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**John Moe:** A note to our listeners: this mini episode contains discussions of suicide.

Hi, welcome to a special MaxFunDrive mini episode of *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here. It's a stripped-down episode. There's no music, there's no guests. There isn't really even a script. I just want to talk to you a little bit.

I've been thinking during the MaxFun drive about the idea of support. It's a word that we use a lot. "We need your help. Support the show, support our efforts, support these podcasts, support MaxFun." And I do like the word support, because it can mean a lot of different things. There's the money to make something like this. There's the financial support, the actual dollars, and those are great. We love those dollars, because making a show does cost money. Having people working on the show, having the equipment—dollars help a lot. But there's also the matter of what the dollars and donations represent. Because it's people voting with their wallets to keep a show like this going; to keep this particular show going; to keep a dialogue going; to keep open, honest conversation about mental health going; to keep the questions that I ask of guests coming and going, I suppose. You know, to bring in these people and get perspectives, get insight, get stories, get resonant stories of what people have been through that you can recognize. So, the dollars, those donations, that kind of support is crucial. It makes a big difference.

A softer kind of support, a non-financial support, has also been crucial, really, in making this show. All the letters, the emails, the direct messages that people come up to me or send me—it's huge. People saying, "Yes, this show has made a difference in my life. Thank you for talking about this kind of thing. I've sent this around to people I know." It's wonderful. And it gives me strength. It's like finding—it's like being in a video game and finding a little piece of food, a little piece of fruit or something. And then you can power up and be a little stronger. Because, you know, the show is difficult. To have these conversations is hard. To listen to them is hard. So—because it's not a topic that can be handled lightly. It's got to be handled with a lot of concentration and a lot of thought. Because it's really important. So it's hard.

So, why do it? Well, I want to tell you why I do it. It's to help other people carry their loads. This world, this life that we have weighs a frigging ton. It weighs more when you have an interesting brain like ours, my friends. I think a lot of you have really interesting brains, and that's why you're here listening to the show. And I want to help carry that load. I want to see what I can do. It's kind of a life purpose sort of thing. I thought, you know, why am I here on this planet? And when I thought about it, the answer came back to me: to help other people carry their loads. Now, why is that important to me? Well, part of it is that there was someone who was supposed to help me carry my load, and he's not here to do that. And it's not fair, and it could have been avoided.

I had an older brother. I don't anymore, but I want to tell you about him. I want to tell you about Rick. Rick Moe was six years older than me, and he was my hero—as is the case with a lot of younger brothers and older brothers. You know, it's been happening for a long time, happening all over the world. I craved his attention, his affection, his validation. I really admired him. He was older and stronger and bigger. And Rick liked me. This is different than

I think a lot of siblings in these situations would have. We would hang out, you know, even when he was 16 and I was 10.

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We would hang out. He'd want to talk to me. He'd want to find out what I was doing. He'd want to see if I was okay. And often our affection took the form of combat, as is the case sometimes with boys. I remember seeing a pair of tube socks in the clean clothes, and we both wanted that pair of tube socks, and that would launch us into an hour-long wrestling match. Because wrestling is how boys hug sometimes when they love each other. Rick would stand up to his friends when his friends were picking on me. He would—he was great.

And then mental illness came for him. He got sick. We call it substance use disorder now. Back then it was being a pothead or, you know, being a druggie. I like “substance use disorder”. It's a nicer term. I think it's preferable. I like it because it's honest. It was an illness that he had. I mean, he didn't choose to be ill. People rarely choose an illness. He chose pot, yes. He chose other substances. And what he didn't choose was various parts of his life gradually caving in because of those substances. He didn't choose to be unable to stop ingesting these substances. No, he didn't choose that. People didn't choose that.

So, in his late teens, he was using. And he grew up and found work. We grew up in Seattle, in the Seattle area, but he eventually moved to Sacramento for his work. He worked at the airport for a freight company, just like my dad did. And then he had a chance to move to San Diego with his job, and he took it. He moved down there to San Diego, and that's where he stayed. And after a while, lost the job, and found new jobs, and started losing those too. Drove a truck, a lot of times. He would drive a truck around San Diego making various deliveries.

The way substance use disorder sometimes works is that your maturation stops at the age that you were when you started using, and that's how Rick lived his life—as kind of a perpetual 17-year-old. So, you know, when other people his age were partnering up and having careers and buying houses and doing those things, Rick kind of bounced around different apartments with different roommates, some of whom he knew better than others. And he would have, you know, old, beat-up cars that he would drive until they died, and then buy another car for \$500 if he could, and drive that one into the ground as well. Itinerant jobs, drifting.

