

[00:00:00] **John Moe:** I think Ozzy Osborne looks cute on the cover of his album, *Bark at the Moon*. I mean, okay, on this album cover, it's nighttime. There's a full moon, and Ozzy is clearly supposed to be a werewolf. He's done up all pale, like some kind of arctic werewolf maybe, I don't know. They hired some monster makeup person and Ozzy is bearing his big fake fangs and mugging at the camera, and he looks cute, I think.

I remember him often looking cute or at least harmless, and I thought this way before Ozzy's current incarnation as kind of a cuddly, confused person back when he was at the forefront of the Satanic panic back when certain people believed that rock stars, especially in the heavy metal oeuvre, were worshiping Satan, trying to indoctrinate youths into the ways of Satan, or were possibly just Satan himself, taking over the bodies of rock stars like Ozzy. People were scared of Ozzy Osborne. There were stories about him, most fake, many outlandish. He was on people's minds and people like Ozzy would play into it, of course, to try to be scary, to be something dangerous and spooky that the kids would love and that would make parents upset and frightened because rock and roll, you know?

But I think on the cover of *Bark at the Moon*, he just looks like he's playing dress up and doing it well and having fun. The reason I'm thinking about and talking about Ozzy and Bark at the Moon is that I Googled scary album covers, and this was one of the first to come up and no, I'm not scared of it.

It's not that scary. Iron Maiden's album, *Number of the Beast*, is on there too, which has Satan on the cover, along with Eddie, the kind of zombie monster mascot of Iron Maiden. And I don't know if this kind of thing was scary when I was a kid, it's not anymore. It just looks like someone in shop class drawing Iron Maiden stuff, but you know the pinnacle of that art form. It's the platonic ideal of someone doodling in shop class. It looks like a comic book. It's even a little cute too because Satan is all red and has horns and he is holding a trident. It's funny, not many of the album covers on this list are scary, really.

Queen's *News of the World* is on here with the huge robot that has killed Queen, but the robot looks kind of benign and a little pensive like he killed Queen accidentally and is just now realizing it. And you know, industrial accidents are scary, but they're more unfortunate than terrifying. Black Sabbath's self-titled album is on here and that has a picture of a kind of a witch, and it's a little scary. A bit. But I can get over it.

It's no *Nebraska*. *Nebraska* by Bruce Springsteen, alone without the East Street Band, 1982. No monsters or Satans or witches or robots on the cover. No picture of Bruce either. It's a black and white photo, and I'm moving from bottom to top, here. We have a car dashboard, then a windshield wiper, a little bit of snow on there, and then we see a long, flat, straight road stretched out before us.

Looks like some fences on either side. Above it clouds, portentous clouds, and red lettering. All caps, block letters on a black background. Bruce Springsteen, *Nebraska*. And it's scary because whatever it means, it's ominous. It indicates something scary happening or about to happen. My sister was a Springsteen fan; still is I'm sure. Loved *The River*, Bruce's last album before *Nebraska*.

And so, she bought *Nebraska* and didn't know quite what to make of it and told me that. I remember thinking it looked scary. I was 14 years old. Well, fast forward a whole bunch of

years, and *Nebraska* is still scary, but for different reasons because I've actually listened to it now one or 2000 times since it came out.

Okay. So right off the bat, title track "Nebraska", Bruce opens with, "I saw her standing on her front lawn, just a-twirling her baton." And like, uh-oh. "Me and her went for a ride, sir." Oh no. What did you do on the ride? And why are you calling me, sir? Who am I in this story? Finally, "And 10 innocent people died."

Okay, there it is. First verse, we're into murder. Multiple murder, decuple murder. I had to look up the word decuple. Tenfold. Murder. The album never relents. Next song, "Atlantic City", a chicken man gets blown up and then his house gets blown up. And that's just the first two lines. It's a violent and intense and sad and beautiful album, *Nebraska*. It's one of the best albums of all the albums made, and it's scary. Because to be able to write the songs, the painful, scary, tragic songs takes a knowledge of a profound darkness, which means that Bruce Springsteen was in touch with a profound darkness. What I didn't know until pretty recently was that Bruce Springsteen had experienced some monumental depression in his life, that he wrote and recorded this album in a period of his life where the darkness wasn't just on the edge of town; it was everywhere.

Nebraska is an album maybe about depression, maybe not about depression, but steeped in depression, soaked, marinated in the stuff. Sometimes, when you get to know depression, when you shine a light on that darkness, there is a beauty that is revealed. You should listen to *Nebraska*. I mean, right now you're listening to this.

It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

[00:06:14] **Music:** Plucky, upbeat guitar.

[00:06:22] **John Moe:** I learned a lot about *Nebraska* and Springsteen from Warren Zanes. He's the author of a new book, *Deliver Me From Nowhere: The Making of Bruce Springsteen's Nebraska*. Warren is the former guitarist for the band, the Del Fuegos. He also has a PhD in Visual and Cultural Studies, has been a professor at several universities and was Vice President of Education and Public Programs for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum.

