

Wonderful! 170: The Coldest, Wettest Time in Texas

Published 24th February, 2021

[Listen here on themcelroy.family](https://themcelroy.family)

[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is *Wonderful!*

Griffin: Can't keep us down, can you?

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Y'all thought, "This is it. This must be the end of *Wonderful!*"

Rachel: Guess who's back? [sings a little ditty]

Griffin: [singing quietly] Back again.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [singing] Guess whose first floor of their house smells like something died in it. It is us. Shit is rough. It's been a pretty shitty past fortnight. [stops singing] Hey, everybody. Welcome to *Wonderful!*

Rachel: The remix!

Griffin: The remix is here! Thank you for listening to *Wonderful!* And coming at you with a bit of a curveball this week. I like this energy, actually, right now. We got the door open to the outside.

Rachel: I know, I'm surprised you're allowing this outdoor noise.

Griffin: Yeah, we'll get some outdoor foley. It, um, you know. There's the ventilation issue that's quite pleasant, I'm enjoying the good smells from outside. It's about 70 degrees outside because we *are* being gaslit by fucking nature at this point.

Rachel: Doesn't it feel like Texas is trying to be like, "What are you talking about?"

Griffin: "What is it? What? Snow?"

Rachel: "Was it cold here?"

Griffin: Yeah. In the sort of shadowy recesses, like, on the stairs behind our house, there's still a little bit of snow back there.

Rachel: Oh, I didn't know that.

Griffin: And I saw it yesterday, like, "What?" And I was like, "Oh, yeah. It destroyed the state. It was just here."

Rachel: Yeah. So, we are recordering— [laughs] We are recording this, um, the week after there was just a record, terrible amount of snow and ice and cold temperatures...

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: ... that basically shut the entire state down.

Griffin: We don't have much anything prepared for this episode. I imagine we'll be talking mostly about that and it will be a strange one, but we still are dealing with a lot of stuff over here, like a lot of Texans, and I do want to put a bit—

I wrote up sort of a run-down of our week that I shared on Facebook, which was strange for me. And I included a caveat, and I'll mention it here, because we are gonna be talking about it and probably doing a fair amount of complaining, but I do want to say that we are safe and we were put through the ringer, but we are very lucky, in sort of the grand scheme of things, of having, you know, food and shelter and not so much water, but kind of.

And, uh, so, I don't want to make it sound like we got the toughest break out of what happened, but um...

Rachel: Yeah. I mean, you know, it's like any kind of disaster in that whatever your circumstances going into it, only becomes worse, and luckily we had a pretty good circumstance going into it.

Griffin: Sure, yes.

Rachel: And I think our intention talking about it, I mean, not only is to avoid having to research topics, but also because there's a lot of good stuff, you know?

I think those of you that have looked at this nationally have probably seen a lot of the efforts that, you know, the people in our community have been making to make this a more livable place for people. And that alone has been inspiring to us and motivating.

Griffin: Absolutely. We're probably— We don't have, again, no prep. We just sat down and started shooting from the hip.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But there's still a lot of places in Texas that need help, so we're going to include some links in the show notes of places you can donate and that would be really great, because the snow is gone but the amount of—

We sustained some pretty major property damage here, but we can live in our house and that's not true of a lot of people. There's an incalculable amount of damage that is still done. An incalculable amount of, you know, food shortage, water shortage, in large parts of the state.

So, still need your help. If you are able, please donate and, uh—
[whispering] Hey, do you have any small wonders?

Rachel: [giggles] Small wonders. Small wonders. Uh, our chest freezer. Have we talked about that?

Griffin: Chest freezer— Listen.

Rachel: [laughing] Have we talked about that?

Griffin: Our kitchen buddy, our big kitchen Frigidaire buddy didn't— It did its best, but it got bad in there.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Um. It was colder outside of the fridge than it was inside of the fridge, which, you know, in hindsight, maybe we should have just thrown wide the gates of Jericho there and let the— Just let all the air sort of intermingle.

Rachel: [through laughter] Yeah.

Griffin: It would have been better than what did happen, but that chest freezer is unflappable.

Rachel: Almost a year. We spent almost a year with this chest freezer...

Griffin: That's right.

Rachel: ... because when the pandemic popped off, Griffin was like, "Wouldn't it be great for us to have a big chest freezer?" And before everybody had to start isolating and things became scarce, Griffin purchased this for us, it fits very neatly in our little kitchen, and uh...

Griffin: It's a chicken nugget warehouse, is essentially what it is, if we're being—

Rachel: [laughs] Griffin and I will eat anything, you know? But our four-year-old, that is not the case.

Griffin: I'm gonna say Stardew Valley 1.5 update, uh, dropped on Switch literally two days before the storm hit? Big ups. Big ups to, uh, Eric Barone is the name of the developer of that game. Crushed it.

Rachel: Griffin has escaped into this little farming paradise.

Griffin: That's right, things are going good on Madrigal Farm. Uh, we just entered year two, completed the community center, found my way to Ginger Island. I'm exploring all the content there. I'm having a great time.

Uh, we had two rechargeable battery packs that we were using for phone and at one point, I had to run the calculation in my head of do I give my Switch, you know, a 15% little bump, just to get me through the night, or do I save this for our phone to use to call out to emergency services, if necessary.

Yeah, no joke. I've played quite a bit of it and it's been, um. It's been a salve. It's a good game. I've tried to sell Rachel on it, because you are an Animal Crossing fan, but I think the, uh...

Rachel: I think it's the smallness of it, right? Like, Animal Crossing, I can see the little cute animal faces, you know?

Griffin: Oh, I see.

Rachel: And I can customize in a way that is very, like, enjoyable. Stardew Valley, everybody looks so tiny. I can't—

Griffin: Well, you can zoom in, so that's one thing.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: But I feel like the thing that might bump for you is the economics of it.

