

Wonderful! 270: Harma and Reg

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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: It's so special today! And I can feel it in the air.

Rachel: Woah, okay.

Griffin: In the studio. It's week two of the MaxFunDrive.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Huge for us, but even huger, I would say. And I love how these two events have dovetailed.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh-huh.

Griffin: It's Rachel's birthday.

Rachel: [laughs] Now, we didn't plan this.

Griffin: We did not plan this.

Rachel: I know that it was Sydnee's birthday just the other day.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: And that felt like... is that a push for MaxFunDrive and now we're doing it too, but it is actually also my birthday today.

Griffin: Yes. And tomorrow is our son's birthday.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: There's so many birthdays. There's never been a better time for you to go to maximumfun.org/join—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: ... and show your support to our shows in the network at large.

Rachel: Now if you aren't able to support, I will still have a birthday.

Griffin: Rachel will still have a birthday. Rachel's age will still increase by one year.

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah.

Griffin: As will Sydnee's and Gus's. But I mean, why? Why... Why deny yourself the experience of becoming a Max Fun supporter?

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: Deny yourself all of the bonus content that is awaiting you.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: Behind... behind the silvered wall. If you go to maximumfun.org/join, you can check out all of the different support levels that are there, all the different pledge gifts that you can get if you come in at those different levels. And this is our last week, this is the last time we're going to be talking to you about that for this year on *Wonderful!*, but it's been a little bit slow this year. The drive has. Which is to, I think, to be expected because of the 'conomy.

Rachel: The 'conomy.

Griffin: Da 'conomy, has been better.

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah.

Griffin: So...

Rachel: We are not taking it personally. But—

Griffin: We are not, no.

Rachel: ... we do want to make sure that we take every opportunity to remind folks that maybe haven't gotten a chance to do it yet, that now you should do it.

Griffin: Now you should do it.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: This is the right time. It's... It's Rachel's birthday!

Rachel: It's my birthday!

Griffin: Say it... Can you say it in like a little... Like... Like [baby voice] "It's my birfday"? Like—

Rachel: That's not really a thing that I do.

Griffin: No, it isn't, is it?

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's... Yeah, maximumfun.org/join is the link. Do it. Do it now. If you've thought about it and you enjoy our work and you want to support it very, very directly, this is the way that you can do so. And we sure do appreciate it, but I sure also do appreciate— I'm serving a lot of masters this episode, because it's tough talking about the MaxFunDrive, which I feel very strongly about.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: And your birthday.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Which I feel also very, very strongly about.

Rachel: [laughs harder]

Griffin: Um, do you have any Small Wonders?

Rachel: Oh man. I'm going to say when, and this is applicable, when you receive birthday gifts in advance of your birthday.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But you save them until the day of your birthday.

Griffin: Ooh, that's good.

Rachel: This is something I don't know that, if everybody expects me to do? But if I receive a gift in advance of the actual day, I will not open it.

Griffin: No.

Rachel: Until the day.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: It's a little treat for myself.

Griffin: It feels like cheating, to do it otherwise.

Rachel: I know! I'm nervous because my parents are about to come into town and I have a gift from them and I'm trying to decide... I should probably wait till they get here, even though it is my birthday today.

Griffin: No, I would crack that bad boy.

Rachel: Oh yeah? [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. I love... uh, you...

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: ... and your birthday. And I love giving people presents. It makes me very uncomfortable to see them open it. And... Because I can't help but like sort of look at their face and try to—

Rachel: Yeah...

Griffin: Sort of like look at their little micro expressions.

Rachel: Although I do love giving our sons presents.

Griffin: Well, yeah, because they're an easy target.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah. One of `em likes cars. One of `em likes Pokémon. And Sonic. So just any of those—

Rachel: I know!

Griffin: If you get one of those two things, guarantee, gonna put smiles on those little faces.

Rachel: And what's great is there are infinities of all of those things.

Griffin: All of them.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: There's so many cars.

Rachel: And so many Sonic characters.

Griffin: So many fuckin' Sonic characters.

Rachel: I don't know where they came from, honestly.

Griffin: I don't either, so they could be entirely made from whole cloth.

Rachel: But he seems to know them.

Griffin: Maybe. I dunno.

Rachel: [laughs] A lot of times I will give him one that I've never heard of.

Griffin: They just look cool. Yeah, we got him like this purple chameleon dude, and it's like, "I don't know who that is, but he has cool bangles so..."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: "... he must be all right." I'm going to say building, just sort of freestyling, making vehicles with Legos is good.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: It's always been a passion of mine.