[00:06:48] **Music:** Energetic acoustic guitar.

[00:07:00] **John Moe:** Warren Zanes. Welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

[00:07:03] **Warren Zanes:** Thank you for having me.

[00:07:05] **John Moe:** Alright, so for people who follow this show closely, but maybe don't follow Bruce as closely as they should, what is the *Nebraska* album?

[00:07:15] **Warren Zanes:** The *Nebraska* album is Bruce Springsteen's sixth official release. It was the follow up to *The River*. *The River* was his first number one album. It had his first top 10 single with Hungry Heart. And really from a music business perspective, from the angle of a record label a manager, what you do after your first number one record and your first Top 10 single is you go up to the next level.

That is a platform from which you can get to potentially superstardom and what Springsteen did, because he recorded an album that confused a lot of his listeners, that couldn't be played on FM Rock Radio next to, you know, records by Styx and J. Geils Band. And then, he went on to not promote the record, not do any interviews, and for the first time ever, not tour behind it.

So, if you could make a list of all the things that a record label would not wanna hear from one of their artists, he pretty much checked every box. And so, this is a—this is a record that when I first heard it in 1982, it felt like this active defiance. It felt like this artist was kind of flying in the face of everything that the marketplace was asking of him.

So, even before dropping the needle, I loved him for that. It felt like punk rock to me. So, I loved the defiance, but the truth was I was also confused, and I still had that lingering question when I started this book. Why would an artist do that?

[00:09:14] **John Moe:** Right, right. And the recording of it was not exactly a big recording studio, highly produced affair.

[00:09:23] **Warren Zanes:** No. So, this—you know, the recording begins in 1981. And two years before that the first home multi-track device was put on the market. So, you're talking about a consumer device that is capable of multi-track recording, in this case four-track recording. So, you could buy a cassette at CVS, go home to your TEAC 144 four-track recorder, and do multitrack recording.

You could lay down a guitar and a vocal. You could put percussion to it. You could sing a harmony. Basically. You could be a one-man band. So, this was, this was a novelty. But quality wise, it was no comparison to the commercial recording studios that artists were using to make records.

[00:10:20] **John Moe:** And that that Bruce himself had been using. He was famously fastidious and very fussy with everything that he had done before, and this was something else entirely.

[00:10:30] **Warren Zanes:** Yeah. And he was also willing to spend his own money, which is like—believe me, that's not every artist, but when he was making records, like *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, at some point, a record label's going to say, "We're not putting any more money into this." And Springsteen would spend his own money.

And that's why at the start of *The River* tour, again, his fifth record, here's an artist who's about to score his first number one album, who two records before was on the cover of *Time* and *Newsweek*, and he had \$20,000 in the bank. And that's because he kept putting his money back into the process. So that four-track recorder looked like the solution to a pretty significant problem.

[00:11:19] **John Moe:** Right. What was going on in Springsteen's life when he made *Nebraska*? What was, where was he in his world?

[00:11:29] **Warren Zanes:** Well, he comes off the tour for *The River*. During the tour, he had to move out of the farmhouse that he'd been in, where the band had rehearsed and had written albums. Uh, and so sight unseen, he got this new rental, this ranch house that was right on a

reservoir in Colts Neck, New Jersey. And he came home to that, and he went into a kind of isolation.

You know, Max Weinberg, the drummer in the E Street Band said, you know, there was a period where we didn't even know where he lived. And so, he goes into this kind of isolation and, you know, whether he intended it or not, he's in the neighborhood of Freehold, the town he grew up in. And his mind takes him back to early childhood, you know. So, we've heard a lot about his conflicted relationship with his father.

This is a period when he kind of goes back before that to the time when he and his parents were living with his grandparents. And, you know, a lot of times, when we talk about childhood trauma, it's about explicit abuse. It's physical abuse. It's sexual abuse. And he goes back to a childhood trauma that isn't that.

But, you know, if I can give you a—you know, a more long-winded answer here. Um.

[00:13:00] **John Moe:** Yeah, please. You got to my question before I even got to it myself, so please continue.

[00:13:05] **Warren Zanes:** Yeah, I mean, what happened in that home? You know, he's so—Bruce is so unguarded about this stuff, which I think is a major—I think it's brave and I think it's important. But he talks about that home in terms of a kind of grief that isn't passing. It's a stuck grief. So, his grandparents had a daughter who, at age six, was on her tricycle and was hit and killed by a truck, um, on Mc Lean Street in Freehold.

And there was a picture of her Aunt Virginia in this house where Springsteen was until about age six. And it was like—he said, that was the centerpiece of the house. And his grandparents, Virginia's parents—really, it's like they froze time and were just stuck in that loss. And when Bruce came along as the first grandchild, he was given this radical freedom in a—in like a misguided tribute to this daughter who was killed.

They suspended all discipline with Bruce. He could stay up as late as he wanted. He could watch TV when he wanted. And you know, like he said so openly in my interviews with him, it sounds like exactly what a kid would want. And it's exactly what they don't want. And you know, so he's going back to this complicated situation.

