

Wonderful! 179: The Sogmaster

Published May 5th, 2021

Listen here on themcelroy.family

[theme music plays]

Rachel:

Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin:

Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel:

And this is Wonderful!

Griffin:

It's Sweep's Week, baby. Time for the big guns. That's right, this week, we're talking about our favorite guns.

Rachel:

[laughs] Griffin is wearing an elaborate costume—

Griffin:

Yes.

Rachel:

In honor of Sweep's Week.

Griffin:

Mm-hmm.

Rachel:

Unfortunately, you won't be able to see it.

Griffin:

Well I'm a fun man.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

I'm, my name is Max Fun.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

And I love to boogie board.

Rachel:

Oh my gosh, why haven't they done that?

Griffin:

I love boogie board and tapas 'cause I'm Max— Maximilian Funsberg.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

And today, today we're kicking off the Max Fun drive. Well, the Max Fun drive's been going on since Monday, but we're kicking it off.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

In our own special way...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

whatever day this episode goes up because we're recording it late 'cause our infant baby, let's just say, not a team player in a lot of ways.

Rachel:

Mm-hmm. Not like brother Printer.

Griffin:

Not like brother Printer, not like rug.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Not like lamp and lamp two.

Rachel:

Mm-hmm.

Griffin:

Like there's a lot of elements in the studio that are all coming together to create a cohesive whole and Gus is not one of them.

Rachel:

No.

Griffin:

I would say he is... drains a lot of our ability to do the show both literally and figuratively, but also, he makes it tough to record. Is he, is he moving around... we're watching him in a baby monitor right now. This is so not ideal recording circumstances, but we're gonna...

Rachel:

He's okay right now.

Griffin:

We're gonna carry on and be brave and put on a brave face and talk to you about the Maximum Fun drive 'cause it's a special time of year for us where we ask you if you enjoy, uh, this show and other shows on the Max Fun network to consider, uh, becoming a member and supporting us so that we can grow our shows and continue, you know, making 'em our livelihoods.

Rachel:

Yeah, no, it, it makes a huge difference for our show and all the shows on the network. It is audience supported and so once a year we say, "Hey, we really want you to be part of our Max Fun family."

Griffin:

Yes.

Rachel:

And you get all sorts of cool stuff if you do.

Griffin:

That's true, you got bonus content, you get other awesome gifts and stuff.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

We're gonna talk, we're gonna talk more about them as we go on, but the link is maximumfun.org/join, uh, and then you can choose which shows that you want to, uh, directly support and, uh, yeah, we, we would appreciate you checking out that link. If you like our show, we know it's a weird and still not great time for a lot of folks coming out of, uh, a pandemic, by which I mean still being very much in the pandemic-

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

And we fully understand that. It's been rough on us as well not being able to, you know, tour or, you know, do a lot of things that were integral to our,

our, uh, careers. But, uh, yeah, if you, if you can, if you're able, uh, you feel the spirit move you, maximumfun.org/join.

Do you have any small wonders?

Rachel:

I do and I know that I talk a lot about ice cream on this show.

Griffin:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Rachel:

But, uh, Benjamin and Gerald...

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

...have created a, uh, a dairy free ice cream.

Griffin:

Yes.

Rachel:

Uh, that is remarkable.

Griffin:

Several, several, I mean, all of their essentially core Benjamin and Gerald flavors are represented here, like the whole spectrum, Phish Food, Chunkie...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Chunkie Hubby, all that, all the, all the jammers.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

You can get 'em all in dairy free format.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Which is excited for you 'cause you're living a dairy free life right now.

Rachel:

Yeah, just kind of in a precautionary way, uh, as, uh, we mentioned, uh, Gus is a angry baby.

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

And so I decided I'll sacrifice more to please him. [laughs]

Griffin:

Yeah, yeah. Uh, so, that's, that's exciting. I've been eating the regular straight up Benjamin and Gerald for the first time in my life 'cause I've never really... I talked about this with you off, off mic...

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

In that we were very much a, like, a mom would buy a three quart tub of like...

Rachel:

Of course she would.

Griffin:

Of like some sherbet or like just basic ass—

Rachel:

Can you imagine buying individual pints for a family of three boys? [laughs]

Griffin:

Yeah, no, you're right. All we deserved was vanilla Breyers was essentially what we had.

Rachel:

I just think, I mean, if you wanted to wear clothes and have ice cream—

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

I feel like you have to cut costs somewhere.

Griffin:

That's a fair point. Um, I'm gonna say Enfamil Gas Drops. I talked about 'em on Vem Bam, they're really good at what they do. You can give as much as you want to a baby that farts a lot and the farts make him angry and we give the drops to Gus and he chills out a little bit.

Rachel:

You're saying Enfamil, but I think it's, uh...

