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**John Moe:** Oh, I know a few of you listening to the show. I've met a few of you over the years. Some I know outside of the show, just people from college or my neighborhood who happen to be listening. One of you listening is my mom. Hi.

But most of you, I haven't met. Yet, I feel confident in saying that very few of you, probably—I think—have climbed some of the highest mountains in the world, especially in winter. Not a lot of you, I'm guessing, have taken pictures of yourself that have ended up on the cover of *National Geographic*.

But! I bet a lot of you survived difficult things in childhood, a lot of you have faced violence, and a lot of you have made some big mistakes in your adult lives. Some of you have really let people down. And I know that more than a few of you have dealt with mental health conditions. So, we all have a lot in common with each other and with our guest this week.

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

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Today, we'll talk to someone with a background of mental health problems who dealt with an unstable home and violence, who has behaved in a way that caused harm to others, and someone who—yeah—climbed some of the highest peaks in the world, nearly died as a result, and who is a world class photographer.

Cory Richards is a climber, a mountaineer, and a photographer. He is the first American to climb one of the 14 8,000+ meter mountains of the world in the winter. His photography has frequently appeared in *National Geographic* magazine. Cory is the author of a new memoir, *The Color of Everything: A Journey to Quiet the Chaos Within*.

In the book, he talks about his life as a kid, including with his brother. Brothers often compete, wrestle, pick on each other a little bit. But this went far beyond the normal, into physical violence and real, lasting, traumatic damage. Cory also talks about being diagnosed with bipolar 2, being in and out of inpatient treatment facilities and homelessness as a teenager, and eventually latching on to mountain climbing and photography as a career. He also details terrifying near-death experiences on the mountains; he talks about cheating on his wife, being held accountable for inappropriate behavior toward a colleague, and a lifetime spent trying to make sense of his own mind.

Today, Cory is retired from his climbing career. He spends a lot of time advocating for mental health. Cory Richards says his life as a kid started out pretty great.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**Cory Richards:** Our early childhood was so—it was magical, you know. We didn't have money, but my parents were always invested in getting us outside. So, we grew up doing things like skiing. I started skiing when I was two. I don't remember learning how to ski. I

hardly remember learning how to climb. So, the early years of childhood up until early adolescence were really marvelous.

And then, by virtue of complicated family dynamics, the relationship between my brother and I got complicated. And it got violent. And it got... rageful. And he's two years older. And I would argue that the physical violence of it was almost secondary to the rage that perpetuated it. And you know, in the book, I really, really dig into that and why that happened—at least to the best of my understanding. Why the dynamic between us became what it was.

So, there's this violence, and then that sets off a series of events that leads to, you know, my hospitalization in the psychiatric unit. It leads to long term, you know, inpatient/outpatient care. It leads to homelessness; it leads to addiction; it leads to all sorts of amazing, marvelous, and terrible things.

Well, and for a long time, I very much lived—even though I had the words to say, “I’m not a victim,” I lived—I really do think I lived in a sense of victimhood. And there was a lot of projection that this was all my brother's doing.

But unraveling it and writing the book and in the process of writing that book, I started to see that there was this incredible tapestry of family dynamics that were pushing it.

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And I started to really understand, especially towards the end of writing the book, how much I had contributed to that, and—consciously and unconsciously. Because the narrative of like, you know, “my brother beat the shit out of me” is very easy in some ways to escape any accountability. But in a more—in a deeper context, there's like, yes, and we both learned that conflict got us attention. And so, there was this push and pull where I would—you know, not always, but at times I would pick the fight, and then I would become the victim of the violence, and then I got the attention and the care that I was so longing for, even though there was a perceived lack of safety because of the violence. And then my brother would get that attention but in a negative way, and then that would perpetuate his feeling of sort of neglect.

And I don't—you know, I tend not to tell his story as much, because I don't know it. I don't know his experience. These are just my ways of understanding it. But the way I look at our relationship now is very much from a place of deep—and I mean this very seriously—deep reverence for my brother. Because without him and without that relationship, my life would not be what it is.

