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**John Moe:** When one member of a family has a mental illness, the whole family has a mental illness, really. Everyone's affected. And especially for kids, growing up around a close family member with a mental illness, that effect can be profound and last forever. We're all built out of the people who raised us. Then it's a matter of making sense of what happened, processing it, and moving forward with wisdom.

That's it. That's the introduction to the episode. It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**Clip:**

**Richard Sarvate:** It was weird growing up with a schizophrenic mother. She used to think I was trying to kill her all the time. She'd be like, "You're trying to kill me." I'm like, I'm not trying to kill you. First of all, your cooking is delicious.

*(Laughter.)*

Dude, we're Indian. Indian food is already amazing, right?

*(Cheers of agreement from the crowd.)*

Yeah! But have you tried butter chicken made by someone who speaks with the devil?

*(Laughter.)*

Dude, I'm not sure what these voices were telling her, but they were crushing it in the kitchen.

*(Laughter.)*

*(Demonically.)* "More cardamom."

**John Moe:** Richard Sarvate is a standup comedian, a headliner in clubs, he has a million and a half TikTok followers, and he has a new album out called *They're Gonna Know*. And as the clip that we just played suggests, he grew up in a home where his mom had schizophrenia. Mayo Clinic says, quote, "Schizophrenia is a serious mental health condition that affects how people think, feel, and behave. It may result in a mix of hallucinations, delusions, and disorganized thinking and behavior. Hallucinations involve seeing things or hearing voices that aren't observed by others." Unquote.

We're going to talk about what Richard went through, how he processed it—as we all must—and how it informed what he became.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Richard Sarvate, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

**Richard Sarvate:** Thank you for having me, John.

**John Moe:** I hate to make this sound like a therapy session, because it's not a therapy session, and I'm not a therapist. But I see no way around this. Let's start by talking about your mother.

*(They chuckle.)*

**Richard Sarvate:** Wow, this is—*(chuckles)* I feel like you're Sigmund Freud right now.

**John Moe:** You know, I'm so unqualified to be a therapist. But it just seems like the beginning of your story, in terms of mental health and where it's intersected with your life.

**Richard Sarvate:** Mm-hm. Yeah, it has definitely been seminal to my development as a person. So, my mom has paranoid schizophrenia. And she has had it as long as I can remember. I have no memory of her without it. It's really affected me in—the main way I would say that it affects you is that your mother is supposed to be a source of constant love and encouragement.

So, most people when they develop, they need to know that they can make mistakes, they can try things, and there's always going to be some source of like—there's going to be some sort of—some rock that they can return to.

**John Moe:** Unconditional love and acceptance.

**Richard Sarvate:** There we go! Hey, that's the word I was looking for. And that is very important to a child's development and anyone's development. I did not have that. So, a lot of times what the illness would do would be that it would cause her to think that—she would get these paranoid delusions where she would think that people in her family were, you know, trying to attack her, trying to kill her, those kind of things. And when the person that's supposed to love you unconditionally thinks that you are trying to kill them, then that whole thing goes out the window.

So, for me... there's something called object constancy, where you're supposed to believe that like things are there even when you leave. So, like if you're talking to your friend on the phone, and they say, “Okay, see you later,” and then they put the phone down, you're supposed to believe that your friend is still there and still your friend.

Now, if you don't have the unconditional love, now that feeling goes away in your life. So, I suffered from that feeling for many, many, many years, where if somebody wasn't

immediately talking to me, or immediately saying to me like, “I’m your friend; I’m here,” I had no way of knowing whether they still liked me.

**John Moe:** Wow. So, like—I mean, this is from the beginning. This is from your earliest memories then.

**Richard Sarvate:** This is—yeah, early, early memories.

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Yeah, I have just—you know, I can remember being four years old and just hearing my mom—yeah, seeing my mom pace around the house, you know, screaming that like we’re all gonna die and that kind of stuff.

