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John Moe: A note to our listeners, this episode contains discussion of suicide and violence against children.

You have to be careful not to judge a person too much on traumatic events in their past, including if the events took place before that person was even born. Yes, those events may be phenomenally huge, but a person is made up of all sorts of experiences—happy, sad, significant. You live long enough, yeah, there's going to be some door dings and rust patches on the car that is your life. You can't define a person by one thing. Granted. Understood. Of course, you shouldn't dismiss. Something huge and traumatic that happened in a person's life, either, or before a person's life.

Generational trauma, or intergenerational trauma, or transgenerational trauma—that's a real thing. What happened to your parents helped shape who they became. And that parent, molded in part by that trauma—well, they made you and all the genetic and environmental factors that turned you into who you are. And again, it might not define a person, but it shouldn't be ignored either. In summary—the big trauma, it isn't everything, but it is something. And therefore, knowing all this, let us proceed.

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

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Liz Miele is a very funny New York comedian who has appeared on Comedy Central and NPR's *Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me*. She headlines at comedy clubs around the country and has released several specials which you can watch on YouTube. Her latest is called *Murder Sheets*.

Clip:

Liz Miele (*Murder Sheets*): I have one rule in my life. I have exactly one rule I try to live by. I'm not allowed to do edibles. Yeah, I've had it for ten years. I break it every year.

(Laughter.)

The main reason for that rule is mental illness runs in both sides of my family. So, when I freak out—like, when I freak out on drugs, it is generations of paranoia. It is a family tree of conspiracy theories. It is a double helix of crazy. So, it isn't like, “Oh no, the cops are coming.” It's like, “Oh god. I think I started Scientology.”

(Laughter.)

John Moe: Liz's comedy involves a lot of storytelling, and it tends to be really personal. She really opens up. Liz tells a lengthy story in the *Murder Sheets* special that involves her cat, her brother, taxidermy, lamps, and awkward moments involving her freezer. It's pretty dark and oddly moving and very funny. At some point in this interview, Liz Miele is going to mention some trauma that happened before she was even born. It does not define who she is, but it shouldn't be dismissed either.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Liz Miele, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Liz Miele: Hi! Thanks for having me.

John Moe: How are you today?

Liz Miele: Better?

(They laugh.)

Um.

John Moe: That's a loaded word.

Liz Miele: Yeah. I mean, it's truthful. I was—I actually—two things. I went through a depressive episode like a month and a half ago and had to get ready to do a three week European tour. And I was like I don't want to get out of bed, let alone go to a new city every day. And it feels very weird to complain about a dream. You know what I mean? Getting to go to different countries and—but it's—A) it's very hard. You're in a new—literally you're on a plane or a train every day in a new city doing an hour every night. And it would be hard even if I wasn't already burnt out and going through a depressive episode. So—and I was already exhausted. So, I started to feel a little bit better in the middle of it. And then now that I'm home, I don't know if—I don't know if I discovered a tactic, but maybe making your life harder while you're depressed is—

(John laughs.)

Oh, you know what I mean? Like, almost like a mom tactic. Like, “I'll give you something to be depressed about.” Like, I truly just feel better being home. And I'm still very jet lagged, but I wasn't sure how long this was gonna last. And I was like anticipating it being much worse. So, I'm like weirdly in a place of relieved, even though I'm still kinda coming out of it, and I am very tired.

John Moe: Were you going to non-English speaking places in Europe?

Liz Miele: For sure. I mean, nobody's coming to see me that doesn't speak English, but—yeah, I was everywhere. I was—Turkey, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland.

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I'm trying to think of the non-English ones. But you know, everything.

John Moe: How is the Turkish standup scene these days? (*Chuckles.*)

Liz Miele: It was awesome!

John Moe: Was it?

Liz Miele: It was—first of all, yeah, so I did a military tour in Izmir. So, it's not the same, because you're not performing for locals, but I just loved Turkey. Like, I just—it's cats everywhere. It's beautiful. I love the food. People are really nice. And then when I had the opportunity to do Istanbul—which is like, to me, marketed as like a cat haven, I was like, “I have to go.” And it didn't let me down. It was awesome. Just, it was so much fun. The audiences were super appreciative. I think they're slowly building up their scene to have more English-speaking comedy. So, this booker in particular just had Daniel Sloss and Jimmy Carr, but he flat out said, “We don't have a lot of women coming out here, especially English speaking.” And like they wanted to kind of build up—and I mean that it was—I have a pretty good mix of fans, but this was like—it was predominantly women in the audience. And they were super excited, and I was like, oh, this feels nice. Like—

John Moe: Oh, that's great.

Liz Miele: Yeah. It was awesome.

John Moe: Yeah. Well, it's interesting that traveling around and doing the work, you were able to climb out of that episode. Because for a lot of people, I think travel is a trigger. Like, you're away from everything you know. You're away from, you know, your people, your pets, your home. And that—just all the mental work that goes into traveling, especially if there are language issues, can be really triggering for a lot of people. But it pulled you out somehow.

