

Wonderful! 34: Master Bwuce

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Rachel:

Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin:

Hey, it's Griffin McElroy.

Rachel:

This is Wonderful!

Griffin:

I have hand, foot, and mouth disease. I have—

Rachel:

Just starting out...

Griffin:

I have hand, foot...

Rachel:

... like that.

Griffin:

... and mouth disease. For me, it's mostly the mouth and I got it from a baby that I know very well. Well, you know, I thought I knew him. I thought I knew him pretty well.

Rachel:

Do you have any hand and feet ailments?

Griffin:

My hands and my feet got through this one unscathed, which a curse because I'd rather I spread it around a little bit more, you know, so my mouth wasn't doing all the heavy lifting. Um, but yeah, my baby gave me a

hand, foot, mouth that, uh, he got from probably some other baby. So thanks for that, uh, other kiddo.

And it makes it hard to talk and that's why I sound like a real mush mouth over here. And we'll continue to for the rest of the episode. Every word that comes outta my mouth is, like, um, a little bee that I'm spitting out.

It's like every word is, like, a small bee that just spent a little time in my mouth and got comfortable in there. Oh, boy. So, I basically wanted to just put out there that this one is a sacrifice I'm making for you, the audience, to listen to.

Rachel:

I'm sorry, Griffin.

Griffin:

Hey, you know what? Sometimes you gotta know when to hold and know when to fold 'em. That doesn't apply here. And really, every dumb joke I make that doesn't work is just like 14 or 16 bees. Um, and so it's just... It's real bad. Um, but what's good this week, I guess, to focus on for the small wonder segment?

Rachel:

For the small wonders. Uh, oh my gosh. The, uh, the pot roast you made.

Griffin:

I made a pot roast.

Rachel:

Oh, it was so good.

Griffin:

It was, uh, a special day for moms and so I made a roast in a crockpot. Uh, not a big deal, just seared a big old five pound boy and, uh...

Rachel:

I have eaten it three days in a row now.

Griffin:

Yeah, I'm looking forward to it. I'm about to take round three myself. Uh, let the good hot pot roast juices soothe my ailing, uh, head hole, and uh, yeah, it turned out real nice. I'm glad that you enjoyed it.

Rachel:

Well, can I ask you why you chose that as your meal?

Griffin:

Yeah. I like, uh, crockpot based things.

Rachel:

Yes, yes.

Griffin:

Because—

Rachel:

For sure.

Griffin:

And, and it's not just the laziness of it. There's something almost... it's almost like wine making to me, where it's like, you know, you let the tannins mature—

Rachel:

For a few hours.

Griffin:

For many hours. Yeah. Well, this is... and I guess it'd be like prison wine in this case, but yeah. I mean, something cool happens when you put meat in a bunch of other stuff...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

...into a pot where you just kind of let it get hot together for six hours or so.

Rachel:

Flavor's real good.

Griffin:

And the flavors just get interesting. I'm glad you enjoyed it.

Rachel:

Yes.

Griffin:

I wanted to do eating a hotdog at a baseball game.

Rachel:

Oh, man. That's another good one.

Griffin:

I'm a red blooded American and there's just something about eating one of these hot dogs at a baseball game that really does it for me. Um, baseball is either a fun, exciting sport to... it's a sport that takes about four hours to complete. And in there, you're gonna get a few, like, 10 second long chunks of genuine excitement and enjoyment and the rest of the time, I recommend, if you've never gone to one of these baseball games, is to fill that time with hot dogs.

Rachel:

Yeah. I do wanna eat constantly when I'm at a baseball game.

Griffin:

It's because there's not much else to do.

Rachel:

I do enjoy every baseball players' walkout music though. I feel [crosstalk] like I'm getting a little window into their song.

Griffin:

There is a dude for the Round Rock Express, which is the local Austin Minor League team whose walkout music is, uh, China Grove, uh, which I think is a

Steely Dan song, if I'm not mistaken. I am mistaken. China Grove is from the Doobie Brothers.

Rachel:

Oh, okay.

Griffin:

Um, but it's an unexpected walkout jam and it made me so happy, rooted for him every time, but he struck out a lot. But that's okay because there are hot dogs. I think I go first this week.

Rachel:

Yes, you do.

Griffin:

My first thing... oh, it breaks my heart to talk about it in the past tense. My first thing is Vine.

Rachel:

Oh, Griffin.

Griffin:

Vine was too good for this world. We did not deserve Vine and Vine ascended to heaven. Um—

Rachel:

Did you see some folks in the wonderful Facebook group that were talking specifically about your Vines?

Griffin:

No, I did not see this.

Rachel:

There was a post just this week. I was looking through it of people talking about out how much they enjoyed your Vines.

Griffin:

Oh, that's sweet. I have seen, recently, folks say that's, like, how they found my body of work, which is very strange to me because, uh, I was under the impression that nobody used Vine. Um, no, I wanted to talk about it because Vine, uh, if you weren't familiar, it was a video platform that was acquired by Twitter where you could upload these 6-second long video loops.

Um, and it launched in 2013, but it was shuttered tragically in 2017, mostly because Twitter couldn't find out, uh, a way to monetize it, which is like, it's a museum at that point. Like, do we really need the profits, guys? Because it's providing a broader cultural thing for the world. Um, and I mourn its death every waking moment of my days.

Um, but last year, one of the co-founders announced that he was working on a squee-quel called V2 that sadly, last week, uh, he announced was on indefinite hiatus.

Rachel:

Oh, my gosh.

Griffin:

So really jerking me around with Vine. Um, but in the four years where it was in operation, it was the best social media platform ever created. Um, and there's a lot of things about it that make it really special. Um, I think it was special, uh, among other social media platforms in how explicitly performative it was. Um, and maybe this is sort of, um, a crass way of looking at, at social media platforms, but I think there is an element of performance to most of the stuff that you, that you do on there.

