

## Wonderful! 227: Soup in a McElroy Hat

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[theme music plays]

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

**Griffin:** Hello, Rachel McElroy. My name is Griffin McElroy.

**Rachel:** And this is *Wonderful!*

**Griffin:** Nice to meet you. Nice to... treat you. With—

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** —another episode of our podcast, called *Wonderful!* is the name of it. And it's a show we do every week, and we go— I like to think— pretty freaking hard during the Maximum Fun Drive.

**Rachel:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Griffin:** I mean, we go pretty hard in the paint, I would say, every episode. We leave it all out there. When we finish, we are... dripping with sweat.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Uh-huh, uh-huh.

**Griffin:** Parched.

**Rachel:** We've got water bottles and towels right next to us.

**Griffin:** And we have trainers that spray us with the bottles in our—

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** We, like, open our mouths like, "Ahh," and they spray it in our mouths.

**Rachel:** And they say things like "Happier! More joyous!"

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** "Watch— watch those plosives!" And, um, we could not afford those trainers, 'cause they're very expensive, without the support we receive during the Max Fun Drive. Which there's, like, two days left in for this year's thing, so you are... officially out of time, if you have been thinking about supporting our show and the other shows on the Maximum Fun Network, which you can do by going to [Maximumfun.org/join](http://Maximumfun.org/join), choosing the support level that works with you, that fits into your life and your budget.

Uh, you can check out all the sweet gifts that you get for joining at those different levels. And, uh, just think about how much you are helping us out, and how you are supporting the— the work that you, I'm assuming, enjoy, 'cause you're listening to it right now.

**Rachel:** That was really well done.

**Griffin:** Thank you. It felt a little dispassionate, so let me try again.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** We, uh— we really do rely on your support. It has allowed us to sort of have the— the lives and career that we have now, and making this show is a genuine delight. And we know that it means a lot to a lot of people who listen to it, and so if you are one of those people, and you have the means, and you have never supported the Max Fun network or supported our shows during the Drive, please think about doing it, because it is huge for us. It means everything to us. And also, you get cool stuff. Like at \$5 a month, you get all this bonus content. I think it's over 350 hours of bonus content!

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** It's so much! This year, we talked— Rachel and I watched a couple episodes of *Dharma & Greg* and talked about, and it was a fun—

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** —it was a fun experience, I think, for everyone.

**Rachel:** It really was. It really was. A lot of you know us from our early days of talking about television.

**Griffin:** Yes.

**Rachel:** Uh, which is something that Griffin and I spend a lot of time doing on our own, just, you know, in the evening time.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** And so it was fun to— to break out—

**Griffin:** Expose the world to that.

**Rachel:** Yeah, and break out the old chops.

**Griffin:** And especially for a completely unproblematic show like Dharma...

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** ... and her good beau, Greg.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Oh, [Maximumfun.org/join](http://Maximumfun.org/join) is the link. We're gonna talk a little bit more about it as we go on through this episode. But again, this is the last week for the Max Fun Drive, so if it's something you have been thinking about, please consider supporting us at [Maximumfun.org/join](http://Maximumfun.org/join). Small wondies?

**Rachel:** I'm gonna say, like, uh... chill airplane seat neighbors.

**Griffin:** Oh yeah.

**Rachel:** We are now of the community of parents that fly with children, and it takes a village on an airplane. [laughs]

**Griffin:** It takes a village to at least, like, not be shitheads about it.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** We definitely had our first, like— we were not seated together, which we kind of have to be to make it through this thing, 'cause Gus is at an age where he just wants to party all the time.

**Rachel:** Henry is chill. We could put Henry—

**Griffin:** Henry is chill. He could—

**Rachel:** —anywhere on the plane now. He is...

**Griffin:** He could be copiloting the thing.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** He could— he's— he does not care.

**Rachel:** [laughs] He could sit in an exit row. I'm just gonna say it.

**Griffin:** Wow!

**Rachel:** Yeah, I think he could save—

**Griffin:** Huge responsibility.

**Rachel:** He could save a plane.

**Griffin:** I think he could save a pla— you know that's not what they do in the exit row, right?

**Rachel:** [laughs] I know, but I—

**Griffin:** They're not like, "I'm gonna exit the plane and fix up whatever is happening out there."

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Um... there was one dude who, like— I was like, "I'm so sorry. Would you mind scooting up a row?"

He was trading an aisle seat for a window seat, which in my mind is a pretty equivalent exchange, right?

**Rachel:** Yeah, although you're not on the aisle anymore, are you? [laughs quietly]

**Griffin:** No, but you're not in the middle, are you?

**Rachel:** That's true.

**Griffin:** It wasn't like I was asking this dude— and he gave me the most... *vicious...*

**Rachel:** It was difficult to tell. 'Cause you know how older men like to do this like, "Oh, I'm surly," but kind of in a winky way? I wanted to interpret his surliness as winky. But he did not give us a face that suggested that's what was happening. [laughs]

**Griffin:** No. It's 2022. Like, you can't faux-sur— everyone's surly. You can't be fake surly.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** You're just surly. Anyway. That's not wonderful. What is wonderful is—

**Rachel:** Anyway, he did switch, and he became fast friends with our front seat neighbor.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** Um, but I want—

**Griffin:** Who looked at me and said, "Gotta keep the family together, man."

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** He said, "You gotta keep the family together, man. You made the right call." And I was like...

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** "I n— I didn't need confirmation on that? But I appreciate it."

