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**John Moe:** A note to listeners, this week's episode contains discussion of suicide and suicidal ideation.

If you go see Lynyrd Skynyrd, you want to hear them play “Free Bird”. You just do. You see Gary Numan in concert, you expect him at some point to play “Cars”. If A-Ha didn't play “Take on Me”, you'd feel shortchanged. It's like on *The Simpsons* when Bart, Milhouse, Martin, and Nelson go see Andy Williams in Branson, Missouri.

**Clip:**

*(Audience cheering.)*

**Speaker 1:** *(Giddy.)* I didn't think he was gonna do “Moon River”! But then, bam! Second encore!

**John Moe:** What's our “Moon River” here on the show? Our “Free Bird” or “Cars” or “In a Big Country”? Well, there's always “you can't achieve your way out of depression”. That's been a hit. The idea—the fallacy—that people who get big prizes, land huge jobs, get into phenomenal schools, can't possibly be depressed. Because they can, just like anyone.

You've heard “you can't achieve your way out of depression” before on the show. It's always a crowd pleaser. And it's on the set list this week, along with some deeper cut tracks that you might not have heard before.

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

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Sierra Katow is a veteran standup comedian, writer, and actor. Her new special is called *Funt*.

**Clip:**

*(Audience laughter.)*

**Sierra Katow:** I'm super lucky. I feel lucky. Any other long-termers out here? Long term relationship folks?

*(Cheers from the audience.)*

Alright, alright. Okay. My parents didn't cheer, wow.

*(Laughter.)*

Because of my situation, like I haven't really dated in my adult life. Which I know that's a little controversial when I tell single friends who have been single for a while. It's kind of like telling a war veteran that you dodged the draft. You're like, "Oh my god, I'm sorry. Bone spurs. I—"

*(Laughter.)*

**John Moe:** Sierra has been doing standup since she was 16 years old. She's appeared on late night shows and *Last Comic Standing*. She has a recurring role on HBO's *The Sex Lives of College Girls*. She went to Harvard, was on the *Harvard Lampoon* there, got a degree in computer science too, and has done a lot of work in that industry.

And she's lived with depression and dealt with suicidal ideation. Yes, these things can affect anyone. No, successful achievement-oriented people are not immune. But it's not a matter of someone succeeding in spite of mental health issues, and it's certainly not succeeding because of mental health issues. It's more a matter of succeeding and having mental health issues at the same time.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Sierra Katow, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

**Sierra Katow:** Hey! Thank you so much, John. I'm very excited to be here.

**John Moe:** Where do we find you today?

**Sierra Katow:** Oh! Well, I'm in Los Angeles—East LA, as they call it over here. Without doxing myself completely, a little east of downtown LA. But yeah, it's nice. A little overcast today, appropriately.

**John Moe:** Cool, nice.

*(They laugh.)*

Yeah, exactly. Get the gloom in there in time for the interview.

I watched your special, *Funt*. I enjoyed it very much.

*(Sierra thanks him.)*

I have to ask—your parents were in the audience, and you referenced them, you pointed them out. They were there for a lot of jokes. Some of the jokes were about them, almost at their expense. And then there was plenty of I guess adult subject matter in the special.

(Sierra laughs.)

How did that go for you, having your mom and dad sitting there watching all that?

**Sierra Katow:** You know, it's a great question. 'Cause I think a lot of people were like, "Oh, wow." You know, the fact that they were down to be there and be videoed and everything, the reactions. Luckily for me, you know, they've been on this journey with me basically the whole time—obviously, in the sense that they raised me, but for the comedy journey too. Like, they—I started when I was 16, so they would like drive me. Like, I didn't have a driver's license, you know, for at least a bit of it. So, they would take me to open mics. They would sometimes watch shows with me. So, I mean, you know, we were definitely breaching tough, kind of risqué topics at these comedy clubs when I was even younger than I am, right?

So, I think there was, you know, maybe that sort of callousness to hearing those dirty jokes is there. I think I was, you know, banking on the fact that maybe they couldn't hear everything I said. (Laughs.) But no, I think that luckily they have—I get my sense of humor from them. I think like I probably got into this to make them laugh and to breach tough topics with them and be able to like kind of tease each other.

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And they tease me. And so, I—and they have a good, thankfully, sense of humor about themselves. So, yeah, they're kind of the perfect audience. And you know, I owe a lot to them for being, again, like open and willing to be there (chuckles) and hopefully make it a little more interesting.

