

[00:00:00]

John Moe: A note to our listeners, this episode contains mention of suicidal ideation and rape.

Clip:

(Cheers and applause.)

Announcer: Gracie Gold, the 18-year-old who broke through at the national championships last season. That silver medal turned into a gold one in Boston recently. Here she is at the Olympics for the first time.

Music: Exuberant classical music.

John Moe: In a sense, maybe we're all in a figure skating competition, really. It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: No, we don't have to actually lace up real skates and zip around on actual ice. But think about it. Don't we all have to go out there in life, in front of everybody, and perform? Regardless of how we're feeling, no matter how we're holding up, we just gotta go out there anyway. Don't we all have to put on some form of costume when we go out there? An outfit, clothes, an appearance that we wouldn't ordinarily wear but have to wear in front of those watching us? We need to make sure our hair and maybe our makeup looks just right? Do we all not have to face some kind of judges who evaluate us? Perhaps there are flowers thrown at us afterwards. Maybe not. Perhaps there is a room that has been designated for crying. I think there's something to this.

And look, we all know that the ongoing challenge of daily life is made more difficult when you're dealing with a mind that is not quite working the way you want it to. It's all the judgment, the degree of difficulty, the skating—really—that the normies have to deal with, plus the obstacles thrown out by what's happening in our complicated brains. Okay, now imagine that you have those obstacles, plus the metaphorical skating competition that I talked about that is life, plus—add this!—actual figure skating! Now that is a lot. And for Olympic figure skater Gracie Gold, it was a lot.

Gracie was a medalist in the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi, two-time US national champion, top performer in competitions around the world. She was also struggling with just so much in terms of mental health. Body dysmorphia, eating disorders, dissociation, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, OCD, ADHD. It's a long list. And it was too much, and her world came crashing down. Then she got help, and the help worked, and she got to a better place. Gracie's story is told in her new book, *OutofShapeWorthlessLoser: A Memoir of Figure Skating, F*cking Up, and Figuring It Out*.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Gracie Gold, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Gracie Gold: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

John Moe: *OutofShapeWorthlessLoser* is quite a title. Why did you go with that as the title of your book?

Gracie Gold: I knew it would have been a kind of a controversial title, but I was in some ways inspired. Like, I love Jeanette McCurdy's, you know, title—*I'm Glad My Mom Died* or *I'm Glad My Mother's Dead*. I feel like if you have difficult relationships—right?—with a family member or even someone that's, you know—that title resonated. Some people hated it. Some people liked it. And in some ways I—when we were thinking of titles, I didn't want anything, you know, fluffy or skating related. You know, all of the *Graceful*, *Fall from Grace*, you know, *Goes for Gold*.

John Moe: *On Thin Ice*? Yeah.

Gracie Gold: Yes. Like all of those puns. Yeah. For a little bit, the sub text or subtitle was, you know, like *My Life on Edge and On the Ice*. And I was like I—all of the media and skating has written every single title and pun I think that you can come up with. So, I, you know, wanted something that spoke to the other aspects of my life and kind of the—what I'm semi famous for—right?—is being the poster child of a mental health crisis. And *Out of Shape Worthless Loser*—right?—is the name that I gave that voice in my head that, you know, tells you're a piece of shit; you're an out of shape, worthless loser; you know, all of the worst things. And that voice was really prevalent, and it became prevalent as my massive depressive episode, and fall from grace—if you will—was transpiring.

And so, you know, once we—the only other title I kind of liked was *Failed Anorexic*, but I—not that the editors didn't like it, but they didn't want it to get labeled as a figure skating eating disorder book, because there's so much else in it. So, yeah, we waited. And obviously, even when I first heard *OutofShapeWorthlessLoser*, it was for sure in the top three. And you know, after even just a day or two, we decided this is the title.

John Moe: And it is the name of one of the sections of the book.

[00:05:00]

Could you give us kind of a rundown of the different sections of the book? Because I think that's important to the arc of your story.

Gracie Gold: Yeah, so we broke the book down into four sections. You know, it is hard to put one's 20+ years of life into 300 pages. So, the first part is “Grace Elizabeth”, right? Technically my name is Grace, middle initial E, so it's Grace E. Gold. But I've always been called Gracie. You know, that's kind of my inner child and childhood and just who I was before—you know, my formative years, right? Before I was kind of the skating star.

And then it goes to “Gracie Golds”, which I found myself the top of the world in skating and—which was great. You know, my dreams in skating really came true, but it kind of talks about how the narrative I got stuck with was this Grace Kelly, ice princess, kind of plastic Barbie and—you know, what that was like. I felt like I was living two lives in a way. That there was this like Gracie Gold kind of perfect figure, like inspiring the youth, right? People compared me to Grace Kelly. And then little kids, you know, they thought I was real-life Elsa. And I just—it was hard to live up to, you know, a Disney princess in real life when I’m so much not like that.

