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John Moe: A note to our listeners: this episode contains discussions of abuse and violence against children.

I'll let you in on a secret. It doesn't matter that the guests on this program are sometimes famous people. I mean, yeah, it comes in handy sometimes for us in that more people are more likely to click on a name that they know. So, that's good for business. And these folks have often been interviewed before. So, they're skilled at telling a story, at being interviewed. But at the end of the day, we're all just people—me, you, the guests, everyone. We've all had ups and downs and wins and losses. And hopefully by the end of the interview, you'll feel that and maybe pick up a thing or two that are useful.

Here's what we're going to do this week. I'm going to tell you about the guest. He is famous. Then I'll do the thing where I say the name of the show, and we play the music. And while that music plays, here's what I want you to do. I want you to forget everything I told you about the guest, the person I told you about just a few seconds ago. Alright? Okay? So, listen to this, and get ready to forget it.

Paul Scheer is an actor, writer, producer, and podcast maker. He's a big deal in the world of comedy. Paul was one of the stars of *The League* on FX and *Black Monday* on Showtime. He was on *Veep*, *Fresh Off the Boat*, *Best Week Ever*. He's been cohosting the hit podcast, *How Did This Get Made*, for the last 14 years. Paul's done a ton of work with Upright Citizens Brigade, the hugely influential theatre and school that was a launching pad for more comedy stars than I have time to mention here.

Okay, now get ready to forget everything I just told you about Paul. It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: I know lots of people, like you probably do. There's this one friend of mine, Paul. He lives in California. He's married. He has a couple kids. He's self-employed, mostly just does a lot of freelance work. He does some work at the TV studios and movie studios. You'd like him. He's a nice guy. Really funny. He's like a lot of other people. And like a lot of other people, Paul has been through some shit. Trauma. Including some really horrible abuse that he suffered at the hands of his stepfather when Paul was a kid. And like what happens with a lot of other people who go through something like that, it then fell on Paul—as an adult—to make sense of that trauma that had occurred, to understand what the damage actually was, how deep it went, what it meant to the adult that Paul became, what it meant when he became a dad.

Paul has written a book about some of the hard things that have come his way and how he's made sense of them, including the abuse. It's smart, it's poignant, it's a moving book. And because Paul is, like I said, really funny, it's a pretty funny book too. It's called *Joyful Recollections of Trauma*. Talking to my friend Paul might give you some ideas on perspectives about facing trauma, because either you've faced it or someone close to you has.

It might help to hear about it. You want to meet Paul? That might be nice. Come on, let's meet Paul.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Paul Scheer, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Paul Scheer: John, so excited to be here. An old friend. And you know, this has been a real highlight to come on this show. I'm a fan, so this is great.

John Moe: Oh, good, good. I read the book. I can't say I always enjoyed it. Sometimes I found it upsetting, but that's a credit to you as a writer. (*Chuckles.*) Because you describe some upsetting events. I think maybe the place to start is to introduce the character of Hunter and tell people who Hunter was in your life.

Paul Scheer: Yeah. So, Hunter was my stepdad. He was in my life from maybe about 5 years old to 12 years old, like in that period. And he was this truck driver, a guy who kind of carried himself like he was in a perpetual hangover, even though he wasn't an alcoholic. Had like this energy of you don't want to like mess with him. And you know, he was severely abusive. You know, physically, verbally. It was something that was a part of our daily life. And I think that growing up... as a kid, you don't actually understand maybe how that is wrong. You know, it's like, "Oh, this is—my dad is one way. My stepdad is another way." This is like all the flavors of life's—

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—Baskin and Robbins, you know. And I think it took me a while to kind of understand exactly the effect that this man had on my life. Because while we lived in this kind of fear and abusive day-to-day life, it was also so commonplace that it was mixed with all these wonderful moments too. You know, my life was kind of intertwined in an interesting way. You know, it's like I was living through this. I was doing something else; you know. I think to the outside world—and even to this day, a lot of my friends don't even know this part of my life. And so, that really is, I guess, the catalyst character in this book.

You know, this memoir is about me growing up with this man for these like very pivotal years and kind of the aftershocks of him throughout my life, which I came to much, much later. Or you know, certainly at points, different kind of aftershocks showed up.

John Moe: Yeah. I wonder if you could talk about—because I'm fascinated by how hypervigilant you must have become as a result of living with this guy during these formative years. Can you talk about when you were playing *Monopoly* and what would happen in that scenario?

Paul Scheer: Well, here's the thing with Hunter. There were times where he was incredibly gregarious and fun, right? We would have a good time. In a weird way, Hunter acted a lot more like an older stepbrother or an older brother than a stepfather. He was also in his 40s, and I was very, very young. And so, you never knew when stuff was going to go sideways.

I talk about this in the book, but there was one time we were playing *Monopoly*, and he had landed on one of my properties. He owed me some money, and he was like, “You don't want to do this.” And it was so bizarre to me. What do you mean I don't want to do this? Again, “Don't—think about what you're doing.” I'm like why? It's the game. You're paying me! I've played *Monopoly* a lot. You owe me \$375. And he's like, “Don't do this.”