And, you know, in his words, again, he said it was—“It made me, and it destroyed me.” And so, he comes back from *The River* tour, and that's the past he goes into. And that's the kind of energy pocket, that's the emotional territory that fuels the *Nebraska* project.

[00:15:05] **John Moe:** Was it—and I know that his father had dealt with depression a lot as well, and there were other mental health issues in the family. Did those feed into the making of *Nebraska* as well?

[00:15:17] **Warren Zanes:** You know, I think those have come out elsewhere in his work. You know, I think if you go—if you experience a parent's depression, it's gonna be in everything. But there was a real focus to that time with his grandparents and, you know, he's just coming into his 30s and feeling—you know, it is—god, it's—it was tremendous to sit and listen to him talk about it, but he'd just kind of lost the thread.

He didn't know where he fit. And then when you layer on top of it, he was feeling disconnected from the people that he wrote about. After The River tour—he might have started with 20,000, but at the end he had enough money to buy his first new car. And it was like he didn't even know how to deal with that.

It made him too different from the people that he wrote about and the people who were his people growing up. So, there was this disconnection. And I think that just triggered this kind of—it like—it was like a conversation with ghosts, you know? You know that saying if you—you deal with your past or your past deals with you. And I think that's the crossroads he was at. And he chose to deal with his past. And you know, when I said, that's not the kind of thing you should do alone, he said, "I didn't know that yet."

[00:16:50] **John Moe:** Right. But so, he's—you know, he says very explicitly, and you talk about—in the book, you talk with him about how this album is about his childhood trauma, but the songs are about state troopers and violence in Philadelphia and serial killers and these things that weren't part of his childhood.

[00:17:11] **Warren Zanes:** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, and that's where—you know, there's a good section of the book where I talk about the influence of Flannery O'Connor's short stories on Bruce Springsteen in that period. And I think *Nebraska's* a really—you know, Bruce Springsteen is a remarkable writer if you stopped at his second record. You know? And then he keeps evolving.

But with *Nebraska*, you know, part of the beauty of his long career is he keeps developing. With *Nebraska*, he's really thinking like a short story writer. The writing's getting more economical. But absolutely, these aren't stories of his childhood. He's not going into that model of the singer songwriter experience.

It's not the confessional model. This is like a short story writer. So, much in the same way you can't find Flannery O'Connor's memoir embedded in her short stories, but you know, she's in there. Same thing with *Nebraska*. So, that's why I say that early childhood was the fuel for *Nebraska*. The stories that he told, the violences in them, they were connected but not literally.

[00:18:35] **John Moe:** Was the violence—and you talked about how the musician, Patty Griffin, notes how there's just violence all through the *Nebraska* record. Was that his way of processing what had happened to his aunt?

[00:18:49] **Warren Zanes:** I don't think it was about what happened to his aunt. I think it was like violence was a way to talk about what happened to him. This is what I think. Um, you know, and again, it's not to say that he experienced physical violence, but that radical freedom, which seemed beneficent but left him having to figure out as a child what was too much. That's the adult's role and it was given to him. And what that leads to is a kind of psychic violence. You know, so it's a very nuanced thing that he's getting into, but to me he kind of makes that emotional violence literal in these stories.

[00:19:43] **John Moe:** There was a road trip after the album came out that seemed pretty pivotal. What was that trip?

[00:19:50] **Warren Zanes:** Yeah. So, I mean—I'll tell you for this book, I feel—look, I couldn't have done it without interviewing Bruce. He's the spine of the book. And he's as good an interview as you're gonna find, because he goes into it with his own curiosity. And nothing makes for a better interview. To be forthcoming, to be curious, to understand what the person conducting the interview is after—in this case, a book about *Nebraska*.

You know, he was unguarded, and he was inquisitive. So why did I get into it in the first place? When he wrote his memoir, I feel like he carved out the door for me. That door was—like in the memoir, *Nebraska* goes by pretty quickly. It's just a few pages. And then he takes this road trip west. That is really the centerpiece of the book, of Bruce's memoir.

And he's kind of describing a breakdown. He uses different language, but it's unambiguous. Like when that book came out, it was the headline. People were talking about Bruce and depression, about this incident after which his manager, John Landau, said, "You need professional help." And he got it and started a kind of—what he calls his odyssey, a therapeutic path that went into his—I think he's still on it. You know, I can't speak for that, but that's the impression I get of the man. But this trip west, seeing it coming right after *Nebraska*, knowing *Nebraska* was a journey into this childhood trauma, I didn't wanna make a causal relationship, but I felt there's a connection.

So, that was the doorway he cut out for me to walk through. And then, in allowing me to spend time with him to ask all the questions I needed to, that was the second gift. And I felt like, you know, he was pulled to this particular past. He was compelled to tell stories that were fueled by that past, and it got him to a place of just heightened vulnerability and, you know, shit came apart.