Liz Miele: I think because it's connected to work, and I felt like 1) I didn't want to let my fans down, and I take great pride in showing up. And at the end of the day, I just have to show up for an hour. You know what I mean? Like, not to say that rallying for an hour is easy, but in the scheme of things—if I was a mom, or had a 9 to 5, or had—you know, was in charge of multiple employees, that's your whole day that you have to like put on a face and figure it out. I just have to figure it—I just have to get on my plane, check into my hotel, and figure it out for an hour. And because I care, and it's important to me, I can fake it until you make it a little bit. And then I also like kind of had a like a come to Jesus talk. I talked to my boyfriend about it. I talked to my friend who was opening for me, and I was like, “I'm not okay, but I'm logical enough to know that this is an opportunity, and I'm going to make the best of it.” I am in many cities I've never been before. I am very fortunate to be somebody—

Like, up until I brought my mom to London with me six years ago, she had never left the country before—both my parents. Many of my siblings have never left the country. Like, just

to even go and see other cultures, let alone have people be excited to see you and have your trip pretty much paid for is a luxury. And so, I think even at my lowest, I can be like, “This is a pretty good life for how shitty you feel.” (*Laughs.*) You know what I mean? Like.

John Moe: Yeah. What does a depressive episode look like for you?

Liz Miele: You know, it's interesting. It depends on what sparked it. So, I've had ones that just feel like they came out of nowhere, and they're not triggered by anything. This one was triggered by work. I actually put a video out about a week ago kind of about it. But basically, I put my special out on YouTube a month ago, and then 48 hours later, it got flagged for hate speech. I was as surprised as you are. So, I asked for a human review, and at 51 minutes and 30 seconds, they said I will continue to have limited ads because of what I said. And I was so confused. And I call my cat the C word.

(*John “oh”s.*)

And they consider that hate speech, but like how me and everybody else has felt is like, 1) I don't know if it could be hate speech if you call your cat that. 2) All cats are c words.

(*John chuckles.*)

And 3) it's a comedy special, and most of the rules—and they don't say anything. They just changed the rules recently to clarify what hate speech is. Even in the new clarification that came out a couple weeks after I put my special out, it still doesn't list the c word! So, it's just like—so, you know, I tried to get my ads back, I bleeped it. I did all this stuff, because it affects me financially, because I self-produce everything. You know, this is all like an algorithm. So, the algorithm is saying hate speech is into this. So, we're going to give you limited ads, and we're going to stop showing it to you. Because they're treating me truly like a bad person, and they don't want to spread my stuff.

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So, it's limiting my reach. It's limiting my revenue. And I have twice as many fans as I did a year ago, and I'm getting a third of the views on something I worked really hard on, and I was proud of. And I was just—it just set me down. I do love what I do, and I am really proud of it. And this business is up and down. It is never consistent, and the highs are just as deep as the lows. But I actually do a pretty good job at managing them, and I feel like all my therapy has really helped me manage the constant up and down. But this one just felt like a gut punch, and I think mentally after like being like, “It's gonna be okay. It's gonna be okay.” Like, all these little ups and downs, this deep down, it just—my whole brain was like, “Nope, I'm sad.” And it just—

I thought I could feel it coming, but I was like, nah, I can get through this. And then I just started crying every day. (*Laughs.*) And I was like oh no. I was like oh no! It's happening! And I haven't had... I don't think I've had a depressive episode in two years. And it definitely—I think it also felt like it was more witnessed. Because the last one was during the pandemic, where it was just like, “I'm sad. I'll just keep that to myself, and I'll figure it out.” I

told my therapist; I told like friends. But it didn't feel—I didn't have to do anything. I literally—it was February of like 2021, I think, or maybe 2022. No, February 2022. And it's just like the Delta variant came out. Nobody's doing anything. And I don't know, I think the added pressure of like I have things to do, and I have a boyfriend, I've only been dating for 10 months. And I remember telling him like, “Hey, I'm not okay, and I'm scared for you to see that.” You know, especially as somebody that like—you know, he's seen me talk about it in like clips and stuff, but it's a new relationship, and you don't know how people handle the...

John Moe: The tougher side. Yeah.

Liz Miele: Yeah! And I don't even want to say it's the worst side of me, because I don't think it's the worst side of me. It's just the—

John Moe: Yeah. It's just a different side, I guess.

Liz Miele: Yeah. And it's... it's one that I've had to do a lot of work about accepting. And most of my friends I've had for 20/30 years, and they've seen every version of me. So, it's weird to be kind of sideswiped by my feelings and have to like reintroduce a version of myself to somebody.

John Moe: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I know you have a history of panic attacks as well. Do those happen around the depressive episodes, or are they completely different phenomena?