And all of a sudden I felt like this tone switch. And this is kind of the way that it always happened in my life. Like this—all of a sudden, like an eclipse would happen. The sun would be out and—boom. What happened? And he reached across the table and grabbed me by my neck, and he started choking me and basically saying, “Don't charge me. Do you want to charge me? Do you want to charge me?” And I'm like no, no! And he let me go, and I just dropped back into my seat, and he picked up the dice and rolled again. And that was it. We were back in the game. And that kind of moment—you know, it wasn't like, “Oh, every time we played *Monopoly*, he would choke me.” It was like—but that really was indicative of what it was like to live in the house. You'd be doing one thing normally; everything would be fine. And then something would switch, you know. Like—and it would get incredibly violent.

I remember one time we were driving, and I wanted to change the radio station, you know. And I reached up from the backseat to change the radio station, and he grabbed my arm and just started, you know, twisting it and down. Like, you know, it's like this thing where, you know, a parent—a normal parent might, you know, at most maybe slap the hand away, “Stop, no.” You know, or say, “Don't do that.” And he was just grabbing it. Like, everything was about bending to his will. Like, you know, I talk about in the book, like he'd always make me like essentially cry for mercy. You know, “Mercy, mercy. Do you cry mercy?” And it's like—and that was such a difficult thing to kind of wrestle with.

But it also felt like that's the way that you dealt with him. That was it. Like, you had to kind of pick your battles. You know, when you would fight back, when you wouldn't fight back. And you know—and I think I didn't realize also like just the unfair advantage that a 40+ year old man has on a kid. ‘Cause I was like, okay. Well, we fight. We both fight. We fight together. You know, it's like—but I'm a kid. You know, he's an adult. He's a father figure for all intents and purposes.

John Moe: Was he abusive to your mom?

Paul Scheer: Oh, absolutely. You know, I tried very hard in my book to tell my story and not tell my mom's story, not tell my dad's story. Because I felt like I could only speak to what happened to me. You know, my mom wasn't somebody who stood by and let this happen. My mom and I were living in this house where abuse was happening. And if—you know, if I got in front of my mom, it would come after me. If my mom got in front of me, it would come—You know, and my mom I think dealt with things that were much more horrific that I never saw.

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And vice versa, because a lot of this stuff happened in isolated periods, like when one of us wasn't there. So, we were living in this thing. And I think a lot of people, you know, look, and

like, “Well, how did you not get out of this?” Or, you know, “You're smart.” My mom, you know, is an incredibly smart person. You know, “How did you not navigate out of this?” And that's kind of this thing that's a tricky—it's tricky to describe. Because when I tell you this and we talk about it, it's very easy to say, “Well, I would have done this, or you should have done that.” You know, you got to go back 36 years. Right? You have to go back to a time where there's no internet. There's no ways to kind of reach out. We did reach out, you know. We did reach out to what we had—our family, therapy, child protective services. We had all these things that all kind of failed us.

And, you know, I think on some level too... this is something that we hear about all the time. It's like people do turn a blind eye to this, you know. So, then you just kind of—you do your best to just maintain and live through it. And, you know, we did get out of it. My mom eventually got us out of it, but it's not like that's easy. Because if you get out of it, you have to make sure that you can stay out of it and support— You know, as a parent now, I look at that and I go... you know, I have no blame on my mom. You know, I think some people do. I think some people have like an inability to separate the two things. But it's like you have to look at it and go like we only had what were at our devices. And you know, we are much more educated now. We are much more aware now. There's so many things that go into this.

I think for myself, I had a hard time even using the word abuse. I didn't want to use it. I'm like, “Well, I don't know if it's abuse. Is it abuse?” You know, and I would be cagey about it. Because it just—that's a tough word. You know, it's a tough word when you've been in it. It feels like you are a victim, which I think is hard to put yourself in the middle of. I don't think people want to be a victim. And you know, like that. And I think, it's—well, I got through it. It was okay. I guess it wasn't abuse. People out there get worse, you know. And there are, and that's the thing. It's like—and I talked to people about this book. And you don't have to have lived the life that I lived to recognize these things. You know, I talk to people who'd say, “Oh, my brother was like this.” “Oh, my next-door neighbor's dad was like this.” “My mom was like this.”

You know, people have different elements of feeling a little trapped, alone, isolated. And you know—and obviously, this book deals with that. But also, like I said, it's a mix. The title is *Joyful Recollections of Trauma*. So, yes, there's trauma, there's joy, there's a mix of different things. And I think in many respects, all things can be true, right? You know, you can have—like somebody asked me the other day, “Did you have a happy childhood?” And I'm like I did! But I also lived through this other thing. You know, it's hard to reconcile. Because when it's so constant, it's not like—it's like, oh yes, our house had—you know, we only had one bathroom, so that was difficult, right? Or whatever, you know, we had three kids in one bathroom. And it's like, oh yeah, we had an abusive father, but we got through it.

And we got through it. And I think that those are the coping mechanisms that I don't think—that I think are foreign to people who maybe have not lived through that.

John Moe: Did you develop coping mechanisms with your mom in conversation about what was happening, or did you even talk to your mom about it? Or was it just silently acknowledged?