And there's a lag time before *Born in the U.S.A.* comes. And I felt—and it's—and it's not there in his memoir. And I thought there's a bigger story here. I think one of the things that really strikes me is a lot of people will make art about a kind of breakdown but often after the fact. *Nebraska's* like this document from the heart of it. You know, from losing—he's like losing his basis, and he makes a record when he is there.

And I felt like even if I didn't get it intellectually, in 1982 I'm like connecting with that. There's some part of me that like heard that record and I was my own kinda untethered. I was, you know—I was in my own trouble. And I think I was one of many, many people who felt vibrations coming from that recording that were really personal.

You know, it took me years to get at it, but you know, there I am in my 50s, having one of my most brutal years. You know, I lost a job of 10 years. The father that I never got to know died, meaning I wasn't ever going to get to know him. A marriage came apart. And there I am writing about this record, *Nebraska*.

You know, I just—I don't think it's sheer coincidence.

[00:23:56] **John Moe:** You said he loses his basis? What do you mean loses his basis?

[00:24:00] **Warren Zanes:** Meaning, you know, the last song on *Nebraska* is "Reason to Believe". And you know, "Reason to Believe" is a song that shows these little different scenes of people who have no reason to believe. People who have lost their basis for living, you

know, their belief in institutions—whether it's family, religion, work—and don't have any answers for the question why.

And everybody gets their turn with that. You don't have to be dealing with clinical depression to lose your basis, you know, to get to a place where it's not making sense and you're out of answers. And I think that he made a record from that place, whether those songs are—you know, those songs don't have hope in them, but the act of making it and the act of putting it out there for people like me to connect with, that's where the hope is.

So sometimes you gotta measure it differently. You can't look at the—at the songs and say, that's where the hope is. You gotta look at the act and you gotta look at the transmission and go that's where the hope is.

[00:25:26] **John Moe:** Well, that's where the defiance is. The existential crisis is occurring, and you step into the void and, you know, get out your four-track and make an album anyway.

[00:25:38] **Warren Zanes:** Yeah, yeah. I'm gonna do this even though I'm not believing in anything right now. Like, that's some powerful stuff. I mean, a life in art is, you know, it's—I say it to my own kids, like, learn to write songs for an audience of one, you know. They don't have to be great. Learn this craft because sometimes it might be the rope that you can grab onto.

You know, I just think art—and I'm stating the obvious here, but I feel like it's an obvious that I don't mind saying over and over and over again is like, learn some kind of art so that when you're in that place, when you're out of things to believe in, you've got that thing to hold onto. And the art—there's a good chance that it will do something for you that's just enough, you know? So don't think about it in terms of hit records and hit movies. Think about it in terms of saving your own ass.

[00:26:52] **Music:** Plucky, upbeat guitar.

[00:26:55] **John Moe:** More with Warren Zanes and with Bruce Springsteen really in just a moment.

(Music ends.)

[00:27:06] **Promo:**

(Sci-fi beeping.)

Music: Cheerful synth.

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(Sci-fi beeping. Music ends.)

[00:27:51] **Music:** Plucky, upbeat guitar.

[00:27:54] **John Moe:** Back with Warren Zanes, author of *Deliver Me From Nowhere: The Making of Bruce Springsteen's, Nebraska*.

(Music ends.)

So, I want to get back to you and what you mentioned about these crises that were happening while you were writing about *Nebraska*. What are the similarities and differences to what he was going through when he made *Nebraska* compared to what you were going through when you were writing about *Nebraska*?

[00:28:21] **Warren Zanes:** Well, let me—I mean, let me just say like, there was no—there was no intention. I didn't think this thing through. I mean, you're guided by this stuff. If there wasn't a mystical component, it would be far less interesting. I feel like any project I get into, I come out the other side going, "Oh, now I understand why I got into it." You know?

[00:28:43] **John Moe:** Right. Now the plot points line up, don't they?

[00:28:47] **Warren Zanes:** Yeah, so pandemic was kind of mixed into it, but I wrote two versions of this book. And the first one, without even thinking it, I went totally alone. I didn't share pages with my editor or my agent. I didn't share 'em with anyone. I wrote a book that's twice as long as the one that came out. I gave it to them, and they said, "We don't think this is the book you meant to write."

And you know—and only then did I kind of go like, "Whoa. I didn't share it with anyone." I gave it to them, and they said, "We don't think this is the book you meant to write." And you know—and only then did I kind of go like, "Whoa. I didn't share it with anyone." Like, I've never done that. And I didn't—I hadn't even—I just did it without thinking, and I wrote way too much. (Laughs.)

And then I wrote a second book, and it got me to the book I needed to write. But it is—without intending it, without even thinking about it, I went into my own little *Nebraska*,

uh, and I was in a little bit of trouble, you know. But like, it was hard to under—when you, when you have a father that you don't even know.

So, so my father—you know, I've—I have—I probably have like 10 memories of meeting him, but he was out of the picture—oh, by the time I was two. So, I have no memories of living with him. And then I lived like 30 minutes from him for years. And this—he just wasn't interested in having this relationship.