And over the years, over the next couple decades, he deteriorated. He started needing emergency money a lot. I couldn't trace where he was living a lot of times. I was never sure if he had a job. There was, you know, phone numbers occasionally that you could leave a message at, and it was unclear if he'd ever get them. And as we lost more and more contact with him, we found out that he had been using meth. And I was furious, because I didn't understand how mental illness worked. I was mad at him for being—for having substance use disorder. I was mad at him for his addiction.

We have addiction in our family history. We have depression. We have suicidality. My anger was misplaced. Rick didn't want to be living this life. He didn't want to have this illness. I was mad at him, when in fact I was mad at fate, at God, the universe. But I focused it on Rick, that this was his failing. And we pretty much stopped having contact. I couldn't forgive

him for falling from grace. (*Beat.*) I thought somehow he had chosen it. Um, and I'd see him occasionally over the years. He'd come up for Christmas and stay at our mom and dad's house. And I'd go down and see him and try to figure out if he was on something, and he probably was. And in the late '90s—in 1999—my father was dying of cancer. And so, all of us came to the house in the Seattle suburbs where he was to die. And it was my two sisters and me and Rick came up from San Diego.

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And I wrote about this in my book, in *The Hilarious World of Depression*—so, I'm not telling anything new here. But as soon as my dad had died—as soon as we had the information that, yes, he has passed—the first words out of my brother's mouth were, “What time does the mail get here?” That's the first thing he said. And he was waiting on a delivery from his dealer. And I was so furious. I was so mad at him for saying that. I was mad at him for having a disorder. I was mad at him for having a mental health problem that overrode all his other sense of normalcy. I was mad at him for letting me down, for being flawed.

And so, things went on like that for a while. I didn't have much contact with him. And then something happened a few years later. According to Rick, he got into an experimental treatment study kind of thing at a university. And it worked, and he found recovery. He says that he got straight, started getting his shit together, started hanging out with positive people, people from the program. Rick started volunteering at a Narcotics Anonymous hotline most nights. He would go to work during the day, driving a truck around, and then go to the NA hotline. People would call in when they wanted to start using again, and he wouldn't preach at them. He wouldn't, you know, try to bully them or anything. He would just talk with them for as long as they needed.

And he seemed to stabilize. And I still didn't understand mental illness. Because I thought, okay, he's better now. He was sick, and now he's well, and now everything's fine. I thought he was out of the woods. I thought there wasn't anything else going on. Then Rick found out that he was going to be a father. He told us this at Christmas 2006. And I don't know if it was accidental, or he and his girlfriend planned it. I was unclear, but he was gonna be a dad. He was in his 40s by this point. Nobody ever expected this from Rick, and he was overwhelmed. He was like freaking out about this in a way that was different than I've seen most people be when they find out that they're going to be parents. Because usually there's some excitement. Usually there's some sense of, “Okay, here we go! Buckle up. We're gonna have a real rollercoaster.”

There was only fear and dread. And Rick said, “I just—I don't think somebody like me should be somebody's dad.”

We met for coffee during that Christmas period, and I said, “Let's just go out, you and me. Let's talk about some things.” And I told him that, yeah, I had been angry at him over the years. But because of the drugs. But now he wasn't on drugs, and now we can make a new start. You know, now we could build a new relationship. Now Rick and me and my wife and kids and his baby could build something new, because I thought now things were taken care of. He had been an addict, he had been a user, now he was better. I didn't know enough about mental health.

And Rick said, “I want you to know that I'm sorry I left. I'm sorry I wasn't here to help you deal with everything, growing up.” He had left town when I was about 15, moved to California, wasn't around after that. He said, “I'm really, really sorry that I wasn't here.”

And he was noncommittal about the future. My plan that we could build a new relationship together, he didn't really say anything about—which I didn't think anything of. Damn it. I didn't think anything of it. A few months later, Rick was dead by suicide. He was no longer here. And my education about mental health began. I talked with people who knew him in San Diego, and I talked with people who were close to him, and I gathered some information as best I could. From what I gathered—and I could be wrong about some of this, but what it appears to me happened is that—

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—even though he was off the narcotics, the depression was still there. And I've talked with other people who have substance use disorder, people who are in recovery. And they said, “Yeah, good luck finding somebody who is in recovery and hasn't dealt with depression, because it's a huge part of being there.” And he had this overwhelming depression, and he sought help. He was told that it was severe and that he should consider an inpatient facility. And at that point he cut off treatment, because he was so ashamed. Because he was afraid. Because he felt like he had let everybody down for having a disease.

And it hadn't occurred to me. You know, when he died, I thought, “But he was... sober. How is this possible?” And I became disabused of the notion that people only ever have one diagnosis and that everything else is fine. I thought, you know, if you have depression but then you go to a doctor and then it gets treated, then you're okay. You know, if you have an eating disorder and you get treatment, then you will no longer have the eating disorder, and everything will be completely fine. I thought it was clear and simple, and I didn't realize that it could be a big wash of mud and gray. Because it's not simple. Mental health isn't simple. That's why we have to keep talking about it!

