did that taught these techniques. The first was, uh, the Imagination Station. Which was sort of like a general, like, kid-friendly, like... y'know, here's how these different— here's how to do perspective. Here's how to do these different things.

His other show was called Commander Mark's The Secret City, and this show fucking rips. And I watched some episodes of it on YouTube, because there are some, and I had like... I had forgotten about it. It was like, deep, deep, deep down in the memory banks, like, teetering on the edge of oblivion, of me just forgetting about it forever.

Um, so, Secret City took place in this weird sci-fi fiction, where Mark Kistler played Commander Mark, who was like, a space commander who was exploring these cities that he would draw. And every sort of drawing would take place on this huge, like, whiteboard-sized canvas. And in each episode, he would focus on a different technique, like shading and perspective, and he would focus on teaching drawing 3D drawings with these like, dynamic drawing techniques. Like forced perspective and, uh, and shading, and things to sort of simulate 3D illustration.

He would do this by adding more and more things to this one enormous drawing of a secret, hidden space that he would just kind of improvise as he went along. And there were other kind of like, space creature sci-fi creatures who would like, chime in every now and then.

And to me, as somebody who was not particularly artistic and was not very capable of, y'know, recreating his techniques that he taught in these videos. But watching somebody draw a map of like, this futuristic city from nothing, or like, this secret, underground tunnel world, was, to me, the coolest shit in the entire universe.

**Rachel:** Yeah, that sounds incredible! I have never heard of this, but I can see why it would appeal to you. Because a lot of what you do in early art class is, you just try and recreate things that exist. So, this idea that you would use it for like, world building, I can see, would be...

**Griffin:** It's so cool!

**Rachel:** Super cool.

**Griffin:** Um, and I would encourage you, like, if you're around my age range, the 33-year-old sort of group, and you had art classes in your early education, I encourage you to search on YouTube for Mark Kistler. Because uh, watching these videos like, really, really, *really* hurled me back in time in a way that very few things are capable of doing.

Um, I really like the idea of teaching art techniques, rather than teaching just sort of general, like, "Okay kids, sit down. Here's some red paint and

some yellow paint, and mix them together, and that's orange. You just got arted." And more like, "Here's how you can have the tools to draw whatever the hell it is you wanna draw."

**Rachel:** Yeah! I don't ever remember learning technique. I feel like the class was always like, "Here's a thing. Make it." And you were kind of like...

**Griffin:** "Express yourself."

**Rachel:** Well, I guess I'll see what I can do. [laughs]

**Griffin:** And having those techniques be based on these fantasy and sci-fi worlds... oh, my god! Oh my god, I loved it so, so, so much.

**Rachel:** That's really brilliant. Yeah, I always kind of worshipped, uh... well, I don't want to say always. I've definitely had some bad art teachers. But I will say that that is a profession that I always admired.

**Griffin:** Oh, for sure. I mean, you went to art camp, didn't you?

**Rachel:** Yeah, every summer.

**Griffin:** Yeah. And so like, you definitely have a lot of exposure to this. I will also say, like, I— y'know, talking in general about art class, I also did really like the "just go make a thing" thing. Because like I said, like, I didn't take a lot of pride in my academic work, necessarily. Um, I— but like, I remember very, very distinctly, when I started thinking about like, early art classes, like... the projects that we would work on for like, a whole week.

I remember very clearly making a papier-mâché mask of my face, and painting it. And it looked so bad! Like, it looked so terrible, and it hurt quite badly to take it off of my face after I sculpted it on there. But at the end, having this thing that I made... having this mask that I made and painted, and it was unlike anything else anybody had ever made in the whole world and history of time, like... that was so appealing to me. Like, that was so, so, so cool to me.

And I would come home from school... my parents would be like, "What did you do at school today?" And I wouldn't remember like, "Oh, y'know, we read, uh, Red Badge of Courage. We read Johnny Tremain." I would be like, "Look at this shitty mask I made!"

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** We would use clay. Not like, on a sculpting table, but just sort of like, molding clay that you could then sort of like, glaze and bake, and have like, a really rough shod little cup. And again, I would be like, "Hey, I finally cracked the order of operations of math today. But screw that – look at this tiny little cup I made!"

**Rachel:** So, no part of you ever like, wanted to be an artist? You just always kind of enjoyed it?

**Griffin:** Oh, I think there was definitely a part of... and this was the great thing about having these art classes is that like, everybody that I went to elementary school with doodled. And everybody drew. And everybody like... no matter like, where you landed on the popularity social spectrum of that school, like... you were interested, in some regard, in art.

