

[00:00:00]

**John Moe:** I'll give you an easy one. Which came first, the chicken or the egg? It's the egg. Eggs have been around for 340,000,000 years or so, while the chicken first appeared at most 58,000 years ago. So, it's the egg. Or if you want to look at it another way, when the first chicken appeared in the evolutionary timeline, the egg with that chicken in it was laid by something that was almost—but not quite—a chicken. So, it's still the egg. I'm not an egg. The show isn't an egg. It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Now we'll move on to a slightly harder question. Does someone have a hard time making friends because they deal with depression and anxiety? Or does someone deal with anxiety and depression because they have a hard time making friends? I got no answer on that one. But it might be a question that Gabe Mollica has spent some time mulling over. Gabe is a comedian in New York, and he's the creator and star of an Off-Broadway one man show called *Solo: A Show About Friendship*. Gabe has, at various times, found himself without friends—albeit with bros; he'll explain—and also he's found himself depressed and anxious.

I wanted you to hear his story, because there's a lot in it about how we reach out to other people and why we reach out to other people and how that sometimes works out for us.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Gabe Mollica, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

**Gabe Mollica:** It's really, really exciting to be here. As I was telling you, John, I've been listening for a long time and to all different types of guests, so this is very cool to make an appearance.

**John Moe:** Excellent. Well, thanks for listening. What is your show, *Solo*, about?

**Gabe Mollica:** So, the main premise is that I get onstage, and I just say, “I turned 30, and it occurred to me that I don't have friends.” And it's a pretty jarring statement, because like I'm pretty affable, and I think some people are like, “Get outta here! What are you talking about? You have friends in your life. You're nuts.” And I kinda make the distinction between like I have friends, and I have bros. And there's a distinction there in the sense of like these bros I've known since high school, and we hang out once a month. We order food. We watch movies, but we don't really talk about anything all that serious.

And for a long time that was like, not a problem. Because life is hard, and it's nice to have those people. And then I talk about how my mom got sick, and this was challenged a little bit, and her getting sick caused me to have a bit of a meltdown—which I describe in the show. And the meltdown kind of star started me to analyze these friendships a little bit. And then I go—the main arc of the show is I talk about a big friendship breakup in my early 20s and how like I used to have a person that I thought was this kind of like rock-steady kind of

relationship in my life, and that imploded in my early 20s. And so, the show is kind of those two ingredients.

**John Moe:** How was the show born?

**Gabe Mollica:** You know, I went through this friendship breakup in my early 20s, and I kind of immediately knew—because I started comedy right after and started listening to comedy podcasts right after—like, this is my origin story. Like, this is my *The Big Sick* or *Crashing* or whatever it is. This is like how I got into comedy. And truth be told, I was living in Scotland when this friendship breakup happened, and I just bought notebooks and started sitting in coffee shops all day.

And finally, I had something to do to occupy my brain. Like, I had never drank coffee before. I'd never really been creative or put time aside to be creative. And suddenly, my days were flying by, because I had these goals, which is I'm going to write and then talk about my thoughts.

**John Moe:** What were you doing in Scotland?

**Gabe Mollica:** I had a teaching fellowship. It was an exchange program where a graduate of my college would go to Scotland for a year at a prep school, and a graduate of this prep school would come to my college for a year and have like a freshman year of college. And so, I got this fellowship mostly because I just had experience working with kids. It was not because I was the smartest or the brightest. They were just like, “You actually like kids and volunteer with children, like you should have this.” And so, it was a fun year. I was the varsity basketball coach, and I helped in music class.

(John “wow”s.)

Yeah, they were just like, “You're American. You know basketball.”

And I was like—I talk in the show. I'm like I'm terrible at sports, but they just needed someone to do it. And so, I kind of just did a lot of different things. And about halfway through this year—it's like a tale as old as time, right? My best friend and my girlfriend fell in love. And that was about like the halfway point. And so, it was a miserable first half of the year, because I kind of could sense that it was happening. And then the second half of the year in Scotland was just me dealing with that. And so, it was not the best year of my life. It was a pretty informative year to be honest. It made me miss New York. It made me miss my people. But it really did change the trajectory of my whole life. I think had I not had that, it would have been trouble.

**John Moe:** So, the breakup with your friend, was that happening after your mom was sick?

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah, the friendship—the big friendship breakup is from my early 20s, and that's like the—and my mom getting sick was—I'm 31 now; that was when I was 30. So, that's like more recent. Yeah.

[00:05:00]

**John Moe:** Okay. Well, let's introduce the characters in this friendship breakup, because I think it's important. Tell me about—I believe your friend's name is Tim.

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah, his name is Tim, and we met in college. We met in poetry class, and he was just kind of this really brilliant, smart, kind person. And the first time we hung out, we were walking across campus, and I was like, “Oh, like I gotta go leave. I gotta go sing with my accompanist.”

