

[00:00:00] **John Moe:** A note to our listeners, this episode contains discussions of suicide that some people might find upsetting.

Now, okay, this is the part at the beginning of the episode where it's just me talking for a bit before the guest shows up on the show. And yeah, the show, it's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here. Here comes the music.

[00:00:22] **Music:** Upbeat acoustic guitar.

[00:00:30] **John Moe:** And the purpose of the “me talking” part at the beginning of the show is to frame the interview you're about to hear, to point to the overarching theme of the conversation. It's my job in this stretch to name the thesis, really. Here's what this episode is about kind of thing. Put it into a sentence or so, an elevator pitch.

But sometimes—not often, but occasionally—an interview comes along and is so densely packed with so much variety and amazing components that I can't really put it all into a sentence. Sometimes, all I can do is narrow it down to a few potential big meanings, and that's how it is this week with my guest Kate Speer. And what's the interview about this week, John, you ask? Well, it's about dogs and how they can help a person with mental illness in very practical and perhaps unexpected ways. The episode is also about how an inaccurate diagnosis can lead one down the wrong track. And it's about how exposure therapy can put one onto a better track. Oh, the episode, it's about so many things! It's about relationships with friends. It's about hallucinations and psychosis and college, a lot about college, and also poison ivy. It's about a lot of things, like I said.

Kate Speer is a writer, entrepreneur, and mental health advocate. She has a popular Instagram account and Substack newsletter where she often talks about mental illness and recovery and her psychiatric service dogs, Waffle and Tugboat, and she talks a lot about her friend, Maura.

If you search for Kate on YouTube, you can find a video of a TEDx talk that she gave where she told people all about Maura, whom Kate had met while in an inpatient psychiatric hospital. In the video, Kate explains that Maura died soon after checking out of the hospital, due to depression. We're gonna learn more about Kate Speer in this interview, and we're gonna learn a lot more about Maura, as well.

[00:02:41] **Music:** Bright, energetic acoustic guitar.

[00:02:50] **John Moe:** Kate Speer, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

[00:02:53] **Kate Speer:** Thank you so much for having me. It's an honor to be here.

[00:02:56] **John Moe:** I have to ask, how are the dogs?

[00:02:59] **Kate Speer:** Thank you! I mean, how did we start with me? They're—(*chuckles*) they're fabulous. I've got one right here, and the other is on an adventurous hike in the woods with my husband. So, doing well.

[00:03:10] **John Moe:** Which one do you have with you now?

[00:03:12] **Kate Speer:** I have Waffle, who actually as of right now is kind of coming back out of retirement to do some work. So, she has been snuggling me, doing some deep pressure therapy for about the last hour in advance of this. (*Laughs.*)

[00:03:25] **John Moe:** Wait out of retirement? How does a dog retire?

[00:03:29] **Kate Speer:** Great question. Very important question. So, Waffle is a semi-retired service dog. She's a medical alert dog, so she's professionally trained to smell me. What a lucky gal, huh? (*Chuckles.*)

[00:03:42] **John Moe:** Wow.

[00:03:43] **Kate Speer:** And she's just here to make sure that I don't dissociate too much today.

[00:03:47] **John Moe:** Okay. Excellent. Well, I'm sure she's doing a great job. And your other dog is Tugboat, correct?

[00:03:54] **Kate Speer:** Exactly. Yeah. So, Tugboat is out in the woods living her best life. She worked all last night. She does night terror alerts and such like that. So, she needed some recreation.

[00:04:03] **John Moe:** Alright, well, we're gonna catch up with the dogs and we're gonna—we're gonna get to a nexus point of your mental health journey and the dogs here in a little bit. But let's go back pre-dog, if you can imagine that such a life was even possible. And your journey is a long and meandering one, in terms of mental health. Where does it begin? How old are you when the mental health journey starts?

[00:04:29] **Kate Speer:** Ooh. (*Laughs.*) In utero? Is that possible?

[00:04:32] **John Moe:** Could be. Could be!

[00:04:33] **Kate Speer:** Generationally, probably two generations ago. Right? But truthfully, it started when I was just a little girl. So, when I was, I think, going into kindergarten, I exhibited anxiety, generalized fear, but mine presented very differently. So, while most people got shy and timid, I got loud. Very, very loud and colorful.

And so, people often mistook my anxiety and fear as just this gregarious, kind of overzealous personality. So that's really when it began. Kindergarten,

[00:05:06] **John Moe:** So how was that detected as being something other than a gregarious personality?

[00:05:11] **Kate Speer:** It wasn't. (*Laughs.*) Not until far later. I think the first thing diagnostically that—you know, I've actually just started going through all of my health records and journals and such. But it's clear that it started in about first grade. They realized that I had some pretty severe learning differences. So, I process information very differently.

And around that time, that was when a therapist was called in to run just basically an overview analysis of what was going on with me, my brain, and my emotions in relation to that. And that's where, at least in the paperwork, I can now see Kate's very much nervous, but always trying to present her best self and compensates with volume, which I still struggle with. I have no volume control. So just turn it down already, everybody, for the entire episode. (*Laughs.*)

[00:06:03] **John Moe:** We have engineering staff standing by to make sure that everything—the EQ is going to be very efficient on this one. Diagnostically, did this have a name, what they figured you had?

[00:06:16] **Kate Speer:** Yeah, no. So, it's just—it's classified back in the day as a processing disorder. When I was 16, the diagnosis criteria for ADHD changed and evolved to what it is now. So, technically it was a combination of a processing disorder and ADHD, but basically when I was a little kid—I feel like I'm dating myself. I'm only 35. But they had yet to recognize ADHD in the combined type. So, they didn't really understand the idea of inattentive combined with the more outgoing kind of loud versions. And I was the yin and yang. I did both, and that didn't fit the criteria at the time. So.

[00:06:54] **John Moe:** So, we've got the idea of the diagnoses here and some of the names and the semantic imperfections.

[00:07:01] **Kate Speer:** Ugh, yes. (*Laughs.*)

[00:07:03] **John Moe:** What was it like for you, though? What were you like as an adolescent, say, in terms of mental health?

[00:07:09] **Kate Speer:** I—so basically, growing up, I just always felt different. I thought of myself—even though maybe I wasn't—as an outsider. I just never found my people, and I never understood why everyone wasn't feeling as strongly as I was feeling. I remember that actually as a very young girl, all the way through adolescence. But by about middle school, I started to emote, cry a bit more, and it's definitely in my memory—I just remember being friends with teachers. I had wonderful friends. I was very athletic, and I think my athleticism actually was really social capital, almost currency, that allowed me to move through my adolescence with ease. It was like, “Oh, Kate's crying in the hallway, but she scored all the goals last night! So, whatever!”