Liz Miele: For me, I feel like they're—I mean, it kind of depends. Like, I feel like I've had more panic attacks than depressive episodes. Weirdly, my life is split down the middle of like before I was on—actually, when I was on birth control, because I was on birth control since I was 16, to afterwards. And I've gotten less depressive episodes and like less depressive—so, less episodes, less severe, and less long episodes since I went off birth control. And it wasn't until years after I went off—because I've been off I think 11 years. More studies came out a couple years after I went off it, saying that depression is linked to birth control. And it's usually like you have a history of it, or somehow you're already predisposed to it, and it makes it worse. And I would say I'm definitely, with my family, predisposed to it.

But because I was on birth control for so long, I was like—when they came, they were scary, because I could have them for years. And they could be much more difficult. And I also think I spent much of my life being in a low hum depression. And now, being off birth control, not having this low hum depression in general, they're just not as bad. Like, it sounds a little weird to say, but my depression is way more manageable post birth control. And maybe because I even experienced the worst version of it, but they're just less intense and less scary.

But my panic attacks have been pretty consistent throughout my life. And the only difference is—that other kind of down the middle is when I used to do drugs, and now I don't do drugs. Because I truly found out I can't smoke weed anymore. ‘Cause my brain is like, “Weed is panic attack time!” (*Chuckles.*) And so—

John Moe: “We're throwing a party!”

Liz Miele: Yeah. And I don't want to be at that party. That's not a party I want to be at. So, weed when I was younger actually really calmed my anxiety and was like one of the first moments I remember—I don't even know if I felt like myself. I just felt less like on edge, and I couldn't—

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You know, I didn't know I was self-medicating, but somewhere in my 20s weed was just like, “No, we're going to do the opposite!” And I still feel like there's not a lot of literature on why some people go from it being a calming thing to being a panic thing when nothing has changed, other than maybe I have more responsibilities.

John Moe: How often do you get the panic attacks?

Liz Miele: It's so weird, because I had one on stage in November. And before that, I had one while driving maybe a year earlier. So, it's gotten down to maybe once a year in the last couple of years. But I would say I used to get them every couple of months, often while driving and alone and at night. Like, there was something about just truly my mind wandering while doing long drives late at night, and it would just trigger. And it's like I feel like I can't pull over. I'm a young woman on the road at one in the morning, and I'm scared, and I feel this fear that's not based in reality. But I can't get myself out of it. So, one of the tools I had learned because that happened so often was just to call a friend. Not even tell them what's happening, because I don't need to be calmed by something I know isn't real. I just need to get out of my head.

So, I would often like call my little sister who's in LA and be like, “Hey, we haven't caught up in a while. Can you tell me about what's going on?”

And she would be like, “Absolutely. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.” And just asking her questions and focusing on her would kind of take me out of my mindset. And it would like calm me. And because of doing that, it really helped me when I had this panic attack on stage, which I've never had on stage before—knowing that breathing exercises—and I don't know—I'm sure that helps for other people, but it's never helped for me. I just needed to distract myself. And that's kind of like how I was able to get out of it and continue my set.

John Moe: Wow, where and when did that panic attack on stage happen? And like, what did it feel like?

Liz Miele: So, it happened—it was the weekend of Thanksgiving. So, I was with my family, and then I was in Baltimore. Because my mom was actually in the audience when it happened. So, I started my set, and I got triggered. I messed up a joke. I messed up my first joke, which is a little like disorienting. But I was like, “Hey guys, sorry.” And then I went into the next joke, and I messed it up again. And then I finally just stopped and was like, “Hey, I'm not okay. And I need a second.” And it's an audience, it's a sold-out show of my fans. And they're all very nice, and they're like sure.

And when I took the second and looked up, a full—like, my whole body got hot, and all of a sudden I could just feel myself freaking out and getting scared and getting overwhelmed. So, then I know to call it. So, I did say like, “Hey, guys, I'm having a panic attack. I just need—just give me a little bit more time.” They started cheering. I was like, “Absolutely not. Please don't do that.”

(They chuckle.)

Like, I can't. That's—I cannot. And I was like, “Just, it's going to be weird. Just give me a second.” And I remember looking at my set list, it almost like melting. I was like, oh, that's not going to ground me. *(Laughs.)* And I just had this moment where I was like I have to—I can't do my old stuff, because it's too rooted in my brain. I should—what I normally do is I'll do new stuff at the end, but I was—I just kind of was like I'm going to do new. And I told him exactly what I was doing. I was like, “Hey, I need to just do new stuff, try things out, kind of be a little bit more loose. It's going to be a little stumbly, but just let me see if I can get myself out of this.”

And I did, and I was shaky. My voice was shaky. My hands were shaky. They were very generous. I'm not delivering it nearly to the ability I could. But after about the second joke, I started to like get back into it and feel good. They're laughing. And then I was able to kind of turn around and get back into the older stuff. So, I mean, some of that is 100% the audience getting it.

Because, you know, I had a couple of fans come up to me afterwards and be like, “You know, you've always talked about anxiety. It's always made me feel better. But I don't—” Because I was apologizing to people. And they're like, “You have nothing to apologize about.”