And I don't think that's like, something that you can accomplish with the way that art is currently kind of, uh, built into the core curriculum. There's the— I'm sure I'm— you know all about this, because you're like, in it. Um, but a lot of art education in schools these days takes place in the form of arts integration, which is about like, integrating visual or performance elements into the everyday curriculum of math and language and science and all of those things.

Which benefits, in a lot of ways, the core curriculum, right? Because it makes students pay closer attention to math and science and engage with it in a way that maybe they wouldn't without that artistic thing. But it doesn't necessarily build up the art education side of things. It uses art to benefit core curriculum, instead of the other way around.



**Rachel:** Now, I have an exact example of this. When I was in high school, we were told to make an alternate cover to the book, *Grapes of Wrath*, in our English class. And I remember being like, "Okay..." and not really understanding what was happening or why we were doing it, and just being like, "Well, this is fun."

**Griffin:** And ever since the emphasis was placed almost entirely on standardized test scores, and No Child Left Behind came along and more or less made it prioritize that, uh... arts education has been slashed, right? The budget for National Endowment of the Arts, with regards to like, how it would benefit schools, has been slashed. And so, there's not much room for art and music classes and stuff like that, and that's where you get things like arts integration, and saying like, "Oh, I hope that's enough."

And it's not, because you don't make the thing. And then, that's what I'm saying, like... I was good. I was a good test taker, and I got good grades in school. But nothing that I accomplished, with regards to like, my GPA, ever came close to like, my pride in making a shitty cup or a shitty mask. And I think that's kind of heartbreaking.

This is kind of a two-in-one, because I genuinely love the things that I did in art class. But most of all, Mark Kistler, out here.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Regardless of whether or not you grew up watching him, watch some of *The Secret City*. First of all, it's got that '80s PBS aesthetic that I am like, so crazy about. But also, just like, watching this weird mustachioed, jumpsuit wearing space man, like, drawing basically, like, sci-fi *Fraggle Rock* is like, absolutely the coolest shit in the whole world. So, that is my first thing.

**Rachel:** Okay. My first thing is a little themed, in that it is the floating character balloons in parades.

**Griffin:** Okay!

**Rachel:** Mm-hmm.

**Griffin:** I mean, is this a thing that happens much outside of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade?

**Rachel:** Uh, I mean, y'know, there's like a— there's a Christmas parade, too.

**Griffin:** Oh, sure. Yeah.

**Rachel:** And then, a lot of places will have like, a July 4<sup>th</sup> parade. I don't know that they have the floating character balloons...

**Griffin:** As much.

**Rachel:** ... for other holidays.

**Griffin:** Yeah, sure.

**Rachel:** [laughs] And given that these are big budget items, I don't know that you'd find them in your home city. But yeah, I mean, I was specifically thinking of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade when I did this.

Um, I always like... I don't know. If I'm watching a parade, like, that is what I am looking for.

**Griffin:** Absolutely.

**Rachel:** Y'know, like, I enjoy a marching band. And I will even tolerate, sometimes, a reproduction of a Broadway number. But what I'm looking for are those balloons.

**Griffin:** Those big balloons. And especially... when they go wrong. And I don't want anybody to get hurt! I never want to see anybody get hurt.

**Rachel:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** But watching Mr. Peanut just like, dead, draped over a telephone pole or something, is my absolute aesthetic.

**Rachel:** I have a great suggestion for you later in this segment.

**Griffin:** Okay!

**Rachel:** Because I looked up that very thing.

**Griffin:** Fantastic.

**Rachel:** I was like, "I want to talk about this." I was like, "I also want to know the terrible things that have happened."

**Griffin:** Okay. [laughs]

**Rachel:** [laughs] Uh, so, the balloons are typically between 60 feet long and 30 feet high, and each balloon needs around 90 handlers. And there are all these rules around the handlers. They get training, because of the enormity of these balloons.

**Griffin:** Sure.

**Rachel:** So you have to be at least 120 pounds and in good health. And then you go to a training, where you kind of learn about the like, geometry and physics of balloon handling. And then you test it out on the field, and there's a team leader, and then, there's also, uh, a police officer that marches with each balloon in the parade.

**Griffin:** Okay... if— just quick question.

**Rachel:** Yeah?

**Griffin:** Never thought about this. There's 90 handlers. If, as a prank, 89 of them coordinated to all let go at the same time...

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Would somebody go flying up into the heavens, suspended on a big Pikachu?