Griffin:

Oh, Enfamils the, uh...

Rachel:

That's formula.

Griffin:

That's a formula. What is it called?

Rachel:

It's Mylicon.

Griffin:

Mylicon, yeah.

Rachel:

Mm-hmm.

Griffin:

They, uh, it smells good. It smells like candy. I've been curious to try it myself. I'm a man who...

Rachel:

Yeah, what would that... gosh, if that worked—

Griffin:

What would it do? What would it do to me?

Rachel:

If that worked for you? [laughs]

Griffin:

There's stuff, um, that you can pour in like for hot tub pool maintenance that like if it gets sudsy, bubbly, you pour like a few drops of this thing in it and it just kills the, the bubbles on top. I wonder if that's what's going on with, with this, uh, this medicine for babies.

Rachel:

Oh.

Griffin:

But anyway, just any sort of foot hold we can get...

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

[laughs] ...on making our child less of a, um, like just a broken car alarm, uh, the, the better it is for us.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Um, yeah. We've, we've both been at this sort of manic late night sleepover energy vibe for like two straight weeks now.

Rachel:

Mm-hmm.

Griffin:

And it's fun, like, it's fun to talk to you in this state, but I also recognize that I shouldn't be making like major life decisions or—

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

I shouldn't be getting any tattoos right now...

Rachel:

Yeah, yeah.

Griffin:

...because my mind is like on whatever the opposite of the limitless pill is.

Rachel:

Griffin has had to go to the bank for weeks now and we just keep thinking maybe tomorrow will be the day.

Griffin:

All right, let's get real. I had a few days in a row where I was like, "I'm gonna take a shower today."

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

And I didn't. Uh, it's been... hygiene's not been, I would say, a top priority around here.

Rachel:

No.

Griffin:

Um, and that's... we're a stink household and that's fine 'cause sleep is above stink in my heart and my head.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

Um, do you wanna go first or should I? 'Cause it's been so long since that has been a factor.

Rachel:

I would like for you to go first actually.

Griffin:

I'll go first this week and again, we are switching to a one topic per person format, uh, for the time being, uh, until things become less hectic around here, but I am gonna kick things off by talking about... and this is a sort of holistic coverage that I like to do in my journalism. Um, I wanna talk about Cap'n Crunch.

Rachel:

Whoa.

Griffin:

Yeah, and it's been awhile since I've eaten Cap'n Crunch, which you probably know 'cause I'm not a big cereal head. The only cereal I really eat is Honey Bunches of Oats 'cause I tell myself, like, this is healthy for me, when it's, it's probably not.

Rachel:

It has oats.

Griffin:

And today, today I did do the thing where I poured it and, uh, the box ran out, and there's only like half a bowl in there, so I did put some ancient Cinnamon Toast Crunch that we have in our cabinet for some reason...

Rachel:

Mm-hmm.

Griffin:

As like, you know, sprinklings.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

And it improved the Honey Bunches of Oats dramatically.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

But, man, when I was a kid, I loved Cap'n Crunch and I, uh, I'm not... I don't even wanna talk about the, the pleasurable eating experience of Cap'n Crunch as much as that it like represents this bonkers world of over marketing and world building...

Rachel:

Yes.

Griffin:

... that exists especially within the cereal space.

Rachel:

Yes.

Griffin:

And especially during like the 80s and 90s that I find so fucking funny and fascinating and so that's, that's, that's the subject of my coverage today.

Rachel:

Yeah, and I wanted to quickly say for, for cereal enthusiasts that somehow listen to our show and not the Empty Bowl, I would encourage you to check out the Empty Bowl.

Griffin:

Yes, uh, the world's premiere cereal podcast.

Rachel:

Yes. [laughs]

Griffin:

Um, so, Cap'n Crunch, the, the flavor and, like, actual... cereal-ass cereal that you put in your bowl was developed by a flavorist named Pamela Low in 1963, and she based the... how would you describe the flavor of Cap'n Crunch 'cause I hadn't thought about it until I read this.

Rachel:

I haven't had Cap'n Crunch in a very long time...

Griffin:

It's been awhile.

Rachel:

... because, like, any time I have a sugar cereal it comes in that variety pack, you know?

Griffin:

Right.

Rachel:

And you don't see Cap'n Crunch in that variety pack.

Griffin:

You don't. Under represented. A lot of Cocoa Puffs.

Rachel:

Yeah, yeah, uh, I mean, I'm just thinking like a, a sugar. [laughs]

Griffin:

It's based on a recipe that Pamela Low's grandmother made, uh, that was basically just brown sugar and butter powered over rice. Isn't that interesting? Like I bet that would be good as hell.

Rachel:

Yeah, it sounds like a little like, like porridge-y.

