

Wonderful! 262: Not A Bonus February

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[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is *Wonderful!*

Griffin: Welcome to the show!

Rachel: Welcome!

Griffin: Come on. Take your shoes off.

Rachel: Whoa!

Griffin: Right—come on in! We got a lot of—we got tea sandwiches.

Rachel: I'm glad you brought up the shoes off thing.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: This is like an unofficial rule in our house, and a lot of times when people enter they will ask if they should remove their shoes, and I never know what to say because we do it.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: But not—not... in, like, a real intentional way where we're like "Don't you dare bring a shoe in here."

Griffin: We do many things in this house... in the Japanese style.

Rachel: [laughs] There it is.

Griffin: I would say. Um, no, yeah. I mean—

Rachel: Like, if somebody were to ask you—I always kind of stumble a little bit. Like, if somebody comes to our house and says "Oh, do you want me to take my shoes off?" What do you say?

Griffin: Uh, "Yes. Please." [wheezes]

Rachel: Wow, really?

Griffin: Yeah. I say "Yes, please." Well, you know, you don't wanna sound like you're just trying to scope those... little toesies. Scope those piggies.

Rachel: [laughs] That's your immediate thought? This is so funny. You have—

Griffin: That I don't want them to think I'm a—a—

Rachel: You have this constant fear of appearing to be, like, a deviant.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: This is like when we talked about hot tubs and you were like, "Well, if we get a hot tub, we'll be those people." [laughs]

Griffin: These are not—these are not unreasonable fears... for—we were told growing up that these were normal things to be—to be afraid of.

Rachel: That's true. I forget sometimes, because you're so loose now, you know?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I forget about your prudish upbringing.

Griffin: Yeah. Like, you've always had a sort of heathenous...

Rachel: [laughs] I'm a real Dharma. [laughs]

Griffin: You—dammit!

Rachel: No I'm not.

Griffin: I'm not willing to cede that ground.

Rachel: I'm gonna put it on this podcast. I cede Dharma to you.

Griffin: You can't—I—I can't believe how casually you just did that.

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah.

Griffin: I feel like that is some—

Rachel: I saw you blowing bubbles the other day and I was like, "That's Dharma. I can't compete with that."

Griffin: [simultaneously] Can I say something?

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I didn't know until we had kids how good I am at blowing bubbles. I can't... are you saying "oh my god" because you're exasperated with me because it's a weird thing to flex over, or because you know the truth?

Rachel: It's this trait, and I see it in Henry now, too, where it's like you will try something, you will be better at it than you expected, and then instantly you're like, "Maybe I should be a professional bubble blower." [laughs]

Griffin: Well, I didn't go that far.

Rachel: [through laughter] Okay.

Griffin: I wouldn't say I went that far.

Rachel: But you had the thought a little bit, right? Like, "I wonder what the biggest bubble is?"

Griffin: No. I mean, I've read enough, like, *Guinness Book of World Records* books. I feel like in my school library there would be times where we would just go in there and read and I would be like, "That sucks. These so boring. But these *Guinness Book of World Records*, they have wild facts in them." And so I would read about, like, the world's biggest pizza, or, you know, the world's biggest bubble. I couldn't come close to that.

Rachel: Okay. But you are good. I'm not saying that you're not good. You are good.

Griffin: I'm pretty good. Good breath control from all of my meditating. Uh, hand-eye coordination. Risk assessment. These are all important sort of traits of a bubble blowers.

Rachel: See, now you're leaning towards Greg again and I'm regretting my Dharma assertion.

Griffin: You think that blowing a nice big bub—okay. So, Dharma would blow a bunch of little bubbles. Greg would get in his head about blowing, like, huge bubbles.

Rachel: [laughs] No. I was saying—the fact that you just detailed an analysis of the strategies to maximum bubble blowing is a very Greg move.

Griffin: It's hard to be this, like, quirky and random all the time. It takes a lot of work, actually, to be Dharma.

Rachel: Yeah. Okay.

Griffin: Do you have a small wonder for me, my—my love?

Rachel: Hmm... I mean, I don't know that we've talked about it, but there is a place here called Jetties.

Griffin: Jetties!

Rachel: That has a year-round Thanksgiving sandwich.