Rachel:

Yeah. That's an interesting point, yeah, because the things on Vine always seemed to be, like, creative pursuits.

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

It wasn't necessarily like—

Griffin:

Sharing information or—

Rachel:

Yeah. Like, "Here, I got a haircut. Here's seven seconds of me with a haircut."

Griffin:

Right, exactly. It was a performance. There was something about the honesty of that, um, that made it, that made it different; that I think made it kind of special. It wasn't this avenue for, um, necessarily communication or, like, broadcasting updates about your life.

Uh, it was like a small stage and it was competitive in a way because people saw how other people were using this, not just a platform, but this, like, new medium and then try to do bigger and funnier and more clever stuff with it. And being, like, on the, you know, ground floor of that and watching it change and grow over those four years, it was really exciting.

And, um, I, it was the— For— When it was alive, it was the platform that I used the most, far more than Twitter and Facebook. Um, for comedy, specifically, I think Vine represented something really, really neat, um, because where, like, a long form platform like YouTube or whatever video plat— Facebook video, whatever.

Um, represented, like, a sketch or a scene or, like, a standup set. Vine... a Vine was just a single joke. Um, and I think there's a way of reading that as, like, a condemnation of, like, a reflection of our attention span in the modern age when we're using online social media.

But I think there's another way of looking at it in that it's just a different thing. It was in and you do the thing and you get out. And so, for comedy, like, there are jokes that were on Vine that only worked on Vine because they were six seconds long.

Rachel:

Well, and I think too, it's like the equalizer, like pretty much... as far as I know, everybody used their phone to do Vine.

Griffin:

Right.

Rachel:

So it wasn't like there was this big differential between people depending on the equipment. Or, you know, with, like, with YouTube, you know, you can put a fair amount of investment into your equipment.

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

Whereas, when Vine's on phone, like, everybody's kind of on the same playing field.

Griffin:

Yeah. And so, like, a lot of, like, the best Vines were people just, like, shooting it themselves on their phone. I think, uh, there were a lot of Vines from, like, visual artists and stuff who weren't necessarily doing comedy. They were doing, like, cool visual shit with their six seconds and playing with the loops. And there were people who did comedy and visual art stuff together in a way that was really, really successful.

Um, but there... specifically about comedy, like, uh, there was a... uh, I tweeted a video from him earlier this week. There was a Vine user named Gabe Gandacker, who is a comedian, who did a series of Vines called Guy Who Likes Music that I've shown Rachel many times.

And the premise is just, it is a man who doesn't know what music is. It is his first time discovering what music is. And so he's like pointing at the corner of the room like, "I like this, the music. Where is it coming from? The green? The green or the black?" And he's pointing to, like, a house plant and a speaker. "Oh, it's coming from the black? I love that." Um, and that joke, if it was a Saturday Night Live sketch, it would be fucking terrible.

And I've seen... I cannot tell you how many Saturday Night Live sketches throughout the... you know, its history, I have seen that would work better as a Vine, was basically a Vine, was just one joke that they're like, "All right. Lauren says we need four minutes of this." And it's like, "Oh, but you got about six good seconds."

Um, and I— So I think that there was something inherent to Vine where it was just, like, these are things that wouldn't work anywhere else and it's

because of the fact that they are constrained to just six seconds and then you're done.

Um, and as, uh, like, a creator of Vines, I thought that Vine was, like, kind of a powerful learning tool for, like, honing your comedy. Because one of the most important things I've learned from, like, making and editing podcasts all these years is that one of the best things you can do to improve the quality of your content is to prioritize a respect for your audience's time and attention. Uh, and that was a pitfall that we fell into a lot starting out.

Like, every second of your podcast or video or whatever that you spend not doing something entertaining is... whether that's, like, a long pause or a bit that you perform that, you know, wasn't necessarily very good, but you leave it in anyways, just to pad out the time, uh, is a second of your consumer's time that you're just, like, wasting.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Um, and at scale, if you have a lot of people watching your content, that's a lot of seconds that you're just kind of flushing down the toilet. And that accumulates really, really quickly, and it reflects so poorly on the content you create.

Meanwhile, if you hone it down until it's just the good stuff, then people don't know about the bad stuff that you did or the, the pauses that you did or the, you know, suboptimal stuff that you did. They just think like, "Oh, well, this is really great."

Um, and Vine— With Vine, there's nowhere to hide. Like, it is explicitly an exercise in concision. Um, and it's one that I found very, very valuable while I was still active. Um, and so I don't know. I am so sad that Vine is gone. I'm very sad that V2 is apparently indefinitely canceled and probably won't come back.

And that makes me so sad because the people who, like, liked Vine, loved Vine, and it had such a diehard audience and it had a community of creators also who have, like, kind of gone on to do other things, but it was strange that for four years, there was this cult of personality of Viners. And those people were so established and now like, there's—

Rachel:

You know, I think about it. You used to watch... like, we would watch Vines together at night and now we're watching, like, tasty videos and, like, flipping through, like, craft videos trying to scratch that same edge.

Griffin:

I'll tell you, though, craft videos are getting there. For Rachel and... one of our favorite pastimes, this counts as a small wonder, is watching craft videos, uh, from Facebook channels, especially, like, life hacks that are just...

We watched one where somebody took some fucking rubber out of a keyboard. They dismantled the keyboard and took the rubber underneath the keys that are, like, the padding. And then they cut it into a square and then hot glued that onto a cup. And it's like, why'd you do that? And they're like, "Now my cup has a rubber on it!"

Rachel:

We watched one last night with Legos and it was all about the different ways you can use Legos. And pretty much all of them were like, you can glue a Lego onto another thing!

Griffin:

You can glue it onto a key chain or a tie clip, or a... et cetera.