(*They laugh.*)

[00:07:56] **John Moe:** I always say that the speed at which you can run matters so much at that age, and then, you know, I want to whisper to those kids, “It will never matter again.”

[00:08:06] **Kate Speer:** Ever! Ever.

[00:08:07] **John Moe:** It's never gonna be currency after this.

[00:08:11] **Kate Speer:** But I—yeah, I look back and I'm really grateful that I somehow managed to be, you know, a tri-varsity athlete, just because I think it allowed for this deep depression that arrived when I was about 13 to—and it wasn't identified as such, but I just cried all the time—to just be more socially acceptable.

I remember, I think starting in my sophomore year, I used to literally walk into each classroom on the first day of school and I would say, “Hi, my name is Kate. I cry all the time. I'd like your permission to sit in the back of the room and cry during class so that I can learn.” And I remember these teachers would just slam into the chalkboard. They were just so overwhelmed. (*Laughs.*)

‘Cause, you know, 20 years ago this wasn't talked about. We just—we had yet to normalize it at all. But yeah, that was me growing up. I played a lot of sports, and I cried a ton and uh, yeah! (*Chuckles.*)

[00:09:04] **John Moe:** Those poor teachers were getting a preview of what the rest of the semester was going to be like in that moment, too.

[00:09:09] **Kate Speer:** Oh yeah. Oh yeah. They had no idea how to deal with me. I mean, I think the funny thing was by my junior year, I used to qualify it by saying, “You can send me to the guidance counselor, but we're best friends. So, then it'll just be more like social time for me. So, it's better if you just let me cry in the back of the room.”

[00:09:28] **John Moe:** And you know, you were—sounds like a smart kid. You were kind of aware of things. Did you know that this was depression? Did you think of this as being a major depressive disorder?

[00:09:39] **Kate Speer:** Uh, great question. I don't think—although I'm quick to throw around diagnostics. Clearly, I'm just dropping all the jargon today. Woo! I don't think I've ever thought of myself as depressed in the sense of being the identity of depressed. And I think I say that because I've never thought—I don't think there's a wrong way to be human.

There's no wrong way to be human. We're just human. And as long as you're kind, you just show up as you are. And I think that's actually something that, throughout my childhood in particular and especially once we got into college, became notable. Like I didn't think it was weird to tell my teachers that I cried all the time. I was just like, yeah, I cry all the time. What's the big deal? It's just what I do.

And I think—I think I was able to acknowledge that, yes, this is depression. But I don't think I added the weight of that word or especially the stigma associated with it at the time. I think it took, you know, many years, actually—not until I was experiencing psychosis—until I really started to feel completely othered to a point of debilitation and shame.

But yeah, so I would say yes and no. I was like, yeah, I cry all the time, but I just didn't attach a weight or a morality to it. It just was what was.

[00:10:54] **John Moe:** So, that's middle school and that's high school. What happens after high school?

[00:11:00] **Kate Speer:** Oh boy. (*Laughs.*)

[00:11:02] **John Moe:** The party begins.

[00:11:03] **Kate Speer:** So, uh, I got—yeah. So again, luckily athleticism helped in a lot of ways, and I was recruited to play division one lacrosse. Opted not to do that so I could try to play two sports at Middlebury College. And basically, in advance of arriving, I was a feb, which basically means you get this term off at Middlebury. It's this—it's how they used to navigate people going abroad and the housing dynamic.

But really what it is, is just a way for people to get a quasi, you know, half basically year off prior to school. And during that time, the depression turned into something else. It started to be these mood swings, these kind of prolonged periods of elevated mood. So, by the time I arrived at Middlebury in February, I was diagnosed with a mood disorder not otherwise classified.

And that semester, I had the most wonderful time and also the most volatile time. So, I would not sleep for three weeks. I would go from running, you know, 5 miles to running 35 miles with no training. And my body would just do these seemingly wild, unusual things. And manifested in the last week of the semester, I wrote this 12-page analysis on the history of the '70s, and my professor called me in basically accusing me of plagiarism. And I said, "I so hear you, Professor Jacobs, and come with me."

And so, I like grabbed his hand. The dean was outside, and I grabbed his hand too. And I walked them to my room, and I showed him what was just a labyrinth of colorful note cards.

There were just basically post-it's all over my room in a rainbow. And I was like, "See, this is how it worked." And it was just laid out in this beautiful mosaic, and it was how I'd written the piece. And they called the health office. (*Laughs.*) And the next—yeah, and the next day—

[00:13:01] **John Moe:** Wh-why?!

[00:13:02] **Kate Speer:** Uh, because my room looked like I had had a break of sorts. There was just—at the time, I remember the wall. But in asking my professor about it, after the episode—kind of the next semester—he said, "There was stuff everywhere; you were talking a hundred miles a minute. You were activated. You just clearly hadn't showered in a long time. And we realized there was something else going on. This wasn't cheating, this wasn't plagiarism, this was a health crisis."

And I had, prior to that, been very upfront that I had health issues. I was very transparent throughout my entire life, especially at college, that I struggled with health stuff. And so, I think his awareness of that furthered his understanding that something was up and at that point was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. So. Woof!

[00:13:49] **John Moe:** By somebody on campus or—?

[00:13:52] **Kate Speer:** No, by my psychiatrist at the time. And my grandmother had lived with it, lived with bipolar type one. And so, it was just the expectation of, “Oh, you're 18. This is the time in life when it comes to fruition. You've got bipolar two.” And so, that was just the truth that was accepted for the next decade.

[00:14:16] **John Moe:** Yeah. Yeah. And then how did you receive that news? Or that misdiagnosis, I guess?

[00:14:23] **Kate Speer:** Yeah, so the time, obviously I didn't know it was a misdiagnosis, and I felt oddly relieved, I think. Honestly, I felt relieved every time I was given a diagnosis. And I think that speaks to this duality of understanding: the understanding that, oh, I'm just a human who experiences these things, and I do feel othered. I do feel like I live in a society that doesn't explain and give me space for who I am and what I am and make me feel like I actually belong.

So that relief speaks to that inner kind of deep, dark, “Wow, I don't fit in.” And when I was given a word, it almost set me free. It almost was like a permission slip. It was like, yeah, you are different. And that... that makes sense. It makes all of this make sense; you know? Just like I'm an athlete and it makes sense that I score, I have bipolar disorder and it makes sense sometimes I don't sleep for weeks at a time.

And it like, it gave that reason, like that rationale behind it. So yeah, I think I felt relief.