And so, I thought, eh, you know, I'm better off without this guy. You know, he was married either five or six times, had kids in at least half of those marriages. But I'm like, you know, this didn't affect me. He's just an absence. He was never a presence. And then when that father dies, you come up against some, you know—just that I said earlier, like, with his death, there was no chance you were ever gonna know this guy.

And something happens that's—I don't know, it affected me more than I thought it would. It just—it was a destabilizing force. And then there was—you know, I don't know what was up. Why did I—why did I lose my job right at the same time. And I'd never lost a job. Uh, I'd left them. But why did that happen right when this father, I didn't know died? And then it—then a marriage falls apart. It was just—you know, everybody gets their turn in the deep shit. That was my deep shit. And then I read a book about *Nebraska* and—look, it was—in the end, I think it did me a lot of good. And I think I was helped by the story of an artist who made a record in a very dark place.

Again, like I was saying about—that doesn't surprise me, but I only saw it in retrospect.

[00:32:29] **John Moe:** What was the sequence of events with job loss, death of father, end of marriage, and deciding to write about *Nebraska*? Where did the decision to make a book about this album of all things you could write about—where did that fit in?

[00:32:45] **Warren Zanes:** I think you just named the sequence and—but I honestly—I didn't think about what was going on with me when I said, "I wanna write about this." I was really dealing with lingering questions. And if I were to boil 'em down, one was: why do I connect with these desperate people in the way that I do? So, there's the personal layer, which I knew wouldn't be in the book, but it might fuel it. And then the other was still that same question. Why would a guy at the top of his game do something that, from afar, looks like career self-sabotage? Why would he do that? Because I looked at it and I thought, man, if I was coming off a number one album and a Top 10 single, I'd go for the gold.

(Chuckling.) Why did that guy do something that's so out of line with human behavior? Something was driving him. So, you know, I wanted that. I wanted that answer. I wanted to find out. These guys are so interesting to me who come from, you know, lower working class backgrounds and then find these lives that look 100% different from what they come from.

I think that's an intense experience. And for the ones who survive it, I think they're really deep people, and I wanted to—I wanted to go into that story and look at another one of these guys.

[00:34:38] **John Moe:** Yeah, so Springsteen goes into this album. I mean, he goes into making some demos that eventually became the album, and then he makes the album. Then

he has—you know, shit falls apart. Would shit have fallen apart with or without this album? Or was this a—did this force everything into a crisis? Did it screw him up further?

[00:35:03] **Warren Zanes:** I wouldn't say screwed him up further, but I just think there's no way, going into that territory of his childhood, that it didn't like unmoor him further. You know, when people come into that moment in their life where they're ready to deal with their past before it deals with them, it's probably gonna get darker before it gets lighter.

They're going to—they're gonna come into some things. Hopefully they're with a good and able therapist or a team of them. You know, look, we really need help. But I just think it gets—the seas get rougher before they, again, get calm. And so that's what I was seeing. Like if he went into *Nebraska*—and these were the conversations I had with him, and I feel like he confirmed this. Like, you can't make it a strict causal relationship, but come on. If you go to that place, it's going to be harder.

And then you're gonna start to put things together and rebuild. And I felt like there was something about looking at *Nebraska* and *Born in the U.S.A.* and going, I think he—there's a big dip down between those things. And then he returns. And that's where I got obsessed with this Homer's *Odyssey* as a story that had that same dip down before the return of the hero, in Odysseus.

And I really wanted, in sitting with Bruce—I really wanted to, with him, map that story onto his own and that period of his life.

[00:37:08] **John Moe:** Yeah, explain that connection because I know that really resonated with him a lot too when you brought that up.

[00:37:13] **Warren Zanes:** The problem with it is it's really hard to do in a short form. (Laughs.) But you know, the story of *The Odyssey* begins. When Odysseus tricks the cyclops to get out of his cave. The cyclops is big. He is a brute. He can gobble men up. And somehow Odysseus has to get out of the cave. And he tricks the cyclops by saying, "I'm nobody."

And they gouge out the eye of the Cyclops. And when the Cyclops yells for help, the other Cyclops say, "Who did this?" And he says, "Nobody did this! Nobody did this!" So, Odysseus uses his cunning to get out of the cave, but what he does is he's nobody. But then Odysseus, leaving the island of the Cyclops, can't help himself.

And in a moment of hubris, a fit of ego, he says, "It is I, Odysseus!" And the moment he says that, that he stops being nobody, he's declared himself. The cyclops's father, Poseidon, hears that and goes, "I'm gonna fuck this guy up." And Odysseus can't get home. You know, he goes through all these trials, and you know, Poseidon not letting him get home to his family is a big part of the story of *The Odyssey*.

So, the way Odysseus finally gets home to recover his position as a hero, his position as a husband, his position as a father, is to return as nobody. He gets another shot at being nobody. He returns to his home, which is filled with suitors—men who want his wife's hand, who want his son's power—and he returns as a beggar, invisible, nobody once again.

