

[00:00:00] **John Moe:** Brain asks heart, “How are you feeling today?”

Heart responds, “Happy, grateful, miserable, angry, scared, awesome, insecure, gassy, guilty, a little nostalgic, confused, and content.”

Brain says, “That's normal. Emotions are complicated, especially when you're aware of them.”

Heart smiles warmly and says, “Add understood.”

Here's another one. Brain says, “You’re wrong, and I can prove it with facts.”

Heart says, “You’re wrong, and I can prove it with loudness.”

Those are two of many comics by the cartoonist Nick Seluk, from the series *Heart and Brain*, which is sort of about cute, little bodily organs that talk, but more broadly about the relationship between the rational—the brain—and the emotional—the heart. That dialogue, that tension, that interplay between rational and emotional, that thing that we all experience. Nick has been making comic strips about Heart and Brain for years, retiring from his corporate graphic design job some years back to concentrate on his comics full time.

I noticed a lot of these *Heart and Brain* strips popping up on the Preshies group on Facebook—people sharing them, people recognizing themselves in Heart or Brain, or Heart and Brain, and having a laugh, feeling connected, feeling understood. Preshies is a Facebook group that was started by our show, and there is discussion about episodes of the show happening there. But it's also filled with a lot of people just sharing their mental health experiences, offering ideas and support to each other. And our show—this show by the way, it's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here. Music.

[00:01:48] **Transition:** Warm, upbeat acoustic guitar.

[00:01:55] **John Moe:** So, these *Heart and Brain* comics were popping up a lot in the Preshies group, because they resonated with the members there. When you talk about mental health, I think that tension, that balance or quest for balance between the rational and the emotional is a big part of mental health, because it's a big part of just living life.

(Music fades out.)

Nick includes other body parts in the comics too. The tongue is a character. The stomach, lungs. Nick Seluk deals with ADHD, depression, and anxiety, and hearts, and brains. I talked to Nick from his home, in Michigan.

[00:02:30] **Transition:** Relaxed acoustic guitar.

[00:02:38] **John Moe:** Nick Seluk, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

[00:02:40] **Nick Seluk:** Thanks for having me, John.

[00:02:42] **John Moe:** Tell us, if you will—introduce us to these main characters, the Heart and the Brain, if you would.

[00:02:51] **Nick Seluk:** Oh sure. Yeah. So, *The Awkward Yeti* is the comic that I make, and the characters Heart and Brain are—as I've come to find out—sort of a representation of my own ADHD, because the brain represents kind of the practical side of things, as you would imagine. Thoughtful. Like, what does society want us to do? The heart is the more free-spirited, more of the self and trying to get out and have fun and follow impulses.

And so, their interactions tend to be in general disagreement. I found that a lot of the fans of my work, they relate to one or the other. And part of how I discovered the ADHD is with like, “Well, how are you—how’s everybody one or the other when I'm both?”

(John chuckles.)

“All the time.”

[00:03:42] **John Moe:** Right, right. So, these developed—I mean, the heart and the brain develop inside the body, as all organs do. But these characters developed how? How were they birthed?

[00:03:56] **Nick Seluk:** The comics started off being actually about an awkward yeti named Lars, who was sort of socially uncomfortable and got into awkward situations in general. It's just kinda a fun thing, and I added the Brain character at one point, because I wanted to start diving more into Lars's own thought process—what was creating all this anxiety. And so, he would start having these conversations with his brain, who would keep him up at night. And eventually, I introduced the Heart to kind of offset that, because it wasn't all just anxiety. There's some good in there. There are also some impulses that I thought the Heart could represent really well.

And so, I started doing these comics with the three characters, and eventually Lars just kind of exited. And part of that was—part of that was just the logistics, the space issue. You know? The two small characters with the big character. And so, Heart and Brain kind of took off. They started getting all the attention, and my audience started taking off, and I thought this is a really interesting way to have these conversations through my comics. And it just kind of happened naturally. It just happened over time, and the way people responded, I thought maybe I've got a good direction going here.

[00:05:20] **John Moe:** Did that surprise you that these drawings of a brain with glasses and a and a very happy looking heart resonated so much with people?

[00:05:29] **Nick Seluk:** Yeah. I was surprised. I was really into how it started, like with the yeti, and it was more of a gag kind of thing. And then this started becoming a little bit more of a mental health and almost like a therapy for myself, because now I wasn't just doing the cheap gag humor that I was enjoying, but I was getting a little bit deeper, mixed in with some

comedy, some slice of life. But it's really—it doesn't always have to be funny to work. And I thought it was interesting to see that a lot of the times the more serious and vulnerable I got through these, the more people would connect to it.

[00:06:10] **John Moe:** Hm. You mentioned ADHD. How far back does that go with you?