Rachel: [laughing] Uh-huh.

Griffin: We've... We do a lot of Legos around the house, mostly Minecraft Lego sets, which Henry is like, obsessed with. And we've built over a dozen of those.

Rachel: And you say "We"?

Griffin: Me and Henry.

Rachel: Well, but also—

Griffin: Mostly me.

Rachel: Mostly you, yeah.

Griffin: Mostly me.

Rachel: Yeah, Henry has an interest in the completed set.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: He does not necessarily have the patience or ability yet to do it himself.

Griffin: But, when we freestyle it, he likes to make little monsters and little robots out of Legos.

Rachel: Yeah, they're so good.

Griffin: And they're really, really good.

Rachel: He... he always—

Griffin: And then he will play with them for hours and hours and hours.

Rachel: Yeah. He will always make me take a picture and then tell me that he wants me to send it to his teacher.

Griffin: He made a snake robot yesterday with a hand on the back of it that he named Handler, and we played with Handler for a long time.

Rachel: It's my favorite—

Griffin: I love that.

Rachel: That's my—

Griffin: That's my favorite one. It's my favorite *Friends* character too.
[laughs]

Griffin: It's my favorite *Friends* character, is Handler. And Onica. And Oss. Achel. Hoebe.

Rachel: [laughing hard]

Griffin: Oey. Oey and Hoebe. They should get together, don't you think?

Rachel: They'd be such a good pair.

Griffin: Yeah. I also love Arma and Reg.

Rachel: [laughs] Okay, this... this isn't applicable anymore.

Griffin: You go first this week.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: What do you got for us? For your birthday and the second week of the MaxFunDrive. I bet it's gonna be hot stuff.

Rachel: If you had to guess, what would you guess?

Griffin: Your birthday?

Rachel: No. [laughs]

Griffin: That'd be weird if you brought your own... your own bir— If I had to guess?

Rachel: No!

Griffin: I don't know! You have a lot of things that you enjoy, baby.

Rachel: A-bubba-de-bum-bum-bum.

Griffin: Ohh, you're going to the Poetry Corner?

Rachel: Yes, sir.

Griffin: Ohh, you're not holding a book?

Rachel: I'm not.

Griffin: That's usually my clue.

Rachel: They do have poems on the internet.

Griffin: [sarcastic] You're kidding me?

Rachel: [sarcastic] They do! Yeah, you don't have to have a book!

Griffin: [sarcastic] Do... So... How... how... How's that work? You... Do you... Like, is it on Amazon? You buy the poems? Or...?

Rachel: A lot of times they're just up there for free.

Griffin: Oh, like torrent. Like you down—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Go to the old Pirate Bay.

Rachel: [still laughing] Uh-huh.

Griffin: And download— And torrent a few poems.

Rachel: [sarcastic] I go to LimeWire and I—

Griffin: That's interesting.

Rachel: Yeah, uh-huh.

Griffin: [sarcastic] Wow! I never would have thought.

Rachel: Uh... [laughs]

Griffin: Poem. We're talking about poems?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Wow.

Rachel: Yeah. The poem I'm reading today I got from Poetry Foundation, which has a lot of 'em up there.

Griffin: Sounds like they would. It would be wild if they had something else.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. You know where Poetry Foundation is located?

Griffin: Oh, sure, Washington, DC.

Rachel: No, Chicago, Illinois.

Griffin: Fuck.

Rachel: [laughs] I used to go to Printers' Row Book Fair, did you ever go to that?

Griffin: Oh yeah.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [groans]

Rachel: I had... For a while I had a little free, like Poetry Foundation tote bag that I used to—

Griffin: I love that.

Rachel: ... I used to carry around like, "Hey, you know what I like?"

Griffin: In Chicago? Oh, for sure.

Rachel: [laughs] "I got this for free." The poet I wanted to talk about, though, does have a connection to DC, and that is Elizabeth Alexander.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: She was born in New York, but grew up in Washington, DC. And actually went to school at Sidwell Friends School, which is the DC school that like a lot of the Presidents' kids go to. So like Chelsea Clinton went there. Sasha and Malia went there. It's like the fancy school in DC.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: That the super smart, fancy kids go to.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And that's where she went. But you know what's interesting is that she actually has a— Besides, you know, having gone to the same school many years in advance as the Obamas, she actually has a connection to President Barack Obama. When she was at University of Chicago... And she was doing that because she was an assistant professor of English in the early '90s. And that was around the time that President Obama was a senior lecturer at the school's law school.