**John Moe:** I’m interested in this object...

**Richard Sarvate:** Constancy?

**John Moe:** Constancy, yeah. I was gonna say permanence, but maybe it’s a similar thing, I don’t know.

**Richard Sarvate:** You know what? Yeah, I think it does sound like the same thing.

**John Moe:** Did that apply to just like things? Like, if you didn’t—if you were in another room, did you just not believe that your bed still existed in your room?

**Richard Sarvate:** (*Chuckles.*) I think it just related to relationships with people. Yeah.

**John Moe:** Okay, okay. So, like you thought that if they weren’t talking to you, then they were no longer your friend; that they didn’t still maintain a relationship with you.

**Richard Sarvate:** Yeah, absolutely. And it also made it so that anytime someone seemed like a little bit—you know, not completely happy. Like, you know, if I was talking to my friend and—you know, maybe I’m playing sports or something, and I miss a catch. You know, my world turns into “Now I have no more friends.” You know, the minute there’s some negative energy, you think you’re just irrelevant.

**John Moe:** Right, it needs to be—you’re being judged on what you’re providing, the value that you’re providing to a situation and to another person on an ongoing basis.

**Richard Sarvate:** That’s exactly right. Because, you know, the healthy way to live your life is to say that like, you know, “Yeah, I contribute things here and there. I’m a good person. But if I’m not actively contributing, that doesn’t mean that people hate me.”

So, what it did to me—I mean, and this is kind of funny. It actually made me hyper, hyper productive. Because my whole identity was sort of based around how much value was I providing.

**John Moe:** Right. Because you didn't have a baseline value. This is—you had to be proving yourself. You had to be out there achieving.

**Richard Sarvate:** Absolutely. Yeah. I mean, it was—my value was completely based on, you know, what are the grades on my report card? You know, are people laughing around me? And I really think that's when standup comedy kind of started. Because—

**John Moe:** (*Chuckling.*) I was going to say, we're talking with professional standup comedian, Richard Sarvate here. Who tells jokes to strangers for their approval.

**Richard Sarvate:** Absolutely. And you know, I always say that standup comedy is inherently very unhealthy, because you are going on stage looking for approval from people, and you are pretending that is real love.

**John Moe:** Yes. When did you start to realize that your mom was not like other moms? Like, would you go to a friend's house, and the mom would be behaving inexplicably, to you?

**Richard Sarvate:** (*Laughing.*) Yeah, I would go to my friend's houses and be like, “What's wrong with your mom? Like, you know, why is she not insulting you? Why is she not calling the police?”

(*John chuckles.*)

Yeah, I started noticing—yeah, pretty... Well, here, the funny thing is that I actually didn't have friends for a long time, because I was so isolated because of my family. So, the first time I actually had a real friend, I think... you know, I think in the fifth grade, I began socializing. So, I think, you know, most people start socializing a little bit earlier than that—probably, you know, Kindergarten, first grade. I really had maybe a person that would come to my house occasionally in the fifth grade, and he started telling me that like this is not—(*chuckles*). You know, like, “What's going on?” Like, he would ask me so many questions. So, I think—yeah, 1995, that's kind of when I realized we were different.

**John Moe:** So, that's like 10 years old. That's, uh...

**Richard Sarvate:** Yeah, 10 years old. And the issue with not socializing really before 10 is that you don't really develop those skills on how to communicate with other people. And I also think that's another reason why standup was so appealing to me. Because I found this medium that I was able to communicate in that wasn't just normal social interaction.

**John Moe:** Why didn't you have friends then because of your family? Were you just scared to have anyone over, or—? What blocked that?

**Richard Sarvate:** Yeah. Yeah. You know, my parents—my dad would not encourage anyone to come over. And I think—well, I also was just very unsocialized, and—you know, not weird, but just like I barely spoke. Because I was just processing so much internally. I think, you know, also like my parents didn't really teach me normal social interaction with people.