Rachel: I guess, so.

Griffin: I mean, you are managing a small business, essentially. Um, but I would love to play it with you. It does have multiplayer. So we can talk about that off-mic.

Rachel: Okay, alright. Uh, so, I thought we would just, to give some context for how all of this popped off for us, it was the evening of Valentine's Day.

Griffin: It was. Uh, I—

Rachel: Griffin had made a beautiful meal.

Griffin: I had. It was, uh, short rib ragu with gnocchi. It's sort of my special dish. Takes a long time to make, do it in the old Dutch oven and, uh, it's real tasty. Had leftovers. Those didn't make it.

Rachel: No. At that point, we had known that people were starting to lose power.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: And it had been communicated to us that the storm that was coming in was going to be quite bad.

Griffin: And we knew that, what, two weeks— Texas saw that, this is an important part of the puzzle, Texas knew that this cold front was coming in very, very, well enough in advance to take certain precautions.

Rachel: There was no preparation that every single person, more or less, was going to lose either power and/or water or both.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And so, we had kind of prepared for it. Um, but not for a multi-day situation.

Griffin: Right. That weekend we got freezing rain, um, which sort of drove a bit of a rush that I participated in to go to the grocery store and stock up on things. Which is, on one hand, good, 'cause we did have stuff for the next two days, but also all that stuff got spoiled, so.

Rachel: Yeah, we just didn't think. We didn't think we were getting in for a situation where everything we purchased that required electricity was going to go bad.

Griffin: Right. Um, so, yeah. About 1:30 A.M. on Monday morning, Sunday evening, Valentine's Day evening, we lost power. Um and—

Rachel: It was cold.

Griffin: It was cold, yeah. I mean, it was—

Rachel: In the 30s maybe?

Griffin: I don't know, man. I think it was already in the teens at that point. Definitely Monday night is when it got to seven degrees. So, we have a baby monitor, so I had to go sleep on the second floor of the house with the door open so I could hear Henry cry if that was an issue.

Rachel: If he woke up, yeah.

Griffin: And, uh, when we woke up it was already very cold inside of our house. Uh, we have a two-story house and the second story at that point was maybe 20 degrees warmer than the first floor?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: So very quickly that Monday, we realized that we were going to have to move upstairs, because I would estimate it was probably, I don't know, high forties downstairs. Inside.

Rachel: And we have a gas fireplace...

Griffin: It produces no—

Rachel: ... but it's more decorative than functional.

Griffin: Yeah. Uh, with the flue open, we were letting in more cold air than the fireplace could offset, so that was not— Unfortunately.

Rachel: But we still had water! At that point.

Griffin: Well, yeah, I guess. Kind of. Uh, we were doing the thing— Maybe we can share some life lessons. Also, if this happens to you, no joke, there are things I wish I would have known.

Rachel: Yeah, for sure.

Griffin: Like, when they say let your water drip out of your pipes. That's— That's not a joke. That's incredibly important prescriptive advice.

Rachel: Yeah. And this is something I talked about with Griffin, like, we have obviously been homeowners for a while now, but never outside of Texas.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: So any kind of issues we've had with homeownership have been Texas-specific, which don't typically involve freezings.

Griffin: [simultaneously] Freezings. Um, so we were doing that. Uh, to fast forward that particular element though, uh, it got below freezing inside of our house and so we had literal stalactites hanging from— little icicles hanging from the faucets.

Rachel: Yeah, which we thought, like, "Oh, isn't that crazy?"

Griffin: "Isn't that cute?" Uh, so, that— The drip didn't end up protecting us at all.

Rachel: Yeah. At this point, we had no idea how long our power was going to be off, and so we thought like, let's try and stick it out because the roads are quite bad.

Griffin: The roads were terrible. We had, what, half a foot of snow? And we live up in a hilly neighborhood and, uh—

Rachel: Another thing about Texas is that there is no infrastructure to support snow removal and so the streets were not being cleared.

Griffin: No.

Rachel: And what would happen is, every night it would get below freezing and so any melt that may have happened would just freeze.

Griffin: It would freeze right away, yeah.

Rachel: And it would just get worse and worse and worse.

Griffin: Uh, to really drive this home, because this was one of those things that was everyone, uh, very, very, very, very long story, as short as I can, the power grid was in danger of fully blacking out, which is a tremendous danger and takes, you know, weeks and weeks to repair.

Everybody who was not on a power circuit that was shared with a hospital or fire station or other sort of essential, um, you know, building, lost power. And those outages were supposed to rotate, but there were no non-essential circuits to rotate to.

So, basically, if you lost power, you didn't have power. And there were lots of power generators in the state that failed because they were not properly winterized. Texas is part of its— It has its own power grid, uh, to be sort of free of the regulations of the big national power grid, so there was no outside help coming in.

Um, and there wasn't enough power being generated because natural gas lines and coal lines and some renewable energy lines, although a majority of

our power came from natural gas, which got shut down, just froze up because they weren't prepared.

Uh, and the government doesn't, sort of, enforce what meager winterization regulations exist already. Which is gonna be a thing that hopefully we talk about, moving forward.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: So that is why the power grid collapsed. Like, not fully, but for all intents and purposes, for the people affected. It went down and it did not come back up.

So there was nowhere to go, because you couldn't get in your car and drive anywhere, especially in our neighborhood, and so your only option was let's bundle up.

This is why when people, you know, were making themselves sick with carbon monoxide poisoning because they were lighting their gas ovens and just letting that run, it's— We were—

Like, people in the state and city were cornered and had nowhere to go and could only wrap themselves up in so many blankets, but eventually your inside gets as cold as the outside and that's— What do you fucking do at that point?

Rachel: Yeah, so we found kind of the sunniest, most insulated room in our house and brought a bunch of blankets and spent all day Monday, into the evening, in one room of our house.

Griffin: Our son was a real trooper about it, but...

