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

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Before we get started, I wanted you to know that today is day one of the 2024 MaxFunDrive. *Depresh Mode*, like all of the shows at Maximum Fun, runs on a membership model. 70% of our revenue comes from individual listeners, just like you. We don't clog up the show with a million ads. We don't charge a subscription to be able to listen to regular episodes. We rely on you. Because our idea is this: we'll make a great show about mental health, put it out into the world, let people benefit from it, and then ask people to support the continued existence of that show. Of this show! *Depresh Mode*. It's a show that can inform, can entertain, can make you think.

Maybe you recognize something that one of our guests has talked about from within yourself and your own experience. Maybe it makes you feel not so alone. Maybe it helps you along on your journey. We know this is a useful program. You have told us so, and now is the time to join. I'll be back later in the show to tell you about some really fun, amazing thank you gifts that we have available. Or you can check them out right now while you listen at [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). And while you're there, become a member at a level that works for you. Or boost or upgrade your membership. [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). Okay, on with the show.

*(Beat.)*

Where you are now with your mental health is not necessarily where you will always be. If things are bad, they could get better. I can't make any promises as to when that will be or what that will look like, but I just want you to know that it is possible. There is reason to hope. There is reason to keep trying to get to a better place. When you're in a bad place, it can feel permanent. I'm telling you right now, that's not always so. In the summer of 2021, I interviewed the comedian, actor, and writer Joel Kim Booster. It was a difficult interview. It was grim. Joel was in a bad place. He was depressed, said he felt dead inside, was certain that he would never be able to write good, creative, funny ideas ever again. He was sure that this was just his life, from this point on—that he'd never feel any better.

Here's a clip from that episode.

**Clip:**

**John Moe:** And the depression is new. This didn't exist pre pandemic, correct?

**Joel Kim Booster:** No. Not to this magnitude. I mean, I'd get sad sometimes. But you know, it was nothing that would keep me from writing.

**John Moe:** What are you doing to address it?

**Joel Kim Booster:** Oh, you know, therapy, medication, that whole shit.

**John Moe:** Sounds like it's not going great on that front.

**Joel Kim Booster:** No, nothing works. This is who I am now.

**John Moe:** Well, this episode got listened to a lot. People talked about it and wrote about it. I said at the time—and I still maintain—that while it can be a brutal interview to hear, it's one of the most raw and honest depictions of clinical depression that I've ever heard. People can ask me how depression feels, and I could just send them a link to the Joel Kim Booster episode. Like, here, listen to this. This is how it feels.

Joel's been working since that episode aired. He wrote, starred in, and executive produced the movie *Fire Island*, which was popular and well-reviewed. He costars in the comedy *Loot* with Maya Rudolph on Apple TV+, which has its season two premiere on April 3rd. So, I've seen what kind of stuff he's been making, what kind of stuff he's been putting out into the world. But I didn't know how Joel was doing. Like a lot of people who heard my conversation with Joel from 2021, I worried about him. Recently, coming up on three years since that conversation took place, we reached out to Joel Kim Booster again to see if he'd return. And I was delighted and a bit surprised that he agreed to come back on the show. When our Zoom call began, I honestly didn't know what condition Joel would be in. I was prepared for anything.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Joel Kim Booster, welcome back to *Depresh Mode*.

**Joel Kim Booster:** (*Cheerfully.*) Hello! Thank you for having me!

**John Moe:** First of all, thank you for coming back. Your appearance a few years ago was one of our most popular and most talked about episodes, and I really appreciate this.

**Joel Kim Booster:** Yeah! (*Chuckles.*) It's wild. I don't think I've ever had a response like that from appearing on someone else's podcast before.

(*John chuckles.*)

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And I still—it still rolls, and I actually feel quite bad when people listen to it now. Because they'll send me DMs and they'll be like, “I hope you're okay.” And they have no idea.

And I'm like, oh, babe, that was four years ago. We're—we figured out the—we figured out some things since then. It's very jarring. It's very jarring to have people DM you and be like,

“I hope you're not still like feeling this bad,” when you're not feeling this bad. It's just so strange, 'cause it does feel like they're talking about a different person in a lot of ways.

**John Moe:** Really? Yeah. Well, how are you doing today?

**Joel Kim Booster:** Listen, I'm great. I'm much more stable, I think, than I was when I was talking to you. I mean, the first thing that has to be said, I think, about my last time coming on this podcast is that I was doing that thing where I went off my meds without talking to anybody about it. Which, again, like I am not an evangelist for medication. Everybody's journey is their own. I do think that like being transparent and honest with your healthcare providers or whoever your team may be is the thing to do. Like, if you're going to—if you don't want to take medication anymore, like at least tell your doctor or whoever so that they can, you know. I have a really wonderful psychiatrist, and every time I've gone off my meds, I have alerted him since then. And you know, he's not—he doesn't love it, (*chuckles*) but it is good for him to know like what is going on with my brain, even when I make these sorts of decisions for myself.

**John Moe:** How long had you been off meds when we spoke? Do you remember?

**Joel Kim Booster:** Mm. Okay, when—what year? It was 2021, right?

**John Moe:** It was summer of 2021?

**Joel Kim Booster:** Summer of 2021. Early summer of 2021. So, I had probably been off my meds since... I guess it would have been like around like January/February. I just remember I went off my meds right around the time Biden was inaugurated. (*Chuckles.*)

Right around January 6th.