And then part three is “Out of Shape Worthless Loser” which kind of details how from the Olympics, three years later, I found myself in rehab in the middle of the godforsaken desert in Arizona and just the whole mental health crisis, but in some ways how—and just that voice in your head that everyone has that tells you, you know, “You ain’t shit,” whatever. And then part four is “Me” and just kind of reconciling these three distinct parts of me as I move forward in my life.

John Moe: It's quite a journey, and we're going to get into it here. Tell me about your family. I think that's where this discussion has to start. Who are the characters at your foundation?

Gracie Gold: So, it's my mom, and then my dad, my sister, and I. And we—it was kind of just us four in a lot of ways. You know, at least from the outside. But really it was just my mom, my sister, and I for—in a lot of ways, I kind of identify being raised by a single mom. So, although we were—my dad participated financially and kind of from the outside, you know, at skating events and all this stuff, I really identify—like, my mom is the reason that my sister and I are both successful. And yeah, it was just kind of us three, like a really close group. And my sister's a twin. So, we were, you know, glued at the hip until we were 21 or 22.

John Moe: And why did you take up skating in the first place?

Gracie Gold: Great question. Kind of a niche sport in a way. But I went to my friend's birthday party at the local ice rink in Springfield, Missouri, right? You open presents, have cake, and then you jump on the ice for public skates. And I had—I guess technically when I was two, my mother tried to take my sister and I to New Hampshire skating. I think it lasted about five minutes. We were all in tears. So, I don't really count that. And so, yeah, we were eight. And the story that I've always told is that I fell in love with skating and that there were the figure skaters in the middle spinning. And I found out, yeah, like within relatively recently that's actually not true. And that once I fell in love with—I wanted to play hockey.

I was a bit of a rough and tumble, really kind of true tomboy through elementary and middle school, and I wasn't particularly infatuated with the concept of tights or wearing a skirt. And you know, I wanted to get in there. I wanted to skate fast and get after it. My mother though—I mean, I'd already been red carded in soccer more than one time. So, she thought putting me in where you can legally fight the other team was not the best choice. You know, noses are expensive, teeth are expensive. And so, she was the one that said, “Well, if you want to skate—” I didn't have a Saturday activity. My sister was horseback riding. She's like, “Let's do Learn to Skate. Let's start with figure skating. Like, let's just learn to skate very, you know, properly and gently. And then we can talk about the hockey thing along the way.”

And yeah, as soon as I started Learn to Skate, I fell in love with figure skating.

John Moe: And then as you rose up through the ranks and as you became competitive and competed on bigger and bigger stages, was it you pushing yourself forward into this world, or was somebody else pushing you?

Gracie Gold: I mean, it was definitely—it wasn't the story of the, you know, tiger mom and like Eastern bloc coach that like forced me to skate. I always loved skating, and I love to skate, but it was sometimes difficult to manage. You know, later on in my story, there were years where I started thinking like maybe I kind of wanted a break.

[00:10:00]

But I didn't know how to ask. 'Cause my mom is not a like crazy skating mom. Or you know, like the, some of the moms you see on *Dance Moms*. My mom though is very intense. My mom is a, you know—if you're going to do something, you're going to do it. You know, she's an ER nurse, works night shifts, started in Boston Mass Gen. And I call her whiskey in a teacup. But so, my mom is very intense in all aspects of life, so it didn't matter if I was going to be a skater or anything. That's just how my mom is. And I did inherit that. You know, I very much struggle with doing things for the love of it. I feel like I have to be the best all the time. Right? I'm a crippling perfectionist. So, a lot of it was me.

There are times though that I think—and I think it's appropriate for parents or a coach to push, you know, their child. Skating is a very expensive and time-consuming sport. And you know, I was not raised with gentle parenting, so this trend is very new to me. And I think there are some pros. But I mean, you know, if I was—when I was in middle school... middle schoolers are not particularly easygoing, right? 'Cause they have their own thoughts but haven't developed empathy yet. And so—and I was a very spirited child. So, you know, my mom sometimes did have to push me, but it was never—I never identified with like against my will. There were times, but it was not like an overarching theme in my life.

John Moe: When during your skating career were the first signs that something was going wrong with your mental health?

Gracie Gold: I mean, I think that there were—I mean, hindsight's 20/20, right? So, looking back, I think that there were things. I think it depends on which mental health issue you're talking about. Like, my eating disorder definitely started much earlier than what I came to realize was like a massive depressive episode. I think the struggle is that—and part of the stigma that I was also part of—is that I thought there was just like one way for a certain mental illness to look. You know, the rhetoric that all schizophrenics are dangerous serial killers. You know, eating disorders, they're just for girls. And that depression I thought happened after a really traumatic event—you know, the death of a spouse or, you know, a parent, something like this. And, you know, that the world was blue and that you cried all the time. And you know, people brought you casseroles.