Rachel:

And now it has a Lego on.

Griffin:

And now the Lego's just on it. Um, Vine was better than any of this.

Rachel:

Yes. Yes.

Griffin:

Um, because, like, Vine wasn't really a social media platform. It wasn't, it was a short form entertainment channel featuring content that did not exist and has not existed since. Uh, it was only there.

Rachel:

Oh, yeah. And you're somebody that, you know, part of your job at Polygon used to be producing, like, unique video content. And now that you have left that job—

Griffin:

I know. I need the Vine outlet.

Rachel:

You need something.

Griffin:

I need V3 this, this time for sure. Um, I am sad that it's gone, but I still, Vine still lives on in, like, compilation videos that are on YouTube. And I watch these several times a week of just the best stuff. Not out of pure nostalgia, but because it's, like, another, it's a different form of entertainment that I enjoy that doesn't exist anywhere else on earth.

Rachel:

Yes.

Griffin:

What is your first thing?

Rachel:

Uh, my first thing is a Ted Talk.

Griffin:

A Ted Talk.

Rachel:

That's very Ted Talk.

Griffin:

Oh, okay.

Rachel:

It's called Why You Don't Like the Sound of Your Own Voice.

Griffin:

Now, hold on a minute. You don't like the sound of your own voice?

Rachel:

I didn't used to.

Griffin:

Until we started doing this podcast?

Rachel:

Until I got used to it.

Griffin:

Oh, okay.

Rachel:

Uh, so this is a PhD candidate at MIT, uh, their media lab program. It's Rebecca Kleinberger. Uh, and she gives a talk about the different voices we have and why there's a disconnect between hearing your voice on a recording versus how you hear it in your own head.

Griffin:

So the different voices, there's normal voice, sad voice, angry voice, and Michael Kane? I think those are the four everybody has. So there's the normal voice, angry, sad, and then Michael Kane.

Rachel:

There it is.

Griffin:

[imitating Michael Kane] "Why do we fall, Master Bruce? Bruce."

Rachel:

Are you telling me that was the first impression you ever did, right? Was Michael Kane or no?

Griffin:

That's the only impression because everyone does it. It's one of our four voices. So go ahead and do your Michael Kane now and just say, "Why do we fall, Master Bruce?"

Rachel:

[laughing] Gosh, you know how bad I am at impressions.

Griffin:

No, it'll be really good, please.

Rachel:

Give me something to say.

Griffin:

"Why do we fall, Master Bruce?" Oh, it's gonna be good. Let's buckle the fuck up.

Rachel:

[imitating Michael Kane, but it sounds Australian] "Why do we fall, Master Bruce?"

Griffin:

[cackles]

Rachel:

[laughs] I felt like I had it with "fall."

Griffin:

Why do we f— No, you lost at fall. Are you kidding? [like a sad child] "Why do we fall, Master Bwuce?"

Rachel:

[laughs] Like, we had Muppet Babies Michael Kane.

Griffin:

"Some people just want to watch the wowld buwn."

Rachel:

[laughs] No, the voices she's talking about—

Griffin:

I love you, by the way. I didn't mean to make fun of your Michael Kane. It was very good.

Rachel:

No, I knew what was happening when you asked me to do it.

Griffin:

Okay.

Rachel:

I knew where we were going. Um, so the different voices are the outward voice, the inward voice, and the inner voice.

Griffin:

Okay.

Rachel:

Uh, so the outward voice is the voice that you hear...

Griffin:

On your podcast that you do.

Rachel:

Yes, exactly. Uh, it's the voice that other people hear.

Griffin:

Okay.

Rachel:

Uh, and, um, it's a voice that can change. Well, here's the other thing that's interesting. You have a different voice for every person you talk to.

Griffin:

Whoa.

Rachel:

Uh, which—

Griffin:

Sorry. Were you talking to me specifically or is that sort of the royal you?

Rachel:

No, everybody.

Griffin:

Okay.

Rachel:

The, um, researchers can hear differences in your voice when you're talking to your spouse or a parent or a sibling or a boss, for example.

Griffin:

A child is the one that gets me really bad 'cause I, um... Henry has started to really enjoy watching videos of himself and I will watch them and hear myself talking. And I'm really trying not to do, like, baby voice stuff because they encourage you not to do that.

They encourage you to just, like, speak with your regular voice because it helps with speech development and stuff. But sure enough, man, it's just like, [doing a slight baby voice] "Are you playing with the water table? Oh, is it a squirt gun? Oh, my buddy." And it's like, I don't talk. I don't say buddy to—

Rachel:

Well, I feel like he wouldn't get your affection for him if you were like, [flatly] "Are you playing with a water table?"

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

[flatly] "Oh, my buddy."

Griffin:

[flatly] "Oh, my buddy." Like, I even did it there.

Rachel:

[laughs] Um, and there's the inward voice, which is the voice you hear when you're talking. And it sounds lower, uh, and more musical because you're hearing it through bone in your inner ear and the cochlea and a neurological filter. Now, this is...

Griffin:

Whoa.

Rachel:

... interesting to me. So there's something called corollary discharge, which is the motor command to your muscles to produce movement. So, it's not the movement itself. It's just a command that goes to various parts of your body to do things.

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

And apparently, that is the same for when you speak. So you're not really listening when you speak.

Griffin:

Oh, that's entirely true for me, in general.

Rachel:

Um, it's just kind of... it's an impulse being sent to the parts of you that need to work to say what you're saying.

Griffin:

Oh, man. I get really existentially freaked the fuck out when we talk about this kind of stuff 'cause I know it's, like, cool and science and stuff, but just thinking like, yeah, your brain sends electricity to your meat so that you fucking expel wind in the way that makes sound happen. And it's like, no, my words come from my soul!