**Rachel:** Well, and his— his comment suggested, like, a larger, you know, like, psychological belief that I felt like— well, we're just— I mean, we're on a plane. [laughs]

**Griffin:** We're on an airplane, though. But wow, that is— that is special.

**Rachel:** Yeah. No, I was speaking more towards the people who were super chill when we thought, maybe there's too much light. Let's ask these people around us to close their window shades, and then—

**Griffin:** *That'll* make our baby sleep.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Then clearly that did not work.

**Griffin:** No, but they were still very nice about it.

**Rachel:** But they were very nice about it. What's— what's, uh, what's your small wonder?

**Griffin:** [simultaneously] Dairy Queen Blizzards.

**Rachel:** Ohh, okay.

**Griffin:** When we were in Huntington for my Nonny's 90th birthday, and—

**Rachel:** And Griffin's very good commencement speech.

**Griffin:** —and my commencement speech. Thank you, honey. Uh, which I think is still on—

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

**Griffin:** I think you can still find the stream of the 2022 commencement from Marshall, if that's something that you all want to seek out. Uh, and we were just like— me and Justin drove the kids to Dairy Queen to get Blizzards, like, the first day we got there. And I have not had a Blizzard, in... hmm... 25 years? It's been a super, duper, duper long time.

**Rachel:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**Griffin:** And I got, like, a— a cheesecake one.

**Rachel:** Wow.

**Griffin:** Henry and the rest of the kids got a cotton candy one, and they were both scrumdiddlyumptious.

**Rachel:** For me, Oreo all the way.

**Griffin:** Yeah. I mean, I could create that at home, you know what I mean? But I'm not gonna get a cheesecake and chop it up, and then put it into a ice cream treat.

**Rachel:** Okay, okay.

**Griffin:** Um, but I do enjoy— I do enjoy an Oreo. They had, I think, like, a mudslide one with gummy worms and Oreo in it?

**Rachel:** Ew.

**Griffin:** Yeah, that's not, like... there's a lot of things that when they reach cold temperatures, they become unplea— unpleasantly toothsome.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Who goes first this week? I did not— I'm usually pretty good about looking it up, but I did not.

**Rachel:** Oh, I didn't check either. Entirely dependent upon... it is me! [laughs]

**Griffin:** Okay! What do you got?

**Rachel:** Um, so, in honor of the Max Fun Drive, I always feel this, like, dedication to our listeners, and figuring out kind of what is gonna be the content that's gonna feel special.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** Uh, and I decided to go to a, um— a piece of property that our show is dependent on, as you just witnessed, which is *Small Wonder*, the television show.  
[laughs]

**Griffin:** Oh my goodness.

**Rachel:** I will say, we're not dependent on it, but when we talk about small wonders about the beginning of the show, we are referencing the original television show called *Small Wonder*.

**Griffin:** I remember the first time we did that bit, we called it something else. Like, little wonder.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** And then, like, somebody in the Facebook group was like, "Y'all realize you missed a trick here in a pretty major way, right?"

And we were like, "Oh, yeah. There was a TV show called *Small Wonder*."

**Rachel:** Yeah. So I— I actually really did like this.

**Griffin:** I never watched it once in my life.

**Rachel:** Oh, really?

**Griffin:** It's one of those many fines, like *Turbo Teen*, that we reference— or *Dharma & Greg*— that we reference all the time that I am not actually that familiar with.

**Rachel:** Wait, you haven't seen *Turbo Teen*?

**Griffin:** No, I've never seen *Turbo Teen* in my life.

**Rachel:** Wow!

**Griffin:** I just know it's about a teen that when he eats spicy food he turns into a car. That's fucking funny.



**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** There is nothing not funny about that.

**Rachel:** So, *Small Wonder* was of this time period, and I wanted to list some of the other shows to kind of give an example, but *Small Wonder*, 1965 to 1989, was a show about a secret robot who was made to look like a human girl.

**Griffin:** All I remember is I've seen the intro sequence to the show, and there's a part where her face opens up, and it reveals the robot face underneath. And I remember thinking, "[clicks tongue] That's just about the scariest thing I ever did see."

**Rachel:** Yeah. I debated whether or not we needed to include the song as part of the episode. Um, I don't think we do. But you know the song, right?

**Griffin:** I don't think I do.

**Rachel:** It's very, like, snappy.

**Griffin:** Ooh.

**Rachel:** It's like a... "[singing] It's—" er, "[singing] she's a small wonder."

**Griffin:** Wow, that really— that really sent me, honey.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** That really soothed me and relaxed me.

**Rachel:** Um, so in that time period, you also had *Alf*, which we referenced before, an alien living with a family, kept secret.

**Griffin:** Yes.

**Rachel:** Uh, also *Out of This World*, which people often confuse with *Small Wonder*, because it is also about a girl, but it is an alien girl. Uh, that was 1987 to 1991. *Mork & Mindy*, of course, kind of started everybody off.

**Griffin:** That was older, though, right? That was, like, 70—

**Rachel:** Yeah, 78 to 82.

**Griffin:** I watched me a lot— inexplicably, I watched a lot of *Mork & Mindy*.

**Rachel:** It was— I mean, it was on all the time, I feel like.

**Griffin:** It was on all the time, but also it was great. Like, Robin Williams was fucking great in that show.

**Rachel:** Another— another secret alien.

**Griffin:** Yeah, but he wasn't— like, he came out— the people who came over to *Mork & Mindy's* house and weren't, like, "Did he just climb out of a egg? Is that a— is that a real person?"