**John Moe:** What led you to start standup at 16 years old?

**Sierra Katow:** Oh! I remember being—well, I still am quite a nerd, but definitely in high school, you know, all those things get exaggerated. So, I was very—maybe a little bit quieter, dutiful, nerd, student government. You know, all these things that I felt were also maybe things I wanted to break out of, and I felt like standup was the perfect way to do it. Because A) you know, you get a microphone; you get to be the one talking. No real barrier. Again, like my parents would take me to these open mics, and like everybody—you just sign up, you know. Of course, sometimes there's a lottery system, or there are people who—you know, you can't move on to the next level if there's like a booked show.

But for the most part, standup is like a great way to just break in with like minimal gatekeeping at the earliest level. So, I think I felt like, yeah, it would help me break out of my shell. And I knew I liked funny people, and I loved comedy. And it just was a good way to kind of like take matters into my own hands in some ways. It felt that way, at least at the time.

**John Moe:** What kind of stuff did you talk about at that age?

**Sierra Katow:** Oh, *(laughs)* nothing important. I mean, yeah, I think it's like, you know, you don't know. You don't have much life experience. So, you know, I would—I think a lot of it—

**John Moe:** PSATs.

**Sierra Katow:** Yes. Oh yeah. Oh god, the PSAT, man. You know! Slipping in there that I was young, so it could be kind of a fun part of the joke or like talking about being, you know, in school. And I think I had a fart joke. That was one of my earliest jokes. So, you're—you know, I think when you're starting out and you're young like that, you kind of—you go to topics that are pretty absurd absurdist or, you know, not so deep. Because there's not really that much I can pull from. Yeah.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Did you know even from that age like this is my destiny, I will be a standup comedian?

**Sierra Katow:** Oh gosh. Um, yeah, I mean, I think I liked that it had a trajectory that felt very like—again, DIY, like you didn't necessarily have to do anything in particular like go to a get a particular degree or— It did feel very like sky's the limit, you know, if you just keep pushing at it. Of course, I've learned way more limits now, but I think like—

*(They chuckle.)*

As you get older.

**John Moe:** More than just the sky, there's plenty of...

**Sierra Katow:** Yeah, I guess the sky—there's a little bit more stuff in between. Yeah, and then I think it just seemed like this was something that you could also just do for a while, and if you wanted to make it a big career, you could. But you know, it could also be on the side. And I did it for a while on the side while still going to school and college and stuff. So, yeah, I think it definitely was one of the first like creative things that I really felt like maybe I had a future in.

Before that—and I talked about this in my special, but like, you know, I played basketball for a long time. And there was a real clear, I think, ceiling on that for me as like a 5'1 child. *(Laughs.)* You know, still, I didn't—yeah, grow past that limit. So, I think it was good to know like, okay, this one's a little bit less limited than basketball.

**John Moe:** There's not as much of a height restriction in standup. Yeah, yeah. Well, being the show that we are, I do have to ask you—and you talk about depression in your special, in *Fund*. When did depression come into your life?

**Sierra Katow:** Oh gosh. Yeah, I think it was pretty early. And again, it's like, you know, whatever I'm determining is that, because I didn't have a diagnosis at the time. But I think like I remember probably around teenage years, of course—great time to get all the things going. I think I felt like certain amounts of, oh yeah, despondent-ness and like, oh, there's weirdly—

You know, I felt very luckily in tune with my emotions as a kid. I remember like crying a lot and hating that I would cry. You know what I mean? Because it was always embarrassing. Ugh! My sister and I would call it public crying if we ever like cried and somebody—you know, at a basketball game. Though, it happens. Sometimes you feel like you let your team down. There's like an audience there. You're like, “Oh no!”

So, I did remember at least knowing—I could at least interpret my emotions. But then at a certain point I remember feeling like, oh wait, this is a weird one where I feel kind of aimless and not much going up or down, sort of just like I'm stuck in this kind of weird, liminal zone. And it was not something I could control. Like, I could identify that that's—it was strange, and I couldn't be like, “Oh, well, intellectually we're in a great place. It's going to be fine!” You know, I could say that, but it wouldn't necessarily change how I felt.

So, yeah, I feel like that was in the teen years, maybe post puberty or around puberty time, you know? Classic.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Did you have much of an understanding of what mental illness or depression were?

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**Sierra Katow:** Huh. I don't think I did. I couldn't have. I think it's the thing where, you know, now that I had learned more about it, I'm like, “Oh yeah, retroactively, maybe I knew that that was what that was.” But I don't think I had the words for it and maybe had heard of a friend's mom had trouble getting out of bed or something. So, I'd be like, oh, interesting. But then it was typically tied to, “Oh, they had, you know, a loss in the family or—” You know, some event. And so, that makes—

**John Moe:** There was a reason for reason for it.

**Sierra Katow:** Yeah. Yeah. That kind of makes you go, oh, okay. Well, then. That has to happen in order for you to feel that way. You know.