You know, it's not—you know, if I could just do an episode on depression, “Here's depression. Here's how you solve it. Okay, five-minute episode. You know, next week we'll do obsessive compulsive disorder.” And you know, after a while we'd work through the DSM, and then we'd be out of conditions, and then the show could stop. That's not how the show works. It's very complicated. Things overlap and things appear in different ways, and it's mud a lot of times. We've got to sift through the mud.

When we were down in San Diego for Rick's service with his friends down there, one of his coworkers got up and said, “The thing about driving a truck with Rick—” You know, they'd be partners; they'd go out in the truck together. “The thing about driving a truck with Rick Moe is that if there is an animal in distress, your whole day is shot.” (*Chuckling.*) He talked about how if like, my brother saw like a wounded bird on the side of the road, well, they'd have to pull over. And Rick would have to wrap it up, you know, and approach it very carefully and not scare it. And then they'd have to detour, you know, to an animal shelter or an animal rescue facility. Rick knew all of them in San Diego. He knew where to go. And so, you'd be late for all your deliveries that day. And you'd be getting home late, all because Rick saw some messed up crow.

And I just love that story about him. And it occurred to me that he could be so accommodating to people on the Narcotics Anonymous hotline, and that he could be accommodating to crows, and he could help everybody, but he couldn't help himself on the issue of depression. And he died from it. And when we were at the service in Seattle—we had two services.

When we were up in the one in Seattle, you know, I was thinking about his situation. And I thought if Rick had not felt that shame, that stigma, that guilt about his depression, maybe he would have a chance to find somebody to talk to about it. Maybe he would hear more people talking about it. Maybe he could... maybe he could still be around for one more day on that hardest day that he had. If more people in our world talked about this kind of thing, and he was able to hear more voices talking about going through what he was going through, maybe he'd feel less alone. Maybe he'd stick around one more day. And then maybe that day could turn into another day.

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So, if we could talk more about it, that'll help. Or if we don't talk about it, more people will feel like they're alone, will feel like they're guilty. More people will feel ashamed for having an illness that they never fucking chose.

So, what are we going to do? I thought, as I stood there. Are we going to talk about it or not? It seems pretty obvious that we fricking should talk about it. We should make people feel less alone. We should make people realize that this is not their fault. And I thought, okay. I'm just standing there at the service. I probably have a glass of punch or something. And I thought, okay, well, what are you going to do about it, John? You're not a politician. You can't change policy and government. You know, you're not a doctor. You're not a therapist. No, I thought, but I can talk into microphones, and I could put sentences together. And if everybody else is going to be quiet about this kind of thing, someone's got to be a loudmouth. And I'll be the loudmouth. Fine.

And that's what I started to do. I started to write about it, started to talk about it, started podcasts about it. You know, the one that you're listening to now. Thank you for your support. Because I decided I got to speak for these people who are still here. I got to be a loudmouth for the people for whom it's not already too late. And that's the path that I chose... for all those people. It's too late for Rick. It's not too late for someone else. Maybe just talking about it isn't enough. God knows that the suicide rates are bleak right now. But fuck it. I'm gonna fight. I'm gonna—you know, I might be throwing rocks at a giant, but I'm going to keep throwing the rocks. I know where to get more rocks. (*Chuckles.*) I'll keep going.

And it's hard, because I manage my own mental health also. And sometimes that's really hard too. You know, I was diagnosed. I remember being diagnosed with major depressive disorder and feeling really happy that there was a name for this thing that had been with me my whole life and that there was help to be had, that there was hope. And I believe that. I'm glad I felt that happy. But again, it's not simple. You know, I found in that experience, yes, they were able to give me some meds. Sometimes the meds worked. Sometimes they didn't. Sometimes they worked for a while and then suddenly didn't. And I had to keep going.

And I realized, oh, this is an ongoing management issue. You know, these issues, these disorders haven't gone away. I just have to try like hell to manage them. As I said on the show not too long ago, mental health is a present-tense proposition. And some of these interviews are hard. You know, it's impossible not to take on at least some psychic damage from some of these things. But it's worth it. I gotta help carry the load. That's what I'm doing here. I'm doing it for these other people who are still around. We gotta save the people we love so that they're around so we can love them some more. It's worth it.

And I know I have support from a lot of people. Like you. So, I'm gonna keep doing it. I do have a microphone still, and I have people with me. Like you. One of my favorite bits of I guess history or writing is the preamble to the Constitution, where they say, “We the people, in order to form a more perfect union—” 'Cause they don't say “in order to preserve a perfect union”. They're saying it's not perfect, but we're gonna form one that's more perfect. That's what we gotta keep doing with mental health. It's soupy. It's challenging. But it's good to know I have your support. Let's keep making a show together. I'm glad you're here.

To support *Depresh Mode*, please go to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). Thanks.