Rachel: Yeah. We were lucky in that we had enough power saved up in our devices that we had the iPad, we had a lot of toys still. Uh, and the other thing that made things tricky for us, though, was that we have no cell service.

Griffin: In our house, right.

Rachel: Yeah, our neighborhood is laid out in that we are completely dependent on Wi-Fi calling, so.

Griffin: So we would have to walk out [sighs]. Out onto the street and just be on the street. We couldn't park our cars in the street because our cars couldn't move, uh, from the garage. Uh, and just like, stand out in the cold along with all of our neighbors.

Rachel: Our neighbors, yeah.

Griffin: So this is the first big wonder, I think for me, is we met a lot of our neighbors this week. We are terrible, I think, as a lot of people in our generation are, at like, actually being in touch with our neighbors, and did a lot of talking. And I think there was a lot of isolation, COVID isolation, that was—

I mean there were a lot of sort of quarantine protocols that we had to break, like, full stop and were not as COVID-safe as we possible could be, but um, just, you know, talking to our neighbors from six feet away on the street was genuinely nice and literally everybody was going through the exact same thing. So being able to share—

Rachel: Well, it was information.

Griffin: Sharing information was huge, too. But, you know, coming back in from outside, there was no way to get warm. I genuinely was afraid of frostbite. Eventually we had to—

The next day. We spent the night at the house, uh, we lit a bunch of candles. We had, like, a dozen scented candles which, like— Big ups, uh, to everybody. Erica Huff.

Rachel: Yeah, Erica Huff at Wick Habit.

[crosstalk]

Griffin: ...who sent us candles.

Rachel: Probably not the usage these candles were intended for.

Griffin: No, I think it probably gave us a few degrees bump in that room that we, uh— By the time we fell asleep, we could see our breath in the room we were sleeping in, which sucks.

And we woke up with, like, black crusty goo coming out of our noses. We were like, picking gross gunk out of Henry's nose, because I don't think you're supposed to have that many candles going in a room. [laughs]

Rachel: [simultaneously] Burning all night long, yeah. No. That was a big mistake.

Griffin: We're laughing, but like, I felt like I had smoked a pack of cigarettes the next day after.

Rachel: Yeah, it was bad.

Griffin: And we have a nice sort of umbra in our, uh, in the room we slept in, going up to the ceiling.

Rachel: That was probably the most dangerous.

Griffin: Uh-huh.

Rachel: Or one of the most dangerous things that we did.

Griffin: The smell— They're delightful smelling candles when used one at a time.

Rachel: [laughing] We had a yoga studio aesthetic, uh, in our cold wasteland.

Griffin: Yeah. But it smells like a fucking Bath and Bodyworks burned down inside of our room, there. Um, so the next morning we woke up and the toilet water had frozen and we were like, "We got to fucking go."

Rachel: Yeah. Our gas stove continued to work and so we were able to, like, make warm meals.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Uh, but yeah, our—

Griffin: Probably the shittiest mac and cheese— or, uh, shittiest grilled cheese sandwiches I've ever made in my life.

Rachel: Yeah. We were really lucky because we went out to the street to get in. Griffin was able to get his car out of the garage when we went out to the street and we realized we didn't have the energy or ability to find a place to stay on our own, just given our limited battery, so we—

Griffin: I texted the family and said, "Please, will you please, you know, call the area and find a hotel. Amanda, our business manager, was helping out,

too. Basically all hands on deck and we're very appreciative of that. Um, but there were not very many vacancies.

Rachel: I will also say that this was simultaneously happening in West Virginia, more or less.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: And so, Justin and Sydnee were kind of fighting their own battle.

Griffin: That did not make the national news as much as Texas, but West Virginia got hit extremely hard. There are places in West Virginia that still don't have power and they need, you know, just as much help as we do.

Um, but another complication is that a lot of hotels lost power, so like, a lot of these booking places like, you know, Kayak or Hotel Tonight or whatever you would go on and be like, "Hey, here's a room!" So, my family would like, book a room and then call the hotel and be like, "Oh, no, we have no power. We are not a functioning, operating business right now."

So they booked, like, six hotels and, like, five of them were not functioning hotels. And they had to, like, get a refund right away. But they found one room in a very sort of ritzy— Not— Ritzy's not the word. Hip maybe is the right word?

Rachel: Yeah. So, downtown Austin was one of the areas least affected by the power outage, and so if you were able to find a hotel room downtown, more than likely it was in pretty good shape.

Griffin: So they had one room downtown, uh, and we couldn't check in for a while so we— We had to leave our house. So we got in and slip-slided our way across town to our friends' house. Which, to be fully honest, was one of the highlights where we sort of allowed ourselves to—

We knew that they were keeping safe, sort of, COVID-wise. And so we all kept masks on and the kids kept masks on, our friends— Henry and their kids are friends and so watching Henry play with other kids for the first time in...

Rachel: A year.

Griffin: Yeah. Was... tear-jerking? We were so emotionally devastated, I think, by what had happened and were scared of being in this freezing house with our son and like, hoping it didn't get much colder and hoping we could sleep through it. And having this sort of ray of sunlight of, like, seeing our kids play together was like, a lot to handle.

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah. I think one of our concerns, we've been very fortunate in that we have been able to keep Henry home so he has not been in school or daycare for a very long time and one of our concerns has always been like, is he gonna be—

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Is he gonna have a hard time relating to other kids after this? And it was just, really it was nice to see him play.

Griffin: They were thick as thieves again. It was, uh...

Rachel: Yeah. But at this point, it's Tuesday and it's like, lunchtime, and we are just kind of hanging out there because they have no lost power this entire time.

Griffin: Right, they had family coming in town that week, so they had a pretty full house. They offered us a place to stay, but we didn't want to, you

know. They were also going through it, so we decided to make the trek downtown which, the one major highway in Austin is I-35.