It would—he has been, in so many ways, my absolute greatest teacher. And that's not some backhanded compliment. It's like a—that is really, really, really true. I am so grateful for him and our dynamic. And we don't have a—

**John Moe:** (*Interrupting with surprise.*) For the violence?

**Cory Richards:** Yes! Yeah. I am grateful for it. Because without it, I wouldn't have formed the way I did. And if I wasn't—(*stammering*) and it's such a hard shift for people to make, and it's a big leap, but I am grateful for it.

Stephen Colbert, he did a marvelous podcast with Anderson Cooper. And he talked about accepting and finding gratitude for the totality of our experiences, because the buy in for life is complicated, you know? But if we can make that shift—it doesn't mean that the violence didn't hurt; it doesn't mean that there isn't some scar tissue around it. But making that shift to like, “Holy shit! He—that relationship formed me. And if I'm at peace with myself now, that means—wow! What a gift.” You know?

**John Moe:** Are you at peace with yourself now?

**Cory Richards:** I would say 90%. (*Chuckles.*)

**John Moe:** Okay. That's pretty good.

**Cory Richards:** Yeah. Yeah, I mean 90% at piece of it. There's extreme discomfort sometimes, you know.

**John Moe:** You talk about how you were getting this nurturing and this care from—basically, from getting the shit beaten out of you by your brother—that was filling a need that you had. Why wasn't that nurturing and that care available in the traditional means?

**Cory Richards:** Well, I think early on it was. But I think this is one of the complications with family, is that we are a web of the history of our parents and the history of their parents. And so, you know, back as far as that is gone, we are all so interconnected. And early on in life, I really did feel that care. But it was the violence and that rage that created that toxic stress that floods the body with stress hormones, that ultimately, as I came into that rage and that violence, and there was such tumult, there was a sense of a lack of safety. There was a sense of a lack of care.

Like, “Why am I not being protected from this?” Even as I'm participating in it. So, that—I think that's what shifted, you know. And to the best of their ability, my parents were trying to care for it. But that care, in some ways, got interpreted as a deep sense of brokenness.

**John Moe:** Mm. If everything had been stable and supportive at home and there hadn't been violence, do you think you were predisposed to go down the road to... the road you did, with inpatient treatment and with homelessness, with substance use? Do you think you were destined for that? Or was it a result of the environment in your house growing up?

**Cory Richards:** I think the answer to that is yes. Meaning both things are true, right? Like, I was—I think in my heart, I've always been somebody who is quite likely going to push boundaries—for better and worse—

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—and try to touch those edges. I think it's far too reductive to say that like, because of the violence, that's why I'm bipolar or anything like that. I don't think that's—I think that's way, way, way too simplified or oversimplified.

So, had it been totally stable? I mean, who knows? It's an unanswerable question. But I still think that I would have gravitated towards self-expression through this deep, unbridled sense of the need for freedom, that—ultimately—climbing gave me and photography became an expression of.

**John Moe:** When you first heard the term bipolar, how old were you?

**Cory Richards:** I mean, I was diagnosed at 14.

**John Moe:** 14, okay.

**Cory Richards:** Yeah, so I'm bipolar 2, which is like—you know, it's not...

**John Moe:** You don't have the mania; you have the hypomanic episodes.

**Cory Richards:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah, it's not as—it doesn't get into that place of near-psychosis.

**John Moe:** Did that make sense to you at 14? Did that seem like, “Ah, yes. They've got me pegged”?

**Cory Richards:** God, no. I was like, alright, cool. What's this label? Oh, it means that I'm sick. Oh, that means that I'm special. Oh, that means—you know. But it also means that I'm broken.

So, there was actually, you know, very much a—and I think I carried this for a long time throughout my life; it was almost like a leveraging or an exploitation of a diagnosis to... potentially at times excuse behavior, escape accountability.

And so, no, it didn't make sense at all. I was just like, “I feel like shit. You know, why is this so—? Or I feel so elated that I can hardly contain myself.” But oftentimes the elation or the hypomania came with racing thoughts that were so uncomfortable that I wanted to escape—you know, I wanted to escape my own mind, which I think later became...

I think that's part of both climbing and photography is it was a way to sort of narrow the focus of being to escape that disquiet.

**John Moe:** So, like the experience of having the sort of simple—not easy, but simple—challenge of a climb or the experience of putting everything in the frame of a camera?

**Cory Richards:** Yeah, yeah. I mean, you think about that, it narrows it. So, especially when you're in a high—like, when survival is actually present, your focus is required to narrow.