[00:06:16] **Nick Seluk:** Well, forever. But not—I didn't know about it until just a few years ago. So, you know, I went through life struggling against myself for a very long time, and I still do. It's not like I'm cured just because I'm aware of it and, you know, maybe take a little Adderall or something. But you know, it's still an issue. And you know, you have to dive pretty deep to get to the root of that kind of thing. And it's a process. It's gonna take a while, but I feel like I'm early in the process.

[00:06:52] **John Moe:** Well, how does it manifest for you? Because I hear over and over from people with ADHD, that it's not, “I can't pay attention. I get distracted by a squirrel.” Like, it doesn't fit—the experience doesn't fit the stereotype is what I hear a lot.

[00:07:11] **Nick Seluk:** Uh, yeah. There's some truth to that, but I think that everybody experiences those kinds of things. Everybody experiences walking into a room, and you don't remember why you went in there. And that's just kind of your brain readjusting to the environment and sort of resetting. It's a little bit different when it's a problem. It's a little bit more intense and far-reaching and a lot of those—like, not being able to pay attention, it can be incapacitating just to try to do anything that you don't want to do. And that that can be really, really difficult. But it can also be really helpful, because I'm able to jump around a lot.

And so, in my career—working on a lot of different projects, running a business, doing all these things—I can flip back and forth pretty easily, but staying focused is definitely a big part of it for sure. And there are different ways of coping and, you know, impulse control can be difficult. And you know, there are a lot of negatives that come with it that are hard to control.

[00:08:18] **John Moe:** What led you to finally getting diagnosed?

[00:08:22] **Nick Seluk:** Well, I got a divorce, and I was going through a hard time with business, and I had been taken advantage of by people—business partners—and I was just spiraling. And I just—I had to do something. So, I finally went to see a psychiatrist, and I didn't know what I was going there for. I just—I needed something. I needed some help. I was like, “Something's wrong. I have been refusing to—” I always thought like, “My brain, I'm smart. I can figure this out on my own. I can fix myself if I just think all the time and try to problem solve within my own head.”

(They chuckle.)

But the second I went to go—

[00:09:05] **John Moe:** I'll just crawl into my own head, and then all the answers will be there somehow.

[00:09:09] **Nick Seluk:** Yeah, exactly. (*Laughs.*) I did that forever, and it didn't work. So, let's keep trying, just in case I missed something.

(*John chuckles and affirms.*)

So, I went to the psychiatrist, and I was like, “You know, I'm not exactly sure what's going on. Maybe it's—I don't know, am I bipolar? Or like maybe I have this? Or—” I'm like going through my story, and I'm, you know, jumping around a lot. And I said like, “Maybe even ADHD.”

And he's just like, “Yyyeah.”

(*They chuckle.*)

It's like, oh. Okay.

[00:09:40] **John Moe:** “Stop there!” Wow.

[00:09:43] **Nick Seluk:** It was just a really funny reaction.

[00:09:46] **John Moe:** Why did he stop you on that?

[00:09:49] **Nick Seluk:** I think it was just the way I was telling the story was so disconnected, so disjointed. I was all over the place. And I was—I'm very open to being told like what would help. And so, I ended up going with that, and I got some medication for it. And it was the funniest thing. (*Chuckles.*)

When I—so, I first started taking Adderall. I've tried a few different things. But so, I had—(*chuckles*) I had a condo, and I had a pen that was on the stairs for months. Just sitting there. And I would go downstairs, and it would be like, “Agh!” You know, it stressed me out. I'd see the pen, and it stresses me out. I go back upstairs. I've got stuff in my hands. I look at the pen. I'm stressed out. I'm like, “Somebody—probably me—should do something about this pen eventually.” But nothing was happening. The first day that I took Adderall, the first thing I did is I picked up the pen and put it away. And I thought, “This is—this is mind blowing!” The inability to focus enough to do something, because I'm thinking about so many other things at the same time—that's a big part of it is just the—like, you're constantly overthinking to the point you're thinking about—I mean, it could be three to five things at the same time, and it can be incapacitating to focus on any one of them.

You know, you think about what a decision will do for you, and you think about every possible outcome, and that is too much. It could—because that even applies to looking at a menu, like a food menu. I can barely get through that. I've gotten a lot better. But yeah, so the medication definitely helped, but it's certainly not the ultimate solution. It's a Band-Aid, probably.

[00:11:32] **John Moe:** Yeah. So, how long ago was this that you were diagnosed?

[00:11:35] **Nick Seluk:** I would say about three years ago.

[00:11:38] **John Moe:** Three years ago. Okay. And how long have you been doing comics? Quite a long—quite a bit longer than that, I think. Right?

[00:11:46] **Nick Seluk:** Yeah. Well, I've been doing them my whole life, basically. And you know, came and went. But I've been doing this—*The Awkward Yeti*, for about 10 years, and professionally for about eight years.

[00:11:56] **John Moe:** Hmm. And the Heart and the Brain or the Brain and the Heart for how long?

[00:12:01] **Nick Seluk:** Probably about eight years, nine years.