It had been salted, it had been de-iced, so we were able to get downtown fairly easily and then slip-slide our way to the hotel. Um, which was— They had power, they had hot water, we were able to shower which was great.

Rachel: This is when I think the food shortage became really real for us, because...

Griffin: Yes. They had like three things in their kitchen that they could make. One of them was a cheese pizza, thank God. So Henry had something to eat. Uh, 'cause he wasn't gonna eat, like, a superfood quinoa bowl.

Rachel: [giggling]

Griffin: So that night, we had food, we had hot water, we had a warm place to sleep and that was great. I made a very stupid choice that night, which was— At that point, we had heard of pipes bursting and the advice that was going around, again, not like on any kind of governmental level.

Rachel: No, it was on Facebook.

Griffin: Austin Water was not— It's really tough for me to place blame on citywide agencies, right? Like Austin Energy, people were threatening Austin Energy crews who were like, coming out in 10 degree weather, like climbing up iced poles to try and fucking fix stuff.

And so the communication coming out of those places wasn't great, but you know, a lot of that stuff was coming from a statewide level that they had no control over. But all that to say, there was no unified voice saying, "Go out to the street right now. Here's what the homeowner's shut-off for your water looks like."

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: So I didn't fucking know. So, everybody was saying shut off your water on Facebook, so I drove back here in what was probably the riskiest driving I've ever done in my life, because at that point it was night time and everything was frozen over again and I had to go over the hills and roads were shut down and...

I got chewed out by somebody for trying to, uh, go down a street I shouldn't have and it was very treacherous, but when I got here, it was night and I couldn't find said shut-off. So I just went inside the house and did what I could. And I got back to the—

Rachel: Yeah. So at this point, we knew that our power had come back on...

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: ... uh, because we have— I mean, I don't know if wanna plug the particular service we have.

Griffin: No, we have a thermostat that was like, "Hey, you have power again." It was still 30 degrees inside the house and it was not gonna be warm enough to sleep.

Rachel: We have an app on our phone that tells us, like, if our thermostat is running. And so we knew that we had power and we knew that once things started to warm up we were going to get a real sense of the damage.

Griffin: But it was night. Our homeowner— [sighs] In Austin, and I imagine probably in a lot of places too, but I don't fucking know, you have two water shut-offs of the water going from the street, into your house.

One is the city shut-off and one is the homeowner shut-off. The city shut-off, you need a special tool and not everybody has a homeowner shut-off. So there were a lot of people whose pipes exploded and they were like, "My house is actively flooding right now and there's nothing I can do about it because there is no homeowner shut-off and the city requires you to use a special tool."

You are not supposed to shut off the city shut-off yourself. You're supposed to call them. But it's fucking, you know, an ice field outside. There's no way that they can get down here. They are— You can't get through to them.

And so a lot of places were just screwed. So ours was buried under snow, I couldn't find it. I did what I could and drove back home. The next morning, we woke up to a letter under the door of our hotel saying, "We now have no food."

So, we were like, "Well. Okay. Uh, shit." I went out to a— I found a CVS that opened at 10 A.M. It was the only business downtown that was open. I was like, "I'll get there right at 10 A.M. I'll be money!" I got there and there was a line around the corner.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Uh, so I waited in line for two hours. Here's a wonder. Here's a nice wonder. Talked to nice people. There was a nice young couple who was right behind me in line and we talked for the whole two hours and they were very, very nice.

They were sort of, uh— It was kind of— It was nice to complain to somebody who, like— The idea that we had a four-year-old and you are, you know,

quite pregnant and, you know, we needed food and we're trying to keep our son happy, and like...

We had more responsibilities than they did and seeing them be like, "Oh, my God!" was in a way, kind of like, "Okay, so it does suck shit. It is fucking bad here. Yeah, okay. Thank you." That's quite nice.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But everybody was going through it and to— It was the first, like, conversation I'd had with strangers at length in a year and so that was genuinely nice. And it took us two hours to get inside and when we got inside there was no food, there was—

Rachel: Griffin came back with some great Valentine's candy.

Griffin: That's it, that's all they had.

Rachel: Recently expired, still tasted brand new. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. Uh, so a sad voyage, but like, seeing those people inside the store once— They were only letting in three people at a time, so it was basically Supermarket Sweep, just the three of us in there, like, "Hey! What'd you find?"

"Oh, I got some expired applesauce!"

"Cool!"

Rachel: I know, I was texting Griffin like, "What are people coming out with? Are you looking in their bags?"

Griffin: I came home with some Sour Patch Kids, some Reese's hearts.

Rachel: We got some juice.

Griffin: We got some bad juice. Some shitty, flavorless juice. So, um, about halfway through the day, the sun had come out, the roads were getting a little bit better. We thought, let's just— We have power at our house. It's still very cold there, but it's getting warmer. Let's go home.

Rachel: And Griffin had to kind of argue with me on this because I knew it was a gamble, what we were going to find when we got home.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And it was still somewhat dangerous, because it hadn't completely thawed to get home and I had that real dilemma of do we leave this, like, warm hotel room with power and water?

Griffin: Yeah. The hotel was tricky because they weren't kicking anyone out, right? They can't. And so we called down, like, "Can we stay an extra night?" And they were like, "Yeah." Uh, 'cause they weren't taking new reservations. We must have gotten one of the very last ones because nobody was leaving.

They couldn't take any reservations. We had the room for another night, but part of me wanted to free that room up if we could, if we could go home. And the other part of me was, "We need to be home in case something bad happens."

Rachel: Yeah. And I had thought, since Griffin went the night before and said that things looked okay, that we were potentially out of the woods.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Which was a little—

Griffin: Was, uh, foolhardy. So, we got everything packed up, got in the car, drove home, which was not too bad.

Rachel: Uh, should we leave a little cliffhanger here, so...?