**Rachel:** I mean, yes, probably. So, they used to just be filled with air, but now it is a mix of air and helium.

**Griffin:** How would they float if it was just air?

**Rachel:** Well, so, they used to be attached to cranes.

**Griffin:** What's the point?! What's the point?

**Rachel:** [laughs] Well, I guess in 1958, there was a helium shortage. And so, they... yeah.

**Griffin:** How is— just get— get more helium! What?!

**Rachel:** I don't know!

**Griffin:** It's in the air! Just get helium!

**Rachel:** I don't know the history of helium.

**Griffin:** Wait. Hold on. Where's helium come from? Hey... hey! Wait a minute. If you had asked me, "Griffin, where's helium come from?" I would've told you, helium tanks, like at the supermarket.

**Rachel:** Uh-huh.

**Griffin:** But then there's another step after that, isn't there?! Just like, how do they— it's not— it doesn't generate inside those tanks, so where does the helium come from?

**Rachel:** I mean, my answer would be science. Which I know doesn't necessarily answer your question, but feels comfortable to me.

**Griffin:** Like, you put air in a centrifuge and you spin it, and there's a little bit of helium at the... but... what?! Where does helium come from?!

**Rachel:** Nobody knows.

**Griffin:** Farms?!

**Rachel:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** Farms?!

**Rachel:** Probably farms.

**Griffin:** It's like, at the top of a corn silo, it just makes helium up there, and you scoop it up in the tanks. Oh, Jesus. Can we stop doing the episode for a second so I can Google where helium comes from?

**Rachel:** [laughing] You probably should. Uh, so, balloons started in 1927. They replaced... so, the parade actually started three years earlier, and they used to put, uh, live zoo animals on floats. And then, I think, they realized there were several problematic things about that, moved to balloons...

**Griffin:** [laughing]

**Rachel:** And uh, started right away with the big ones. Just didn't even, y'know, scale up slowly. Just...

**Griffin:** Just went right for it.

**Rachel:** Just big right away.

**Griffin:** I just started imagining an alternate version of Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street, where like, Santa's up there on the Santa float, and everybody's like, "Wow, that guy really looks like— a *rhinoceros*!! Get out of the way!!"

**Rachel:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** "The giraffes! The giraffes are chasing the children!"

**Rachel:** "Why did we do this?!"

**Griffin:** "Why did we think this was a good— look at that Santa. He looks so re— oh, he's been eaten by four lions."

**Rachel:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** "They've drawn and quartered the Santa Claus."

**Rachel:** Um, so, this kind of speaks to just kind of the nature of American history. When they first started creating these balloons, they did not develop a plan to deflate them.

**Griffin:** [laughing]

**Rachel:** So, at the end of the parade, for several years, they just released them into the air.

**Griffin:** [bursts into laughter] That's so much worse than— I thought you were gonna be like, "They shot them with guns. They fired a big harpoon into them."

**Rachel:** That might've been better. Uh, they just— they just released... they just released them.

**Griffin:** And then they— and they were like, "This is somebody else's— good luck, everyone! This is gonna land on someone!"

**Rachel:** Yeah, so, there were several things that led to them stopping doing that. Um, first, Felix the Cat caught on fire. They released him, and he got caught in a high-tension wire and burst into flames.

**Griffin:** Cool, cool, cool.

**Rachel:** So that was one incident. Another was, uh... a Tom Cat balloon, 60 feet large, was released. And a woman who was taking flying lessons, uh, ran into it.

**Griffin:** [gasps]

**Rachel:** And... [laughs] They used to offer a reward to anyone who retrieved and returned the loose balloon.

**Griffin:** What?!

**Rachel:** And so, there was... there was speculation that she was trying to get the award by running her plane into it. Luckily, she was with a flight instructor who helped her kind of regain control of the plane. Uh...

**Griffin:** With a big inflatable cat wrapped around it? How do you pull— how do you come back from that?

**Rachel:** Don't know, but she was able to regain control of the aircraft, luckily.

**Griffin:** Oh, that's good. Okay.

**Rachel:** But yeah. So, this was, uh, 1932, and they stopped just lettin' them go. [laughs]

**Griffin:** That is so fucking funny. God, I wish— I wi—

**Rachel:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** Okay, again, I don't want anybody to get hurt. But the idea of, at the end of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, everybody just being like, "Okay! Whee! There goes the big yellow M&M!"

**Rachel:** And just like, the reports of people in their apartment buildings, like, calling and saying like, "I think I see a UFO. Oh no no no, that's Snoopy. Never mind, the parade was yesterday. I forgot."

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** And also, just like, to put a reward out there, you're encouraging people to like...

**Griffin:** Fly their planes into them. Yeah, no, it's a flawed system.

**Rachel:** [laughs] It's terrible!

**Griffin:** That's why I'm saying, I'm strongly in the corner of shoot these balloons to— and make them die and go to balloon hell. And then, that way, planes won't run into them. I think that's the ethical decision.

