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**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Moon Zappa is 56 now. She never was a musician, but she became a successful actor—lots of credits on her IMDb. And she's a writer, an author with a new memoir: *Earth to Moon*, titled after what her mother, Gail, would sometimes say when she was trying to get Moon's attention.

The portrait the book paints of their family is not pleasant. There's neglect, there's trauma, there are a lot of things that weren't just unusual, they were not okay. Long absences from her dad, her dad openly sleeping with other women in their house, her parents fighting, and Frank asking Moon to hide a gun from Gale when Moon—still a kid—didn't even know they had a gun. The book chronicles Moon's adulthood also and examines the legacy of what had happened. *Earth to Moon* also explores the impact that this chaos had on the relationships between siblings, which has been rocky in their adulthood, due in part to the wills left behind following Frank and Gale's deaths.

I've heard people say that you just need to get over what happened when you were a kid. Let it go. It's not that simple. Because that stuff made you who you are. Faulkner said, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Moon Zappa, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

**Moon Zappa:** Thanks for having me. Thrilled to be here.

**John Moe:** You know, everything that we grow up with, we think of as normal at the time. Because we have nothing to compare it to, because we're kids. Paint a little picture here, if you could.

What are some things that were happening in the Zappa household when you're growing up that seemed normal then, but maybe not so normal when you got more perspective?

**Moon Zappa:** Well, in the book I describe my father—and first of all, my father and mother introduced themselves to me as Gail and Frank. So, that was—

**John Moe:** (*Laughs.*) Right off the bat? Right.

**Moon Zappa:** Right off the bat. I'm like, huh. And there was a feeling that went along with that that already made me feel uncomfortable. And then Gail told me that I was—I chose her to be her parent before I was born. So, already I'm just grappling with these gigantic ideas. Then my father—something else that also was unusual was he moved a groupie into the basement, and they slept downstairs, and we all slept upstairs.

And of course, again, these were the things that were normal. He had a blow-up sex doll downstairs, and then I had my regular dolls upstairs. These were just things that were—yeah, just how the house worked. Spontaneous go-go parties, milk and sugar in my baby bottle, a lot of consulting the Ouija board for problem solving. And then when I became—when I was old enough to go to regular school, then of course I started to compare my family to what I was experiencing when I'd visit their homes.

**John Moe:** Did they give a reason why they were Frank and Gail and not Mom and Dad? Did they explain that? They

**Moon Zappa:** They most certainly explained nothing. It was just watch what's happening and kind of figure stuff out on your own. My guess is it was a reaction to how they were raised. My mother came from a military family. My father, his family traveled a lot—largely for his asthma. His father couldn't find steady work, and some of the jobs he had was having mustard gas put on his hand as a test subject. And my father had—his toys were a broken thermometer and playing with the mercury inside the thermometer. (*Chuckles.*)

And so, I think they just wanted to do something completely different. I do notice, though, that it goes: military family, rockstar, the kids are woo-wo and do something in the yoga world.

**John Moe:** Right. (*Laughs.*) Yoga starts to enter the picture at some point. Well, so having a dad who was gone all the time; and then when he was around, he was sleeping with women who weren't your mom—is that the kind of thing that a kid just accepts like, “Oh yeah, that's just dad”? Or was it troubling to you even before you started to compare it to your friends?

**Moon Zappa:** Oh, it was very troubling to me. I didn't like the effect it had on Gale. I didn't think he was very nice to Gale when he did that. Which was confusing because he was so important in the world, and he was so talented, and people admired him so much.

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So, already I was having to hold these paradoxes. And then Gale publicly would be Zen about it, and then privately would be very upset about it. And then he would say that they didn't mean anything to him. And so, I was doing the kid math and thinking, “Well, if he's spending time with people that don't mean anything to him, and he's not spending the time with me, I must mean less than the thing that means nothing.” And so, this is not a great foundational way to start.

And plus, the male gaze—I felt unsafe. I never knew who was sleeping with who. I was always trying to assess—I was super hypervigilant, and I was always trying to assess if somebody liked boys, if they like girls, if they like girls of a certain age. I just—I always had this feeling I had to identify and try to figure out how safe I was.