And in the creation of art—whether it's writing a joke, or writing a book, or creating a photograph—it's required to narrow. There's an awareness. You have to be hyperaware and narrow at the same time, which is true in climbing as well.

So—but what that did was— You know, I'm cautious about like, “Oh, it put me in a flow state.” Yeah, sometimes, but really it just was a requirement to condense the attention into something that was less chaotic.

**John Moe:** Yeah. How did you discover photography?

**Cory Richards:** It's so weird. (*Stammering*) I was—you know, there were friends—we had friends who started their photography career really early. This guy named Adam Clark, who we skied with and grew up with. And he basically started shooting, you know, like kind of professionally at 16. And so, he was two years older, and my brother was also—he became a professional skier quite young. And so, he was surrounded by photographers. And it was sort of this like, “Oh, is that possible?”

But it wasn't until coming out of this phase of adolescence, when I sort of rediscovered climbing, that I was I picked up a camera for myself. And I remember telling my dad, I'm like, “I think I want to pursue photography.” We're sitting on a chairlift.

And he's like, “Yyyeah, I'm not sure about that.” And they were always very encouraging, even after—you know, even as we were still in the depths of the complications of our relationship, they were always very encouraging. But he was like, “That's a hard life, you know?”

And sort of appropriate to me, I was like, “Aw, fuck it. If it's a hard life, then I'm going to do it.” You know, like it was almost like a fuck you, you know? It was like, okay, challenge accepted.

**John Moe:** Just makes you want to do it more.

**Cory Richards:** Right, right. Challenge accepted. I'm gonna do this. And so, I took this camera on a climbing trip, and I took way too many pictures.

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You know, just like pointing everywhere. But it made sense to me. There was a sense of like, “Oh, I can make something moment-to-moment.” And that became, I think, really, really—it was as if I was using it to explain myself through the avatar of climbing. But that happened when I was like 18 or so.

**John Moe:** Did those two interests—as those two interests grew, did that form a way to make more sense of the bipolar, the violence, the inpatient treatment? These other things, did they make more sense once you had these strong interests?

**Cory Richards:** Well, I would say eventually, yes. But initially, no. They were—in fact, I think they were adaptations. Some people would call it maladaptive. I just think they were pretty marvelous adaptations, but they worked also as a way to escape, right? Because the hyper-stimulation of those environments—again, it demands a certain degree of focus, and it narrows the noise. But as I started to really get into that as my career blossomed, there was never a time to stop and reflect. It was always motion; it was just hypermotion.

You're on the road, you're shooting, you're on a climb, you're shooting, you're in a hotel, you're speaking. Like, there was just no—even as I gained more and more knowledge around mental health and understood to a certain degree my past, you know, it was not necessarily this healthy—the totality, like people like, “Oh, this is a healthy expression.”

I was like, “Well, mmm, yes and.”

So, it's not as—I don't think it's as simple as that. But then later in life, I was like, “Ohhh, these were things that I was using to try to make sense as much as escape.”

**John Moe:** Did it work?

**Cory Richards:** (*Laughs.*) Yeah, it worked! It worked, and it didn't work. It worked until it didn't. You know, like in 2019 or—no, I guess 2021, when I went on my last climb and I had a, you know, mixed bipolar episode at base camp, I—you know, it was like, “Oh shit, this doesn't work anymore.”

Like, I have to go—like, I've gone external; I've gone outward; I've explored, I've explored, I've explored. But something is calling me to really go internal. And I'd done that to a degree throughout my life, but that was sort of like the precipice that was—there was a moment of crisis that became the point of growth that I think in some ways—

Because I knew for a while that something was not working anymore. But I think in many ways, that episode was an expression of a deep internal knowledge that I was fighting.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Just ahead, Cory Richards takes to the mountains.

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** We're back with Cory Richards, author of the memoir *The Color of Everything*.

When did the climbing start? I mean, I guess all kids climb, but when did it become more of a thing for you?