Griffin: The Nobadear.

Rachel: Yes. I don't really actually know why...

Griffin: Nor I, nor I.

Rachel: ... it's called that. But it's, like, turkey and stuffing and cranberry sauce and, I mean, you can get it any time you want. And so I had it yesterday. Uh, I had leftovers for lunch.

Griffin: I followed the same trajectory for my lunch choices! I forget the name of the sandwich I get, but it's like a chicken parmesan sandwich. It's good as hell. Keep it up, Jetties.

Rachel: I just—I love... I feel a little purist about Thanksgiving food in that I wouldn't necessarily just make stuffing, like, in April. But I like that I can have a little Thanksgiving sandwich any time I want.

Griffin: Yep. I'm gonna say, uh, I've been struggling with some pretty bad insomnia lately. Mostly brought on by stress, and also the fact that our baby wakes up a lot now, and so what's the point?

Rachel: Yeah... [sighs]

Griffin: Um, but I have been sort of knocking out some stuff off the backlog of some movies I've wanted to watch. Mostly horror films, which is probably not helping matters much. But I finally saw *Nope*.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: And I thought it fuckin' ruled. I thought it was really good, and super scary. Extremely, deeply unsettling and scary. Uh, in ways that I wasn't even expecting... you know, Jordan Peele to go to, which is saying something after *Get Out* and *Us*.

Rachel: I feel like that says a lot. Because to me... *Us* was incredibly scary.

Griffin: See, I never thought *Us* was that scary.

Rachel: And the fact that you didn't but think that this one is makes me think it must be... crazy.

Griffin: This one's about alien abduction, which I think when done... right—and this film does it right—is an inherently terrifying concept.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And this movie does a really great job of establishing its alien as, like... a—a genuinely threatening presence. And then, like, after it establishes that, just constantly throws the heroes of the film into scrape after scrape after scrape after scrape with it. Uh, it's badass. It's got, like, some genuinely rad moments in it. Uh... it's great. It's great. I can't stop thinking about it. It is, uh—it's great.

I don't know what else to say about it 'cause I'm, like, a year and a half late to this discussion. But I don't know why—I mean, I know why I put it off. It's because, like... it's tough to get stoked about watching horror movies when you only have, like, an hour to watch TV at night. But, uh, I'm glad I dipped in, because I thought it absolutely ruled.

Uh, I go first this week.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: I'm talking about a music thing. I'm excited to talk about a music because it's, like, a... a music thing I've loved for a long time, and so it's, like, one of those, "Why haven't I talked about it yet?"

Rachel: I know.

Griffin: It's the band Soul Coughing.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And by extension, front man Mike Doughty, who has gone on to have an illustrious and incredible solo career as a musician. '90s kids will 'memba this one. Um... Soul Coughing was an experimental... alt-rock, question mark? Band? The genre is, like, completely—

Rachel: Yeah. I mean, that feels right.

Griffin: Yeah. I'll talk about sort of what kind of music that the band made, but they don't adhere to a genre very cleanly. Um, and yeah. It was fronted by Mike Doughty, who has some pretty complicated feelings about Soul Coughing that I'll get into a little bit later.

The trajectory of Soul Coughing was, like, almost archetypical New York experimental music group in the '90s story. He was a doorman and, like, an amateur music critic who met up with a drummer and a bassist and a dude with a sampler machine at the Knitting Factory, which was like this, uh, experimental rock nightclub in the same sort of, like, CBGBs circuit, the same Manhattan neighborhood in the '90s.

And so, these four people came together and just formed this Frankenstein-like group that dabbled in rock, and blues guitar, and hip-hop, and jazz samples, to make something that is just—just wild. Um, if you've never heard a song of theirs—that's not true. You have heard at least one song of theirs. It was probably "Circles," which was on their third and final studio album, *El Oso*, which came out in 1998.

Uh, it's been in a bunch of movies, and TV shows, and video games, and commercials, and everything. Uh, I think unequivocally it's, like, maybe their best song. But it also is not like the rest of their stuff. But I wanted to play it, because it's probably the same one you remember, 'cause it's got a super catchy hook and the chorus is just, like, eight words over and over and over again. So here's a little bit of "Circles."