**John Moe:** Mm. Safe from people in the house?

**Moon Zappa:** Yeah. I mean, there's a story I tell in the book about how I was really little, and I guess naked, and I apparently said to a man, "John, look at my peepee." And he didn't. And then I said, "John, look! At! My peepee!" And he then did look, and Gail would tell people that I knew that he was gay and was just trying to have him confront his sexuality. And I was probably two or three. Do you know what I mean? And so, for me, (*stammering*) this is a horror story. (*Chuckles.*) And of course, no child knows—no child's doing that. That's not in the mind of a child. That's in the mind of a weird adult.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Well, when you would go to your friends' houses—you write in the book about how, you know, you marveled that when you would have a sleepover, and the families would all eat dinner together and had table manners and placemats and everything. Did you want that kind of thing? Did you want that kind of normal?

**Moon Zappa:** I did want that kind of normal. I wanted to have a parent who tucked me in, and who listened to me, and who gave me comfort when I was upset, or brought soup when I was not feeling well. These basic things. But the thing about... I always think about how the US, we're just a nation of hustlers. Because we have to pay for absolutely everything. It's just a runaway train. And so, when I was writing the book and reflecting on it, I had to go back and think about the context of the times and how a lot of what I guess you would maybe label as neglect was probably just trying to keep the family together and keep it moving.

And Gail's rage-outs were because Frank was often gone, and she was burdened with all of the pressure to keep the house together, keep his business running. She was the driver, the cook, the—all these things. And so, I was definitely seeing a lot of chaos and a lot of frustration.

You know the movie with Elizabeth Taylor—what's the one where they're at each other's throats all the time? It was *Afraid of Virginia Woolf*.

(*John echoes her.*)

Yeah. So, there was—I had that feeling in the house. But my father never raised his voice. So, then you're just, it would—ever. And he could keep it calm and be very, very... yeah, so that was some of the stuff. So, you've got this going on, and then you've also got this—like, the house was incredibly exciting. It was wild colors. Other people's houses had—everything looked like toast. Our house was purple walls and a royal blue outside and a wild garden overgrown and a jungle feeling and a fire pole.

And so, there was all of this stuff that was also very inviting in some ways and made your imagination kind of get activated. And my father's output was just—there was just always music in the house, his.

**John Moe:** Yeah, but yet you didn't feel safe.

**Moon Zappa:** I didn't feel safe, but I wouldn't have labeled it like that at that time. It just created a tension in my body that there was no relief from. And so, I got the message that I—yeah, that I wasn't important. I didn't matter.

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And so, that definitely created a lot of self-hatred. Because I was taking the feeling I was receiving; I was being conditioned to—there weren't smiles, you know what I mean? So, it's hard to think well of yourself if you've got a mother—as I say in the book—as your first bully, who's bursting your bubble; but in her head thinking she's toughening me up for the world.

**John Moe:** Yeah. What kind of behavior did that result in for you?

**Moon Zappa:** Well, I definitely became a self-mutilator. And so, that turned into skin-picking. It turned into like literally picking on myself. I was getting picked on, and I picked on myself.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Everybody else was doing it.

**Moon Zappa:** Right. So, it just—that's what I learned. I didn't learn how to self soothe. I didn't learn how to turn my frustrations into art. I didn't learn how to talk things through, to even locate a need, to be able to name a feeling accurately. And so, as I got even older, of course, I would—because my father worked at such a high-high level, I was always looking for the expert who could—I always had a sense that there was like some kind of like an operating system that everyone was working from, and I didn't receive. Like, I was missing pages. And so, I could feel that I was—

And then, I kept getting moved ahead in school. And so, that made me feel even more cuckoo, because I had a sophistication early on and an adult—

**John Moe:** 'Cause you needed one. Yeah.

**Moon Zappa:** And then—but my skill level didn't match the masking.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Yeah. It sounds like people pleasing. It sounds like, you know, when your parents are narcissists, you subjugate yourself to them. Because that's what you've been taught.

**Moon Zappa:** Yeah. It was definitely a pyramid, the Thoreau syndrome, where all the arrows pointed to the top of the pyramid. And that's just ultimately not sustainable. Because if you're doing that, and then you have a time, a chance to be at the top of the pyramid, sweet! But that was not how it went. We all sacrificed so that my father's dreams could happen. And it was—

**John Moe:** And his desires would be accommodated and tolerated.

**Moon Zappa:** Right. 'Cause his appetite was as great as his—yeah. His exposition. Exposition? No. His output. I'm mixing words. (*Chuckles.*) Yeah. Exposition?!