[00:12:04] **John Moe:** Okay. Okay, okay. So, do you think that that the ADHD has been your secret collaborator, kind of conspiring with you on those comics the whole time?

[00:12:15] **Nick Seluk:** Oh, for sure. In fact, somebody said—years ago, after I posted a comic—a *Heart and Brain* comic. They said, “It looks like you've got ADHD.” And I was so offended!

(They chuckle.)

I don't think I responded, but I was so offended by it. Like, how dare you diagnose me through my comics that are very obvious about this condition?

(They laugh.)

[00:12:40] **John Moe:** The act of creating comics, is that beneficial or harmful to your efforts to manage your ADHD? Is it a release or is it a compulsion?

[00:12:52] **Nick Seluk:** Uh, it's—well. *(Laughs.)* It's both.

[00:12:54] **John Moe:** It's both.

[00:12:55] **Nick Seluk:** It is a compulsion to create. In general, to create—I spiral if I am not creating. I can't—I can't get by if I'm not doing something. It doesn't have to be for anybody else. I could do—I could paint and never show it to anybody, but I have to do something. But it also ends up being really good therapy, because I just use it as a tool to make fun of myself and the little quirks and just be honest with myself and joke about it, because this is what I get to deal with. And you know, the comics are also great. They're short form. That's good for my attention span. *(Chuckles.)* So, that medium works well. I've tried a lot of other things. I've tried writing a novel. I've tried writing screenplays.

I've tried—well, that's another mark of ADHD. You go very passionately into some kind of activity, and you want to do something and you're completely, 100% into it. But you can't generally finish it.

[00:13:57] **John Moe:** Hm. So, how far did you get on the novel?

[00:14:00] **Nick Seluk:** Oh, the novel? A few chapters. The screenplay, probably first act.

[00:14:06] **John Moe:** Okay.

(They chuckle.)

[00:14:07] **Nick Seluk:** I did write one screenplay just for my friends, just for fun. And I finished that one, because there was nothing at stake, and it was just fun and absurd and a lot of inside jokes. So, it kept me entertained as I went.

[00:14:25] **John Moe:** So, what are you doing in terms of managing the ADHD now? Are you still doing the Adderall? Are you doing therapy? Like what's the plan?

[00:14:34] **Nick Seluk:** Well, the comics are a big part of my therapy. I think having that, and having people relate to it is really helpful for all of us. Because, you know, you feel less alone with some of the things you're dealing with, and you don't bury them and see it as a bad thing so much as this is just how things kind of are.

[00:14:54] **John Moe:** There's a lot of comics that have dealt with depression. I'm thinking of, of *Peanuts* primarily. Maybe it's 'cause I live in St. Paul, where Charles Schultz is from. I'm reminded of that comic strip everywhere we go. There's a lot of depression and anxiety in that comic strip and in a lot of classic comic strips. Are those things that you've dealt with as well? Depression and anxiety?

[00:15:17] **Nick Seluk:** Oh, absolutely.

[00:15:20] **Transition:** Fun, staccato guitar.

[00:15:22] **John Moe:** The effect of depression and anxiety on the heart and the brain, after the break.

(Music ends.)

[00:15:35] **Promo:**

Music: “Medicines” from the album *Exhilarating News* by The Taxpayers.

Justin McElroy: Hey, Sydnee. You're a physician and the co-host of *Sawbones: A Marital Tour of Misguided Medicine*, right?

Sydnee McElroy: That's true, Justin.

Justin: Is it true that our medical history podcast is just as good as a visit to your primary care physician?

Sydnee: No, Justin. That is absolutely not true. Uh, however, our podcast is funny and interesting and a great way to learn about the medical misdeeds of the past, as well as some current, not-so-legit healthcare fads.

Justin: So, you're saying that by listening to our podcast, people will feel better?

Sydnee: Sure.

Justin: And isn't that the same reason that you go to the doctor?

Sydnee: Well, uh, you could say that, but—

Justin: And our podcast is free.

Sydnee: Yes, it is free.

Justin: You heard it here first, folks. *Sawbones: A Marital Tour of Misguided Medicine*, right here on Maximum Fun: just as good as going to the doctor.

Sydnee: No, no, no. Still not just as good as going to the doctor, but pretty good.

Justin: (*Softly.*) It's up there.

(*Music ends.*)

[00:16:20] **Transition:** Relaxed acoustic guitar.

[00:16:23] **John Moe:** Back with cartoonist Nick Seluk, creator of the *Heart and Brain* comics, and a person with ADHD. Before the break, I asked Nick if he's also dealt with depression and anxiety, and he said ab-so-lutely.

(*Music ends.*)

[00:16:38] **Nick Seluk:** Depression, on and off. It's probably more of an acute thing generally, but anxiety has been very chronic for me. And it turns out that a lot of that anxiety is related to the ADHD. So, you did ask if I was still taking Adderall, and it's very difficult to get for one thing. So, I've been on and off with it, but I am on it right now. And I mean, it doesn't feel like it today. I think I'm between doses, but—(*laughs*) I'm trying to remember where we left...