**Cory Richards:** Well, I mean, I love that you said that. All kids climb. We are—it's so important for me to remember that we are primates. We're not—you know, like that's what we are. No matter whether you believe we evolved or not, we are still primates, right? And

people love to draw these parallels. Oh, are we more chimp, or are we more bonobo? And I'm like, no, we're not—we're our own thing. And we—

But that deep inner sort of draw to climb, I think, resides in all kids. You see it all the time. They're just like—they're just crawling all over everything. That's how they initially explore. They're pulling themselves up. They're climbing on top of stuff. They're falling off. They're breaking their arms. But as far as like actual climbing that would become the alpine climbing and the mountaineering, that started when I was about five.

*(John “wow”s.)*

That was the first time my parents—you know, my dad took us climbing. And it was like—literally, he threw a rock over the top of a boulder. You know? It wasn't like—and then we just climbed up, and he tied us. And it was really, really sweet and innocent. So—

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But I rediscovered climbing as, really, an anchor and a form of identity coming out of my adolescence, coming out of the homelessness, coming out of the treatment, the hospitals, all of this stuff. I found a way to anchor myself to something that felt deeply secure, even though it was also very dangerous.

**John Moe:** Was—or is—climbing a form of treatment or therapy?

**Cory Richards:** It sure can be. I think climbing, whether it's—you know, I think these extreme activities are often an attempt to either escape or unwind and sort of self-medicate. That's not always the case. I don't want to paint climbing in a picture—or extreme sports in a picture that is like everybody's fucked up, and that's why they're going and doing it. I don't think that's the case. I think it can be that. And I certainly think for me, there was a therapeutic aspect of it for a really long time.

And truthfully, even since I retired from that, you know, sort of professional sphere of doing that, I'm curious about going back. And I wonder very much about how it will be different now. You know, is there going to be more...? Is it going to be calmer? Is it going to be—is there going to be a surrender instead of a fight? And I'm excited to find out.

**John Moe:** So, you're going back to climbing?

**Cory Richards:** Well, I'm not going to go back to climbing in a professional context. But I do want to go back to the big mountains. I do. There's something in me. And I think that the space that I've taken from it over the last four years has created a perspective that might allow me to actually enjoy it more.

**John Moe:** For those people who haven't followed closely on your history, I have to ask what happened with the avalanche on—and I'm hoping I'm pronouncing this right—Gasherbrum.

**Cory Richards:** For people that don't know, there are 14 8,000-meter peaks in the world. And 8,000 meters is, you know, 26,240 feet or something like that. So, there's these 14 mountains that stick up really high into the atmosphere. And there's one in India called Kanchenjunga; that's the third highest mountain. And then there are eight in Nepal and Tibet that are just like right on the border. That's where Everest is. And then there are five in Pakistan, in the Karakoram range.

So, those five are about 600 miles further north than the other mountains. And in the history of 8,000-meter climbing—you know, of course, everybody started— Eventually all those summits were climbed. And then in the '80s, the Polish got really excited about doing them all in winter. Which is crazy! It's weird. I mean, it truly is weird.

But slowly they ticked them all off—not just the Polish, but people got into this. And all of the—the one in India and then the other eight got climbed. But for whatever reason—and it's partly because the mountains are further north in Pakistan, the weather's more severe in the winter. None of the Pakistani 8,000-meter peaks had ever been climbed. And many expeditions—I think 16 expeditions over 26 years—had tried and failed.

And so, in the winter of 2010/11—and this is as I was really stepping into my professional career as a climber and photographer—I got invited by two other climbers to try to do an ascent, a winter ascent, of Gasherbrum II, the 13th highest. So, we go. And at the time I did not know that—I really didn't—I hadn't done the research. It was Simone Moro and Dennis Urubko, and they're like Himalayan giants. These guys are like—I was like, “Oh my god, they're Himalayan gods.” And—you know, which is so funny, because the world of climbing is actually so tiny. But to me, at the time they were like these famous climbers who were asking me to come and take pictures.

And so, I went, and I didn't know I would be the first American to do that, to climb an 8,000-meter peak in winter. I didn't know, and I still am the only one. So, anyway, we climb this thing; we summit on February 2nd. It's like -80 with windchill at the top. I mean, it's ridiculous. But we stand on the top, a storm closes in, and we start the descent.

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And the storm got more and more powerful. And so, it took us two days to get back down to camp one, which is a full day above our base camp. And as we left the morning to go to descend, we—all this fresh snow was hanging on a mountain called Gasherbrum V above us. And whether it was an icefall that broke it loose or—who knows, maybe it was just the compounding weight of what's called a wind slab. There was a huge avalanche that came down off Gasherbrum V and hit the flat ground that we were on, which is called the deposit zone, and pushed the wind blast of the avalanche towards us.