**John Moe:** Yeah. What did mental health mean in your family?

**Sierra Katow:** (*Laughs.*) I don't think we really had much to chat about there. I think it was—you know, and it still is tough, I think. As much as my parents are wonderful about the jokes and, you know, come in and make fun of themselves, me and my—actually I know I'm very lucky. I have some great cousins too. My sister, of course. And we're millennials typically, so it's like much more to talk about mental health, but our parents are typically baby boomers. And I think, of course, they wouldn't—they just didn't really have that in their vocabulary, or it just wasn't an important thing.

So, I think we—at least I commiserate with my cousins about the fact that our parents are kind of like—don't really have much room for that, or they don't fully understand it if we try to breach the topic. And there's kind of like a, “Oh, therapy. Well, you know, you're not—that's for like extreme measures, you know, if you really, really need something or something

horrible happens. That's not something you do just to like maintain, you know, general mental health.”

So, I think it's been—yeah, especially growing up, yeah, definitely wasn't a thing and kind of was something that I found on my own, and then also other people and my cousins and friends and sister vicinity were like learning simultaneously, which was cool.

**John Moe:** Well, okay. So, you're growing up. You're running into this kind of morbid feelings, this kind of gloom, these kinds of things that would be identified later as a clinical depression. And then you are still able to move on to frigging Harvard! Which is a hard school, as I understand it, to get into. So, were you—

**Sierra Katow:** Not the best place for mental health. (*Laughs.*)

**John Moe:** Well, that's what I was going to ask. Like, were you able to separate, you know, your achievements and your academics and all the resume things, things that go in an application during high school, from these depressive tendencies?

**Sierra Katow:** Oh yeah. I mean, it's interesting. I think like, yes, there's definitely like a—you know, high school felt like such a singular focus of like, okay, well you obviously just like got to do your homework and get—you know, do all the tests and PSAT, like you said. Got to do that PSAT, of course. And then getting to college definitely felt like, oh, interesting. So, you know, you've achieved the thing, which was going to Harvard. I mean, of course, for me that was a huge deal. I like, you know, didn't really have family that went there. So, it was kind of this pipe dream thing and obviously a big name, you know. There's that element of also wanting the prestige, but also you want to go to a good school so you can hopefully do well in whatever field.

So, I think getting in—I mean—was awesome, but also, yeah, then once you're there, you run into a few things. Which is—for me, it was like, okay, I kind of knew—I mean, going in, it's like I'm going to be surrounded by a bunch of extremely accomplished people. So, it's a lot of like, okay, maybe you were the big fish in your small pond of your high school, but once you're in college and then also Harvard, like everybody was valedictorian and class president. So, like what else do you bring to the table? And you're 18 or 17 and like around that age, and maybe you don't bring something else to the table, and that's okay. And maybe you don't have to bring anything to the table, you know what I mean? But the personality that goes there is often like, “Oh, well, god, I gotta be number one in something, you know?”

So, I think that panic set in early. And I mean, I had the benefit too of like getting to tap into creative stuff more, because I was doing comedy even before college. I sort of like leaned into that more, because it was something a little different. And I think I also worked with the arts. Like, I remember as a counselor for the freshman arts program, which was called that at the time. It's like first—you know, when the first years' coming in, and they want to do something artsy. And I would kind of get to see every year new first year's coming in and how the pressure could be universal, even if people were extremely, extremely talented in their own right. Or maybe they wanted to try something new, but there was just this fear of like, well, I'm not going to be the best, so what's the point? You know?

And at that young age, I feel like that's a very difficult thing to have to live up to, of course. So—you know, so I saw it from both sides, and then—yeah, and then when you're there, I think, you know, there's of course the pressure of—the academic pressure, which I think I probably felt a little less. (*Chuckles.*) Because I was—I did study computer science, but I kind of had this comedy dream.

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So, I knew, hey, look; if I don't get—you know. I think also there was the help of like I didn't want to go to grad school, so maybe grades weren't as important as they were in high school for me. And Harvard has grade inflation, let's be honest. So, there is like some help there. (*Laughs.*) Yeah.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Well, I've always wondered, 'cause I've heard both sides, but I've always wondered is Harvard hard? Like, is it a difficult place to go to school?

