

[00:00:00] **John Moe:** As I sit here today, this song has over 152 million listens on Spotify.

[00:00:07] **Music:** “Stick Season” from the album *Stick Season (We’ll All Be Here Forever)* by Noah Kahan, a folk-pop track with an upbeat tempo but a melancholy feel.

And I am terrified of weather, 'cause I see you when it rains

Doc told me to travel, but there's Covid on the planes

And I love Vermont, but it's the season of the sticks

And I saw your mom, she forgot that I existed

And it's half my fault, but I just like to play the victim

I'll drink alcohol 'til my friends come home for Christmas

And I'll dream each night...

(Music fades out.)

[00:00:34] **John Moe:** That's Noah Kahan with the song “Stick Season” off the album of the same name, and it's a huge, huge hit for the 26-year-old singer-songwriter from Vermont. Over the past few years, Noah has become a big star, playing venues like Red Rocks, in Colorado, Radio City Music Hall, big out outdoor festivals. And because he's so successful, he can't possibly be depressed, and he's doing fine. End of episode.

Thank you so much for joining us this week!

No. No, no, no. That's not true. We know depression doesn't work like that. We've talked about it before on this program. It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here. Little more Noah Kahan music for you? Okay.

[00:01:17] **Music:** “Homesick” from the album *Stick Season (We’ll All Be Here Forever)* by Noah Kahan, a folk-pop track with a catchy tune.

Two months since you got back

How have you been and are you bored yet?

The weather ain't been bad

If you're into masochistic bullshit

And every photograph

That's taken here is from the summer

Some guy won Olympic gold

Eight years ago, a distance runner

And that makes a lot of sense...

(Music fades out.)

[00:01:40] **John Moe:** That's a song called "Homesick" off of the Album *Stick Season*. Noah Kahan deals with depression and anxiety in his life. He's also coming to terms with some body dysmorphia issues that he has. I'm not revealing secrets here; Noah sings about these kind of things in the songs that he writes and in the interviews he gives. Mental health issues are part of him, and he wants to make music about what's really going on in his world. Noah recently released a new deluxe version of the *Stick Season* album with a bunch of new tracks. He was backstage at a venue in Pittsburgh when we spoke.

[00:02:14] **Music:** Warm acoustic guitar.

[00:02:21] **Noah Kahan:** Yeah, it's, um—so, you know, we started out with this endeavor to kind of make a deluxe *Stick Season*, just because I wanted to kind of spend more time in the world of *Stick Season* and kind of this—the theme of the music felt so right to me, and this whole experience has felt so right and true to me that I wanted to expand on it.

And, you know, I started making this deluxe while I was really heavily touring and, you know, promoting this record. So it was a much different process than the original album process, which was kind of like, you know, I had years to make it and the whole summer to create it, and like a lot of space and time. And this has been a much more rushed process.

So, in that process, I feel like I've actually been more productive. It's kind of created a anxiety that's forced me to produce, and we wrote six new songs and an extended version of "The View Between Villages", so there's six new songs. It does kind of feel like a whole new record, but I feel like it continues telling the story in a really cool way and a really creatively satisfying way, and I'm just excited for the world to hear it.

[00:03:16] **John Moe:** You know when I've—when I've told people I'm talking to you, they said, "Oh, well, yeah, Noah talks a lot about mental health. It's a big issue for him." Is that a conscious decision on your part? Have you set out to be like, "I'm going to talk about mental health in my songs," or does it just bubble to the surface when you write songs?

[00:03:33] **Noah Kahan:** I think it started, you know, bubbling to the surface. It's just such a presence in my life. You know, struggling with my mental health is really something I've gotten used to, and I try to be as straightforward and forthcoming about how I'm feeling as

possible in my music. And that really has always kind of circulated around my mental health. And you know, the more I get into my career and the more—the more people I have to speak to and the bigger platform I get, I feel like I've found it very important to, you know, have that be my flagship issue. It's something that I'm very familiar with and very passionate about. You know, reducing stigma is something that I desperately wanted to do when I was younger and now I have a really cool opportunity to do it.

So I do feel like it's kind of my main talking point, and I'm really okay with that. You know, I think if I can help people feel better, then I'm fine being the mental health guy.

[00:04:19] **John Moe:** And then, how far back do you go with depression symptoms? Did that—is that something that started when you were a kid or as an adult or what?

[00:04:27] **Noah Kahan:** Yeah. It started when I was a kid, as long as I can remember. I think the first time I went to a therapist was my family dog died and I came to my car, and my dog had died, stuck in the car. It was the worst thing ever and I—kind of was the first time I really felt any trauma, and I didn't know what I was experiencing. I didn't know what I was feeling. I went to a therapist and I didn't know why, and I felt all these confusing feelings. And from there, I think the idea that I was depressed or that I had this anxiety, you know, it was more ever-present in my life. So, I think I was about eight years old when I started feeling like I had depression.

I would tell my mom, I had this feeling. I called it, “I don't know where I am.” And it was the “I don't know where I am” feeling, and I would feel like outside of my body. And I would feel like I was watching over myself and I was completely out of the moment that I was in. And you know, my mom and I kind of always thought that I might just be dehydrated, but we started to realize that I was actually disassociating.