**Rachel:** And then of course *Quantum Leap*, which isn't really related, but was—

**Griffin:** You just wanted to mention it.

**Rachel:** [laughs loudly]

**Griffin:** Yeah, sure.

**Rachel:** 89 to 93, a secret time traveler.

**Griffin:** Okay. Secret time travel. Okay. So it's like secret sci-fi identity.

**Rachel:** Just the idea of, like— yeah. You have a secret person in your house that has some kind of power that most people don't know about.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** And that was, like, a thing in that time period.

**Griffin:** I will grant the conceit.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** That yes, there were— three makes a pattern, I would say.

**Rachel:** Uh, yeah. So, this show lasted four seasons, which is kind of... crazy.

**Griffin:** How do you get four seasons worth of, like—

**Rachel:** I know.

**Griffin:** "[wavery voice] My batteries!"

**Rachel:** [laughs] Well, and this is— this was kind of true of *Alf*, too. Like, so Vici is just one member of the family. A lot of episodes weren't even really about the fact that Vici was a robot. A lot of them were like, "Oh no, her— her human brother cheated on a test, and now we have to address it." [laughs]

**Griffin:** So it's got that *Young Sheldon* problem. Where it's like, we— we watch—

**Rachel:** Again, a show we've never seen. [laughs]

**Griffin:** We watch— but we watch shows on— I mean, we watch *Survivor* on the CBS Network, and we will get served *Young Sheldon* papers.

**Rachel:** Yeah. [laughs] Don't even include Sheldon.

**Griffin:** And it's just not even about Sheldon. It's like, "Oh, his dad's out there dating again, I guess." And it's like... where's Sheldon?!

**Rachel:** Yeah, I came for Sheldon. [laughs]

**Griffin:** I came here for Sheldon! 'Cause it says his name right on the tin.

**Rachel:** Uh, so I'm gonna get to teach you a lot about this show, because you didn't watch it.

**Griffin:** Okay, fun.

**Rachel:** Uh, Vici is of course an acronym for Voice Input Child Identificant.

**Griffin:** So it's V-I-C-I?

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** Uh—

**Griffin:** Veechee.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** It should be.

**Rachel:** It was actually broadcast around the world, so maybe.

**Griffin:** Maybe in Italy.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Um, ten-year-old girl, was invented by her dad on the show, Ted Lawson, an engineer/inventor for United Robotronics.

**Griffin:** 'Kay.

**Rachel:** Uh, he takes his robot that he created home so it can mature within a family environment.

**Griffin:** That's interesting. I be there's a lot of sort of intrigue there. Where it's like, "You gotta bring her back to the lab. She's— belongs to the government!" The, like—

**Rachel:** Oh. Yeah, no, there's definitely, like, a lot of competitors. There's an episode [laughs quietly] where Russia creates their own robot.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** It's very much of the time. Um, she also has, uh, powers, like superhuman strength and speed.

**Griffin:** Like robots. Current— like, current robots. You've seen the current sort of Boston— Boston Dynamics? Is that the name of the— all their new robots have super strength and speed.

**Rachel:** Okay. [laughs quietly]

**Griffin:** It's pretty great. Move stuff with their mind.

**Rachel:** Uh, and then as Griffin mentioned, there's a lot of features. She's got an AC outlet under her right arm, a data port under her left arm, an access panel in the back. Um, but when the family is asked about her, they say that she is an orphan that they adopted.

**Griffin:** What else do you— what else do you need to know? It's— that's a thing that we're all doing all the time. Just scoopin' up orphans off the streets.

**Rachel:** [laughs] "Where'd she come from?"

"Oh, we adopted her. No big deal. We haven't been talking about it for months. We wanted to surprise you." [laughs quietly]

**Griffin:** "Why is there cappuccino coming out of her elbow?"

"Umm... it's an orphan thing. You would not get it."

**Rachel:** Um, also, much like *Alf*— see, I wanted to blame Small—

**Griffin:** She eats a cat.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** In one episode.

**Rachel:** It was—

**Griffin:** It is not addressed again.

**Rachel:** —a very special episode. Uh, I also— I wanted to blame *Small Wonder* for ripping off *Alf*, but *Small Wonder*, in fact, came out a year before *Alf*.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** Um, but the Lawson family has a bunch of nosy neighbors, so they have to kind of keep her... her secret.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** The neighbors are always like, "Oh, what's going on?" In *Alf* this was, of course, the Ochmoneks. Uh, in *Small Wonder* it is the Brindles.

**Griffin:** But *Alf* didn't have a boy suit, did he?

**Rachel:** No.

**Griffin:** He did not have a— he did not have a boy— you know what I mean?

**Rachel:** No.

**Griffin:** Like, you walk into *Alf's* house at the wrong time, and that's the ball game. At least Veechee had, you know, girl— girl skin. That she had stretched over her sort of cybernetic form.

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** I'm just saying, the stakes are quite— are much lower for her.

**Rachel:** True. True, yeah. I mean, that's the thing. Like... if you found out a neighborhood family, their adopted daughter was actually a robot, like, what would you...

**Griffin:** I'd keep my fucking mouth shut.

**Rachel:** Like, what would you do, really?

**Griffin:** 'Cause you don't know the story there. Right? Like, if they've got a robot daughter, that's gotta make you think that maybe at some point they had a flesh daughter—

**Rachel:** Ohh.

**Griffin:** —and there's a story there that maybe you don't wanna dive into.

**Rachel:** Yeah, right? It's none of your business.

**Griffin:** And maybe in *Alf*, when they found *Alf*, they were— he was replacing a boy that they somehow lost.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Whose name was Ralph.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** But then it turns out, reincarnation.