**John Moe:** His output. (*Chuckles.*) His production. Yeah.

Let's talk about "Valley Girl". Because I think the story of how that came about is so interesting. And how did that song happen?

**Moon Zappa:** Well, my father was the funniest person in the house, and that was the relief that we'd have. Because when he was home, the culture of the house would change. There was more laughter, there was better food, there was more music, there was—I really felt like I did have an ally. I could tattle on Gail. But he would work at night and sleep during the day. And so, even when he was home, he didn't—

**John Moe:** He worked down in the basement, right?

**Moon Zappa:** Yeah, exactly. So, there was a feeling of inaccessibility. And so, by the time I was 13, I just had enough of this. And so, I slid a note under the door of the studio and just said, "I'd like to work with you. It seems like you like to be down here a lot. So, maybe we could work together. And contact my manager,"—AKA Gail—"Here's the home phone number." (*Chuckles.*) And he took me up on my offer, woke me up on a school night one night. And you didn't question the time. You just—you did it on his time. So.

But I got probably a grand total of maybe 17 minutes with him, just improvising and doing this funny voice that he found amusing that I thought was hilarious—the girls I went to school with. And then for me, it was just intimacy, fun, just me-time with my father. And I—

**John Moe:** He'd welcomed you into his world.

**Moon Zappa:** Right. And I had no thought beyond that. And so, all of a sudden that song is the breakout song. He's getting FM radio airplay for the first time. He's in his 40s. He's got 34 other albums and 20 years of work that he's been not recognized for. And then I come on the scene, and then something happens.

**John Moe:** Mm. And how did he take it?

**Moon Zappa:** Well, he was frustrated that that's what was giving him recognition, but it was also paying bills—more than we'd ever had.

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And Gail—I write about it in the memoir. Gail was... she said, "Improvisation isn't writing," and I was the only reason Frank gave me the credit. Now, years later, I would wonder if that was even true. Because she turned out to be such an unreliable narrator. But certainly, her desire to keep me down was definitely there.

So, then I'm then told that I have to go and promote this thing that my dad's not happy about. And that I'm being told is not even mine anyway. So, it was a lot that was cooking inside my TV appearances.

**John Moe:** Did you get writing credit on the song?

**Moon Zappa:** I was given writing credit for my improvisation, yeah.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Coming up, how Moon handles huge fame, and how Frank handles Moon's huge fame.

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Back with Moon Zappa, author of *Earth to Moon*. She became a huge star at age 14 on the song “Valley Girl” with her dad, Frank Zappa.

Well, you've described yourself in the book as being pretty self-conscious around that time, kind of awkward, kind of insecure.

*(Moon confirms.)*

Typical adolescent in many ways. What happens to a kid like that, from a background like that, when that becomes the biggest phenomenon in the country? Like, what did that mean to you? What did that do to you?

**Moon Zappa:** Well, I don't love a spotlight on me to start with. And again, I don't know if that's because all the oxygen was sucked out of the room in the family I grew up in. They had the entire sexual revolution in the living room. So, I was the kid that was looking for, you know, a turtleneck bathing suit.

And so, I just—I didn't—yeah, I didn't want any of that kind of attention on me. I was just trying to get through my geometry homework and not have raging acne. So, that was—I had no ambitions to be a musician or be seen as a musician. And in fact, it's an acting job. I was a character. So, to be then put in even another category that made no sense to me, it was a lot of mixed messages internally and then out in the world as well.

And then I was both adored, and then, locally, girls would get picked on. And so, I started off getting fan mail, which felt like it had nothing to do with me. And then I started getting hate mail, which for what—that, I believed. And that's because of how I was conditioned. Do you know what I mean?

*(John agrees with a sad sigh.)*

This is something I could take in, because that was what I was—

**John Moe:** Because it reflects what you're already hearing and what you're already feeling about yourself.

**Moon Zappa:** Yeah. So, the memoir is just me like working my life like a cold case, forensically, and trying to figure out all the places where there was a missed opportunity to be self-soothing, to have self-love, to— You know, I really was like, “This pattern ends with me. I want to give myself that gift of removing that voice from my head, that critical voice.”