And this time he gets it right. He's not gonna go, "It is I, Odysseus" and let the suitors kill him off. He remains nobody. And that's how he regains his position. I felt like *Nebraska* was

Springsteen being nobody so that he could return in *Born in the U.S.A.* as the hero. But you've gotta be able to be and sustain being nobody.

And it just explains so many things to me. And I wanted to kind of tell a short version of that story to Springsteen and see him hearing that. And it could have gone either way. And in the middle of it he says, "Go on," meaning keep telling that story. And I was like, man, that's like top five moments in my working life.

Like I felt like my theory held some water and he was telling me to go with it. It's funny what gets you. Um, that one gets me, in part because I think *The Odyssey* is the best self-help book ever written. You know, it's—I've learned so much from it. Like I found an audio audiobook version for young readers that I'd play for my sons when they were really young because I felt like I needed it as a reference for them, to parent them.

You know, it was—it was a book that parented me. You know, like, I think the best—you know, I started going to the self-help book section hoping nobody caught me there, and now I go there proudly. But the best self-help books are the ones that parent you, that give you something you didn't get when you were growing up.

And there are lots of us who didn't get everything we needed. And so, a good book can provide some of that—not the flesh contact, but the guidance. And Homer's *Odyssey* gives you all these things like the temptations of ego, the temptations of the flesh, greed. And you get to watch Odysseus find his way to this absolute simplicity of being nobody.

And you know, I'm a member of 29 years clean and sober. And Alcoholics Anonymous, if I can talk about it for a minute—like everybody thinks "anonymous" means you don't tell people that you go there and you don't tell people who else is there. I don't think that's the heart of it. I think the heart of it is: can you be in the room and be nobody?

Can you be without the trappings of ego? Can you be without the resume? Can you be without your successes, you know, or your physique? Can you be without all that stuff and still be in that room comfortably? That part of anonymous, I feel like *The Odyssey* covers that. Like the people I look to and admire are capable of being anonymous in the middle of the room.

And I looked at Springsteen making *Nebraska*, and I'm like, that's kind of as anonymous as a rockstar can get in putting out an official release. It just—it still mesmerizes me as a choice. *The Odyssey* helped me get to that and, you know. (Chuckling.) So, thank you for letting me go into it.

[00:43:38] **John Moe:** (Laughs.) There's—there's a lot that could be substituted, but with *The Odyssey* and *Nebraska*, it sounds like. Yeah, it sounds like, you know, the shedding off of The E Street Band and the arena tours and everything else to sit in this little bedroom and make this album and be nobody.

[00:44:02] **Warren Zanes:** Yeah. To be nobody and to be so completely alone. Odysseus also, in being in returning home as that—as that beggar as nobody, he's alone, you know? He's alone in his own home. And to be alone in your own home, you have to have this kind of strength that is the type of strength that carries you through anything, you know?

And he finally gets to. Odysseus had a lot of strength 20 years before, you know, when the Trojan War starts. He's a hero. He's known for his strengths; he's known for his cunning, but it wasn't enough. He needed to be able to be without any of the moorings, you know? And in the case of Springsteen, it was the moorings of band. It was the moorings of, you know, being the star on the record cover. He stripped so much back.

[00:45:05] **John Moe:** Was him making *Nebraska* a healthy and therapeutic thing? And was you writing about *Nebraska*, writing *Deliver Me From Nowhere*, a therapeutic thing? Was it a moment of being in the depths that was necessary to get to a healthier, happier place?

[00:45:28] **Warren Zanes:** Well, for me, I have a therapist. I've got a long-term therapist. I'm in recovery. I have a sponsor I talk to. Like I'm really like—I got a lot of support around me. So, when I had my experience and you know, it was—it was particularly the loss of that marriage. Like really, I mean, I was down the well. But I had a lot of people who were looking down into that well with flashlights, keeping an eye on me. I feel like when Bruce made *Nebraska*, you know, that's why I asked him that question. Like, you know, you're not supposed to do that alone. He was like, "I didn't know that yet." You know, like I said to you already, I don't think he would do it the same way again, knowing what he knows now. You know, he got to the end of that road trip and John Landau said, "I think you need professional help."

And he got it. Like even, you know—even our heroes. And then this is like—look, I'm a professor. I look into my classroom and post- pandemic, I see students—many more students dealing with panic attacks, missing more classes. Like there, there's a mental health crisis that's underway and under-reported. And when someone like Bruce Springsteen steps up as he did in his memoir and talks about his own mental health, I hope he's setting a new standard for others to do the same, you know? But there's this old thing where we want our heroes to just show up as heroes. And what we actually need is our heroes to show up as humans and to expose vulnerabilities, to expose challenges. And, you know, he's—man, he's an inspiring model in that respect.

But I wouldn't draw a parallel between my *Nebraska* and his, because I had so much help.

[00:47:40] **John Moe:** Right, right. What's a song on *Nebraska* that you keep going back to?

[00:47:47] **Warren Zanes:** Well, uh, "Highway Patrolman". Oh, boy, I'll tell you something. Like doing interviews for this book, like—it like pokes at me a lot and often. Because I mean—and having heard from so many people who love *Nebraska*, I know I'm far from alone in this. But the stuff is... you know, I can barely talk about "My Father's House".