Rachel:

Well, and these are all examples of why when you hear your own voice, it sounds different because you're not especially used to hearing it, because you're hearing it differently than you would when you speak. Um...

Griffin:

It's funny we're talking about this right now 'cause I feel like we're locked in a strange science experiment every time we record this show, because I am wearing headphones and monitoring both of our audio. So I am actually getting both...

Rachel:

Oh!

Griffin:

...and you are not. And so I hear the sort of deep, sinuey, luscious tones that my ruined chords produce, but you don't get that.

Rachel:

No. And... oh, and the final voice is the inner voice. So this is the voice when you read or...

Griffin:

It's God...

Rachel:

... rehearse.

Griffin:

It's God and the holy spirit inside you telling you not to steal a car.

Rachel:

Or you get a song in your head or in your dreams. Uh, it's the voice that, when you're not actually communicating.

Griffin:

Does it actually sound like anything, your inner voice?

Rachel:

Um, I don't think so. The example she gave was dreams. Like, dreams is where you can really kind of experience that, but—

Griffin:

Sure. But, like, you have thoughts and those thoughts have words and coherent sort of structure.

Rachel:

Well, one thing she did say is that people with schizophrenia can't control or distinguish the intervals.

Griffin:

Uh, yeah, that makes sense.

Rachel:

So that's part of the reason, you know, there's so many issues there, but, uh, yeah, she didn't talk about whether or not there's a sound quality to it.

Griffin:

I think mine is Michael Kane and that's maybe true for everyone and that's why it's so successful.

Rachel:

And that's why your impression is so great.

Griffin:

And that's why it's so great. [imitating Michael Kane] "Bruce."

Rachel:

Mine is, um, not Michael Kane, clearly.

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

'Cause I don't have that ability.

Griffin:

It's really good though.

Rachel:

I have baby Michael Kane.

Griffin:

Baby Michael Kane is very good also. Um, I'm curious why you brought this. Was there something that happened that made you really think about your own voice for a bit?

Rachel:

Well, I think I've gotten... since we started doing the podcast, I've gotten a lot of feedback on how people enjoy the, uh, sound of my voice, which is not something I ever really thought about. And I know when I used to hear recordings of myself—

Griffin:

You didn't like it, I remember.

Rachel:

I didn't. No. I thought I sounded like a child. Like a...

Griffin:

I had never gotten that from you.

Rachel:

... like a 13 year old or something. Like, I still am self-conscious of my work voicemail, uh, you know, my office phone. I'm like, "Oh, people are calling and they're thinking that they're reaching out to a teenager."

Griffin:

Well... Are you doing your baby Michael Kane voice in an office phone?
'Cause that might be a bad problem.

Rachel:

Well, there's certain thing that, uh, I have to be careful about. Have you heard of up talking?

Griffin:

Yes.

Rachel:

I feel like sometimes I'll do that, especially on like a voicemail message. Like, [with an upward inflection] "Hi, this is Rachel. Please leave a message and I'll give you a call back."

Griffin:

I think that people who criticize people for up talking and vocal fry and stuff like that are basically just sound pedants who are the fucking worst. Um, I see Jesse tweet people who tweet mean things, the NPR folks, like, all the time, and it's just like, "Chill the fuck out. They sound how they sound. If you don't like it, go listen to something else. Otherwise, huff my duff." He says that exactly.

Rachel:

[laughs] Uh, yes. I just... the Ted Talk I thought was really interesting to me because I hadn't really thought about a lot of that. They also talk about how vocal indicators can give you a sign of whether or not somebody has an illness, like, Parkinson's, for example. Or they said, um, depression, too. Like, the tempo of the way you speak and indicate your likelihood for depression.

Griffin:

Probably not with 100% accuracy.

Rachel:

Yeah. No, I'm sure not. Um, obviously, all of this is just, you know, to varying degrees. But another thing they said is that your vocal posture, when you talk to a spouse, can predict when or if you will divorce.

Griffin:

Oh, my God.

Rachel:

I know.

Griffin:

I'm hunched over real bad right now and I'm barely opening my mouth this—

Rachel:

Well, no, vocal posture. Like, not your physical posture.

Griffin:

What's vocal posture?

Rachel:

Vocal posture. Like, the tone and way you are communicating with someone.

Griffin:

Are we okay? I want you to know my vocal posture's probably not good right now, but that's because of the hand, foot, and mouth disease. This hand, foot, and mouth disease is tearing our romance apart. God, it really does suck pretty bad though. Can I steal you away?

Rachel:

Wait, I wanted to ask you another question.

Griffin:

Please.

Rachel:

Have you all... Well, how do you feel about your voice?

Griffin:

Huh, that's a good one. Oh, good question. Thank you. Um, I also used to not like it, but now I'm, uh, I listen to it so fucking much 'cause I edit the podcast that um, I do enjoy it. The—

Rachel:

Yeah. I think that's what my... The difference for me too. I mean, it speaks to the point of this, this lecture too, is that often you don't like the sound of your voice 'cause it sounds so different from what you hear in your head and you're not familiar with it. But I think doing podcasts has helped me kind of not feel as jarred by it when I hear it.

Griffin:

Yeah. I mean I've listened to my own voice for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of hours now. And so there's— I'm— I don't know. I'm a strange use case in this conversation. Um, can I steal you away, though? You gotta do it. My mouth hurts so bad.

Rachel:

I know, I know, I know.

Griffin:

I couldn't do, like, a fake kazoo or something.

Rachel:

[Quacks to the tune of the Home Improvement sting]

Griffin:

Now, folks, don't get scared. There's not a duck in our room or your room and you probably just looked around for the Aflac duck coming to—

Rachel:

But the exciting thing is that I just opened a whole new genre of music that we can do...

Griffin:

Farm animals.

Rachel:

... for this, uh, interstitial. Is that what it's called? [laughs]

Griffin:

Yeah. It's so... Every time we read a baby book that's about farm animals...