And so, I've been struggling with like really mental—really serious mental health problems since I was a little kid. And you know, they've persisted through my life and they've been there forever. But what I've done is I've found tools to help deal with them, and I've kind of—I can identify them really well, and I still struggle with them, but I feel like I'm more equipped to handle and understand them.

[00:05:36] **John Moe:** Yeah. So, you started going to therapy. Is—did you start on meds at a young age too?

[00:05:42] **Noah Kahan:** Yeah, so I was eight years old when I started going to therapy, and I was kind of in and out of the therapist for a while. I would take a couple years without going, then a year going. And I went on medication when I was in high school. I went on Prozac, and I had a really difficult and not fun experience with Prozac.

I felt like it really changed a lot of things with my personality and kind of brought to light these really negative feelings and this kind of numbness that really made me uncomfortable. And I also probably had a burgeoning drinking problem, which is not good with antidepressants, obviously. You know, drinking and combining medication is a really dangerous thing to do.

And so, I wasn't equipped to handle these things as an 18-year-old kid or a 17-year-old kid or whatever it was. I felt like they helped; they created like a stop in like this really serious depression, these depressive symptoms. They also introduced some other issues. And so, I went off of them cold turkey when I was 19, which was a really stupid decision.

I kind of had a little bit of like a mental breakdown. Like, I don't know if it was like psychosis or what it was, but you know, you can have serious side effects from kind of going off of your meds without tapering. And it put me off of them for a few years. And in the past two years, I've been on Zoloft, which has been a real positive for me. You know, it still comes with some side effects and some negative features, but, I kind of approached it with a more medical and clinical understanding of what the drug does, how to use it, how much to take, how to taper off of it. And so that's been a positive for me. So I've been kind of struggling with medication for most of my young adulthood and into my twenties.

[00:07:09] **John Moe:** Is your struggles with mental health—is that what's been informing your music? Is that why you started to write music?

[00:07:16] **Noah Kahan:** No, I started to write music 'cause I just loved the idea that I could create something out of thin air and that I could sound like my favorite artist and that I could do what these heroes of mine had done, which was just write songs. And my mom was an author, and I looked up to her so much in the way that she was able to be creative and I was always so bored of my life and of school and of where I was. And I found that music was one of the only things that helped me feel less bored. And so, I think when I found music and I kind of started to experience these mental health symptoms and mental health struggles, it was like the perfect outlet for me.

It allowed me to kind of deal with that, but also, you know, alleviate some boredom and express myself creatively. So I wouldn't say it was because of mental health, but I think mental health has played a huge role in what I love about songwriting.

[00:08:01] **John Moe:** How so?

[00:08:03] **Noah Kahan:** Sometimes I'll write a song, and I'll look at the words afterwards, and I'll think, “Man, I've been feeling this, but I haven't—I hadn't known how to say it out loud until I wrote it in a song.” It feels like the only way I can express some of these feelings. At least it did. And I thought that was a really, really cool, important tool to use to identify, you know, these struggles and to explain my behaviors and to understand why I was feeling a certain way. It's like sometimes the only way I could figure it out was through writing songs and through listening to music. So, it was kind of an outlet for those things.

[00:08:30] **John Moe:** Noah is not the only one in his family who's dealt with depression. His parents both have as well, something Noah mentions in the song “Stick Season”.

[00:08:38] **Music:** “Stick Season” from the album *Stick Season (We'll All Be Here Forever)* by Noah Kahan, a folk-pop track with an upbeat tempo but a melancholy feel.

So, I thought that if I piled something good on all my bad

That I could cancel out the darkness I inherited from Dad

No, I am no longer funny, 'cause I miss the way you laugh

You once called me "forever," now you still can't call me back

And I love Vermont, but it's the season of the sticks...

(Music fades out.)

[00:08:57] **Noah Kahan:** Yeah. Yeah. My parents both struggle with depression and, you know, some other mental health struggles, anxiety, and you know—god, who knows what else. I was lucky to have them in my life, because they had experienced it and had created a really open environment for people in my family to talk about it, which is not common and is a real privilege.

[00:09:17] **John Moe:** Yeah, I was gonna ask that. That's not the traditional family model is, you know, to be open and share their struggles. Did they do that from when you were a kid?

[00:09:28] **Noah Kahan:** Yeah, they did. They were just incredible parents. In every way, but particularly in the way they supported the kids through what they were going through. We—my mom—my brothers and my sister, they—we all struggled with mental health and in our own different ways. And my parents were just so supportive. And you know, we were lucky to grow up with money. You know, we were able to go to therapy, and we were able to get medication and to get support and to access the support that a lot of people don't get.

And not a day goes by that I'm not grateful for that privilege and that right. And yeah, that was—I'm just really lucky to be from a family that allowed that kind of discussion, that kind of treatment.

[00:10:03] **John Moe:** How was your dad about being mentioned in a song so directly, about the darkness from your dad?

[00:10:10] **Noah Kahan:** I mean, they're kind of used to it at this point.

(John chuckles.)