Griffin: Oh, that's fun!

Rachel: And so they met each other then. And then in 2009, Elizabeth Alexander had the opportunity to read the poem at the Presidential inauguration.

Griffin: Oh, cool!

Rachel: She was only the 4th poet to read at a Presidential inauguration.

Griffin: Wow!

Rachel: Which I was surprised about.

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: Because it seems like there have been a lot of 'em.

Griffin: Well, there's a lot of singing at these things if memory serves. You get—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: You get a lot of... I feel like a lot of diva, sort of singer-style folks, have... have... made a mark on it.

Rachel: I guess 'cause it's so memorable. So there was Robert Frost in 1961. Maya Angelou in 1993, which I've read... I think, I believe, I read that poem, actually.

Griffin: That Bill Clinton?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Oh wow.

Rachel: Miller Williams in 1997, which I think was—

Griffin: Second...

Rachel: ... Clinton's second term.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And then, you know, Amanda Gorman.

Griffin: Yeah, of course.

Rachel: Which kind of blew things up.

Griffin: There should... You... It's weird that presidents give a second inaugural address.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I feel like you should be allowed to phone that one in. And be like, "Thanks guys. I appreciate it. You clearly... clearly like what I'm putting— What I'm laying down. And so just more of the same, I think, is going to be the sort of vibe I'm going for. Huge thanks. I was worried. Huge thanks, gang."

Rachel: I think the poem always, especially— Like, especially the poem, it gives you kind of this sense of like a little bit of a fresh start in a way.

Griffin: Okay, sure.

Rachel: Like, "Yeah, I've been here. But now we're about to start something a little better."

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: "A little different."

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: "And here's a poem to set that tone."

Griffin: The extent of that is definitely not contingent on the many other elected representatives in the sort of demographic makeup of Congress.

Rachel: Yeah...

Griffin: "This is our year, gang."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: "This is gonna be it for sure. I'm feeling like getting a lot of stuff done."

Rachel: [sighs] Yeah... Yeah. And I'm a real sucker for that, if I'm going to be honest.

Griffin: Oh, of course.

Rachel: Like, I love being hopeful.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: Which is probably not unique to me. [laughs] But I am always willing to fall for it.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Like, you put the right words together I'm like, "Yes!"

Griffin: Good poem.

Rachel: "Yes! Things are going to be better!"

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: So I actually wanted to read that poem that she read at his inauguration, and it's called "Praise Song for the Day".

Griffin: Whose inauguration?

Rachel: President Obama.

Griffin: Oh, okay.

Rachel: 2009.

Griffin: Got it.

Rachel: Elizabeth Alexander.

Griffin: Yes, sorry. We talked about a lot of inaugurations and I got all mixed up, confused.

Rachel: [laughing] I know, I'm sorry. "Praise Song for the Day."

"Each day we go about our business,
walking past each other, catching each other's
eyes or not, about to speak or speaking.

All about us is noise. All about us is
noise and bramble, thorn and din, each
one of our ancestors on our tongues.

Someone is stitching up a hem, darning
a hole in a uniform, patching a tire,
repairing the things in need of repair.

Someone is trying to make music somewhere,
with a pair of wooden spoons on an oil drum,
with cello, boom box, harmonica, voice.

A woman and her son wait for the bus.
A farmer considers the changing sky.
A teacher says, Take out your pencils. Begin.

We encounter each other in words, words
spiny or smooth, whispered or declaimed,
words to consider, reconsider.

We cross dirt roads and highways that mark
the will of some one and then others, who said
I need to see what's on the other side.

I know there's something better down the road.
We need to find a place where we are safe.
We walk into that which we cannot yet see.

Say it plain: that many have died for this day.

Sing the names of the dead who brought us here,
who laid the train tracks, raised the bridges,

picked the cotton and the lettuce, built
brick by brick the glittering edifices
they would then keep clean and work inside of.

Praise song for struggle, praise song for the day.
Praise song for every hand-lettered sign,
the figuring-it-out at kitchen tables.

Some live by love thy neighbor as thyself,
others by first do no harm or take no more
than you need. What if the mightiest word is love?

Love beyond marital, filial, national,
love that casts a widening pool of light,
love with no need to pre-empt grievance.

In today's sharp sparkle, this winter air,
any thing can be made, any sentence begun.
On the brink, on the brim, on the cusp,

praise song for walking forward in that light."

Isn't that lovely?

Griffin: That's... I love an epic poem about just sort of life.

Rachel: Yes!