And I'll never forget Tim being like, “Oh, like can I come hear you sing?” And that was just very counter to my bro experience in high school. Like, none of the bros were like really interested at all in my creative, musical life. And so, the fact this guy would want to come to my music lesson was like nuts to me. I was like who is this guy that wants to like share in all the parts of my life? And since then—or the rest of college, we were really, really close, right? We took like a million classes together. We lived together. We volunteered together. We did the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. So, we like adopted a kid together to be like this kid's uncles. And we'd take him to concerts and bowling and stuff like that.

So, it was like a pretty unusual, I would say, friendship—in the sense that it just felt very close to me. And then we got even closer when he brought me to this summer camp for kids with illnesses, this Paul Newman camp. And you know, he taught—he like opened my eyes to the world of like really helping these kids, or like really making them—maybe not even helping so much as like giving these kids with chronic illness is like a really great week at camp and how important and sacred that is, right? Where it's like the only thing you care about is this kid having fun.

And so, he really changed my life. Like, I talk about this very lovingly, but like he made me more empathetic. He made me more critical of the world, of myself, and we were really, really close. And when we were working at camp together, I start seeing this woman. And you know, the love triangle started.

**John Moe:** Friend of his?

**Gabe Mollica:** He introduced me to her. But he was seeing someone at the time, and so he wasn't really available. And then I leave for Scotland, and the two of them I guess start hanging out. And it was one of those things where like the timeline's a little murky, but like he's always maintained like, “Oh, like you guys broke up, and then we got together.” But it always felt like too soon to me, you know? Where it was just like—

And then like the main crux of it is, he flies to Edinburgh for New Year's and tells me, “Hey, Kate and I are together, and we're not like sorry. We're not asking for your permission. Like, this is—you're gonna have to deal with this.” And it really did—one, it confirmed the suspicion I had, right? There's something about when you have this giant fear happening and then you're right about it. (*Chuckles.*) It's this bizarre feeling like—

**John Moe:** It's not paranoid if it actually is happening to you.

**Gabe Mollica:** Exactly! Exactly. So, there was a weird part of me that's like, well, I do get to be right. (*Chuckles.*) Which is like not—it doesn't feel great, but there's a part of you that's like, oh, okay, like I'm not, you know, making stuff up. But it was the loss of like who I thought he was is like the big crux of it.

**John Moe:** Who did you think he was vs who did he turn out to be?

**Gabe Mollica:** (*Sighs.*) Yeah, that's a really great question. I think I really put him on a pedestal. I think—I talk about this a lot in my show of really idolizing other people and kind of thinking that they're greater than I am and they're unattainable and that I should be chasing, you know, who they are and being around these people makes me better.

And so, I really thought he was somebody that—given this situation, this really difficult situation, right? Like, a friendship, love triangle thing is a tale as old as time. But I wish—you know, he really didn't show me any grace in that moment. He was just like, “We're not asking for your permission, dude. Like, get over it.” And that was such a shock to me, because I loved him. And it was such a shock to me to see it laid bare in this way, where he was like, “I don't really care about you enough to do this gently, and it's easier for me to put distance between you and I. It's easier to pretend our relationship is not as strong as it is.” And that really hurt me, and it hurt me so much that I just kept talking about it on stage until it became the *Solo* show, you know? (*Chuckling.*) Like, I needed to share.

**John Moe:** So, were they both—were Tim and Kate both in Scotland when they told you this information?

**Gabe Mollica:** So, the plan the whole fall was for Kate and Tim and a couple counselors to come visit me for New Year's. And when Kate and I broke up around Thanksgiving, the first thing she said was like, “I don't think I'm gonna come to Edinburgh for New Year's. Like, it's not fair to you, and I shouldn't go.”

But Tim was like, “I'll still come.” And so, Tim came with a couple counselors, and he told me in Edinburgh that New Year's week. And it was one of those things where he thought he was doing the right thing because he told it to my face.

And I was like, “You didn't tell me this in a way that cared about me at all.” Like I—because some friendships—and this has happened to me a lot after talking to people who've seen the show, where they're like, “Oh, my friend group, we went through this and we survived, because we showed each other care.” Like I can think of a couple examples of that. And I was always jealous of that.

[00:10:00]

I was like, “Oh, you guys figured it out. We weren't able to.”

**John Moe:** You've talked about this kind of relying on other people to complete you, like throwing yourself into the end of this friendship. Did you have kind of a diminished view of yourself growing up? How did you think about Gabe growing up?

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah, that's a really great question. I was a musical theater kid. I loved musical theater. I was in a musical every year, at least one every year from fifth grade 'til senior year of college. Actually, all through college. And that was kind of my identity. And as like a straight guy in theater, you know, you just feel a little alienated, right? You feel a little bit like—

**John Moe:** Especially musicals. Yeah.

**Gabe Mollica:** Especially musicals. Yeah, and like I was a Sondheim nerd, and that was my deal. And there was always a part of me that kind of felt like in either group, in the bro group or the musical group, that I didn't totally fit in there. Like, these people didn't totally—I always felt like defined by the thing I wasn't doing. So, like in musicals like Gabe's the bro, Gabe plays fantasy football, and with the bros, Gabe's the musical guy. Gabe loves Sondheim and *Little Shop of Horrors*. So, it's this bizarre thing where you just kind of want to be defined by the thing that you're doing, but you don't feel that way.