You know, it's always tricky to write about someone that you love and to say something that maybe doesn't feel like a positive. There's so much about my dad and my mom in these songs that I write about that I express positivity and love and admiration for, and I think it's just unrealistic to say that everything is perfect all the time with your parents. It's not. And they know that. I'm critical of myself. I'm critical of the people around me. And I think it's important to show that, you know, you can have a healthy relationship with somebody while

recognizing, you know, struggles that they've been through, flaws that they might have, because it shows a real honesty and I think paints a real picture of people.

You know, my parents are just wonderful, beautiful people, but they're human just like me. And I'm grateful that they're okay with me writing about them occasionally and speaking about them, because they know that it allows me to express myself. And I think it also brings us closer as a family to be able to, you know, have these feelings out in the open.

And like I said, there's never been any secret with my dad or my mom about their struggles, and I certainly didn't feel like there was any kind of discomfort on their end about me singing about it.

[00:11:07] **John Moe:** Was there ever a struggle for you about whether to be open and transparent about your mental health struggles? Or is that just always been something that you figured you would do?

[00:11:21] **Noah Kahan:** I think it was always gonna happen either way. I think there's always discomfort in being vulnerable. And I say this in like every interview I've ever given, so I apologize if, you know, you don't want the soundbite.

[00:11:28] **John Moe:** (Chuckles.) It's okay.

[00:11:29] **Noah Kahan:** But I—when I was a kid and someone would say something that felt so real and intimate and vulnerable, like it really helped me get through. It really helped me survive, I think. And to hear someone say something that I thought I was the only one in the world to feel was just a real—it felt like a miracle. Like, it felt like religion, and it felt like the only person in the world that understood me was, you know, Jason Mraz or Bon Iver or, as I got older, Phoebe Bridgers and Sam Fender, like people that spoke about these things that I couldn't believe they experienced too.

And it changed my life, and it made me look at the world in a different way. And I want to be able to provide that for somebody. That's like my biggest goal is to be able to provide that moment of like “I can do this” to somebody. It's incredibly important to me.

[00:12:09] **John Moe:** Can you remember any of those particular lyrics that struck you when you were younger?

[00:12:16] **Noah Kahan:** Yeah, the Counting Crows “Mrs. Potter's Lullaby”, he says, “I woke up in mid-afternoon, ‘cause that's when it all hurts the most.” Just this, like—the hours of like two to five were my most depressive hours, like it's that time of day where you're too late to do what you wanted, but it's too early to say fuck it.

And I had just felt that connected with me so much, and it meant so much to me to hear someone else be like, “This time of day sucks, and it's okay. You know, this is the worst— (chuckles) this is the worst time of day.” Or when—you know, the same song, it says, “I don't know anyone at the party, but I'm always the host.”

You know, this feeling of like you always feel this impetus and this need to be social and to be the guy and to be the person that people look at but still feeling like you can't connect with anyone. I think I felt really disconnected from people when I was younger and still do. To hear AdamDurst sing that made me feel comfortable and safe.

And there's a bunch of others I can't remember off the top of my head. I wish I'd prepared them, but that's fine.

[00:13:09] **John Moe:** (Chuckling.) That's okay. That's okay. Does it still happen? Like, do you still get that same inspiration now as you did when you were a kid? When you hear a well-crafted lyric?

[00:13:19] **Noah Kahan:** Absolutely. Yeah. That never goes away. And I'm so grateful for that. No matter what medication I'm on or what part of life I'm in or what's going on in my life, I can hear a lyric and I still will be moved and sit there thinking about it for the—for the rest of the day.

You know, like we had an opener, this kid—uh, I won't say kid. He is a grown man, but he's younger than me. JackVanCleef, he's an amazing artist. He has this amazing song called "Rattlesnake", and he talks about—he says, "Goddamn this easy living." I just think that's such an important line to me. I—like I said, I grew up—I wasn't rich, but I wasn't poor. I was upper middle class, middle class, and I always felt like I wasn't worthy of feeling pain, because I had a nice family and I lived in a nice town. And the truth is pain is pain, and it transcends wealth and transcends race and creed and class and sexual orientation. And I felt connected to that lyric, because it made me think that it was okay to—that my problems were real, and that it didn't matter where I came from or who I was or what my, you know, whatever. It was real.

I heard that lyric just a few years ago, and it connected with me so much. I brought him out on tour, just 'cause I wanted to hear him sing it every night. And it was just a really cool thing to be able to hear someone speak to you like that. And it's cool to still feel that every day.

[00:14:26] **Music:** Relaxed acoustic guitar.

[00:14:28] **John Moe:** More with Noah Kahan after the break. Here's a song from the new deluxe version of his album *Stick Season*. This is "Call Your Mom".

[00:14:36] **Music:** "Call Your Mom" from the album *Stick Season (We'll All Be Here Forever)* by Noah Kahan, a sweet, melancholy track with heavy use of falsetto.

Don't let this darkness fool you

All lights turned off can be turned on

I'll drive, I'll drive all night

I'll call your mom

Oh, dear, don't be discouraged...

(Music fades out.)

[00:15:00] **Promo:**

(School bell rings.)