**Sierra Katow:** Sure. I mean, okay, I would say it's as hard as you want it to be, right? Because you could be like, "I need a 4.0," and then you just have to like kind of go deep into that. And that's extremely difficult, of course. Or "I want to get a master's in four years," which some people did too. But you know, if you are having—if you're accepting like, hey, I'm actually just going to try to have like a good time and experience all the things and take a lot of interesting classes, it can be fine. Because it's not as—you know, it's not as rigorous grade-wise, I suppose.

That being said, people compete. I think it's just like naturally extremely competitive. So, you're going to fall into that, you know, if you are a person who is competitive—which is probably why you're there. So, you know, for instance, I was in like—probably one of my main focuses was the *Harvard Lampoon*, which was like a humor magazine there, and I wanted to write for TV and do comedy, of course. So, that was like kind of an important extracurricular for me to do. And I think there it became competitive in its own way, even though it's not a class. You're not getting a grade. But you know, there were people who, you know, you wanted to... you wanted to rise in the ranks, let's say.

So, it kind of became like a little mini business, and then you kind of try to negotiate your way to the top kind of thing. So, yeah, like even making that a competitive environment was like by choice, right?

**John Moe:** Yeah, yeah. So, then how did your mental health do at Harvard? Like, you had this depression before you got there. And we're going to talk about, you know, how it was after you talk about going to therapist and as an adult. How did it do during those four years?

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Back with more from Sierra Katow after a break. I wonder why I keep asking people what their parents think about what they're doing. Maybe it's because my mom has started regularly listening to the show. I'll give that some thought.

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** We're back with Sierra Katow, comedian, actor, writer. Before the break, I asked her how her still-active depression did during four years of studying at Harvard.

**Sierra Katow:** Right, yeah. I think not great, you know. I think it was—it's just a lot of—all sorts of new experiences too. So, that's really great and then also can mean a lot of overload of like, okay—now you have to like, also think about this. Like, you know, you have your new friendships. And if those aren't going great, you feel like that's bad. Or then, okay, grades. Of course, academics. And so, I think because there's so many different things facets of college life, and you're young, and you're away from home, and you're also trying to kind of keep on a good face for everybody, because it seems like that's what everybody else is doing. I think it was pretty tough.

And you know, I don't think I can point to a particular like horrible breaking point or anything, but I think there was a—you know, I look back and go, yeah, that was probably really hard on young Sierra. And I had friends who went through some pretty tough things where maybe they were more—seriously needed to take a leave of absence or reconsider kind of what to—like, what to value in their life. So, I think, yeah, a lot of stuff now is kind of working through those times and being like, “Oh yeah, maybe I feel this way because I was pushing myself really hard in college, and that's kind of residual now.” And you know, also a lot of my friends are the same. And so, maybe we kind of have all the same thing going on where we're kind of pushing ourselves. And who are we trying to impress?

You know, stuff like that. So, yeah, I think—you know, it was tough. I wouldn't say—I think no one gets away unscathed. (*Chuckles.*) And it's just a—I know it's just a product of it being that time of your life when you're young and you're, you know, trying everything new and you're failing a lot. So.

**John Moe:** Were you trying to—you had so many achievements of getting into Harvard and rising and the *Lampoon* and all these things. Were you trying to achieve the depression away? Like, surely nobody who's gotten to this level could be depressed, so I better win as much as I can?

**Sierra Katow:** Oh yeah, definitely. Yeah. I mean, I think I still am trying to achieve the depression away. I'm still trying to find out where that level is. No, I think it's—

**John Moe:** Good luck!

**Sierra Katow:** But yes, of course. Yeah. Where is it? Come on. Tell me, John. You know! You surely have talked to some people.

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**John Moe:** You know, it's one of my pet subjects that, you know, I've seen people do. And I've done it myself, and I continue to do it even though I know it's an impossibility, this achieving your way out.



**Sierra Katow:** Oh my gosh. Yes. Yeah, no, good to know. I think like it's a good reminder, right? Like, I feel as if, you know, there's still—it's quieter now, but at the time I think there was that voice that was like, well, look, even if—say—you can't achieve your way out of this, don't lose your edge. Because we've never lost our edge before. Like, we've never not tried to achieve. So, like who knows what's over there? So, let's just keep pushing, you know, just in case, and like keep maintaining that pressure to achieve to maybe get out of this. Because if you somehow discover that that's not the answer, then like maybe you won't achieve. And then, oof! We don't want to go there, you know? So, I think there was like kind of this bargaining of, you know, let's at least just see this through, whatever that means. (*Chuckles.*)

**John Moe:** Yeah, let's keep achieving and, you know, hope for the best in that department. And you were a computer science major, right?