Paul Scheer: No, I think—you know, my mom and I understood what was going on. You know, I'm also a kid, right? So, it's hard. It's like the conversations I have with my mom now versus then. You know, I think I'm looking to my mom to be the protector, right? Oh my gosh, this person hurt me. Stick up for me. But my mom can only do so much, because she's also a victim in this thing as well, right? You know, so it's a delicate balance that she's got to play. It's like we were—this is our household. Like, we had lived through this. The screaming, the yelling, the back and forth of all of this. You know, it's—you know, my mom and I ran away multiple times, you know, tried to get out, but came back in. And I think that's something that happens a lot in these relationships.

So, again, I don't think it was labeled or spoken about in a way that was super clear, but we did go to therapy, a family therapist. And you know, the therapist was able to put these things into words and say, “How do you—you know, how do you—? What's going on here? Tell me what's going on.” To which I gave her this laundry list of things. And she stops me in the middle of it and says like, “Well, look, I'm here now. That's never going to happen again. That's wrong. And if he does it again, I'm going to take care of it.” You know.

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And of course we leave therapy, everything's okay for a couple of days, and then it starts up again. And we go back to therapy, and we go, “Oh my gosh, remember when you told me you were going to be there for me? Well, it happened again.”

And she's like, “Okay, one more time.” Right? You know, and that's the thing. And it's tricky. It's hard, right? Because it's like I'm dealing with people who are not ever treating it seriously. So, I think honestly—you know, and even saying this now, I don't think I've ever put this together fully. The way that the adults treated it in my life—whether it was family members who refused to really acknowledge it or call it out; or whether it was child protective services who came to our house, but didn't interview me, and interviewed my mom and my stepfather together; or whether it was this therapist—like, these people repeatedly said, “It's okay.” Right?

So, when you see these adults saying it's okay or not dealing with it—even my dad—you're left to be a little confused, right? There is no—well, maybe I'm exaggerating this. Maybe it isn't that bad. Maybe that. And you know, it took me a while to kind of come to this realization that, yes, I lived through this. Yes, this was bad. I think, you know, as long as you didn't have a broken bone, you're like, “Well, not bad.” Right? You know, and that was it.

John Moe: Yeah. But the damage was being done. Did that—I mean, the people who were supposed to be taking care of you, with the exception of your mom and maybe your actual dad, but these other people in your life, these other adults in your life were failing you. Did that have an impact on your ability to trust, to form relationships?

Paul Scheer: Oh, absolutely. I think—you know, there are fine lines that you can draw to things and go, “Oh, well, this probably leads to this.” But I think in this situation, the abuse kind of created these under the surface ways of being—it almost like reconstructed my like interpersonal DNA. You know, I'm expecting something terrible to happen. I don't trust. You know, I am waiting for someone to hurt me. Like, these things that I don't even really—I

couldn't acknowledge or even understand. It was just like, well, because it was so normalized that as I got older, that's, oh, well, this is the way the world works. This is the way that this is the way the world works. And so, I think that unpacking that, that's the hardest thing. It's easy to see when the scars are on the surface, right? It's hard to see when they're kind of rewiring your own way of thinking.

John Moe: Do you have a hard time feeling safe and secure today?

Paul Scheer: No. I mean, you know, this is the thing that I'm happy with, with this book, is this book is not therapy. It's a reflection of therapy, of the work that I've done, of the growth that I've had in my life. You know, I'm not writing this book fresh out of the situation. This is kind of an—oddly, a reflection of 20+ years of work. Because I don't think I was ready to write this book until I had kids. Because that was like, I think, the final layer that really opened up another level of understanding for me about what I went through. And that was really important, because I think that also gave me empathy. Not to my abuser, but empathy for myself, empathy for my parents. You know, there is something about this. And I also think if you're putting it in a book, it no longer is yours. And I'm sitting here, I'm talking to you about it.

If I wasn't secure where I am—and you know, look. I don't think—there's always work to be done. I want to be better. I want to be... you know, I understand there are things I'll probably fall back into. And you know, there are things that are just there. You know, this like, for lack of a better term, like that inner child that is always going to be like, “We'll step up to the plate when you're at your most fried or, you know, most—” You know, and the best I can do is just kind of step in front of that version of myself and try to deal with it. I have those tools now. So, yeah, I think that right now I am not—I don't have those problems. But in a moment of stress, in a moment of panic, it definitely creeps in. And I have to do work to make sure that I recognize it. And I think the difference is, before I didn't recognize it. It just would happen. And I would expect it. And so, now I at least have the rationality to understand, no, no.

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That's in your own head. That's something else. That's not what's actually going on.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: More with Paul Scheer in just a moment, including why he's talking about all of this now.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We're back with Paul Scheer, author of *Joyful Recollections of Trauma*.

I got the sense in reading the book that you haven't opened up about a lot of these things to a whole lot of people over the years. Why do it now in the form of a book?

Paul Scheer: You know, I think there's two things at play. One, you know, I came from a family where we didn't talk about this sort of stuff, right? That was just part of it. And then when you don't talk about it—just like the same way I was talking about like these things that are under the surface, like I forget to talk about it. Because it's so—we're not talking about it. And then all of a sudden, I think in my mid-20s, I was like why do I not talk about this? But then it's also like, well, if I'm going to—then it's like why am I going to start talking about this?