Griffin:

A little porridge-y, yeah, so that's, that is what the flavor is based on and then, uh, a guy named Robert Rountree Reinhart Sr.

Rachel:

Love it.

Griffin:

That's really good, led an R and D team to manufacture, like, Cap'n Crunch the cereal based on this, this flavoring and in doing so, came up with a new, like, cereal technique that kind of changed the game where the flavor of Cap'n Crunch is the... that flavor payload is delivered via an oil coating on the cereal itself, uh, and that's what helps keep it crunchy for, for so long,

but it was sort of the first cereal of its kind where like the flavor was not baked into the thing, it was coated onto the thing after...

Rachel:

Oh, okay.

Griffin:

...the crunch 'ems were, were created. Uh, Pamela Low also helped make the flavors for Mounds, Almond Joys and Heath Bars. Well done—

Rachel:

Wow, Pamela!

Griffin:

Well done, Pamela. Um, that's great. What I love about Cap'n Crunch though is that Quaker Oats had this whole marketing plan and a character mascot and a name and a story put together well before the cereal itself had been developed.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

That's what's amazing to me about Cap'n Crunch is that Quaker Oats knew they were gonna have this fucking tiny 18th century Naval Cap'n and a little, a little bicorn hat, uh, who's name, by the way, is Horatio Magellan Crunch, as the mascot, for inter-cereal, here— Like, someday we'll have a cereal that will live up to this, this gentleman's name.

Rachel:

See, now who is this for? Right? Like, like the Trix bunny and the, the Dig 'Em Frog—

Griffin:

Right.

Rachel:

Like that's, that's for kids, right?

Griffin:

Right.

Rachel:

But the ship captain...

Griffin:

There's something that speaks to an adult with that, right?

Rachel:

[laughs] Yes.

Griffin:

Oh, oh, naval combat!

Rachel:

Yes.

Griffin:

Interesting.

Rachel:

Like I, I support our troops. [laughs]

Griffin:

Not only, not only like do they love that mascot so much, they love him so much that they made his name...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

...the cereal name which is wild 'cause it's not called Trix Rabbit.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

It's not called Lucky the Leprechaun.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

And the only other thing you get like this is like what? Boo Berry, Count Chocula where it's like the character is the thing...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

I cannot thing... Smacks, I think Smacks the Frog was the— but it wasn't named... anyway, Smacks the Frog was named after Smacks the cereal, I think we can all agree about that.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

But Cap'n Crunch was, uh, the, the creation of the...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

...Quaker Oats marketing team and...

Rachel:

I never thought about that.

Griffin:

Because it's patently bonkers. Who does that? Who makes that decision? It's the wildest shit ever.

Rachel:

Yeah, like I wanna eat this man. [laughs]

Griffin:

Exactly so, uh, this is my favorite paragraph I've ever read. It's from the wiki article about Cap'n Crunch.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

"According to the Wall Street Journal, the character, Horatio Magellan Crunch captains a ship called The Guppy and was born on Crunch Island—"

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

"A magical island off the coast of Ohio and in the sea of milk with talking trees, crazy creatures and a mountain, Mount Crunchmore, made out of Cap'n Crunch cereal. The article refers to Captian's bicorn as a Napoleon style hat—"

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

"And claims that this has led to speculation that he may be French. According to Crunch Facts, a website dedicated to the mascot, Horatio Crunch has a perfect 200 IQ."

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

Why do we need this much?

Rachel:

Uh, there's a lot there. There's, there's the island, which I'm very interested in—

Griffin:

Yes.

Rachel:

Because that suggests that there are maybe other mascots to come from that island.

Griffin:

From Crunch Island.

Rachel:

Mm. Mm-hmm.

Griffin:

Yes, um, I mean there is, there are more characters that I'm gonna get into here a little bit later, but...

Rachel:

Um, also, off the coast of Ohio?

Griffin:

Yeah, I think that's fun.

Rachel:

That's just fun.

Griffin:

I think that's fun, I like that.

Rachel:

That's just fun. [laughs]

Griffin:

Uh, the original tagline for the commercials, for the cereal, like, they had such a strong premise. This is a small man in a bicorn hat, his name's Cap'n Crunch, you're gonna love his cereal.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

The original tagline that they used in commercials was it's got corn for crunch, oats for punch and it stays crunchy even in milk. That's a fucking mouthful, Quaker Oats.

Rachel:

That is, that's a big thing—

Griffin:

That's a swing and a miss.

Rachel:

That was a big thing for cereal like, like your ability to maintain your integrity in milk was just...

Griffin:

Right. Chex, I remember Chex—

Rachel:

Number one.

Griffin:

This is the only thing Chex, Chex and, uh, Chex Mix and staying crunchy was like the only thing Chex had to hang its hat on.