(*John laughs.*)

That filled me with so much joy and joie de vivre that I felt I could survive without the medication. No, what was really happening and the reason—always the reason I go off my medication is I go through these cycles. And actually this hasn't happened in a long time, because I think we finally figured out the right dosages. But I'm constantly afraid that the medication is killing my creativity or that part of myself that is creative. And so, I'll like convince myself that it's the medication and that's why I have writer's block. And so, I'll go off the medication. And then oftentimes like it will help immensely. And so, anecdotally like it probably was affecting me in some way or another.

But then it's that thing of like, oh, I'm hypomanic, and so I'm writing a lot. And then I spiral from there. And so, the unfortunate thing about, you know, being bipolar is that like, especially the hypomania—it's really easy for me to know when I'm depressed. Like, I am always aware when I'm in a depressive episode. I am never aware when I'm hypomanic until after. It's only in hindsight that I'm like, oh wow! Like, I had sex with three people that day and was, you know, up until four. You know, it's just like in the moment, it just feels good,

and it just feels productive, and it doesn't feel detrimental or damaging in the same way that like depression feels very heavy when it's happening to you.

Yeah. And so, then I go through these cycles. And the last—I did this again, actually, last summer. I went off my meds. And it was a similar sort of situation where I had really, really high highs. And then by the end of the summer, I was just like a fucking brick. I couldn't move. I couldn't get out of bed. I couldn't do anything. It was really bad. It was about as bad as probably—it hadn't been as bad, the depression, since 2021. I would say. Since I did your podcast the first time, and then I went back on my meds. And again, we like sort of figured out a new regimen and a new dosage. And since then I haven't even been tempted to go off, because I feel pretty great, and I've been pretty creatively productive and life productive.

And yeah, so things are going pretty well.

**John Moe:** Isn't it interesting how—I mean, in that interview, and not to talk exclusively about that interview—because you know, it's 2024 now. But you talked about being—your creativity was gone, that you would never write again. That it seemed so permanent, that state that you were in, you didn't—you weren't able to recognize it as maybe this is because of the meds.

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Or maybe this is something that I'm in for a while and that could go away. You thought that's what it was for good.

**Joel Kim Booster:** Well, yeah, because I think at that point I had gone off my meds, and it didn't come back. Because I was just depressed. You know, that was the thing that—I had so often gone off meds and had that initial bump and felt great. And this time I went off the meds, and I didn't really have that initial bump. And I just went straight into this like depressive episode that lasted for way too long. And it was actually sort of reversed. Because if I can get real, I was like deeply depressed from like the spring into the summer, and then once *Fire Island* started shooting, I was high as a kite. Like, so manic. And like, there were—it thankfully didn't affect shooting until pretty much the end.

Like, there were moments on set that I'm really not proud of now that thankfully most people weren't privy to except for my like inner circle executive producers and the people that I really trusted, Andrew the director. But I was losing it. I was losing it at the end of that movie, because it was a lot of pressure. It was a lot of stress. And I thought I was handling everything really well off-meds, because I was mostly either maybe somewhat stable but then definitely by the end filming a little manic.

**John Moe:** When was that you were shooting *Fire Island*?

**Joel Kim Booster:** That was like August into September.

**John Moe:** Of—? '21?

**Joel Kim Booster:** 2021.

**John Moe:** Oh, wow. Okay. So, right after we had spoken. Yeah. I mean, what—did you go off the meds, or did you stay off the meds at that point because of the fear of losing your creativity?

**Joel Kim Booster:** Yeah. Well, especially because going into the movie, shooting the movie, I was really concerned. I was like, “I have to be able to access this part of my brain with no interruptions, with no hurdles, nothing.” And this is—you know, up to that point had been the biggest thing of my entire life. And yeah. And so, I was really concerned that if I was medicated, that it would stifle something really important and that it would affect the movie in some way. And you know, of course, ironically enough, it did. It sort of affected it negatively, ultimately. Hopefully not in the finished product. I don't think any of it reads on screen, or at least I hope it doesn't. But it did make some of the production of it, the behind-the-scenes stuff, a little more difficult for a couple days than it needed to be.

**John Moe:** In what way?

**Joel Kim Booster:** I was just really freaked out. I think—it was a really fun experience. I cannot say enough about how much fun I had and how that time filming that movie is probably—will remain some of the best days of my entire life for the rest of my life. Because I got to make a movie with some of my best friends. And so, for the first like four or five weeks, it was all great. It was all gravy. And then we—you know, we shot on Fire Island only for the last two weeks or so of shooting. And by that point, it just—I had suddenly—it just got real. It just got really real that the movie was going to come out, that people were going to see it. And I was so hyper concerned about its reception and if it was going to flop, if it was going to fail.

And I knew—I started to obsess over the fact that like my name was all over this. I was starring in it, and I wrote it, I executive produced it. And I knew that like if the movie failed, it would be on me. And if the movie succeeded, it wouldn't necessarily be on—it wouldn't be attributed to me in the same way that its failure would. And I just became really, really obsessed with this idea that the movie would be a huge failure, a huge flop, people would hate it, and it would be all on me. And I got angry. I just got really angry and paranoid. I was like, no one else is taking this movie seriously. No one else is putting in the work. No one else is caring as deeply as I do, because no one—this is not going to be on anyone else's shoulder. Like, if this movie fails, everyone else will be able to walk away clean. I will be the one who its failure will be attributed to.