(*Sierra confirms.*)

Wow. Okay, why that?

**Sierra Katow:** Oh gosh, I mean—yeah, I know. That has a history with me where I'm like, well—(*laughs*) no, I coded a lot in high school and before. So, I like was a real nerd, as I had mentioned. So, I loved to play—it actually started with this game, *Neopets*.

(*John affirms.*)

Which is like a virtual pets online game. Oh yeah, you know *Neopets*?

**John Moe:** My kids were into *Neopets*, except all their *Neopets* would just sort of—I always felt bad when they lost interest, and these *Neopets* were just abandoned in cyberspace.

**Sierra Katow:** Oh yeah. I mean, unfortunately I think that's the majority of them. (*Laughs.*) So, don't feel—yeah, that's okay. I mean, luckily they're virtual, you know. And they never actually die. They're always—they do like go hungry, but then they just kind of land at the bottom at dying, I think.

(*John laughs.*)

So, they never disappear, which is good. And yeah. I mean, that was like all the rage at a certain time and perfect timing with my, you know, being 10 or whatever age I was. And so—but that introduced me to coding, because there was some sort of elements where like you can customize your page and make cool backgrounds or sparkly—you know, sparkly text and stuff like that. And I think it actually got a lot of girls into coding, so I hear now. But anyway, so I self-taught a lot of coding at the time and got into that and then knew I kind of wanted to do computer science in college.

But I really—I think, luckily, actually our high school did have a couple classes, which was great. I took one, I remember, so that was cool. And yeah, so then I knew it would be a good—like, I did some internships in tech and everything. And I was like kind of planning to go into tech, but obviously wanted to do comedy. And I thought it would be a good backup

plan to pay the bills, which I've done since. You know, it's very good—it was good freelance work in the beginning when, you know, you're not making any money from comedy. And I mean, surely I'll come back to it probably if I need to, right?

But I think, I wasn't as—yeah, as maybe enthusiastic about it as I was in comedy and everything. But it was a nice like way to kind of escape and a very different world.

**John Moe:** You talk in your special about going to a therapist and them telling you, yes, you have depression. How far back do you go with therapy? Was that your first therapist who told you that?

**Sierra Katow:** So, I started in kind of the pandemic, of course. Or you know, probably April 2020. It was pretty soon after we had locked down more formally. And I think I'd wanted to start therapy for a while, but I had also—I think what helped was that when everything went to teletherapy, everything was online, and it kind of made it a lot easier. Before I had this thing in my head where I was like, “Well, if I'm going to pay for therapy, I should do the in person. But if I do the in person, then I got to go shop around.” And I just didn't have—like, didn't prioritize it.

So I think what was great about everything going online, it was like no choice but to do teletherapy. And this one's actually a little bit simpler if you just want to sit at your computer and figure that out. So, that's when I began officially. And yeah. And I mean, of course, that was the peak of, you know, really tough mental health for everybody. So, I think it was just the right time to get into it for me. And yeah, so that was—yeah, around April 2020.

**John Moe:** You talk about it being tough mental health for everybody. What was it like for you? How was it manifesting?

**Sierra Katow:** Yeah, just being away from people, of course. I think it's not our natural state. But also, I—yeah, I realized how important also—not just the socializing, but the standup comedy became not a thing anymore pretty quickly.

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And it was something I'd been doing for, you know, since I was 16. And so, it was like—I had never been the person who had to get up, you know, five times a night or whatever, and depended on it for therapy. But I did still realize, you know—of course, when the well runs dry sort of situation. Hey, I did actually really need this, and I really miss it. So, I think it was the kind of loss of, you know, social life and then this sort of career that was also a passion.

And I think... yeah, I just was feeling the general down, despondent-ness, but also like definitely way more suicidal ideation than usual. Like, you know, just because there was not much else to think about, I guess. So, that hit a more, yeah, constant stride then. And yeah, I think that was kind of like all the things that were like, yeah, I think it's time to really try to tackle this.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** More with Sierra Katow just ahead. As we go to break, here's a bit more from her special, *Funt*.

**Clip:**

**Sierra Katow:** You know, we do standup. We put our videos online. Some of those videos go viral. And then, you not only learn how much people like you, but also how much people hate you. And want you to kill yourself with a blunt object. Even on the weekends!

*(Laughter.)*

Yeah, fun fact about me, I like to read all of the comments. Yeah. And by read, I mean I scroll past all the nice-ies, I get right to the meanies! You know? 'Cause the mean comments, those are the ones that count. You know that, yeah? Mean comments, those are like the real runs, right? Because—it's kind of like how if somebody compliments you, they're lying. They're lying to your face! Right? But if they insult you behind your back, oh, that's the God's honest truth!