**Rachel:** Are you writing the reboot right now?

**Griffin:** Yes. It's called *Ralf*. R-A-L-F.

**Rachel:** [laughs] What does the R stand for?

**Griffin:** Really.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Really Alien Life Form.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** Vici can also, uh, shrink. Uh...

**Griffin:** [laughs] Like a robot!

**Rachel:** [laughs] She can channel electricity through her hands. Uh, and she can also, like, download information super fast. For example, there's an episode where she extends the gas mileage on cars. [laughs quietly]

**Griffin:** Just all cars?

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Jeez. Thanks, Vici!

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** She could be— if Vici hadn't been scrapped by DARPA, she would be out here, like, you know, figuring out climate change and everything. Dammit!

**Rachel:** Uh, the actress, Tiffany Brissette, who was, um, cast as Vici, was also, like, a pageant person.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** Uh, who had all these special talents. But her whole job was to appear robotic and speak in a robotic voice, so it was— it was very frustrating for her as an actress.

**Griffin:** Was one of her talents charging appliances with the AC port under her left arm?

**Rachel:** No, it was more like horseback riding.

**Griffin:** And shrinking.

**Rachel:** [laughs] Um, they— so here's the thing that happens with all child actors. You know, after four years, like, Vici— Vici's grown up. And how do they explain that?

**Griffin:** Big wonder.

**Rachel:** How do they explain that? Because it's a robot. Robot's don't typically age. Uh, in the third season, they give Vici an upgrade where they age her face, dress her in modern clothes, and allow her to eat and drink. [laughs quietly]

**Griffin:** Dress her in modern clothes?

**Rachel:** Yeah. See, I couldn't— I didn't see any footage of this. In the first episode she's wearing, like, a red and white dress with a red bow in her hair. Like, very much like a doll. But you know—

**Griffin:** Hey, that's not fucking creepy the most. That's not the most creepiest.

**Rachel:** And she wore that every episode. Like, that was her, like, robot uniform.



**Griffin:** Wow, guys! You're doing a great job fucking cloaking your replacement daughter. Your cyber replacement daughter. Dumb-dumbs.

**Rachel:** In addition to the actress's special talents. [laughs quietly] Uh, her daughter said that she did a... [laughs] a good John Wayne.

**Griffin:** Oh!

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Okay. Did that ever come up in the show?

**Rachel:** No. [sighs]

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** No. Uh—

**Griffin:** She never had, like, a— you know, like a blaster that came out of her hand and... she did the whole, uh... the "Are you lucky— are you lucky today? Hey, man. Are you lucky today?"

**Rachel:** I think you're thinking of Clint Eastwood.

**Griffin:** Who did I say? Clint East— yeah, that's a different guy from—

**Rachel:** Yeah, it's a different guy.

**Griffin:** No, no, sorry. Clint Eastwood had "Do you feel lucky, punk?" John Wayne had...

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** "Hey, man."

**Rachel:** "Do you feel lucky today?"

**Griffin:** "Hey, man. Are you a lucky man today?"

**Rachel:** Um...

**Griffin:** "Let's find with a gun— with my bullet gun."

**Rachel:** [laughs] I don't have a whole lot more to say, but I wanted to talk about some themes. Um, a lot of child services themes. So, as I mentioned, like, the stakes with the neighbors? Not super high. So they would often bring in child services... specifically, like, every season. Of, like, "Oh. Well, why isn't she in school? You have to hire a tutor."

Or like, "Oh, it's her birthday. Are you not doing anything to celebrate her birthday?" So there was a lot of that. Of like, "Oh no! They're here! Let's make her seem like a real girl."

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** Um, there was also a lot of typical 80's things. Like somebody, like, "Oh no! Vici's gonna try... drugs." [laughs quietly]

**Griffin:** Oh, really?

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** How would that even... what would that do to her?

**Rachel:** I don't know. There was an episode about smoking. There was an episode about drugs.

**Griffin:** Wouldn't do anything to her. Wouldn't do anything to her. She's made of metal.

**Rachel:** Well...

**Griffin:** Smoking might, like, get in her, like—

**Rachel:** Yeah, right?

**Griffin:** —ventilate— her ventilators or whatever. Vaping would— vaping would destroy Veechee. Would abso— the little metal flecks in there would absolutely shred her bionics.

**Rachel:** Yeah. Yeah, I mean, I— I— I imagine it's equivalent to, like, when your car catches on fire, right? Like, she could maybe explode.

**Griffin:** That's a thing they never really talk about in that show, either, is that at any moment—

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** —some *malfunction* could cause her to absolutely detonate and destroy the whole house.

**Rachel:** I remember— so, I remember there being tons of episodes of like, "Oh no, Vici's gonna get wet."

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** But the only one I could find was season 3, episode 2, Vici jumps in a pool to save the neighbor.

**Griffin:** How'd you google this?

**Rachel:** Uh, I mean, it—

**Griffin:** Episode of *Little Wonder* where girl... gets wet and explodes?

**Rachel:** There's an episode guide.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** And I just read the synopsis of every episode, like you do.

**Griffin:** I think a better show would've been if they did not reveal to the household viewer that she was a robot until maybe, like, the series finale.