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You know, I would just be at home talking to my mom. That wasn't really a good source of how to talk to people. And my dad was hyperfocused on work and making money and just making sure, you know, the economics were taken care of. And so, my ability to talk to people was very stunted. So, I would go to school, and I would kind of just sit there and get through the day and go home.

So, I didn't talk to people for many years. And I remember during recess, I would just go to the blacktop, the recess, and I would just sit and just watch everyone play, and then wait 'til it was over, and then just go back to class. So, there was—so, you know, on top of not being able to make friends... There was two factors. I wasn't able to make friends. And then also, I think my dad didn't want people to know what was happening in our house.

**John Moe:** Was your mom's illness—did it manifest in like extreme behavior all the time? Like, was she always talking about how you were going to try to kill her? Or were there moments?

**Richard Sarvate:** Yeah, there were—there were moments. I mean, she was taking some medication that sedated her a little bit. But these were the old, sort of first-generation antipsychotics. The medical professionals didn't really know how to treat schizophrenia that well in the early '90s, mid-'90s. And so, I would say these psychotic outbreaks were happening, probably... like, a big one—yeah, probably like once a week or something like that. And then for the rest of the week, she was kind of in a disoriented state.

**John Moe:** But not activated, not alarmed, but just sort of out of it?

**Richard Sarvate:** Yeah, just out of it. Yeah, I forget what the medication is called, but it really—you seem sedated when you're on it. And you're not that active. You know, she was able to do basic things like—you know, very funny. She was actually a really good at cooking. And I—yeah. And we—you know, I don't know how that part was not affected.

*(They chuckle.)*

But you know, I remember like her—she would make these— We're Indian, and she would make Indian food. And she had these flatbreads she would make; they were called chapatis. And one time my friend tried it, and he was like, “This is so good.” He was like, “What is this?” Like, and then he would—I would have to like sneak him some of these chapatis at school and stuff like that. He'd be like, “Can you like bring me some?”

**John Moe:** But you couldn't just say, "Hey, can you pack some extra, because my friend wants some?"

**Richard Sarvate:** I did occasionally ask for that. Yeah. But my mom was—she was very difficult to talk to. I mean, and I remember one time I asked for seconds, basically. And she went on this tirade. I mean, she was like—she's like, "You want seconds? Like, you're so fat. Like, why do I have to cook for you? You know, I hate you."

So, I was like, okay. So, I kind of stopped talking to her after that.

**John Moe:** Wow! Um, did your dad explain any of this to you about why your mom was this way, and what to expect, and give you some of that grounding that you weren't getting from her?

**Richard Sarvate:** You know, the difficulty—so, my dad is an Indian immigrant. He came to the United States in '76. He was 30 years old when he came. In the Indian culture at that time, and still even now, you just don't talk about mental illness. It's highly, highly stigmatized in all of Asia, I think. I think it's the same in the other countries in Asia. So, it was a very like—it was a lot of shame around my mother having the illness. And so, instead of, you know, really talking about it and explaining what to expect, he would just say, "She's crazy. She's crazy." And it would just be written off like that.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** More with comedian Richard Sarvate, including how he became a comedian of all things, in a moment.

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**Clip:**

**Richard Sarvate:** So, my mom has paranoid schizophrenia. But my question—I was thinking, I was like, "Wait, what's regular schizophrenia?"

*(Laughter.)*

Like, I think if you're hearing voices, you are allowed to be... suspicious. You know, like, who is that? Who's this doctor diagnosing people? He's like, "Okay, you are schizophrenic, but we just have one more question. *(Beat.)* Does it bother you?"

*(Laughter.)*

[00:15:00]

**John Moe:** We're back with comedian Richard Sarvate.

You start to have friends around 10 years old, around fifth grade. You start to come out of your shell a little bit. How did that come about? Like, was there an incident that let you think that maybe this is safe to do? Maybe I can bloom a little bit?