["Circles" by Soul Coughing plays]

Griffin: I'll still fuck with "Circles," even though I don't think it's necessarily representative of the rest of their work.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Did you—you grew up—you listened to Soul Coughing in their active era, right?

Rachel: No.

Griffin: No.

Rachel: I don't think so. There was this period of time in college where I really found a community of people that really loved music. And I hadn't really had that prior.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And so there were all these bands that I had a real passing knowledge of from the '90s. Like Stone Temple Pilots, for example.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: And Soul Coughing was another one that just kind of showed up all of a sudden and I was like, "Wow. I'm really late on this one, but this is exactly what I like."

Griffin: It does not surprise me that you liked it. It is so sort of poetry influenced. I honestly—when I look back, Mike Doughty has gone on to have his own solo career, and he's made more music and music that is, like, more meaningful to me, 'cause it was like I was going through college when he was releasing music, and it was just—it hit all the—all of my pleasure centers all at the same time.

But the nostalgia factor I guess for me with Soul Coughing is, like, completely off the charts. There was a thing... it can't exist. It can't possibly exist anymore. But it was called Columbia House, and it was Columbia Record's sort of distribution and sales platform that if memory serves you would, like, get a flier in a magazine that you would just sort of check the boxes of what albums you wanted, and then you would mail that in you and

would get a bunch of cassettes or CDs in the mail. Justin did this constantly, 'cause they were dirt cheap for whatever reason.

Rachel: Yeah, I couldn't figure out—I wonder, did you have to pay for a membership?

Griffin: I don't know.

Rachel: 'Cause they always would advertise, like, "9 CDs for 9 dollars!" And I'm like, how are they doing this? [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. I remember going through the checklist once, because Justin had some, like, extra picks, and it was like 99 cents per CD, which is, like, uh...

Rachel: Yeah. I don't understand.

Griffin: The cost of and distribution of music doesn't mean anything, like, anymore. Not compared to how it was. But this was like a—a thing that Justin used constantly, and I know it exposed him to a lot of music, and then of course by trickledown economics would then go on to inform sort of the—the music that I thought was cool.

And that is, like, all Soul Coughing. It didn't sound like anything else I had ever heard. I don't know that really anybody's been able to emulate it quite the way that they did it. It's lots of spoken word, lots of just sort of stream of consciousness lyrics, a bunch of jazz, a lot of drum and bass samples in their later music, which is funky as fuck.

Uh, it's just when I look back at the music that I thought was cool in the '90s, there's not a lot that still stands up to scrutiny, that I would still look back on and not be like, "Well, that—okay. Maybe that wasn't so cool." Soul Coughing fuckin' stands the test of time. It is still fresh as hell. I'm gonna play another one of their songs off of *El Oso* called "Fully Retractable," which sort of more encapsulates the band's super specific genre, which Mike Doughty described as "deep slacker jazz."

Rachel: [laughs]

["Fully Retractable" by Soul Coughing plays]

Griffin: Um, so Soul Coughing released three albums together before they broke up in 2000. Over a decade later, Mike Doughty wrote a memoir called *The Book of Drugs* that described pretty hellish conditions in the band. There was just, like, constant strife over creative direction, and credit, and all of this different stuff. I think one of their members had a baby and then that was just like—they were like, "Okay, well, this is reason—this is the off ramp that we needed to not do this band anymore."

He was also struggling with drug addiction, which unsurprisingly based on the title of the book it deals mostly. And he also wrote a book of poetry? I don't know if I ever—if you knew about that. It was when I was in college, he released a book of poetry called *Slanky* that I like, read in college.

Rachel: Yeah, I've seen it.

Griffin: In the same way I thought his music was, like, the coolest shit in middle school, *Slanky* was like the coolest shit for me in college. Yeah. I think that, uh, it's really unique music that I can still go back to and listen to, and not only enjoy but just kind of, like... you know. Appreciate the fact that that was some pretty cool shit that I was into as a middle—the novelty still works for me in a way, even though it is very sort of, you know, ego... aggrandizing, maybe, a bit. But it's kind of undeniable how cool the music is that Soul Coughing made, and that Mike Doughty continues to make.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And if you've never listened to any of their stuff, I'm kind of jealous of you, because there's a pretty big body of work there to dip into. Go listen to pretty much all of *El Oso*. It fuckin' shreds from start to finish. That's Soul Coughing. Can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

[ad break]

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: So, kind of speaking of that time period...