Griffin: And I love it because I feel like it's very hard to write. It's probably the hardest kind of poem to write and write well.

Rachel: Uh-huh! Yeah, yeah, 'cause it can seem just like a list. Like—

Griffin: It can seem like a list, it can seem like nothing but sort of just gross generalization. Right? When you write about life, that's a pretty broad sort of thing—

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: ... that is different for a lot of people. And so to say like, "I'm gonna wrap this whole thing up in a few good stanzas."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But that was excellent.

Rachel: One of the poems, or one of the poets I've brought here before is Kenneth Koch, and he was of this like New York school of poets. And they got criticism for what they called, "I do this/I do that" poems.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Because they were kind of like, list-y. But I feel like that so accurately reflects a time period. Like it's kind of the best way to kind of travel through time in what people do you know, day-to-day.

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: Here's what's interesting about that poem. So, you know, obviously that is a huge platform for her.

Griffin: Yeah, of course.

Rachel: To, like, give that poem at the inauguration. And she was largely unknown at that point. One, because she's a poet [laughs]...

Griffin: [laughing] I was gonna say...

Rachel: And two just, I mean, just, you know, in the poetry community, you know, she wasn't as widely known. Actually in 2007, which was just two years earlier, she received an honor. She was the first recipient of the

Jackson Poetry Prize, which is an annual prize awarded by poets and writers for an American poet who deserves wider recognition.

Griffin: That's great!

Rachel: [laughs] So they were like, "Hey, you should really be checking this person out." And then two years later, she's like, "I'm going to read in front of everybody."

So here's what is really unfortunate. So she read that poem and then all these newspapers came out and were like, [stuffy critic voice] "Mwah, it wasn't very good." [laughs]

Griffin: Aww!

Rachel: *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Los Angeles Times*' book editor, most critics were unimpressed. Quote, "Her poem was too much like prose."

Griffin: [sarcastic] Oh. Okay. What the fuck does that even mean?

Rachel: [laughs] Quote, "Her delivery was insufficiently dramatic."

Adam Kirsch of the *New Republic* found the poem, quote, "Dull, bureaucratic," and found it, "proved that the poet's place is not on the platform but in the crowd." That she should "speak not—"

Griffin: [sarcastic] Fuck yeah! That's... That's a cool thing to say, dude!

Rachel: That she should "speak not for the people, but to them."

Griffin: [sarcastic] Oh, nice!

Rachel: Which like, how is she not speaking to people? Like that—

Griffin: What a fucking—

Rachel: I know.

Griffin: ... bonkers, inane thing to say—

Rachel: I know.

Griffin: ... about any kind of art form whatsoever.

Rachel: I know. I mean—

Griffin: [as stuffy critic] “You shouldn't be doing that *to* people. You should be doing it *with* them.” What does that...?

Rachel: Yeah, like she's at the inauguration. Like, what is she supposed to do?

Griffin: Can I say something about poetry? As somebody who like, doesn't know fuck all about it? I feel like I saw a lot of this about Amanda Gorman also, when she did her... A lot of people who came out like, “That wasn't very good!”

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Who don't know fucking anything about poetry. Who were like, “Uh, it didn't even rhyme super good.”

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I feel like there's... Poetry for whatever reason is an art form that a lot of people who don't know anything about it feel very well-equipped to say some shit about it. Which is completely mystifying to me.

Rachel: Yeah, it's incredibly hard to write a poem and to write a poem that is supposed to welcome the new president—

Griffin: [emphatically] Uh-huh!

Rachel: ... and deliver it in front of a larger audience than most likely that poet has ever spoken in front of.

Griffin: Or most poets. Argu—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: That was a big fu— Both of Obama's inauguration—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Those were big fuckin' to-dos.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: So I can't think of too many times where poets had a bigger platform than that.

Rachel: Yeah. So, yeah, I would recommend checking out Elizabeth Alexander. She has a great book.

She wrote an essay in 2020 called "The Trayvon Generation" in *The New Yorker* that she then turned into a book that just came out in 2022. It's really, really... Like from what I have read, a really beautifully examination— Like, a beautiful examination of kind of what it is like to be a young person in Black America. Particularly if you have only lived in a world during, you know, Trayvon and George Floyd—

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: ... and Brianna Taylor, in that time period that was hugely traumatic. And she speaks kind of to that generation of young people and kind of this world that we live in now.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And so I would really recommend looking at that if you enjoyed her poem and enjoy her.