And I think that led to me having a little bit of a diminished view of who I was, even though deep down I think secretly I was like I have these special talents, like I'm special, you know? But I think the way I saw myself, the way I presented myself is being anxious in different social situations and being attracted to a certain type of person, a certain type of magnanimous, smart, special person. I've always been really drawn to smart women, to smart friends. I'm always really attracted to that.

**John Moe:** It's interesting. I've thought about this a lot, because I was a theater kid too. And I think about how much the immediate gratification of a curtain call provides for somebody who might be a little insecure, might be a little at sea with themselves. Like, you literally have—especially in an educational type setting, you literally have your peers applauding you as you stand there on stage. It's a hell of a drug.

**Gabe Mollica:** Oh, it's incredible. The first time I was ever on stage, it was a fifth-grade production of *Bye Bye Birdie*, and the kids operating the curtain are children. And so, they made a mistake, and they opened it probably like eight feet. And I'm sitting on stage. I'm in the kitchen; I'm Mr. McAfee. And I look out in the audience and like, clearly it's not my fault. There's just been a mistake, and I just kinda like made a face like, "Well, that's not supposed to happen!" And it got a big laugh. And I was just like I'm hooked. I didn't even say anything. I haven't said one line, and I'm into this. Like, I'll do this forever.

*(They laugh.)*

**John Moe:** The way you describe friendship and being attracted to people—and I saw some clips of you where you talk about how, you know, you like to go out and try to meet guys, meaning trying to make friends. It seems like a really blurry line, an intentionally blurry line, between friendship and romance that you portray here.

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah, I think that's one of the reasons I was so drawn to talking about this on stage. And I think it's the reason why people keep showing up, thankfully, is that there's no real script for a friendship breakup. And romance—like, the killers have *Mr. Brightside*, and you can blast that at a club, and people are like, "Yeah, like I know that feeling that this girl I

like is leaving with another guy.” But when your guy friends break up, there's no script, and it's challenging, and there's not a vocabulary for it. And that isolation is really challenging to deal with.

And so, like I talk about it. Like, I go to parties. I try to meet guys. And even still, like I have people in my life who are like, “Gabe, you can text me. I like you. Like, text me.” And even now I'm like, what, am I gonna call them and talk about my financial problems? Like, I don't know. I just don't have that in me sometimes, to reach out in ways that I know that I should.

**John Moe:** Why not?

**Gabe Mollica:** *(Sighs.)* That's a really great question. I don't know. I'm working on it. I'm really trying to get into a deeper level with that. I will say I've become a lot better since doing the show. *(Chuckling.)* And like the bros in my life who I talk about as being in some ways deficient have seen the show. I do call them more, and I think a phone call has been a real—it's so funny, like I'm always complaining about my phone and my phone use or whatever. But if you use the phone and talk to somebody, it's probably the best use of it. And that's gotten me out of a lot, where it's like an hour phone call with someone is so—you could text 48 hours straight, and it won't be as good as an hour phone call. No way.

And so, that I think has bailed me out a little bit. And Nick, who I talk about in my show, who's like my 30 year old bro who like reacted somewhat poorly to my mom—the information that my mom got sick. He has like a tough moment in the show where I'm like disappointed in him. And he and I have gotten a lot closer I think since I've started talking about it and doing the show, where he's going through some family stuff or some medical stuff, and we just talk about that stuff even just like 10% more.

[00:15:00]

And that's been really helpful. Sometimes it's like leaning on the people you already have as opposed to like trying to find new people has been helpful for me.

**John Moe:** What happened with Nick in regard to your mom?

**Gabe Mollica:** So, Mom got sick, and we were getting all these conflicting diagnoses, like we weren't really sure what was going on with her. Which was really stressful. And they're like was it a stroke? Was it MS? Was it a bulging disc? Like, what could it be? And periodically that week I'm texting the people in my life, just like, “Hey, this is what's going on. Mom's in the hospital.”

And Nick sent me a message that was kind of like—he kind of like missed the mark. What I needed from him was to be like, “Hey, man. How are you doing?” And he was kind of just like, “This is how I can fix the problem. Like, you should ask about this. You should do this.” And I talk about this as like a problem that men have where we try to fix a problem instead of listening to it. And the punchline is, I know that's a problem that men have, because I've dated women, and you guys have told me. And that usually gets a big laugh from the women, 'cause they're like, “We do say that all the time! We just want you to listen!” *(Laughs.)*

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Coming up, when your best friend ends the friendship, what exactly do you do next?

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Back with comedian Gabe Mollica.

I want to get back to—you talked about this breakup with your friend and your friend pairing up with your ex-girlfriend—the not-too-distantly ex-girlfriend. What happened in the days and hours that followed this information? Because I think it gets to a lot of mental health, and we are the show that we are.