You know, it was weird to kind of reconcile even that, you know. Because it was like something that was kind of put in a box on a shelf. We don't deal with it. And then when I had kids, like I said, I started to think about this in a different way. Now having kids coincided—well, not coincided, but I've been doing *How Did This Get Made* for 14 years. My oldest kid is 10 years old. And over the course of these 14 years of *How Did This Get Made*, I've told these stories about my childhood. And every time I tell a story about my childhood—not about the abuse, but just these funny side stories—I'd look at Jason and June, my cohosts on the show, and they'd be like, “Oh my god, wait, what happened?” I'm like, oh yeah, that. And they're like—

And yeah, they're so shocked. And in my mind I'm like, well, you don't even know the half of it. I mean, June does. But Jason didn't and the audience doesn't. And then all of a sudden people are like putting together like these Reddit threads or YouTube, you know, compilations of Paul's most harrowing childhood stories. You know, and everyone's like, “Oh, you should write a book. You should write a book.” And for a long time, I resisted that, because I respect that process a lot. I respect the idea of what a book should be. I'm a fan of reading. I'm a fan of books.

And so, when I sat down to write this, my intent wasn't to write the book that I actually wrote. It was like, well, let me just try to figure out what that book would be. A *How Did This Get Made* kind of book that would fill in the blanks for people that would like this. But as I found myself writing it, I couldn't pull myself away from the actual narrative of my life. Because the anecdote on a podcast is really fun and easy to digest, right? There's no—you can have some follow up questions, but you don't really need to get into it. But if you're sitting down with a book, you have to kind of tell the full story.

And I also think, you know, part of the thing that I'm realizing is—you know, when you talk about stuff like this—if you were and I had a meet at dinner, and I start going into this—and maybe not you, but the general you. I can feel someone's asshole clench when I start saying like, “Oh, abuse or this,” because I think immediately people feel like if I'm telling you this, you need to do something. Like, you need—I'm going to get Hunter. Oh, I'm mad! Oh, whose fault is it? And all of a sudden it starts to take on this other thing. You know, very rarely can people like listen to this. Or they get upset. You know, which is fine. But then I feel guilty. I don't want to make you upset. I'm not trying to trauma dump. I'm trying to tell you a story.

And you get in this zone where I felt like I could never really even tell these stories fully, because I'm reading the way that somebody is receiving them. So, then I veer, I tangent. You know, and in a weird way, sitting down and writing—again, it wasn't as intentional as it became—was a chance for me to tell this story without any of that, without any response. You know, somebody said to me, “Well, why don't you do a one person show?” I was like, I

could do that. Sure. There's something there, I guess. But it's the same thing. I can rest in moments longer in a book. I can do—like, I don't have to worry.

Like, I believe—and I wrote this book to be entertaining. Like, it's not a trauma dump. I can get highs and lows. And you know, as I talk to people, they're like, “Oh, I'm laughing one minute, I'm crying the next minute.” And that's the best compliment for me, because I think I wanted to be real to what happened, but I also understood that my role here is to be an entertaining book and also hopefully give you something that is of value that's not just—you know, I do plenty of podcasts. You can get that for free every week. So, if I'm charging you some money to get a book, let me give you some more depth. And so, yeah. That kind of—all that stuff kind of mixed together.

John Moe: I know when I wrote my last book, there was a lot of—

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I had a lot of experiences where I would write about something that happened when I was 9, and then I'd be writing about something that happened when I was 25. And I'd be like, “Oh, I get it! I understand why the thing happened at 25. It was because of this thing that happened at 9!” Like, all these connections that I had made just by kind of spilling it all out on the page. Did you have that experience?

Paul Scheer: Oh, absolutely. I think that there's something about this—and not to get too highfalutin on the whole thing, but it felt like I was carving something out of marble. Like, it was there, right? I'm like, okay, here's something. I have this piece. And then I would start to find these things. Like, no, that's what this is. This is what it should be, and this is how it should look. And this is—and you know, stories that I had come back to a bunch of times in my life where I maybe have eliminated certain things, because the anecdote was easier to tell than the actual full story. I realized why I went back to those anecdotes. There was something in there that was connected to a larger part of my actual story.

And kind of finding that stuff out—the way the book is told— You know, I think even from the first chapter, you know, the first chapter is talking about a lot of different stuff. And it ends reflecting on my children, now having two kids. You know, so that first chapter goes from, you know, introducing me as a child, to my mom being married, to this situation that happened, and now me looking back on it as an adult. So, I kind of—the entire time it is this conversation. It's not a traditional memoir in the sense of “This is chapter one, and this is when I'm young. And this is chapter two.” It is a fluid kind of discussion. Thematically, it comes together. So, yeah, I totally agree that I saw things.

And as a matter of fact, I wish I could say I was so smart that I knew it from the beginning, but when I saw the book done and I read it, that was when I started to see even more connections. And it was a beautiful part. There's a part of me that was like, “Oh, you give the book to your editor, and then you're done.” It's like, oh, no, no. That's just the beginning of the end.

John Moe: That's table stakes.

Paul Scheer: Yeah! Right? And you know, my editor unfortunately left the company in the middle of my—well, she basically gave me my notes and then left. You know, and God bless. She's going on to a different job and having a great time. And she was lovely while she was there. And she kind of put this stuff in an order in a way that was really helpful to me. But it was like, that was the first part of me kind of completing this monumental task. I think that she saw something that I was working towards and brought me a little bit closer. And then those last two months of just really being in the weeds was really where the book came together.