**Rachel:** Uh... [laughs] Uh, so, the example I wanted to give is exactly of a balloon that was put towards balloon hell. And I didn't want to give— there are examples of people like, actually getting injured. There are rules now around not doing these balloons on like, high wind days. And I think— I think I've watched a parade before where they have delayed it and delayed it, just to try and wait out the weather.

**Griffin:** I remember learning that, if one of these balloons runs into a light pole or a telephone pole, the telephone pole loses. And falls right over, and will hurt anybody nearby.

**Rachel:** Yeah. So uh, the example – and there is a— there's a four-minute video of this – is of 1997 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade with Barney the Dinosaur.

**Griffin:** Oh no! What'd he do?



**Rachel:** Uh, so, super high winds. There were several accidents during that parade. The... [laughs] Barney the Dinosaur... so this four-minute video shows from somebody's apartment building. The dinosaur is kind of going back and forth on either side of the street. And you can hear the crowds just kind of like, gasp as it hits like, their side of the street. You can tell that they can't control it, and there are like, people like, three handlers to a cord, trying to like, hold it down.

**Griffin:** Ugh, god.

**Rachel:** Eventually, it is knocked into a street light, which tears it open, and starts to deflate. But the winds are still strong, and they can't get it down. And so... [laughs] At the very end of the video, there are police officers swarming the balloon with knives and stabbing holes into it to release the helium. [laughing]

**Griffin:** Okay, I do want to see that.

**Rachel:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** I do need to see that.

**Rachel:** I ended up just— there's a certain point when you're watching the video, where you're just like, "Alright, I know what's gonna happen. Let me just get to it." Like, I was surprised that the video was only four minutes, because for the first minute, I'm like, "When— when are we getting there?"

**Griffin:** I don't know that I would've anticipated a Julius Caesar style assassination of Barney.

**Rachel:** [laughing] You see the video, uh... at the end, and it's just these uniformed officers, just triumphantly walking away from this corpse.

**Griffin:** With their— with their hunt. Who— who make— okay. Who made that call? With the NYPD, there's no way they were prepared for this

situation. So, somebody would've been like, "Alright, everybody! You got knives! Get in there! This is our moment, lads!"

**Rachel:** I mean, I think... I'm gonna disagree with you. I think they have to have been prepared for that situation. Like—

**Griffin:** There was a room at the police station where they're like, "Alright, y'all, you know the plan. We're gonna have a lot of fun this year. Got, uh— we got a, uh, a new yellow M&M floating up there. We're really excited about that. But... knives at the ready."

**Rachel:** [laughs] Um, it was definitely kind of scary to watch. But the thing that is most enjoyable is that, when you think about the fact that it is Barney the Dinosaur, and just...

**Griffin:** [Barney impression] "What are you guys— aaahhh! Ow!"

**Rachel:** The children watching this, and watching their... y'know, their like, television hero just... just mortally wounded, over and over again... [laughs]

**Griffin:** Yeah. Yeah, that must've been rough to watch. Uh, hey, can I steal you away?

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** Thank you.

[ad break stinger plays]

[ad break]

**Griffin:** We got some gumbo prawns here, do we! This one is for Future Sam, and it's from Past Sam, who says, "Hey Sam, it's Past Sam. When you're hearing this, you've either just started your last semester of your bachelor's degree, or you're finishing it up. Listen – you don't give yourself enough credit for the work you've done, and I am so proud of you. I hope

that everything is going well, and this message from your favorite people finds you happy.”

Uh, congratulations on that bachelor’s degree. Y’know, for the longest time, I didn’t know what that meant. And... my idea of what it did mean was so cartoonishly wrong. I thought it was just like a— like—[laughs] A thing for like, single folks...

**Rachel:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** ... to go and learn a little bit of, y’know, pre-med or whatever.

**Rachel:** Mm-hmm.

**Griffin:** But that ends up not being the case, and uh... I’m not a particularly intelligent man.

**Rachel:** [laughing] You make a good art project, though.

**Griffin:** Oh, do I, though. A nice, uh... a nice, uh, plastic grocery bag holder made out of— yeah. Oh boy. Made out of a tissue box.

**Rachel:** Uh, this next message is for Micah. It is from Andrew. “We’ve come a long way as meeting as bar trivia team mates, and I’m so lucky to have your humor, depth, and kindness in my life. Your D&D adventures are epic, your art is inspiring, and your company brings me so much joy. Though our trivia team always lost, I’ve never felt more like a winner than when I’m spending time with you. I love you.”