Griffin: Oh boy.

Rachel: I wanted to talk about my wonderful thing this week, which is Hot Topic.

Griffin: Oh, god. I—maybe this inspired you as well. I just saw some post somewhere that was just screenshots of the Hot Topic website when it first launched—

Rachel: [laughs] No.

Griffin: —and, like, the merch that they had, the *Beavis and Butt-Head* and Slipknot and MCR merch and shit that they had there, and it took me on a journey.

Rachel: I think—honestly I don't remember how I came to this topic. But, uh—

Griffin: Have we not discussed Hot Topic before?

Rachel: So, we've talked about the mall. Right?

Griffin: Okay. I was going to say, I know I've shared some *deep, dark* Hot Topic-based secrets on this show before.

Rachel: Uh, and I think, like, it was easy to recognize that it was special, because it was so different from any other store in the mall.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: But I didn't really think about kind of the access it gave suburban kids or small town kids over the country. Like, the fact that you could—you

know, you didn't have to live in, like, a hip college town, or a New York or a Los Angeles. You could go to the mall and access these, like, band t-shirts.

Griffin: An incredibly canny, I would say, business decision to go after that market that was being crucially underserved.

Rachel: And it's funny, too—

Griffin: In the Huntington, West Virginias of the country.

Rachel: [laughs] It was funny, too, to think about how intimidating that store was to me.

Griffin: Oh, for fucking sure!

Rachel: And, like, obviously it was designed I think to be that way a little bit.

Griffin: I mean, every store in the mall was designed to be that way, from your Hollisters to your American Eagles to your, you know, whatever.

Rachel: Yeah, but this felt more like you had to have cred, you know? Because the employees—and I guess this was true with, like, Hollister, too.

Griffin: Yeah, for sure.

Rachel: But the employees represented something that was very intimidating. The music was very, very loud. As I mentioned, the storefront was, you know, super imposing.

Griffin: And very bad sometimes, and that's okay too.

Rachel: Yeah. I mean, that's just true of young people. [laughs] Like, in a retail environment, you know, you have employees more often than not that aren't being paid well.

Griffin: I have to be careful after talking about Soul Coughing in the first half of the show approaching this Hot Topic half of the show and not

sounding like the world's biggest hipster, douchebag, piece-of-shit asshole ever.

Rachel: Oh... I don't think that's possible for you.

Griffin: It's not—I loved Hot Topic with my whole heart. I always wanted to hang there, but I knew that I was, like, not nearly on the right level.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: I used that—I shopped there wrong. I would leave the store and be like, that wasn't—I bought a ring. Why—that wasn't right.

Rachel: [laughs] I know.

Griffin: I panicked and bought a ring.

Rachel: Um, yeah. They—for me it was like—they had hair dye in the, like, crazy Manic Panic colors, which was hard to find, like, at a, you know, grocery store, which is where you—

Griffin: Did you get wild with your hair—like, your hair colors?

Rachel: I mean, I tried. I never bleached my hair.

Griffin: Right, which you gotta do.

Rachel: So when I would do purple or red, it would be very subdued because my hair was brown, you know? But I definitely tried. And, like, body jewelry too, you know? It was just like stuff that you really didn't know where to get it as a young person. You know, particularly if you, like, couldn't drive yet. Not that I had any kind of body piercing before I could drive. But, you know, I'm just saying. Like, it was a way to access things, you know, that you, like, were into and couldn't get at, you know, Target. [laughs]

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: I didn't realize a lot about kind of the story behind Hot Topic. It was really charming to read about. It was a couple that started it out of their Southern California garage in 1989, and they opened their first location in Montclair, California at a mall. The couple was Orv and LeAnn Madden. Orv was a former executive at The Children's Place.

Griffin: Huh.

Rachel: And if you could find a picture of this couple online...

Griffin: Does he just have, like, his ears gauged?

Rachel: No! It's like the most—

Griffin: [wheezes and laughs loudly]

Rachel: —wholesome couple you've ever seen.