John Moe: As a parent, is your parenting a response to what happened to you as a child?

Paul Scheer: I don't think it could be anything but that. You know, I think we all are coming into that, right? Like, we all are... trying to be better than our parents. And I don't mean that in a way that's like dismissive of my parents. I do think that we—as a culture, we should all be trying to be a little bit better, right? We should be trying to raise—like, I have two boys. I'm trying to raise them to be good men. I'm trying to raise them to be good humans, you know. And I'm more—I am in touch with some more things than my parents were. I'm older than my parents were when they had them.

So, it's not like “my parents did this, so I'm going to do this”. I think it's a much more fluid conversation. I want to do this. I want to make sure that I'm here for them. Part of this book was also—like I said, because I wrote this book after I had kids, I'm like, oh, I'm doing this. Oh, this is what I never felt. Or I felt this, but I want to make sure that—

Positively and negatively, right? Like, it's like there are things that my dad and mom did that are part of my child's life, that I'm imitating, that I'm bringing in culturally. And there are parts of things that I am fixing and improving on. And that to me is, I think—and I will continue to. I'm in the beginning of this. You know, my kid's 10 and 7. I've got a lot more time to go, you know. And my job is to just—I think at the end of the day, it's hard to be a parent, because there's a lot of competition maybe in your own—I feel it in my own mind. Like, oh my gosh, well, they're doing this. And they're—you know, am I a good enough parent? Am I—? You know, it's, the same thing I think that we feel when you look at Instagram or social media, where you're just like, “Oh, well they're doing that.” The FOMO of “am I—?”

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You know, or FOPA—of being a good parent, you know, and a fear of missing out of being a parent. I gotta figure that one out. But that idea... I think it's always in response to how I am. And I don't think that's a bad thing. It's not like I'm fighting with myself. It's like, I want to be better. And I want to give my kids these opportunities. And that's all.

John Moe: Yeah. Yeah. I find, with my kids, I'll be doing things because it's not how it happened when I was a kid. It's not how my dad would do it. And it's very conscious. And then other times I'll open my mouth, and his voice will come out (*laughs*) in the exact same words and intonation that he used. And it scares the hell out of me.

Paul Scheer: Oh yeah. Oh, I've been there too. I've been there too. Like, you know, again, like I'm saying like, "Oh yeah, I try to—" but there's moments where I'm like, oh, I'm my dad. I'm my mom right now. And—you know, and then I think there's a part of that too which is like, what I try to do is not live alone in that feeling. Like, I think there's a moment where I'm like, "You know what? I just acted in a way that I'm not super proud of." It doesn't have to be yelling. It could just be like dismissive. It could be making fun of my kid in a way that—you know, whatever. You know, it could be the smallest of things. And instead of like sitting in my bed up all night going, "Oh gosh, I shouldn't have said that." I talk to my kids. I'm like, "I'm sorry I did that. I'm sorry if that hurt you, if that connected to you."

You know, it's like I think that that's a big deal, being with fault, you know, with your own children. 'Cause it's like—I think that in the past, it's been like, "Well, I can't admit failure." You know, like your kids are looking to you as leaders. Absolutely. But also, a good leader can admit when they're wrong.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: When we come back, where the trauma of childhood lives in adulthood.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We're back with Paul Scheer.

Where is the trauma in you today? I mean, obviously you've done a lot of work on it. You've gone to therapy. You've put a lot of conscious thought into it. Where is it still with you?

Paul Scheer: You know, look. I think that trauma is the fire in which we are forged on a certain level, right? We are—I am one with it. I'm not a part of it. You know, this is me. And I think—you know, it's like, am I letting it control me? No, but I am letting it inform the way that I want to be. And it keeps me on a path. It also lets me know when I'm off that path, right? Like, there's something there. It is in... you know, to give a very bad analogy, it is this idea of like—you know, the way that—you know, Bruce Banner in *Incredible Hulk*, it's like I have these two things. Like, these two things, and it's trying to reconcile them together, you know? And be like, "I am this, and I am this, and I can—and how can I balance it so one isn't always on?" Or like, it's how do you find that middle ground? I don't know.

You know, it's like—and then there's new things that pop up. You know, I'm married for almost 20 years. And you know, we're dealing with that and making sure that my marriage is staying healthy and good. And you know, I talk about it in the book—you know, one of the hardest things I wrote about in the book, oddly, was finding out later in life that I had ADHD. And that was the chapter I wanted to take out. Time and time again, at the very—my wife didn't read the book until the very end. And I was like, "I think I'm going to take out that chapter." And she was like, "What? No! That's—like, you need to leave that."

And I talked to my publisher, and they were like, "No, you have to leave that!" And that, to me—I think the reason why I was nervous about it was because I didn't tell anyone that. The only person that knew that was my wife and my therapist. Right? Like, it was not even a dirty

secret. It's like, I just didn't—I didn't want to be that person. It's like, “I have ADHD. I have this.” You know? It felt to me, again, like weak on some level. Right? Or I don't know.