**Gabe Mollica:** Yes, yes. This is really key, because the two people I talked to the most in that time was my sister and my college therapist. And my college therapist is somebody I'm still very, very close to. He's come to see the show like three times, and I talk about him in the show, because when Sondheim died he called me on the phone. And that's how you know (*chuckling*) that you have a good therapist, because we hadn't talked in a while. And he was like, "Are you okay? Sondheim died."

So, yes, when that information—my sister remembers me—I don't remember this, but my sister remembers me calling her. And it was like four in the morning/five in the morning Scotland time and midnight in New York, and just kind of saying over and over again like I'm gonna be okay. And I don't remember this phone call, but I must—I mean, she remembers it very, very clearly. But I'm proud of myself that in retrospect I did—those are the two people that I reached out to, my sister and my therapist. Those feel like the right phone calls, even if I was in shock. 'Cause it was also very dramatic. He told me at four in the morning. We had just gone to a casino. We had been drinking all day. Like, it was a mess.

Now, drinking, stuff like that, I don't do anymore. But at the time, it was like kind of part of my life. And so, those are the people I reached out to. And I still have a lot of those emails with David, my therapist. And he was somebody that I really got to kind of process all of this with and talk through the language and the vocabulary of Tim doesn't think there's like a friendship code, and there is one. There is an obligation that you have to your friends. And realizing like, oh, that's the objection. I don't have the objection to them falling in love. That would be crazy. Of course, they can fall in love. We're on a planet in the sky. Like, people fall in love. It's fine. But what do you owe your friend if you want to continue that friendship?

And being able to process that and then being able to internalize that and then be able to talk about it on stage. The talk about it on stage is kind of like the last part. (*Chuckling.*) You know, you have to kind of be good with it in some way.

**John Moe:** Yeah, that's another way to process it, I guess, is to get up on stage and process. It might not be the most advisable or wise move, but it's one that a lot of people do.

**Gabe Mollica:** Yes, and I definitely probably started a little too early wanting to talk about it on stage. But luckily I wasn't famous, and I'm still not. So, like it was fine, like it was in a vacuum. Like, it was for no one. The anonymity was really powerful, because you're like—you're just some guy. You can say whatever you want. Young comedians, like I'm just like, oh my—like, when I talk to people who are like 23/24 who want to do solo shows. I'm like, “You're anonymous. That's really powerful. You can kind of say whatever you want.” *(Laughs.)* It's pretty great.

**John Moe:** Right, right. Tell me about those times when you got up on stage in the immediate aftermath of this event. Like, what did audiences see on those occasions?

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah, I mean, I would just kind of say it very quickly. We were like, I do this. It started as like a quick joke. I'd be like, “I do this because my best friend and my girlfriend fall in love. So, I'm not afraid of you at all. Like, Tim and Kate got together. We're all going to be fine.” And I would just say that. And now that's kind of what I do for 85 minutes as a show. *(Chuckles.)* Like, that same joke, really, that same observation is what the show is. I just got better at the thing. It was also really nice to listen to like comedy podcasts. I remember at one point I heard Paul Scheer just offhandedly be like, “Oh yeah. Like, when I was young, my best friend and my girlfriend fell in love.”

[00:20:00]

And for him, it like wasn't a thing that he was gonna make art about. It was just like a detail in his life. And I was like, oh, it can be a detail in your life?! It doesn't have to like define who you are? Like, that's so powerful. It was so innocuous that, “Oh yeah, this thing happened to me one time.” And I was like, oh cool. So, when I got on stage that also really helped, which is just like you can say it. No one's gonna be like, “This guy's a loser,” like everyone has some sort of heartbreak. That's why we go to the arts—right?—to share in that. So, it was probably not well executed, but I was sharing it immediately. *(Laughs.)*

**John Moe:** It became an issue for everybody.

**Gabe Mollica:** Yes, everybody needed to know. And I was in Scotland, right? So, it was just like who cares, right? It's not in clubs on Long Island where I'm like, “I know like the vibes of this place.” It was like I was a foreigner in a foreign land just being like, “I'm so sad. I hate it here.” And that was pretty funny.

**John Moe:** Did it help?

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah, I think it did. And I maintained this during the pandemic, also. The thing I missed about performing comedy is not the performing. It is the I have a show tonight, and all day long now, I have a purpose. So, I'm gonna write and drink coffee and walk around, and I have this thing at the end of the day that I'm gonna be preparing for. And so, that's why during the pandemic, even—like Zoom show's obviously terrible—but when I had a Zoom show one night, I was like, oh, I'm so happy! Not because I love Zoom comedy, but because all day long now, I'm distracted from my own neuroses, *(chuckling)* and I can just prepare something, and I'm excited to share. Being excited to share, I think, is like the thing that gets me out of a lot of my self-doubt and my neuroses and my anxiety.



**John Moe:** So, when during this journey of, you know, living in Scotland, having this breakup with your friend—and as you go through, when did you kind of come to this understanding that you don't actually have friends; you have bros?