**Rachel:** Ohh. And you're like, what's the deal with this weird girl? [laughs quietly]

**Griffin:** I'm saying in *Growing Pains* when Leonardo DiCaprio just, like, joins the squad for some reason... if at the last episode, you know, a car is about to hit one of them and he, like, stops it with his body.

**Rachel:** Oh, by the way.

**Griffin:** And, like, his— it destroys his hand, but it's just like the cyber frame is underneath it. And you're like, "Oh, shit! This makes sense! A lot of stuff makes sense now!"

**Rachel:** Well, no. *Small Wonder* episode 1, you know...

**Griffin:** They pretty much reveal that she's a robot.

**Rachel:** You know this girl's a robot.

**Griffin:** Okay.

**Rachel:** Um... yeah. I don't know. I really enjoyed the show. I think there— this was the time period— like, I mentioned *Out of This World*, also, like, *Punky Brewster*. there were a lot of, like, shows with—

**Griffin:** Not a alien though, right?

**Rachel:** No. But a lot of shirls— lot of shows with girls...

**Griffin:** Shirl— we call 'em shirls.

**Rachel:** [laughs] A lot of shirl shows. Uh, and that was— that was cool to see, like, as a— as a— as a little girl. Like, "Oh hey, look! There's somebody, you know, like me, and they get their own television show."

**Griffin:** Was she, though?

**Rachel:** I mean, no, not at all! But it was a small person that— that kind of looked like me.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** And it was cool to see that.

**Griffin:** Yeah. Well, you— you did— there was that one time— it was actually our wedding night? When you were like, "Let me slip into something a little more comfortable," and you took off your face.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** And then you had sort of like a Terminator...

**Rachel:** And then I put on my romance face.

**Griffin:** You put on your— yeah.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** It was really nice. Hey, can I, uh, tell you all about the Max Fun Drive?

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** I was about to steal you away. I guess I still can. Come with me.  
[imitates *Home Improvement* theme] [high-pitched moan]

So, uh, Max Fun Drive's going on right now. And it's just going on for a few more days. This is the second and last week of the 2022 Max Fun Drive.

Let's talk about some of those gifties.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** \$5 a month, you get bonus content for all the shows on the network, for the whole fullness of time since we've been doing the Max Fun Drive.

**Rachel:** Yeah. I would encourage those of you who think it's just, like, bonus episodes, there's also some video content on there.

**Griffin:** There's some videos. There's, uh— gosh. I mean, for just our stuff, we're releasing I believe the, like, custom ship worksheet stuff that I made for Ethersea this season. Like, there's— it's a bevy of multimedia content.

**Rachel:** I'm in the middle of listening to the episode where you and your brothers are putting together a hot new television property to pitch to your agent.

**Griffin:** Yeah. That— that one is its— that's a still-evolving story.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** That's— I don't know that I've talked to you about sort of the [holding back laughter] recent developments.

**Rachel:** No. I mean, you told me that there was actual interest, but I have not heard anything since then.

**Griffin:** No spoilies. No spoilies.

**Rachel:** Okay.

**Griffin:** Um, but yeah. I mean, there's a ton of great stuff. A lot of people— we hear sometimes from folks who are like, "Hey, sorry I can only do the bottom level."

Uh, to support us in a material way like that, it means the absolute world. And, uh, it's— you know, that support is really the most important thing. Uh, if you do want to, you know, up it a little bit more, or if you already have a membership and you want to boost it up to the next level, at \$10 a month you get the bonus content. You get a Max Fun membership card. But you will also get to choose a patch, uh, modeled after each of the shows on the Maximum Fun network.

**Rachel:** Yeah, I'm looking at these patches right now. You know, you'd think we would be like "You have to get the *Wonderful!* patch." I— I am all for you getting the patch that you love the most.

**Griffin:** Express yourself.

**Rachel:** And there's a lot of really good ones on here.

**Griffin:** Yeah! Uh, \$20 a month, you get all the stuff in the previous levels, and then you can choose between a Max Fun rocket logo hat, which is very sleek and stylish, or a creativity kit that comes with a bunch of sort of arts and crafts supplies, and a deck of cards that provides sort of creative springboards for different projects that you can do with those projects.

**Rachel:** Yeah, maybe you're not a hat person, you know?

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** Like, for a long time I thought I wasn't a hat person, but it's just 'cause I've got a big head.

**Griffin:** Did I leave my new hat on the airplane? Did it end up in your purse? I'm just now thinking about it. I took it off to entertain the baby on the airplane. Now I am terrified that I did not get my hat off the plane.

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

**Griffin:** It was my new special hat.

**Rachel:** We can— I mean, we can get another one.

**Griffin:** [tearfully] Not like this!

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Um, there's other levels. But really, you know, just go to [Maximumfun.org/join](https://Maximumfun.org/join) and check out the levels and see what you can, uh— see what you, you know, what makes sense for your budget. And, you know, think about helping us out.

I will say that, uh, it has been slow this year, which makes sense. We are in the middle of a, you know, ongoing pandemic, and once—

**Rachel:** We're always in the middle of it. [laughs]

**Griffin:** —once in a generation sort of, uh, uh, inflation situation. We get it. Totally. Uh, but I will also say that this past year has been, uh, challenging and stressful for us, with a newborn and trying to navigate the waters of having a newborn in the midst of a pandemic, and...