[00:15:27] **John Moe:** Did it make the symptoms any easier? Did it alleviate—did it, you know, help you recover more? Getting the diagnosis?

[00:15:35] **Kate Speer:** Yeah, I—totally. I think I—I don't think I would've survived what I went through had I not been as radically accepting of myself as I was. I've really never thought of mental illness as a weakness. Actually, I think of it as a superpower. We're feelers! We're just part of the spectrum of humanity, and we're feelers.

And I, again, I think in today's world, it's very common to talk about mental illness and mental health. But when I was in college, you know, 20 years ago, it was not. It was shocking, honestly. And I was—people used to be like, whoa. You know, they'd just pee. But as soon as they kind of got used to it, it was just like, “Oh, that's Kate. She just brings her entire little pill pack to the, you know—the cafeteria and the dining hall. And she's the girl who introduced herself as, ‘Hi, I'm Kate. I have bipolar disorder, so if I ever get weird—yeah! That's me! Whatever!’” I just—I don't—I never attached morality to it in college, especially.

And so, yeah, that acceptance definitely made it easier. I think it's one of the reasons why I don't—people always say, “I'm so sorry for what you went through.” And I'm like, I'm not! I had so much joy along the way, because along with the pain, there was so much joy. Because I was allowed to be me in me, and when I was allowed to be me in me, others did the same. Which is a lot of the reason I love dogs now, 'cause they do that too.

[00:17:01] **John Moe:** We're getting to the dogs.

[00:17:02] **Kate Speer:** We're getting there. I know. I had to drop it in there, you know? Right? We were—we just—it was a lot of—it was a lot. So.

[00:17:07] **John Moe:** That's called a forward promote. Yes. We're getting to the dogs.

(They chuckle.)

So, you're 19 when you get this diagnosis of bipolar—of bipolar two, you said?

[00:17:19] **Kate Speer:** Yeah. Bipolar disorder, type two.

[00:17:21] **John Moe:** Okay.

[00:17:21] **Kate Speer:** Yep. So, rapid cycling.

[00:17:23] **John Moe:** Right. And how does the rest of college go?

[00:17:27] **Kate Speer:** The rest of college was a trip! Literally and figuratively, now. But basically, I was prescribed a number of medications for bipolar disorder. And with every medication that I was put on, I seemingly presented with more symptoms. And by the end of my second year at Middlebury, I had already, you know, planned a suicide and been hospitalized and had electric convulsive therapy.

And then it took me five and a half years to go through Middlebury. And during that time, I was hospitalized I think 15 times. And I was struggling by my sophomore year with pretty debilitating psychosis. So, I started with hearing things, and then by the end of my sophomore year, it manifested into kind of full-blown visual, um—I say madness, and I say that with love, because it was beautiful and hell at the same time.

[00:18:28] **John Moe:** So, what would you hallucinate? What would you see and what would you hear?

[00:18:32] **Kate Speer:** All sorts of things. There were joyful hallucinations. I used to talk to trees all the time. I had the most amazing conversations with this maple tree at Middlebury. *(Laughs.)* I've subsequently visited it; it doesn't talk back any longer. Shucks. *(Laughs.)* But more than that, I hallucinated some pretty dark stuff.

So, a lot of it had to do with my own suicide. I used to walk up College Hill, and I would just watch my body hurl itself from every tree. And around this time, I also started to be chased by both humans that were not real turns out, but also kind of demons. And it really depended on the day what I was in for. But yeah, it was a whole slew of things that I saw.

[00:19:25] **John Moe:** And—but yet, you're still like turning in papers and going to the quad and doing college things. I don't know if there was a quad, but—

[00:19:35] **Kate Speer:** I mean there might as well have been. Yeah, it didn't make sense. I—honestly, I look back and I read my journals and I just—*(laughs)* I'm just kind of, and this is not meant to be said with any grandeur or ego—I'm just shocked. I'm kind of in awe that I kept going. But really what happened was I had electroconvulsive therapy, and I lost my memory.

So, for certain individuals, there's this very rare side effect where you have a prolonged period of memory loss. And I actually lost almost all of my time at Middlebury. And so, when I came back to college, I had to figure out how to rebuild my memory, and I didn't trust anything. My short-term memory had also been damaged.

So, I got my parents Nikon—it's like this old beater Nikon camera—and I started taking pictures of everything. And so, I would take pictures of my day, everyone in it, write it up, and then, in the morning I would read through it. And this was also how I developed OCD, because I became very ritualized in everything that I did.

But it was also how, once I started having these hallucinations, I was able to figure out what was real and what wasn't. Because I would just walk around, and I'd literally look in the viewfinder. And what was in the viewfinder was real and what wasn't, wasn't. So, I went to class like that. I literally had my Nikon just on the desk.

And I would say I had a lot of help. When I was in college, I had a lot of help. I had incredible professors who listened to me as I built out my own supported education program, and I had friends who took turns on suicide watch. And yeah. I had people show up. And I think that's that idea—right?—where we show up for ourselves. We do that terrifying thing of exposing ourselves with vulnerability, and it's the greatest gift we can actually give to ourselves. 'Cause it's the only way people can give back. 'Cause otherwise, they don't see us as we are. So, yeah, I got through because of a lot of people. *(Chuckles.)*

[00:21:41] **John Moe:** Yeah. Was it terrifying to be vulnerable for you? Or was it—or were you comfortable doing that?

[00:21:47] **Kate Speer:** It took a lot—I think of vulnerability as a muscle. I just—I think the more we do it, the easier it becomes. And I'm not gonna say that I didn't have extreme anxiety every time I started a new semester and had to go into every single professor's office and sit down and hand them—literally, I had a binder for each of them that said, “Here are the crisis numbers. Here's my diagnosis. Here's the note from the dean. Here are responses to my emails for you to send when I tell you that I am either suicidal or having a medication side effect.”

Like, I literally built out this entire framework for them, and that was terrifying every time. But as terrifying as it was to ask for help in that way and to show up as honestly as I did... (*choking up a little*) it was tenfold easier to live to be accepted as I was. And, um, the only way I've ever known how to live is to be me. And, um, yeah, it was my way of saving myself, I guess, was I needed to be accepted as I was. And with that level—I call it radical transparency—with that level of radical transparency, I was able to go to college. I was able to turn papers in. Not on time nearly ever, (*laughs*) with incomplete after incomplete.

But yeah, I was able to go to college. Which, um, when I graduated, I thought that was gonna be the only thing I did in my life, and that was gonna be the biggest accomplishment. And yeah, still definitely up there.

[00:23:21] **John Moe:** What happened after college?