Griffin: Oh, yeah, we do need to go to ads. Uh—

Rachel: [laughing] So I can steal you away.

Griffin: We walked into our house and everything was fucking ruined. Can I steal you away?

[music plays]

[ad break]

Griffin: Hey, here's jumbo-bombs. And this one is for Grant, my love and it's from your love, Katie who says, "Hey, bubba! You are my favorite. I know *Wonderful* is my show, but you are the most wonderful thing to me, so why not share the love?

"I love you very much and can't wait to see where we are living when we hear this. Hopefully, we have a dog by then as well. If not, let's go out and get one now! This is also a signal for me to slap your butt! So look out!"
Ooh.

Rachel: Whoa.

Griffin: Got to keep your head on a swivel there, Grant. Could be butt-slaps coming in hot and surprise dogs!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's a real jungle out there.

Rachel: Can I read the next message?

Griffin: Please do.

Rachel: It is for future Alec, from past Alec. "Hello, future Alec! You're listening to your favorite podcast and you're doing great, I'm sure. Don't listen to that voice that says otherwise. You're working on your degree and I'm sure you're still running a stellar D&D game with marvelous players who all love you. You are loved by your husband, too, so don't give up! Much love, past Alec."

Griffin: That is a sweet one and I'm glad that this is your favorite podcast. There's a lot. There's a lot of good ones out there, are you sure?

Rachel: We know you have choices when you listen and we're thankful that you choose us.

Griffin: Absolutely. You're our platinum medallion, gold, diamond member.

[pause]

Rachel: Alright, so.

Griffin: When last we left...

Rachel: [laughs] We had just returned home and we're grateful—

Griffin: I think the first words in my head— I opened up the door, the first floor was still very cold, but like, you know. We could tell that—

Rachel: There was power.

Griffin: There was power. And I think we walked in and, like, because there wasn't water at our doorstep or, like, rushing under our doorstep, I think the first words I said was, "Well, this doesn't look too bad."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And then I listened with my listening ears and I heard [imitates rushing water]. Our... I mean, I'm trying to think of how to describe the kind of architecture of our house.

The first floor has, like, a sort of sunken area, right? Where you walk down a couple stairs and then there's our bedroom, there's a closet, there's a guest bathroom down there, and then there's our master bathroom which has, like, our main closet where we keep our clothes in and a little toilet alcove.

Rachel: And this is like, the very side of the house, too. This is like, uh, when you walk in, obviously, there's all of our living spaces and kind of on one side—

Griffin: About a quarter of our house, right? You think of about maybe a third of the first floor of our house is down a foot, that you have to go down a couple stairs to get down to. The ceiling was gone...? Well, it wasn't gone.

Rachel: In the bathroom.

Griffin: It was on the floor. Uh, and there was a pipe directly above the hole that was shooting tremendous amounts of water. It was not a drippy-drip. It

was a blast. It was like somebody had knocked the cap off a fire hydrant, literally that much.

Rachel: Yeah. I think— So, I come from a very quiet home and Griffin comes from a louder home. So it's not unusual for me to hear Griffin make a loud noise and sometimes it's just like a, "Oh, I got a paper cut." This was a different kind of loud noise. I knew there was a problem.

Griffin: You're also— You knew there was a problem when you heard the sound of gallons of water falling.

Rachel: I didn't. I didn't hear it until I got right on top of it. I didn't hear it like, front door.

Griffin: So I called 311, called the city and like, gave Rachel my phone while I ran outside to try and find the homeowner shut off. Which I couldn't. I found the city shut-off, which was under a big, sort of, manhole and I popped it open and there was what looked like—

There was the water meter, right? And then there looked like a big, sort of steel, cast iron bolt. So I ran back inside and grabbed my wrenches.

Rachel: Which, by the way, like, that wrench set— How did you— It looked like it had been unopened and so it was like this—

Griffin: No, it looked like it had been unopened but it's— That's just how it's stored.

Rachel: Oh, okay. I was just like, "Where did this even come from?" I didn't know we had it. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. No, I've used it for couple plumbing, sort of, scenarios. Nothing quite this dire. But that bolt in the city shut-off, again, you need a special tool which they sell online and you can, like, buy them at Home Depot and some of our neighbors had them.

So I also got on Facebook, really— This was in the span of five minutes? 10 minutes? And posted like, "I need this right now. Does anybody on our street have it?" Uh, and then I ran to our neighbor's house and knocked on his door, like, "Hey. I found this thing, do you happen to have this tool? I also don't know if it's our shut-off or your shut-off so I don't wanna—"

So, he came up and showed me his homeowner shut off. So now I kind of knew what to look for on my side and I got out a shovel and I started digging and under a bush, under a half a foot of snow, I finally found it and turned it off and after another five minutes or so, the water had flushed from our system and was still dripping quite violently into our room, but not gushing, right?

Rachel: Yeah. At this point, when we got home, it was like, Tuesday afternoon, uh, and so we realized, like, we need to start making phone calls if we're gonna get anybody.

Griffin: Right away.

Rachel: Because we knew this was happening all over the city.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Uh, and we knew also that there were limited business hours left in the day and at that point, we had been on hold with 311 for like, 20 minutes.

Griffin: We gave up on the city.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: We gave up on 311 because they weren't— And this is, like, the sort of emergency— Non-life-threatening emergency services number that you call and they didn't answer because of how slammed they were.

Rachel: Overloaded. Yeah. And so, we did what the equivalent of, like, taking out a yellow pages is and we just started calling every number.

Griffin: I got on Angie's List and filed a bunch of different, like— Filed our insurance claim and like, there's a lot. If you're not a homeowner, there's a lot of stuff you have to deal with. Water damage specifically, we have no water now, right? Because we had to shut off the city plumbing, and we still don't!

You need a plumber to fix that. You need a water remediation company to come in and assess the damage. Water damage is catastrophic because it gets in the walls and the insulation and all of that has to go.