Music: Playful synth fades in.

Caroline Roper: Alright, class. Tomorrow's exam will cover the science of perfect pitch, the history of pride flags, and speed running video games. Any questions? Ah, yes, you in the back.

Student: Uh, what is this?

Tom Lum: It's the podcast *Let's Learn Everything!*

Ella Hubber: —where we learn about science and a bit of everything else.

Tom: My name's Tom. I studied cognitive and computer science, but I'll also be your teacher for Intermediate Emojis.

Caroline: My name's Caroline, and I did my masters in biodiversity conservation, and I'll be teaching you Intro to Things the British Museum Stole.

Ella: My name's Ella. I did a PhD in stem cell biology. So, obviously I'll be teaching you the History of Fanfiction!

Tom: Class meets every other Thursday on Maximum Fun.

(Music ends.)

Student: So, do I still get credit for this?

(They laugh.)

Caroline, Tom, & Ella: (In unison.) No!

Ella: Obviously not.

Caroline: No.

Tom: It's a podcast.

(They laugh.)

[00:15:49] **Music:** Upbeat acoustic guitar.

[00:15:51] **John Moe:** Back with singer-songwriter Noah Kahan. K-A-H-A-N, if you're trying to look him up.

(Music ends.)

I talked with a lot of people who—for whom Covid was a really rough experience, and especially people who are used to being on tour—a lot of musicians had a really tough time. Or they found ways to kind of cope with the mental stress of being locked down for as long as they were. How was Covid for you?

[00:16:22] **Noah Kahan:** It was, uh—it was a kind of a few different angles to it, for me. I think there was an angle of real pain and discomfort, like having to cancel tours, having to leave New York where I was living and be at home and—you know, experiencing some, you know, family problems, and being right there in the middle of it was really hard.

It felt like the feeling that we can all relate to of like when is this gonna end and when is—when are things gonna be normal again? And not knowing was just so difficult. Like, the not knowing was so difficult for me as a musician, somebody that lives for live music and lives for traveling and experiencing live shows and playing for fans, like that was so hard.

And it was hard because I had to come to terms with a lot of things that I was able to push away with tour and with travel and with living in a city where the noise drowned out what I was feeling. So I had to really reckon with some things. And I think that is why Covid was great for me too, because it forced me to reckon with some really hidden, unsurfaced feelings, some relationships within my—in my own life, you know, with my family, my loved ones.

And I think through that it was a—I was able to kind of find a lot of clarity through Covid, you know, not only in my personal life but also in my music. I had been really struggling creatively for a long time. I felt like I was just in a path that wasn't right for me, and I didn't know how to get out of it cause it felt, you know—it felt so safe.

And Covid kind of shook that all up. And it required me to reevaluate what I loved about music and why I was doing it. 'Cause who knows if I'll ever be able to go back to it. "Who knows if it's ever gonna end," is how I felt at the time. And I just started writing music I loved again. And I started feeling happy with the music I was writing and felt really creative and inspired, and it kind of changed my whole life in that way. Like, it forced me to make music that I cared about, 'cause there was no reason to do anything but make music you care about anymore.

[00:18:06] **John Moe:** Is that when you shifted to more of a folk kind of sound?

[00:18:10] **Noah Kahan:** Yeah, I've been—you know, I—songwriting to me is like—even though it felt like a job for a long time, before Covid—has never really been about putting everything out. Like, I would write folk songs just on my own, because it was fun. And I have hundreds of songs that I'll never show to anybody, just because it's fun for me to express myself that way.

So I've been writing folk music for a long time. But you know, when Covid came around, there was a real like “fuck it” moment, and I started just kind of like looking into that more and posting them on, you know, TikTok and doing Instagram Lives with songs that were more folky. And, you know, I had the go ahead for my lovely label to make this little EP called *Cape Elizabeth*, which was definitely more folk-leaning.

I went over to my buddy, Finn's, house in Thedford, Vermont, and, we just made a little folk album in a week. And people liked it, and it was so cool to be able to kind of have this validation of like, “Hey, this is what I like to do, and people like it too.” And it really inspired me to kind of keep going on that folkier path for sure and to be more expressive with that music.

[00:19:04] **John Moe:** I wanted to ask—you're talking about the songs that you wrote coming out of Covid and for the *Stick Season* album. In your song “Growing Sideways”, You talk about getting therapy, getting medication, this numbness that you feel. What was the process of writing a song like that and taking all those really personal things and turning that into a song?

[00:19:28] **Noah Kahan:** It was a weird one, that song. I wrote it in my girlfriend's bedroom when she was at work in like 25 minutes. And I think I was trying to like channel a little bit of the PaulSimon kind of storytelling thing is I guess how I set out. And started these—started—these words started pouring out of me. It was one of those songs where like, I've really been struggling with this like feeling of kicking the can down the road and not feeling anything because it's easy. ‘Cause you can actually just go through life and not ever be happy. You can like really exist in a meaningful way and not be working on yourself. You know, like I was able to—you know, you go get groceries, you go to bed, you go home, you watch TV, you go get drinks, you go get food, you play soccer, whatever. You can do all that and still be struggling so mightily. And you can do that forever.