**Griffin:** That is so, so nice.

**Rachel:** That is so nice! Gosh, remember bar trivia?

**Griffin:** Yeah. You gotta tighten it up. You gotta tighten it up. It’s all about finding your weaknesses. For us, it was sports. So, we found ourselves a sportsman, and his name was Chaz. And nobody liked him.

**Rachel:** [laughing]

**Griffin:** He was a total tool. A terrible person. But damn it, he knew so much about sports!

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Carried us to victory. Didn't he? I miss Chaz. Whatever happened to him? Let me Google. Boop boop boop boop boop! He got run over by the Wienermobile.

**Rachel:** [laughing] What is this?

**Griffin:** Eh, it was kind of good.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

[Maximum Fun advertisement plays]

**Griffin:** Can I do my second thing?

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** I was kind of surprised you haven't talked about this. You did a small wonder once, a long time ago, on Lollapalooza. But I want to talk about music festivals in general, because I – I think I've talked about this on the show – am suspended in this weird state of maybe being too acclimated to our current sort of situation, where when I see movies or TV shows where people are gathering somewhere, it weirds me out. It makes me like, uncomfortable. So maybe this seems like it strangely bumps up against that.

**Rachel:** Yeah, I know what you mean. Like, I follow the Austin City Limits Instagram account, and they will post pictures occasionally of previous concerts where people are just shoulder to shoulder.

**Griffin:** Yes.

**Rachel:** And I think the idea of standing that close to that many strangers, like, seems crazy to me now.

**Griffin:** Yeah, I definitely fell off of this scene as I got— as I sort of aged out of them, I guess. But there's a part of me now that like, thinks about, y'know, when quarantine has ended, and the pandemic is more or less over, this being like, a pretty wild way to get back into the world.

**Rachel:** Yeah, it— can I just say, it blows my mind that you went to Bonnaroo repeatedly.

**Griffin:** Yes. Three times.

**Rachel:** It just seems to counter... to a lot of your, um... uh, traits, I guess. [laughs]

**Griffin:** Yes, it absolutely is. That's, uh... the main thing I kind of wanted to talk about. Uh, concerts in general make me a bit anxious. Like, being anywhere with a big crowd, where I don't have access to like, the kinds of amenities that I count on. Like, uh, bathroom access. A chair. Like, those make me a little bit anxious.

And a music festival sort of takes that anxiety and multiplies it by a billion, especially something like a Bonnaroo, where uh, you don't know... like, you're gonna sleep in a tent. There's no electricity. There's some port-a-potties, right? Like, that's not great.

And ACL and uh, Pitchfork Music Festival, the other two I've been to a bunch... uh, that takes care of it a bit. Because in both of those situations, I can just go home and go to sleep. But like, something with like, a camp out element is like... oof. Where am I gonna— where am I gonna poop in the morning? Because I actually know the answer to that, and it's not a great place, and also, I'm gonna have to wait like, a half hour before I can get in it.

**Rachel:** I was gonna say, Griffin and I— Griffin and I have known each other for nine years now. And we have been camping once, and that was for a friend's birthday celebration.

**Griffin:** It did not go well.

**Rachel:** It did not go well. And we do not own tents. We do not own sleeping bags. Like, it is not something that either of us tend to choose willingly.

**Griffin:** But this was 2006! This was 19-year-old, vivacious Griffin! The world was my oyster! No, I mean, I still definitely had those anxieties back then, right? Like, it was not— I— I was in a really weird place in 2006, right? My mom died in 2005, basically as I was graduating high school. And then my first year of college was a fuckin' mess. Like, I was— I had very little... I was excited by the opportunity to kind of have a clean slate, and be whatever I wanted to be.

Which is not, y'know... that is not exclusive to going through a sort of major shakeup like I was going through. Like, everybody goes through that. But I, for whatever reason, like, the limiters were taken off completely, and like, I lost my scholarship, and I was just like... I made a lot of really shithead decisions, both in like, how I was treating myself, and the types of people that I was like, kind of, uh... trying to assimilate into.

And by the summer of 2006, like, I had kind of realized the error of my ways, especially when I lost my scholarship. [laughs] And uh... yet, this opportunity presented itself to go to Bonnaroo. And it was such a like, wild, adventurous thing. The first concert I ever went to was when I was 18, was in 2005, was when I went and saw Ben Folds in Cleveland. That was the first concert I ever went to.

And then like, less than a year later, I went to a music festival in the middle of hot-ass Tennessee, and saw... dozens of shows. And thinking back about it, like, so much the music that I still enjoy now, that like, informed my music tastes growing up in my adult life, I discovered at music festivals.