**Rachel:** Yeah, and trying to make any kind of future plans to come out and see you all has been difficult.

**Griffin:** That is another major thing. We've had childcare that has fallen through a lot, daycares have closed, and nannies have, you know, left or gotten sick or, you know, any number of things have happened, and it is only because of the support that we have received from you all that we have been able to *mostly*

[laughs quietly] stay on schedule, and not make ourselves completely fucking miserable while doing so.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Uh, that is one-to-one. When you— when you— when you give to the Max Fun network, that is— I am describing to you what happens with that money. Uh, it lets us make the stuff you like without, uh, making us miserable in the process, so.

**Rachel:** [laughs quietly]

**Griffin:** Uh, [Maximumfun.org/join](http://Maximumfun.org/join). Just a few days left. We're not gonna be talking about this any more after this week, so— I mean, until next year. Uh, so please think about going there and— and helping us out.

**Rachel:** Do it— do it right now!

**Griffin:** Yeah, while you're thinking about it. It's very quick and easy. It doesn't take very long at all, and then you can feel good every time you listen to the show, because you are helping to put good stuff out into the world.

**Rachel:** Thanks!

**Griffin:** At least I think our show is good stuff.

**Rachel:** Thanks, Steve. And...

**Griffin:** Thanks, Steve, and Jeremy, and Melissa, and...

**Rachel:** Uh-huh. And Julie.

**Griffin:** And, uh, Jasmine.

**Rachel:** Uh-huh.

**Griffin:** And, uh...

**Rachel:** Bertrand.



**Griffin:** Sue. Hey, do you wanna know my thing?

**Rachel:** Yes.

**Griffin:** Uh, I wanted to talk about— I was gonna talk about a game, and then I realized that I should just talk about the person who makes this game, because he has a career that is truly buck wild. His name is Zach Gage. Uh, and he is a sort of conceptual artist and game developer who is, in my humble opinion, one of the most sort of, like, consistently... like, brilliant game designers currently in the biz.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Uh, and if you play a lot of mobile games but you don't recognize his name immediately, I can pretty much guarantee you've played one of his— his mobile titles. Uh, his biggest ones are *SpellTower*, which came out 11 years ago. More recently he has released *Flipflop Solitaire* and *Really Bad Chess*. Uh, I'll talk about his catalog and what I really like about it in a second, but his history and the route that he took to game development is really fascinating to me.

Uh, he was, like, real— as a kid, he was really into, like, these nascent programming languages. Like Apple Cocoa, which was like a super rudimentary programming language that you could use to make, like, super simple games. Um, so he, like, learned all these programming languages and went to college for a computer science degree, but he got bored with it and got into photography. So he, like, pursued an art degree instead.

Uh, and then he followed that up with getting an MFA at the Parsons School of Design. And I actually first heard about Zach Gage because of a piece that he included in his, like, thesis show that he did for his MFA program, where he made, like, a bunch of different, you know, art projects. And one of them was a game that was called *Lose/Lose*. And it was sort of a retro space shooter looking thing where you had, like, a little ship that you could shoot lasers out of while other alien ships came at you from the top of the screen, right?

But every time that you destroyed an enemy ship, it would delete a random file off of your computer.

**Rachel:** [through laughter] Oh, God!

**Griffin:** And if, uh— if you get destroyed, if your ship touches an enemy ship, the game deletes itself off the computer. Uh, and you could really fuck up your computer, right? Like, if you delete, like, registry files off of your computer, like, it will become... inoperable. And it carried, like, numerous warnings sort of stating that.

Uh, but it made, like, headlines, right? Because that's such a bonkers idea.

**Rachel:** Yeah!

**Griffin:** Uh, I remember writing, I think for *Joystiq*, about how, like, all of these different, like, antivirus software companies, like, had to list it as malware, because, like, you could download the game and, like, really mess up your stuff.

But what was really interesting about the game is that it never provides, like, um— like, instructions or directions telling you to destroy the enemy ships.

**Rachel:** Oh...

**Griffin:** It just puts you into what seems like a pretty familiar looking thing and, like, if you press the button it shoots a laser, but it doesn't say, like, "Hey. Destroy all this stuff."

So it's kind of, like, got a lot to say about, like, the— it's called *Lose/Lose: A Game About Consequences*, and so it's all about, like, real life consequences for the actions that you somewhat arbitrarily choose, that you are kind of programmed to choose because of how you have, like, played similar games in the past.

Uh, and I think objectively speaking that's really cool, and very fascinating, and it absolutely makes sense, like, why that was—

**Rachel:** That's really clever.

**Griffin:** —uh, a big thing that kind of helped him become a name. Um, and then, like, he started to just, like, release some real jams. In 2011, like I said, he released *SpellTower* on iOS, which was kind of a— you played a lot of this game.

**Rachel:** Yeah!

**Griffin:** And I was trying to think of a good way to describe. It's like a word search, kinda, where you have, like, a big stack of letters, uh, and can, like, sort of connect the letters to spell words, and you can make it go sideways, and backwards, and diagonal, and all directions, and—

**Rachel:** But you're trying to, like, get all the blocks.

**Griffin:** You're trying to clear the tiles off of this tower and, like, if the word is a certain length it'll, like, explode the letters near it. And if you use, like, Q or X or Z, it would, like, have some sort of special effect where it would clear it. But it's basically like trying to clear out this whole tower, which means you have to be kind of thoughtful as you near the end that you are leaving yourself enough letter to make enough words.