And I felt like I was in that path of like I could just live the rest of my life in this kind of numb, fugue state if I want to. And I started to examine that in that song. And it all kind of poured out of me really quickly. And it was actually like that song really helped me force myself to go back to therapy, like seeing myself feel these feelings and like identifying the truth within myself in those lyrics, it like reminded me that I needed to go take care of myself and start telling people how I felt and telling a therapist what was going on with me.

[00:20:35] **John Moe:** Is songwriting therapeutic? Is it a form of therapy for you?

[00:20:39] **Noah Kahan:** God, a lot of times it feels like torture.

(John chuckles.)

But so does therapy. You know? It sucks, and it hurts, and you don't wanna say shit, or you can't say shit, and you don't know the words. And suddenly something comes out, and it hurts. And then you're like, “Wow, I actually, I feel better having said that.” So, sometimes songwriting is therapy for me. When I'm at my lowest, like—and I feel like things in my life aren't working out or I don't have anything else, like songwriting is all that's there for me. And it's always been the last stop gap between me and nothing. So, to me it is therapeutic.

[00:21:09] **John Moe:** What would “nothing” be?

[00:21:13] **Noah Kahan:** I don't know. I guess I'm always just like—‘cause my biggest fear is like just having to go get a real job or having to like, you know, just be someone that I've—the person I've always wanted to be is the musician. And like, having to not be that is like my biggest fear. And I think like you can put a lot of bullshit on top of you to make you seem like you're doing well—like streaming success or sold out shows or, you know, external validation. And when that goes away, you wonder like who you are.

And when that goes away, I still feel like I can sit down and write a song, and it makes me feel better for a few minutes. And so I feel like that is the last stop gap between me and like all this inflated shit that I put on myself to feel like I'm important or feel like I'm doing well.

[00:21:53] **John Moe:** Do you ever have moments of like, “Oh, I'm, I'm playing at Red Rocks. I'm playing at Radio City Music Hall. What, you know—what do I have to be depressed about?” Do you ever kind of question your own depression due to the success that you've had?

[00:22:07] **Noah Kahan:** I do and then I—I do, and then I have to try to remind myself that again, like my depression doesn't give a fuck if I'm playing Radio City, or it's all about my internal dialogue of myself day to day by day that's gonna determine if I can be happy in those moments. Like if I'm not taking care of myself in multiple ways, then I'm not gonna have good feelings. Doesn't matter where you are.

I remember when I was. 18 and I said when I had 10 million streams that I would be happy. And I got 10 million streams and I was like, oh no, I need 100 million. I got 100 million. I was like, oh, nope, I still feel like shit. I have a billion streams, and I still struggle every day with my depression and my anxiety. And it's just about day by day making the right choices to make yourself do what you know feels better and telling yourself more positive thoughts and thinking more positively that you can get to a place where you're able to be happy in those moments, because that shit will follow you if you don't deal with it.

[00:22:55] **John Moe:** Yeah, it turns out you can't achieve your way out of depression.

[00:22:58] **Noah Kahan:** You just can't. I mean, unless—I feel like if I was going to do that, I probably would've, hopefully, had done it by now.

[00:23:04] **John Moe:** Right.

(They chuckle.)

[00:23:04] **Noah Kahan:** I remember sitting at—it was—I think I was in Boston and my song was like being covered by all these artists that I love and all these people that I loved. And there was charting, and I was like, above Taylor Swift or something.

And I was like—everyone's like, (excited) “Dude, check this shit out!” And I was having like the worst day, and I just didn't care at all. And I was like, “This is a bummer. I didn't take care of my mental health. And so, I'm not able to feel the happiness of this moment. So, I'm not able to feel the highs.” And so, I make sure to try to, you know—work in progress, but I make sure every day to try to focus on those things, so I can enjoy those moments when they come.

[00:23:35] **John Moe:** Yeah. You've been talking recently in some interviews about body dysmorphia that had been showing up in your life. When did that show up, and what has that been for you?

[00:23:47] **Noah Kahan:** Yeah, that's still a real tough one for me. I think I've been dealing with it for a long time, and I didn't realize what it was until I got a little bit older. And I just struggle with like impulsivity and my dieting and the way I eat and the way I—I like look in the mirror and I see someone that people aren't seeing, and I don't know why. And, uh, it plagues me. And, uh, I don't know. I don't know what this—I haven't really worked through that one yet. I'm still trying to. I have a song that people have like asked me to release, called “Shape of My Shadow” that really kind of highlights some of those struggles. And it's like the only song that I've ever put out that doesn't feel like I can put it out, ‘cause I haven't dealt with it myself, and I don't know if I'm ready to have that kind of intimacy about it in the world yet.

But I know it's something that a lot of people struggle with and that people really, really fight through. And it's another one of those situations where I'm like, “Man, maybe this can help someone, and maybe it'll help me understand more about myself, and maybe opening up about that will—and finally kind of putting it out in the world will force me to kind of confront it a little bit.”

And yeah, it's just another kind of one of those things that I haven't sorted out yet.