And that was the sort of mind cycle I was going through at the time, at the end of filming. And that was not a great headspace to be in for the last couple of days of shooting a movie like that. Especially in a very stressful environment. You know, we were up against a lot on Fire Island. It is not an easy place to film a movie at. And there were a lot of weather conditions that really almost screwed us up and ruined a lot of things. And it was just—it was a really high stress situation that I should not have put myself in while being unstable.

**John Moe:** Yeah.

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What happened after shooting wrapped?

**Joel Kim Booster:** After shooting wrapped, I went back to LA. I started shooting *Loot* immediately. I like—literally, we wrapped at like 4AM the final day of shooting *Fire Island*. I went straight from set to the airport, landed in LA, and went straight to set for *Loot*.

**John Moe:** Oh, wow.

**Joel Kim Booster:** It was that close. In fact, there was a moment I remember I had a mini freakout. Because they cast me on *Loot*, but then because the shoot dates overlapped with *Fire Island*, I was almost not going to be able to do it. And then they were kind enough to push it as far as they could, which was they gave me like 12 hours to make it.

*(They chuckle.)*

And—which, you know, in this industry—like, people will listen to this and be like, “What assholes.” But like, you don’t understand. Like, I don’t even know how much money that costs for them to push that 12 hours for me. And so, I was really grateful for that. I got back to LA. And I had been sort of dating this guy that I had met in May, which I think I had met him right before I did your podcast. And that was another huge sort of factor in the depression mode for me, because I was feeling very insecure and very like, “This guy will never reciprocate these feelings.” I had never been in a relationship.

And I touched back down in LA. I was feeling a lot better than I was in May, but I started seeing him more intensely. I was working really long hours. *Loot*—you know, shooting a television show is not easy. It’s like—sometimes it’s like 12/14-hour days. Wasn’t sleeping a lot. Had a lot of struggles on that set too, because—in the first block or so, because I was unmedicated, and I was acting crazy. And like, it was one of those things where I would be so—like, I would have like five normal days where I was like a full joy to be around. And then on the sixth day, it would be like 11 hours of joy and fun and Joel being normal. And then the last hour, something would trigger me, and I would be a fucking lunatic. And people would—

And again, like people would be like, “What the fuck is going on? Like, this person has been so normal, and suddenly he’s not.” And a lot of that had to do—again, I was unmedicated, and I was dating this—I was in a new relationship, my first adult relationship, and I was sort of managing that. And I remember, we got in our first fight at some point, in like September or October or sometime in the fall. I can’t remember exactly when it was, but we got in a huge fight, and I can’t remember the specifics of it, because it’s such a fog in my head now. But we basically broke up for about two hours and then got back together, and I told him that I was off my meds. And I hadn’t been on my meds for almost—you know, it had been like nine months at that point.

And he was like, “If you want to make this work, then you need to do—you need to take steps to take care of yourself and take care of this part of your health.” And he didn’t—it

wasn't like, "Get back on your meds." He was like, "I don't know enough about your situation, but you aren't helping yourself right now in any way—whether that be medication or any other behavioral, cognitive, anything." I wasn't in therapy at the time. I wasn't—you know, I wasn't doing anything to support myself mentally. And so, he was like, "I just need you to take steps to try. And whatever that looks like for you." And again, for me at that point, I was like I need to go back on my meds. And so, then I did! And it evened me out. And it completely sort of changed the trajectory of our relationship and my life in a lot of ways. And I'm so glad I did it in the lead-up to 2022, which became sort of the craziest year of my entire life. And I was able to handle that year with so much more grace and stability than—

Like, I think about what would have happened to me if I tried to do that year with the release of the movie and my special and *Loot* and all of the things that came along with those releases—if I were unmedicated or just not taking care of myself in whatever way, I don't know what would have happened to me. (*Chuckles.*) It would have been a much different press cycle, I think.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** More with Joel Kim Booster in just a moment.

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Such a tremendous story, Joel Kim Booster. A story of hope and recovery. We are happy—delighted!—to bring this to you on *Depresh Mode*, especially as a follow up from our episode from a few years ago. This is the kind of story that you turn to *Depresh Mode* to hear.

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And we're going to get right back into the show in just a moment. But first, welcome to the 2024 MaxFunDrive. This is the one time of year that we come to you with a reminder that *Depresh Mode* only exists because our listeners—that's you—decide that it should. More than 70% of our revenue comes from individual membership. And this is our one on-air membership drive. Only happens once a year, which is several fewer than our friends in public radio do. This is the time, and we need to hear from you. I'm here with *Depresh Mode* producer Raghu Manavalan. Hey, Raghu!

**Raghu Manavalan:** Hey, John. How's it going?

**John Moe:** Good, thanks.

**Raghu Manavalan:** For our listeners. Here's a website to remember: [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). Again, [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). You can go there now and join Maximum Fun and *Depresh Mode*. You can upgrade to a new level of membership and receive more gifts from us, or you can boost your membership and provide more support for the shows you love, like *Depresh Mode*!