Rachel: We had, based on the fact that Griffin came the night before and things looked okay and, uh, we got home the afternoon the following day— We have no idea how long this was happening.

Griffin: There's about a 15-hour period between when I was at the house and then when we came back from the hotel that we don't know. So it could have been gushing for 15 hours, it could have been gushing for a half hour, we don't know. [laughs] We kind of know now.

Rachel: Yeah. The damage is extensive and we were fortunate, for better or worse, that we were still kind of in the frontrunner pack of damage. And so we have—

Griffin: But I mean, it's still— It's Tuesday now. This was Wednesday when we got home. A plumber is supposed to come today, while we're recording. Still don't have water. Uh, the water remediation company got bumped and got bumped and got bumped and finally came late last night to walk in and say everything's fucking ruined and we're gonna have to gut, basically a quarter of the house.

Like, all the walls are coming out, all the ceilings are coming out, all the insulation's coming out, all the carpets are coming out, all the— And they're gonna start tearing the house apart today, but again like, we don't know if they're actually gonna show up or not.

And we are lucky. Like, we are the lucky ones. There are plumbers who, and this is making national news, like people getting 300 calls a day with full voicemails, and plumbers that are booked six weeks out.

We have a nanny who started coming in again last week, even though we didn't have water, who's been fucking amazing. Who has brought in— She has camping gear and so she's brought in these six-gallon buckets of water because we had been melting snow in pots to pour into our toilets to flush them.

Uh, and we were looking at having to boil snow to drink and fortunately I found a gas station just down the hill that I was able to drive to to get a palette of water from. So, like, that's another thing we've been very lucky about. Is that we have not hurt for drinking water which a lot of fucking people are.

Rachel: Yeah. When Griffin was able to find a water remediation crew and I was able to find a plumber—

Griffin: Yeah. So we had somebody who could destroy our house and fix our water, but we still don't have anybody to fix the house. Which is— We have places to live inside of our house, but also, we're gonna have a baby in like, three weeks!

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah. It's too much to kind of process all at once, so all we can really do is kind of feel fortunate that—

Griffin: We have the stuff that we do have and we have the resources to, like, get stuff fixed.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Which a lot of people don't. Again, we're like, I'm genuinely so grateful for everything that worked out, but it is, on a personal level, it's... horrible.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And very scary. But on a statewide level, it's unthinkable. It's immeasurable. Everybody is going through this.

Rachel: [sighs] The thing that Griffin and I keep talking about that you don't always realize if you're not living in a place after a disaster, because— You know, Griffin and I are both from areas that are used to cold weather. The power goes out. It comes back on. Things go back to normal.

But that's just not gonna be the case here. And all these people that maybe now have power, it's not like they can just go back to their life now. They

have serious damage to their home and their property. You know, the city has basically been shut down for a week, and so—

Griffin: Oh, we got a— The day we got home, you know, it didn't affect us much because we didn't have water, because I had to shut it off, because of what exploded inside of our house, but there was a city-wide boil notice from Wednesday through— I mean, it's still active in parts of the city.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Because one of the, uh, water treatment plants went down. And so now, even if you had power and you did have running water, you had to boil it, which made things tricky for us, because it's not like we could just go to a friend's house, grab some water, start chugging it down, baby. We would have to start— We would have to boil that.

Rachel: Yeah. What I guess I want to communicate is that even though the power's on and it is 70 degrees outside, uh, the damage done by this will take a very long time to repair.

And so, again, it's not like my childhood where it's like, oh, I got out a flashlight for a night, you know? And maybe I had to throw out my ice cream. I mean, the reason I bring that up and it gives me a level of compassion that I didn't previously have is people always talk about during a disaster, there is tremendous momentum for relief.

Everybody is donating and providing water and then after a week or two, everyone kind of assumes like, they should be good now. And that's just— That's not gonna be the case for a lot of people here.

Griffin: Yeah. I mean, the disruption to— We were in the middle of a pandemic and trying to figure out what bringing a child into this world and

our home was gonna look like. We are in the home stretch of that. And that is a lot for anyone and now we have, you know, a quarter of our home that we can't go in so much right now and we still don't really know what it's gonna take to tear that out and fix everything.

And that is, you know, at worst an inconvenience, right? But you extrapolate that out to, like, everybody is going through that and there are many, many, many, many people who are going through much worse.

Austin, thank God, has an okay infrastructure for people experiencing homelessness and they very quickly expanded warming centers and shelters and they converted the entire Capital Metro system to transporting folks to those warming centers. But like, you know, that's not gonna be true in every rural area or even every city in Texas.

Rachel: Yeah. I mean, there are still people who— Grocery stores are kind of back up and running after several days where they couldn't get new shipments.

Griffin: Fucking HEB. It's like a meme in Texas where like, you can't really trust the government to do anything for you because it's been deregulated to the point of being functionally useless. But HE-fucking-B will, like—

Rachel: Yeah. Our governor and our senators are doing almost nothing, but our grocery store was really coming through. [laughs]

Griffin: Our grocery store. But this is the hugest wonder and it's also quite sad, that the work is being— Maybe not sad, right? Like, I don't know how to interpret this. The work is being done by neighbors and it's being done by local businesses who are just giving fucking food away.

HEB had the power go out in one of their locations while people were shopping there and they were just like, "Go ahead and leave with your food and don't worry about paying for it." Not that HEB is a particularly small business, but like, mutual aid funds are saving lives.

Like, literally saving lives, putting food on tables and giving people water and safe places to stay who would have died without that help. That is where the help is coming from.

And that on one hand is a beautiful portrait of community and what it's capable of and how strong it still is despite everything that we're going through, and it is also heartbreaking that there's not a more centralized effort to fucking provide relief. It's so frustrating and sad and—

Rachel: Yeah. I, uh— There are so many people in circumstances, you know— You couldn't get stuff. You couldn't get it delivered to your house like, you really had to be like, "Does anybody on my street have formula?" Because you couldn't chance driving out to get to a store that had nothing on the shelves, you know?