Griffin: [distantly] Look at 'em!

Rachel: Like, it looks like—I mean, like, if they introduced themselves, like if you were at, let's say like a neighborhood ice rink, and both your kids were on the same hockey team and you leaned over and you're like, "Hey, so what do you do?"

And they were like, "Oh, I started Hot Topic." You'd be like "No way."

Griffin: "No you fucking didn't!"

Rachel: [laughs] Um... yeah. But they're—they were super—

Griffin: "Do you kids like... *Invader Zim*?!"

Rachel: [laughs] Um... so I read this—I read a couple articles, but one that I read was with Cindy Levitt, who was the very first employee hired by Hot Topic and is now the Senior Vice President of Merchandising and Marketing.

Griffin: I love that.

Rachel: And she said—

Griffin: I love that for Cindy.

Rachel: I know. [laughs] Initially when they started it was going to be like a hip young men's accessory chain. So, like—

Griffin: Wait. Hold on. Wait. Uh, an accessory—they just had the one chain that they were selling to mens and accessories?

Rachel: Shh...

Griffin: To wear at the ska concert?

Rachel: That's sweet. No, I'm talking about, like, sunglasses, belts, you know.

Griffin: Oh, right, yeah.

Rachel: Like... uh, and then they kind of just kept adding as they kind of followed where the interest was. Um, and so then they went on to, like, jewelry. The spiked wristbands and collars that you may remember. Uh, and then they started traveling around the country, and back in 1989 you couldn't find, like, music t-shirts at any kind of, like, mall.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: You know? Like, there was—you would go to a concert, or you would go to, like, a really cool... area of, like, downtown Big City, USA. Um, but you couldn't find that at the mall. And so they immediately started, like, trying to find those t-shirts all over the country to bring to their store.

Griffin: I remember—god. I remember going to a Tower Records in New York City before I think we had a Hot Topic in Huntington and just being like, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. You can buy shirts with the bands' names *on* it?"

Rachel: Yeah! I mean, that's the thing. It was before the internet, right? Like, you had to physically go somewhere to purchase this thing, and you didn't really know where to go. Um, and Hot Topic [laughs] kind of cornered the market on that. Um, so then they expanded to pop culture which is like what we know of now, like their big *Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Care Bears* kind of, like, genre.

Griffin: That whole aesthetic, right.

Rachel: But their first big pop culture shirt... [laughs] was Homey the Clown from *In Living Color*, was their first non-music license that they purchased.

Griffin: It worked—I guess it worked! History was made.

Rachel: It was huge for them. And then they started buying, like, *Twin Peaks* shirts, and people went crazy for it. And then they started going after shirts where merchandise wasn't available yet, like *SpongeBob*.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: It was like the first year of the show, Nickelodeon hadn't put out any merch yet, and so Hot Topic scheduled a meeting with the company and became the, like, exclusive deal for *SpongeBob* t-shirts.

Griffin: I'm curious what their licensing deals with, like, different anime distributors is like. Because I feel like every time I walk past a Hot Topic now it's like *Demon Slayer*, and *Yuri on Ice*, and like big—big, uh... breakout anime shows that, I mean, certainly wasn't anything I was watching when Hot Topic first opened and came to Huntington.

Rachel: Yeah. No, that's what's kind of incredible is that for a store that tries to be so specifically, like, of the moment and relevant to young people's interest, that they've really kept up in a way that is surprising? Um, the *Care Bears* thing that I was talking about is what I remember from that time period. 'Cause I would walk into Hot Topic super intimidated by all the, like, spikes and boots. And then I would see, you know, Strawberry Shortcake, and I'd be like, "Wait... like..." [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. Part—there was a weird part of the, like, early... emo zeitgeist, I guess, that was very, like, 80's and NES—I remember they had, like, a bunch of—they had, like, a—they had, like, a Zelda wallet. And I was like "Whoa! That's fuckin' cool!"

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Like, for whatever reason those two kind of cultural touchstones blended in the petri dish of the Hot Topic.