**John Moe:** And when you support *Depresh Mode*, really, you're supporting mental health for the society that you live in. It comes down to that. And we think that matters today more than ever. You are supporting a positive environment where these issues can be openly discussed, where people can better understand what they're going through and what to do about it. We're smashing stigma together, and you can be a part of that and where listeners like you and people you know and complete strangers can remember that they're not alone. We make this show, because we know that it makes for a better, more understanding, kinder world.

**Raghu Manavalan:** Any membership at \$5 a month or more gives you access to the entire Maximum Fun bonus content library. Over 600 hours of shows available exclusively to Max Fun members. This year, *Depresh Mode* has an “Ask Me Anything” episode where our listeners ask John questions, and he has to answer them. Ah, there are so many good questions in that, John.

**John Moe:** So many good questions! Our listeners put me on the spot. It was a bit of a nervous-making experience for me, but it's fair that the tables get turned. It's a really interesting talk, actually, about mental health, about the show, about me. We get behind the scenes. And again, you get all the bonus content from all the MaxFun shows that have ever been made. So, it's not just—we're not talking 600 hours of *Depresh Mode* bonus content only. That would take a lot of work from us. But it's from all the shows. It's from *Judge John Hodgman* and *Bullseye* and all these other programs that are out there.

Look, I'm sure you have had something that you love—a TV show, a podcast, something—canceled in the past year, because some media conglomerate corporate overlords didn't think that it made enough money. We don't have corporate overlords. Maximum Fun is an employee-owned cooperative, and this show and all of our shows at MaxFun operate on a membership model. So, you are the bosses. You decide whether we get to keep going. We can only do it with your help.

**Raghu Manavalan:** If you're joining for the first time at the \$10 a month level, or upgrading your membership level from \$10 to \$20 a month, you get the bonus content and our brand new *Depresh Mode* enable pin. It's bright orange, and it says, “I'm glad you're here,” just like John says on every episode of the show.

**John Moe:** Yep, that little phrase has come to mean a lot to a lot of people, and now you can display it to the world. It doesn't even have *Depresh Mode* on the pin. It just says, “I'm glad you're here”. You can support the show and put some positivity out into the world. Imagine someone seeing a pin that you display that says, “I'm glad you're here”. You just made that person's day.

**Raghu Manavalan:** Alright, we're getting back into the show now. But as you listen, go to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). Find a level that works for you. We have more gifts available at all sorts of levels. [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). And thank you.

**John Moe:** Back with actor, comedian, writer—Joel Kim Booster. We've been talking about a period in his life a few years ago where he was off his antidepressant meds, very busy with making movies and TV, and going through some hard times with his mental health and behavior.



When you were having these difficult times shooting *Fire Island*, or when you were having these 11th hour fall-aparts on *Loot*, were you associating that with going off the meds? Did you make that connection?

**Joel Kim Booster:** Um... yes and no. I was really in denial about it. I think like one of the great sort of tricks of the disease is that it's really hard to, in the moment, sort of recognize what's going on and why, and why you're behaving in a certain way, or why something is triggering you to such a huge degree. And again, I think I did know. The worse it got, the more I was like I need to do something.

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And I was just so afraid of going back to like a place of not being able to be creative, and it was so important to me. Like, that was my entire life was my work. And I think the thing that changed was having this new thing in my life that suddenly felt more important than my work, and it was the first time in my life that something had taken priority over the work. And that was my partner. And yeah. And—

**John Moe:** Are you still together?

**Joel Kim Booster:** Yes, we are.

**John Moe:** Excellent.

**Joel Kim Booster:** Yeah. (*Chuckles.*) It would have been really devastating to mention now.

**John Moe:** “Nah, nah, that fizzled out.”

**Joel Kim Booster:** Yeah, I know. (*Chuckles.*) It was a really—it was a huge flexion point in my journey with mental health. And I'm glad that it happened in the way that it needed to happen. And I've slowly sort of figured out the right sort of levels for me. I did—I will say, I think—wait, did I already say this? I went off this last summer? Yes, I did.

Um, anyway, so, that was another sort of area of strife for our relationship. Because I had promised him that I would tell him if I ever did go off again, and I didn't tell him. And that was a real breach of trust. And again, he's never someone who's like I need you to be on medication for us to be in a relationship. I just need to be on the same page as you. I just need you to be honest with me, so that I can be in it with you and have the full context of what's going on.

Because he knew something was off with me all summer, but like I would tell him that I was on my meds. And so, he couldn't quite put his finger on what was happening, and he trusted me, and I broke that trust. And that was a huge—again, like I'm lucky that I got one of those in this relationship. I don't think I'll get a second.

**John Moe:** Why did you go off the meds a second time?

**Joel Kim Booster:** Because I had such a long stretch of time of feeling great. (*Laughs.*) And I—and again, like I was like I'm feeling great. My life is so stable. Surely the stability of my career and my life and my personal life right now—I don't need it! And I didn't want to—I just—I kept feeling like I don't—maybe I don't need it anymore. And yeah, I just—I really hate that I have to do this. I don't like it.

**John Moe:** That you have to take meds?

**Joel Kim Booster:** Yeah! I mean, I don't think anybody does. It's not like a pleasant thing to know about yourself, ultimately. And so, you will look for any excuse to say that you're cured or you're in a better place or you don't need them. And, yeah, it just—it really—I had gotten to that place. And then, in all of the stability that I was experiencing, destabilized my entire life over the summer, and in many different ways. And then really came crashing down and was faced with the fact that I needed to, once again, like figure out what I needed to do to get back to myself.