Um, it's hard to talk about "Mansion on the Hill". It's "Highway Patrolman" that gets me, like still. Um, you know, I got a brother and, you know, we've got a pretty good relationship today. And—but you know, we didn't—you kind of need a father to help you understand how to be brothers and we didn't have that.

And you know, in my home, my brother was kind of elevated to, well, he's the oldest male. He must be the man of the house. And that's the wild fucking west. And it was hard for us to be brothers in the wake of that. And, you know, "Highway Patrolman" when he lets his brother go, when he suspends the power of the law to honor that brother relationship—god. You know, I was talking to Dave Alvin, who is in The Blasters and has made a lot of great

solo records, and he was in a band with his brother. And man, when we were talking about "Highway Patrolmen" as two guys who were in bands with their brothers, we were like, "How did Bruce Springsteen get to those truths without having had the experience we did?"

Like that is a writer's gift. You know, that's a—that's a kind of sensitivity that, you know, we just were—felt a kind of awe because. We just felt ourselves in that song. So that's a long, (laughing) long answer that—

[00:50:06] **John Moe:** No, that's a great answer.

[00:50:09] **Warren Zanes:** Oof.

[00:50:10] **John Moe:** I've, uh—yeah, that's the one that I keep coming back to as well. And, and I think—I mean, in my case it's 'cause I had a brother who got into a lot of trouble, and I really have to dole that song out carefully.

[00:50:26] **Warren Zanes:** It's such a complicated ending.

[00:50:29] **John Moe:** It is.

[00:50:30] **Warren Zanes:** Because there's a—there's a couple things happening. You know, one of them is like this expression of love over the law. Like, I'm gonna go with love and let you go. But at the same time, he's detaching like—

[00:50:48] **John Moe:** It's loss, as well.

[00:50:49] **Warren Zanes:** "I can't keep saving you." Yeah. It's so—and they're both resonating without him spelling that out. Like Springsteen as a songwriter knows like how much he needs to leave for the listener and how much he needs to bring to the listener. But that moment is like—you know, "The Highway Patrolman" has, you know—they say like, you know, you gotta put on your air mask before you help the other person on the plane.

He can't help his brother if he can't first help himself. And so, he is letting him go, but he knows what he's letting him go into. It's not good. It's not freedom. You know. But he's gotta detach. At a certain point, you've gotta detach.

[00:51:46] **John Moe:** Yeah. Yeah. That—I mean, that makes me wonder though. Does he ultimately—he says in the song, "Man turns his back on his brother. That man ain't no good." Does he turn his back on Frankie at the end of the song?

[00:52:09] **Warren Zanes:** You know, it's—it's no and yes.

[00:52:15] **John Moe:** Okay.

[00:52:17] **Warren Zanes:** You know, so it's like—that's the thing of like, you listen to a song like that, you get to the end you have to go back to the beginning. So, that that line that you just shared can resonate differently.

[00:52:34] **John Moe:** Right.

[00:52:35] **Warren Zanes:** So, you get to the end like, well, is that what he did? Is he—is he singing that line in the story because he's so conflicted over what he did? The sophistication of the writing is—you know, give me—as a songwriter, give me one "Highway Patrolman", and I promise I'll retire.

[00:52:57] **John Moe:** (Chuckles.) I want to take a moment to thank our listeners for sticking around for the granular analysis of Springsteen lyrics portion of this interview.

(Warren laughs.)

And we didn't even get into why, having blown up a chicken man, one needs to blow up his house too. It seems like overkill to me. I don't know. The book is *Delivered Me From Nowhere: The Making of Bruce Springsteen's Nebraska*. The author is Warren Zanes. Warren, thanks.

[00:53:25] **Warren Zanes:** That was a lot of fun for me. Thank you.

[00:53:29] **Music:** Relaxed acoustic guitar.

[00:53:33] **John Moe:** You can find out more about Warren Zanes at Warren-Zanes.com. Check out his biography of Tom Petty also, if you have a chance. Warren goes deep with that subject and it's very interesting and very moving. Laura House and a meditation moment right after the break.

(Music ends.)

[00:53:58] **Promo:**

Music: Upbeat music.

Drea Clark: Hey there. This is Drea Clark.

Alonso Duralde: This is Alonso Duralde.

Ify Nwadiwe: And this is Sparta!

Drea: Ify...

Ify: Listen, I got 300 on the brain. We just watched the movie *300* in honor of our 300th episode of *Maximum Film!*

Alonso: That's right. And to celebrate this major milestone we brought back original co-hosts, Ricky Carmona and April Wolfe.

Ify: But just for this one episode, right?

Alonso: Oh, Ify. You know, we could never replace you.

Drea: Some of the voices have changed over the years. Heck, the name of the show has changed too. But through it all, *Maximum Film!* remains—

All: (In unison.) The movie podcast that isn't just a bunch of straight, White guys.

Ify: Deal with it.