But it's hard for—I base a lot of my stuff on professionalism. And in the moment, I didn't give myself the leniency of somebody that's, let's say, sick or however you want to describe it. I just—I presented it as I messed up my job. And it took me probably a while to process that and be like I don't have anything to apologize for. On top of the fact that that happened five minutes in, and then afterwards I did a full hour. And that is a hard thing to do. It's a hard thing to do when you just feel tired, let alone feel triggered—

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—and have a panic attack. So, I think probably weeks to months later, I started to... not pat myself on the back, but be proud of like all the past experiences were what made me able to handle it when it was a public panic attack, because I've had so many private ones.

John Moe: Right. Right. Yeah. You leaned into what you knew. Was that from therapy, or more from just the wisdom of having experienced this so many times?

Liz Miele: I would say the panic attack has been mostly experience. Like, depression has definitely been therapy and all the work my therapist has helped me do and stuff like that. I think with panic attacks, because—you know, she's not on speed dial. *(Chuckling.)* You know what I mean? She has clients and a life. I've processed them a little bit after the fact and

talked about them and figured out sometimes why I was more susceptible at this moment, you know, and why they happened at certain moments. But the actual getting through them has always been probably 90% myself, sometimes 10% whoever I'm talking to or who I was with or whatever. Like, I used to have Xanax on me. And I've only used Xanax I think twice, like when I really was like, oh, I can't do this on my own. But I'm out of Xanax, (*laughs*) and I probably should—I've always kept it—like, I've always kept like five in my purse as like a safety net. Like, you know, like a—

John Moe: Yeah, break glass kind of thing.

Liz Miele: Yeah, yeah. Break glass in case head falls off. So, 1) I'm out, and I probably should go at least get a few just to have. And like I said, I've been dealing with this for probably—I think I've been having panic attacks since I was in elementary school, if I'm honest. And I just didn't have the understanding or the language or clearly the experience to know what they were until I was probably in my 20s. But I've had every one, from ones that feel triggered by something that's happened outside, to something that's internally triggered it, to just they happen for no reason, that like I feel like I've experienced each kind of one, and each kind of experience that I just kind of—trial and error against my own will to figure it out.

John Moe: What did you call them or what did you think they were when you were a kid and would get them?

Liz Miele: I thought they were nerves. So, I think they started when I was a gymnast, 'cause I did gymnastics meets. And I had these Polish and Russian coaches that were not nice. I remember this like tiny Polish woman hit me, and I was like, “Hey, I get hit at home! Like, I don't—like, this is supposed to be fun!” Like, I was like, “What are we doing here?” But they were relentless, and they were mean. And I felt the pressure of performance and doing a good job. And I was just raised, as you can kind of probably tell, like you sign your name to everything, you always show up 100%.

My dad would drop me off at gymnastics and was like, “Go give 100%.” And it's like—I think there's a lot of pride I have into anything I do. And I think that shows, but I also think there's this undue pressure from a 9-year-old to an almost 40-year-old now that I sometimes can't let go of. And I think when I was—you know, I would get really nervous or overwhelmed or really—like, now I know this whole body getting hot is like the beginning of it. That would happen while I'm on a balance beam, and I would fall, and I wouldn't—and I would be shaking, and I wouldn't know how to like—

You know, I don't know if I would be able to, even today, rebalance myself on a balance beam in the middle of a panic attack. So, I don't know what I was expecting from nine-year-old me. But knowing what it is and just calling it for what it is takes the edge off so much that I don't—I mean, I probably quit gymnastics when I was 14 because of those panic attacks, not knowing that's what they were.

John Moe: Yeah. You got hit at home?

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We'll find out more about that after the break.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with comedian Liz Miele. We've been talking about depressive episodes, panic attacks, and she mentioned as an aside that she got hit at home. So, I had to follow up on that one.

You got hit at home?

Liz Miele: Yeah, I would say it was like... I love my mom. My mom's one of my favorite people, and I don't judge my mom whatsoever. But she had five kids, and she worked a full-time job, and she was stressed. And when she couldn't handle things, that was—she got us to listen, I'll tell you that much. (*Laughs.*)

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So, I—as somebody that doesn't have kids, I don't even think I'm in the position to judge. But I don't judge my mom at all. And I very much—as I become very close with my mom, I... nobody in my family handles stress well, and I don't think I'll ever be in a position to feel as helpless and stressed as my mom did when we were kids.

John Moe: What kind of—? Was it just a smack on the butt or what kind of—?

Liz Miele: My mom threw things the most. That was my mom's—yeah, so my mom threw a lot of stuff at us. I would say that the hits were more sparing, and they were actually more driven towards my brothers. And often it was me and my sister getting in the way to prevent that, because they were younger. And it was bursts. Like, we had—there's holes in the walls. I remember our old kitchen like a scene from a movie. Like, there were holes by the phone that was on the wall, there was holes almost by every entrance. And we all have like a dark sense of humor, so people would buy her these kitschy like, you know, home—you know, like those kind of “home is where the heart is”, but it would have something kind of cynical on it. And they would—they covered up all the holes.