Rachel: Well, that interview that I read with the senior Vice President was talking about rave culture. Like, how that became really popular. This kind of, like, nostalgic, like, big pants, you know, like, child's t-shirt, like, glow sticks, like, all of that. They just, like, really—

Griffin: Which I've never thought of rave culture as being...

Rachel: —really doubled down on it.

Griffin: ... an extension of one's childhood.

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah. So they have really kind of kept up in a way that has been surprising. Like, a lot of, as you know, shopping malls and stores in malls are struggling. And they definitely had a dip? But they still have over, like, 676 stores in malls around the country. The one thing I wanted to show you that I didn't realize—so, the Hot Topic I remember looked like this.

Griffin: Shit, yeah.

Rachel: Like, had the big metal gates, the, like, gargoyles, the, like, crazy font. Um, you know, they, like, really set it apart.

Griffin: Which I know there are younger people who listen to this show. You have to imagine going to a mall where there's, like, an Auntie Ann's and a Suncoast Records.

Rachel: And like a Sears.

Griffin: And a Sears. And then there's a fucking... gateway to hell! It was the most badass stuff ever.

Rachel: Let me show you how Hot Topic looks now.

Griffin: Oh.

Rachel: It's gonna make you kind of sad.

Griffin: No, I get it. Like, I get the aesthetic.

Rachel: Yeah. I mean, that's the thing, right? Like, so now it's—it kind of just looks like a—like a modern urban store. Like, it's not—

Griffin: Yeah. It's still dark. Like, a dark—

Rachel: —designed...

Griffin: —darker vibe than the PacSun next door, but...

Rachel: It's not deigned to be, you know, as intimidating, maybe, as it once was. This I guess all happened in, like, 2007?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: They intentionally, like, pursued what they called this "lighter and brighter" model of just, like, making it more accessible to people. Because obviously they're carrying a lot of stuff that young people want, and they want to be like "Hey, you can come in here. It's okay." [laughs]

Griffin: Well, and it's also good for the people who were teens when Hot Topic first came out, and then are not teens because of the—the—the... cruel trajectory of time's arrow. And then they're like, "People are not going—adults are not going to come in this fucking store, y'all."

Rachel: Yeah, that's fair.

Griffin: So they had to change something.

Rachel: Yeah? Um, they've done—they've continued to do a lot of stuff. Um... but the most recent thing I found is they've launched—and this is really, I think, wise. They've launched a resale program with a partnership through Thredup. So you can, like, resell your Hot Topic apparel for credit.

Griffin: That's interesting.

Rachel: Which I think is interesting, because there's always, like, this push for, you know, finding vintage stuff.

Griffin: Vintage shit, yeah.

Rachel: And obviously at a certain point—

Griffin: God, that's hysteri—the idea that old Hot Topic merch is now vintage makes me wanna go sit down in a dark and cold room.

Rachel: [laughs] This just happened. October 2022 they announced this. So this is brand new. Um...

Griffin: I'll see if I can find my, uh, my goggles.

Rachel: [laughs] Your goggles...

Griffin: My fuckin' *Cowboy Bebop* windbreaker.

Rachel: Yeah. I don't know if I ever... [sighs] I mean, I definitely bought stuff in Hot Topic, but I was in there maybe 100 times more than I ever bought anything.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Because I would just kind of be like "[shaky voice] Well—uh—no—okay, I gotta go." [laughs]

Griffin: I didn't buy much there. I think I got—I bought goggles once. I bought a ring once. It was expensive. I mean, it was mall expensive which, like, I didn't have any fuckin' money. So, like, any amount of money was mall expensive for me.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But I always—it always was like a proving ground. It felt like—it felt taboo for me to be in there, partially because of my own, you know... Southern Baptist upbringing, and feeling like "Oh, man. What if someone from church sees me in here?"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But also from the like, "I don't know—I have no idea what I'm doing. I'm gonna touch something and someone will be like, 'Why are you touching that shirt that way? That's not a touching shirt.'"

Rachel: Well, there was this big thing. And in the interviews that I read they talk a lot about how the culture has changed, where you're, like, kind of allowed to like different things now? Whereas when we were younger, I feel like there was this big fear of being a poser, you know?

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: You had to, like, lean—

Griffin: Absolutely.