Rachel:

It's kind of like M&M's, the whole melt in your mouth, not in your hand, it's just like "our product is not defective and we're telling you that from minute one."

Griffin:

Another thing about his outfit is that he has bars, like, uh, officer signifying bars on his jacket...

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

Uh, and four bars is captain, but he's also been depicted with one bar, which would make him an Ensign, or an Ensign, I never really sure how to say that word. Uh, he's also been shown with three bars, which is a commander. So, I don't actually think this dude...

Rachel:

Oh.

Griffin:

Like, went to the naval aca— or served. I think this is stolen valor.

Rachel:

Um, that is interesting 'cause they created this character with this rich backstory but then they couldn't be bothered to actually— [laughs]

Griffin:

To figure out... right.

Rachel:

Get him the appropriate credit.

Griffin:

So, so you mention what other characters came out of the Crunch Island.

Rachel:

Yes.

Griffin:

There, there is a whole Crunchiverse, uh, here. Uh, Cap'n Crunch had a crew of children that worked on the Guppy named Alfie, Brunhilde, Carlisle and Dave and together they helped fight off Jean LaFoote, which is a pun on Jean Lafitte which was an old pirate guy, I guess, and Jean LaFoote was a pirate who wanted to steal the Cap'n Crunch cereal...

Rachel:

There it is.

Griffin:

...from the Guppy. There was also a story arch in the 80s where an alien, like, species called the Soggies came to earth and they wanted to sogify everything.

Rachel:

That sounds familiar to me.

Griffin:

Uh, they are, there was a leader called the Sog Master who, who led... and they're basically little blobs of sentient milk, uh, which is horrifying, but Cap'n Crunch obviously was able to hold them off with their incredibly resilient cereal. Um, it's just so much. It's so much...

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

There's so much lore here, and Cap'n Crunch is not the only one to like have all this. Like, look into Toucan Sam and his family and his adventures and the, the trials and tribulations that Toucan Sam has gone through.

Rachel:

Mm-hmm.

Griffin:

It's its own cinematic universe.

Rachel:

Mm-hmm.

Griffin:

But for whatever reason, Cap'n Crunch, like, it was plot forward. It was plot first, cereal second and to, to a degree that I do not believe any other cereal has accomplished.

Rachel:

Now, do you have any intel on the Crunch Berries?

Griffin:

Oh, Rachel, that is the next...

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

The exact next bit here that I've prepared. Cap'n Crunch came out in 1963, four years later, 1967, Quaker Oats was like actually, all of this yellow cereal is boring.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

And so crunch berries were born and they were just red starting out and they were just little red spherical bits floating around.

Rachel:

Now, I don't think I have had the crunch berry.

Griffin:

Oh, the crunch berry is exceptional. Over the years, different colors of crunch berry were added, then they started doing like weird little crunch berry clusters for awhile, and then, Quaker Oats said fuck it, we're doing all berries, how are we gonna market this one though?

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

'Cause we're essentially excising Cap'n Crunch.

Rachel:

Oh, I didn't realize this was a Cap'n Crunch thing. I always thought Oops All Berries was... I don't know, wasn't, wasn't affiliated, I guess.

Griffin:

Wild, so you thought that just the name of a cereal that came out... this is wild, I don't know how you get there because it's like, it can't be like Oops, Fruity Pebbles!

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

Because then what's the oops about? Like there has to be something, there has to be a mistake that was made.

Rachel:

Well, I knew, I knew that it came from like a, uh, a head cereal, like it was a spin off...

Griffin:

Right.

Rachel:

I just didn't know what the spin off was.

Griffin:

Of Cap'n Crunch—

Rachel:

Mm-hmm.

Griffin:

Yeah, it was, it's... and it—

Rachel:

They so successfully excised the captain that I, like, had forgotten about his existence.

Griffin:

Right, and the plot was that there was an uh-oh at the Cap'n Crunch factory, I guess...

Rachel:

Yeah, yeah.

Griffin:

...and it just made the crunch berries and people went absolutely wild. This was such a big part of my childhood and, um, as, as such, I feel like we've all said the words Oops! All Berries out loud so many times that it's lost...

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

...sort of the novelty.

Rachel:

Yeah, yeah.

Griffin:

But, uh, I would encourage everybody to kind of like purge that from your mind and try to think with the child's eyes that there was a product put out there called...

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

...Oops! All Berries and how incredible that is.

Rachel:

I wanna return to M&Ms and suggest what if they had taken peanut M&Ms and just gotten rid of the M&Ms and just said, oops, all peanuts.

Griffin:

Oops! All peanuts.