[00:17:11] **John Moe:** (*Chuckles.*) We're talking about anxiety.

[00:17:14] **Nick Seluk:** Anxiety. Yes. Yes. So, the treatment for the ADHD shifts my anxiety entirely, because a lot of my anxiety stems from all that overthinking and that layered thinking, you know? So, being able to focus those thoughts kind of turns it into that good anxiety, that ambitious anxiety, that's useful. So, even though it's a stimulant, I find it extremely calming.

[00:17:40] **John Moe:** How long has anxiety been a thing for you?

[00:17:43] **Nick Seluk:** As long as I can remember, but probably couldn't quite identify it until maybe in my twenties, more so. We didn't talk about this kind of stuff quite as much back then, not directly anyway. We didn't talk so much about mental health. There was a stigma of over-medicating kids on ADHD, which—and there's a lot of truth to that, you know—trying to get kids to sit in the structure of school when people just aren't meant for that kind of structure for 12 years. Of course, they're gonna be restless. But anyway, there wasn't a lot in terms of addressing mental health when I was growing up.

[00:18:27] **John Moe:** Yeah. Do you mean in your house or in society?

[00:18:33] **Nick Seluk:** Well, I can't speak entirely for society. But probably in my house, it just didn't really come up too much, and I kind of just buried feelings and stuff like that. So, I had my own issues there.

[00:18:49] **John Moe:** So, I'm curious why it came out of all places in comics. Like, you've talked about writing novels and writing screenplays and some of these other things, but it seems like this anthropomorphic heart and brain are the most pure conduit into your thinking and to your—the life of your mental health. Why are comics such a good platform for that, do you think?

[00:19:17] **Nick Seluk:** Well, I think a lot of it is you can get into tougher, bigger issues and present it in a very, light way—in a way that's accessible and not threatening. There's no preaching or anything about your—I don't have to talk about my politics or anything, which is great. I just—I find that it's a good way to try to reach people on a more universal level, on a—like we're all sort of the same deep down. And there are a lot of differences on the surface. So, I like to focus on the deep down, because that's what ultimately leads to the decisions and the behaviors. And a lot of those can be based on a thought process that's not very empathetic.

Maybe if they just hadn't—people don't necessarily think to look at it at that level. And I think that's a messaging that I can get across through that format, but also it's—the length of it is very accessible for somebody. Because, like I said, my attention span—I've just always gravitated towards that medium. I can't say for sure why that is, but I've always come back to it. It just seems to be a really helpful way for me to communicate in a way that I don't tend to do as well in person.

[00:20:40] **John Moe:** I mentioned to our Facebook group of listeners to the show, on Facebook, that I was gonna be speaking to you. And a couple of questions that came in from listener Nicole, who says, “How did you get the courage to put your work out there?”

[00:20:59] **Nick Seluk:** I was working a job, a corporate job, that—you know, it was a good job as far as, you know, on a resume, it looked good. It was as an art director. But it didn't feel right to me to be in that kind of structure. It was like the same kind of thing as school. Like I just don't—I don't work well with a structure, especially if I don't believe in it. And I just—I had to do something that was more me, more representative of me.

I was always happier when I made comics. Usually, it was just for friends. I'd just share with a couple people—you know, middle school and high school, and even at my corporate job, I would make comics about our clients or something like that and share those. I found that I just had to try something, and this was always the thing that worked for me. And when I discovered that you could just go on Facebook and post whatever you wanted and you didn't have to have an editor reject you—you know, you don't have to submit to a syndicate like you used to. Not one—there wouldn't be one person or one company that decides what's good and what's not. And then once you do it, they decide does it fit the audience and, you know, where is that rooted in? I don't know. But I loved this idea that I could just post it and it didn't matter. Like, nobody could stop me. (*Chuckles.*)

And so, I started posting. But it was terrifying, at the same time. The more my audience grew, the scarier got. And you do—early on, you get a lot of negative feedback, depending on where you post. You'll always get something negative. People tell you to kill yourself 'cause comic's not funny. Like, well that seems like a little bit of a reach, but. (*Laughs.*)

[00:22:45] **John Moe:** Seems rash.

[00:22:48] **Nick Seluk:** Seems a little extreme. Can you just go to a different web page or something? (*Chuckles.*) There's so much stuff out there, like I don't understand when people are so negative about creative work. Like, you've got sooo much content to choose from. Just go find the stuff you like. What are you doing here?

But anyway, there were so many times I did want to quit because of that kinda stuff, especially early on when I hadn't quite thickened up my skin. And—but I just had to do it. I liked it too much, and I also was so desperate to get out of my job. And I thought, you know, if I really work at this, I might have a shot. And it turned out—it turned out I was right. I just kind of decided at one point to bet on myself, you know. And same thing when I decided to quit my old job. I had gotten to this point where I was making about the same amount of money, which wasn't a ton, from both my cartooning—like the merchandise and stuff—and my job.