I didn't understand for a long time that mental illnesses can present differently. And I think the world sometimes has trouble... everyone is fine with mental health issues until—you know, until it's something different, until it's something that starts affecting their life. So, I

was super apathetic. I wasn't particularly sad. I was abrasive. I was abrasive, I was apathetic, I wasn't warm, because I wasn't feeling anything. Very disconnected. You know, somebody came up to me—and people recall at that time, “Yeah, you felt different. You felt just like you were here, but not here.” And yeah, I was short with people. I was grumpier. I became more selfish. And so, those traits—I feel like people are less understanding of those, right? If it doesn't—if the mental health doesn't like—if it's not how you picture it in your head or how you read it in the health book, right? Like, with eating disorders, if you are not rail thin and a woman, like they don't apply. Like, society—we're still not ready to have a lot of those conversations.

You know, anxiety, you have to be really nervous and really shy. But some people's anxiety can come out, you know, aggressively. They can be very short with people. You know, they can almost kind of be bigger—you know, they're not always shrinking down like Bambi. So, I think some of mine had symptoms that were not atypical, but I thought they were. Because again, my definition of depression is what I read in my health book, right? I didn't have a concept—

John Moe: Right. And depression can be all sorts of things.

Gracie Gold: Yeah. And sometimes it is what you read in the health book, but I think a lot of times it isn't. So, looking back—you know, and isolating was a big—is still one of my—humor and isolation are some of my favorite coping mechanisms. But you know, when I slowly start to withdraw from the world, stop replying to people, I'm very hard to get hold of. Like, now I know that's a sign that something is unbalanced in my life and that something is making me feel a certain way, and to address it. With anxiety, I start becoming a little bit more active. You know, suddenly I'm color coding my closet, and I'm organizing this, and it's like everything has to be done right then. But you know, it's not the shaking kind of shy or fidgeting all the time.

[00:15:00]

Looking back, knowing that those symptoms—that's how my issues presented. I think they started in different ways early on, but they ebbed and flowed. Which I think in some ways is normal. You know, I think that if you watch the world championships or, you know, a national event, I think it's normal. I don't think that the concept of being happy all the time and that kind of toxic positivity, I've never really bought into. But yeah, the eating disorder was probably the first thing that started to come around in my life, and I would have been about 16 or 17.

John Moe: Okay. And then the depression and anxiety and—I mean, I had to take notes when I was reading your book, because there's a lot of things that you've been dealing with. Did these other conditions like the depression, the anxiety, the OCD—did those emerge from the eating disorders? Like, were those exacerbated by the body dysmorphia and the eating disorders?

Gracie Gold: I think that if you—like, I think if you asked my therapist or if you asked like people that are trained, you know, via school in the mental health world, I'm sure that there is a correlation, and sometimes they can exacerbate the other. I feel more though—I think my

disordered eating and body dysmorphia are—I don't know if it's just that I've had them the longest, but they're probably the two that I would struggle with the most consistently. Just because—unlike other addictions, right?—you can't cut out food. And you know, you can't really cut out entirely—or you shouldn't—all physical exercise or movements. So, you know, trying to manage an addiction, but you still have to—at least in some parts—be involved with your addiction, right? You know, you can cut out heroin but not food.

But I think that when I was starting to feel anxious or feel depressed, the control, the illusion—delusion—of control that my eating disorder gave me— In some ways I used my eating disorder to control my feelings of depression and anxiety. You know, if I felt like my life was out of control, and it was kind of making me anxious; you know, or if skating wasn't going well, and I was starting to feel kind of down, I could help mitigate both of those via my eating disorder. I would say—I mean, my first touch with—I also classify, at least in my own life, like performance anxiety—like what I feel before an event—separate from the anxiety that I can feel in like what I call real life. 'Cause I think that performance anxiety is way more normal and not inherently detrimental in the way that I think constant and chronic anxiety can be.

And the first time I really felt depressed in a way that was affecting my life—you know, not just, “Oh, I had a bad event. I was kind of sad this weekend.” You know, not that—was after the Olympics. And there is something called, you know, like the post-Olympic depression, the post-Olympic blues. And that was the first time... my mom used to describe me as those cars, you know, that you pull back and they shoot forward—in that I just always had—I could just always pull my car back. And if I was going, I was going. But that I would—but if I ran into a wall, I had trouble with redirection, and that I would just keep hitting the wall.

And so, she learned and was really good at, thank god—and some of my coaches had the ability to help redirect it. But after the Olympics, it was the first time that I felt like, if I tried to pull my car back, it just kinda—it didn't really go. Kinda went. Not really. And after the Olympics, I remember feeling like, “Now what?” ‘Cause it's the dream in Olympic sports that you chase your whole life. And then I remember thinking, “Yeah, like now what? Is this it? Did I peak at 18? Oh my god.” (*Chuckles.*)

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Coming up, Gracie faces the “now what?” of post-Olympic life and a slew of mental health issues that have not been resolved.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with figure skater and memoirist Gracie Gold, she was talking about the letdown following the Sochi Olympics.

That was a really interesting section in your book when you go to the Olympics, you medal in the team competition, you come in fourth in the individual competition. Were the blues a result of not measuring up to some standard that the media or yourself or people around you had set for you? Or was it just the letdown after a big event?