Rachel:

It's just a bag of peanuts. [laughs]

Griffin:

This is also what's weird, 'cause there's kind of a Mandela effect thing happening here where I, I genuinely remember all the great times I had eating Oops! All Berries, but it was introduced in 1998 and discontinued the following year.

Rachel:

Wow.

Griffin:

And it's only come back for like little short runs, like seasonally. I definitely did a Vine where I ate Oops! All Berries, like, in Austin, so this was like you know, 2013-2014 maybe, and I was eating them and I said, like, you do not need to apologize for this. I remember making that vine. So like, I know it came out again at some point.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

But it's just like... it's not like, uh, your off core buddy. Like, it's just like there for you sometimes and it was only there for one year in my childhood.

Rachel:

Wild.

Griffin:

When I was 11 years old.

Rachel:

Yeah, 'cause I, like, Oops All Berries, like that, that is... that is a touchstone.
[laughs]

Griffin:

Yeah, I know, I think that...

Rachel:

Some people of an older generation have the moon landing.

Griffin:

Yeah, for us it was...

Rachel:

And we—

Griffin:

Oops! All Berries. [crosstalk] Twix tried to chomp that flavor a bit, 'cause Twix started to do like oh no we put two left Twix in the same packaging—

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Get the fuck out of here.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

'Cause you don't have the courage to actually make... if you had done one where it's just like oops, all you get is a bag of caramel.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

Then maybe we could, maybe we could talk, but you don't have the, the courage of your convictions to stand by that and Cap'n Crunch does. I just love it. It's a marketing forward food product.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

It's a mascot forward food product and that, I cannot, I genuinely can't think of another example of, of a food product that is so lore centric. You feel like you are eating the cereal version of the cartoon Cap'n Crunch.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

Which I love and I think is amazing.

Rachel:

That is incredible.

Griffin:

Yeah, thank you. Um, hey, can we talk about the Max Fun drive for just like a second? For just like a little bit, maybe we can tell folks about like some of the great gifts they can get if they become members?

Rachel:

All right.

Griffin:

Do you wanna tell them what they get if they just join at the, the, the starting level of five bucks a month and become a Max Fun High fiver. What do they get?

Rachel:

Okay, so this is an incredible entry point, right? Some people are just like, "Here's a sticker and we're gonna mail it to you." But, with Max Fun, you get, uh, over 200 hours of bonus content from all of the shows.

Griffin:

Yes.

Rachel:

So you'll get a link, you'll be able to listen to all of this additional content, a lot of people are saying, "I'm all caught up on my favorite shows, what do I do?" Well, not anymore.

Griffin:

If you're a one...

Rachel:

200 hours. [laughs]

Griffin:

If you're a Wonderful fan, which I assume you are, uh, for our episode this year, uh, Rachel made a character for Dungeons and Dragons [laughs] which is not her...

Rachel:

No.

Griffin:

Wheelhouse.

Rachel:

I have never played, uh...

Griffin:

Nor expressed any interest in playing.

Rachel:

No, and, and I had absolutely no knowledge going in. And so Griffin walks me through the process with his masterful hand.

Griffin:

Thank you.

Rachel:

Uh, and uh, I created a, a character and then we, we, we play for a second at the end.

Griffin:

For like 15 seconds.

Rachel:

And it was thrilling.

Griffin:

It was...

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

I think you get it, I genuinely think you get it now. Uh, yeah, if you're a fan of Adventure Zone, we played a one shot that Justin's, uh, oldest daughter, Charlie, created, uh, that is hysterically funny and amazing and good. You get everything from this year and all years past.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

So, it's, it, it... a lot of people like weirdly apologize, like, I'm sorry that five bucks is all I can do. It's amazing that you would come out and support us at all...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

...in any way, uh, like it genuinely means the world and also, I think you get, like, the best shit. Like, you get so much bonus content...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

And a lot of it is, like, really, really wonderful stuff.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Um, if you wanna step it up, though, \$10 a month, you can become a friend of the family and you get the bonus content, every time you move up a level you get the stuff from the previous ones. You get a letter press Max Fun membership card, uh, that you can show off to make new friends, I guess. Um, but also, you can choose one of 38 enamel pins designed by Megan Lyn

Cott, who has made pins for us, uh, for the past few years. This year for Wonderful, it's a porcupine, holding a pumpkin and it says try it.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

[laughs]

Rachel:

Very recent episode of Wonderful—

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

...where Griffin talked about the porcupine.

Griffin:

Ah, yeah.

Rachel:

Uh, but you're welcome to choose any pin you want. There are a lot of really great ones. Uh, actually you know what's funny, uh, I think it's Janet Farney has a pin that says, "Hey Wonderfals." And I was like oh—

Griffin:

Oh, okay.