And so, I made the decision to cut my income in half by quitting my job, thinking if I bet that 40 hours on myself, I'll bet I can make it work. And yeah, I don't know. I just—I'm terrified of failure, but I am more than willing to fail. And now, it's a little different, where like I'll throw out tons of stuff, and I don't even think about it anymore. Like, if I submit something, I don't even think and wait for response. I'm onto the next thing, because the key to creative

success is just like failing a lot. And being—yeah, and that's it. But just keep failing, and don't worry about it. Just—one of them may or may not hit, and you just keep at it.

[00:24:46] **John Moe:** You mentioned submitting things. Where are you submitting them?

[00:24:50] **Nick Seluk:** Oh, I might submit to publishers. Like, I'm trying to pitch a graphic novel—a couple different graphic novels. One for kids, one for teenagers. That's mainly where I'm at right now. Oh, like TV—worked in—I've tried to do that whole thing, the Hollywood circuit, trying to get *Heart and Brain* turned into something. And you know, it's the same way it. It fizzles out so often at every stage of the process that at this point, if I have a meeting, I think nothing of it. I have no—I'm not excited about it.

[00:25:25] **John Moe:** Don't get excited. Yeah.

[00:25:26] **Nick Seluk:** No. (*Chuckles.*) But like, I'm okay failing. I've accepted that that's just part of it.

[00:25:32] **John Moe:** You talk about taking this—betting big on yourself and concentrating on the comic and letting the corporate job go. It sounds like that's worked out pretty well. Has that helped you to kind of silence the inner critic, the voice that sounds like your voice saying, “You suck. This is no good.”

[00:25:52] **Nick Seluk:** (*Laughs.*) No.

[00:25:53] **John Moe:** Okay. (*Laughs.*)

[00:25:54] **Nick Seluk:** No, I don't—in some ways, it made it worse. Because I have to—I still have to do things that I don't like to do to make money, like advertising my merchandise or getting people to join my Patreon. It's—I really hate that part of the job, but it's necessary. So, I'd be a lot happier if I was just doing the work.

[00:26:20] **Transition:** Quiet, thoughtful guitar.

[00:26:22] **John Moe:** More with cartoonist Nick Seluk after the break.

(*Music ends.*)

[00:26:34] **Promo:**

Music: Bright, brassy music.

Alex Schmidt: Hi, I'm ketchup.

Katie Goldin: And I'm socks.

Alex: And I'm ball bearings.

Katie: And I'm pigeons.

Alex: And I'm water towers.

Katie: And I'm cardboard?

Alex: Surprise! We are actually humans.

Katie: Humans making a podcast about those kinds of topics!

Alex: Because those are real episode topics on the podcast *Secretly Incredibly Fascinating*. That's a podcast where we take ordinary-seeming things, like ketchup and socks and cardboard, and bring you the little-known history and science and stories that make those things secretly, incredibly fascinating.

Katie: *Secretly Incredibly Fascinating!*

Alex: The title of the podcast! Hear the back catalog anytime, and hear new, amazing episodes every Monday at MaximumFun.org.

(Music fades out.)

[00:27:17] **Transition:** Peaceful, up-tempo acoustic guitar.

[00:27:18] **John Moe:** Back with Nick Seluk, creator of *Heart and Brain* comics, a successful comic that takes Nick's innermost vulnerabilities and puts them on the internet for everybody to see and talk about.

(Music ends.)

We've talked about the depression that you've had, the anxiety that you deal with, the ADHD that you deal with, and it seems like that's all playing out in these characters—in the Heart and the Brain and the various other organs that are depicted in your comics. What is it like having your emotions, as demonstrated by internal organs, just out there for the world to see? Like does that—does that weird you? Or is it just another day at the office for you at this point?

[00:28:03] **Nick Seluk:** I think it's become another day at the office. I used to be a lot more scared of being vulnerable, but as I found that people related to that stuff the most—and especially that it was helping people—that was the thing that really kept me going. Because I would get some pretty intense messages about how the comics—they felt alone, and they were like practically on their way out, and then they felt seen. And I was just like, “I can't stop doing this ever.” *(Laughs.)*

It's like my—I need to just suck it up and, you know, make myself feel uncomfortable, and if I'm not doing it for me, at least do it for them and hope that I get paid enough to do all the stuff that I want to do too.

[00:28:55] **John Moe:** It sounds very noble. It also still seems very, uh, treacherous and tenuous.

(Nick laughs.)

Are you—you know, you're helping a lot of people, but are you endangering yourself in the process? Like, is the vulnerability protected, I guess?