Gracie Gold: I think it was the letdown after the Olympics had gone really well. Because even though I was fourth, you know, people love to say—people would be like—if I said, oh, yeah, I was fourth at the Olympics, they're like, “Oh no, sorry! Because you're like—you were so close.”

And it's like, okay, but if I had said I was fifth, you'd be like, “Wow, top five in the world. Like, that's crazy.” Or, you know, top six.

[00:20:00]

Or if you're top ten—oh, it's top ten at the Olympic Games! People would be like, “Holy shit, that's incredible!” And I struggled with that, because I also wasn't expected to medal at the Olympics. You know, I didn't go into the games carrying that. You know, even in October/November of 2013, I think that there were plenty of people that, you know, didn't even know if I would go or qualify. I think a lot of people thought I had a great shot, but it wasn't a guarantee even going, let alone to medal in both the team and the individual. Like, so those weren't expectations I went in with.

So, I think I did have a bit of a strong reaction to, one, people seeming—like, they seemed disappointed for me that I was fourth. And that bothered me because—right?—I thought I was—you know, we're aiming for a top ten. I thought top six, you know, last warmup that goes out was fucking awesome. Like, that's what I was hoping for. And then for suddenly people to act like it was a disappointment that I was just shy of the podium. So, that just kind of made me feel—I don't know if I want to say depressed, but I remember struggling with like, “But I kind of feel good about myself, but everyone else seems disappointed.” But at the same time, you know, the team event and I skated so well that I left the Olympics kind of feeling in a lot of ways like I peaked. But then the feeling after is like, okay, so now I just do what for four years? You know, like nothing's gonna live up to that for another four years?

And I'm one of those people that takes everything very seriously. So, I don't—you know, I've never half assed anything in my life. You know, even hobbies I like to take to the next level. So, it was the first time that I felt—I remember the next—I had a summer event. I think I was maybe the only senior lady. I just had to complete this event, and it was in Yorba Linda, California in what clearly definitely used to be a Ralph's or a Vons. They popped a rink there. And I just was like I don't care. Like, this isn't the—like, I just was at the Olympics. And like, now I can see that some of these summer events don't matter. But it was the first time I was like—I mean, I guess they do for the integrity of skating. And you know, I always want to do well, but you know, it was the first time I was like, “I don't really... care?” ‘Cause I just was at the biggest event you can be at in figure skating, and I did so well at it. So, no, that was kind of—and it was just hard for me to get going. ‘Cause yeah, I just so distinctly just remember thinking like, “Now what?”

John Moe: Well, the book chronicles things getting worse, obviously. The depression gets worse. The eating disorders are presenting stronger than ever. How was mental health or mental illness viewed within the skating community?

Gracie Gold: So, again, speaking from my own view, I guess I can—I don't want to speak just for the skating community. But again, I feel like I was part of the problem for a long

time. And I remember when Michael Phelps was like maybe one of the first—right after his DUI—but he was like, “Oh, I’m depressed.” And I do remember a lot of the rhetoric around that was like what the hell does Michael Phelps have to be depressed about? You know like, oh—

John Moe: As if it’s about something.

Gracie Gold: Yeah. It’s, “Oh, life must be so hard being like the most decorated Olympian.” And I remember understanding like why people were saying that, but also thinking like, oh, well maybe something else is going on. But I also—you know, that was kind of that language around Michael Phelps. And I’m like, oh, probably because—you know, he got ripped a new one ‘cause he—what?—smoked from a bong. Remember when that was like the—rocked the Olympic world. And now I look back, and I’m like, so—like, grow up everyone.

I think one of the reasons why, you know, I wrote a memoir and have been so open about a lot of my mental health is that when I came outright and I said in my—the more palatable press release even—that I struggled with disordered eating, depression, anxiety, and I need help, because I was thinking of checking out early, the reaction from the skating community was so beautiful. But I also remember being horrified, because some people were acting like I was the first or this was somehow—I mean, I probably was one of the first to talk about it, but it was somehow like—it just had never been brought up at all. And I thought that was—especially with the disordered eating. You know, there are power sports like bobsledding and maybe, you know, endurance sports like long distance running, pole vault, gymnastics, figure skating. And the concept that I was the first person to ever mention, as a figure skater, I might have an eating disorder?

[00:25:00]

I mean, it literally reminds me from *Devil Wears Prada* where it’s like, “Oh, florals for spring? Groundbreaking.” You know, I just was like why is everybody so shocked? Why is this not a thing? And then I realized that, yeah, we—there’s all of this injury prevention for the physical body. You know, they tell you—you know, typically skaters have really tight hip flexors. Their posterior chain is weak. Their lower back is strong, but their lower abs. So, even if they haven’t—these are just common things, and we’re on the lookout for them. You know, labrums are really common in the hip and in the shoulder if you’re a pair guy. We just know that these are things that could happen to the body. These are the things that we should check out. Even if you don’t have one of these injuries yet—you know, ankles, feet, whatever.