**Gabe Mollica:** So, for a long time, I was telling this story—this Tim and Kate breakup story. And I was starting to get towards my late 20s. And I kind of kept thinking to myself why am I still telling this story? Like, who cares? You were 22 years old. What difference does it make? And when my mom got sick—and I had like a real meltdown, which I describe in the show. Like, I throw my phone, I have this fit that I compare to Paul Dano in *Little Miss Sunshine* when he like runs out of the car and screams. I like kind of have one of those moments.

And when my mom got sick and like it felt like, to me, like the people in my life didn't know what to say and didn't know what to do, it was that real low point when I was like, “Oh, like I'm alone. I don't have friends.” In that it was an expression of a feeling. I don't necessarily feel that way all the time, but in the depths of it, I had the thought and the feeling, “Do I not have friends?” And then once I had that feeling and I could explore it and write about it, then it kind of gave a lens to the friendship breakup story. Where it was like, oh, this is why the friendship breakup story matters. Because it felt like at one point in my life I did have those people, and then that imploded. And then my mom gets sick, and now it suddenly feels relevant again. It was like a lens within to see that big heartbreak.

**John Moe:** Did you avoid making friends because you didn't want to get hurt again?

**Gabe Mollica:** *(Sighs.)* Yeah, I think there's a little bit to that, for sure. I think there's a—it's safer to be at a distance, right? And I'm a comedian, so I meet people all the time, constantly. Interesting, smart people. Empathetic people. And I think there's a little bit like we're colleagues, and we can be at arm's distance, and we can see each other, you know, twice a season, and that's fine. And, yeah, when you get hurt like that, it really does—it changes the way you look at friendship. And it made me revert back to being like, “Listen, the bros,”—in my early 20s, after the Tim breakup, I was like, “Listen, the bros are maybe not what Tim was, but they would never do that to me.” There's comfort in that. They would rather die than make me feel bad.

And so, there's something about like all these like dopey, doughy, like goofy idiots who I love dearly—maybe they're not Tim. Maybe they're not gonna ask to go hear me sing opera. But like, they would never hurt me like that. And they would certainly never be like, “And we're not apologizing. Like, get over it.” And so, there's a comfort in that too, where it's like, yeah, they might not get to the 100% on the friendship scale like Tim felt like he was, but they're loyal. And I'm loyal to them. And I think there's something really sacred about that.

**John Moe:** What have been your experiences, if any, with therapy in trying to deal with these—I mean, the breakup, which you are still processing on stage many years later. And you know, and your mom being sick, all these things that have happened, did you go to therapy on some of these issues?

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah. So, David, my therapist from college, I'm still very close to him.

**John Moe:** Oh, yeah, you talked about him. Sure.

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah, so we'll talk a little bit now and then. And we just had a—

[00:25:00]

We hadn't had like a formal session in a long time, and we started—we did like a couple long sessions on the phone, because my story—the show was gonna be on *This American Life*. And there was something about like, oh, 5,000,000 people are gonna hear this. How do you think about it? Because again, if you're not sure about it, it's hard to communicate to other people. And so, that was a situation where it was like, oh, I just need to talk through my thoughts. And the terrible irony is all the thoughts that we talked about in these like massively long sessions were not included in the story at all. (*Laughs.*)

They were just like, who cares about your personal journey? Which really made me laugh. But I was like I'm glad I did the work anyway. You know, what's important is that I know how I feel, and I know that connecting with other people about the friendship breakup is in some ways more important than my relationship with Tim. In other ways, you know, I really tried in the last—I talk about this in the show also, but it's just like hard to find a good therapist. I think there's a reason I keep returning to David, even though he's a father and the director of a counseling center at a college and very busy. Where there's comfort in like, I know him already. I've known him for years, and even if it's not weekly maintenance, I can talk to him once a month and text a little bit, and he's there for me. He's somebody in my life who cares.

I tried to find some therapists. I probably went through three or four in the past year. And I just haven't found somebody who gels with me yet. I don't know quite what that issue is. One person like I knew immediately I wasn't good with, because she just kind of asked me generic questions and immediately was like, “You have anxiety.”

And I was like, “I don't think this is that helpful.” Like, this is—just like throwing out a label to me within the first 40 minutes doesn't feel that great. Like, I would rather you just like ask me about my parents. (*Laughs.*)

**John Moe:** You're looking for something a little more Freudian.

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah, a little more Freudian, maybe a little more humanistic. Like, I'm like a pretty... at least in college, I was like very humanistic. Now, maybe I could use some CBT, something more like goal-oriented or like checking boxes. I love to check things off a list. So, maybe I'm growing into that a little bit more. Whereas a young person, I was like, “I want to be a humanist. I want to do mushrooms and talk about, you know.” (*Laughs.*)

**John Moe:** Expansion of consciousness.

**Gabe Mollica:** Yes. Yes. Where David is good—David is good for the practical stuff and like the big picture. Like, I'm going to walk around and do mushrooms.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Do you have an anxiety disorder?