And it wasn't until my parents were selling the house like six years ago that my dad patched it. Because he was like, “Why am I patching up these holes? She's just going to make more holes.” So, like there were just signs hanging in front of these holes of when my mom would get angry. And you know, when I was younger, I was really scared of my mom, because I didn't understand it, and I didn't know. And you know, sometimes my dad would call and give us a heads up, like, “Your mom had a bad day at work, maybe clean the house.” But like, first of all, we're kids. And second of all, she's not mad about the house being not clean. And she's not really mad about work. I think she felt out of control, and she didn't know how to express herself. And you know, I feel bad for the walls and some of the plates that we no longer have.

But I don't know, I started to really try to understand my mom in my 20s, and I think as I've gotten older and closer with my mom—I don't know, I feel I more bad that she went through

that alone than judging how she reacted to it. Because I am very similar to my mom, and I don't think I would have done a better job. (*Laughs.*)

John Moe: Well, I watched your special *Murder Sheets*, and it is great.

(*Liz thanks him.*)

And thank you for making it. Because I am who I am and host the show that I do, I noticed that you mentioned your family having mental health issues on both sides. And then you kind of jump off that statement and move on to something else. What was the story with your family on both sides?

Liz Miele: So, I do have other jokes about it. So, I talk about it more. I talk about a little—I actually talk a little bit about the abuse at the end of the *Ghost of Academic Future*, which came out last year. And then I talk about my brother's bipolar one in *Self-Help Me*, which is two years before that. So, there's—if you—that's not your homework, but there is a layer of like—

John Moe: (*Chuckling.*) The catalog gets to it.

Liz Miele: Truly every single special, I talk—I gained more confidence and talk about it more and more. But both my grandmothers were mentally ill and in and out of mental hospitals, and both committed suicide. And then my—you know, my parents, I think it's hard to say when somebody's undiagnosed. But I feel like it's probably a combination of the trauma of having mentally ill parents and probably growing up in the '50s. I think that's its own trauma. (*Laughs.*) And then—

John Moe: (*Inaudible*) to suicide too.

Liz Miele: Truly, truly. And young. I think my dad was probably 19, and my mom was probably 20.

(*John “oof”s sympathetically.*)

And then my brother, Sam, got diagnosed with bipolar one when he was 19. And so, that was probably 11 years ago, and he was in and out of mental hospitals for probably about five years. He's doing great now, but it was—my parents—my mom really didn't talk about her mom that much, and my dad talked about the mental illness a little bit. But it was always like very surface talk about this, and just I always had an awareness that it was in my family, and it was something to be worried about. But when my brother started having these psychotic breaks, it was the first time both my parents started to explicitly talk about memories. And I think because, you know, mental health in the '50s and '60s wasn't the best, my dad didn't really know what was wrong with his mom. And clearly, it now looks like his mom probably did have bipolar one.

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Because like the episodes my brother were having, my dad was like, “That's how my mom would act.” So, I think it was incredibly triggering when my brother was going in and out of mental hospitals. I was very much the voice of reason often, because you have these two people that are truly gutturally making a response, not wanting him to go into the hospital, because that's where bad things happened to their parents. And me being like, “Hey, man, he isn't right, and he needs help.”

John Moe: Yeah. He's sick. You need to go to the doctor when you're sick.

Liz Miele: Yeah! And truly having to like—and being scared, because when my brother was in psychotic breaks, he wasn't himself. And my brother's the kindest, funniest, sweetest man you'll meet. And when he was having psychotic breaks, he was scary, and he was mean. And my parents were like, “Well, he would never hurt us.”

And I was like, “He would never hurt you guys, but this different version of him could, and you aren't basing your decisions in who he is right now.” And it was a really—you know, and he hated being in those hospitals, and I would visit him every weekend, and it was a horrible time for my entire family. But this—I also don't know if we would have recognized it as early if it wasn't something that our family was predisposed to. And also, you know, my parents have jobs, they have health insurance. Sam was 19 to about 25, so he was under my parents' health insurance. Like, there's a lot of things that we can be grateful for, because we were on top of it, I guess you could say.

John Moe: You got thrust into the role of caretaker for your siblings. 'Cause you're—are you the second of five?

Liz Miele: I'm the second of five, but my older sister was an even better gymnast. And she had a—she went to a gym that was like an hour away in high school. So, she was kind of always gone. And I kind of got pushed into the older sister role.

John Moe: So, what did that entail, taking care? It was three younger brothers then?

Liz Miele: So, I have a younger sister who's five years younger, and then Sam is nine years younger, and Greg is 11 years younger. So, it was a lot of babysitting, a lot of laundry, cooking. Nobody really cooked, a lot of microwaving. We did some extreme microwaving. Yeah, I was my mom's kind of right hand, you know, daughter. I feel like it was put on me to make sure that everything got done and everything was okay and that my mom was okay and that my siblings went to bed. And my mom's thanked me. I don't—you know, I think my mom, again, was in survival mode. I think my dad was just—you know, he had five kids, and he's just trying to make sure everybody eats.