[00:23:23] **Kate Speer:** Uh, so, I think working to college was actually this incredible gift, because it gave me something to work towards. It's like, "I'm going to graduate." And as soon as I graduated, I was pretty much in free fall. I didn't have a job. I was, at this point, debilitatingly psychotic. I also had crippling contamination OCD, and that was the result of kind of the memory loss and the rituals and that all developed over time.

[00:23:53] **John Moe:** Is that like a germaphobia kind of thing?

[00:23:55] **Kate Speer:** Yeah, I had this bizarre fear of poison ivy. (*Laughs.*) My girlfriend basically had gotten systemic poison ivy on her body, and she and I ran together, and I just remember her having these just like oozy patches. And this had all happened after, actually, I was sexually assaulted in one of my hospital stays. And I think at that time I was looking for anything, and this was all subconscious, but anything for people to not touch me.

And my girlfriend who had systemic poison ivy used to be like, "I don't hug people. I have poison ivy." And it was the most socially acceptable way to say I don't get touched, which I really didn't want to be. So, I think there was this subconscious part of me, and I was also running with her, and we were doing laundry together and she was teaching me all of these protocols and just kind of kicked into something.

So yeah, so I graduated, and I basically spent three to six hours a day in the shower washing myself with this thing called Tecnu, which gets rid of the urushiol, which is the oil that activates the skin. And I thought I was gonna write my first book. *Living A Diagnosis* was gonna be the title. And so, I spent the summer trying to do that, and my hallucinations got worse, and my OCD got worse. And it became pretty clear that I needed to be hospitalized. And so, I went in for kind of a longer stay—like a five week stay—and then, thereafter I really just disappeared.

[00:25:29] **John Moe:** What do you mean disappeared?

[00:25:31] **Kate Speer:** Whew. Come on. It's too hard. (*Laughs.*) Um, I think there was part of me that broke after I graduated college. And I think a lot of that had to do with, um, sexual assault and how the hospital handled that, and being—feeling like very violated by both the

system and the individual who assaulted me. But I think I disappeared in the sense that all of the shame that I had kept at bay and all of this othering that had been really bestowed upon me, that I was able to deflect with this complete radical acceptance for years, just caught up to me like a tidal wave.

And my great-aunt, who lives in the same town as my parents, was moved into a retirement home. And her house was just there, vacant. So, I moved in there, and I just stopped leaving. I would set my alarm and go shopping at the 24-hour grocery store, just so I didn't see people, and I'd only check out with the electronic checkers.

And I developed really debilitating agoraphobia. So, it was about two years of just shrinking just my whole reality. My world became very small. I got up. I wrote a suicide note. I took a long, OCD ritualized shower, um, and I, you know, went into the ward every time the hallucinations got too bad. And that was the routine.

[00:27:06] **John Moe:** How many times do you think you were hospitalized?

[00:27:10] **Kate Speer:** I've been pulling through the records. So, it looks like it was like 21 times, and that doesn't include the longer stay at the Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Institute at McLean, which was a full summer, and some of the other kind of—we'd call them—they were like outpatient programs, where like we'd have like a professional nurse. My parents are both two very well-connected health professionals. And so, I grew up with incredible privilege and access. And they were able to, you know, get a nurse to basically live with me, instead of me being put in some of these more sterile and nurturing health programs.

[00:27:48] **John Moe:** So, this is—this is a situation where things have gotten steadily worse. Did you—? How did you see the future at that point? What did you think was going to happen to your life?

[00:28:01] **Kate Speer:** (*Softly.*) Great question. Um, I didn't know. I think there was this part of me that—honestly, at this time, um—for anyone who reads my Substack, they're gonna just be like, “Wait, what?!” Uh, this time I basically—my brain invented an imaginary friend, and her name is Maura.

[00:28:23] **Music:** Bright acoustic guitar.

[00:28:23] **John Moe:** More with Kate Speer and more about Maura after the break.

(*Music ends.*)

[00:28:35] **Promo:**

Music: Playful rock music.

Dave Holmes: Oh my gosh. Hi! It's me, Dave Holmes, host of the pop culture game show *Troubled Waters*. On *Troubled Waters*, we play a whole host of games like one

where I describe a show using Limerick, and our guests have to figure out what it is. Let's do one right now. What show am I talking about?

This podcast has game after game and brilliant guests who come play 'em! The host is named Dave. It could be your fave! So, try it. Life won't be the same.

Speaker 1: Uh, a *Big Business*, starring Bette Midler and Lily Tomlin.

Dave: Close! But no.

Speaker 2: Oh, is it *Troubled Waters*, the pop culture quiz show with all your favorite comedians?

Dave: Yes!

(Ding!)

Troubled Waters is the answer.

Speaker 1: To this question and all of my life's problems.

Dave: Now, legally, we actually can't guarantee that. But! You can find it on MaximumFun.org or wherever you get your podcasts.

(Music fades out.)

[00:29:21] **Music:** Relaxed acoustic guitar.

[00:29:22] **John Moe:** Back with Kate Speer, who has revealed that her friend Maura never existed in the physical world.

(Music ends.)

[00:29:31] **Kate Speer:** I know she wasn't real, but I believe she was real. She was me and an imaginary friend. But one of my hospitalizations, I met her. And, up until that point I had basically wanted to die to spare my family. Um, I'm an empath, as you could tell. I'm almost crying every other sentence. *(Laughs.)*

[00:29:51] **John Moe:** I feel like one of your middle school teachers.

[00:29:53] **Kate Speer:** Yeah, I mean, woof! We got it! I mean, it's like—*(fumbling for words)* so, I mean, you're like, “Wow, *(inaudible)*—”

[00:29:58] **John Moe:** Sit in the back of the interview and go ahead and cry.

[00:30:01] **Kate Speer:** Yeah. I was like, “Oh, it's the *Hilarious World of Depression* guy. Gotta be funny. I'm gonna try not to cry!” I mean, I definitely laugh a lot, so it's a both. But, um, but yeah, so I basically—at this point, I wanted to die just to spare my family. I... and I wrote a lot about it. Every journal is that. It's like looking at just—yeah.

(*Choking up.*) It's like every time I would be hospitalized, and my parents would walk in, I'd just be like, “All I wanna do is take away this pain from them.” And that's all I felt like I was doing was causing pain. Like even my practitioners were just, um, really sad. And I think it was—it was all love, you know? Like to care to that level, that one feels deep sorrow on behalf of another is such a beautiful testament to love. And, uh, it still was a huge weight for me.