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

... there's always a duck or a goose. Are we—

Rachel:

Okay.

Griffin:

No. Let me... [laughs]

Rachel:

Are we just doing animals now?

Griffin:

No.

Rachel:

[laughs] Okay.

Griffin:

Pigs... pig is a farm animal. Is a goose? Well, you see this in, like, Charlotte's web or one of these and it's like, uh-oh, here comes the goose. And it's, like, why have you got a bunch of fucking geese around? Is it a farm animal?

Rachel:

No, I don't think so. Not from my perspective.

Griffin:

Then how come we've been convinced that a goose is a farm animal?

Rachel:

I don't know that I grew up thinking that.

Griffin:

Well, good.

[ad break]

Rachel:

This message is for Wifey. It is from Amy. "Hey, you beautiful, powerful Pawnee goddess. I'm sorry it took me so long to jump on the podcast train, but I'm the fucking conductor now."

Griffin:

[laughs] Sorry. I love when Rachel cusses. It almost never happens.

Rachel:

"Thanks for being the Pacha to my Yzma, the Kentucky to my Estonia, making trivia night the highlight of my week and winning free beer for me. To my favorite Galentine, I love you. Kelly, answer your phone quick."

Griffin:

Oh shit, Kelly. Kelly this is important. The storms and tornado is coming. We got to lock all the corn in the cellar. That's also my Michael Kane when he did the farming movie.

Rachel:

Oh, when he was in the movie Twister?

Griffin:

Mm-hmm.

Rachel:

[laughs].

Griffin:

[as Michael Kane] "That's a cow, Master Bruce. I'm not a cow." It's not that good.

Rachel:

[laughs] I just— I'm tickled. Uh, this message is for Emily. It is from Gabriel. "Hey, dog. [laughs] Thanks for introducing me to the McElroys and for being such a great mentor, listener, and friend. You've taught me so much about hard work, coping with anxiety, and board games. Wish you many happy years with your amazing wife and adorable pets, and hope the earnestness of this message didn't make you too uncomfortable." I will appreciate that that message gave me a chance to say dog, which is not something I usually say when I refer to people.

Griffin:

Yeah, not really since, uh, Randy Jackson left American Idol do we all have sort of the ability to say dog.

Rachel:

Well, you do definitely say dog.

Griffin:

Yeah. I guess so, but that's because—

Rachel:

You do a lot of, "hey, dog?"

Griffin:

Uh, well, I carry Randy deep in my heart. I carry his heart. I carry it in my heart.

Rachel:

Were you a member of the original Dog Pound?

Griffin:

Uh, no. I came on when Philip died.

Rachel:

[laughs] God.

[Can I Pet Your Dog jingle plays]

Allegra:

I'm Allegra Ringo, a small dog owner. My dog, Pistachio, howls when she's excited.

Renee:

And I'm Renee Colvert, a big dog owner. My dog, Tugboat, tips over when he's sleepy.

Allegra:

And we co—host a podcast called Can I Pet Your Dog that airs every Tuesday? We bring you all things dog.

Renee:

Yes. Dog news, dog tech, dogs we met this week. We also have pretty famous guests on butt legs. We're not gonna let 'em talk about the projects.

Allegra:

No.

Renee:

Just wanna hear about those dogs.

Allegra:

We don't wanna hear about your stuff, only your dogs. So join us every Tuesday on Max Fun.

[ad break ends]

Griffin:

Can I tell you about my second thing?

Rachel:

Yes.

Griffin:

My second thing is a video game. Um, and I hesitate to bring video games on this show, uh, because I know it can be a bit to alienating folks who have not played them before, like yourself.

Rachel:

Like me, particularly. [laughs]

Griffin:

But I only wanna do it when a game does something, like, fascinating enough that I think it can be sort of appreciated by someone who doesn't maybe have interest in games. And so I wanted to talk about a game called Undertale, uh, which, uh, I don't know if you're familiar with. I've played it like a dozen times since we've known each other.

Rachel:

I remember you playing it. Yes.

Griffin:

Um, I saw somebody in the Facebook group recently with an Undertale themed graduation cap design and so I was kind of inspired to talk about it, uh, from that. So it's a game from a developer named Toby Fox. It came out in 2015 and it's since sort of appeared on multiple platforms. A Switch version is coming out very soon, which is exciting.

Um, it's a role playing game with sort of simple pixel graphics that is set in this monster filled world underneath the surface of the earth. Uh, and there is a protagonist who's just a human child that you get to name, who falls into this world and is kind of looking for a way to escape.

What the game does that is very, very cool that, um, not very many games do is it's not just about going around and killing these monsters as you try to find a way outta the world, it turns them into characters themselves.

And so, well, you may fight a, you know, some big ice bird monster thing. Later on in the game, you may see them sort of at a bar off their patrol shift just kind of hanging out. Um, and they, you know, they tell you a story about their kids or something like that.

Um, it's a very, very funny game, which there are very, very few of. There are a lot of games that try to be funny and are fucking miserable at it, um, but this game does a lot of sort of visual gags and stuff like that, uh, despite

the fact that there's, like, a gag on virtually every screen of the game, the density of them never really gets old.

Um, but what's really cool about this game and what I wanted to talk about is its take on morality, which is something that games attempt to do a lot and usually do like a comedically ham-fisted job of. It made me think of one game that you and I did play together is The Walking Dead, uh, Telltale adventure game series, which I think did a fairly good job of, uh, giving the player sort of these decisions.

Not because it dealt in, uh, black and white morality necessarily, uh, but rather that it put you in extremely bleak and stressful circumstances and then had you make one of two very, very bad and painful decisions.

Rachel:

Yeah, exactly.