Griffin: There was somebody looking for Similac, which is a special kind of dairy and soy free baby formula that we had to use with Henry, because he had a cow's milk protein allergy, which sounds like bullshit but is, like a pretty serious thing.

Uh, and we didn't have anymore, but when we did have to find it, we had to like, get it from the Babies R Us that is now closed and— Like, sourcing that was such a stressor when everything was working right, and now...

Rachel: Well and everybody, like, all of our family wanted to help and they wanted to mail us things, but they—

Griffin: That doesn't— Yeah.

Rachel: You know, and everyone that had those two-day shipping options didn't realize that two-day shipping meant a week now because of the way the trucks had gotten behind, so.

Griffin: Yeah. I don't know how— Oh, Henry got also a stomach bug, weirdly, a couple nights ago which we think is probably because he—

Rachel: Either we pushed our expired food from the thaw...

Griffin: Not expired, but like—

Rachel: Well, you know, food that was no longer good because we couldn't maintain the right temperature or because we don't have running water to wash his hands. Like, this circumstance was so bleak and so eye-opening for us. Like, it was almost too much. But he's better today.

Griffin: He's fine now. He had like, a fever for not even like— That's not, uh, it's not helpful.

Rachel: It was just, it was just another thing. But, yeah, I mean, I think the thing I've realized is there are a lot of people around the country that have been through kind of natural disasters and they have experienced a lot of what we are talking about.

I think this is the first time that Griffin and I really have had to, you know, weather some kind of storm that really drastically, dangerously impacted our circumstance. And every— It just touched everything.

Griffin: It hit everyone and I— There is the extra, infuriating element of what could have been avoided if regulation was taken seriously with regards

to our— [sighs] Fucking, uh, Rick Perry had a statement because people were coming after ERCOT, which is the statewide sort of regulation board for the power grid.

And people were coming after all of, basically, how power works in Texas, saying like, there has to be regulation, there has to be some sort of redundancy with the national grid, there has to be something so that when this does happen again, because this is a fucking freak storm, it was the longest stretch of below freezing temperatures in the state's history.

Rachel: Yeah, ever.

Griffin: Ever. But it— In 2011, we had a big blackout and got all of these, like, warnings basically saying, like, "Your power grid is not safe for this. You need to do something about it." 10 years later, we didn't and this is what happened.

Um, but Rick Perry had a quote where he was like, "The good people of Texas aren't gonna let a few cold days keep them from giving in to the federal regulations that—" And it's like, Texas pushes that to the extreme, right? We have no income tax, we are— There is a genuinely huge amount of light touch taken to statewide government.

Rachel: Yeah, it's a state for business, you know? Like, they make things comfortable for corporations to come which makes our state look, you know, pretty prosperous, but when you look at it...

Griffin: Yeah, but then those businesses don't fucking protect us and themselves from this weather and this is what happens. So, like, having Greg fucking Abbott go on Hannity and talk about that this is the green new deal. Like, fuck off, dude.

Ted Cruz leaving, like Ted Cruz is a fucking dipshit idiot loser piece of trash, but watching Greg Abbott go on and immediately start, like, lying when people are fucking dying because nobody was taking this seriously.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It does not make us particularly optimistic that things are gonna change because of the way that Texas thinks about regulating corporate interests. It's— There's not a particularly sunny lesson to be taken there. You see, like—

And this is that, like, dichotomy I think I was getting at earlier, is like, I saw more people helping people than I have in my entire life and was subject to that help and gave that help in ways that I haven't in my life, because we've never gone through anything like this.

But it's going to happen again because of this other level of people who could stop it and will not, or at least have given no indication that they will. And so it's like, well, I guess I'm glad that the community is here but we shouldn't have to be the ones to shoulder the burden of this.

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah. I have always been a believer that there is a strong place and role for government in our society, uh, and I would say that that failed us at every level this past week.

Griffin: Brass tacks, the government has to take care of the roads and utilities. Like that's— If they're not doing that, then what the fuck are they doing?

There's so much more that the pooling of all of our national interests accomplishes for us that they should be doing, but that the very basis of it

we need water and power and roads that work and if you can't fucking do that, then what the fuck are you doing? Like, what do you do all day?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It's insulting. It's infuriating. It's a— [pauses] I knew it was bad, but when you see shit, the skeleton of the thing fall apart. [pauses] I apologize. I— This energy is helping absolutely nobody and I recognize that but it's so demoralizing.

And it's so the antithesis of what we try to do on this show because there were a lot of light points to this, but those light points came as survival mechanisms in the face of a thing that shouldn't have fucking happened.

Rachel: To be as grateful as we were to get buckets of wastewater from people so we could flush our toilet, like it's just, like... It's unreal to have that experience in a place that is supposed to be one of the best economies in the country, you know?

Griffin: Yeah. We see— And there's a cost to that, right? That now everybody is very intimately familiar with, but I don't know that there's much else to say. Like, that's where we're at.

This has been a genuinely life-changing, like, event. Both from a, like, adult responsibility thing. Like, I've never experienced walking into our house to find it flooded and, like, what do you do with that and worse. I feel like I have quite a bit more know-how for...

Rachel: I'm glad, um. I'm glad this baby's still inside.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I can't even imagine trying to do this with a newborn. I'm glad that we had friends that had running water and/or power to help us out.

Griffin: The shop vac came in clutch.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Big ups to the Menskers for that shop vac, holy shit.

Rachel: Yeah, otherwise we would still have standing water, potentially, in that space downstairs.

Griffin: Uh, we may. We haven't knocked those walls out. [laughs] I'd be surprised if we didn't have a little, you know, little kiddie pool going on in there.