Griffin: I almost want to, even though I don't read poetry recreationally, just to spite the critics—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: ... from whatever. God, 2009? That was a long time ago, eh?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Hoo boy. You know what's not a long time ago and it is now? Is the MaxFunDrive and Rachel's birthday. But I think for this break we're going to mostly focus on the MaxFunDrive.

Rachel: [laughs] I'm fine with that.

Griffin: I saw a really great tweet about it and I apologize because I didn't... I don't remember what the name of the person was. But I'll just sort of summarize the idea of it.

When you support us and you support the MaxFunDrive by going to maximumfun.org/join, you get, you know, certain pledge rewards depending on where you come in.

\$5 a month, you get over 500 hours of bonus content. This year we got Rachel into *Stardew Valley*, a game that has consumed her in a way that I have not seen a game do since *Words with Friends*, probably.

If you give a little bit more than that, if you give 10 bucks a month, then we have all these different stickers that represent each of the different shows that are restickable, which is like scientifically just sort of a marvel, to me.

Rachel: Yeah, I don't know how it works.

Griffin: You get... you get cool stuff—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: ... when you become a supporter of the shows. But what you are really doing is twofold.

One, you are supporting us financially, so we can keep, you know, making the shows and growing the shows. I would say in the last couple of years, some of the biggest stuff that we've done with that money is hire people. We've hired a lot of people who work with us to facilitate merch or video. We're doing a hundred times more video content than we ever have because we were able to hire Tom and get support with other folks who we've brought on board to help out with that too. So your support is very direct. You choose the shows that you listen to whenever you go to that link and become a supporter.

The bigger thing that you do, though, is that these shows are free, to listen to, for anyone.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: All the shows in the MaxFun Network are free. And when you become a supporter and you, you know, give money to us to help make the shows, you are helping keep those shows free. You are helping to keep this huge library of shows. Not just from us but from all the shows on the network of free and available to listen to. The BoCo, all of the other stuff is, you know, like a... I think I saw Linda Holmes refer to it as a thank you note—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: ... to you, the listener, which I really like. It's great and it's like, I love all of the bonus content stuff that we've done, but really what you are... What you are doing when you do that is helping us and other shows on the network grow and keep all of the stuff that we make free for everyone else to listen to. And I think that's rad and powerful.

Rachel: Yeah, I mean as somebody who listens to podcasts a lot across, you know, multiple platforms and networks, you know, I have noticed and I'm sure our listeners have noticed that more and more podcasts are going to networks that are a little prohibitive for people.

Griffin: True.

Rachel: You know, for whatever reason. Or, you know, may require the artist to compromise some things in order for them to create their content.

Griffin: Or have huge, huge paywalls.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And that's like not a value judgment on other shows that do that where it's like if you want to hear the full thing, you gotta go—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Like obviously we have the bonus content but like a vast, vast majority of the stuff that we make is just out there for folks to listen to. And if you don't have the means to support us, that's totally fine.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And we completely understand that and that stuff is still going to be, you know, available to you. But if you do have the means and you enjoy the stuff that we make, I really am hoping you will think about going to maximumfun.org/join. There's only a couple days left in the drive and it has been kind of slow and so if you have been listening to us for a very long time and haven't, you know, found a good reason to become a member, to become a supporter, let this... let this be the time.

Please go to maximumfun.org/join, pick the level that's right for you. If you're already a member, we'd super appreciate your support. If you're, you know, you want to upgrade to the next level and get the next level of pledge gifts, or if you just want to boost it by a couple of bucks, you can also do that at maximumfun.org/join. And we... I can't thank you enough for the support that you all have shown us year in and year out. And it's a really weird time for the industry as a whole, ads are way down. Live show sales are way down, I would say.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And so, you know, we are relying on the MaxFunDrive money, I would say, more than... more than ever. So maximumfun.org/join, thank you. Thank you so much.

Do you have anything else you want to say about the Maximum Fun Drive? Because I feel like I talked a lot there. I get very nervous.

Rachel: [laughs] I mean, it's a hard thing to do.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: You know, we like providing this content. Obviously we enjoy doing it and it's important to us, I think, week to week to have this opportunity. And I think because it's available for free, it's uncomfortable sometimes to be like, "Well, but you know what would be really great...?" [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: "Is if you helped us out a little bit."

But I think Max Fun, one thing I really appreciate about it is that it creates a community in a way. You know there's... We try and work with the other artists on the network.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: You know, we just did that episode of—

Griffin: *Go Fact Yours—*

Rachel: ... *Go Fact Yourself*.

Griffin: Yeah, that was so fun.