**John Moe:** Yeah. Did you take that song personally, given how big it was? Like it was an extension of you as a human?

**Moon Zappa:** I really... once Gail said that she was responsible for the credit, then I didn't. I dissociated from it. And dissociation was certainly one of my ways of being in that house. And so, I didn't—yeah, I didn't feel any connection to any part of that experience.

**John Moe:** Do you wish the song had never happened?

**Moon Zappa:** (*Laughs.*) I don't like to waste wishes.

(*They laugh.*)

If I had a faith, I think I'd have a macro lens on the experience, and I would say, “Oh, what's it going to take to wake this person up to the stuff that shouldn't be there?” And so, when I was, again, looking at the events in my life; and I was looking at everything on a kind of a timeline and trying to chart when was the first time these patterns that were less than pleasant first appeared?

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Then I was kind of looking at who I was before the event and who I was after the event. And for me, my memory crystallized around these events that I just kept looping on. And so, it was—to go back was both retraumatizing myself, but also I just had this—I inherited, ironically, Gail's tenacity. So, I was like, “Love gets to win! I will not let this pattern move forward.” (*Chuckles.*) So, I just climbed in there, and I just thought, “I'm going to move all my broken pieces forward. I'm going to figure out where I'm stunted.”

‘Cause I spent a lot of time asking all the right questions of all the wrong people, because I kept choosing people like my parents. ‘Cause that's what I knew. Professionally, friend-wise, I just was in these patterns. And also, growing up when I did a lot of the psychology out there was you find people that are like a little like your mom and a little like your dad. And if it works out, you heal both! You know? But it's... (*chuckles*).

**John Moe:** That's just not true!

(*They laugh.*)

**Moon Zappa:** And who is that person?!

**John Moe:** I don't know.

**Moon Zappa:** But that literally was what was being peddled at that time.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Yeah. you talk in the book about really being denied a full high school experience, and you've alluded to it too with being kind of pushed ahead grades in school. You finished with a GED when you were already working as an actor. You weren't really even—college didn't even seem to enter the conversation.

**Moon Zappa:** I didn't know I was smart.

**John Moe:** You didn't know you were smart.

**Moon Zappa:** No, I didn't think I'd get into college. Yeah, I had no idea.

**John Moe:** Because you had your parents telling you weren't?

**Moon Zappa:** I had my mother telling me I wasn't.

*(John affirms.)*

And in my head, as a kid, I just assumed Frank was on board with it. And then later as I was writing the book, I thought, “Oh my God, what if he never knew what the house was like when he wasn't there?”

**John Moe:** Right, right. Why did she not want you to—why did Gail not want you to finish high school in a high school? Why did she not want you to go to college?

**Moon Zappa:** Uh. I mean, I can speculate. I'm not a psychiatrist, *(chuckling)* but I have my working theories—again—working this cold case. But I think ultimately, Gail was somebody who felt like anybody who got something that she didn't get robbed her of something. If I got attention from my father, it robbed her of—she got less of his time. If I got something good happen, then she wasn't given that opportunity. So, she wasn't gonna let that happen to me.

**John Moe:** You get a hit song; it's because of her.

**Moon Zappa:** Right. Exactly. And so—which is unfathomable to me, especially as a parent, because I would be ecstatic for my kid to go farther and help more people and be happy. I mean, of course, that's what you... to me, that's what you—

**John Moe:** It's all you want.

**Moon Zappa:** Yeah. That's all you want. You want the people that you love, that matter to you—that you matter to those people. And so, I was always acutely aware of what I was missing. Let's say it that way.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Were you—you were the oldest of four. Were you drafted into being a parent?

**Moon Zappa:** Oh yeah! I mean, from the time I was tiny, I felt like I was parenting the people who are parenting me. And—

**John Moe:** Oh, so not just parenting your siblings, but parenting your parents.

**Moon Zappa:** Oh yes! Oh yeah. Oh yeah. (*Chuckles.*) Having to remind Gail to wake up to take us to school. I mean, I was terrified the truant officer was coming.

**John Moe:** God, even more reason to not feel secure. Even, like—have you been hypervigilant your whole life?

(*Moon confirms.*)

Yeah. Yeah. Sounds like it's like the recipe for it.