[00:29:14] **Nick Seluk:** I—sometimes. I think what I get back—a lot of it is just how people relate to it so well, and how much it helps them. I think that helps keep me going, 'cause then it makes me feel like I'm doing something worthwhile. And I'm not just like in the corporate world making some rich people more money. So, I don't see it as a noble thing necessarily. *(Chuckles.)* But I do get something back from that. Makes me feel good about the direction I'm taking.

[00:29:51] **John Moe:** I'm looking at a recent comic. Heart says to Brain, “What's the secret to happiness?”

Brain says, “Effectively distracting ourselves from the impermanence of life. I mean—” And then says, “Baby animals.” Holds up A puppy, who says, “Bork.”

Heart says, “Gasp! What were we talking about?” And there's a butterfly. And so often in these comics, this butterfly—this orange butterfly appears, and I'm trying to figure out what the butterfly represents.

[00:30:21] **Nick Seluk:** Yeah, I get that question a lot. And I don't know that I even know the answer, because the answer is basically the unknown of it all. Like the—whatever invisible force is happening, whether we choose to do something or not. And I think it's kind of this impulse that Heart follows. And generally, the butterfly will appear when—as some people have said, when Heart is at its heartiest. And there's some truth to that.

It's kind of just a—it's a feeling of where it fits. And there are occasionally comics where it does not appear, because I don't believe it fits. And—but it's a rare case. But it's not like something that I add as just a—like a hidden easter egg kind of thing in every single comic. It's—there's something to it.

[00:31:23] **John Moe:** *(Chuckles.)* Do you get letters if the butterfly isn't there?

[00:31:26] **Nick Seluk:** Yes.

(They chuckle.)

Yeah, yeah. People will bring it up. And there have been a couple occasions where I just forgot.

[00:31:33] **John Moe:** Uh-huh. You talk about getting all this feedback from people who were in terrible shape, but they feel understood. Do you feel a responsibility to people? Like, do you feel like you have their mental health and their wellbeing in your hands, in your pen?

[00:31:56] **Nick Seluk:** (*Chuckles.*) Um, no. I don't feel like that, but I do feel that whatever I'm doing to communicate is kind of helping to open up conversations that may—or just opening up the humor behind the human condition a little bit more. You know, things that people are afraid to talk about. I think this kind of thing really helps, because, you know, I can make a joke about—I mean, I've had comics about chemotherapy. And the people who have been through it always find it funny. You know, we're dealing with these bodies that are in incredibly complex, but also absurdly clumsy. And they—we have issues. There are so many different issues that we can't even—we're not even aware of how it all works. You know, the immune system alone is so complex, and we're just—we're going to be running into issues because of how complex this machine is. So, might as well have some fun with it!

So, the medical and mental health—which I see as it's all kind of the same thing. It's just that mental health—I don't know, it gets a little bit too separated from medical health. But anyway, they're both important because they're—everybody deals with it. Everybody's body is going to be falling apart over time, and we're all eventually going to die. So, you know, like let's at least be able to laugh about it on the way. Right?

(*They chuckle.*)

What are we so serious about?

[00:33:38] **John Moe:** I've mentioned Heart and Brain quite a bit here, but there are several other organs. There's a stomach, there's a gallbladder, there's a coffee—which I don't think is technically an internal organ but is still anthropomorphized. Do you have a favorite character to draw and write? Do you have one that you—that feels like a little treat for you to get to explore?

[00:34:02] **Nick Seluk:** Yeah, I think I have fun with Tongue, because Tongue is somehow—it's more impulsive than Heart, has a one—it's just one goal. It's just to have something that tastes good. That's it. That's the only thing it cares about. And so, I like that singular dimension because Tongue is also very intelligent and manipulative and will find all kinds of ways to reach this one, single goal. And so, that could be through smashing a plate over Brain's head or—however that works, anatomically.

(*John laughs.*)

Or just doing a song and dance, whatever it is. Like, I think there's just a lot of fun in the way that that character interacts with the others.

[00:34:55] **John Moe:** Does that feel the closest to you or do any of them feel the closest to who you actually are?

[00:35:03] **Nick Seluk:** Uh, I wouldn't—no, I don't think Tongue really feels like, uh, very related to me. I just—I like having that sort of antagonistic character. I think Heart and Brain are fairly representative of me, but it's not so specific. You know, I keep things as general as I can, so that everybody can kind of project themselves on the organs. And I think that's something that really works too—just that it doesn't matter what you look like or what your situation is, you can put—you can project yourself onto these characters and find a way to relate to life through them. And that's kind of the goal. At least, that's what I try to do.

[00:35:52] **John Moe:** A follow up on when we were talking earlier about ADHD and about Adderall—that there was an Adderall shortage. Why do you think there is an Adderall shortage right now?