**Richard Sarvate:** Yeah. You know, I ended up being friends with basically people who were complete misfits, just like me. And one of my friends, he—I was doing my thing where I just, during recess, I go to the blacktop, and I don't talk to anybody. And he noticed me doing this for months on end and eventually invited me to play a game with them. And he ended up becoming, you know, my best friend for a long time.

And it's very interesting, because as I got older, like into my—going to college and stuff like that, I realized that he had pretty severe Asperger's, and... which was interesting, because—but that's kind of what made him okay with hanging out with me, because I was also not socialized well at all. And so, we just had this like—you know, we would hang out all the time. But—and I didn't realize that he was different also. You know, so. But he was my best friend for a long time. And still is one of my best friends. I actually emceed his wedding a few years ago.

**John Moe:** Oh, that's amazing. When did the comedy start?

**Richard Sarvate:** The comedy, you know, um...

**John Moe:** The awareness of it, at least. You know, the fandom. When did that start?

**Richard Sarvate:** Yeah, the awareness of it—you know, well, so it started first with just looking for attention. And I was not the class clown. I was really badly behaved in school. I was, you know, just looking for ways to cause a disruption, and I was looking for ways to get attention—good or bad. And I remember, you know—just, I would do random things. Like, I remember I would take credit for things that—I would take credit for... yeah, things that I hadn't done.

Like, during recess one time, somebody broke the window of the classroom. And when we went back to class, the teacher was like, "Okay, who did this?"

And I just immediately raised my hand. I was like, "It was me. It was me. I did it."

And something in me—like, I just love the attention. Any sort of like eyes on me. And so, I would look for any way to get attention. In class I would disrupt. You know, I would get out of my desk and run three laps around the classroom. And the teacher would be like, you know, "What are you doing?"

I was always getting, you know, the detention slips and behavior slips and that kind of stuff.

**John Moe:** So, was it that the negative attention. You know, taking the blame for the broken window. Were you just used to being in trouble, because your mom always made you feel like you were in trouble?

**Richard Sarvate:** I think so. Yeah. I think that was a—yeah, a natural way for me to operate that, oh, I'm doing something bad. And you know, I think maybe I decided to start owning that. Like, okay, I'm the bad person. And yeah, that definitely became part of my identity. I started having a lot of behavior problems.

Then I realized that I could kind of use my bad behavior to get laughs. And so, it started becoming—like, I would be hanging out with my friend, and then he had some friends. So, then we would kind of—I would get invited to, you know, hanging out with a group. And I realized that by saying really inappropriate, shocking things, I could make people laugh. And so, I wasn't being funny yet. I was just saying things that were so awful that people would sort of laugh out of shock. And I noticed that I enjoyed that reaction. So, that was the next evolution.

**John Moe:** When was that?

**Richard Sarvate:** This started happening in middle school. Middle school, high school. And yeah, so then we started finding ways to get rid of this negative energy. We started going to—me and all my misfit friends, we would start going to these basically hardcore, punk, metal shows. And so, you know. And once again, I didn't realize at the time that this was different. You know, we would be driving to San Francisco and going to these really gritty punk venues. And you know, we were 14 years old. And you know, we're going to like—these venues are always in the worst part of town. It was like scary and exciting, and the music was aggressive, and then we started seeing all these people that were going to these shows.

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And we're like, “Oh, these people are just like us. “And so, that became an outlet for a while. And then, I think after that, I—that inspired a love of music, and then I started making music. And then I realized I could make funny music. Because, you know, like the way I talk is a little bit different; the things I think about are different. I realized that when I would play music for people, that they would laugh. Yeah, so I started making funny music, and I did that for many years. And then, eventually, after that, I said, “Get rid of the music part. I just want to talk directly to people.” And that's when standup started.

**John Moe:** (*Chuckles.*) A lot of punk and hardcore is pretty funny. Like, if you listen to the lyrics, there's a lot of cleverness in there.