And then, my brain created Maura, and she was awesome. She was everything I used to be: this colorful, bright, zesty. She called herself a bipolar bear, and I was her bipolar bear, and we were the bipolar bears, and it was this whole thing, and it was amazing.

And she is—which means me, uh, it's very trippy in talking about this—um, basically turned my life around, because she made me promise that I would tell my story and that I would keep doing what I was doing. And when I went into the ward, it wasn't because I wanted to die. It was usually 'cause I didn't wanna die, and I didn't trust my reality.

And so, when I was in the ward, everyone used to think I was a medical student, because I'd interview everybody, and I'd write up all these stories about everybody. Because I thought everyone's story is spectacular, and everyone deserves their story to be heard and seen and known. And she acknowledged that and celebrated it and was like, “This is what you need to do with your life. You need to survive to do this.”

And what my brain created was after my therapist of nine years passed away from colon cancer and Maura and I were hospitalized together, after my one and only suicide attempt—his death and some circumstances that were really complicated for me—she made me promise that I would start writing about this publicly.

And then she signed out against medical advice. Again, this is an imaginary friend. This is what my brain created. And she died from her depression, from suicide. And I think it just sealed my fate. It just made me have to do it. And so that's how I started writing her on Instagram. That's how I got into what I do, you know, online.

But yeah, I think the original question—aside from my extremely long answer—was about what did I think would happen and what did I hope for? And the truth is, I hoped to spare the world pain. That was all I wanted. I hoped to alleviate the look on my mom and dad's face when they walked in the room (*softly*) and the tears my little sister cried every time she visited me in the unit.

[00:33:22] **John Moe:** About Maura. How do you—did you see her? Were you under the impression that she was a real person? Were you—was she a—

[00:33:32] **Kate Speer:** Entirely.

[00:33:33] **John Moe:** She was a vivid hallucination.

[00:33:34] **Kate Speer:** Entirely. And I never camera checked her until my wedding. So, about a week before my wedding, I—one of the things that's most fascinating about Maura is actually that I wrote like the first five years of—back when my channel on Instagram was called Positively Kate, I wrote all about Maura. It's like all about her. And everyone fell in love with Maura, and Maura was amazing, and I was in love with Maura. Sometimes I think I'm bisexual just because of Maura. (*Laughs.*) What kind of an ego is that?

But really it was before our—my husband and my wedding. My husband's name is Dave. Dave said, “I think it would be really great if we put up some photos of all the people who couldn't join us today, like your grandparents who've subsequently passed. And my grandparents.”

And I said, “Oh, I love that idea.”

And he said, “And what about Maura?”

And I was like, “Oh my gosh. Yes!” So, I grabbed all of these, you know, just SD cards that you have with a camera, and they were all written like “Maura X”, you know, “hike” “Maura X bike ride”, “Maura X”—da-da-da-da. And um, I loaded them up into my computer, and it was just scenery. It was a vacant trailer. It was just an ice cream cone. She wasn't there. (*Softly.*) There was no one there. Um, and I had a full-blown panic attack (*laughing weakly*) for the first time in four years. Uh, called my therapist, and he said, “Yeah, that was you giving yourself a life again, Kate.”

And I said, “Did you always know?”

And he said, “Yeah, you are always gonna save yourself. Humans are the only ones that can save themselves. And that was you doing exactly that.”

[00:35:14] **John Moe:** So how beyond Maura did you begin to save yourself?

[00:35:18] **Kate Speer:** Great question. I began to leave the house. After Maura died, I vowed that I was going to live a life on purpose, and I was not going to waste it behind my door cowering and only going out at three in the morning. So, I started actually by first playing squash, which felt safe, ‘cause everyone had to wear white, and they had to change their shoes. (*Laughs.*) Also—

[00:35:43] **John Moe:** No poison ivy on the squash court.

[00:35:45] **Kate Speer:** Exactly, you got it! (*Laughs.*)

So, it felt completely contained. And best of all, it was the only sport I could actually play without being completely distracted by my hallucinations, which I was still having throughout all of this. And so, on a squash court, white walls and you got a ball. So basically,

anything that's not the ball or the white wall, it's a hallucination. It was just like another version of my camera. And so, I would go every day, and I would change my shoes. I was obsessed. I got clean shoes. It was so awesome. (*Laughs.*) And I played squash, and I—honestly, it started really slowly. And then, I was actually, you know, introduced to this new doctor who was the one who determined that I actually didn't have bipolar disorder.

And so, this doctor basically realized within a number of sessions that I had debilitating PTSD and panic disorder, but that bipolar disorder had been a misdiagnosis and that all of these hallucinations and these manifestations that I was seeing was actually the culmination of a drug trip. So basically, I had been tripping, uh literally, on these psychiatric medications extensively. And that is where all of these psychotic presentations had come from.

[00:37:09] **John Moe:** Okay. So, it was a—it was a response to the bipolar medication.

[00:37:15] **Kate Speer:** Totally. Yeah. So basically what—and I think he had seen other patients with different manifestations, which is how he realized this. But basically every medication that I was put on activated me further, and my body—by the time I saw Dr. Candido, who's this doctor I was on 13 psychiatric medications, and they were not cross tested, and they believe—basically, now their understanding is that the interactions of those medications combined with the extreme stress I was under—you know, anyone can hallucinate. If you don't sleep for weeks, you're gonna hallucinate. So, they believe the combination of those things created this kind of prolonged psychotic break, really.

[00:38:06] **John Moe:** That could invent an entire secret best friend for yourself.

[00:38:10] **Kate Speer:** Oh yeah. So much. I mean, the whole—the—I'm trying to write the book right now, and it's—when I remember her as she's real, it's so easy to write. And then when I get into the intricacies of (*laughing*) how the absolute heck did this happen and how did these people not realize, uh, I get pretty stuck. But yeah. It's pretty wild.

[00:38:32] **John Moe:** Wow. Yeah, that's a—that's a writing assignment. That's a hell of a prompt right there.

[00:38:37] **Kate Speer:** I know.

[00:38:39] **John Moe:** So, okay. So, the diagnosis gets straightened out. The medication gets straightened out. And then, how do you treat this incredibly severe anxiety and panic disorder situation?

[00:38:54] **Kate Speer:** Exposure therapy. (*Dryly.*) My favorite thing in the world. Yeah. Basically, for those who aren't familiar, exposure therapy is a therapeutic intervention where an individual literally exposes oneself to the very stimuli that terrifies you. It's pretty brutal, but it's done in a very controlled way. So, it's all about building a hierarchy.