And these things can create huge wind blasts. And also, there's the snow that is underlying it. And all of us were buried. We were all partially buried. And so, we all ended up surviving it and getting out of it. And about an hour later—right after that, I turned on my camera, and I just broke down. And about an hour later, maybe two hours later—I don't know, 47 minutes, something like that, who knows—I turned the camera on again, and I took a picture of myself. And it's—you know, I've got this crazy ice beard, and I just look haunted.



And that was this inflection point that became sort of the beginning of a much—you know, it launched my career upward, because that photo became the cover of *National Geographic*. The story sort of resounded out to even—it went outside of the climbing world. And so, my career took off. And it was after that I really started working consistently for *National Geographic Magazine*.

But it was also after that, by virtue of that event, that the early childhood trauma, the complex post-traumatic stress of everything that I experienced in my adolescence sort of blossomed into an episode of acute PTSD. And I didn't really know what I was experiencing, but I experienced a lot of deeper anger, forgetfulness, an inability to sort of self-regulate my nervous system.

And so, you've got this like—boom! The career grows, like blows up. And slowly but all at once, the inner life starts to unwind and unravel.

**John Moe:** Well, what you see in that picture, what I see in that picture that you're talking about—and it's extraordinary, of course—you see trauma happening.

*(Cory agrees.)*

And you see something horrifying has just happened. And you see, or at least I do, that there are horrors yet to come as a result of it. I think that's why it's so compelling. What did that PTSD... how did that manifest? What behaviors did that lead to? What was going on within you?

**Cory Richards:** I mean—see, the way you just described that was so... profound. I've tried to articulate it a million times. And to the point where sometimes I just completely disconnect from it. I don't even—a piece of me doesn't recognize myself in it. But the opening quote in the book is by a dear friend of mine, Gregory Alan Isakov. He's an amazing musician. And it says, "The past, she is haunted; the future is laced."

And it's exactly what you're describing, where there's a hauntedness to it that is the result or the manifestation of everything that came before and the fear of everything to come. But in the moment, it was just the fear of—it was the residual fear of the avalanche. It was the horror of coming so close to the edge and then walking back. And it was the inability to make sense of any of it at the time.

But the way that manifested throughout the future was, you know, slowly I started drinking more. You know, I got married, and pretty immediately I started cheating on my wife. Because there was also this added access to—you know, there was a certain degree of fame in it. And I always joke that like, if you've got your A listers, if you've got Brad Pitt, then like the celebrity that's involved in climbing is like a K lister.

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You know, you're all the way down the alphabet. You're like—yeah, but I mean, it was famous in a small context. But what that opened up was access. Access to people, access to

sort of a lack of accountability. Because I'm always on the road, I'm alone. And if I'm speaking, there's this huge degree of attention that's coming at me. And certainly that comes with sort of an accessibility to things that I just leaned into to, to sort of calm the chaos of my mind—both from the accession of bipolar and PTSD.

So, you know, sex is a pretty—and I say marvelous. Like, I say awesome, not in like, “Oh, it was awesome,” but like literally awe inspiring. Sex is a profound coping mechanism. Because at least for a moment, there's a feeling of connectedness. And what I was experiencing in my life—my internal landscape was a deep sense of disconnectedness. Both a disconnectedness between mind and body, let alone even the understanding of my heart.

And so, there's that disconnectedness, but then also— Interesting thing about any sort of notoriety is that you are separate, right? Like, so you're like literally standing on stage, you're separate. And so, you can feel a connection to the audience, you're feeding off the energy, but there's a disconnection.

And if you look at it through the lens of photography, you're always the outsider looking in. You're never really a part of something, but more so a witness to it. So, yes, you're in the moment, but you're really not in the moment at the same time. And so, that feeling was just always ever present.

And so, sex and sexuality sort of generated this feeling of like, “Oh, I could feel connected.” And alcohol and things like that just grease the wheels for that. And then, you know, there's this profound vacuum that occurs on the back side when you sidestep intimacy. That doesn't mean that every time you have sex you should have to have some like deep loving connection, but it certainly changes the nature of it all.