[00:24:58] **Music:** “Growing Sideways” from the album *Stick Season (We'll All Be Here Forever)* by Noah Kahan.

[00:24:59] **John Moe:** More with Noah Kahan just ahead. Here's a little of that song “Moving Sideways” we were talking about.

[00:25:05] **Music:** “Growing Sideways” by Noah Kahan.

But I ignore things, and I move sideways

‘Til I forget what I felt in the first place

At the end of the day, I know there are worse ways to stay alive

(Music fades out.)

[00:25:28] **Promo:**

Music: Fun, upbeat, brassy music.

Mallory O'Meara: Hey, let us guess. You love books, but wish you had more time to read.

Brea Grant: Or maybe you used to read a lot, but life has gotten in the way. Kids, grad school, you name it.

Mallory: Maybe you don't know where to start, and bookish social media is overwhelming.

(Music cuts out suddenly.)

How do people on TikTok read so many books?!

Brea: Oh my God, I don't know!

(Music resumes.)

And maybe even reading the same book for six months, and now it's permanently attached to your bedside table.

Mallory: Maybe you don't even know what you like to read anymore.

Brea: We're *Reading Glasses*, and don't worry. We got you. We'll get you back into reading and help you enjoy books again. *Reading Glasses*, every week on Maximum Fun.

(Music fades out.)

[00:26:12] **Music:** Relaxed acoustic guitar.

[00:26:14] **Music:** Back with singer-songwriter Noah Kahan.

(Music ends.)

And we've talked about the depression. How about the anxiety? How does the anxiety that you're—that you're managing now, how does that present in your life?

[00:26:29] **Noah Kahan:** I think I get real—I spent a lot of time in isolation, not just in Covid, but I spent a lot of time in Vermont, you know, after high school by myself. My dad

was there, but you know, I didn't see him that much. He was out working, and I spent a lot of time in isolation, and it kind of became this weird, toxic comfort for me where it's like, "Alright, well fuck all this shit, man. Like I can just be alone."

And now I bring that isolation with me everywhere I go. I think if I'm feeling anxious, like I get this anxiety and I'm like, "Fuck it, I'm just gonna go be alone. Or I'm gonna sit in this dark room and watch TV. Or like I'm gonna eat, or I'm gonna smoke weed or drink." And the anxiety really kind of builds up if I'm not dealing with it.

And I just isolate myself and that's kind of how it presents. And I, you know—I don't accept help or I get frustrated when people try to reach out, because they're not understanding it the right way, even though I won't tell them. And I just become like a kind of an asshole and just wanna be alone.

And I try to recognize, when I'm feeling that way, that it's not the right decision to make and that it's important to reach out and be around people that love you and—you know—go through a little bit of discomfort about feeling like judged or, you know, just facing the fear and being with people. But I do feel like when I get really anxious, I just totally lock myself away.

[00:27:36] **John Moe:** And what do you do about that?

[00:27:38] **Noah Kahan:** I'm working on that. You know, it's like right before you get in the shower, you're just like, "Oh, fuck dude, I don't wanna get in the shower. Should I just go through my day like smelling weird and gross?" Because it's that bad. And once you get in, you feel great, and you're like, "Okay, I did the right thing. I'm clean. I feel happy." And I think it's just that before you get in the shower moment every day of like, "Alright, I'm isolating myself. My bandmates are going to get dinner. Or I'm isolating myself, and my friends are going golfing or whatever—going out to go fishing and I should go."

And if it doesn't feel right, it's a discomfort that isn't telling me not to do it. It's a discomfort that's telling me to do it. And so, just recognizing those moments and making the decision to go be with people and to go get the help you need.

[00:28:16] **John Moe:** I want to ask about your parents' divorce, if that's okay with you.

[00:28:20] **Noah Kahan:** Sure.

[00:28:21] **John Moe:** Your parents split up towards the end of Covid, is that right?

[00:28:25] **Noah Kahan:** Yeah. My parents split up, yeah, right around when Covid started.

[00:28:28] **John Moe:** Okay. Right when Covid was starting up. What did that do to you as a person and as an artist?

[00:28:36] **Noah Kahan:** It was really challenging. Obviously, you know. I'm grateful that I was older, and so that I had a little bit of maturity emotionally to kind of handle it. And also, the emotional maturity of understanding that my parents were struggling more than I was with it. You know, they were—you know, without going into the details, really, just—(stammering) they're so human, and you realize that more as you get older, that your parents are people.

And I was glad that I was able to recognize that and to, you know, have the ability within myself to offer them the grace, as I handled that myself, of them going through their own thing. And kind of being there for it was really difficult and created a lot of long conversations. And I think it actually brought me closer to my parents, because it allowed me to speak with them about how I was feeling, and they kind of, when they could and when I would allow them to, speak with me about how they were feeling, not expecting to be coddled.

You know, a lot of times I feel like I was expecting to be treated like a little kid, and it's like, well, I'm 20/22/23 years old. Like they're going through their own thing and they can't—they don't have the—maybe they didn't have the emotional bandwidth to like coddle me and to make sure I was okay with everything. And that's okay.