**Gabe Mollica:** You know, that's a really great question. I resented her diagnosing me so quickly, because I was like no, I don't! Like, we don't—it doesn't have to be this way. I think—I will say this. I've had three panic attacks in my life, and they've all been experiential. So, they've not just been like I'm on the subway and I start to panic, and I can't stop. Two were about like comedy career stuff, and one of them was when my mom got sick. And so, I think—*(sighs)* I think I'm no more anxious than anyone else. You know, evidence suggests to me that like, oh, I'm anxious because like life is filled with anxiety. And I—but then you talk to some people, and it's like, “I've never had a panic attack, what are you talking about?” *(Laughs.)* And so I'm like maybe I'm further on that spectrum than I think.

**John Moe:** Well, again—and I talk about this all the time on this show and to anybody who cares to listen—the elevation from feeling anxiety to an anxiety disorder mostly just means it's disruptive in your life, like the carrying out the tasks and responsibilities and things you want to do, that gets interfered with by the anxiety. So, in that sense, has that been the case with you and anxiety?

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah. I mean, I have to make like a big decision in the next couple days, and I've been really putting it off. And the decisions about whether to continue doing the show, potentially at a continued financial deficit, or do I take the risk and do that? And I'm supposed to like schedule these phone calls and make moves on it, and I just have kind of been at it like a 72-hour paralysis about making the choice. And so yeah, it's affecting my ability to proceed and like people are counting on me, and I just like haven't made the choice yet. And I haven't even done some of the work that would be required to make the choice. Like, I'm not even like making all the phone calls I need to make—the pre-work, you know?

And so, yeah. I would say—*(stammering)* does it impact my like daily function? Not necessarily, but it definitely—when big things come up, I just like—it's like a big flare up. And it's like, oh! Like, we're put—

**John Moe:** It gets in the way.

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah, it gets in the way, and the brakes come on, and I'm like oh no. And yeah, so I honestly, like when I was—there was a part of me that was like—this conversation, I was like, oh, this conversation is going to have me call David immediately after I talk to John.

*(They laugh.)*

Where I was like, oh no, I'm going to have to dive into this.

**John Moe:** Yeah, sorry.

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah, you must do that a lot. You must have that effect on people. *(Laughs.)*

**John Moe:** You know, I'm never with the person after the interview is over, so I don't know what phone calls they're making. That's so funny.

[00:30:00]

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah, I had a feeling this is the direction we were headed, and I was like, oh, David's gonna get a text.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Just ahead, Gabe's bro Nick becomes Gabe's friend Nick.

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** We're back with comedian Gabe Mollica from *Solo: A Show About Friendship*.

Well, I mean, I'm really interested in the friendlessness or the alteration to your friendship. Like, tell me what happened with your friend Nick to allow this friendship to get deeper and give you more of that closeness that you crave? Was it just that he came to see the show?

**Gabe Mollica:** So, Nick comes all the time to the show, and a lot of times afterwards people are like, “Oh my god—”

**John Moe:** He's processing his own thing about friendship. (*Chuckles.*)

**Gabe Mollica:** Exactly, exactly. And a lot of people—the show ends, there's a big reveal where I talk about Nick loves to rank the Adam Sandler movies. He's obsessed with them, and so at the end, we kind of give people a taste of what that list is like. And so, a lot of times people come up to me and they're like, “Oh my god, has Nick seen the show? I want to talk to him about Adam Sandler.” And I'm like, he's right over there. Like, you can talk to him right now if you want. (*Laughs.*)

Nick and I have grown a lot in these last couple years. I think in particular the trust I had in him to be like, “Hey, man, I'm going to talk about this thing on stage very publicly, this like not great moment between us.”

And Nick being not only okay with it, but supportive of being like, “Oh, like you're going to talk about me in not a great light. And you're doing it because it will benefit the show and it'll benefit people's understanding of you.” And that is a trust thing that I am so grateful for. So, that's really helped. The other thing is like Nick's gone through things in his own life in these past couple years, some family stuff, some medical stuff. And we've just been a lot more open about that kind of thing, and I think there's something about hitting your early 30s where—he's married and I'm not, but like the stressors become a little bit more real. It's no longer like he's a law student. Now there's like real family stuff going on.

And listen, the majority of our conversations are still 80% like memes and, you know, fantasy football or whatever. Like, I don't—like, the day that the *This American Life* thing was going to happen, like the biggest thing in my life ever, Nick texted me like, “Can you believe they're changing the Long Island Railroad schedule?” And I was like I can't believe this is what you're texting me today. (*Laughing.*) Like, this is the biggest day of my life, and you're texting me about the train schedule.

That said, we really have started to set aside a little bit of time to talk about the adult stuff, and I am really, really proud of that. And Nick and Tim end up being this like kind of foil in my show, where it's like Tim was the guy—like, Nick doesn't care about musicals. He could give a shit. But Nick would never—Nick is just so... He just loves me in a way that feels so much more eternal, you know, and not temporary. And so, being able to talk about some medical stuff, that's been really good for us. And I'm really—I'm proud to be a person in his life that he can turn to for stuff like that.