**Moon Zappa:** Yeah, yeah. And in fact, when things calmed down, then surprise things would happen. So, it's really hard for me to relax and settle. I really have to—I have to exercise to the point of exhausting the large muscle groups in my legs. I have to be in nature. I have to be in new situations that are safe and foreign, so that I stay present. I mean, it's a lot.

**John Moe:** Yeah. You seek some peace, I guess, with a guru at some point in your book. And you fall pretty hard. This was when you were a young adult. I mean, is that—was that a response to something that was missing in your childhood? Is it that simple?

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**Moon Zappa:** I was so conditioned to have no needs. The only time I got some love was if I had no needs. And so, I was completely—

**John Moe:** You were easy.

**Moon Zappa:** Right. So, I was prey to subjugation. I was prey to the thing—just being of service. And so, here comes this guru. And in my head, I'm thinking, oh, this is cool. I'm a feminist—because it's a female guru, and women don't hurt other women. So, I'm doing like, again, cuckoo logic based on how I'm raised. (*Chuckles.*) And so—and I throw—I'm so loyal. I know that 100% gives you results, 50% doesn't. And so, I just threw myself in. And that was... that was quite a—what's it called when you're taking a walk and then you take a side road that—you get totally lost? What's that called?

**John Moe:** I don't know. Tangent? A diversion?

**Moon Zappa:** Yeah, I don't know, but I definitely—

**John Moe:** You got lost in the woods.

**Moon Zappa:** I got lost in the woods. And I forgot to drop breadcrumbs to find my way back.

*(They chuckle.)*

**John Moe:** Your father was sick with prostate cancer for a long time. It was a years'-long death. What did that mean to you and to the life you were living and to your relationship with him?

**Moon Zappa:** Well, I write about how I had this mixed feeling that I felt quite ashamed of. On the one hand, of course, I didn't want to see him suffering. And on the other hand, I thought, "Oh, this is amazing. He's going to be home, and I'll get to have a chance to have time with him." And I could apologize for all the ways that Gail had led me to believe I needed to apologize.

Because at one point, she—*(stammering)* yeah, I'll—

**John Moe:** You felt like you owed him something.

**Moon Zappa:** I felt I owed him something. And that's—again, that's that—when you're raised in that kind of a setting— I understand now it's, "If I take the blame, I can do something about it. If you're at fault, I have no control over you." And so, if I take the totality of the blame, then I can see a therapist, I can try again.

**John Moe:** I can work harder. I can try something else to change something.

**Moon Zappa:** Right. Exactly, exactly. Get a different result. And so, I just—some of the recovery was not taking responsibility, and saying the other person— Like, honestly, at that time looked like saying the truth about what I didn't cause, what I didn't do. That I had harmed myself by blaming myself.

And people would say, "Oh, you're so hard on yourself." But they never would say how to stop being hard on yourself. *(Chuckles.)* It's not helpful to say, "you're so hard on yourself".

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** More with Moon Zappa in just a moment.

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Talking with Moon Zappa about her life, her family, and what happened when her father, Frank Zappa, was dying of cancer.

Did it help to take care of Frank in a way that he never took care of you? Did that feel healing in any way?

**Moon Zappa:** Uh... that's interesting. I didn't see it like that. I certainly felt it that way having a child and getting what I called my first chance at a childhood through my child's eyes. And I even felt guilty about doing that, because I was like, "You're supposed to have your whole childhood to yourself." Do you know what I mean? But I—you know, you're wanting to make sure your kid—yeah, gets all the things you didn't get. And so, that was incredibly healing and still is. I still love—what's weird now is that there were stages where I was stunted in my family; I don't always have tools opposite my kid.

And so, a lot of times we're learning things in real time, which to me is mortifying. Because in my head, a parent is supposed to be this big, soft place to land. And where I fall short, where I'm messy, it's hard for me to believe that I'm still lovable. Even though I absolutely accepted the flaws of everybody.

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But it's like I still glitch on that I could also be forgiven for being human, or that I could be lovable, or that it's okay to make a mistake, or—it's bizarre how this stuff still sticks, you know?

**John Moe:** That's interesting. Because I mean—your parents, far from perfect—but it sounds like you've got a perfectionist tendency as a parent. Like, you've just got to solve everything, because it wasn't there.

*(Moon agrees and chuckles.)*

Oh boy. In the book, you talk about your daughter getting very, very sick when she was I think three years old.