And so it allowed us to kind of have this new kind of relationship and new dynamic in a relationship that allowed for a lot of honesty. And it brought me really close with my siblings. It brought me really close with my brothers and my sister, 'cause they allowed me to have something we could all connect with, even if it was a hard thing to go through. We checked in on each other more than we ever did.

And so, that was a positive. Obviously, it was really hard, and it caused a lot of pain and I explored some of that in my music, in my album. 'Cause it was so present when I was writing this record; it was a real backdrop to what was happening in my life when I was making *Stick Season*. So I was happy to be able to process it that way as well.

You know, I went to a lot of therapy about it, and I also just, you know—I talk about it a lot, and I just want people to know that I'm not mad at my parents for getting divorced, and I'm not using it as like a commercial thing to do. I just feel an obligation to speak about what I'm going through, in the most vulnerable way.

That was really present for me, and it was something that I felt like I had to say 'cause I wanted to be honest in my music. And I think it hopefully will allow people to kind of reevaluate their relationship with their parents and to think about their parents, whether they're together or apart, and what their relationship looks like too.

[00:30:46] **John Moe:** Do you ever get tempted to spend a song or two, or an album or two, just locking off your heart and just writing a song about, you know, politics or writing a song about something that doesn't require as much vulnerability? 'Cause it's gotta be—it's gotta be taxing on you.

[00:31:03] **Noah Kahan:** I did that for a long time. I just wrote—come up, go into a writer's room, and come up with a concept like, “What if this person was in a long distance

relationship, and then this guy cheated or whatever?” You know, like you do that shit all day. And it just fucking killed my soul, dude. Like, I just couldn't care less about something that didn't actually happen and—or at least I couldn't care less about something that didn't—I write about things that didn't happen. There's songs about people that aren't me, but they always have a little bit of me in them. Like, I just—like I said, that boredom would just come back, and I would just find myself being on my phone or looking out the window or thinking about, you know, going and getting a beer, going and playing video games.

Like I would just think about everything else besides the song, 'cause I just couldn't connect with it in any level. And I think my entire life has just been a real—like I said, it's a real escape from boredom. And that process of like locking myself—locking my heart off and writing about things that don't mean anything to me, it just bored the shit out of me.

And like, even if the song became like a huge hit—and I had a song that became a—you know, a hit. It was a big hit in Australia, (laughs) but it was a hit. And I didn't really care about what was happening in the song, and it fucking tortured me to have to go promote that song and to play it all the time, and to have to like pretend to be excited about what was happening with it when I didn't care about what it meant to me.

And I really learned my lesson on that. And I think Covid was nice, because I kind of went home into this environment of, you know, certain struggle and certain stress and certain beauty as well. And it forced me to write about things that really were right in front of me, and I just connected with it so much. And getting onstage, I can live with myself and fall asleep at night playing these songs.

Like I—you just—you don't wanna write a song that you can't live with yourself singing. You don't wanna do it. It's just the worst feeling ever. And I think any artist who's had a song that they're not proud of would tell you that.

[00:32:42] **John Moe:** So what's the feeling then after you've gone out and played a good show and played these very personal, very vulnerable songs? What's that satisfaction feel like?

[00:32:52] **Noah Kahan:** It is just like—ugh, I feel like I sometimes talk about this and I sound like the douchey artist cliché, but it's just like the human connection of it all. Like to see people that are singing these words at the top of their lungs when you were scared to even write them; it's just beautiful like to see people feel comfortable enough in a public area to sing about their trauma or what they've gone through, and to watch them sing it without any shame.

It's just beautiful. Like a lot of my life was spent with a lot of shame. And I just try to shed it when I can. And so to watch other people do that is just so special, and it feels like the ultimate achievement more than a sold out show or money or an award or, you know, streams. It just feels like the ultimate achievement is to watch people shed their shame and guilt about what they feel and who they are.

[00:33:39] **John Moe:** Alright. Meds treating you well these days?

[00:33:42] **Noah Kahan:** Yeah, they are. I'm actually not on them right now. I tapered off, but I plan on going back on them pretty soon. They offer—they create some creative issues for me, which I want to talk about. Because when I was young, I would look up “artists on Prozac” or “artists on Zoloft”, because I didn't wanna make the decision to do it without knowing—like, thinking that I could never make music again.

I was like, “Man, I wanna see other people that have—are still making music when they're on these meds.” And there wasn't a lot of information about it. Not a lot of people talked about it. Connor Oberst had talked about it in like an interview and I was like, “Fuck yeah. This is the only thing I got. If Connor Oberst can do it—”

So, they create some issues for me, creatively. They also solve a lot of issues for me creatively. I think when I get super depressed, I am like completely uncreative and unproductive, ‘cause I'm just paralyzed by my anxiety and my depression. And so, getting on the meds like allows a little bit of clarity.

I think for me, Zoloft can sometimes offer a little bit of—I wanna say—I don't wanna say not caring, but a little bit of like a detached feeling from the songs. And when I'm making an album, I want to feel—especially for the deluxe, I wanted to feel really attached to the music. So I went off my medication after I got off the road, ‘cause I'm gonna go make this music.