You know, and what I've found is, as much as people have responded to the trauma, I've met so many people who are like, “Thank you for writing this chapter. This helped me with my husband. This helped me with my own child. This helped me with me.” And what I realized was this whole book—and what I love about, you know, like what you've written, what I see online is that people are always sharing information. And it's the best way that we can sort of help ourselves.

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It's like, you know, this idea that—you know, I think movies bring us empathy, whether when we were kids, when we're seeing *E.T.*, *E.T.* dies, we're like, “Oh my gosh!” You go through these emotions. And as we get older, we read these stories, whether they're memoirs—or I read that book, *The Wager*, which is fantastic. You know, I'm reading these things and putting myself in these positions. I'm seeing things in myself. I'm asking myself what would I do? How is that me? It's important. And so, I do think it's important. We live in a society of storytellers, so I do think it's important to share these things. And sometimes when it's uncomfortable, it's uncomfortable for a reason.

I think for me, I just wanted to be careful that it was not—I think that there's a— It's like walking a tightrope on a tightrope. How to reveal enough that it's sharing, but not enough that you lose your self-respect, right? There's like this—it's a fine line, right? And I think—you know, and people can push that. Depending on who you are, you can push those lines in different ways. But I think you have to—yeah, I think it's a responsibility I think you have as a writer to the reader, to make them also know that you're okay.

John Moe: I hear about this a lot with people who get diagnoses later in life—whether it's ADHD or something else—that it's sort of a Keyser Söze moment where like, “Oh, I understand now all these things that had happened before. This was—this helps explain these things that were inexplicable at the time.” Was that the case for you?

Paul Scheer: Oh, 1,000,000%. I mean, it was—when I read my first book about ADHD—my therapist gave me a book when I was kind of in the beginning phases of it. It blew my mind. It was like I was reading the instruction manual of my life; you know. And then there's this moment of anger. Like, why didn't I know this?! You know, there was—(*chuckling*) you know, for a long time I didn't get glasses, right? I would tell my parents, “It's hard. The teacher's writing very lightly on the board.” You know, like as if it's the teacher's fault, not the fact that my—you know.

John Moe: It's a chalk problem.

Paul Scheer: Yeah, it's a chalk problem, right? And it's like—and that, it's a hard thing to kind of, not unpack, but... there's an anger. Like, what did I miss out on? I also think, and forgive me if this sounds egotistical at all, but I think it's important to say. I think that when people hear my story about ADHD, there's something that allows them to connect to it, because, oh, I am somebody that people view as being very productive. Right? And I only

found this out about myself just a little while ago. So, for me, I think—so, I think that people felt like, “Oh, if he is this productive, and he has it, maybe I can allow myself that grace to think maybe I have that too.” You know what I mean?

I think that often times when you look at that kind of a diagnosis, you are saying to yourself, “Well, that's this type of person. The person who can't get their shit together. The person who can't get out of the house. The person who can't do things.” And I think for me, there's a connection with a lot of people who are high functioning and still need help, but are like, “I didn't know it, because I'm like, well, I'm doing all this stuff. I'm paying my bills on time. I get my projects done. I am productive.” And I think that that was—so, that was, I think—been really interesting to talk to those types of people.

John Moe: Yeah. Yeah. It's—well, I mean, it's a reason to run away from a diagnosis or to not even talk to somebody about it, because of those stereotypes of like, “If I have depression, that'll mean I can never get out of bed and never have a job. If I have ADHD, it means I can't read a book.” You know? And it's so much more nuanced than that.

Paul Scheer: Yeah. I think that we live in a world of absolutes, right? Like, oh, this is what depression looks like. This is what abuse looks like. This is what— You know, it's very black and white. And I think, you know, in a way this book is very grey. You know, you can—two things can be true. You can have joyful recollections of trauma. You can be productive and successful and also have untreated, you know, ADHD! You can be—you know, there's so many things that I feel like we are trained by media.

Like, I was joking about this the other day. Before I had my first kid, I thought when the water breaks, and your wife is pregnant, the baby's coming within minutes, right? It's like that—the water's going to break, and the kid's going to shoot out like a few seconds later, you know. My wife and I ran—

John Moe: ‘Cause you've seen a lot of movies.

Paul Scheer: Right, exactly! Right. We ran to the hospital. And on the way to the hospital, my doctor called us, and he was like, “No, no, no, go home. Relax. You got time.” Right? And it's like, but you're—but this is the thing. It's like these stereotypes that we build. And I understand in a weird way.

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Like, these are these things that—when we talk about representation in movies, or we talk about... it's different bodies and advertising campaigns. It's important, because we forget how much, culturally, these things are ingrained in us. This is a depressed person in a movie. This is a depressed person in a TV show, or this—you know, we look at— There's so much nuance, but we often see the biggest stereotype.

John Moe: Yeah. Well, even the—I mean, the title is delightfully provocative, *Joyful Recollections of Trauma*. And it's kind of surprising, because you do tell these stories in the book. Your writing style is sort of like having a laugh with some friends over beers. Yet

you're saying—you're talking about these really, really heavy incidents. And I know that they have stayed with you, and I know that writing about them has sought to—you know, for lack of a better word, help process some of these things. But you're really good at kind of contextualizing what happened and showing that was then, this is now.