*(Moon confirms.)*

And she's hospitalized. She's in intensive care, and it looks like she might not even make it. Terrifying. And you called your mother. And I'd like you to tell us what happened then.

**Moon Zappa:** I mean, what's so crazy is that once you read the book, you'll be like, "Why would she call her?! Call anybody but her!"

But I called Gail. And Gail said, "Well, I'm just—" Gail said, "Well, is she in intensive care? Because I just got to a Christmas party." The most abnormal response to "my three-year-old's in the hospital". Any other person would have been like, "What do you need? I'll be right there. I'm coming down." Like, you would leave the party! You wouldn't be like—

**John Moe:** You'd race there!

**Moon Zappa:** You'd race! You'd probably—you'd be worried—you'd get a speeding ticket, and you'd still be like, "Chase me, officer! I gotta save this baby!" Like, you know what I mean?

*(John confirms.)*

And so—and this is one of those things where I look back and I think, wow, that was a moment where I should have never spoken to her again, but I still did. And Gail said, “Well, I don't like hospitals.”

And I'm like, “Nobody likes a hospital!” So.

**John Moe:** Ugh, yeah. Well, you know, I can't diagnose anyone. I'm not a psychiatrist, but it sounds to me like Gail is how someone would define a person with narcissistic personality disorder. Which is so hard when you're a kid, because you end up sacrificing yourself to feed that parent's disorder. Did you—? *(Sighs.)* How did you understand Gail more as you grew up, as you got out into the world, as you became a parent yourself? Did you get more of a kind of clinical understanding of her?

**Moon Zappa:** Well, I describe going to see a therapist in the book. And I tell a few stories. And the therapist says, “I'm going to stop you. Run for your life. Your mother's a malignant narcissist.”

*(John chuckles.)*

And I went, “Oh no, I must be telling it wrong. I must've made myself look good. Let me tell it again and tell you what I did that might've upset her.”

And she just said, “Run for your life.”

And so, then instead of listening to her, I found another therapist, because I thought I blew it. I didn't explain it well. And—because my goal was harmony. It was not to cut somebody out of my life. This was unimaginable! Because I wouldn't—do unto others. I wouldn't want to be cut out for not knowing how to do something. You know what I mean? *(Chuckles)* So, I'm still using this bizarre “do unto others” logic that—and even now, I sometimes still don't realize I'm—like, I have a delay on somebody causing me harm. I have a bit of a delay. I have a delay on it. So, I'm trying to shorten that time.

**John Moe:** Do you start to think—is your first thought that you are responsible for the harm being caused to you?

**Moon Zappa:** If I see an argument that I'm not even involved in, I think it's my fault. It could be in a supermarket across the thing. I'm like, “Maybe I left a—did I leave something some—?” Like, it's unbelievable. The damage is so great.

**John Moe:** Wow. How do you manage that legacy? Emotional legacy.

**Moon Zappa:** Well, many ways. And I also describe it in the book, all the ways that I've tried to *(laughs)* basically come to life. Because I just suffered terrible depression, obviously,

from these experiences. I just—and then no one could relate to it. And then I was always told, “Depression's a choice!” And I just was like not when you're conditioned.

**John Moe:** Why would anyone choose it?!

**Moon Zappa:** Nobody would! Exactly. And so—and that's also not a way to help you not feel that way. You know what I mean? It's just—it's such a bizarre reaction. But I think—

**John Moe:** Well, a narcissistic reaction. It's like, “Well, that's inconvenient to me for you to feel that way. Therefore you don't.”

**Moon Zappa:** Exactly. Exactly. Or they just, “Put your big girl pants on or whatever.” It's like I wish I could!

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I'm literally unable to function, because I'm so distraught. And I don't even have faith in the world. If your core humans treat you this way, why would somebody outside of the home be any better? Why would a stranger be safe? Do you know? So.

**John Moe:** Were you hooked on achievements? Because that's—when you're not getting what you need—

**Moon Zappa:** No! My whole thing was have no goals, be nothing, do nothing. Don't upset anybody. Disappear! Don't exist!

**John Moe:** Yeah, yeah. Fade away. Wow.

**Moon Zappa:** Fade away. Right. Yeah. I mean, again, I took my names literally. Moon, no light of its own. Reflecting the light of my father, the sun. I didn't even think I was allowed to have any light.