Rachel:

Well that one works, too. [laughs]

Griffin:

Yeah, you can, you can sort of get two birds with one stone there. That's amazing. Uh, do you wanna tell folks about 20 bucks a month? The diamond friendship circle?

Rachel:

Okay, so \$20 a month, you get the take a minute tea kit. Uh, it is a beautiful tall tea tin [laughs] that holds loose leaf tea, tea bags, dice, pins, whatever, and then, uh, there's a special blend of loose leaf interstellar orange tea, uh, which you can drink hot or cold. Uh, and then a rocket strainer and tray for you to enjoy your tea, uh, in the little strainer and it's just a really lovely little tea kit.

Griffin:

I want this. Maybe this is what will actually finally get me into tea.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

Is this, is this... but you also get one of the 38 enamel pins, you get the letter press Max Fun membership card, you get the bonus content. Um, there's other levels on top of that but we'll, we'll, we'll stop there for now, uh, and just say that, uh, the support you all have shown us over the years, uh, particularly when we, you know, changed directions pretty dramatically from, from Rose Buddies and started doing Wonderful has meant the world to us and has genuinely changed our lives, um, you know, I was doing shows before, but now this has become, like, a pretty major part of mine and Rachel's like, life, and that's... it's amazing.

I can't describe it really in, in, in such a short amount of time, but it's a genuinely life changing thing. This is a big part of my life now and that's only true because of the growth that we've been able to do because of the support we've gotten in Max Fun drives past.

So, thank you all so much, Maximumfun.org/join is the link if you wanna become a member. Uh, you, you choose the level you wanna join at, you select what shows you listen to and your money goes directly to those shows and, um, think about it. Think about it, please.

Rachel:

Yeah, and I would encourage you to select all the shows you listen to. You know, I think a lot of times people think oh, I'm only giving \$5, I don't wanna, you know, spread it out too thin, but it's really important, I think, for all the shows in the network that you listen to and enjoy to, to get represented in your donation.

Griffin:

Yeah, absolutely. Maximumfun.org/join. Thank you.

Griffin:

Do you wanna do your topic?

Rachel:

Okay, so my topic is an exciting topic.

Griffin:

Okay.

Rachel:

But you don't have to take my word for it.

Griffin:

Mm-hmm. What?

Rachel:

Does that do anything for you? That's a little hint.

Griffin:

I'm excited, but I don't know what that means.

Rachel:

Reading Rainbow.

Griffin:

Oh, okay.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

No, I don't know that I, that I sort of got enough Reading Rainbow exposure to...

Rachel:

Oh.

Griffin:

I mean, I definitely watched Reading Rainbow but it's, it's not something I've returned to, uh—

Rachel:

There was, there was a little thing, you know, where the kids would recommend the book...

Griffin:

Okay, right, yes...

Rachel:

Mm-hmm.

Griffin:

Now I remember this part of Reading Rainbow.

Rachel:

Yeah, I, I loved the show. I loved the show as a kid, um, because unlike, you know, like Sesame Street or a lot of, like, PBS shows it didn't focus on literacy, it just focused on like actual love of book and narrative...

Griffin:

Right.

Rachel:

You know? And so they would, they would bring books and they would walk you through the story and then LaVar Burton would go on little field trips and like show you, like, oh, this book's about dinosaurs and so we're going to a dinosaur park.

Griffin:

Um, I'm not on soci, is... but I know I know people have been talking about LaVar Burton, is he—

Rachel:

He's the new Jeopardy host, yeah.

Griffin:

Permanently or just like for a little bit?

Rachel:

I mean, he's been announced as the new host.

Griffin:

That's cool.

Rachel:

So hopefully for a while I think.

Griffin:

All right, that's neat.

Rachel:

Yeah. So I did a little, uh, research, there's a great Mental Floss article on the oral history of Reading Rainbow. Uh, and it came out of this concern in the 70s and 80s of, uh, summer learning loss.

Griffin:

Oh.

Rachel:

So this idea that kids are going home, they're not reading anything all summer and then they're coming back to school behind, uh, and how do we address that with a television show?

Griffin:

That's interesting.

Rachel:

Yeah, uh...

Griffin:

How do you address that with a television show that kids are actually gonna wanna watch?

Rachel:

Yeah, and that, that was what was really interesting about this is they had a really hard time kind of explaining it and getting funding to support it.

Griffin:

Right.

Rachel:

Uh, because it was a half hour show and they were gonna feature one book and so everybody was kind of like how do... I mean, it takes like five minutes to read a book.

Griffin:

Right.

Rachel:

How are, how are you doing that? Uh, and so they had to figure out kind of how to address that, um, and also kind of piggyback on the success of shows like, you know, Sesame Street and Captain Kangaroo and figure out how to reach that same audience.

Griffin:

Right.