Paul Scheer: Yeah. And I think that, you know—again, the book isn't therapy. You know, for me. Like, people say, "Is it cathartic for you to write this?" Not really. What's been cathartic is actually talking to so many people who also have felt like they can't share their story, or they also have this. So, to feel like you're not alone is kind of—that's the most cathartic thing. You know, like sharing my story was easy to do on some level. And thank you for saying that about the tone, because that was really why I wanted to do it. This is like—I wanted this to be like me telling you a story. It's like there's gonna be highs and lows in it.

Like, there's a—you know, I talked to my mom after I wrote the book, and she was like, "I don't know why you added that—why you didn't add that in or this." And I'm like, well, because also like that chapter ends better that way, right? Like, there's a part of this too that's like I'm still telling stories, right? Like, I'm not—this is not a court transcript. This is not like, you know, A, B, and C. Like, you know, this is—you know, you don't need to. It's not a textbook. And I think that that's—you know, that was very top of mind. It's like, I'm not creating anything, but I am going to give you a beginning, middle, and end, and try to make it feel like there's something there.

Because I do think that that's when you get into trauma dumping. That's when you get into, "And then this happened, and then this happened, and then this happened. And then—" You know, there's no reflection. It's sort of a list of events.

John Moe: What's your relationship with the idea of forgiveness when it comes to Hunter, your stepdad?

Paul Scheer: I don't really have any forgiveness to him. I have a lot of empathy for my parents. You know, I think that I asked some questions of my parents in the book that I've also said to them privately, you know. But becoming a parent myself, I have empathy for—I don't truly have empathy for Hunter, but I also don't have any desire to rectify a situation, right? Like, I don't need—like, I don't seek revenge. I don't seek, you know, comeuppance. I don't—like, that's not where I'm at. So, in that way, it probably has changed over the years. You know, I'm not angry at him. Because I've also dealt with it myself, but I don't have sympathy for him. Right? I think those things can be—two things can be true.

You know, like people are like, "Oh, you know, fuck this guy." I'm like, yeah, fuck him. But you don't have to go find him. You don't have to call him out. My desire is not to—my desire isn't—it was interesting, because I even talk about having an experience at the UCB theatre where I felt like this figure, a teacher of mine—I heard this teacher talking negatively about me. Somebody that I thought was really supportive of me. People were like, "Well, who is it? Who is it?" And I'm like it doesn't make a difference. It doesn't make a difference. Hunter doesn't make a difference. They were these people in my life that taught me something, that gave me something, that put me in a position, right?

Like, the story is more important than who it was, why they're there. I have no issue with wanting—like, this is not about creating a burn book or finally getting—you know. And articulating that thought I think is hard for people sometimes. It's like—or for people to hear. It's like that represents something more than it is that person is bad. This is not a book about Harvey Weinstein.

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It's not a book about, you know, somebody who has done something... like, this is not like building a case against somebody. This is more about my experience with these certain people in my life and how I got over it. So, yes, they are whatever they are, but it doesn't mean that, you know. Like, I know where Hunter is, I know what Hunter's doing. I don't think that Hunter's out doing this anymore, you know. And that would have been—it could have been an isolated incident, it could not have been an isolated—I don't know, but I don't care to find out either.

John Moe: You just used the phrase “over it”. Are you over it?

Paul Scheer: I think... yes, I think I'm over... I'm not emotionally in it, right? Like, I'm not—like, I can talk about it. Like, I've done a bunch of interviews about this book. And you know, people will say to me—one of the first interviews I ever did, and I've gotten this the same way. People go, “Oh, there's a story about *Monopoly* in here. And I got to tell you, my family was pretty competitive playing board games, but I never got choked out. I mean, what was that like?” You know, you're coming at it—and from that point of view, I'm like—and if I wasn't over it, I couldn't be able to handle that, right? Like, but I can handle it, because it's like, it's done. Like, whatever I put there, I've given over to anybody else.

I could talk to you about it in a very different way. Many people are like you. But if I wasn't over it, I'd be damaging myself. Because I couldn't talk about it. I couldn't have this kind of conversation with you, because I'd still be wrestling with it. But to that point, it is still part of me. It's just not an active part. You know, it's like a volcano. It's a dormant volcano that will never erupt, but it's a part of the island structure. And maybe I'm just saying that, because I'm reading *Eruption* by James Patterson and Michael Crichton right now.

John Moe: (*Chuckles.*) Do you think you went into comedy to find some of the joy that had been robbed from you?

Paul Scheer: I think, as an only child, I grew up with a friend who was television. You know, and I grew up with a VCR at the beginning of the time of VCRs and renting movies and watching TV. I wanted to be in those worlds. I created my own worlds, you know, when I was a kid. So, what comedy did for me was... I often say, like I don't know if I wanted to be an actor as much as I wanted to be inside my television set. And I didn't know how to do it. And I kind of feel like I fell backwards into it. You know, I wanted to perform. I like performing. I was performing. It was part of my coping mechanism. You know, I was an only child, so I would perform just these like one person shows for no one.