*(Laughter.)*

That's the purest form of expression right there.

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Back with Sierra Katow. She was talking about experiencing suicidal ideation during the pandemic.

Was that a shock when the suicidal ideation showed up?

**Sierra Katow:** I don't think so. I think it was just—it became way more automatic. I think I've had that sort of general like murmur before and always thought it was like, well, everybody has this. And you know, it's maybe just the extreme part of your brain being kind of—you know, liking to make things a little more dramatic. And then—but yeah, I think it was just like, okay, now it's becoming like a little bit more of the go-to thought. If the slightest thing is going wrong, or if I'm feeling like just little—it kind of is like the perfectionist thing where it's like either it's perfect, or it's like you gotta just end it all. You know, it's a—that became a little bit more of the extreme, black and white.

**John Moe:** Did that interfere with your life, with your work, with your relationships?

**Sierra Katow:** I don't think it did. I mean, you know, certainly I'm probably not the one to ask. *(Chuckles.)* But I think like they're—you know, I think I was still working as a—I was lucky that I had a TV writing job that kind of went remote, so I had that sort of obligation.

I had this, you know, boss to show up to every day and put on a face for. So, I think that helped a little bit. If anything, like all that was sort of—yeah, on my own time. (*Chuckles.*) You know, off the clock Sierra was, you know, making sure to keep it contained, I guess.

**John Moe:** Is there a Nobel Prize or an Academy Award for compartmentalizing? Because I think you would really have a good shot at that award. You're a very good compartmentalizer.

**Sierra Katow:** (*Laughing.*) Oh-ho-ho! Hey, well, you're talking to an achievement centered brain. So, you know. Show me the way!

**John Moe:** If there's a trophy to be had, bring it on!

(*Sierra agrees.*)

No, I'm serious though. Like, you've dealt with—you know, that's—like, hitting suicidal ideation. That's pretty serious stuff, obviously. And you're, you know, holding down jobs, and you're achieving all the way through. It's really remarkable that somebody can do that.

**Sierra Katow:** Oh, no. I mean, I think it is something, and I think this helped with therapy was like my therapist saying like, “Oh, you know, everybody does have this to a certain degree.” And I think like the people that I have met who I also had no idea, you know, were maybe going through tougher things. And maybe I got a little bit more window into that when we were in school together, where you kind of see every angle of them. Versus if I'm just coworkers with somebody, of course I don't know what's going on with them after we leave work.

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But yeah, just that it is very common, and I think everybody is dealing with something. And I've learned that even more now in comedy, right? Because it's like you've got the people who are like hilarious, and then they're really crushing it. And you see them, you know, like get the great thing on—you know, a good TV role or something. You know, something that's like, oh, well surely they figured it out. You know, and then inevitably we find out, oh, okay, actually they've got some stuff they really had to deal with and are still dealing with.

And so, yeah. It just seems like the package deal, you know? Everybody has to have a little bit of that, I guess.

**John Moe:** Huh. So, do you think that everybody has episodes of suicidal ideation?

**Sierra Katow:** Well, I hope not, I guess. But yeah, I mean, I guess I just—I think what did help me initially was like this is a thing that isn't—it doesn't guarantee that anything like will happen, if that makes sense. So, it's like, okay, I might be having these thoughts, but I'm not necessarily like gonna act on them.

**John Moe:** Making a plan, yeah.

**Sierra Katow:** Yeah. And then, you know, the fact that they're in my mind doesn't mean that I am right. You know, that that should happen. And I think that was a lot of it, which was interesting. I think a lot of the version that I had was like, oh, well, you should do this, because that's like the right thing to do. Like, it was almost like a moral obligation. Which is like kind of—I don't know. Like, I think that maybe—so, it helped when I heard from a therapist like, “Well, you know, people have this. It doesn't mean that that's—” I think, its saying like you're not special and having this. So, if you have this, then like—

**John Moe:** There are other people who have it too.

**Sierra Katow:** You know, versus if you—exactly. Yes, exactly. Yeah. Like, it's like, if you have it, it doesn't mean that you specifically need to commit suicide, you know? So, I think it was—(*chuckles*) that was helpful to kind of know that it was a bit more common and didn't necessarily make it the right thing to do.