And when it comes to mental health, there just isn’t any of that. And yeah, I just remember feeling shocked. Like, oh yeah, like labral tears are really common in the hip and skating. And we talk about those. You know, they tell you in all of the seminars, like at Champs Camp or whatever, these are the things we need. Clamshells. You know, your glute medius is probably weak, right? Hamstrings’ weak. And when it comes to mental health, there’s no one saying—talking about it. There’s no prevention. And in some ways, I wish like someone had said, “Hey, here are some things you might fall into. Like, the post-Olympic kind of blues. Like, these are—if you feel any of these. You may, you may not. Totally normal. It’s a lightweight body sport. So, you might find yourself using, you know, food or overexercising.

Which again, eating clean and working out a lot are not inherently bad for an athlete, but you might start overdoing it in this effort to feel more control.”

And just to talk about it like we're talking about ,you know, like glute strength or injury prevention. So, there's kind of—I mean, it's getting a little bit better, but at the time... it just seemed like I—I just was almost dumbfounded that the world was like—that it apparently had never been talked about. And that was like the really crazy part for me. Like, what do you mean eating disorders have never been talked about?

John Moe: Right. (*Chuckles.*) In the world of figure skating.

Gracie Gold: Yeah, like be so for real guys. Yeah. In ballet or models—like, I just couldn't believe it. I was like dumbfounded that seemed to be like this—like, that I was kind of the poster child for mental health in sport, but also eating disorders. I was just like (*chuckles*) what do you mean?

John Moe: As things got worse for you with your mental health, as your career goes along, what was happening with your parents? Because that wasn't exactly a foundation of strength with your mom and dad.

Gracie Gold: Yeah. They had... as an adult now, the—you know, I could almost just like kick myself for how, especially in my—yeah, like middle school, like high school years—like, how I treated my mom, and I was so short with her. But I feel like women that have been married to, you know, narcissists and sociopaths, I hope that they can really identify with my mom from the book. And we ended up editing out a lot about my parents, just because it was my memoir.

And I think my mom could write the most fascinating book. She's had really quite a wild life. But you know, I think that when you are married to someone who feels like an emotional terrorist a lot of the time, and then she's trying to raise twin daughters. And you know, my sister's like a finance star, and I'm this Olympian. And to try to do that with like no emotional or mental support from your spouse. If anything, they are like draining you—which is so difficult. And when my dad lost his job and like didn't tell anyone about it, then to add like a bit of a financial crisis on top of it? We just imploded is how I describe it. And you know, my mom, sister, and I have reunited and found our feet again. But it just was really the cherry on top of everything.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Just ahead, Gracie is in a bad place and gets some help to climb out.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with Gracie Gold, champion figure skater and author of *OutofShapeWorthlessLoser*.

Checking in for treatment, finally, was a big turning point for you, as you've mentioned. Where were things with you and your health just before that happened?

Gracie Gold: I was unwell. (*Chuckles.*) In the chapter before the one that's titled “Nuclear Meltdown”, does describe... I had very much a nuclear sized meltdown at what's called Champs Camp.

[00:30:00]

So, it's always in August, and it's where all of the skaters that are going out on the Grand Prix Circuit—we have like a little summer check in kind of camp, so to speak, and we call it Champs Camp. And so, nobody had really seen me. I hadn't been skating, and I—honest to god—like don't even know why I showed up. I guess I did because I was just so stuck in the, well, you can't—like, you have to keep going until they tell you. Until you start bombing or don't have assignments. You know, the concept that somebody would, you know, have two Grand Prix's and not do them because they were having mental health issues was very much not a concept I understood or even thought of. You know, I just was like, well, I can't just not show up because like, I'm sad.

And, you know, it was part of the concept—right?—that I thought a lot of mental health issues were behavioral and that I just didn't want it, or I just lost my spark, not realizing that the chemicals in my brain had like changed wildly. And I was—I mean, I was like almost agoraphobic at times when I was living in Detroit prior. I showed up at champs camp an absolute mess. And yeah, in the skating world, being palatable is very much something that's preached. Kind of old fashioned in a way of like you don't want to take stances or like, you know, when companies like don't want to get involved. Like, we don't have opinions, even when (*chuckles*) as we're kind of seeing now, like some things deserve—like, you can say your stance.

Everyone is very mild mannered, right? 'Cause skating up until—what?—a year or two ago was still ladies' figure skating. We just got changed to women's skating. You know, it's not ladies' basketball. It's not ladies' hockey. Right? It's not gentlemen's hockey. It's men's. And so, it was men's figure skating, but it was ladies' figure skating. You know, and ice dance—women couldn't wear pants in ice dance until 2015.