Rachel: —you had to, like, lean into an interest. And if you leaned into that interest, you had to, like, follow everything that went along with it. And so it was very challenging, I think, to be the person like me who really just kind of liked REM and Fiona Apple to be in Hot Topic and feel like it can be for me, too. [laughs] Like, I don't really know Metallica. Um, but I can be in a place where there are Metallica shirts. [laughs]

Griffin: How strange and sad—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I know we... eulogized the mall on our episode where we talked about the mall. But it's so wild how that was a... a personal cultural moment, when Hot Topic opened and all of a sudden this place where you go to buy jeans and, uh, you know, video games at the Babbage's has, like, some counterculture shit in it?

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: And you'd get exposed to that for the first time. Obviously, like, you know, you can buy whatever online. But to be able to have that kind of, like, communal... shared experience with all my friends of, like, figuring out, like, how do we—how do we approach this store?

Rachel: And I think—I mean, I think—and this is what I was reading when I was researching it is, like, in a lot of small towns, that is still very much true.

Griffin: Yeah, for sure.

Rachel: Like, they don't have access to, like, places to gather there where their interests are, like, welcomed and common, except for Hot Topic. Which I think is—

Griffin: God bless Hot Topic.

Rachel: —is great!

Griffin: God bless you, Hot Topic. Uh, thank you 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 thank you to the Maximum Fun Network for having us on the network. Speaking of, Max Fun Drive is gonna be coming up here in a while. And we've been thinking about our bonus episode, our BoCo for *Wonderful!* this year.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: If you don't know, we're a pledge supported show, and the Max Fun Drive is our chance to put out some extra stuff, and ask y'all for help supporting the show. Anyway, we've been talking about what we want to do this year, and we've discussed doing a return to Rachel plays a video game for the first time.

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah, we aren't really 100% sure on what the video game should be.

Griffin: Two years ago it was *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*, I think, before—

Rachel: Yeah, which did in some ways kind of—

Griffin: Or no, the one before that. Uh...

Rachel: Oh yeah.

Griffin: No, it was *New Leaf*. It was the 3DS one and then *New Horizons* was the—yeah.

Rachel: Yeah. And that really—I mean, it did—I played that game a lot.

Griffin: You played the hell out of that game.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: So if you have any suggestions, hop in the Facebook group. What game? Maybe someone could get a poll there. Maybe Rachel even could [crosstalk].

Rachel: Keeping in mind—here, let's set some parameters.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I would prefer it to be on a handheld device, because then I can do it in different places of our house. [laughs]

Griffin: I would say a switch game would be ideal. We have a couple of those.

Rachel: Uh, yeah. And also, like, the barrier to entry has to be pretty low, because I'm not gonna have a lot of time to dedicate to this.

Griffin: That's true. I think something in the *Stardew Valley* family would be good.

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah.

Griffin: I think, um... I don't know. A Zel—a Zel—you've never played any of those, a *Zelda*.

Rachel: Yeah, but those are huge games, right?

Griffin: Those are pretty big games, sure.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But, I mean, so is *Animal Crossing*, technically, if you think about it. Anyway, just food for tot. We have merch over at mcelroymerch.com. Uh, always updating the stuff in there. We got a bunch of videos up on our YouTube channel at the McElroy Family on YouTube. Go subscribe and watch stuff. Uh, and... have a—hey. Have a great... month.

Rachel: Whoa!

Griffin: February's gonna be your month.

Rachel: Yeah. It's February, huh?

Griffin: Which is cruel, 'cause it's the shortest one. Is this the special one where we get bonus? No. It's an odd-number year. There's no way it's a leap year.

Rachel: Yeah. I don't believe that it is.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Don't get bonus February. [laughs quietly]

Griffin: Dammit. I love a bonus February. It feels like stolen time. You know? Seized from... [pause] Mother Na—from the Father Time.

Rachel: I like bonus February as, like, a band name maybe?

Griffin: Yes!

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Dry January. Bonus February. No-Nut November.

Rachel: Oh! I thought we were gonna do all the months, but we're just...

Griffin: I'm jumping around.

Rachel: Okay.

[pause]

Griffin: Groovy June.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh-huh?

Griffin: That's—I don't wanna do any more.

Rachel: Okay.

[theme music plays]

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