**John Moe:** I wonder how you manage the idea of ego. Because you—I mean, it seems to me, not being a climber at all—but like, this mountain that nobody can climb, I got to the top of it. And then combine that with your photography. My face on the cover of *National Geographic*.

Do you—? But then I know from having read your book that there are times of deep self-loathing and times when you really, really hate yourself. How do you manage your relationship with ego?

**Cory Richards:** (*Stammering speechlessly.*) What a—dude, love it. Thank you for that question. (*Pleasantly.*) And fuck you for that question.

(*They laugh.*)

No, I'm just—

You know, first of all, I think ego—I've changed my relationship with the definition too. Because I think ego, when we talk about it in contemporary culture, is often sort of... it comes across in a negative context. Like, you have to let go of your ego, disavow—like, completely abandon your ego.

I think that's too reductive. You know, I love like Ryan Holiday's book, *Ego is the Enemy*—one of my favorite books. But it's only one—and he states this; it's only one understanding of what ego is. So, there's sort of the more Freudian, Jungian idea that ego is an essential part of our personality. And in many ways it acts as, in some way, a protector to keep us safe.

The ego that I—and I think that you're asking about the former context of the ego, right? A little bit more the—?

**John Moe:** A little bit, yeah.

**Cory Richards:** Yeah, so it's very easy—I mean, it was very easy for me to sort of start drinking my own Kool Aid, which propped up the ego. What's ironic about it is at the same time, these mountains and these experiences—especially nearly dying—generates a huge degree of humility and finitude and scarcity in that like your life is so short. It's so precious.

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And so, potentially—and this is why this question is difficult. Potentially, I use the accomplishment to sidestep the reality of my own mortality, my own deficit, my own blind spots. Because in that context of like, yeah, I climbed this mountain. Nobody's ever—you know, no American's ever done it. And no American's done it since.

Those things are really seductive to say, because it sort of masks the totality and the reality of my humanness. And because there was a deep degree of self-loathing, that was incredibly seductive. Because I could hide behind it. And so, the engagement with my ego and the resultant arrogance was profound. And it expressed in pretty profound ways too.

It's a degree of entitlement. Certainly as the career started to blow up, I was—you know, things started to come really easily. It's like when a celebrity or a comedian or whatever, you know, starts to get that attention, there's a momentum that then things just start to happen. And it's very easy to believe that you deserve those things to be happening.

And I disagree with that now.

**John Moe:** You disagree with the idea that you deserve—

**Cory Richards:** (*Interrupting.*) Yes.

**John Moe:** —the successes that you have?

**Cory Richards:** It's not that I—so, what I would say is... and it's a subtle shift in language. I'm worthy of the successes, but I'm not entitled to anything. And I don't deserve anything. I'm worthy of the successes. And I have created those successes. Because deserving suggests that it should come sort of without—you know, it keeps coming.

And I think you just have to keep working for it and—not proving your worth, but engaging with it and using that as a way to understand what you can generate in the world.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** More with Cory Richards in a moment.

**Promo:**

**Music:** A bouncy beat.

**Dave Shumka:** *(Rhythmically.)* If you need a laugh, and you're on the go, try S-T-O-P P-O-D-C-A-S-T-I—augh. *(Sighs.)* Hm.

*(Music stops.)*

**Graham Clark:** Were you trying to put the name of the podcast there?

**Dave:** Yeah, I'm trying to spell it, but it's tricky.

**Graham:** Let me give it a try.

**Dave:** Okay!

*(Music resumes.)*

**Graham:** *(Rhythmically.)* If you need a laugh, and you're on the go, call S-T-O-P P-A-D—ah, it'll never fit!

**Dave:** No, it will! Let me try.

*(Music resumes.)*

*(Rhythmically.)* If you need a laugh, and you're on the go, try S-T-O-P P-O-D-C-O-O. UGH! We are so close!

**Graham:** *Stop Podcasting Yourself.*

**Dave:** A podcast, from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org).

**Graham:** If you need a laugh, and you're on the go.

*(Music ends.)*

**Promo:**

**Music:** Relaxed guitar that builds into a fun, upbeat rock song.

**Jordan Crucchiola:** My name is Jordan Crucchiola, and I love movies. But you know what I might love even more? Talking about movies. And the directors, actors, and writers that join me every week on *Feeling Seen* love to talk about movies too. Like, our recent cohost, the writer and director, Justin Simien.