[00:36:05] **Nick Seluk:** Uh, well, I have no idea. I don't know if a lot more people are taking it or if it's just—it's still a taboo thing. It's a class one. I mean, it's definitely affected me, and I do—it's hard for me, because I know that I really benefit from this in a healthy way. So. I'm sure there are a lot of people that take it because it's fun to take or they can concentrate more for finals or whatever it might be. But I have had trouble getting it on occasion, and the times when I'm not on it, I go right back into kind of spiraling. So, yeah, I hope that it does not continue to be a shortage.

[00:36:50] **John Moe:** Yeah. Are you looking ahead with ADHD as something that you can leave behind one day? Or is it just something you plan to be managing from here on out?

[00:37:04] **Nick Seluk:** It's something I would hope to be able to work through, through a combination of therapy—probably cognitive behavioral therapy—and working on things just on my own, which may include some of the principles of cognitive behavioral therapy and just looking at the roots of, you know, trauma—which we all have to, you know, vastly varying degrees; but we all have that. You know, so I do think that getting to the root of things could potentially, over time, get me to a point where I don't rely on a medication. That would be my goal.

[00:37:39] **John Moe:** Mm-hm. How's your therapy going?

[00:37:44] **Nick Seluk:** I kind of go in and out of therapy. I struggle with it a lot, because I find that I will talk and the therapist often—I thought about so much that the therapist usually doesn't have very much to add. And that's no fault of their own. And maybe I'm just going to the wrong ones, or maybe I just think way too much. Because I do think about every possibility. I know what I'm supposed to do, and that's part of it too—where it's like I already know what I'm supposed to do, so I don't know what I'm doing here, 'cause they can't make me do it. I have to make me do it.

[00:38:26] **John Moe:** Yeah, I mean, I'm not gonna ask you the—what I think must be the cartoonist's least favorite question of “where do you get your ideas for your comic strips?”, but I will—I do think about how even Charles Schultz, like—you know, maybe he has a dog and can watch what the dog does and then come up with something for Snoopy to do. Or

Family Circus—not to compare you to *Family Circus*, but you know, if you've got kids running around the house—you know, they're gonna say something weird, and then you could turn that into a comic strip.

(*Nick agrees.*)

Is it an inexhaustible resource that you can just draw from your own mental state and turn that into comic strips? Like, is that taxing to be always drawing from that well?

[00:39:11] **Nick Seluk:** It can be, if I haven't like fucked things up in my life. So, that really helps when I have things kinda, uh, going wrong. Then, I'm like, “Oh, yeah! I can talk about what I'm feeling from this thing I just screwed up.” And (*chuckling*) I've found ways to pull from my experience to varying levels, so that if I'm doing well, they can be positive—maybe inspirational. If I'm struggling, they can get a little deeper. And they might not even have a joke at all. They might not even attempt to be comedic. They're just—you know, a lot of them are just: I'm experiencing this thing. And then, people can relate to that a lot of the time.

So, I think the well is always there. I can find anything that I've been through and try to go back and think about what went into that decision or, you know, what's going on between my emotions and my practical thoughts. It does seem to be pretty wide open, and I don't put the pressure on myself of having everything be completely unique, because that can be a thing with more of the gag style, where you're pressured to make everything funny and totally different from everything else you've done.

And I think I can tell—there are so many degrees of storytelling when it comes to something as complex as your thoughts and emotions and mental health and medical afflictions. You know, even those—everything works a little bit differently. And yeah, I think I've—I've got like endless resources to work with as far as I know.

[00:41:03] **John Moe:** Nick Seluk, thank you so much for talking with us.

[00:41:06] **Nick Seluk:** Yeah. Thanks for having me, John.

[00:41:09] **Music:** “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

[00:41:16] **John Moe:** You can see a lot more Heart and Brain and Tongue and Gallbladder, all at AkwardYeti.com.

Next time on *Depresh Mode*: sometimes your brain is a loyal and loving companion, like a wonderful pet. Other times, there are issues.

[00:41:34] **Bethany Cosentino:** Sometimes I feel like my brain is a rabid dog that I have to try to keep on a leash, because it literally feels like that sometimes—where I feel like my thoughts are escaping me or that I get super sidetracked. And I start one thing, and then I'm like, “Oh my god, wait! I just heard a noise outside. I have to go see what that is.” And then—you know, and I'm just sort of like, “Ah!”

[00:41:54] **John Moe:** Singer-songwriter Bethany Cosentino is with us. And it's time, once again, for a meditation moment. Our friend Laura House is here from the *Tiny Victories* podcast. Hi, Laura.

(Music fades out.)

[00:42:06] **Laura House:** Hi, John.

[00:42:07] **John Moe:** Oh, are we ready to find ourselves, to rediscover ourselves within ourselves here for just a brief moment?

[00:42:14] **Laura House:** Yes. Let's totally reconnect. I sometimes think of—so, when I think of meditation, I guess I think of it in my own way of—sometimes— Okay. You can feel like you're holding onto your whole life, like mentally. Like, if I stop thinking about all my concerns and worries and plans, like I'll disappear, or life won't happen.

(John affirms.)