So, I think everybody felt like they were doing their role. And I don't feel like I had a childhood in a lot of ways. But I also—and maybe that's why I kind of got into comedy, which is like, “I'm going to be a child forever!”

(They chuckle.)

Like, you know, as somebody that kind of decorates like this—

John Moe: But in bars, talking to strangers.

(They chuckle.)

Liz Miele: Yeah, yeah. But there is—I've made sure that I haven't completely—like, I think therapy has really helped, because I think there was a little bit of stagnation in my growth and fighting authority and fighting having a traditional life. And while I still kind of feel that way, I think there's a way to do it and not be stunted about it. And I think I was a little bit like, “I'm going to do the complete opposite,” because I had a very responsible, labor-intensive childhood. But yeah, I mean, I've never wanted to have kids. I never want to have kids. I have two kids. My brothers both live in New York, and I feel very responsible for them. But I've also—you know, they're adults, they're doing their thing. But I do pick up the phone pretty fast. *(Laughs.)*

John Moe: Yeah, I bet. So, were you then kind of a people pleaser? Were you putting other people in front of your own needs from that experience?

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: More about people pleasing right after the break. I hope you like it.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We're back with comedian Liz Miele. Before the break, I had asked if she was a people pleaser, putting other people's needs way in front of her own.

Liz Miele: I'd like to think I'm a recovering people pleaser, but I still fall into it. I still struggle with it. I still feel bad when I set boundaries. But yeah, I don't think I realized how intense of a people pleaser I was, because that's also where I got my self-esteem from. You know, my parents would be like, “Thank you so much. Oh, you did such a great job. Oh, we couldn't have done that without Liz.” And it feels good, you know. But then you don't realize that you start to become resentful or angry or that you're not even attuned to your own needs, let alone advocating for them. And that—I think some of the biggest work I did in therapy was understanding why I was a people pleaser—

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—how I do it, the manipulation of it as well. Which is like you often do it because it's your way of kind of controlling the situation. And I don't want to manipulate the situation. I want somebody to show up, because they want to show up. And if they don't, that's information. And you know, you take it in, and you decide based on facts and not skewing things to guilt people or whatever it is that it sometimes feels like.

John Moe: I'm interested in how you got into comedy. Because you got into comedy really young, like 16. Was that—were you doing something similar to what your older sister was doing? Like, finding a way to get out of the house and travel far away to do something?

Liz Miele: I mean, that is a valid point. I think I just... I loved comedy so much. Like, I discovered it when I was like 12/13, and as soon as I discovered it, like something clicked. Like, it's—I don't know. Like, I loved funny movies. Like, I very much grew up with the pratfall Sandra Bullock phase, you know what I mean? I thought that's what I wanted to be. And then when I discovered standup, something just clicked. Because like I'm dyslexic, so I was writing, and I really loved writing. But I would never show anybody, because it's like chicken scratch, and it's not spelled right and what have you, and I was really embarrassed. And then when I saw stand up, it was like, oh, I can write, but nobody ever physically sees it. And I can be funny, and all the attention's on me—as like, you know, one of five.

And it just like—everything kind of aligned with like, what I wanted and what would make me feel special and how I wanted my attention to be, you know, seen. And I just—I don't know, I watched it as much as I could. I quoted it. I read books about it. You know, this is before podcasts and stuff. And so, you know, there's a few memoirs, there's a few like joke books, a few how-to books. But my learning and just my obsession with watching is just—I think it was healing in a time where I was really overwhelmed and scared and frustrated and lost. So, I think just liking something and laughing and the humor of it all was healing. And then when I started to think about doing it for me, like actually trying it, it was this goal that pulled me into a direction of safety. Like, it felt like I have a purpose, and I have a thing that's my own and something that I can control.

And what I really appreciate about—I mean, (*sighs*) I love art. Like, I don't know if you can see behind me. Like, I love buying art, collecting art. I just—I love weird art, it's like one of my favorite things. And I remember drawing when I was probably like eight and having an idea in my head and trying to put it on the paper, and it looked nothing like the paper and just being like, “Oh, I don't know how to draw.” But when I discovered standup, I was old enough to know that you're not just innately good at things. And reading these memoirs and reading these books, people being like, “Well, you gotta practice, and you have to get up more, and da-da-da-da. And it's not—it doesn't just happen.” I was old enough to know that it took work, and I was driven enough to be like I want to do this work.

And I feel fortunate that I discovered standup when I was mature enough to know the work that it would take and driven enough and passionate enough to do that work.

John Moe: Comedy, especially standup comedy, I always found to be—when I was a kid—to be so reassuring. Because it's not that it was predictable; it was full of surprises, but the format was like, okay, someone's going to get up. They're going to talk for a few minutes, they're going to tell a setup, and they're going to tell a punchline, and then they're going to move to the next thing. And then at the end of their set, they'll do some sort of callback to something earlier in their set. It was like the—understanding that format felt very safe, I think.