Like, the first time I really listened to fuckin' Radiohead... was when they headlined Bonnaroo 2006. I was in the audience like, "So what are these guys all about?" And then like, "Whoaaa! Oh man!" Because they basically played all of OK Computer front to back, and I was like, "Holy shit! This is so good!"

**Rachel:** Oh yeah. That is a great point. Because it's so accessible. Y'know, you buy this ticket, and then you can walk, y'know, 20, 30 feet and discover new music.

**Griffin:** And be in a different— exactly.

**Rachel:** Uh, and it makes it very easy for you to just... 'cause that always happened to me. I would go looking forward to one or two shows, but the shows I ended up loving the most were the ones that I wasn't expecting to see.

**Griffin:** Absolutely. It was eye opening in a way that was far bigger than, oh, I found some new bands that I like. It was eye opening in a way that like, this is a life experience that like, I didn't know that you could have. And I think that's what helped me side step a lot of the anxiety of it, that I would have about being sort of way out of my element, is that I was so far out of my element that I saw completely new elements that I didn't really know existed.

It's the same way that I think that like, travel is genuinely an important thing for people to do, because seeing how the world operates outside of your bubble is like... such an essentially component of developing, like, empathy and open-mindedness.

This was kind of similar to that in a way, because it was— I was so uncomfortable, and I was so in the unknown that like, it was— it genuinely was sort of life-altering in a way that like, changed what I knew about the world, and also changed what I thought about myself and what I was capable of doing. And also... there was dope-ass music everywhere! Like, it was such a cool environment.

And also, like, there's a kind of thing that is like... only works in that environment. Like, there are certain concerts that are... The Flaming Lips I've been thinking a lot about lately, and I've seen them in a music festival setting twice. And both times was just like... I'd never seen music like that before! I'd never seen a concert like that before. And that's sort of The Flaming Lips' like, whole aesthetic, I think.

The first time I saw them was at, I think, 2006 Bonnaroo. And they were playing on a headline stage, and they passed boxes of laser pointers out to the audience. I think I've told you about this before. And they just pumped this fog machine out, so that like, you're shooting lasers through the fog, and like, making your own sort of, like, disco display.

But at one point, the words "shoot Wayne" appear on stage, and he pulls out this huge parabolic mirror, and just like, refracts all of the lasers back into the audience. And... y'know, stuff like that, there's a lot of like, side attractions at a Bonnaroo and other festivals. But I feel like Bonnaroo's sort of like, designed for it.

Like, The Sonic Forest, which is just this huge field of pylons that you walk through, and as you touch them, they make different noises. And the silent disco, which is like, spread far beyond music festivals at this point, where there's a DJ playing into wireless headphones, and so, everybody's dancing, but to the outside observer, it's like, completely silent, and everybody's dancing to nothing.

Those things are designed for very high people, I think. People who are very high on drugs, which, fortunately, for me, back in my late teens and early 20s, I was one of them. So it was like, enjoyable in that way. But like, stuff like that... I saw Beastie Boys play with NOZZ in like, one of their like, last performances. And that was like, a thing that... now, in the future, I'm very grateful that I had the chance to experience. And back then, was like, out of my fucking gourd!

**Rachel:** Yeah. Y'know, you're describing it, and it's making me think about the fact, too... like, both you and I didn't get a chance to travel internationally until we were in our like, mid-20s.



**Griffin:** Right.

**Rachel:** Y'know? And so, this was kind of an opportunity to experience this kind of feeling of travel, y'know, in the United States. There's something about going to a music festival that feels like going to a different country.

**Griffin:** I think what we're talking about – and I can probably generalize this feeling beyond traveler music festivals. Because I also recognize like, I was uh, y'know, I was very fortunate that I was able to do this. I had like, a part-time job that I was able to save up money, and spend basically all of it on Bonnaroo.

Um, but there's this... not to get too like, out there, but... because this will for sure make it sound like I'm uh, high at Bonnaroo. But there's like, this weird subconscious collective, like, level, that I feel like, at a really good concert, you can get on. Of just like, this like... everybody's kind of at the same place right now, and there's this like, kind of unspoken energy that we're all tapped into.

And I think you can get into that with travel, like, finding new parts of the world, and seeing like, how other people deal with that energy or whatever. But like, at this kind of environment, at a Bonnaroo, at a big arena music festival, where everybody's into the same thing... like, you can get that at concerts everywhere. I feel like, at a good music festival, it's designed to elicit that. And that's such a special thing.

That is such a genuinely... I scoffed at people who talked about that kind of thing, going to like, a Phish concert or a Grateful Dead concert or whatever jam band shit. And I still am not a big jam band fan. But like, I for sure get it! I for sure get it after going to something like this.