**John Moe:** What did the crashing down look like?

**Joel Kim Booster:** Oh my god! I mean, it was just like a hopeless—it was—I mean, listen to my first episode. That was it. That was it. It was like—

**John Moe:** It was all over again?

**Joel Kim Booster:** Yeah, it was that all over again. And then even scarier, because I—you know, back then when I was in that place, I was like, “If this man loved me, it would solve it.” And then I was back in that place—in and out an almost a three-year long relationship with someone who, you know, loves me deeply, and I love deeply, is the most important thing in my life. And it wasn't fixing it. It wasn't enough. So, that felt really bad when even—you know, I famously wrote a rom com. I believe in the power of love. I want to believe in the power of love so bad, but in this case it was not enough to get over my chemicals.

**John Moe:** And what made you go back on the meds? I mean, was it a look in the mirror or what?

**Joel Kim Booster:** It was telling him. It was telling him that, and then really hitting a wall with the depression again. Because again like when I'm going through—like, I don't know if I mentioned this the last time I was on, but like my bipolar really like historically has manifested mostly on the hypomanic side. I rarely experienced like crushing, crippling depression. Really only in those two instances of—

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—when I went on your podcast, and then most recently this last summer. And so, it's such a bizarre like feeling, because it's so unfamiliar to me. Especially like to the point where I'm not able to do things. Like, I am able to—my work ethic is the only reason I'm successful in this industry. It's not because I'm more talented than anyone else. It's because of the work ethic. And when that goes away, like that's what was really scary was my inability to push

through it. Because I'm able to push through so—I've been able to push through and get the work done through a lot of different things. But then this past summer, it was just like—it was nil. And that was really terrifying for me. And then... I mean, since then, I really—I don't know why I was so hesitant to just try different dosages and try to find the right levels for myself rather than just go off or go back on or try—it was like for some reason, I was like, “My only two options are to do exactly what I was doing before, which sort of worked, or go off my meds completely and face that.”

And there's, of course, this third option, which was we can switch up the meds. We can try different dosages. We can talk it through with your healthcare professional. And that is the third option that I finally tried, and that is what for now has seemed to work. I mean, the thing about this disease though is I have a feeling that while I feel pretty stable now, I do think it will—I'm waiting for the moment where I will be tempted again to go off. And I just don't—I don't know what I'm going to do in that case, but it feels much farther off, at least at this point.

**John Moe:** Why do you think it might happen again?

**Joel Kim Booster:** Because it's just my—it's the cycle of that I've gone through since my diagnosis. You know, I—and maybe it won't happen again. Maybe I have enough data now to know and to trust myself. But I do think that the disease is really good at tricking you into believing certain lies. And I don't know what would happen if—I feel very stable. But like, of course there are life events that could happen at any moment that I think could knock me off kilter. And that's my biggest worry. And that's my biggest reason why I continue to try and stay on my meds is to sort of like, I don't know, ground myself enough in case something bad does happen. Because it is so weird. Like, I just keep waiting for the other shoe to drop.

These last two years have been really, really wonderful. And I don't—and it makes me so scared, because I'm like, “When is the bad thing going to happen?” And of course, every time I tell this to my partner, my partner is like, “Your dad died like right before all this shit happened to you.”

**John Moe:** I was gonna say! Yeah.

**Joel Kim Booster:** So, maybe the bad thing happened and—just reverse order, bad things happen, and then good things happen. But I don't know. I'm just a perpetually pessimistic and nervous, anxious person. Which is ultimately, I guess, kind of helpful for keeping me on the straight and narrow.

**John Moe:** Yeah. When we had talked a few years ago, your dad had passed away relatively recently, and we were coming out of the early stages of coming out of the worst of covid—which you had spent largely by yourself, you said, in an apartment you hated. And I wonder, you how much of those factors—you kind of downplayed the death of your dad a little bit as a contributing factor to the depression. But in retrospect, was it a bigger factor?

**Joel Kim Booster:** Oh my god. Yeah. It was huge. It was hugely impactful, and it remains hugely impactful. I think like especially because of—as all these nice things keep happening to me. And especially seeing its toll on my mom. I mean, that is one of the hardest parts. I

will say that like it did end up sort of bringing my mom and I closer than we have been in a long time, which was hard to recognize I think the last time we spoke, but is much easier now.

**John Moe:** That's wonderful.

**Joel Kim Booster:** And it really just—there was a lot of baggage left on the table from the things that we had never discussed and things that we had never really found closure on. And then the death of my father really sort of just like wiped it all clear. It was like okay. We don't need to—and you know, I guess some people might hear this and think like this is not healthy, but like my dad died, and suddenly it was like, actually, maybe we don't need to dig up all that old shit. Maybe we can just move forward as like a family that loves each other and knows that and not have to deal with some of the conversations. I will say like after my dad died and after we recorded that episode—

[00:35:00]

—as I was getting more and more—falling more and more in love with my partner is I had the courage to finally ask, because it had never happened before. I had never been in a relationship. And so, my sexuality had never really come up since I came out and it really blew up my life with my parents. I was finally like, “What would happen if I brought a guy home? Like, what would Dad have thought of that? What do you think of that? Like, is that even a possibility?”