**Rachel:** Yeah. But it's set up kind of like *Tetris*.

**Griffin:** Sure.

**Rachel:** Like, it's got, like, a real simple interface where you're just kind of— you're playing it like an arcade game, but there's actually letters inside the blocks.

**Griffin:** And like a lot of Zach Gage games, like, it had, like, a really compelling, like, leaderboard sort of thing going for it. And so if your other friends were playing it, it became very easy to kind of, like, track and compete with them in this game. Zach Gage actually did a few interviews when this game, like, became really popular, because it did, where he was talking about, like, he doesn't— he didn't really like word games, really. Like *Scrabble* or *Words with Friends* or anything like that.

**Rachel:** Oh, really?

**Griffin:** But he, like, was fascinated by them, and so he made this game to help, like, understand why people like games like this, and in doing so made, like, one of the best ones of them that I think, even still, has come out.

**Rachel:** I was gonna say, like, his games scratch such an itch—

**Griffin:** Yes.

**Rachel:** —for people that like word games that I just assumed, like, he was, like, a real— like, a— like a Will— Will Shortz.

**Griffin:** He— he's gone on to, like, collaborate with other developers and, like, make other stuff after *SpellTower* came out in 2011. He helped finish up this game called *Ridiculous Fishing* by a studio called Vlambeer, which made a bunch of, like, big iOS games. And this game, *Ridiculous Fishing*, was in, like, development hell. And while they were, like, struggling to finish it, it got basically cloned by other developer. There was this whole, like, speech they gave at GDC about, like, how shitty that felt.

But anyway, Zach Gage was one of the people to help sort of finish development on that. But, like, the thing that I always found interesting about Zach Gage is how he would go on to sort of, um, iterate on classic sort of games, just adding the simplest little tweaks and refinements to make them, like, really, really clever and super slick.

Uh, in 2015 he released a game called *Sage Solitaire*, which I don't know if you ever played.

**Rachel:** No.

**Griffin:** But it kind of combined the rules of Solitaire and poker, where you had, like, stacks of cards, and you would take the top cards off each stack to create poker hands, and you would get points for, like, the better poker hands that you could get.

It was a very simple game, but also, like, one that you could just, like, pick up while you were waiting in line for something. And it would just, like, carry you through, and you would just completely lose track of time.

Um, in 2016 he released *Really Bad Chess*, which I have a very soft spot in my heart for. And literally the premise of *Really Bad Chess* is, it's chess, but all of the pieces are kind of randomized. They start on the two back ranks like in normal chess, but you could have, like, three knights in the front row, and then a couple of queens, and then maybe a pawn, and then, like, four rooks in the back row. But you have the same pieces as the other player does.

So, like, all chess strategy goes out the window, and it's just a question of, like, improvising with this really bad chessboard that you are given. And it was

hysterical, but also, like... I don't know. Chess gets kind of, like, formulaic, inherently. In that there are, like, "Here are the best openings, and you gotta do those if you wanna have the best chance at whatever."

But playing a game where it's like, "Okay. You have nothing but bishops." It's like, okay. This is, uh—

**Rachel:** [through laughter] Yeah.

**Griffin:** Now we're in untread territory. Um, he made *Flipflop Solitaire*, which was just solitaire, except the cards could stack in ascending or descending order.

**Rachel:** Oh.

**Griffin:** Uh, and they could be the same suit. Like, sometimes you could play, like, a one suit game. And so, like, you didn't have to worry about putting red cards on black cards, etc.

**Rachel:** Oh.

**Griffin:** And so, like, it was just solitaire, but with these, like, small tweaks, it made it so that you could pretty much clear it every time. Uh, so then it was like a timed thing, or like—

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** There were all kinds of different modes. Uh, there was *Pocket Run Pool*, which was just like a top-down pool game that made a million of at this point, but it had all these clever mechanics about, like, targeting specific pockets with each shot, and you could get multipliers that would, like, times the number on the ball, and so you had to, like, figure out the best way to route it so that you could get the most points. And, uh, there was...

My favorite game that he has made is called *Good Sudoku*. It's literally just sudoku. I think I've talked about it on this show before, 'cause it came out in 2019, I think. It's just sudoku, but it provides, like, tips and lessons, and all of these, like, quality of life shortcuts that make it possible to tackle, like, really hard sudoku problems.

**Rachel:** Yeah. That's so clever!

**Griffin:** And that's all it is! Right? It's literally just sudoku that is kind to the player.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** And, like, wants— wants the player to, like, get invested. And it taught me about the beauty of sudoku in a way that, like, I never would have done if it was just, like, me and a book that, like, didn't tell me how to do the shit.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Griffin:** Uh, and his most recent game that I just hooked up Rachel on— I think it just came out last week— is called *Knotwords*, with a K. Uh, and it's just like a super dense, very small crossword puzzle. And when I say dense, I mean, like, all the words are kind of stacked up, so you have to, like, form the words so that they make words both vertically and horizontally and just, like— it would be impossible if it weren't for the fact that there was also, like, some sudoku style, like, segments of the puzzle that tell you the letters that go in those segments. So you kind of have to piece it together both ways. And it's really hard, but also I cannot— I cannot put it down.

**Rachel:** Yeah. Yeah, so the idea is that, like, there's different sections of the board, and they give you the potential letters for that sections. And so you have to kind of build out, like, "Okay. Well, there's only two letters that could go here, so what two letters would work?" And then that helps you figure out the next section. Um, and it's— I don't know. It's really fun.