You know, I talk about like I never did chores. I hired someone to do my chores, which was me, and then I'd boss myself around. You know, it's like this is kind of—and that's probably

part of the ADHD too. But what comedy I think did, and I want to like just break it down, because standup is an art form that I don't really do. I do sketch; I do improv. And that's an art form that is community based. You're together with people. And especially improv, you are with people who support you and get your back. And I think on some level, when I found the Upright Citizens Brigade, it was a group of people that supported me. And again, the UCB was the location in which it happened, but it's not even that important. Because what is important is that's where I found my people that support me. And that was I think what really brought me in, like this idea of like creatively building with people, trusting people, allowing yourself to risk it all on a certain level of speaking, and they'll be there for you if you fall, or they'll be able to support you when you are riding high.

And that, to me is what's so appealing about the type of comedy that I love. And that's in the writer's room. That's in—I love collaborating. I'm more prone to collaborating than doing anything solo, because I like that.

John Moe: For me, the show I wanted to climb into and be a part of was the *Carol Burnett Show*. What show was it for you?

Paul Scheer: It's so funny that you say that, because I will tell you, but I just shot this pilot with Marta Kauffman, my creative friends, and my wife. And it's an improvised multi-cam, and we have been—we just have been refining the edit. Someone said to me the other day like, “You know what this reminds me of? The *Carol Burnett Show*.” And I was like, oh wow! And the way that they said why really stuck with me.

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It's like, “You are doing a show. You are committing to it. It's not meta. But you're having fun doing it.” And that show—I do agree, that was something that you had fun doing. I loved—for me, the shows I loved, *Different Strokes*, *Silver Spoons*. like I wanted to be in those houses and those—you know, like oh my gosh, that bedroom, that thing. I loved that. *Webster*. One of the best experiences I've had, and it just happened a few months ago, was I watched *Night Court*. I love *Night Court*. This is a little bit older now. You know, I'm older when I'm watching *Night Court*, but I loved it. And I got to be on the reboot, the revival of *Night Court* with Melissa Rauch. And they rebuilt that set to the exact blueprints of the original *Night Court* set. They actually even have pieces on that set from the original set, right?

So, I walked into that set. There's John Larroquette playing the same character. And it blew me away in a way that—like, I've loved working on *Parks and Rec*. I've loved doing things on *Brooklyn Nine Nine*, all these shows that people love. I love them too, but that was stepping into my childhood. That was being on—you know, I got to perform on the—or I got to audition, I should say. And my audition was a performance on the *SNL* stage. That was stepping into my TV. Like, and I say this as a person who's done a lot of TV, but it's a very specific difference. It's being in not even the hallowed hallways of these things. It's like, it's the thing that you saw. It's the home base of *SNL*. It's the courtroom of *Night Court*. And just walking there and being like oh my gosh. In a weird way, it felt like I made it more in there. It's like I got my dream. I got my dream of being in this show. That was pretty cool.

John Moe: Paul Scheer, I want to thank you for writing *Joyful Recollections of Trauma*. I want to thank you for playing the wolf wrangler in *Popstar: Never Stop Never Stopping*. And I want to thank you for being in *Depresh Mode*. Thanks.

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

Paul Scheer: Thanks so much, John. I appreciate it.

John Moe: *Joyful Recollections of Trauma* is available where books are sold, on account of it's a book. *Night Court* is available on Peacock. The *Mary Tyler Moore Show* is available on Hulu. Your traumas are available in your memories, and they're probably going to stay there. How you live is available in your free will.

Our show exists because people support it financially. It doesn't take much, just a few bucks from a bunch of you, and we can keep this show going. That is up to you. If you've already become a member of *Depresh Mode*, thank you so much for making this possible. If you have yet to become a member, don't worry. It's super easy to do. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join. That's on internet. So, go to internet. MaximumFun.org/join. Find a level that works for you, and then select *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows. And boom, you're supporting us too, sending us out into the world where we can help folks. Be sure to hit subscribe, give us five stars, write rave reviews. All of that helps get the show out in the world, again, where we know it's helping people. And it can help even more people. So, thank you in advance for doing that.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached in the US and Canada by calling or texting 988. It's free. It's available 24/7.

Our Instagram and Twitter are both [@DepreshPod](https://www.instagram.com/DepreshPod). Our *Depresh Mode* newsletter is on Substack. Search that up. I'm on Twitter and Instagram, [@JohnMoe](https://www.instagram.com/JohnMoe). And be sure to swing by our Facebook group, Presbies. Just search for Presbies on Facebook. A lot of good discussion happening over there. Stuff about the show, yes, and just stuff about life and living with interesting brains, people helping each other out. It's a good place. It's a good hang. Our electric mail address is DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. In “Stairway to Heaven” by Led Zeppelin, just before they go into the “and as we wind on down the road” part, that fast part, there's a little sound like “Aah! Aaah!” (*Clears throat.*) Excuse me. Like that. And I always thought that was a vocal, like a backing vocal or a guest vocal, maybe even Robert Plant. But it turns out it's a guitar! It's Jimmy Page. I just found out it's a guitar going “waahh, waaahh.” That blew my mind. And maybe it didn't blow your mind, but now you know it. And I think it's better if we all know it.

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 of the rock and roll band The Old 97's wrote and performed our theme song, “Building Wings”.

[00:55:00]

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

Elizabeth: Hi, this is Elizabeth from Monterey, California. Let's give it 25 to 35% today. 110% is just off the menu. But 25 to 35%? Let's see if we can do that.

(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!