And she was really open to it. And she was like, “If you found someone that you loved that loved you and you loved, we would welcome them and love them as much as your brother-in-law.”—my sister's husband. And I don't know that she would have said that if my dad hadn't passed, honestly. And she's since met him several times, my partner, and loves him and has made good on that promise. Makes him feel so welcome and loved. And that is the craziest thing I think for me is that there was never a moment in my life growing up where I thought that would ever be a possibility.

**John Moe:** Wow. Is the grief from your dad still with you? Is it still rattling around in there?

**Joel Kim Booster:** Mm, yeah. I mean, it doesn't go away. It happens a lot like in big life events, especially the things that like—you know, it took like 36 years, but I think like I'm finally doing things that he would be like proud of me for. Obviously not anything in my career, but like I bought a house. And like that process was really big and scary and crazy. And again, another far away thing that I never thought I would be able to do in my lifetime. And I just know he would have been so into that. Like, he would have been so into the details of that. I have done so much like—you know, everything breaks, and everything falls apart. And I'm constantly dealing with issues like that. I just know he would have loved to get those calls.

And so, every time something happens and I'm doing work on the house, I just think about my dad and how much he tried to teach me about this kind of responsibility and how much I ignored and how much I wish I had him as a resource now, to remind me of all the things that he tried to teach me before he passed. And you know, again, I think part of it was I was like,

“I’m never gonna own a house. So, why do I have to care about this?” And now I do, and I just know he’d be so happy. And I did not make my father very happy growing up or since. And (*stammering*) it’s a brutal—it’s sad to me that like he didn’t get to see this part of my life.

**John Moe:** Yeah. It sounds like you take some comfort in the idea of what would have been instead of having remorse over what didn’t get to happen.

**Joel Kim Booster:** Yeah, a little bit. A little bit. For sure.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** We’ll be back with Joel Kim Booster in just a moment.

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** We’re going to get back into this very moving conversation with Joel Kim Booster in just a moment. But first, we are asking you to support *Depresh Mode* by becoming a member of Maximum Fun during the MaxFunDrive. This show costs money to make, and we can’t do it without you. Even a \$5 a month membership makes a huge difference. If you’re already a member, thank you. And you can upgrade to a new level and support the show even more and collect even more cool gifts, or you can just boost your membership a little and help us keep making *Depresh Mode*.

**Raghu Manavalan:** Just go to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). You can see all the levels there and the gifts available. At \$5 a month, you get access to the vault of MaxFun bonus content—over 600 hours of it across all the shows, including the *Depresh Mode* “Ask John Anything” episode we made fresh this year. Upgrading your membership to \$10 a month or from \$10 to \$20 a month gets you the bonus content and the enamel pin that says, “I’m glad you’re here,” which you can proudly wear and display.

**John Moe:** You can give, because maybe *Depresh Mode* has made a difference in your life. You can give, because it’s absolutely made a difference in other people’s lives. You can give, because you want to live in a society where people are more educated and kind when it comes to mental health.

**Raghu Manavalan:** When you give to MaxFun, the majority of your money goes to the artists who make the show or the shows that you choose to support. Some of it goes to MaxFun itself, so they can make the network run, run the podcast operations, business expenses, and charitable gifts.

**John Moe:** And again, I don’t have corporate executives breathing down my neck about what to put on the show so it will be as profitable as possible. It’s a different model than that. It’s different from how most media, most big podcast companies operate. We pick out the guests and the stories that we think will matter to you—Raghu and I and Kevin Ferguson, our senior producer—we talked about these things and talked about what is going to matter to you, our listeners.

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It's really that simple. And we're supported not by a media conglomerate, but by an employee-owned co-op in Maximum Fun. That matters to us. And I think it matters to you. And it's a good way of doing honest business. It's a good model. We're asking you to support this show and support this business model with a contribution of whatever makes sense for your budget.

**Raghu Manavalan:** You can even gift a membership for someone else, let them know you're thinking of them, or you can give an anonymous gift for someone who's not able to join themselves.

**John Moe:** We're going to get back into this inspirational conversation with Joel Kim Booster, but as you listen, go to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join), find a level that works for you, and then select *Depress Mode* from the list of shows. Shop around the different levels, see the thank you gifts that we are offering. There's a lot of cool stuff. There's a chess and checkers kit with a wearable bandana board and illustrated game pieces. There's a MaxFun bucket Hat. The 35 a month level is Maximum Bag. It's this comedically giant cotton tote with block lettering that actually says, "Maximum Bag". Go check out everything.

**Raghu Manavalan:** Check it out at [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join), and thank you.

**John Moe:** Back again with comedian, writer, and actor Joel Kim Booster.

You talk about calibrating your medication and going through that process. How long did that process take? Did you get frustrated during it? Like, what kind of journey was that?

**Joel Kim Booster:** I will say it has been like—you know, it's all trial and error. It's a really long process, I think. I have found. Because like coming out of the depressive episode, I really primarily just needed to get back on my antidepressant. And once that happened, it was like night and day. It really was like Wellbutrin saved my life. And figuring that out—and so, once that was on, it was really about finding the medication that would keep me from going too up without making me a zombie. And that was a little more difficult, and that was a process that took a few months to figure out, over time. But once again I have an amazing psychiatrist, and we really—we experimented a little bit and a lot.