So, if you can imagine being scared of flying, the way you would begin is actually just by getting a toy plane, and like looking at your toy plane once a day. And then, you would scale up to watching—looking at pictures of flights. And then, you would scale up to looking at

videos. And the idea with exposure therapy is you expose yourself to, say, the plane. And you feel all of these sensations. You know, your heart racing, the sweat. For me, I have the awesome bodily reaction where I shit myself. I'm literally scared shitless. So, I'm a diaper queen. It's good news. Depends. Come on, let's bring 'em out in hot pink. I'm still waiting. *(Chuckles.)* But basically, you sit with it, and as soon as this anxiety dissipates and your body calms, you've completed the exposure. And the more you do this, the less of a reaction your body has to that stimuli.

And it's literally your body and mind learning that you can handle it. And so, I started working with Dr. Candido—and I think it's important to call out that throughout this, like it took two years to come off—to titrate off all those medications. So, when I started exposure therapy, I was actually still hallucinating when we got—when I'm my husband Dave, when we even got my first dog, Waffle. All of that. I was still hallucinating, because you can't just go cold turkey, or else you can have some pretty severe consequences.

[00:40:42] **John Moe:** And Dave shows up in photographs, just making sure.

[00:40:44] **Kate Speer:** Dave—very—thank you! Finally, someone who dares ask such an important question! You bet. He does, Waffle does. I mean, it's part of my obsession—

[00:40:54] **John Moe:** Passes the film test.

[00:40:55] **Kate Speer:** I mean, honestly, I have a new—this wonderful new friend; she's really quickly become my best friend. And I cannot tell you how many times I've brought my camera.

(They laugh.)

She's like, "What are you taking pictures of?"

And I'm like, "That was to make sure you're real. Like, I really need to know that you are here and I'm here, and that this has happened."

[00:41:14] **John Moe:** Right. It's got nothing to do with vampires. Don't worry.

[00:41:17] **Kate Speer:** Well, at least in my case it was Ring Wraiths. So, I used to be chased around by those *Lord of Rings* Ring Wraiths. It's a hot mess!

[00:41:22] **John Moe:** Oh, yikes!

[00:41:23] **Kate Speer:** The things my brain came up with is pretty wild. But yeah, exposure therapy was how I did it. And I started actually—um, at this point, I'd moved into this tiny, little apartment in downtown Hannover.

So, I live right where Dartmouth College is. And I, through my parents, had got Dartmouth housing, just like a tiny little apartment. And so, every day I'd put on my diapers. *(Dryly.)*

Awesome. And I would go stand out behind my apartment in my diapers. I talk about this actually in my TEDx talk, where I'm literally standing there every day. And my neighbors are getting increasingly freaked out.

Like, who is this woman who every day just is camped out by a dumpster? And because I was so activated, it would take hours for my body to come down. So, these people would go to work, and then they'd come back, and I would still be sitting by the dumpster. So finally, someone called security.

Dartmouth security showed up and it's one of my favorite things that ever happened. And they, you know, tried to ask me what I was doing and tell me, you know, there's no loitering. And I screamed at them, and I said, "Back up! I'm growing!"

(They chuckle.)

And they were so overwhelmed or confused or—I'm not sure. Um, they left me alone! But yeah, it started like that and then moved on to, you know, instead of just standing by the dumpster, it would be walking up the hill.

But just that act of being out in daylight—I used to defecate, and it was pretty amazing to see just the act of being seen—which for me used to be my armor. Just, I would put it all out there, 'cause I really believe that nothing holds power once it's no longer a secret. But it was amazing how quickly that stopped being the case later in my life.

And yeah, just the act of being seen even without all the honesty and the vulnerability, that felt terrifying. And yeah, it took many, many months. And I slowly began to meet people on these walks. I met—'cause I was in—I still live in my hometown, but at the time I was definitely in my hometown.

The difference there. *Definitely* in my hometown. Like, language choices, y'all. But, uh, the pictures prove it, guys.

[00:43:33] **John Moe:** It's a real town.

[00:43:34] **Kate Speer:** *(Laughs.)* Exactly. But I met a friend or peer from high school, and she just kind of looped me in with her friends. And then, yeah, I just—I would go. And every time, I'd be terrified, and every time I'd have to stay until the anxiety dissipated. And then, I'd get up and do it again. And I'd sleep about 18 hours every night, just exhausted. Just the very act of—

[00:43:58] **John Moe:** Because you were working hard.

[00:44:00] **Kate Speer:** Very hard. Yeah. Yeah. So, I mean, I look back and I think of exposure therapy as my full-time job for about two years. Um, but yeah, that was how it went.

[00:44:09] **John Moe:** Alright, Kate, it's time to get to the dogs.

[00:44:14] **Music:** Charming acoustic guitar.

[00:44:17] **John Moe:** We're gonna talk about big, fluffy, friendly dogs who help ward off hallucinations. That's right after the break.

(Music ends.)

[00:44:30] **Promo:**

Music: Upbeat piano music.

Helen Hong: J. Keith, do you know what I love more than the trivia, comedy, and celebrity guests on our podcast, *Go Fact Yourself?*

J. Keith van Straaten: No! What, Helen?

Helen: Sharing all of those things with an actual audience!

J. Keith: Yes! Well, lucky for you, *Go Fact Yourself* is back to being a live audience show!

Helen: Woohoo!

J. Keith: Yeah! We've got a free recording coming up on January 15th, in Los Angeles, and February 11th, in Pasadena!

Helen: And if you can't make it there, all of our recordings will still be available as a podcast! Twice a month, every month, on MaximumFun.org.

J. Keith: Yeah, no excuses. So, if you're not listening—

Helen: You can go fact yourself!

[Music ends.]

[00:45:08] **Music:** Playful acoustic guitar.

[00:45:10] **John Moe:** Back with Kate Speer, owner of two dogs, named Waffle and Tugboat.

(Music ends.)

[00:45:19] **Kate Speer:** So, I met these friends. These friends actually introduced me to my now husband Dave. And Dave and I were—we fell in love really hard and fast. And it was beautiful. My husband actually just came out about—talking about his own mental health

struggles. He lives with pretty serious anxiety, which is one of the reasons I think we connected so notably was that he saw himself in me and vice versa.

And we were each other's kind of first community and building a really safe space to be our full self, where we needed to sleep for 18 hours, where people were scary. And he and I—gosh, we moved in really quickly, and we loved dogs, both of us. He had had a dog, a malamute, first that had passed away a few years prior. And I, at this point, was really working on getting over my poison ivy fear with exposure therapy.

So, we kept borrowing my parents' Bernese mountain dog. Her name was Sophie, and we loved it every time we had her. It was the best. It was just—there was something that came alive between us even more than what already was with her. And so, we decided to get our own. And we literally reached out to the same breeder and actually put a deposit down for Sophie's niece, which is Waffle.