And I would encourage like, anybody going through, y'know, a particularly transitional period of your life, to like, do some weird shit that you don't think you would like at all.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** That has the potential to be like, huge for you in that way. So like, again, like, the thought of going to a Bonnaroo now at 33 is like, not... appealing at all. The thought of having two kids and trying to make something like that work is, uh, I can't process the math behind it.

But like, an ACL, a music fest that is more sort of approachable and, uh, I don't know... infrastructurally sound is something that I am... I didn't give a shit about last year, or a couple years ago, but now, like, I miss being a part of that sort of collective, y'know, subconscious sort of realm.

**Rachel:** Yeah. Well, yeah, and that like, creative space.

**Griffin:** Yeah, sure.

**Rachel:** That's a very cool thing to be a part of.

**Griffin:** Yeah. What is your second thing?

**Rachel:** Uh, my second thing is short. Uh...

**Griffin:** Martin Short? So fuckin' funny.

**Rachel:** Uh, no. My second thing is very unique to me, probably, but I imagine some listeners will relate, and that is in-laws.

**Griffin:** Oh yeah!

**Rachel:** I um... as everybody who listens probably knows, I am pretty fortunate.

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Rachel:** In that I have a good group of in-laws kind of in my corner. But I think, for me, as an only child with like, y'know, a pretty small family, it was really exciting to like, be a part of this family and have the opportunity to

like, be an aunt. Y'know? And to have like, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law and all that stuff.

**Griffin:** Right.

**Rachel:** And I think, uh... y'know, it's— like, people always kind of talk about their in-laws in kind of a negative way, and I can understand why people would have that circumstance. Because a lot of times, you are with people that have very different beliefs and outlooks than you do. But for me, it was just something that I just always felt very fortunate for. To have that like, bigger family kind of baked in to getting married.

**Griffin:** Yeah. It almost reminds me of the stuff I was just talking about, of like, whenever you do a sleepover at one of your friend's houses, you're like, "Oh, this is how your family does things." This is like, a very permanent version of that that can be very exciting when it's not like, terrible.

**Rachel:** Yeah, yeah. And to have these, kind of like, traditions baked into it, and also to have this kind of resource to find out more about your partner... I mean, that was like, the first time that Griffin brought me home for Christmas. I just remember just basically interviewing your dad. Like, "Bring me all the Griffin materials!" [laughs]

**Griffin:** Well, I also feel like there's a certain very common type of in-law that like, is so excited to dump that on people. Like all of my family, and...

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** And uh, like the Smirls. I feel like Mary Smirl, Justin's mother-in-law, rolled up on you the first time she saw you like, "You've gotta see this dude as Horton in Seussical. It'll change your shit."

**Rachel:** [laughing] Yeah. And I think— I mean, that's another example of what a unique circumstance I had, was that I was not... I was not ever tested, y'know? Like, the in-laws were not like... demonstrate your worthiness!

**Griffin:** Yeah, sure.

**Rachel:** It was more like, "Oh my gosh, Griffin brought somebody home. This person—"

**Griffin:** Oh, you were being viciously tested. You may not have realized it, because you did really well on the test, but oh my— you were on the rain slick precipice of just being completely jettisoned. But you did so good! You did so good!

**Rachel:** We did... I mean, there were board games involved. And in some ways, that could've been considered a test.

**Griffin:** A crucible of gaming.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Uh, the thing that I didn't really know about until I did research is the whole concept of in-law, and like, what it actually refers to.

**Griffin:** Huh, yeah.

**Rachel:** So, I always assumed – and I think a lot of people assumed – that it is just like, you enter into this like, legal partnership with your partner when you get married, and that gives you legal ties to their family. Uh, but in-law actually started as a reference to canon law, which is the church's set of rules around who you can and can't marry.

**Griffin:** Whoa!

**Rachel:** So, the idea is that, in the Catholic church, for example, you couldn't marry a non-blood relative of your spouse if they passed away.

**Griffin:** You couldn't marry a non-blood relative...

**Rachel:** So, your spouse's siblings, parents, children... you weren't— you weren't allowed to marry them.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** So, father-in-law was a way of saying like... hey, going forward...

**Griffin:** This is your father—

**Rachel:** If things don't work out, like, this can't...

**Griffin:** I never knew that.

**Rachel:** Yeah. Mm-hmm. Uh, it also used to refer to step-siblings. Step-parents. So, a father-in-law could either mean your spouse's father, or your mother's new husband.

**Griffin:** Huh.

**Rachel:** So, people used to say like, if your mother got remarried, that that would be your father-in-law. But they've since stopped saying that as much.