And I just went through these horrible spirals where I was less creative than before all this depression came back. I was struggling so hard, and it took a lot of therapy and a lot of like realizing that the meds weren't actually the issue to kind of get back to writing songs. And so, I actually ended up writing a lot of good songs when I was on Zoloft, like a couple—like a single on this deluxe was written when I was on Zoloft.

And I just wanna say to the folks out there that are creative, that are taking medication that—you know, it's not the only thing that's causing the creative issues, and maybe look deeper into what might be making you feel unproductive or uncreative and making sure that you make the right decision for your mental health before you do anything for your career, for your job. Because your mental health has to come first, and if medication helps you exist every day, then I recommend you stay on it.

[00:35:36] **John Moe:** You've talked about vulnerability as being part of your process, and it's obviously there in your songs. Do you ever feel like you've gone too far and have made yourself too vulnerable?

[00:35:46] **Noah Kahan:** Yeeeah, I think like I was talking about earlier, there's that song—and it's a song that's been like put on TikTok and on YouTube, so people have seen it. So there's context. Like that song, “Shape of My Shadow” is incredibly difficult for me to play and sing, and I do feel like I might have put that out before I handled a lot of the feelings I had around it.

And so, that's one—really the only example where I've ever felt not quite ready to fully embrace what I was saying or what I was feeling in that song. And that's on me, you know. I gotta make sure I'm making the right decisions for myself before I do something that's gonna create a lot of questions that I'm not ready to answer.

So that's one example. But otherwise, I don't think so. You know, there's some songs that I don't play, 'cause I don't want to have to experience the lyrics, but I think it's good to have it out. The song "Howling", that talks about some like really tricky feelings and emotions that I wrote that are really vulnerable, and I don't play alive because it just feels too much for me to talk about every night or to live through again.

But I was happy that that song was out in the world, because someone will find it and they'll be like, "This is my special thing." Just the same way I had so many special songs for myself growing up. So, I don't really—I feel like there's only really one example on being too vulnerable, but other than that, no.

[00:36:54] **John Moe:** Noah Kahan, thank you so much for being with us.

[00:36:58] **Noah Kahan:** Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciated the questions and the conversation.

[00:37:04] **Music:** "Building Wings" by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue then fades out.

[00:37:10] **John Moe:** Noah Kahan's new album is titled *Stick Season (We'll All Be Here Forever)*. Let's close with a bit from that song he recorded but doesn't play live. This is "Howling".

[00:37:22] **Music:** "Howling" from the album *I Was / I Am* by Noah Kahan, a folk-pop track with an upbeat tempo but a melancholy feel.

Is there something keeping me here for the minute, darling?

Did you find the key and what is the meaning of it?

'Cause, honey, sometimes I feel this emptiness

Howling out

Is there something keeping me here for the minute, darling?

Did I lose my mind and and am I still looking for it?

(Music fades out.)

[00:37:54] **Music:** "Building Wings" by Rhett Miller plays under the dialogue.

[00:37:58] **Music:** Next time on *Depresh Mode*, dogs can be trained to do all sorts of things: fetch, roll over, provide care during hallucinatory episodes.

[00:38:07] **Speaker:** She started basically hurling herself on top of me whenever a hallucination would happen. And I called them fluff bombs. So I did the only thing I could think of, which was take my cortisol/panic-sweat (laughs) soaked t-shirt, put it in a Ziploc bag, and start opening it up, getting a paw from Waffle, and rewarding her. The more we did it, the faster she was at doing these fluff bombs. 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.

[00:38:49] **John Moe:** If people donate to the show, we can keep having a show. If they stop the show stops. That's the simple proposition. If you've already donated to help make *Depresh Mode* possible, thank you. If you haven't, it's easy to do. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join. MaximumFun.org/join. You pick a level that works for you. You choose *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows, and then you're supporting the show that you listen to. And what could be better than that? Be sure to hit subscribe. Give us five stars, write rave reviews. All that helps get the show out into the world.

The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available 24/7 for free in the United States by calling 988. The Crisis Text Line, also free and always available. Text the word “home” to 741741. Social media. Okay. Our Instagram and Twitter are both @DepreshPod. If you're on Facebook, look up our mental health discussion group, Preshies. There's conversation there about the show, but about all sorts of things—people helping each other out, talking about mental health. It's a very positive place.

Our *Depresh Mode* newsletter is available on Substack. Search that up. I'm on Twitter and Instagram @JohnMoe. Our electric mail address is depreshmode@maximumfun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. Noah Kahan's favorite song in the whole world is “Father and Son” by Kat Stevens.

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

[00:40:29] **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

[00:41:04] **Melissa:** Hi, this is Melissa from Missouri, and I just wanna say hey to all my fellow Preshies. And I want you to know that I love you, and I appreciate you all.

[00:41:14] **John Moe:** *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun, and Papa Chick. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

(Music fades out.)

[00:41:27] **Sound Effect:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

[00:41:28] **Speaker 1:** MaximumFun.org.

[00:41:30] **Speaker 2:** Comedy and culture.

[00:41:31] **Speaker 3:** Artist owned.

[00:41:32] **Speaker 4:** Audience supported.