**John Moe:** Do you love Nick like you love Tim?

**Gabe Mollica:** I would say I have learned to love Nick so much more than I love Tim.

**John Moe:** Really? Because you loved Tim pretty hard.

**Gabe Mollica:** I loved Tim as—I thought Tim was—I was gonna... I thought Tim was like my friendship soulmate.

**John Moe:** You were gonna spend your life with him. (*Chuckles.*)

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah, I really did. I really did. We were gonna ride out into the sunset. And Tim—listen, so Tim did the *This American Life* episode. He came to see the show. It was very dramatic. And that was a big deal, because he did not have to come. He didn't have to fly across the country to see the show. And he does. And they asked him whether Tim cared about our friendship as much as I cared about our friendship. And Tim's answer was basically like, “No. Like, Gabe cared about me more than I cared about him.”

And that's hard for me to hear. And I basically don't think he's telling the truth. I think he's preserving himself. All that said, when he said it, like it felt a little cruel to me. And Nick is imperfect, but he is not cruel. He is a kind-hearted, sweet person who wants everybody to get along and for life to be fun. And so, in my early 20s—like, if you had asked me in college, “Who do you care about more, Tim or Nick?” I would have said, uh, Nick's like a high school friend, but like Tim's the real deal. And now, like 10 years later, I'm like, listen man, Tim was kind of a jerk. And sure, maybe I went and told everyone on the planet about our failed friendship, (*chuckles*) but Nick would never be a jerk to me and double down on it. He just wouldn't.

[00:35:00]

In life, if you can find Nicks, I recommend them.

**John Moe:** I keep thinking about if there was a male friendship break up, like a hard break up like you had, what hell that would play in a fantasy football league?

**Gabe Mollica:** (*Laughs.*) You know, John, I have a story for you that I have never told publicly.

**John Moe:** This is the place.

**Gabe Mollica:** Which is—(*laughing*) I have never said this. It's such a good detail; it never made the show. Which is, afterwards Tim and I had this breakup—and like two years later we played in the fantasy football championship game.

(*John “wow”s.*)

And what—I know. And what happens in fantasy football is the day after the Sunday, there will be stat corrections. So, they'll be like, ooh, actually he got eight yards, not six. So, we have to change the point total. And Tim beat me by like .5, and then the next day they made a stat correction. And they were like, actually, you win. (*Laughs.*) And so, I won on a technicality.

(*John “wow”s.*)

And it felt very poetic.

**John Moe:** Did you text him and say, “and I'm not even sorry”?

**Gabe Mollica:** You know, we did—we do text a little bit. That's the other thing that I wish Tim could laugh at himself a little bit more. Where like, I talk—I make fun of myself constantly in the show. I'm a Sondheim nerd. I cried when Sondheim died. My therapist called me. Like, we're really like—we're getting into like “Gabe's a dork, and we can make fun of him”, and Tim doesn't laugh at himself in the same way. Like, when Tim and Kate got together, that next summer we worked together at the camp again. And one of the first things I said to him was, “Oh, I should officiate your wedding. Because the only place—the place I belong in your relationship is standing between you.” Which I thought was really funny! And he was just like stone faced. Like, wouldn't laugh.

And I was like, if you can't laugh at this—? Like, this is funny! Like, you gotta have a sense of humor.

**John Moe:** That's a good line.

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah, I felt really proud of it. And there's a part of me that thinks, had he laughed at that moment, I wouldn't have become a comedian. Like, had he just like given it up, (*laughing*) but instead I had to chase this insane career, because I'm a lunatic.

**John Moe:** Wow. Are they still together, Kate and Tim?

**Gabe Mollica:** So, they were together for a while, and they got engaged. And then they broke up. And I don't really talk about it very much in the show. I only mention it because afterwards everyone was running up to me and being like, "Are Tim and Kate still together?!" And I was like, if I don't close this loop, I'm just a bad storyteller.

And when *This American Life* reached out, we had to get in touch with Kate to like fact check to make sure like we weren't like making all of this up. And so, I texted her and I was like, "Listen, dude like I'm sorry like that I brought your personal life into this. The show is not about you at all. But like, this is the deal." And Tim and Kate are both avid *This American Life* listeners. And so, like we had Ira Glass call Tim, which was like a big deal. And when I told Kate, she responded like in a couple hours, and was like, "I did not expect this. I'm very proud of you. I love *This American Life*. I don't want to talk on audio, but I will talk to them."

And her response when the episode came out—she was just so kind. I texted her again. I was like, "Listen, I'm really sorry to like air your dirty laundry in front of the whole world. Like, I'm really sorry."

And she goes, "I really appreciate that. I'm really proud of you." She said it again. "I'm really proud of you, and also I probably won't listen to the episode." And I was like, wow, imagine having that kind of restraint. (*Laughs.*) Because I do not.