Griffin:

Um, which was, uh, I don't know. We played through the first series and really, really enjoyed it. And then by the second series, it was just like, okay, this is the 15th time I've had to decide which character is gonna get eaten by zombies and which one's gonna survive and so the shine came...

Rachel:

I will say, I appreciate that because my inclination a lot of times when playing games where there are choices and one is clearly the right choice and one is clearly the wrong choice is I, my inclination is always to pick the right choice just 'cause I'm like, you know, trying for some invisible approval,

Griffin:

So... right. That's what I wanted to talk about, is that games do this, "are you good or are you evil" idea a lot. Um, there's role playing games like, uh, Mass Effects from, from BioWare, uh, BioShock, uh, a bunch of games that do this. Um, and, they are almost always preposterously, like, black or white. Uh, like, you come across a wounded soldier, do you want to kill them or not kill them? Or, oh, there's an old woman who dropped their wallet. Do you wanna steal it or do you wanna give it back or...

Rachel:

Yeah, exactly.

Griffin:

... there's a little girl full of magic energy. Do you wanna save her or consume her power in some way? Um, and, like, the thing with that, uh, that sort of the Walking Dead game stepped around by making it not black and white, just like bad or bad, uh, is that when you approach a decision like that in a game, it carries very little weight because, like you said, like, I wanted to be good and so I just did the good decision every time.

Or if you're playing through the game and it's, like, I want to get the Dark Side Sith powers in this Star Wars game. So I'm just gonna make the bad person decision every time. It doesn't carry any weight. You're just doing it for mechanical reasons or just to be consistent. And in a lot of ways, that decision's already made for you.

What Undertale does that is so, so, so cool and so clever, cleverer than you would expect from a game that, uh, looks so, like, simple with such, like, fairly rudimentary art and stuff like that is, uh, it does not allow those decisions to ever be easy. So if you wanna be good, if you wanna get the good ending and, uh, be a nice person the whole way through, it's not as simple as choosing, like, don't kill. You actually have to work at it a little bit.

If you're in a fight with a monster and you want to spare them, you have to like figure out what they want and then give it to them. Uh, sometimes you'll be in a boss fight where they won't allow you to walk away, like, uh, peacefully.

They want to fight you. They want one of you to kill each other. And when you're locked in a circumstance like that, how do you find the peaceful resolution to it? And the answer is, like, work. It's hard. It's mechanically very difficult.

Like, you have to survive the fight long enough to find the peaceful solution. Um, and it's never really explicit. It never really shows you... It plays with that, that video game expectation of, well, I'm gonna either make the good decision or the bad decision to get the good guy points or the bad guy points, um, so much so that it never really tells you like, "Hey, you can play through this whole game without killing anybody."

It's kind of up to you to figure that out. And once you start trying to do it and challenging yourself to do it, you start to want to do it. And then all of a sudden that decision does have weight. The idea that, like, I have to work

really, really hard and make the game actually more difficult for myself by refusing to ever hurt anybody.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

And so when you finally do accomplish it, it's like, that was my decision and I worked for it. Not because of some silly reason, it's because I wanted to do it. And the same goes for actually the inverse of the game.

There's a version of this game where you can play through it without killing anybody. And it's very hard and you have to figure out ways to get around these, sometimes like violent monsters who just do wanna kill you.

Rachel:

This is something you do a lot when you play games. Like, I'll see you play games a lot and you'll, like, try and get through the game without, like, murdering.

Griffin:

Well, I did that with Peace Craft for World of Warcraft, which was really fun and interesting to, to do. And that idea is kind of baked into Undertale. There's an inverse though, where you can kill absolutely everybody and it gets pitch black.

It gets genuinely, like, upsetting and troubling. Um, but, again, it's not easy. If you just go through, go through the game and every time you get in a fight, you kill a monster, that doesn't do it. You have to, like, actually go around the areas until monsters stop appearing and then you've killed all of them.

And then they don't appear in town 'cause you've killed all of 'em. It's really, really dark. But again, it's not... nobody ever says to you, like, you can kill everything if you just keep going through and don't leave an area until monsters stop appearing.

Um, so in both cases, if you wanna get the good guy ending or the bad guy ending, you have to work at it and you have to figure it out yourself. And I think that is such a better way of hand handling morality in a game than like press X to shoot the guy or B to walk away. What's really cool is that, uh,

Undertale is a fairly short game. It takes just a few hours to play. Uh, and when you finish it, characters, the next time you play the game, will remember what you did the last time.

Rachel:

Oh, interesting.

Griffin:

And that info doesn't just... that data doesn't get it deleted if you, like, erase your save. It, it gets, like, deep in the files of your computer, where they are very, very hard to access. You can't cheat your way out of it. So if you have a play through where you kill everyone, the next time you come back, there will be characters who remember what you did.

Rachel:

What if, what if you play through it a bunch of times, like you have? Do they, they remember like every—

Griffin:

Yeah. There, there's some cool parallel universe shit that happens in the game. Like, it's tied into the plot a little bit that sort of helps explain this stuff away, but it also means that every time you play it, you're playing through a parallel, like, shard of the game where you might see something you hadn't seen before. Um, but if you go like the pitch black route and kill everything, then, like, folks never forget that.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

And it's really, really cool. And again, like, it gives your... it gives the things you do a lot of weight. Um, and it's just so, like, staggering. The first time I played this game, I wasn't expecting much from it because it didn't look like this, you know, AAA polished game.

But it is one of my favorite video games of all time because despite how, like, humble it appears, it does stuff with morality and, uh, the, the weight of your decisions as a player that I think no other game has ever done before. Also the music is fucking great.

[Bonetrussle by Toby Fox clip plays]

Griffin:

Uh, what's your second thing?

Rachel:

So my second thing, I am by no means an expert in.

Griffin:

Okay.

Rachel:

Uh, but I thought I would talk about it because it has brought me a lot of pleasure.