Liz Miele: Yeah. And it feels surmountable, like a skill. As opposed to, if you need to be tall for something, you feel like there's a limit of how far you can go with it. Like, I didn't feel... I

felt a little bit of a limit being truly a young girl, but nobody told me I couldn't, including my parents. And I feel very fortunate to have grown up when I grew up and how I grew up. And my parents have—you know, I'm not gonna say they weren't scared. I'm not gonna say they didn't put boundaries on it. I'm not gonna say they didn't, throughout the harder times try to convince me to get some kind of real job. I thought about—I went to college, and I thought about dropping out several times.

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And my dad would be like, “Please don't.” (*Laughs.*) But they never told me I couldn't, and they never told me I shouldn't, and they never got in the way. And even more so, you know, I borrowed my dad's car every weekend for years. For years. And then when I saved up money, I asked my dad if he'd help me buy a used car. I think I saved up almost \$5,000, and I just wanted him to like make sure I don't get like a piece of junk. And he actually surprised me, gave me the car that I had been borrowing for eight years and said, “Keep that money, 'cause it's going to break down. And use that for repairs and for gas and insurance.” And that was a game changer. Like, between—and between being able to borrow it every weekend was a game changer, but then having it was a game changer.

And that—those moments are like—you know, there's also times that my parents didn't like the jokes I was doing, but they never said I couldn't. You know, like I think there's a lot of things that I'm incredibly fortunate about when it comes to being a young person and a young woman doing something that most people don't understand and could be fearful of.

John Moe: Yeah. Do you talk to them about the material about your family before you present it? I mean, are they—do they get surprised? Do they veto any jokes?

Liz Miele: With my mom—my dad didn't watch me for years, because we did have a little bit of a tiff about how he responded to stuff. And I kind of said to him like, “Hey, this is my favorite thing. And if you can't even fake enjoying it and make me feel bad, then I think maybe you shouldn't come.”

And he was like, “I think you're right.” And so, for a while he didn't. And there's still stuff he doesn't like that I do, but he knows that like if he wants to be there, he has to like—you can't—you're not going to love everything I do. And so, I think there's been a lot of growth for both of us. So, there was a real like chunk of time my dad didn't see anything. And I didn't run it past him, because I didn't feel like he had the sense of humor or the openness to hear it. But my mom has always loved my stand up, loved coming to shows.

And I would ask her. I'd be like, “Hey, is it okay if I talk about this? Are you okay with this?” And she's only once told—I had a joke probably over 15 years ago. Because both my grandparents committed suicide, and that's actually how my parents met. And I had this joke that maybe that's how I'm going to meet my partner is through something really tragic. And I wasn't vivid about their experience. I was just very vivid about this tragic thing of how I was going to meet my partner.

And it was the only time that my mom was like, “I just really miss my mom. And that joke makes me sad.” And—sorry, but it was like, alright, I hear you. And I just—I threw it away.

Like, I don't ever want to hurt my parents. I don't want to hurt anybody. But I definitely don't want to make my mom sad. So, even with the jokes about my mom—you know, I always ask for permission, because I don't want to make her feel like a villain or make her feel bad. And my mom, she's so funny. She'll be like—"I'll just say it's some—I'll think it's somebody else's mom."

I was like, "We have the same face, and there's no other mom." It's not like I'm like, "My friend said—"

And she's like—it just doesn't bother her. My mom can see the performance aspect of it and the joke of it. And I think my mom knows I don't judge her, and I care about her.

So, with my brother—I've talked about my brother's, you know, mental illness and especially when he was better. It didn't help to talk to him when he wasn't better. But he always said like, "If it's funny, it's fine."

But you know, I also am very—like, my sister will tell me some good news, and I'll be like, "Have you told Mom? Or have you told blah-blah-blah?"

And she goes, "Not yet."

And I go, "Okay, let me know when you do, because that's not my news to share." Right? I don't want to break the news of some promotion or something like that, because that's not my news. But I do want to talk about it behind her back, right? Like, that's fun. (*Chuckles.*) But it's not my news to break. So, that's almost how I feel a little bit with standup is like these aren't my—some of these aren't my stories. Like, I have my sister perspective or my daughter perspective, but I do kind of ask permission sometimes. I won't say all the time, but most of the time, "Can I talk about this?" And if there's anything in it that they don't want me to share. But even like, I have a bunch of jokes about my boyfriend, and I just kind of am like, "You let me know what is okay and not okay."

John Moe: Yeah. Yeah. How did they meet in the wake of suicides? Was it a support group or something?

Liz Miele: No, I wish they went to a support group.