(*Richard agrees.*)

When you were growing up, getting into high school, and going out with friends and everything, what was happening with your mom? Was she still at about the same level with her illness? Or did she get better? She get worse? Or what?



**Richard Sarvate:** She was—yeah, with the same level with her illness. At a certain point, my dad kind of checked out, because—a lot of things were happening. So, he was focusing on taking care of my mom, taking care of his kids—you know, me and my brother. And he was very focused just on making money. And then I think in 2000, I remember the internet crash happened. And I think my dad had been so desperate to make money that he had over invested in internet stocks, and he ended up going really far into debt during that time.

And so, then my mom's illness kind of went to the back burner, because he was just hyperfocused on, you know, getting a job, working. So, during that time, my mom, she just stopped taking her medication, because it had been my dad's job to kind of like give her medication. And a lot of people who have an illness and need medication, they don't want to take it. You kind of have to like sit with them and force them to take it and that kind of thing. So, around the 2000s, my mom stopped taking her medication, and my dad was like, “I don't want to deal with this.” So, she started having like really severe episodes.

And I remember during that time, it started getting so bad—yeah, she started shoplifting a lot. She would just leave the house. She would go to places, start stealing. So, she would get arrested like here and there. And eventually, I think someone suggested—a social worker—to just put her in a mental institution for a while. So, there was a period during that time when I was in college where she was in a mental institution for several years. And we just—we actually really didn't interact with her too much. So, that was like 2000 to 2005, I think. We just—we didn't really talk to her.

The funny thing though is I remember talking to my mom about that time, and she loved being in the institution. I think it was fun for her, like there was like a social area, you know, and there were other people in there. And she seemed happier than when she was at home, actually.

**John Moe:** Presumably, she's on her meds pretty reliably at a place like that.

**Richard Sarvate:** That's exactly right, because she had people actively giving her meds. So, yeah, that was... yeah, in a way, that was actually a calmer time for our family.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Back in a moment with more from comedian Richard Sarvate.

**Promo:**

**Ella Hubber:** Alright, we're over 70 episodes into our show, *Let's Learn Everything*. So, let's do a quick progress check. Have we learned about quantum physics?

**Tom Lum:** Yes, episode 59.

*(Pencil scratching.)*

**Ella:** We haven't learned about the history of gossip yet, have we?

**Caroline Roper:** Yes, we have! Same episode, actually.

**Ella:** Have we talked to Tom Scott about his love of roller coasters?

**Caroline & Tom:** (*In unison.*) Episode 64.

**Ella:** So, how close are we to learning everything?

**Caroline:** Bad news. We still haven't learned everything yet.

**Ella:** Awww!

**Tom:** WE'RE RUINED!

**Music:** Playful synth fades in.

**Ella:** No, no, no! It's good news as well. There is still a lot to learn!

(*They cheer.*)

I'm Dr. Ella Hubber.

**Tom:** I'm Regular Tom Lum.

**Caroline:** I'm Caroline Roper, and on *Let's Learn Everything*, we learn about science and a bit of everything else, too.

**Ella:** And although we haven't learned everything yet, I've got a pretty good feeling about this next episode.

**Tom:** Join us every other Thursday on Maximum Fun.

(*Music ends.*)

**Promo:**

**Music:** Playful, exciting synth.

**Ellen Weatherford:** People say not to judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree.

**Christian Weatherford:** Which is why here on *Just the Zoo of Us*, we judge them by so much more.

**Ellen:** We rate animals out of 10 in the categories of effectiveness, ingenuity, and aesthetics, taking into consideration each animal's true strengths—

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Like a pigeon's ability to tell a Monet from a Picasso, or a polar bear's ability to play basketball.

**Christian:** Guest experts like biologists, ecologists, and more join us to share their unique insight into the animal's world.

**Ellen:** Listen with friends and family of all ages on [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) or wherever you get podcasts.