Griffin:

Okay.

Rachel:

And that's uh, manicures and pedicures.

Griffin:

Yeah. Let's talk about manicure, pedicure 'cause I don't know what that is. I got you one from Mother's Day and I was like, "Enjoy the foot scouring." I don't know. I don't know.

Rachel:

So there is, like, an unlimited amount of resources on this, um, depending on how deep you wanna go. I am not somebody that has ever watched, for example, YouTube tutorials. I've never gotten nail art, which is like where you can get very intricately painted or stuck on details on your nails.

Griffin:

You more like the experience of it than the result of it, right?

Rachel:

No, I like the result too.

Griffin:

Oh, okay.

Rachel:

I just... I don't see it as an opportunity to get especially creative. It more like gives me a, like, and forgive the choice of words here, but it gives me more of a polished feel.

Griffin:

Oh, boy. Oh, yikes. I will not forgive you. You can't just say forgive me. I have to consent to the forgiveness and I do not.

Rachel:

[laughs] Um, one of— The research I did was more on kind of the history of manicures, uh, specifically, 'cause I thought it was kind of an interesting thing. And I don't.... honestly, I don't know how we know all of the things that I was able to find. For example, a lot of what I found said that "Cleopatra and Queen Nefertiti were, uh, big fans of the manicure." And I was like, "How do we know this?"

Griffin:

How do we know this, y'all? I mean, I feel this way about a lot out of history, which makes you sound like a flat-earthier, but, like, how do we know this?
[laughs]

Rachel:

Oh, maybe it's possible. Like, I was wondering, like, in the hieroglyphics of Cleopatra, did she have painted nails and that's how we knew?

Griffin:

Oh, yeah.

Rachel:

Or in, like, sculptures of Queen Nefertiti was, was her nails, like, prominently... I don't know.

Griffin:

I mean, if we can assume that this technology existed back in those days, those two probably did get down on some mad mani-pedis.

Rachel:

Uh, [laughs] so here's the thing. So, as far back as, like, 3,500 BC, apparently ancient Babylonian men manicured and colored their nails with different colors representing different classes. And this is from a Marie Claire article I found from 2014. Uh, apparently, the upper echelons were black while the lower classes were green. And they had found an ancient, uh, solid gold manicure set.

Griffin:

Whoa, shit.

Rachel:

Yeah. Uh, and then as I mentioned, Cleopatra and Queen Nefertiti popularized the manicure by rubbing their hands in rich oils and staining their nails using henna.

Griffin:

Oh, that sounds good.

Rachel:

Which they believed, uh, signified their wealth and status. The bolder the color, the more power you had. Cleopatra, they say, preferred a blood red hue while Nefertiti opted for ruby.

Griffin:

How did— Same color. How did we know this?

Rachel:

I have no idea. I found this in a few articles that I read and nobody ever explained to me how this is known. Uh, and then there's the, uh, Ming Dynasty's manicure.

Griffin:

Oh, I bet they got fucking buck wild.

Rachel:

Both male and female members had perfectly manicured talon-like nails. To add a tint, they mixed together egg whites, wax, vegetable dyes, and other materials to create different color varnishes ranging from dark red to black.

Griffin:

Fuck. Yeah. That is the summer look. Egg whites all up on my nails in the hot sun. [laughs] Fuck yeah.

Rachel:

These little poached eggs that you love.

Griffin:

Stinky, stinky, beautiful nail art.

Rachel:

Uh, so the manicures, we know of today started in the '20s and '30s. Uh, women began to color their nails using high gloss car paint.

Griffin:

Well, that's one way of getting the job done, I suppose.

Rachel:

And then in 1932, Revlon launched a groundbreaking polish that used pigments instead of dyes and was available at drug stores.

Griffin:

In 1932?

Rachel:

I know. It didn't really seem like the—

Griffin:

It didn't seem like a time...

Rachel:

...time for opulence.

Griffin:

...for industrial expansion, maybe Revlon. Or maybe, like, shit was rough and you needed something nice to look at, and it's right there at the end of your hand.

Rachel:

Yeah. I mean, that is actually, that's a fair point because, for me, I'm not somebody that spends a lot of time on my appearance. Um, I don't really put effort into my hair or... and I don't really wear makeup, but, like, a manicure and pedicure makes me feel, like, put together. Like, I... This— Maybe the rest of this is intentional because [laughs], because my nails look nice.

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

Uh, and so I appreciate that. And I didn't get a manicure in until I was in my mid twenties, maybe. Um, it's not anything that I really grew up with, uh, but I became interested in as I got older because it was like, "Oh, I look like a fancy person."

Griffin:

Sure. The— You focus mostly on, like, the painting and design part of it, but there's a certain amount of, like, nurturing that goes into a good one too.

Rachel:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. And that's when I was trying to find the, like, the health benefits to see if there were any like advantages.

Griffin:

Probably not a lot.

Rachel:

No. I mean, they talk about the massage and the moisturizing and the circulation and also, you know, a good, um, manicurist can notice potential issues, you know, like—

Griffin:

Oh, blast your bunions.

Rachel:

Well, if you have, like, a fungus problem, for example.

Griffin:

Oh, no.

Rachel:

Uh, one of my friends was getting a pedicure and they actually found something on her foot that they thought might be cancerous. And so she went to go get it checked out. So there—

Griffin:

Was it?

Rachel:

It was actually, yeah. She had it removed and now she's fine.

Griffin:

Damn.

Rachel:

But it, it was, you know, something that she might not have realized otherwise.

Griffin:

Yeah.

Rachel:

So, there are benefits in that sense, but as far as, like, lasting impact to your nail health, I didn't find as much.

Griffin:

I think there's also something to it. The same me that when I talked about massage, like just making a decision to do something nice for yourself.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Divorced from the actual act of receiving that is a form of self care. Like, deciding that you are worth, you know, doing something nice for.