Drea: Find this and all 300 episodes of *Maximum Film!* anytime on MaximumFun.org.

(Music ends.)

[00:54:44] **Music:** Bright, relaxed guitar.

[00:54:45] **John Moe:** Well, let's have a meditation moment, shall we? Let's collect our minds and our breath a little bit with Laura House. She's the co-host of the *Tiny Victories* podcast, and she joins us now. Hi, Laura.

[00:54:57] **Laura House:** Hi, John. Good to see you. Hear you. Both?

[00:55:00] **John Moe:** Good to see you. Good to hear you. Good to know that your lungs are functioning.

[00:55:05] **Laura House:** Yes, absolutely. We talk sometimes about meditation—how to do it and we walk through it. We don't talk much about when to do it. And I thought I'd throw that out there. The way we do it here—which is great—you can meditate anytime we do a simple mindfulness meditation. But if you wanna make it a habit, it's good to do—like wake up, meditate before you hit the world. Before email. Do the meditation before you open your email, grab your phone, let the world attack your brain.

[00:55:42] **John Moe:** Yeah. Don't dive into the Wordle straight away.

[00:55:46] **Laura House:** (Laughs.) Exactly. Don't get that stressful, like, "Ugh, what if—what if I don't get it? Now my whole day is ruined." But then you can also do it anytime like we can do now. So, if you're in a safe spot where you can close your eyes, you can do that. And just get comfortable wherever you're seated, close your eyes.

[00:56:04] **John Moe:** Feet on the floor.

[00:56:05] **Laura House:** You can feet on the floor. You can want your back supported, head upright and then just breathe.

So, the first thing is we're not looking for anything magical. Just close your eyes. Just breathe... and feel yourself breathe. Like give your breathing a little attention. (Beat.) So, that could be touching your stomach or even just internally, in your mind's eye. (Beat.) And you're probably also having thoughts. Totally normal. You can have thoughts. They're gonna be there, but you're just giving some attention to your breathing. (Beat.) I just sort of let everything go, all your to-do list. (Beat.)

And you can go ahead and open your eyes. It's just a little respite, pulling over the car of your brain.

[00:57:33] **John Moe:** That's right. Even possibly pulling over the car of your car in order to—in order to do that.

[00:57:38] **Laura House:** A definite possibility.

[00:57:40] **John Moe:** Oh, it's, uh—it's just a little pause in the day and it's—what do they say about—uh, was it Pepsi Cola? The pause that refreshes?

[00:57:50] **Laura House:** (Laughs.) I don't recall.

[00:57:51] **John Moe:** I'm not sure. Pepsi doesn't need to be an integral part of your meditation.

[00:57:54] **Laura House:** Yeah. Remember when they started putting lemon in it? I think it was... (Laughs.)

[00:57:57] **John Moe:** Oh yeah. Right, right. Let's not get ahead of ourselves. Laura House can be found at LauraHouse.com and on the *Tiny Victories* podcast. Laura, thanks.

[00:58:07] **Laura House:** Yeah, thank you.

[00:58:11] **Music:** “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song.

[00:58:18] **John Moe:** If people become members of *Depresh Mode*, if people donate, then we can keep having a show. If not, then we can't have a show anymore. We like having a show. We think you like listening to it. So, we need to hear from you. If you've already donated, we really appreciate it. Thank you. You're making it happen.

If you haven't yet donated, it's easy to do. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join. Find a level that works for you and select *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows. You can check out our merchandise store. We have all sorts of wonderful gifts, all sorts of, "I'm glad you're here" type of merchandise on all sorts of things available there, including—we have some depression mode sweatpants that are selling really well.

People love the sweatpants, you know, 'cause what's depression without sweatpants? I say that's at MaxFunStore.com. 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.

Our Instagram and Twitter are both @DepreshPod. If you're on Facebook, look up our mental health discussion group, Preshies. Lots of good conversation and support happening there, people helping one another out. It's very inspirational. Our *Depresh Mode* newsletter is on Substack. Search that up. I'm on Twitter and Instagram @JohnMoe. Our electric mail address is DepreshMode@maximumfun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. My wife and I went to see Bruce Springsteen one time many years ago. The only seats we could get were behind the stage, so we had to kind of wait for him to spin around and play to us, which he did plenty of times. But mostly throughout the concert, the only thing we could see was Bruce's ass. Mrs. Moe reported that this was, in fact, just fine with her. *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", and I'd like to welcome Clara Flesher to our show.

She is our new intern, Clara. Welcome aboard.

[01:00:26] **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*

[01:01:02] **Amy:** Hey, this is Amy from Rockville, Maryland, and I want you to know that your worst moments do not define you.

[01:01:11] **John Moe:** *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun, and Papa Chick. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

(Music fades out.)

[01:01:21] **Sound Effect:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

[01:01:22] **Guest 1:** MaximumFun.org.

[01:01:24] **Guest 2:** Comedy and culture.

[01:01:25] **Guest 3:** Artist owned.

[01:01:26] **Guest 4:** Audience supported.