(*John “wow”s.*)

Yeah, that's probably—like, those two comparisons are my favorite to kind of describe in some ways the culture of skating. And so, it's not a trash talking sport at all. So, to show up at this Champs Camp, and I was spoken to in ways that I was unhappy with, but I was in my on-ice critique. I'd done one of my skates. And it was, you know—not a shocker—horrible. And I just—I mean, I was a disaster. I could maybe do a double axel, wasn't doing any triple jumps. I was a shell of the person that I used to be. And I was the wildly out of shape, and I was wearing a hoodie. Like, I didn't give a fuck, and you could tell. And that was very, I think, disarming for a lot of people.

But in my critique, I had these two USFS people. And one of them said, you know, that all of the judges cried after I skated, because they were so sad for me that I just lost all self-respect. And the other one said, “If you lose 30 pounds, you can have your Grand Prix’s back.”

And I was like, oh, okay. So, this is again like all about my weight. So, nobody cares that I showed up here absolutely a mess, didn't go to any of the team things, that I was rude to everyone. It's just that I was—if I lose weight, I'll be back in the family. That, and then this lack of self-respect. I thought lack of self-respect? Like, I am going to kill myself. Like, I was very much at the edge of “I think I just want to check out early. I can't live like this anymore.”

And these people are saying, “Okay, if she loses weight and starts respecting herself again, she'll be good to go.” And then I lost my mind. And I told everyone exactly what I thought of them with a lot of profanity. And one—BrandonCycle, who used to, run like the fitness section at the USOPC, he and another woman named Jen and Susie, they kind of saw through that and thought like, “Oh, what if this isn't behavioral? What if she's not just being lazy and out of shape and a bitch? What if there's something wrong, like in a mental health way?” And they were the ones that got me that phone call and were like, “We think that you should go. We think that you should—you need help. Like, we see that you are fighting to even stay alive right now, and that this has nothing—like, it has to do with skating, but also nothing to do with skating. And we're here to try to help you.”

And to be fair, I did make sure that the treatment center was AMA. I was not interested in going to, you know, a psych ward. So, I wasn't interested in going to a psych ward. And I thought—'cause I was still unconvinced a little bit. I wasn't sure if it was going to work. I still very much just thought that I was defective and this out of shape, worthless loser, and that nobody could help me. But I went. Just, if anything else, I thought it's not going to be any worse than it is right now.

[00:35:00]

And that I can always decide to check out early, but once I make that decision, I can't come back. Right? So, I thought, “Fuck it. Let's see if this therapy stuff really can work.”

John Moe: You mentioned that the facility that you went to was an AMA facility. What does that mean?

Gracie Gold: Oh, against medical advice. So, I wasn't being held. Some places have the 72-hour—you know, I didn't want to feel like I was committed. Again, because I still thought—right?—I've seen, like *Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. I was like I don't—seen some of that. You know, I watched *American Horror Story*. I was like, I don't want to go to one of those places. And I'm going to be drugged up, and I can't—you know, I was part of that. Like, I just—it's what I thought, 'cause I saw it in a movie, but I didn't actually have any knowledge of what getting treatment for mental health was like. You know, I thought it was either like a Malibu rehab where you had private chefs or, you know, you were committed with like grippy socks. I didn't understand that there were so many different ways.

So, I wanted to make sure. I was like I'm not going to be committed. And like, that USF or the USOC is like trapping me here, right? I'm not gonna be like stuck in the psych ward. And it wasn't at all like that. And also, it was like not the USOC's intention to try to do that. But yeah, AMA is against medical advice. So, I could have left treatment at any time.

John Moe: Well, I want to ask about what happened in treatment, but I feel like we need to include the story as you include in your book. You tell the story of being raped by another skater. How did that affect what was already going on with your mental health problems?

Gracie Gold: I would say in a lot of ways, that was kind of the... mm, one of the final straws. And it's ultimately why I left California and found myself living for the first time alone in Detroit without—I made a few friends while I was there, but I mean, not the level of friendship that my health crisis needed. It was not—and it's like no fault of their own, right? I just like dropped in there, didn't really know them. So, they were not—and they're also training for their own Olympics. Like, they weren't—it was a bad setup of like not having a support system. Again, not—some people think that I am being rude to the people in Detroit that I was skating with. Absolutely not.

They—it's hard to be a support system for someone's mental health crisis if you just met them. That is like an inappropriate like thing that I would have placed on them. So, and then—yeah, after the rape and then bombing nationals and then leaving the only two people I've ever lived with, my mom and sister, behind and going to this new place and trying to live on my own for the first time while being clinically depressed. And at that point, my disordered eating was oscillating more to the other side of the over binge eating. So, my body dysmorphia was—you know, I hated how I looked. I hated who I was. I hated a lot of the people in my life. It was just the really kind of final thing that brought the whole crisis together.

John Moe: What happened in treatment?

Gracie Gold: Like, any specific part?

John Moe: No, what was the approach that was taken? How did you respond to it?