Rachel:

And he worked a lot with, uh, Fred Rogers actually...

Griffin:

Oh, yeah, that makes sense.

Rachel:

Mr. Roger's Neighborhood, uh, to kind of figure out how to put this show together. Um, but they, they had almost no budget to do it and it wasn't until they got money from Kellogg's actually and the Corporation for Public Broadcast that they could put a season together, but it was just 15 episodes.

Griffin:

Wow.

Rachel:

Uh, and later season were like five episodes. Like, they never had a significant budget.

Griffin:

Wow, I don't think I realized that.

Rachel:

At first—

Griffin:

They blew most of their budget on the theme song, which I think...

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

We can all agree is, is a full blown fucking slap bop.

Rachel:

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Griffin:

It's so good.

Rachel:

I was reading about it and they said that they spent the majority of their money on the animation of the beginning of that episode [laughs]—

Griffin:

Yeah, it's amazing. [sings] Butterfly in the sky... We usually play clips of things when we talk about music, but we don't need to 'cause we can just... [sings] I can go twice as high. Just take a look, it's a book, a reading rainbow.

Rachel:

[laughs] So, so part of their budget concern too was at first publishers were not just giving them the books, which was kind of ridiculous.

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

Like they didn't... they had to like beg for access to these books to talk about on the show because people didn't understand what a phenomenon it was gonna be.

Griffin:

Right.

Rachel:

And eventually like you would see publishers starting to put that sticker on the front, like, featured on Reading Rainbow.

Griffin:

Yeah, I remember that.

Rachel:

Uh, but at first it was like, it was really difficult and a lot of their first season books were like totally unknown authors...

Griffin:

Huh.

Rachel:

...that they just happened to be able to get access to. Um, but I wanted to talk a little bit about them finding LaVar Burton as the host 'cause it's like, it's kind of inexplicable in a way.

Griffin:

Was this before or after Roots? It's was—

Rachel:

It was right after Roots.

Griffin:

Okay.

Rachel:

So they were at a kid's TV conference and LaVar Burton was there, uh, just coming off of Roots, uh, and they saw him speak and said like oh my gosh, this would be incredible, um, but—

Griffin:

How do you make that leap?

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

Yeah, we watched, we watched Roots in like middle school I think.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Uh, and I, I remember seeing him in it, playing a very extremely dramatic role and thinking like holy shit, like, that's... he was also fucking Geordi La Forge in Star Trek.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

So that was, it was, it was wild to see, see him without his visor on...

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

...for one thing. Uh, yeah. Yeah, I remember being kind of blown away by that. He's incredible.

Rachel:

[laughs] Yeah, they talked about how magnetic he was, uh, and, and they wanted somebody that had that kind of energy.

Griffin:

Right.

Rachel:

You know? Um, because the show could be... and I, I don't wanna bad mouth Mr. Wizard, but he couldn't have hosted Reading Rainbow.

Griffin:

No.

Rachel:

You know, Mr. Wizard, like, selling a book, uh, you know, the explosions of chemicals—

Griffin:

Right.

Rachel:

Like, wouldn't work.

Griffin:

No. You need the explosive energy of LaVar Burton.

Rachel:

Uh, and so, so they approached, uh, LaVar Burton and it happened that his agent, uh, was a really, um, firm believer in just children's programming.

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

And really pushed it to him and he, he was in Africa and came from Africa to shoot the first episode. [laughs] Like, he was like—

Griffin:

He was like that bought in?

Rachel:

Yeah, uh, and he brought a lot of himself. A lot of what I read was like him trying to figure out who this character was that was hosting the show.
[laughs]

Griffin:

Right.

Rachel:

Like down to like would he put on a backpack this way? Like, would he tell this story? And then there were all these debates [laughs] about his mustache, apparently. In season one, no mustache, season two, came in with the mustache and everybody had a lot of thoughts about it.

Griffin:

Right.

Rachel:

And then also he got his ear pierced and then there was a lot of conversation about that.

Griffin:

Oh my god. Yeah.

Rachel:

Yeah, so, uh, so he, at that time, he was maybe one of the only, uh, like black hosts of a, of a television show, uh, and he made a huge, huge difference in the success of the show. Like, they talk a lot about how parents would watch it with their kids. Um...

Griffin:

Yeah, I legitimately cannot... I've been sitting here thinking, like, who else could have hosted that show 'cause it is a tough—

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Because we watch a lot of videos on YouTube of like people basically doing bootleg Reading Rainbow of just like here's a book and we're gonna read it.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

And it's— it does the job of like getting the information of the book across, but Reading Rainbow had this, had something extra sort of special about it.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Uh, a kind of like, a kind of like tenderness. Like, it felt good to watch Reading Rainbow.