Rachel:

Yeah, exactly. And I think the reason I appreciate it more than, like, a massage, for example, is that, you know, I can look down at my nails and it's like a little reminder of, like, oh, that looks nice. You know, whereas a massage, honestly, like, a few days after, I feel like the benefits have [laughs] totally disappeared.

Griffin:

Yeah. I just get, like, one hour afterwards where I'm like, "Oh, my body's so sticky. I love it. My body's so sticky. My hair smells like mint. I did get a massage." Um, can I tell you what our friends are into this time?

Rachel:

Yes.

Griffin:

Allen says, "I'm going to a convention this weekend. So I'm very excited about cosplay. Whether seeing your favorite character across the showroom floor, working hard all year to debut a new piece and getting to hear people getting excited about your hard work, the ingenuity and passion that goes into the hobby fills me with joy." I love a good cosplay.

Rachel:

I am really fascinated by the, like, the community around this because I, uh, it's not anything I was familiar with until a couple years ago and now I feel like it's everywhere I look.

Griffin:

It's so cool. It's like, uh, it's a way of, uh, artistic expression that also, uh, has a lot of ingenuity behind it. So, like, how complex a character can you make? Uh, and seeing some of the things that people are able to create, like, uh, Overwatch characters like Mercy, where they've created full

expandable wings out of, like, Amazon delivery boxes, it's like, "Holy shit." Um, is very, very cool.

Uh, Hannah says, "Something I think is wonderful is flying on a plane over a big city at nighttime. Getting to see city lights bright and twinkling against the dark sky from the bird's eye view of a plane makes everything look magical and gives me such a sense of wonder." I like this too.

Rachel:

Yeah. I almost never fly at night now that I think about it.

Griffin:

I used to 'cause, uh, Chris Grant, my former boss at Polygon, uh, who I worked for, for a decade, especially back in the, the AOL days, would only allow us to really fly on red eye flights because, especially in the AOL days, we had about \$30. And that was, like, the budget for the whole site. It was \$30 or \$40, so we have to take red eye flights. So I got to see a lot of, uh, bright lights, big cities at, you know, 3:00 AM.

Um, here's one last one from Ian who says, "One thing I love is fixing stuff around the house. I can't do much. And it's usually very frustrating as I'm doing it, but the feeling of accomplishment when my shower handle works at the end of hard work is fantastic."

Rachel:

Oh, man.

Griffin:

Oh, it's my shit.

Rachel:

Yes.

Griffin:

I mean, it's not. I don't know fucking anything about anything. I know literally nothing, but when I... oh, man. We had a pipe at our old house that came down from the attic into the garage. Uh, and I think it was our, like, AC units, like—

Rachel:

Drip.

Griffin:

Drip—

Rachel:

Dripping.

Griffin:

... drippy guy.

Rachel:

Yeah.

Griffin:

Where, like, the water condensation would come off the AC unit in the attic and then it would go down this pipe and it would empty out into nothing! It would just drip onto our garage floor.

Rachel:

Yeah. I don't know what the previous owners were doing.

Griffin:

I don't either, but we put a cooler down there and we just have to remember every day to go and dump the cooler out into our... which was probably bad. It's probably full of bad, uh, stuff, but then I went and I found a way to... I bought a hacksaw and I bought some PVC pipe and I bought some glue.

Rachel:

With the support of the aforementioned Chris Grant.

Griffin:

With the support of the aforementioned Chris Grant and I did the damn thing, so...

Rachel:

That was really impressive to me.

Griffin:

And it took me a long time and I did get extremely frustrated. But at the end of it, I was like, "Hey, I fixed this. I'm an adult."

Rachel:

Yeah. I prefer when you work on this when I'm not at home because if I am present—

Griffin:

Oh, you hate hearing me get very, very angry at pipes.

Rachel:

You get so angry.

Griffin:

I had to go and buy, like, three different, uh, pipe cutting instruments until I finally went and bought a tool at Lowe's called, like, a pipe cutter. And I was like, "Oh, yeah. I should have just fucking bought this."

Rachel:

We also used that to trim branches, like— [laughs]

Griffin:

I've used that pipe cutter for so many things. Um, anyway, that's the episode. Sorry that I've been talking out of a very narrow aperture of my open mouth the whole time. I promise I'll be back up to fighting weight next week and—

Rachel:

Well, I hope so.

Griffin:

God, I hope so too.

Rachel:

This is a very mysterious illness for adults.

Griffin:

Yeah. We're not supposed to get it. The age is supposed to shield me from some things, but, apparently, I didn't get the memo. It doesn't help that I try to eat our son's toes so much and that's probably—

Rachel:

Yeah. Well, and you've also worked from home for over a decade.

Griffin:

I have no immune system whatsoever. That's an excellent point, Rachel. Thank you. And thank you to Maximum Fun for having us on the network. You can go to maximumfun.org and check out all the great shows there. Shows like The Greatest Generation and...

Rachel:

Bullseye.

Griffin:

... and Bullseye and Stop Podcasting Yourself, and a lot more at, uh, maximumfun.org. Thank you to bo en and Augustus for the use of our theme song, Money Won't Pay. You can find a link to that in the episode description.

And, uh, you wanna take us out with one more Michael Kane? Say, like, "Thanks for listening, everybody. Catch us..." You know, the usual podcast stuff.

Rachel:

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. [as Michael Kane] Thanks. Thanks for listening. [laughs]

Griffin:

Nope. No, you got it.

Rachel:

[as Michael Kane] Thanks for listening to Wonderful... Oh, my God.

Griffin:

[delighted] No, keep doing it, it's good!

Rachel:

[as Michael Kane] Join us next week, Master Bruce. [laughs]

Griffin:

All right.

[theme song plays]

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