**John Moe:** (*Sighs sadly.*) Do you—can you have light now?

**Moon Zappa:** Yeah. I mean, it's—again, I inherited my father's good mind and Gail's tenacity. And so, even in—you know how they say there's a plant that's poisonous, and the antidote grows beside it? It's kind of like—it's like that. And so, something always told me there's got to be more to life than this. And again, too, with the fame piece—when I go to a party and people are drinking and having boring questions and were not preoccupied about death, like I was! I just thought if this is life at the top, this is nothing. I just was always in search of—this is before death cafes existed. But I was just like whose mind is not blown by the fact that we have one life, and it ends, and we know when it's gonna end?! And who knows how to use time wisely here?!

**John Moe:** Yeah, how can anybody think of anything else?

**Moon Zappa:** Like, literally anything else!

**John Moe:** Ever!

**Moon Zappa:** Ever!

*(They laugh.)*

**John Moe:** Oh man, I think we're the same person. Gail dies in 2015. And this has been written about a lot, but I think it needs to be explained to get the full context of your life. Tell me about the Zappa estate as she left it. What were her instructions?

**Moon Zappa:** Well, again, you have to understand that we had been living like foxes in a den our whole life, being told that the outside world's unsafe, that we're the only people you can trust, signing contracts that literally made us all a family business. There was some arrangement for tax purposes, there was some configuration. Which I believed.

And so, the trajectory was that when she passed, my siblings—me included—we would be carrying on my father's work and making sure his legacy continued. And what she did, though, was she left all the intellectual property to my two younger siblings and said, “You and Dweezil can never have anything to do with this.” It went Ahmet, Diva, I think a lawyer, and an accountant, and us never. And you have to understand, Gail died millions of dollars in debt.

And my whole goal was, “Hey, can we all—? Remember that thing we always sign all the time? Can we all come up with ideas, so that we can all make money in our lifetime together? Can we give this a try?” I wanted to do a family memoir. I wanted to do a biopic. I wanted to do a documentary. I wanted—there was all these things that I was always trying to do. An album of just the songs girls can listen to. And every single idea was shot down. And so, when she died, and she left all the IP to those two that I helped raise, in essence she was saying, “I wish these two well eternally, and you two, not so much. And this—in summation, in knowing you over the course of a lifetime: eh!”

She also put in the document that if we found God, we didn't even get the uneven distribution. And she—to put herself above God, which in the States, we have a right to a religion of our choosing. And what if God is trees to me? Do we kill all the trees? How does this work?

So, this was the kind of—it just, it broke me. It just absolutely broke me. And at that point, I thought I could either become a cautionary tale about destruction, or I could become my own hero and say, “This ends with me.” And I'm going to go back and rescue that girl and bring that broken part of myself into the now—

[00:40:00]

—and cherish and treasure all parts of myself that didn't get that kind of love.

And so, I'm hoping that if I can articulate some of these things, that my words can be a skeleton key for somebody else to give language to very complex circumstances. Because I do believe everybody gets something custom blended and torturous for them.

*(They chuckle.)*

And it's our job to untangle that pile of Christmas lights and become cleaner and more loving towards ourselves. That's my belief.

**John Moe:** And so, was the estate—? I mean, I understand about the intellectual property. Was the estate divided 30% for Ahmet and Diva and 20% for you and Dweezil?

**Moon Zappa:** The publishing. Yeah. And the—it was so messy. I think the documents are—you can read them online, and you can see for yourself how things were constructed. But again, for me, it was just unthinkable that my—it I just saw my siblings and I as this one unit.

**John Moe:** Family.

*(Moon agrees.)*

Your middle name is unit.

**Moon Zappa:** Exactly! So, again, I took my name literally. And so, it was—like, it was three deaths at once. Because it was two living deaths, because they carried on in this way. And then when my father's will was found—and Gale said he had no will—and my father wanted everything distributed equally, what threw me for a curve ball again was that they were doing Gale's plan, but Gail wasn't honoring Frank's plan. So, they were honoring Gail's plan in the name of my father who had a plan.

So, why wouldn't you just do the plan that the maestro wanted? It was completely illogical to me. So. But that's—I had to get bigger than her final word.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Do you have a relationship with your siblings today?