Rachel: Smells like it.

Griffin: Smells the hell like it, doesn't it? Um, we are going to be okay and there's lots of people who aren't. Please donate, like, if you take anything away from this. When I wrote that thing on my Facebook, I mostly wrote it because I don't think people really understood the scope of what had failed here.

Rachel: Yeah. There are discrete pieces of this that are relatable to anybody, you know? Like people have lost power, people have had icy roads, people have had stores run out of stock. But everything at once made this, like, a very unlivable place for an extended stretch of time.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And I think Griffin really made it clear, like, "Okay, well here are your basic needs and here's how each one was eliminated during this time frame."

Griffin: Yeah. But we're okay now, like, things— We're gonna be living out of different parts of our house for a while and probably— What is broken in our house will not be fixed by the time the baby gets here and that's fine because we're going to be able to give that baby a warm home and...

Rachel: Recording studio's fine.

Griffin: The studio's doing great! Rug is great, lamp is great.

Rachel: Brother printer.

Griffin: Brother printer...

Rachel: Just fine.

Griffin: ... is doing alright. Um, so like, I'm angry and I'm grateful. I feel all these feelings and I feel very self-conscious about them, because we're doing okay and this anger that I have should be reserved for the people who don't, but I can't help—

Like I'm so fucking angry and I'm so moved and I'm sad and I'm so— We're so fucking tired. Like, that's not— Every night, we fell asleep at like—

The night that we had to camp out in the one room, we all fell asleep at like, 7:30. Like, something crazy, because it's just like, we were so tired and still are, like every day. The amount of physical exhaustion of just, like, hauling all of our wet shit out of that one room and tearing out all the insulation.

Which, big ups to my— I posted a picture on Instagram and everybody called out insulation house meat and house beef and that was a genuine highlight. I posted this picture, like, expecting some sympathy and literally every comment was like, "Mm, that's some good house beef you've got there. The house is trying to give you beef, Griffin."

Rachel: [laughing] Griffin was in the perfect head space for that. Because I looked and when he told me that, I looked and tried to read his face, like, "Is this striking you as insensitive or funny?" And it was very much funny. [laughs]

Griffin: It was very fucking funny. Um, and yeah. We're just three people and— Three and a half people and like, there's millions and millions and millions of people who live in this state who—

Rachel: And family members! I mean, it is a bummer to have family so far away from us, but we didn't have to run down to, you know, Nonny's house. We knew that, like, that she would have power. Like, I am grateful that, uh, you know, I'm not trying to chase down an elderly relative right now.

Griffin: Yeah, we were able to just kind of take care of ourselves and our neighbors to, you know, the extent of whoever needed it. Um, and yeah. I hope that this episode doesn't come off as like, poor us.

And I hope it doesn't come off as— I don't know. We try to make a positive show here and there are definitely things to be positive about and there are definitely a lot of things that need to change and...

Rachel: I was telling— You know, we've had a lot of people check in with us because this has made national news and I've said like, we are as optimistic as people without running water can be right now. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. Um, hopefully better the next time we record. We'll, you know, have running—

Rachel: [laughing] Running water.

Griffin: We've been taking this one step at a time and it's like, you know, Dad has been texting a lot and, like, checking in and every time I'm like, you know, "We're warm, we're safe, everything's actually turning around and it's great. But we don't have running water and our downstairs smells so bad." And that's that.

Hey, thanks 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.

Rachel: Yeah. And thank you to Maximum Fun, which is just a true community of artists and in that fashion they have been very, uh, sympathetic and flexible with our timeline and our recording schedule and keeping us kind of going, which is important.

Griffin: Hey, if you have friends in Texas, check in on them because, uh, I genuinely think that there is a lot of people who underestimate, sort of, what folks are going through. And this is again, not a plea for sympathy for us. We are doing fine and we'll be okay.

But if you have friends in Texas that you haven't heard from, just check on them and make sure that— Or, I say just Texas. There's a lot of places that got hit hard. Be that community that, you know, can step in and fill the needs that, you know, other places that should be doing it are not.

Rachel: Yeah and I think, to that point, there are still a lot of organizations that need volunteers right now and so if you have the time, that is a great idea. Or if you know of people that have a certain expertise that would be

useful, you know, like, I have heard stories about people driving in. Like, plumbers from out of state coming in to help. It's just like, it's...

Griffin: Well, they're also having to start bringing— Our nanny told us that there's no more plumbing supplies, like, at the hardware stores in town. So, like, there's more people here to do the work than there are actual, you know. Which— We haven't gotten our stuff fixed yet, so hopefully...

Rachel: There is a lot of room to help and there will be for a while.

Griffin: Yeah. So, again, links in the description. Please think about doing what you can and, um, we'll be back next week. We're gonna keep doing the show until the baby gets here, which hopefully will be at a prescribed date and time and not a— [distant from the mic, at the baby] Listen, you listen to me. And not a second early.

Rachel: [laughing]

Griffin: Not a second before! Until we give the all-clear! The green light! And, uh, that's gonna do it. And uh stay safe and, um, thank you for your support and your— All of the worry that you poured our direction over the last week. That means a lot and um, yeah.

Rachel: And thank you, Griffin.

Griffin: And thank you, Rachel. My wife, my beautiful wife.

Rachel: You're great. You're great.

Griffin: You're so great. You haven't been able to lift heavy things or scoop snow or do a lot of...

Rachel: [teasing] Here it comes.

Griffin: ... physical things. But no, your support—

Rachel: Here we go. Here we go.

Griffin: It's not— You've been there. You've been lifting the heaviest thing, which is...

Rachel: Our unborn child?

Griffin: Our unborn child. Who is, not a joke, quite fucking big.

Rachel: The heaviest thing.

Griffin: Alright, bye!

[theme music plays]

MaximumFun.org

Comedy and culture.

Artist owned.

Audience supported.