Rachel: And it's always such a pleasure.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: You know? I think Max Fun has done a really good job about bringing artists to the table that have kind of a spirit that aligns in a way?

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: And I don't know. I like the Max Fun Drive because it gives us an opportunity to kind of acknowledge that.

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: And talk about it and I hope that it means something to you and that you'll donate if you're able.

Griffin: Hey, can I talk about my thing?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Okay, good cause my thing is... casual dining restaurants!

Rachel: Oh, interesting!

Griffin: I was originally just going to do Applebee's—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: ... but then I decided to broaden it a little bit bigger.

Rachel: Okay...

Griffin: Partially because I haven't eaten at a Applebee's in a long time.

Rachel: Yeah. I think the last time was when I got a gift card from a coworker.

Griffin: Oh did—

Rachel: Was that an Applebee's or a Chili's?

Griffin: No, that was a Chili's. That was a Chili's, my friend. We did go to a Chili's in Austin. *The* Chili's. The like, meme Chili's in Austin.

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah.

Griffin: At like Guadalupe and like 44th or something like that.

Rachel: I think it's Lamar.

Griffin: Lamar and four— Yeah, maybe.

Rachel: Maybe. I don't—

Griffin: Great fuckin' Chili's, man.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Awesome.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It had some of their zesty little chicken poppers.

Rachel: Austin is a community that is very blessed with unique restaurants.

Griffin: Incredible restaurants.

Rachel: To the point where you don't actually really— Unlike a community maybe that doesn't have that—

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: ... you don't have to go to a chain restaurant.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: And yet, there is an opportunity...

Griffin: There is an opportunity, if you do chose— I feel like living in Austin... And DC. Like DC has an incredible food scene as well, has made me forget the face of my father, who is Applebee's a little bit.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Because, like, I have a very soft spot in my heart for casual dining restaurants, largely because growing up in Huntington, there wasn't—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: ... another option for like, quote unquote, “nice food,” right? Like, not... not... I guess not fast food if you're talking about sort of that dichotomy.

Rachel: I had... I definitely had that experience in St. Louis. Now there may have been nice food there, I'm not sure.

Griffin: I will say, St. Louis definitely has nice restaurants.

Rachel: But after, you know, after a football game—

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: ... or on an evening or weekend, like—

Griffin: That's it.

Rachel: ... we were going to the Applebee's.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Or the Steak and Shake.

Griffin: Huntington has great restaurants now that I'm very happy for. Huntington has gotten sort of 50,000 times cooler since I left it, which is unfortunate.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But there was something very beautiful about anytime you had a date or a birthday or a cast party for a show... Whatever, like your choice of dining establishment was probably made for you, and it was Applebee's.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I want to try to separate sort of my nostalgia for that experience from the discussion at large, because I think there's a lot about casual dining restaurants that I love sort of unironically. I love a big menu. I love a big menu that covers multiple food genres.

Rachel: Like a physically big menu?

Griffin: I do like a physically big menu, God help me.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I know they're gross. I feel like the worm has turned against big, laminated menus.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: 'Cause they're just apparently very, very dirty. But man, when I get one... Cheesecake Factory menus are like, bound.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: There's like a binding that has to happen there.

Rachel: [still laughing] Yeah...

Griffin: Because of how bodacious and heavy... Like, when you can't see someone on either side of you because of just the width of the menu that you're looking at?

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah...

Griffin: I love that. I love a restaurant with a million apps and desserts and a kids' menu that goes for days.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: That is huge for us. I cannot understate the value of that last point, especially for us, when we're like touring, when we're on the road and we need to get food for our kids backstage at a show. Knowing that there is a Cheesecake Factory nearby with their infinite menu, really relieves a lot of stress from that equation.

There's an amazing article, I'm sure I've talked about it on this show before from a website called *First We Feast* where they interviewed a bunch of NBA players. Because in the NBA, the Cheesecake Factory has this like, cult-like following that nobody could really understand. And so they interviewed a bunch of NBA players and they realized, like, there's a Cheesecake Factory in every NBA team city.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh-huh.

Griffin: They are usually in the, like, central hub.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Where, you know, the hotels and basketball arenas are. I think that's probably what they're called.

Rachel: [laughs] Stadiums, sometimes.