**Justin Simien:** And I love the premise of your show. *Feeling Seen*. I think that's kind of always my goal when I'm making something. Nothing touches my heart more than when someone comes out of my movie and says, "Oh my God, I never thought I would see myself."

**Jordan Crucchiola:** So, hang out with us and geek out about watching movies, making movies, and the ways the movies we love speak to us directly. You might just start asking folks around you, "Hey, what movie character made you feel seen?" We're doing it every week at [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org).

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Back with climber, photographer, and memoirist Cory Richards. In his book, *The Color of Everything*, Cory discloses an incident where he touched a *National Geographic* colleague inappropriately. No legal action was ultimately taken from the incident.

Did your relationship with that sense of your own power, that sense of your own—I guess— notoriety, did that change with the incident that you talk about in the book very openly? I guess it was a Me Too moment, where you were in trouble with somebody who you worked with.

**Cory Richards:** Yeah. Yeah. Thanks for bringing that up. You know, it's one of those things that doesn't come up very often, but I think it's really, really important.

[00:40:00]

There was an incident when I was working at *National Geographic* that—and I really hope people read the book, because it is complicated. And it was at the height of sort of the Me Too movement, where the pendulum was so far to one side that oftentimes things that, in another context, wouldn't be as serious very much were. And it was—and that's not to excuse any of it. It's just to say that the circumstance was nuanced. It was complicated.

But I would say that what drove that was... yes, it was a certain degree of entitlement, but I don't think it was tied to the career. I think the entitlement from that is more just deeply rooted in what we call, in culture, patriarchy—which as I started to really dive into this, I really understood patriarchy in a very different way.

**John Moe:** And, just so people know, this was an incident where—I guess for lack of a better term—you goosed somebody.

**Cory Richards:** Yeah, yeah. I went—well, two things happened. I told an inappropriate joke at a work function. It wasn't directed at anybody, but it was a joke of a sexual nature. And then the other incident was where I walked into a party—and again, I wanna be very clear, I don't remember this, but I trust the person that was part of this interaction who said it did happen. I just don't remember it.

That's not an excuse. That's just a statement of fact. I don't remember it happening. Which was hard at first. But I walked into a party, and apparently I walked up behind her, and I slapped her on the butt. And what happened was that then there was—five years later, there was an anonymous letter written to *National Geographic* that said—that was, you know, saying these things happened. And my coworker corroborated it. I didn't remember, but she said it happened, and I trusted her. And so, I was like, well, then it happened.

And again, I think what that speaks to is sort of the sense of entitlement that oftentimes men feel towards females. We are brought up culturally to believe in some ways that we have access to women in ways that are profoundly inappropriate and can be very hurtful.

I don't think it was the necessarily directly tied to the career, but certainly the position that I held—specifically, being a photographer at, you know, one of the largest publications in the world. There is that degree of—you know, the accountability oftentimes gets glossed over or accepted or excused. And so, that was at play, I believe. But I don't think I was thinking of it in the like, “Oh, I'm so—like, I'm untouchable.” It was none of that. It was just the unconscious belief that I was entitled to behavior like that.

**John Moe:** Well, and I'm really interested in kind of the arc of someone's mental health issues as they go along the journey that they have.

So, you know, you've described, being bipolar 2 and dealing with this PTSD and all that came around after the avalanche. What did this do, this incident? Because you weren't run out of town on a rail, but your relationship with *National Geographic* certainly changed.

**Cory Richards:** Yeah. Again, this goes back to what I said—like, similarly to what I said about my brother. At first, I was so defensive. I was so combative. I was angry, because I was still viewing it through this lens of “Hey, it was a joke.” You know, like it was playfulness.

And I do believe that in a more intimate context, it can be playfulness. But I completely misread the situation, and like we talked about, there's a sense of entitlement that I didn't understand in its totality. But when this first came out, or when this first was—when this was

happening, I was so—like, I was furious. I was just like, “Fuck! Like, I didn't mean it! You know, I didn't—this is dumb. This is like—”

And then that anger—and I'm so grateful for this, because my personality eventually was, “Okay, I'm going to learn about this.”