My parents—actually, my mom, when we told her this—I mean, she lost it. She was like, “Are you fucking kidding me? Like, are you mother-ducking kidding me?” Like at this point, you know, I'm a year—I'm two years out of being in and out of the psych ward once a month. So, the whole idea that I'm functional and want to take on a new responsibility when my life has just been (*laughing*) one shit storm after another!

She just thought it was the worst idea ever. And I am stubborn. If there's one thing I am, it's stubborn. So, I dug my heels in. We dug our heels in, and we got Waffle. And she arrived on Valentine's Day, 2015. Yeah. And man, she was so cute. (*Chuckles.*) And I actually started [@WaffleNugget](#), the Instagram account I still run, that day—the day she came home. And the most amazing things started happening.

She started basically hurling herself on top of me whenever a hallucination would happen. ‘Cause I was still experiencing them, ‘cause I was still titrating off all those medications. And I called them fluff bombs. And my husband, who holds PhD—you know, absolute nerd. I remember the day vividly. He came home and I was like, “You're not gonna believe it! Our dog knows—! Like Waffle knows how to tell when I'm gonna see things or have a flashback! It's so cool!”

And you know, and he's very sweet, ever kind. But he was like, “Okay sweetie. Like that's amazing.” No way did he believe me.

(*They laugh.*)

But I really believed it. And so, I got to researching. And you know, this is eight years ago—eight and a half years ago. This was way before the normalization of service dogs, nevertheless the normalization of psychiatric service dogs. Like, I didn't even think anything in the service dog world existed really other than mobility and guide dogs. Like, that was my understanding. And so, I researched narcotics dogs—like basically, their sense of smell. Tried to figure that out.

And then, also just looking at how guide dogs alerted their handlers or teammates whenever they're navigating different areas. Like, "Oh, we give you a paw if there's a wall," or something to that effect.

And what I found in reading about it was dogs have this incredible sense of smell. And so, I did the only thing I could think of, which was take my cortisol/panic-sweat-soaked t-shirt, put it in a Ziploc bag, and start opening it up, getting a paw from Waffle, and rewarding her.

And I just kept doing it. And the more we did it, the faster she was at doing these fluff bombs, which we quickly parlayed into giving me a paw in my lap. And in a matter of months—and I proved it on a spreadsheet for my hubby, 'cause it's very important. He needs, you know, statistical proof that she was really smelling these changes in my body and that in smelling them, she actually was smelling them in advance of when I would see something.

So, the way—well, everybody's body is different, but for many people who experience flashbacks from either PTSD or anything, or hallucinations in the form of, you know, any psychotic presentation, the body actually jacks—like raises the cortisol level in the body before the actual manifestation. It's because the body is basically creating this, and the body elevates its cortisol.

So, she was able to literally alert in advance of when these things would happen. And it felt like one of the greatest gifts I was ever given was this idea of knowing when I was about to lose my mind. And yeah, I—we just started practicing more and more and more. Because all I wanted was to know that when I walked out the door, someone would tell me that I didn't need a camera, that I didn't need someone else's reassurance about what was real and what wasn't.

And with Waffle's paw, I knew whatever had just arrived wasn't real. And I could just let it go. I could sit with it, move on, and stay in the present. And that—I would say that exposure therapy was one turning point in my life. But when Waffle learned to alert with cortisol spikes, that was possibly the greatest turning point for me and my recovery.

[00:51:33] **John Moe:** Why is she named Waffle?

[00:51:36] **Kate Speer:** Great question! Well, waffles are delicious. Duh.

[00:51:39] **John Moe:** Yes, sure.

[00:51:40] **Kate Speer:** My husband's first dog was named Queso, so he is obsessed with food names. And my dad's first dog was actually a Newfoundland named Waffle. And Newfoundland Waffle, so Waffle the First, would actually babysit my dad whenever they went to the beach. My grandmother would be off doing whatever, yucking it up socially, and this Newf would water rescue him.

And I loved the idea that a dog could save you. And I don't think I was thinking like, "Oh my gosh, this dog is gonna become my service dog." I didn't even know—I didn't even know service dogs existed or could be a thing for the first two years of Waffle's life, I was just

trying to survive and function. But yeah, Waffle. I'd always said that my first dog would be named Waffle. My husband was in. So, there we go.

[00:52:30] **John Moe:** Okay! And is Waffle still on the job, in terms of protecting you?

[00:52:32] **Kate Speer:** Waffle is semi on the job. Yeah. So, Waffle had a pretty serious health year, last year. She had first an emergency splenectomy and then ruptured a disc. Uh, so she retired. Very emotional process, but it's okay. She's now doing so well. The vets actually think that she's fully functional and is in no pain on a daily basis, which is a beautiful thing.

So, if she chooses to—and she's been subsequently trained to know that she can say no—I say, “Do you wanna work today?” And she can choose. She's never—you know, last year when I used to ask, she would say no, which indicates that she does understand the agency. But yeah. So, right now she's on duty, which is pretty awesome.

[00:53:19] **John Moe:** And then you've got another dog too.

[00:53:21] **Kate Speer:** I do. We have Tugboat. So, Tugboat we got two years ago—actually, two years ago, Memorial Day, she came home. She's an English Lab. And she was—it was a difficult decision to get her. I really wanted to have done enough exposure therapy and to have healed enough to not need another service dog. But basically, over the last—basically, two and a half—starting two and a half years ago, the doctors realized I live with fugue states.

So, one of the ways my body copes with deep stress is to just completely sever the mind-body connection. And they realized that as much as this had saved my life in years prior—obviously, with all of the stress. And this goes back to what you were talking about with, “How did you write your papers?” Pretty much left my body. (*Laughs.*) I wasn't there.

But they realized that, especially with driving, it was really important that I get a second service dog as I work through learning to navigate these dissociations and fugue states. So, we got Tugboat, and she just actually did her first flight. So, she's almost officially no longer a service dog in training, which is pretty cool.

[00:54:37] **John Moe:** So, what—how does a dog help you when you're driving? What does the dog actually do?

[00:54:43] **Kate Speer:** Great question. So basically, they alert the cortisol. So, cortisol—you can—dogs can smell on your breath, or they can—or dogs can smell it when it interacts with your sweat glands and the fat tissues there. And so, both my girls are trained to just give me a paw as soon as they smell an increase. So, they've been trained with kind of a baseline, which is normal, which is basically mild anxiety for me—because let's be real, I'm always anxious. (*Laughs.*) Or really high anxiety.