Gracie Gold: I mean, based on the fact that I'm still here, I like to think that I responded well to it. The parts that I liked—it was one of the first times that I was with a group of people and, you know, there's some anonymity to treatment. And just nobody—I didn't tell anyone that I was a skater, but also nobody asked. Like, nobody was really—like, it might—I'm sure it would—like, it came up with my therapist. But in the group of us, it wasn't really... like, just nobody cared. They were like, “Oh.” Or if I said, you know, I was a skater, like they're like, “That's really cool.” And then the conversation moved on. Like, nobody cared that I was Gracie Gold or—you know, no one knew, nobody cared at all.

And I—it was one of the first times I hung out with such a large group of my peers. And I got to meet a lot of people from like all walks of life all over the place. And I don't want to say—I mean, we didn't trauma bond, but we were like—we bonded in getting better. So, we had—and just the amount that I had in common with these people that if you had asked me a year before, I'd be like, “I don't know what I'd have in common with a heroin addict.” Right?

Because I thought—again, part of the stigma—I thought that drug addicts looked a certain way, and they behaved a certain way, and they came from a certain space. You know, I'm still shocked to this day like absolutely how ignorant I was about so many parts of the world. And it was a mix of—the only therapy I didn't like was equine therapy.

John Moe: Okay, horses?

Gracie Gold: Not a huge horse—not a huge horse fan. I can watch horses from afar. I think they're beautiful creatures.

[00:40:00]

We're not—horses and I are fine, you know.

John Moe: (*Chuckles.*) Separately.

Gracie Gold: Even before covid, we're like minimum six feet apart. Yeah, when I found myself at like 7 or 8AM this Thursday morning running around an open field in the Arizona desert with a hula hoop and a cone chasing after this horse, I thought, “Where—? What am I doing? What is—?”

John Moe: How have all my decisions led to this?

Gracie Gold: I was like, “Wow, I could have guessed every single outcome, and I still wouldn't have guessed this is where I'd be instead of at like my Grand Prix events.” But again, I like remember these times fondly. I also really love—and just like learning about the world. I would say that I was relatively sheltered to a lot of things, you know, growing up super White, Midwest, upper middle class. Like, there were just—I just didn't know. I had no idea about like anything. I was part of the problem in so many ways for so long. And then again, skating is rather a niche sport.

But like, I remember the first time I read the AA book cover to cover. And I just thought that it was beautiful. And you know, it walks through the 12 steps, but it has all of these little stories in the—it's the first or second half. And just the amount of the stories that I could connect to and that resonated and that I thought were beautiful. You know, I went to one of the greatest speakers I ever heard in my life. I went to a Crystal Meth Anonymous meeting at an art gallery. And I am not a big crier, but I just remember feeling like I had tears. It was absolutely one of the most beautiful talks I've ever heard in my life.

And just learning about all of these things and all of these people. And honestly, I felt like for the first time, the only gift that the “Out of Shape Worthless Loser” section gave me was that I finally—first of all, my frontal lobe developed more, which I think probably across the board helped. But also, I felt like I got to meet myself. Like, who I was more organically. ‘Cause a lot of times in skating, it doesn't always matter what you feel. It matters what it looks like. Right? That's like the whole sport is that it matters what nine judges and like the tech panel think of what you do. You know, I grew up always curling my hair at a certain point, because I thought that it showed that I put more effort in. Or I wore it up, because I

thought that's what I was supposed to do with the high bun. You know, that was elegant. It was an updo.

You know, I constantly chose things based on how I thought they would appear from the outside. It wasn't like, "What do I want to wear today?" It was more, "What do I want other people to see today?" is how I was living my life. So, with all of that stripped away—and again, just in a new place with new people and kind of going through this together, talk therapy, art therapy, the lights. What is that—? You sit, and the lights go back and forth, and you recall—

John Moe: Oh, EMDR.

Gracie Gold: EMDR. Yeah, I was like, "EGM is not right."

(They chuckle.)

But you know, that was really interesting, and I think the community and like the friendship groups that we had there—it was a really—I mean, it was a huge, life-changing experience, as I said. Because I am still here. It wasn't always fun. I hate to say, "Oh, rehab was fun." But it was so life changing and beneficial. And there were some—I look back on it really fondly, because of the people there and my experiences, but also because it saved my life.

John Moe: I was a little surprised after you got out of rehab that you went back to skating.

Because I guess I thought of the skating world or just your involvement in skating as being this thing that was making things so much worse, that it kind of surprised me that you got back on the ice. You got back into competitions. Why go back to skating after you got out of rehab?

Gracie Gold: So, that wasn't the initial plan, but I remember thinking—at least for the time being in Arizona—I was like, why? Income. If I do want to move here full time and live here full time, like a job. While I decided if I want to go back to school, and if so for what, and if so where—you know, rent is still due while I make these decisions. So, one of my friends taught at the rink in Scottsdale, Arizona. So, I called him, and I was like, "Weird question. I'm in Arizona. Surprise. Is there any—like, some light coaching that I could do?" And so, it started by teaching. And I had never—I had taught a little bit before, but nothing particularly serious. And then I found my way to IceWorks and Philly suburbs. And then after coaching a lot and doing maybe like a little choreography—and that does involve you to skate a little bit—

[00:45:00]

I was kind of talked into like, "Oh, maybe you should skate, you know, two or three times a week." It was—I mean, it was said like, if you want to, if you would never want to put skates on in any—you know, to do things—like, any capacity, that's great. Whatever. But I thought, you know what? Shows are a thing. I do like performing, and I missed skating. That was the big thing. I thought, okay. You know, twist my arm. And that's how it started is it was—my

intent was to never lace up and go back out there and try to compete at high levels; it just started with the fact that I missed skating.