Griffin: Stadiums, maybe sometimes. The portions are enormous and the prices aren't bonkers because if you're coming at it from, like, a rookie salary that you have to kind of manage, like that can be a consideration.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I know people think like, "Oh, basketball players are super, super, rich." That is not always the case all the time. And also the buildings are

usually huge enough that like if you and most of the team want to have a sit-down dining experience, the Cheesecake Factory can hook you up there too. Is the food *amazing* at a lot of casual dining restaurants? No, of course not. Is it like a lot of the time, sort of frozen and rehydrated? Yes it is.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Do I need my mozzarella sticks to be farm-to-table? I do not.

Rachel: [laughs] That's true.

Griffin: I do not. I'm sure that farm to table mozzarella sticks exist and I'm sure that they are excellent. But like I don't need my bloomin' onion... What's up Outback Steakhouse? We haven't mentioned you by name, but you know I'm looking at you. Do I need my bloomin' onion to be artisinally made? I do not. There is a place for this... this echelon of food, and it exists very specifically in this one sort of category of restaurants.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: That is sort of dying. And not sort of, like it's wicked dying. Like casual dining is in a very rough spot, right now. Obviously, with the COVID-19 shutdowns—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: When they were in sort of full effect, traffic disappeared. As things sort of got back to normal, I saw a statistic that was like traffic at casual dining restaurants is down like 59 percent from where it was pre-COVID.

But even before that, fast casual restaurants, which is your Chipotles, which is your Five Guys, anything without drive-thru service that doesn't have full table service?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Typically you would call a fast casual dining experience.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Just obliterated the market.

Rachel: [sadly] Yeah...

Griffin: Because of how much easier and obviously faster it is to get food there and as sort of the prevalence of, you know, meal delivery took off. Which again was compounded by COVID. You know, it's a lot easier to get a burrito from a restaurant to someone's door than it is to get like, some chicken piccata, for example.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: And so casual places have tried to pivot, but I feel like they are fighting a losing battle. I don't think that there is any coming back from this. Because it's just like, for us, personally speaking, it is very hard for us to get a babysitter.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And get together for like a night out at a dinner. If we're going to do that usually, you know— And we live in a city where we have infinite options 'cause we live in DC. Like usually we're gonna go for someplace a little bit nicer than a Chili's.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But at the same time, I am eternally grateful to have that option available to me when we are traveling.

Rachel: Yeah, I wonder if the young people still do the casual dining. Because I remember like the prospect of going to a restaurant when you, one, don't have a lot of money. And two, don't really know how money is managed—

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: ... is intimidating. And I just remember so many times going to restaurants and sitting around and like all of us were like always trying to figure out how much money we were supposed to put— [laughs]

Griffin: Yes!

Rachel: ... to put down. And that process was made so much easier in an environment that was not stuffy or intimidating, you know?

Griffin: Exactly. That's a really good point. It is a good place to kind of cut your teeth. I'm glad that I went to as many dates at Applebee'ses and Outbackses that I did.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Because it is like a pretty... a non-judgmental environment—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: ... to kind of get your sea legs under you. Also there's like lots of places that... where you know, fine dining options are limited.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And it kicks ass that there are, you know, there is... The Cheesecake Factory can be there in those times. And also full, full, stop. Fancy restaurants don't serve riblets—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: ... and fuckin' Oreo mud slide dirt cake and some of that shit rules.

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah. No, that's true. Like most places that are considered fancy don't have a lot of appetizers, and they don't have a lot of dessert options.

Griffin: Yes!

Rachel: Whereas a casual dining restaurant always has tons of both of those things.

Griffin: Of course.

Rachel: Like you could make a whole meal out of apps and desserts at these places.

Griffin: And you should. You absolutely should. Also, casual restaurants have done some fuckin' bonkers stuff to try and stay in the conversation.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Like I'd like to see Panera Bread try to do infinite soup, salad, and breadsticks. They'd go out of business.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I don't think they know... I don't think they can do that. They charge you for all that shit there. But at Olive Garden, when you're here, you are family.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: This segment has made me want to eat a big, blackened steak at the Applebee's.

Rachel: [wistfully] Yeah...

Griffin: I don't think there is one actually close to us, sadly.

Rachel: No, I don't think so. You know what it has me thinking about is milkshakes.

Griffin: [lustfully] Oh yeah...

Rachel: For whatever reason at casual dining restaurants, they almost always have milkshakes.

Griffin: They sure do.

Rachel: And I could not finish one these days, it would destroy my body.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And I would feel terrible, but I [laughs] I like... I like `em.

Griffin: I had a milkshake— this is a complete non sequitur— at the Alamo Draft House pretty soon after I moved to Austin. And it was a— I mean, they do `em right, there.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: They do `em... They do `em big and thick.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And you could turn that cup upside down, it'd probably make a big mess.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But you know what I'm saying. That wrecked me so completely that it made— It changed my life. That I was like, "I can't..."