**John Moe:** Right, right. Were you surprised when the therapist said, “I think you have major depressive disorder?”

**Sierra Katow:** Oh, I don't think—well, you know, I think there was always a hope to get some sort of perspective on what was going on a little bit. And you know, I think there was also my reluctance to like share everything even with a therapist. And I still feel that way sometimes. You know, there's like, okay, well, maybe if I don't talk about it like maybe it's fine. (*Laughs.*) You know, and then ultimately—you know, I kind of come around to the idea that like, yeah, actually it would be nice to get a little bit more of a clarity of what's going on.

So, no, I don't think it was like a total surprise. But I think it was a little bit like of a relief. And then also just a bit of like, okay, yeah; there's definitely someone else who knows this, you know. And I think that can be comforting.

**John Moe:** How have you gone about addressing it or treating it?

**Sierra Katow:** It's been a little bit like—I probably—I didn't end up getting medication. Because I think there was a time at which I was—you know, I would have—I had to go. I actually talk about this in the special, but it's a little exaggerated in the special. I think I just, at the time, was going to go to a psychiatrist and then kind of did, but didn't get the prescription from that or didn't get the diagnosis from the psychiatrist. So, that was fine.

And then I was a little bit like, oh damn, you know, maybe that would have been helpful like ejector seat is kind of what I was thinking at the time, just to like get out of where I was feeling. But ultimately I just continued therapy, and then I—and I still do. And I think I found a lot of help as we kind of came out of lockdown and less isolation. And I think I really—a lot of things I realized were my routine and figuring out, you know, I do—because I have that sort of achievement brain thing, you know, there was a help when I got a job. And I had—you know, I had an office to go into.

Like, most recently, I think I had more of a regular like people to see and there was like—I do enjoy that. So, I think that actually helped a lot, even though I know it doesn't help everybody. So, I've kind of found that the most like helpful—and taking it day to day. And then if I find myself back in that point again, I would definitely consider, you know, changing course. But, so far, that's worked for me.

**John Moe:** And how are you doing today with your mental health?

**Sierra Katow:** Oh, thank you for asking. Yeah, I'm doing well. I think I've—again, it's been just helpful knowing like I do have a really good support system. I've got, you know, family and friends and people who have been really great and constant.

[00:35:00]

So, I think I have that benefit, hugely. So, it's kind of been like leaning on them and, yeah, knowing that like it kind of goes—it's not going to be fixed, you know, overnight. And it's a constant—well, my therapist always talks about like the spiral of things. Where like, sometimes it feels like I'm back where I was, but then actually it is like slightly higher. You know, instead of a circle, it's like a spiral. You're kind of moving, you know. It's a three-dimensional situation.

So, I've really enjoyed thinking of things that way. And again, feeling very grateful that like I can work in a creative place where it's like we can talk about this stuff. And then I can talk about it on stage or not. And that's cool. And I can talk to people like you where, you know, you have all the experience in the world of having different perspectives. But also like, yeah, it's not taboo.

**John Moe:** Yeah, no, that's what we're after. We're after that open conversation. Are you thinking about the next achievement that you want to achieve right now, Sierra?

**Sierra Katow:** Ugh! Yes. Where do I achieve next? I mean, yeah, I think it's the thing of, you know, I'm learning. And one of the big goals too with therapy is like, you know, trying to be really—not comparing myself to the next thing or other people or other achievements. And that kind of ebbs and flows, of course. But yeah, I mean like, you know, even with standup comedy and coming out with a special—right?—like, it's like the special is actually a goal that I had, and that comedians are like, “Okay, the hour special. You know, you gotta get there.”

And then—you know, and it happened, and I am very glad that it happened. But certainly, you know, I'm at the point where—you know, we filmed it a little bit ago, it came out, and then—you know, certainly, you get that high initially when you achieve. And then it kind of pitters out, and then you probably end up being kind of back where you were before.

And so, I think I am noticing that more. Or like I didn't even—you know, and I think there's also ways for me to—whenever I achieve something, it's like, “Okay, but then I did it in like this way. So, it's like not really the way.” (*Chuckles.*) You know, you can always like justify—

**John Moe:** Right—well, you can justify not feeling good about something that—

*(They chuckle.)*

**Music:** Sure. That's what it is. Yeah.

**John Moe:** I mean, are you somebody who—? I think you might have even talked about this in your special. The critical comments that you might get, you take those to heart, but then you disregard the positive comments that you get.