And right now I feel pretty good. I will say that like I still have pops, I think, of reactivity that are strange and sometimes come out of nowhere. But they last—they are not days on end anymore. I feel much more in control, and I still feel like I'm able to do creative work, and I'm finding that like some—and I'm just like less quick to blame the meds for moments where I'm feeling less creative or feeling blocked, which is another sort of important part of this story.

**John Moe:** Or blame the idea of meds themselves as a single entity kind of thing. Yeah. How is it going with being famous? You know, you're out there more than you've ever been. And you're also kind of vulnerable. I mean, you're somebody who deals with this kind of thing, and people I'm sure write things about you. And I'm sure that they're not all nice.

**Joel Kim Booster:** No, they're definitely not. (*Chuckles.*) I mean, I would, first sort of quibble with the word famous.

(*John chuckles.*)

I don't know that—it's really difficult to self-identify that way. I especially think in like this day and age, it's like there's no monoculture anymore, so like for anyone to be actually famous, you have to be quite big. I think. Because there's just too many—

**John Moe:** Yes. Public. We'll say that you're public.

**Joel Kim Booster:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, public facing for sure. It's strange. And I think like, honestly, being so open about being bipolar is like—it's been a double-edged sword. Like, it is now the thing that I think people use when they disagree with me the most to sort of denigrate me or discredit me or— It's difficult to read that, like when I have an opinion about something or say something and someone's like, “Your bipolar’s showing when you say that.” It's like weird. And I don't regret being as open about it, but it is shitty to read that. And it's a behavioral thing for me too. Like, it's less chemical and more behavioral. I have always been a little too concerned with being well-liked and it's just not, again, a possibility to be in this position in my life and my career. Like, there were definitely—and that was a huge part of it over the summer too, is I got really, really down the rabbit hole of like—

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—finding every comment I could online about myself that was negative and really like sinking my teeth into the negative comments more than anything, you know? And it's weird because, you know, 2022 was the biggest year in my life and career. And it was sort of the culmination of every dream I think I had for myself since I decided I wanted to do this for a living. And when I was in my early 20s, I had so much confidence that I deserved all of this. I was like—you could not tell me I would not achieve all of this when I was 24. And that I was so convinced of my own genius that it had to happen. And now that it's happened, I am so riddled with imposter syndrome, and so I question every day whether or not I deserve it, whether or not I'm good enough, whether or not I—it's hard to block out the negativity, even when, you know, the reception for the movie has been overwhelmingly positive.

And, you know, I think I'm a fairly benign public figure on the internet, and most people seem to either like me or ignore me. But there are still a lot of people who are deeply obsessed with hating me too, online. And I need to step away, ultimately. I think that's the answer, but it is such an addiction that I have.

**John Moe:** Social media or—?

**Joel Kim Booster:** Social media, for sure. Twitter, especially. I mean, Twitter—I have like way too much access to what people think of me. But you know, it's funny. I was talking about this with Bowen recently. We were commiserating, and he's done a much better job of disengaging. I think because he is actually famous and has to deal with it on a much larger scale than I do. And he pointed something out to me that I didn't really think about and fully

agree with it, which is that I've been looking now at the commentary about me for the last couple of years. I know exactly every single reason why someone hates me now. There's like five reasons. There's like five lanes that people slot into for different reasons, why they hate me. And none of it's original anymore. So, like when I go to look for it, it's like—I rarely come across a take about me, a negative take about me, that surprises me anymore. Because they are all sort of—you know, they fit into one of those five lanes. And so, we talked. He told me that. He sort of like pushed me in that direction, and we came to that conclusion, and I was like—

It was honestly like a really freeing conclusion, because I was like, “Oh yeah, I do. Like, they don't say anything new. There aren't more than, you know, these like five or six reasons why people find me detestable.” And so, it's been helpful, and I think I am getting closer and closer to just sort of disengaging and like taking back some power and not giving so much of it away online.

**John Moe:** Why do you go looking for these things?

**Joel Kim Booster:** I don't know! I think like if you knew people were talking about you, wouldn't you want to know what they were saying if you had access to it? Like, if you knew for a fact that people were discussing you, I'm the type of person who just sort of like—I can't resist knowing. And like, I do a really good job of not engaging with it. Like, I rarely if ever do. But it's like—and I seldom adjust course when I do read negativity about myself. Like, I don't let it affect the way in which I go about my work or anything like that, but it still does like—I don't know, I mean, it certainly affects me. And it's so funny, my boyfriend can even tell at this point. Like, he can see me from across the room and he'll be like, “Stop.” Because just like the look on my face looking at my phone, he knows when I'm like on Twitter or something like that or reading the YouTube comments.

**John Moe:** Yeah, yeah. No, I have never been to the Amazon page that sells my book, and I've never been to the Goodreads page that talks about my book.

**Joel Kim Booster:** You are a better man than I! Because I think I've read almost every single letterbox review of my movie. Or at least—actually, no. I've read almost every negative letterbox review of my movie. I scroll past the numerous 4- and 5-star reviews.