I don't think I've had a milkshake since because I'm like, "I can't keep doing this."

Rachel: Yeah, well, I mean, you are most likely lactose intolerant.

Griffin: Yeah, I think so. I think so.

Rachel: [laughs] So...

Griffin: We did our pizza party stream yesterday and I did not feel so good after that. That—

Rachel: I have noticed since I have made a return to dairy—

Griffin: Yeah?

Rachel: ... that I generally do not feel well after consuming lots of dairy.

Griffin: No, no. There's an object lesson in there somewhere, but I'm too dang distracted by the MaxFunDrive and your birthday... to talk about it.

Rachel: [laughs] And my birthday.

Griffin: And your birthday, to talk about it. This is our last pitch for you, for the year. Maximumfun.org/join is the link that you can go to. You can choose the level that works for you. At just 5 bucks a month, so much bonus content, for every show on the network, throughout the fullness of time. You want to listen to us interview *Bachelorette Canada* Jasmine Lorimer on the *Rose Buddies Podcast*?

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: That BoCo's still up.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: *Rose Buddies* ain't around no more but the BoCo still is.

Rachel: Yeah, it's true.

Griffin: If you want to go and dive into that. There's so much really, really fun stuff for you to go listen to. But again, I... I... I am a supporter of the [laughing] MaxFunDrive.

Rachel: Yeah, me too, which is so unnecessary.

Griffin: It is unnecessary in the extreme.

Rachel: 'Cause we live in the same house.

Griffin: But I... Like I... It is an honor to be a part of this network.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: When we... When I got an email from Jesse in like February 2011 while I was checking out at the Trader Joe's in Chicago, that was like, "Hey, we have some listeners of ours who suggested your show and we listened to it and think it would be a really great fit for the network." That was full-blown, like life-changing level of—

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah!

Griffin: ... like, life event for us. And that whole... I mean that year kicked ass.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: That was the year I moved to Austin and met Rachel.

Rachel: Mm-hmm.

Griffin: And we did our first live show in Chicago.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: With Jordan and Jesse and that was an incredibly like happy and exciting year. And I genuinely do, around the MaxFunDrive every year feel that same sort of joy and excitement that this is our lives and this is our career and that we've gotten to be a part of this thing that we all love so much.

Rachel: Yeah. And I want to say particularly about this show, Griffin is somebody now that creates a lot of content. But I would say like this show is like the most personal, vulnerable thing that you make. Would you say that's true?

Griffin: I would say— Now that I don't do *Griffin's Amiibo Corner* anymore—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: ... I would agree with that.

Rachel: [still laughing] I think each week when we sit down and we talk about things that we like, you know there is I think, inherently a risk of coming across as silly, you know?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But I never feel that way because of the community Max Fun has given us and the support of the audience.

Griffin: Just the best.

Rachel: And the opportunity to talk to my person that I like so much.

Griffin: I like you too.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Maximumfun.org/join is the link. Please, please think about going there if you like us and you have the means. If you like us.

Rachel: If you like us, please.

Griffin: Do you *like*, like us?

Rachel: Please? Please like us.

Griffin: Maximumfun.org/join. We have a bunch of stuff over at our YouTube channel, @theMcElroyFamily, we've been doing streams basically every day. And have done a lot of fun stuff like the pizza party stream mentioned earlier. We've been... Me and Justin, Travis and Dad have been playing a weird sort of competitive version of *Stardew Valley* that I didn't know existed. That's over there, too.

Rachel: Yeah, and Griffin and I played *Stardew Valley*.

Griffin: Rachel and I also did some streaming. I finally got to see her farm. It's a thing of beauty.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Thank you to Bo en and Augustus for the use of our theme song "Money Won't Pay." You can find a link to that in the episode description. All of our merch stuff is over at mcelroymerch.com.

I'm trying to wrap up quick 'cause I know you have a meeting in like one minute. But yeah, I... You know what? Let's call it. That's it.

Rachel: Thank you!

Griffin: Thank you all so much for listening. We'll be back next week with another sort of straight down the... Straight over the plate, non-MaxFunDrive episode. So, you're going to listen to that and feel like, "Aw, dang it! Why didn't I donate during the actual MaxFunDrive episode?"

Don't let that be you! This is you from the future calling you on this haunted telephone to say happy birthday to Rachael.

Rachel: [laughs]

[theme song plays]

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