*(Music ends.)*

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**Clip:**

**Richard Sarvate:** My mom has paranoid schizophrenia. And I asked my dad one time, I was like, “Dad, how did you not know when you married her?”

And my dad goes, “Oh, uh, I just thought she was weird.”

*(Laughter.)*

I just stopped the conversation, because I was like who's crazier?

*(Laughter.)*

My mom who's got schizophrenia, or my dad who's like, *(beat)* “Man, this girl’s kind of weird”?

**John Moe:** We're back talking with Richard Sarvate.

What was it like for you—? You know, when you're in high school, you're into college, people sit around, talk about their families. Were you like, “Oh, well, let me tell you about my mom!” Or were you more guarded about it?

**Richard Sarvate:** Yeah. You know, it became almost like a badge of honor to say like—I felt like a war veteran, kind of. You know, I felt so different from other people. That sort of became my identity, that like I am different, and I think that was my way of handling those things. Because the one way would be to feel like, oh, these people have normal families; oh, that seems so nice; I wish I had that. But instead I started going into this mentality that I'm special, I'm different; you know, I'm meant for something. Like, I've been chosen for something.

**John Moe:** You're getting the achievement, you're getting the laugh, you're getting the attention that you couldn't provide for yourself at a very early age.

**Richard Sarvate:** Yeah, yeah. I started transmuting this negative life into—yeah, I started thinking of it as something positive. I've always been very good at finding loopholes and twisting a situation to find the right perspective. And I think this is a survival mechanism that came out of the way I was raised. So, yeah, the starting to feel that I was special, I think I decided I would start doing standup comedy, because I was like, “Well, I think I'm meant for something.”

**John Moe:** When did you start doing standup?

**Richard Sarvate:** You know, so I started—I actually started a little bit late. I started when I was 27.

**John Moe:** Oh, wow.

**Richard Sarvate:** Yeah. You know, what happened was that, during college, I wanted to do standup. But I went to the open mics, and the fear of going up is so intense. I wrote my name on the open mic sheet, and I—right before my name was called, I just—I ran out. And, yeah, that experience, I was like, “Okay, well, standup—I know I want to do it, but it's too tough.” And from 21 to 26, I just went on—I decided that, well, maybe I'm just not going to be able to do it. Maybe it's too hard.

And I just became a computer programmer. That's what I went to college for. And I was a programmer for many years. And—oh, and then what happened was I was in Puerto Rico in May of—I forget;/ May of 2011. And I almost drowned. I went scuba diving, and I got pulled into basically a riptide and had a very close life or death experience. (*Stammering.*) I mean, I can describe how it all went down, but basically I barely made it out alive, and the Coast Guard had to come pull me out of the water.

And when I got back to the US, that week, I started standup comedy. I said, “I'm gonna get on stage.”

**John Moe:** Because you had survived an actual really threatening thing, and then this didn't seem as threatening?

**Richard Sarvate:** Exactly, yeah. I was like, oh, okay, I really could die. In that moment—I mean, it's, a little cliché, but like in the moment of like almost dying, you realize what's really important. And I said, you know, like, “I can't die without having done this.”

**John Moe:** Were you still in touch with your mom, like in college and after college?

[00:30:00]

**Richard Sarvate:** You know, I would see her when I came home. And I would make a trip. If she was in the institution, I would make a trip there occasionally if my dad was going. You know, there were times where, you know, she was at home, because it was—you know, maybe the government didn't want to cover that facility for her anymore. So, she would be at home.

Well, you know, actually I don't know the finances of it. I think also my dad was like struggling really hard to pay for this stuff. And maybe he was like, you know, “Okay, well, I can't pay for it anymore.” So, she'd be at home occasionally. So, I would see her there. But you know, my interactions with her were so limited, because we had no foundation. You know, an entire childhood of just like emotional abuse, then I go home. It's not like, “Hey, Mom. You know, I'm home for the holidays. Or you know, what's going on with you?”