[00:45:00]

No, I'm still a little muddled on the story, but basically my dad's mother committed suicide. And then a year later, my mother's mother committed suicide, and he heard about it, because I think her roommate—he either dated her roommate or was friends with her roommate. And as somebody that had just gone through that—my dad's a very kind and empathetic person, and he just wanted to lend support since he was still in that space. And that's how they became friends and then eventually started seeing each other.

John Moe: Ohh, okay. So, we opened this conversation talking about this depressive episode that you had. And I'm so glad that you were able to kind of come up from those depths. Is

that something—when that happens, do you have the perspective of, “Oh my god, this is just life. This is reality. This is how it's always going to be”? Or do you think, “This is temporary. I've been through this before. It has a beginning and an end”?

Liz Miele: The second. I feel really fortunate. Like I said, they were much worse when I was younger and on birth control. And I've had enough post birth control that they've never been as bad. So, I even have like a degree of change that has given me even more perspective, because the older ones felt longer and endless. And I really do think I was in some kind of low-grade depression for probably 10, 15, 20 years. I don't even know.

John Moe: Dysthymia kind of thing.

Liz Miele: What is it called when you like disconnect? I always forget the word.

John Moe: Dissociation?

Liz Miele: I think I was dissociated for like 20 years.

(John “wow”s.)

I really felt like—who I am now compared to who I was as a teenager and in my 20s is so different. And when I started to learn about disassociation or even just like kind of low-grade depression, it just all started to click. Like, I remember I wrote this in a notebook probably like in my late 20s, because when I started to even learn about the mental illness in my family and learn about mental illness in general and learn about depression and anxiety, all these things that I started to have a name for—all these things about my personality that I thought were unique were just collateral damage. And it was like so disheartening to think you're original (*laughs*) and just realize that you're just kind of like symptoms of issues and trauma and, you know, whatever.

And it really bummed me out on a different level that when I started to feel better, I started to see some of those things fade, and I started to kind of get to know myself. And I am a pretty happy person, and I'm a really silly person, and I'm really an open person. And who I was—I just a very scared, sad person for so long. And I think what comedy did for me was help me discover that person even on a baby level, and then therapy helped me really flesh out and find myself and heal the stuff that—it just felt like a film, you know what I mean? Like, you ever like shower with like shitty soap, and it just—even with the water, it just feels weird?

John Moe: Working in a bakery, same thing.

Liz Miele: (*Laughs*) Yes. Or like, you know, people that like are fishmongers, and they just—that scent never goes away. Like, I felt uncomfortable all the time, but didn't have the words or the understanding and the experience or even the other feeling to know exactly what it was I was feeling. And I think drugs and alcohol were a way to at least not care, right? At the very least not care. But I don't—clearly, a temporary fix, and I didn't understand it. And I think as I've started to find myself, both on stage with standup, but—you know, off stage with books and psychology and therapy... I don't know. I just—I'm not scared when these things

happen. I'm sad. I'm like—it's like a weird level of like, “No, no, no! I'm so busy. Like, we don't have time for this!”

Like, that was borderline my reaction is like, “I have so much to do, and I don't have time to spend three hours trying to convince myself to get out of bed. Like, we don't have time for this!”

John Moe: I can't schedule in a depressive episode right now.

Liz Miele: It's like, ugh, guys! This isn't—can we do this in July when I'm not touring?! Like, ugh! So, it's like—I think there's this like weird watching myself from the outside frustration and like weird sadness about my depression, which is unhelpful. I have so much experience with my own life, with my friends, with my family, that I know the talking points. I know—I even know the life.

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So, I'm annoyed, I'm sad, I'm stressed. But you know, I reach out to my friends. I started talking to my therapist more. I told people what was going on. I, you know, drank more coffee. (*Laughs.*) Like, you know, you find the other drugs you can utilize. So, I feel somewhat fortunate that I... and I know I have a game plan.

John Moe: Well, that's great. The special is *Murder Sheets*. We've been talking—and it's available on YouTube, and you can hear the bleeps that we spoke about. (*Chuckles.*) And we've been talking with Liz Miele. Liz, thank you so much for your time.

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

Liz Miele: Aw, thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

John Moe: There is a lot of Liz Miele standup on YouTube. Search for her. Miele is spelled M-I-E-L-E. Or you could just check the title of this episode you're listening to right now on the podcast app that you're using. Our show exists because people donate to it. That's the whole business model. We don't load it up with a bunch of other things. We ask people to listen to the show, and if they like it, to send us a few bucks. So, hey, won't you please send us a few bucks? It's really easy to do. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join. MaximumFun.org/join. Figure out how many bucks a month you can swing—that's up to you—and then select *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows. If you've already done this, thank you very much. Be sure to hit subscribe. Give us five stars. Write rave reviews. That helps get the show out into the world.

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people commiserating, people making discoveries, and making friends. Hooray for friends. Please use our electric mail address, DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. History is important. Our family traumas are our history, but history is not destiny. *Depresh Mode* is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We got 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. 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

Danny: Hey, this is Danny from Los Angeles. You're doing the best you can, so keep it up.

(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!