**Moon Zappa:** I have made much progress with Ahmet. And my door is open to my other siblings. I get it. This is hard stuff to look at. And in some ways they got different parents. And they are—but we got some of the same ingredients and then stuff that's totally different. The birth order changes it. Ahmet—growing up, Gail would say to Ahmet, “You're just like your sister.”

I was the worst thing a person could be! She could forgive a murderer or a rapist before she could forgive me, and I did nothing.

**John Moe:** Yeah, but you were less than nothing.

**Moon Zappa:** I was less than nothing.

**John Moe:** That's what you were told. Is Gale the reason that you're estranged from your siblings?

**Moon Zappa:** I can't say that, because once there's a—you know, there's a puzzle piece that has another puzzle piece. You can escape that configuration. You can drop the rope. You can examine it. But again, I've had to work really hard on myself to know that everybody has the dignity, has the right to the dignity of their choices. I don't have to agree. And people cast people in roles to agitate themselves.

And again, learning that a lot of my suffering came from not just the first injury, but the meaning I made of it. Gail hurt me, which means I'm worthless. The part that goes “which means I'm worthless”, I didn't realize I was adding that part. I see how I got there, but to heal, I have to remove that piece and just feel the original feeling that was—and that's hard to feel. See figure A.

Because if I accept that she never could have loved me, then it was arbitrary. And then really what I'm raging against is powerlessness, and it's random powerlessness. Do you know what I mean? And how do you—? And it can never be solved. And again, in the '70s and '80s, they were peddling closure—the word closure. So, I was—

**John Moe:** Ah.

*(Moon laughs.)*

Must be nice!

**Moon Zappa:** Yeah. Right. So.

**John Moe:** Well, and when you have that bedrock belief, that belief that you're nothing, that you're less than nothing, that goes all the way to the bottom. Like, that's your most deeply held belief. Like, that's not something you just get over. Like, that takes so much work to pry that loose and to replace it with something healthier. You know? People don't get that.

**Moon Zappa:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I had a yoga teacher who—she said that the mechanism for making a change is actually the same in all cases. But if you've got a core wound there, you'll feel like it's life or death.

[00:45:00]

So, for example, if you go through a breakup, you might say, “I'll never love again,” but if you got stranded at the airport, you wouldn't say, “Well, I guess I live here now!”

*(They chuckle.)*

**John Moe:** How old is your daughter now?

**Moon Zappa:** 19. Yep.

**John Moe:** 19. What have you taught her in terms of being a parent? Like, what has she learned from your parenting that you never learned from your parents?

**Moon Zappa:** I don't know. That would definitely be a question for my kid. But I will say that I feel like my kid came out fully formed, like the personality—born with terror in the eyes. (*Chuckles.*) Born with like, “What is happening here?”

And that was—that's the goodie bag that my kid got. And my goodie bag is, “There's an injustice! I will write it!”

**John Moe:** (*Chuckles.*) Ah, that's mom's burden. That's what mom's got to carry around for a while. Oh boy. The book is *Earth to Moon*, and it's a memoir. And Moon Zappa, thank you so much for your time, and thank you so much for writing the book. It's going to help a lot of people.

**Moon Zappa:** Thank you so much. Thank you. I hope it does.

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

**John Moe:** *Earth to Moon* is available where books are sold, because it is a book. By the way, Moon mentions death cafes in that interview, and I didn't know what that was. But I looked it up, and it's really a thing. Have you heard about this? A death cafe, more of an event than a location. People gather, often strangers, at a predetermined location and time where they consume tea and cake, and they talk about death. It's meant to break the taboo of talking about one's own mortality and about death in general. And yeah, tea and cake gets brought up a lot wherever I read about this. So, Google “death café”, and see if there's one near you.

You know, listening back to “Valley Girl” after all these years, I was a little surprised at how mean it sometimes is. Quote, “Tosses her head and flips her hair. She got a whole bunch of nothing in there.” Yeah, Moon's playing a character, and Frank's lyrics are making fun of that character, but still.

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Hi, credits listeners. My mental health is noticeably better since I backed the F away from LinkedIn.

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

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

**Bea:** This is Bea from Brooklyn, New York, in Tustin, California. As Thích Nhất Hạnh says, “Peace begins with your lovely smile.”

[00:50:00]

**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!