Rachel:

Yeah, and that's what he said, like, in the interview I read with him, he talked a lot about how he like kind of thought of himself as like a 10 year old, like brought in that like 10 year old mindset of like, you know, I'm gonna, I'm gonna talk directly to the camera...

Griffin:

Right.

Rachel:

And I'm gonna address them at like a level of like a kid, uh, which again, was part of the problem with the mustache. [laughs]

Griffin:

Yeah, absolutely.

Rachel:

There was a lot of concern about like oh no, is he a dad now? Like we're ruining it. But, uh, the other thing they did that I thought was interesting, so they couldn't afford animation for the books, so they moved the camera across the book in the way that a kid would view it, uh, so to kind of make it more dynamic instead of just showing the page, they would like move the camera across the page...

Griffin:

Oh, interesting.

Rachel:

...so you like felt like you were experiencing the book as a reader.

Griffin:

That's cool.

Rachel:

Um, so yeah, it was, I mean it, it was really formative for me. There were a lot of books, uh, that I found out about... so at the end of the show, they would have kids like recommend books.

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

Uh, which were like real kids that they found, uh, and everybody was like, "Oh, are you coaching these kids?" And it's like, nah, I mean we obviously would like make sure that they were able to be on camera, um...

Griffin:

Yeah, I remember some of those book reports weren't...

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

...particularly polished.

Rachel:

But I remember like watching it and feeling like it was like my, like, 60 Minutes at the time, like oh yeah, I will have to check that out. That's interesting. Strega Nona. Okay.

Griffin:

[laughs]

Rachel:

I'll look into that. Uh, [laughs] and it was just, I don't know, I, I think as, you know, reading is such a solitary and can be such an isolating activity, uh, and to like find out like other kids are doing it and here's how you find out about it, and it's a kid, it's not like a librarian, you know?

Griffin:

No.

Rachel:

It's not like a... like a 60 year old person who you feel a little disconnected from, it's like, oh, this is another kid telling me about it.

Griffin:

I feel like I learned about Dinotopia through Reading Rainbow and that changed my shit man.

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

That changed my shit. That became like what I sought out at the next Scholastic book fair. How have we not done a segment on the fucking Scholastic book fair?

Rachel:

I don't know.

Griffin:

All right, look forward to—

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

Me talking about Animorphs and—

Rachel:

What is Dinotopia?

Griffin:

Dinotopia was, uh, a young adult series about a city of sort of neo-futuristic dinosaurs, uh, and there were all kinds of cool adventures in Dinotopia. It was a, it was a rad ass book series.

Rachel:

Uh, I will just say one other problem that Reading Rainbow, uh, had with marketing is there's no, like, character. There's no Elmo.

Griffin:

Right.

Rachel:

You know? [laughs] There's no like... they weren't, they weren't selling little stuffed LaVars at the store.

Griffin:

No, no, they weren't.

Rachel:

There was no merchandising, uh, so that, that was another challenge for them. It was, you know, it was like a lot of PBS shows where it was like their, their real goal was to get kids engaged in books and a lot of times that doesn't come with a, with a Cap'n Crunch.

Griffin:

No.

Rachel:

Um, but, uh, really great, really great show.

Griffin:

Yeah. And the precursor to Ghost Writer, I would say.

Rachel:

[laughs] Sure.

Griffin:

Which is Reading Rainbow if LaVar Burton was a ghost. Um, we're gonna wrap up because our son's waking up and that's this has timed out fairly well, I would say.

One last time, one last plea, that link is maximumfun.org/join. If you enjoy our show and other shows on the network, please consider becoming a member, uh, your support has, has helped us so much in the past and you know, we love making this show and, uh, wanna keep on, keep on growing. Um...

Rachel:

Yeah, and, and to those of you that have donated in the past or, or are considering donating, uh, or are already listening to that bonus content, thank you.

Griffin:

Thank you so much. Means the world. Uh, yeah, you get all that bonus content at just five bucks a month and there's other, you know, rad stuff that you can get if you do higher tiers but, um, anything that you can do, it genuinely to, to support us in such a tangible way, uh, it's... this is my, like 11th, maybe 12th Max Fun drive?

Rachel:

Oh, man.

Griffin:

And every year I am, I am... despite the fact that I've done it a lot now, I am still sort of blown away by the, the, the positivity and the outpouring of support that, that we get. It is, uh, especially you know, not being able to tour and get that kind of interaction with folks, this is, this is... uh, genuinely heart warming. Um, he's yelling now, which means—

Rachel:

[laughs]

Griffin:

We gotta go. Thanks for listening, we'll be back next week, and take care of yourselves and, um, love one another... oh, we gotta go!

[theme song plays]

MaximumFun.org

Comedy and culture.

Artist owned.

Audience supported.