**Griffin:** Because it's very confusing.

**Rachel:** It is very confusing. [laughs] Uh, the earliest written mention comes in 1894, an article that states the position of the in-laws, uh, is often not very apt to promote happiness. [laughs]

**Griffin:** [laughs]

**Rachel:** Um, so yeah. I was trying to do more research on this, and a lot of it is just like, "surviving your in-laws", or like, "ways to approach your in-laws successfully". And I will say, another circumstance we have that is, I think, frustrating particularly now, being so far away... y'know, if we were in a Everybody Loves Raymond situation, and it was like a—

**Griffin:** Ugh, that's the dream!

**Rachel:** [laughs] Like an everyday popover, I might feel different.

**Griffin:** Uh-huh. [laughs]

**Rachel:** [laughs] Uh, the distance, I think, makes it seem more special to me, because it, y'know, is usually happy circumstances that we get to see our extended family. But yeah, I just feel really fortunate for it. I think it is a way to kind of exponentially grow your family, and if you're lucky, they are people you like being around.

**Griffin:** Yeah, absolutely! I love my in-laws too. I have to say— I feel like they listen. But David and Linda are crushing it.

**Rachel:** That's the thing, like...

**Griffin:** They keep it so real.

**Rachel:** I don't have any brothers or sisters, so when you met my parents, and like, y'know, a few of my aunts and uncles, like... that was it.

**Griffin:** That's it. No, you got a way better deal. For the money, you got way more sheer tonnage of in-law.

**Rachel:** When I think about how complicated it might be, trying to navigate all the time, if I also, y'know, had siblings and extended family. It would be tricky for us to kind of manage. But as it is, it's pretty... it's pretty stress-free, which is nice.

**Griffin:** Yeah. [laughs] Um, hey, can I tell you what our friends at home are talking about?

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** Well, how about this one from... [imitates a drumroll] Anna. This one's from Anna, who says, "I've recently taken up tap dancing again by following video tutorials, and my small wonder is getting all the steps right in a combo for the first time." I bet that's cool. I bet that feels real good.

**Rachel:** Oh, I love that! I love that. Y'know, so, I took dance classes when I was a kid for a very long time. And tap shoes, I feel like my family was always worried would damage the floor in some way.

**Griffin:** Oh yeah.

**Rachel:** Uh, and so, it was very hard to practice at home, because it was like a, "Are you tapping?!"

**Griffin:** God, you gotta— but I understand, like, you go to Savion Glover's house, and it's like a bomb went off in there.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** It's horr— it's like he's been sword fighting in there. It's— it's untenable.

Uh, LT says, "My small wonder is the YouTube channel, Ordinary Sausage. It's a man making sausages out of everything. For example, an entire pupu platter, or my favorite so far, canned clam chowder. It makes me laugh very much, and reminds me of old YouTube. One man, one slightly disgusting trick, less than five minutes per video."

We're gonna watch these tonight!

**Rachel:** Yeah. We have found our new disgusting food-related fix.

**Griffin:** Chef Club ain't gettin' it done anymore. Chef Club sold out.

**Rachel:** Yeah. Y'know what's weird, is that it's predictable. [laughs]

**Griffin:** Mm-hmm!

**Rachel:** Griffin and I can narrate a Chef Club video in like, three seconds in. And I've realized now, like, that makes it less fun. I know— I know what's gonna happen next. I know where they're gonna put the cheese.

**Griffin:** They're gonna stuff the gooshy cheese inside the weird chicken apple pie, and like, that's... yaaawn.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Uh, thank you to Bo En and Augustus for the use of our theme song, Money Won't Pay. You can find a link to that in the episode description. And thanks to Maximum Fun for having us on the network.

**Rachel:** Yeah, thank you to Maximum Fun for airing a very special Wonderful promo that we just recorded.

**Griffin:** Yes!

**Rachel:** And I would encourage everybody to go and check out some new shows. I think it's a good time now to just spice up your podcast ritual.

**Griffin:** Oh, absolutely. I mean, don't stop listening to us. That would... but supplement us with more great podcasts from the Maximum Fun network.

**Rachel:** Oh, and speaking of McElroy products... if you have not bought a ticket for the MBMBaM Sawbones live show, there's still time.

**Griffin:** Yes! There's still time. You can find links to tickets and everything at [TheMcElroyFamily.com](http://TheMcElroyFamily.com), and uh, it's gonna be a lot of fun. It'll be really weird. We haven't done a live show since... March? So, who knows?

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Who knows what's gonna happen. But we'll— we'll have fun. Uh, I think that's it, and we're gonna stop doing the show in just a few seconds now. But before we get there, it's very important that we tell you— oh, nope! Here it comes! Bye!

[theme music plays]

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