**John Moe:** Yeah, you're probably hitting refresh on the browser to see when the episode will pop up.

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah, I've listened to it more times than I'm proud of. (*Laughs.*)

**John Moe:** Well, I mean, here's what strikes me from a perspective of our show and a perspective of mental health is that you maybe took an unusual step in dealing with the trauma of this breakup. You know, because this breakup symbolized not just a loss of a friend, but a loss of part of yourself, because you put so much of yourself into a friendship. So like, you know, it's not just losing somebody; it's losing somebody plus part of you. And then you process it and sharpen it and hone it.

And in the meantime, it sounds like you kind of grow up a lot, to the point where you can have these healthier friendships and healthier relationships. But it's funny that it's done through the constant polishing and carving of this trauma.

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah, they kind of run parallel to each other. And I think it is not a substitute, right? Like, becoming a solo show person is not a substitute for doing some work on yourself, but they are connected. They are certainly connected. And I think one of the beautiful things about my relationship with Nick is like—do you idolize Nick? I'm like, no. Like, Nick's like a fucking guy. But that's—everyone's just a guy! Tim's just a guy. Kate's just a guy. All the relationships in the show from my early life that I'm really idolizing these people, they're just people.

[00:40:00]

And having that relationship with Nick to just be like, yeah, he's not—I'm not intimidated to text Nick. I'm not like in awe of him. He's just like—he's my friend. That realization in how normal he is in my life and how not on a pedestal he is really—that's been such a nice thing in my life. And getting to see the bros every week and having them come. They come all the time to the show. That feels like such—I mean, I feel so loved. That's where I really feel loved. And they trust me to say, “Hey, I don't have friends,” and they're all in the audience like, “What's this guy talking about? We hang out all the time.” (*Laughs.*)

**John Moe:** Right. Yeah, it sounds like maybe you do have a bunch of friends!

**Gabe Mollica:** Yeah, yeah. And by the end I really do like close the loop on that and really give them their due.

**John Moe:** So, you need to make this decision. This show—this episode of this podcast is going to air after you make that decision. Can you keep in touch and let me know what decision you made?

**Gabe Mollica:** Of course I will.

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

**John Moe:** I don't know what this means for Gabe, for his mental health, or his financial health, or his friends, but *Solo: A Show About Friendship*, is still playing. Extended, since we taped that interview. It's at the Connelly Theater upstairs in New York City through November 18th, then Gabe takes the show to Chicago at the Den Theatre, December 20th through the 23rd.

Next time on *Depresh Mode*, Kevin Drew of the band Broken Social Scene, who knew what he was getting himself into.

**Kevin Drew:** As soon as I heard the title, I went, “Oh shit, I gotta do that. *Depresh Mode*?! Are you kidding me?!” But I'm a very happy person, John. I need you to know that. And I need you to know that, yeah, I've been—I've thought about it. I've thought about leaving. And every time, there's something that makes me stick around, and it makes me stronger. And it makes me understand more. It makes me understand why people leave. It makes me understand why people can't get out of bed. There's a power to feeling this way. There's a power to depression. I think it's really important that people feel it and get through it, so that they can be a community and help others. It's super important.

**John Moe:** *Depresh Mode* exists because people donate to make it happen. If you have donated already, we really appreciate it. Thank you. You're getting the show out into the world where it can help people. If you haven't donated yet, and you want the show to continue, we really need to hear from you. It's easy. Just go to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). You find a level that works for you, and then you select *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows. It's that easy. You're off to the races. You're helping the show, and you're helping your fellow human being, I think.



Hey, you know what? The holidays are coming. It's a great time to shop at the Maximum Fun Merchandise Store. The merch store is at [MaxFunStore.com](http://MaxFunStore.com). You can find all sorts of *Depresh Mode* items, all sorts of I'm Glad You're Here items. We've got shirts, we've got mugs, we've got *Depresh Mode* sweatpants. Gotta have the sweatpants. That's all at [MaxFunStore.com](http://MaxFunStore.com). Be sure to hit subscribe, give us five stars, write rave reviews. That helps us get out into the world even more and lets more people find out about the show.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached in the United States by calling or texting 988. Free, available 24/7.

Our Instagram and Twitter are @DepreshPod. If you're on Facebook, look up our mental health discussion group, Preshies. A lot of good conversation happening over there. Some of it about the show, some of it about other stuff. Lots of it about just people helping each other out on the issue of mental health. Our *Depresh Mode* newsletter is available on Substack. You can search that up. I'm on Twitter and Instagram @JohnMoe. Our electric mail address is [DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org](mailto:DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org).

Hi, credits listeners. If you put a frog in a pot of cold water on the stove and then turn up the heat, the frog will hop out when it gets too hot, because of course it will. I mean, come on.

*Depresh Mode* is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Laura Swisher, Kevin Ferguson, Gabe Mara, and me. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, "Building Wings".

**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*

[00:45:00]

**Mary:** This is Mary from Maine, and I just wanted to say I'm proud of you.

**John Moe:** *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

**Transition:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

**Speaker 1:** Maximum Fun.

**Speaker 2:** A worker-owned network.

**Speaker 3:** Of artist owned shows.

**Speaker 4:** Supported—

**Speaker 5:** —directly—

**Speaker 6:** —by you!