**Sierra Katow:** Yeah, no, that's—yeah, that's real. I mean, the sort of comments on YouTube and social media comments have been just a part of the standup game for so long. And like my own—'cause it's like, you know, when we were starting out, it was—YouTube was the name of the game. So, yeah, of course. I think I've gotten, again, better. But it's that thing where I'll get one comment where I'm like—it really hits in a certain way where I'm like—now suddenly I trust this person, and this person is like my closest critic, you know? *(Chuckles.)* Where it's like, I don't—even though it's just the way that they've judged something or said something that I typically do feel about myself, you know.

Oh, you know, when people say like, “Oh, she's not funny.” Like, I'm like, *(whispering)* oh yeah, maybe I'm not.

**John Moe:** I've heard that from somewhere else. Oh, that's right. It's coming from inside my own head.

**Sierra Katow:** Yeah, yeah.

*(They laugh.)*

How did they know? They hear it too? Yeah, it is like those certain cutting things. So, I think for sure, those weight way heavier than like—right, like you're saying—the good comments you justify like, “Oh, well, they're just saying that because, you know, they probably like didn't even watch the whole thing.”

**John Moe:** Yeah, yeah. I told my therapist one time, when my book came out—I said, “Well, if I read the negative—if I read the positive comments and take those to heart, then I need to read the negative comments and take those to heart as well.”

And she said, “No, you don't.” *(Laughs.)*

**Sierra Katow:** You can do whatever you want to do.

**John Moe:** “There's no law here. There's no rules. Go ahead and enjoy the good ones, and don't even read the bad ones. It's okay.”

**Sierra Katow:** That's right. That's great advice! Yeah. Yeah. That's hilarious. Right. Like, in your head, you're like, “Well, obviously like we have to do math here and make a spreadsheet and weight it accordingly.” (*Laughs.*)

**John Moe:** Right. If I feel joy, I must feel pain in equal measure. No, you don't!

**Sierra Katow:** Equal, yeah. (*Laughs.*) You definitely don't. Yeah. That is—no, that seems also like—yeah, logic. That seems about right, you know. Going in, and then you're like, oh yeah, okay. I can do whatever.

And yeah, it takes somebody else to say it, but that's the natural order.

**John Moe:** Well, congratulations here on all that you've achieved. I hope that you know that you are a worthy person, whether you achieved any of those things or not, because you're automatically a worthy person.

(*Sierra “wow”s and laughs.*)

[00:40:00]

And—but it's great to hear your voice out there in the world, and you're very funny. And congratulations on the success you've had.

**Sierra Katow:** Well, thank you, John. And I mean, of course, the same to you. I hope you don't feel like you need to hear it, but hey.

(*John chuckles.*)

The good reviews are way more important. And true! And the bad reviews, it's—those are just something's going on with that person. You know? They're having a bad day.

**John Moe:** They're having their own issues. Somebody cut them off in traffic, and then they sat down to comment.

**Sierra Katow:** Right, right. I'd like to see them write a book.

**John Moe:** Or make a special! Good job on that. Sierra Katow, thank you so much for being with us.

**Sierra Katow:** Oh, thank you.

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



**John Moe:** You can find Sierra Katow online. That last name is spelled K-A-T-O-W. Just Google that up; you'll find all sorts of things.

Our program depends on funding from our listeners. That's how we make the majority of our operating expenses. If people donate, we can keep having a show. If they don't, show's over. Let's not let the show be over, shall we? We need to hear from you. If we've already heard from you, great! Thank you. If not, it's so easy. Just go to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). Find a level that works for you, and then click on *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows. And boom, you're a member, and I'm thanking you all over again. Be sure to hit subscribe, give us five stars, write rave reviews. That helps get the show out into the world where it can help folks.

Speaking of help, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached in the United States and Canada by calling or texting 988. It's free, available 24/7.

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Hi, credits listeners. It's possible that I kind of shoehorned in that *Simpsons* clip at the top of the show, because it's from one of my favorite episodes.

**Clip:**

**Bart:** So, it's a choice between Disney World and Knoxville.

**Several Voices:** (*Cheering.*) Knoxville! Knoxville! Knoxville!

**Bart:** I concur.

(*A chaotic musical stinger.*)

**John Moe:** *Depresh Mode* is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We got booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, "Building Wings".

*Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

**Music:** "Building Wings" by Rhett Miller.

*I'm always falling off of cliffs, now*

*Building wings on the way down*

*I am figuring things out*

*Building wings, building wings, building wings*

*No one knows the reason*

*Maybe there's no reason*

*I just keep believing*

*No one knows the answer*

*Maybe there's no answer*

*I just keep on dancing*

**Josh:** Hi, I'm Josh from Boise. We're all here to support and forgive each other. Will we support and forgive ourselves? Absolutely not. I'm just kidding. We're working on it.

**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!