John Moe: You still enjoyed it.

Gracie Gold: Yeah. And I mean, in treatment, you know, one of the big things was like it's not—like, skating is not really—'cause a lot of things were blamed on skating, right? I blamed my parents', you know, shitty marriage on skating. And you know, I blamed like finances on skating and why sometimes it felt like I didn't have any friends or no one—you know, it was all skating's fault. But the real tea was that I—there was accountability for me. And also, you know, I had failed myself in a lot of ways. I'd had some like caregivers or people that, you know, were important to me fail me as well. And that—but the accountability of “Is it the sport of skating's fault? Or is there anything you did maybe that added to that?” Maybe how I poorly—you know, she's like, “Gracie, maybe I poorly managed some of those things and the expectations. And also, you know, had to learn the concept of setting boundaries.” (*Chuckles.*)

All of these concepts and conversations. And I thought, you know, I do really like skating. I'm not sure in what capacity I'd have it in my life, but I miss skating, and I should be able to have a normal relationship-ish with just—I should be able to go out and skate, you know, just for fun or for exercise. And it doesn't need to like break my psyche. And then I obviously—again, I've never done anything casually. So, of course I found my way back to competitive skating. But I would say it was a surprise. It certainly wasn't my plan, you know, when I started coaching in Arizona or when I, you know, was coaching on the East coast. Didn't expect to be here. (*Chuckles.*)

John Moe: Yeah. Is it part of your recovery?

Gracie Gold: I think in some ways it really is. It can be—it still can be difficult to, you know, manage sometimes. Like, I definitely feel some of those—like, the perfectionist demons, the imposter syndrome can come back, but I think it is in a lot of ways. And you know, I love skating so much. And you know, I don't think that I have—that you have to have this like addict mentality, no matter how much you love skating. 'Cause it just is not that serious at the end of the day. You know, it just is a—it's just a sport. And I wanted the opportunity to see if I could have this really important thing that I loved in my life in a way that wasn't detrimental to my psyche.

And maybe not everyone can have that with their sport, you know, or their drug of choice. But I thought like I think we should, in a very safe environment—like, can we try it? And can people come back to skating? You know, it's a sport that a lot of people leave bitter and full of resentment, or they feel like they get stuck in it. You know, some people say like, “Well, I can't leave, because it's all I do. It's all I know how.” So, it's like, oh, is there—? Can I come back in a way in skating that I take it really seriously, and it's a huge part of my life, but it's not the undoing? And/or the glue that holds—you know, without it, my life would come undone.

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

John Moe: Gracie Gold, congratulations on the book, and congratulations on your journey, and thanks for telling your story.

Gracie Gold: No, thank you so much. And thanks for having me on and having this conversation with me.

John Moe: Gracie Gold's book is available now. *OutofShapeWorthlessLoser*. No spaces between those words, just all one big word. Subtitle, *A Memoir of Figure Skating, F*cking Up, and Figuring It Out*. I really liked this book. Hey, the MaxFunDrive is just around the corner. It's a celebration of our listeners, the community that we have built together, and of the work being done on Maximum Fun. The drive starts March 18th, and it's only two weeks long. There are some all new gifts available this year that we've been putting together. So excited for you to see them. There are events and surprises. There is bonus content. Our bonus content is really good. I think you'll really enjoy it. And we have some amazing guests lined up! You're going to want to hear those episodes. That's all happening on the MaxFunDrive starting March 18th.

Be sure to hit subscribe, give us five stars, write rave reviews about the show. That gets the show out into the world where it can help folks. We really appreciate your support in that department. Our ratings have been fantastic in those, in those Apple podcast reviews and other places.

[00:50:00]

And we really thank you for that.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached in the United States and Canada by calling or texting 988. Free, available 24/7. Our Instagram and Twitter are both @DepreshPod. Our *Depresh Mode* newsletter is on Substack, search that up. I'm on Twitter and Instagram, @JohnMoe. Be sure to join our Preshies group on Facebook. A lot of great discussion happening over there—people helping each other out, providing support, providing information, providing insight, providing all sorts of things. Just look up Preshies on Facebook; you'll find it. Our electric mail address is DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. The candy Pez—you know, the pellets served from the necks of plastic characters, which is so weird, and we never talk about it—gets its name from Pfefferminz, which is German for peppermint. *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. 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

Phil: Phil from Pullman, Washington, and I think you're pretty great.

(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!