**Griffin:** It's really fun, and it's super compelling. And it represents, uh, my favorite thing in games, which is, like, taking this super familiar thing and figuring out how to make it either, like, new and fresh, or at the very least, like, approachable to people who— who have never really gotten into the thing before.

Like *Good Sudoku*. Like, I love sudoku now, and I didn't before, because there wasn't, like, a well-packaged sort of... you know, user-friendly sudoku experience. And that is, like, the exact type of thing that he is able to make. Like, how do you... it's obviously, like, sort of the most embellished and most preposterous of his games, but *Really Bad Chess* is like, you can't iterate on chess, 'cause it's chess. Like, it's *chess*. It's been chess for the last... thousand years or whatever.

Uh, but he, just by saying, like, "Well, what if all the pieces were randomized, and it was inherently kind of stupid?" Like, that's fun! And that's really clever, and that is, like, the exact type of thing that I like in games.

Um, and so yeah. I wanted to talk about Zach Gage, because his games are, like, consistently good. Like, any time I hear about, oh— I don't play a lot of iOS games anymore, because I think that the market got, like, crazy oversaturated with garbage.

**Rachel:** Well, and everything is like... pay focused.

**Griffin:** Sure, yeah. I like— I have enjoyed Apple Arcade, which is the new sort of, like, subscri— I say "new." I think it came out, like, three years ago. It's a subscription-based thing where the games are not, like, filled with in-app purchases and all this stuff. And so, like, if a good game hits that, I will dip into it. But if I hear there's a new Zach Gage game out, like, I run, not walk, to—

**Rachel:** [laughs] Yeah.

**Griffin:** —to go and download it, because, uh, it's— it's just always gonna— always gonna hit the spot, you know? Uh, so yeah. If you've never played any of his games, I highly recommend it. I highly recommend *Good Sudoku* to everyone. I think it's so good, and will teach— it is— it is educational, almost, more than anything else, in that it shows you why this game is really, really good in a way that maybe has never been— never been revealed to you.

And... that's it, yeah?

**Rachel:** Yeah!

**Griffin:** Do you wanna give the last sort of impassioned plea here for the Max Fun Drive? Our last one for *Wonderful!* for this year, so no pressure.

**Rachel:** Yeah. I mean, something I say every year, and I believe your brother Justin has said too, is that, like, you know, we make a lot of impulse purchases and put money towards things that aren't lasting, and that don't necessarily matter to us past the day that we consume them.

But I think this is a real opportunity to give to something that is important to you, and that you feel like you will continue to use and has made a real difference. And

so we like to give that opportunity and say "Hey, you know, we're gonna do this. You know, and we want it to be important to you, and if it is, it would be great if you could... give to it."

**Griffin:** Yeah. It's— it's [Maximumfun.org/join](http://Maximumfun.org/join). Uh, please think about joining. We— we could— we could use the help, honestly. We have a goal to hit 20,000 new and upgrading members that we are well shy of.

**Rachel:** [through laughter] Yeah.

**Griffin:** Uhh, which again we— you know, those goals, we try to be ambitious with. Uh, and last year was the first year that we've ever missed that goal, and if we don't get a sort of groundswell, I would say, in the next few days, it may happen again this year.

**Rachel:** Yeah. And if you're not able to give at this time, we totally understand. Um, we appreciate that it is not an easy time for a lot of people.

**Griffin:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** Um, but if that's the case, we encourage you to at least share— share the Max Fun Drive with somebody who you think might be interested.

**Griffin:** Yeah. With, like, a rich uncle.

**Rachel:** [through laughter] Yeah.

**Griffin:** Go to your, uh, wrench— wrench uncle. Not your wrench uncle. The one who works at the autobody shop, and both of his arms are just big wrenches.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Uh, I mean your rich— your rich uncle, who owns the autobody shop.

**Rachel:** These both sound like 80's television shows.

**Griffin:** Wrench uncle sounds like an 80's television show?

**Rachel:** [laughs] Uh-huh. I like it.



**Griffin:** Alright. Yeah, we could— we could make something happen there.

**Rachel:** [through laughter] Uh-huh?

**Griffin:** Maximumfun.org/join. Thank you all so much. Thanks to the Maximum Fun network. 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.

And, um... just keep it— please keep it... go— keep it movin', you know?

**Rachel:** Yeah!

**Griffin:** Keep that— keep those gears a-tur— we're both— we both have our heads cocked at, like, a—

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** —I would say an 80-degree angle, looking at each other, for no—is it just because the microphones got in the way?

**Rachel:** Sometimes I like to rest my big head on my shoulder.

**Griffin:** Yeah. All of our— our children do that a lot, too.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Sometimes Henry's ear will just be bright red and I'll be like, "What's going on?" And then I'll realize he was just kind of, like...

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** Just kind of taking a breather of holding— holding the tremendous weight that we have sort of bestowed upon him.

**Rachel:** I got to see your dad's hat collection, by the way. And I— and more than the sheer volume of hats... [laughs] I was impressed by the fact that he had that many hats that fit him. [laughs]

**Griffin:** Yeah. It's the sheer volume of the hats, but also the sheer volume of each hat—

**Rachel:** [laughs]

**Griffin:** —is truly tremendous.

**Rachel:** You could— you could mix salad in our hats.

**Griffin:** You could make a soup. In a ha— in a McElroy hat. Let's leave them with that mental image.

**Rachel:** Let's leave it at that!

**Griffin:** Goodbye.

**Rachel:** [laughs]

[theme music plays]

[chord]

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