So, they've been trained with both of those, and they know to alert at the upper level of cortisol. And so, they'll give me a paw, they'll keep giving me a paw until I do these breathing

exercises. Or if it's kind of at the highest level—there's three levels—I pull over and they'll stop giving me an alert. And in the case of the highest one, they'll actually do deep pressure therapy, which is this—for all people who enjoy a weighted blanket, that's the phenomenon. And that's just when your service dog does it. Yeah.

[00:55:46] **John Moe:** So, like lays on you and kind of—? Puts weight on you?

[00:55:49] **Kate Speer:** Literally lays on you. Yeah. Full body. Just—and on—you know, on days when I'm having really rough dissociations, I'll actually strap Tugboat into—like she wears a seatbelt, I wear a seatbelt, and sometimes she'll be on my lap, just so that I stay in my body.

[00:56:04] **John Moe:** Huh? So, the paw that the dog gives you isn't a “pet me” paw. It's a “You've gotta remember to do your thing,” paw.

[00:56:13] **Kate Speer:** It's like, “Hey mom, let's not get in a car accident.” Yeah.

[00:56:16] **John Moe:** Okay. My dog does that, but it's only so then I'll pet her on the head.

[00:56:23] **Kate Speer:** 100%. And that's—and rightfully so. You should always be petting your dog on its head. So, like, let's get that—let's get that on record. (*Chuckles.*) No, but yeah, so it's been professionally trained. Again, I do pet them usually afterwards. It's their like thank you for doing your job, but yeah.

[00:56:42] **John Moe:** Wow. So, in terms of—in terms of the future, what is your hope for how things will be? Like, it sounds like you're accepting that these are things that are gonna be with you—not the dogs, the anxiety—and are to be managed, not so much eradicated.

[00:57:02] **Kate Speer:** Yeah. I mean, maybe eradicate it. I don't know. I don't think we can know. I really do believe we all have the power to heal. And I don't mean that in the like woo-woo kind of bullshit way that people spew about. (*Laughs.*) I mean that in the like “Do the messy mother-duckery of hell that is the work,” kind of way. Like, this isn't fun.

Yeah. I think my hope for the future is just to keep growing—growing through the fear, growing through the day. I'm really excited. We actually—the day that Tugboat came home—started recording footage for a documentary. So, I'm really excited for that to come to fruition.

But yeah, I think my hope is just—yeah, to keep growing one day at a time and to normalize just the reality of being a human. There's no right way. We're just all doing our best. We're basically all hurt people walking around in a world, hurting other people. And if we held a little bit more space, I think...

[00:58:10] **John Moe:** How does one go about getting a therapy dog?

[00:58:14] **Kate Speer:** Great question. So, I think the first thing to note—and this is said with complete love—a therapy dog is actually different from a psychiatric service dog. And there's, you know, widespread misconception there. And that's for lack of like societal education, but a therapy dog is actually trained for multiple people, and they have to pass a certification test. And they're—you know, they can work in libraries, schools, hospitals. My favorite therapy dog was a Great Dane therapy dog. Thursday was the highlight of every single psychiatric inpatient's day.

And psychiatric service dogs and medical alert service dogs and PTSD service dogs—there's a lot of different classifications. There are a number of nonprofits that do their best to provide these incredible animals. I think the heartbreaking thing is they're just—there's not enough funding. There's not enough resources.

So, a lot of people, especially in the mental illness space, self-train. But if you go to Assistance Dogs International's website, they actually have an entire list of accredited service dog programs and nonprofits that you can look to. So, I think that's the first step. And if—because of the classifications and way those frameworks are organized is actually so state-centric, if—you know—there isn't a program that meets your needs in that state, then you can just give them a call, reaching out, ask for help. They might know personal trainers that actually do these trainings and can help with that. Yeah.

[00:59:54] **John Moe:** And then, final question: are Waffle and Tugboat very good girls? Yes, they are; yes, they are?

[01:00:02] **Kate Speer:** They are best girls. Yes, they are; yes, they are.

[01:00:05] **John Moe:** (*Chuckling.*) Okay. Good to know. Alright, Kate Speer, thank you so much for talking with us.

[01:00:12] **Kate Speer:** Thank you so much for listening and being here. It's an honor.

[01:00:17] **Music:** “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

[01:00:23] **John Moe:** Kate Speer is online at KateSpeer.com. Speer with two Es. Next time on *Depresh Mode*, author Emi Nietfeld had experienced homelessness and mental illness by the time she applied to college, and she was very open about all of it, which might not have gone over so big.

[01:00:42] **Emi Nietfeld:** I applied early to Yale. And at the time, my college counselor said, “You know, I think honesty is the best policy. And so, you're gonna write out everything that happened with your mental health.” And her logic was that that would show Yale how bad my circumstances were. And then, I was rejected. The hypothesis that we had at the end was that I had raised too many red flags. It was too much information, and that I looked like a suicide risk. And so, I went to my other applications, and I was like, “I'm going to eradicate mental illness from these.” You know, it was just like this appropriate amount of struggle like followed by ultimate triumph, and that was what got me into Harvard.

[01:01:28] **John Moe:** If people donate to our show, we can keep having a show. If they don't donate, then we got no show. We like making the show. We think you like listening to the show. So, help us out. If you've already helped us out by donating, thank you. You're making it all happen. If you haven't donated yet, it's so easy to do. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join and find a level that works for you. That's up to you. You figure that out.

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Hi, credits listeners. I don't think my dogs could ever be trained to fluff bomb anyone, but they have been known to eat a bunch of grass in the backyard and then throw up all over the rug in the living room. It's not really—it's not really a beneficial thing. It's not really an assistance—psychiatric assistance kind of move on their part. The throwing up.

Depresh Mode is made possible by your contributions. The show is produced by Gabe Mara. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our production intern is Clara Flesher. And we get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, “Building Wings”.

[01:03:48] **Music:** “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller.

I'm always falling off of cliffs, now

Building wings on the way down

I am figuring things out

Building wings, building wings, building wings

No one knows the reason

Maybe there's no reason

I just keep believing

No one knows the answer

Maybe there's no answer

I just keep on dancing

[01:04:24] **Unica:** This is Unica from South Africa. You're not doing it wrong. This stuff really is hard.

[01:04:32] **John Moe:** *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Papa Chick. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

(Music fades out.)

[01:04:45] **Sound Effect:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

[01:04:46] **Speaker 1:** MaximumFun.org.

[01:04:48] **Speaker 2:** Comedy and culture.

[01:04:49] **Speaker 3:** Artist owned.

[01:04:50] **Speaker 4:** Audience supported.