So, meditation is—now that I've stressed you out—meditation is the putting that down. So, imagine you're holding a bag of groceries—your French bread, *(laughs)* your milk, like in a movie.

[00:42:53] **John Moe:** Leafy celery sticking out the top.

[00:42:55] **Laura House:** Yes, all your movie groceries. But it's not groceries. It's all your concerns and worries of life. So, for our meditation, we're just gonna put that bag down. *(Chuckles.)* This is so dumb, but we're gonna do it!

[00:43:09] **John Moe:** That's right. I'm with you.

[00:43:10] **Laura House:** Oh, good, good, good. So, get to a safe spot where you can close your eyes. If you're driving, do this later. Close your eyes and just be comfortable in your seat, and just breathe. *(Beat.)* And you don't even have to change your breathing, like you're already breathing. So, just sort of put your attention on that, the breathing that you're already doing. *(Beat.)* If you feel yourself still holding onto some of that bag of stuff, just put it down. Like, that's your challenge. For one minute, just put everything down. *(Beat.)*

And you're gonna have thoughts, and thoughts are welcome. They're just hanging out, and we don't have to be concerned with them. *(Beat.)* Just putting some attention on your breath that's already happening.

(A long pause.)

You can go ahead and open your eyes, slowly. *(Beat.)* It makes a difference, right?

(John agrees.)

Even just a few moments of, “Oh, that's right. I can just stop.”

[00:44:51] **John Moe:** I can set the bag down.

[00:44:53] **Laura House:** I can set the bag down! \

[00:44:55] **John Moe:** The bag full of stressors. Which, when you think about it, you have the bag full of stressors that you've accumulated from the vast Costco full of potential stressors that are out there.

(Laura agrees with a laugh.)

You've got your box of stressors that you're carrying home, but you can set those down.

[00:45:13] **Laura House:** Yep. It is the American experience of, “Yes, there's tons everywhere.” But yeah, you can just—what I like about it is it's not a—you don't have to do a big change or a big, magical change. It's like, you know what? For a few moments, I'm gonna set it all down. And then, you actually create new neural pathways every time you do it, so you're retraining your whole system that you can relax every time you basically let yourself relax.

[00:45:41] **John Moe:** It's just that easy, and it's just that productive.

(Laura chuckles.)

You can hear Laura on the *Tiny Victories* podcast with her co-host, Annabelle Gurwitch. Laura, thanks.

[00:45:51] **Laura House:** Thank you.

[00:45:53] **Music:** “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller fades back in.

[00:45:56] **John Moe:** In order for this program to exist, we need donations from listeners. That is our, by far, single biggest source of income. It's people listening to the show, deciding that they want it in the world, deciding that it helps them get through the day, deciding that it helps other people get through the day, and that's a good thing for all of us to invest in.

So, if we get those donations, then there are more shows, more episodes of this show. If there aren't donations, then the whole thing shuts down and goes away, and it stops. We want it to continue. We really need to hear from you in order for that to happen, right now. If you've already donated, thank you so much. You're helping make this show happen. If you haven't donated yet, now is the time. We really need to hear from you, and it's easy to donate. You just go to MaximumFun.org/join. MaximumFun.org/join. You find a level that works for you, and then you select *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows that are there, and then you're on your way. Clickity-click, you're done. It's fine. You're on your way. Thank you.

Our Instagram is [@DepreshPod](#). Our Twitter is also [@DepreshPod](#). If you're on Facebook, look up that mental health discussion group, Preshies, and join up. A lot of good conversation happening there. Our *Depresh Mode* newsletter is available on Substack. Search that up. I'm on Twitter and Instagram [@JohnMoe](#). *Depresh Mode* is made possible by your contributions. The show is produced by Gabe Mara. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our production intern is Clara Flesher, and we get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, "Building Wings".

[00:47:37] **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

[00:48:12] **John Moe:** The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available in the United States by calling 988. It's available 24/7 for free. The crisis text line, also free, always available. Text the word "home" to 741741.

Hi, credits listeners. I'm doing the credits in a different order this week. Sorry to blow your mind. Be sure to hit subscribe on *Depresh Mode*. Give us five-star ratings—six stars, I guess, if you can. Write rave reviews. All of that really helps get the show out into the world. If you need to reach us, our electric mail address is depreshmode@maximumfun.org.

[00:48:48] **Katrina:** Hi, this is Katrina from Detroit, Michigan, and I believe in you—today and every day.

[00:48:54] **John Moe:** *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum, Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

(Music fades out.)

[00:49:06] **Sound Effect:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

[00:49:07] **Speaker 1:** Maximum Fun.

[00:49:08] **Speaker 2:** A worker-owned network.

[00:49:09] **Speaker 3:** Of artist owned shows.

[00:49:11] **Speaker 4:** Supported—

[00:49:12] **Speaker 5:** —directly—

[00:49:13] **Speaker 6:** —by you!