She would—you know, she would talk to me, but she would talk to me through her delusions. She would—it'd basically be like, “Here's what's going on, you know, with the voices in my head right now.”

You know, I mean, these stories are out of left field. But you know, she was obsessed with Bill Clinton for a long time. (*Chuckles.*) Like, they had the same birthday, so she thought they had some sort of connection. So, she'd be like, “Bill told me this today. Bill told me this today.” And so, I would just listen to some of these rants, but there was no like real connection.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Not a lot of sentimental memories of times together.

(*Richard confirms.*) What were holidays like in your house growing up?

**Richard Sarvate:** Yeah. Holidays were—yeah, very strange. I mean, my dad would just buy everything from the store. And you know, my mom would—like I said, my mom always managed to cook. Like, somehow that was the thing that was like not affected. So, during Thanksgiving—you know, my dad would buy a lot of stuff from the store. She would cook it all. There was no discourse at the table or anything. It was just—you know, we were just cohabitating during those times.

**John Moe:** You had chapatis, though. So, that was good.

**Richard Sarvate:** Oh my god, the chapatis are next level. Ugh.

*(They laugh.)*

**John Moe:** Now I really, really want chapati. My takeaway from this interview, I really want to get some chapati.

**Richard Sarvate:** Oh, you gotta. But when you go to the restaurant, like they're just—my mom used to make them like extra buttery. So, they were super soft. Like, anytime I go to a restaurant and get them, they're just a little too hard. So, it's not what I'm looking for.

**John Moe:** That's funny that everything with your mom is a pretty tough memory, except this one. Except the food.

**Richard Sarvate:** Oh my god. Except the food, oh my god. And she used to make this shrimp curry that was so good. So, you take the chapati, you fold it, you scoop the shrimp curry. You get a little piece of shrimp, get a little curry, and it's like this little boat full of like sauce. It's so good.

**John Moe:** Oh, come on!

*(Richard chuckles.)*

What led to you leaving the computer programming job behind and going into comedy full time?

**Richard Sarvate:** Yeah, that was a really like sort of magical transition. I was working at a—I was working at Yahoo; I was working on Yahoo Mail. And I was doing standup also. So, from 2011 to 2016, I was working as a programmer during the day and then doing open mics at night. And my friend and I started collaborating on a comedy show. And it started becoming so successful, because I was able to use my sort of programming and internet skills to promote this show. And it became the most popular show in San Francisco—just a showcase that we used to produce at this tiny bar. And it was just, you know, me, my friend, and three/four other comedians. We all split the time evenly. And these shows started getting so full.

And the funny part is that the show—we were producing it at a bar in the worst neighborhood in San Francisco, the Tenderloin. So, all these people would be coming to the show, because we marketed it online. And they'd get there, and it was in the middle of like, you know, everyone's shooting heroin; you know, homeless are completely lining the streets; the street is filthy. And you could see the look on people's faces. And then you get inside the bar, and it was this beautiful bar. And we would have this like awesome show.

And I think actually the grittiness of the neighborhood contributed to how good the show was, because it was like, “Oh my god, we're on edge. We're in this crazy place, and this show is so good.” So, that show really took off. And it expanded from being one time a month to,

you know, once a week, to twice a week, to three times a week, to five times a week, until we had a full-on comedy club that we were running.

[00:35:00]

And I was able—the club became successful enough that I was able to quit my job and do comedy full-time, in 2016—or?—yeah, 2016.

**John Moe:** That's great. Has your dad been to see you do comedy?

**Richard Sarvate:** He has been to see me do comedy. Yeah.

**John Moe:** What does he think?

**Richard Sarvate:** You know, it's interesting. Your parents, when they're in the audience, it's just extra hard to perform. So, I don't think he ever got to see me. He passed away.

*(John offers quiet condolences.)*

I don't ever think he got to see me like really crush it on stage, which is unfortunate. But he used to love—like, my make like my sketches that I make and put online, he used to think they were so funny. And yeah, he would tell his friends about my sketches.