**John Moe:** Why!? Why don't you read those?

**Joel Kim Booster:** I rarely will read the positivity. And in fact, I'm so crazy that like I will often be like, “Oh, someone's a fan of mine? They have terrible taste.” (*Giggles.*)

**John Moe:** Oh no!

**Joel Kim Booster:** Like, I am convinced that—I don't know. That's not true.

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But it is like—there are these moments where I'm like, “Oh, okay, this person likes me, who cares? Like, that's not interesting to me.” I am fascinated by people who hate me. And then like it is sometimes helpful though, because I'll read a bad review or listen to like a podcast that's discussing the movie or something or me or something that I've done. And sometimes, oftentimes, I will have this moment where I'm like, “Oh, wait, this person is really stupid.”

*(They chuckle.)*

Like, oh, they missed the point completely, or they missed this completely or some version of that. And I'll be like, “Oh. Okay, then I don't—this doesn't matter anymore.” And so like sometimes that is helpful, but there are plenty of smart people who hate me too.

**John Moe:** *(Laughs.)* There must be some dopamine pellet somewhere in the searching for the bad reviews.

**Joel Kim Booster:** Somewhere, yeah. Oh, for sure. Well, there is, because there's a part of me that's like, *(smugly)* “Mm. I'm still killing it. Yeah. *(Chuckles.)* Like, no matter how much it upsets you, like I'm still going to post this *Deadline* article about a script I just sold.” You know? And so, that part feels good. I don't know that I need, like I said, necessarily to see it all laid out in front of me anymore. I'm getting slowly to that point where I just, you know, I know. I have now categorized it all and I know.

**John Moe:** Are you in therapy?

**Joel Kim Booster:** Yes, actually, I just started last year with a gay Asian therapist—male therapist. And it has been so fantastic, I gotta say. I loved—I have had really great relationships with most of my therapists in the past. They have all been White, though. And some have been queer, but either—I think the one queer therapist I've had was a woman and White. And all helpful in their own ways, but I have found that with the gay Asian guy, there's just like—we started at level five, you know? Like, there was just so much at the beginning that I did not have to unpack for him or explain to him about my experience and about my neuroses and about just my life. And it's been really, really helpful. There's just a shorthand there that hasn't existed with any of my therapists in the past.

And so, yeah, it's been really—that has been really helpful. It has honestly been the most—it's the first time I've ever gone to therapy when I don't necessarily have something to talk about and not cancelled the appointment instead.

**John Moe:** Interesting. And it sounds like you're making some great progress there.

**Joel Kim Booster:** Yeah, you could say that. I hope so. I mean, I'm—you know, I haven't left Twitter yet, but that'll be the real trophy.

**John Moe:** Yeah. But enough disapproving looks from your boyfriend across the room might make a difference at some point.

Well, Joel Kim Booster, I'm so heartened by your openness and your self-awareness. And I continue to be such a big fan of your work and of you as a human being. And thanks for being with us again.

**Joel Kim Booster:** Thank you. Yeah, no, I felt like—(*chuckles*) when I got the request to come back, I was like I really do need to do this, because I'm so fearful for the people who thought maybe I hadn't dug myself out of that hole. I actually couldn't finish the episode. I haven't listened to it in its entirety. It's really painful for me to listen to it. And I sound crazy. (*Chuckles.*) Like, I just—it's really... Yeah, so I was really excited to come back on at this stage of my life and where I'm at right now and just hopefully—you know, a lot of people reached out and were like, “I am in this place with you.” And I hope for those people that are listening to this episode now are similarly on a similar trajectory and are out of it with me now too.

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

**John Moe:** You sounded more dead then, and you sound way more alive today.

**Joel Kim Booster:** (*Laughs.*) I'm glad to hear it.

**John Moe:** My thanks to Joel Kim Booster for talking and for getting help. Before we go, I want to remind you once again to be part of *Depresh Mode*, part of getting the show out into the world where it is helping people. If you've never been a MaxFun member, you can try it out at just \$5 a month. You know, pick a level that works for you. Maybe it's five bucks a month. And at that level, you can enjoy the 600+ hours of bonus content from all the shows on Maximum Fun, including *Depresh Mode*. If you're already a member and you'd like to support a little bit more, we would certainly appreciate you upgrading your membership or even boosting it by a few dollars per month. You can go online to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join).

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You can check out the different thank you gifts that we have available, including the enamel pin that says, “I'm glad you're here.” It doesn't even have the name of the show on it, just “I'm glad you're here”. You'll know what show that pin represents. And everyone who sees it will have a better day, because they saw it. There are all sorts of gifts available at [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). Check out the new Maximum Bag! That's at the \$35 level. It's just this huge, huge bag and it says “Maximum Bag” on it. It's a very big bag! So, go look around, join, upgrade, or boost while you're there. We need to hear from you. We need to keep this show going, folks. We need to be helping people, and you can be a huge part of that. [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join).

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Hi, credits listeners. [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). *Depresh Mode* is made possible by your contributions! Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, “Building Wings”. *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I’m John Moe. [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). Bye now!

**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*

**Stacey:** This is Stacey from Minneapolis. My therapist told me that the best thing you can do when you're feeling anxious is to give yourself a silent wolf howl, like this. (*Howls on a whisper.*) It does make me feel a little crazy in public. But who isn’t crazy in public?

*(Music fades out.)*

**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!