You know what? In retrospect, no, I think he liked my standup a lot. Because he would take his friends to come see me. So, yeah, I think I'm being hard on myself. I think he really enjoyed watching me.

**John Moe:** What's happening with your mother now?

**Richard Sarvate:** She's passed away as well.

**John Moe:** Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

**Richard Sarvate:** Yeah, it's okay. She—about five years ago, she started really deteriorating. She started—because my dad was he was tired of dealing with it for so long, so she wasn't really getting the like care she needed. She started just like doing a lot of self-harm stuff. At one point she drank like an entire bottle of cooking oil, and she ended up—

*(John murmurs “gosh”.)*

Yeah, she gave herself a stroke. And then, from then on she was in hospice care. And when she passed away, she was in her 60s, but the doctor said her body was that of a 90-year-old. So, she had really done a lot of damage to her body. Yeah.

**John Moe:** Wow. What have you done to, to manage the trauma of your childhood and of your life? The experiences you've been through, what have you done about that?

**Richard Sarvate:** You know, I think the main problem that it caused was to make me think that I'm a bad person. So.

**John Moe:** That's a big problem!

**Richard Sarvate:** Yeah. (*Chuckling.*) Huge problem. Huge issue.

So, I kinda just started working on taking time for me and realizing that... Anytime I started doing something that was for me, I started feeling a little bit more empowered. For example, one thing that used to really be an issue for me was I thought I had to hang out with like a certain group of friends. And you know, they would always go out on Saturday and Friday and just get really hammered and drunk. And you know, I thought I just had to go do that.

And then, there was a certain point I said, "I don't have to go out on Friday. I don't have to go out on Saturday. In fact, I don't even have to drink alcohol if I don't want to." And I started—you know, I started saying, "Hey, you know, it's Saturday. I just want to go by myself to the movie theater. You know? I just want to go to a restaurant or something like that." And I started doing these things for me. And for some reason that was like a source of—that started giving me a confidence in myself that, you know... that—I don't know what it is. I just started building confidence.

And then also, I go to therapy constantly. I go every week, and it helps to have somebody else mirror to me that, okay, these things were not normal. And the more I realized it wasn't normal, I go, "Oh, okay. That wasn't my fault." And the more I realized things weren't my fault, I think the closer to healing I'm getting.

**John Moe:** It's a process!

**Richard Sarvate:** Mm-hm! Big process. Yeah. You know, I'm 40 years old now, and I think I've only really reached a place where, you know, I feel like, "Oh, I feel..." I guess I would say happy. I feel like I'm doing what I'm meant to be doing. I think—(*stammering*) living my purpose. I mean, I actually feel blessed, because I know a lot of people are not even in a position to live their purpose.

I have so many coworkers, or—you know, so many people are working this corporate job that they hate, and they don't know how to get out of it. And I was given, you know, this like talent that I don't have to do a corporate job. And I'm like—you know, I think appreciating that is kind of—you know, I feel kind of blessed in a way.

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

**John Moe:** Richard Sarvate. Thank you so much.



**Richard Sarvate:** Thank you, John.

[00:40:00]

**John Moe:** Richard Sarvate's new album is called *They're Gonna Know*. It's available now wherever you listen to things on internet.

Our show exists because of funding from listeners like you. That's the only way we're able to make these shows that go out in the world and help people. We ask for your support. If you're already supporting us, thank you. That's wonderful. That's great. If you're not, it's so easy to do. Just go to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join), and then find a level that works for you. Maybe you throw us 5 bucks a month, maybe 10, 20—whatever it is that makes sense for you and your budget. You make that call, then select *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows.

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Hi, credits listeners. Pepperoni, pineapple, jalapenos, all together on a pizza. Trust me.

*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*

**Jack:** I'm Jack Probst from St. Louis, Missouri, and I'm here for you.

*(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!