[00:45:00]

But it came through this almost sense of like male rage. And I was so pissed off. And I realized I was angry at women. Not in like a violent way—you know, like what we think of as like violent expression. But there was a certain degree of like psychic violence, you know? Where I had moved through the world, I think, using sex and sexuality in a pretty exploitative way, and you could understand that as a form of sexual violence, right?

And so, I really—I turned towards it. A lot of the learning came through writing, where I really, really dove into it. And I started digging into my pain around this stuff, and I started looking at my relationship with my mom, and I started looking at, you know, my relationship to women in general. And that's when I started to read more about the central tenets of and the historical roots of feminism, and how that's grown up through time, and how that has been perpetuated by patriarchal thinking.

My hope is that by my examination of what happened—and the way that chapter is written—is that it can be an invitation into the conversation. And quite frankly, I know that it has—you know, some people don't like it, and that's okay too.

**John Moe:** When I look at the experiences you describe in the book, certainly in *The Color of Everything*, there is a lot of violence. There's a lot of violence in your childhood, as we discussed—especially with your brother. And then even with climbing, there is—you know, you'll often come across a body, a frozen body, a mummified body along the trail. People die violently in climbing all the time.

What is your... (*sighs*) I guess, where are you now with your relationship to all that trauma that has stacked up over all that violence that you were a part of and that you witnessed?

**Cory Richards:** Look, there is a certain—when you go climbing, there is, I think, very much an acceptance of—or for me, at least there was a recognition of the potential outcomes. So, how seeing those bodies influenced my mind—and if they can be called traumatic, I think is different than experiencing physical violence or emotional violence in the home or in life.

And so—and there's a question in the book, and it sort of pulls on stoic philosophy in Marcus Aurelius. And I'm slaughtering the quote—like, “Believe you are harmed, and you will be. Believe you are not, and you won't be.” And it's not the direct quote, but there's a curiosity around, well, if the expectation is some degree of trauma, is it as traumatic?

And I just think it's an interesting question. It's sort of an unanswerable one, but you know, I make sort of the—I'm like, look, if going to battle as a Native—you know, as an Indigenous

American or even an Anglo Saxon—if going to battle, was an integral part of your development as a man or as a human, is the trauma the same?

And again, I can't answer the question. I don't know. But all this to say that like when I'm climbing, yes, seeing dead bodies can be troubling and haunting. I'm not sure that it's traumatic in the way that, you know, physical abuse or violence or sexual abuse is. My relationship to it now is very much... you know, I think I've worked really hard to move beyond the stories. I've worked really hard to step into my own accountability around things, which has been deeply liberating. Because I'm no longer trapped by it.

I'm no longer—you know, it's not—I let go of the stories around it. And now there are things that happened, that had consequences, and that's kind of where I leave it. (*Beat.*) So, I'm doing alright.

(*They chuckle.*)

**John Moe:** Good. Final question. Your book is written in the present tense instead of in the past tense, and I don't see that in memoirs very often. Was that a conscious choice?

[00:50:00]

Or did you just feel like that?

**Cory Richards:** It became—so often, art—you know, we talk about finding your voice, especially in writing, you know, finding your style. And I wanted—I knew I wanted it to be immediate. Because there's a certain sense of dissociation when we write in past tense. “This happened.” And I felt—and it sort of happened naturally, very much happened naturally, where it was like, “This is happening, and I want you to be with me as it happens. I want you to experience this as if you're in the room right now, not in sort of the past tense.”

Because my sense was—and I think it was accomplished—it was just more visceral that way. It was more immediate. And I thought there was power in that, you know? And in fact, the way I started it was—you could argue it was more dissociative, or it was still an attempt at that, but it was like second person. “You do this, you do that.” So, I was trying to make the reader the actual participant.

But that didn't feel right eventually, and it became about, you know, my immediate experience but with the attempt to invite people into it, to live it alongside me. But it was fun too. I mean, you know, because I'm sure as you notice, I still go—even from present tense, I'll go back into history, and I'll also jump forward. You know, when I'm talking about finding the body on the mountain in Peru, when I go into the concept of death and dying in the mountains, I say, “16 years from now, when I write this chapter sitting at a cafe in Salzburg, Austria, I will have many friends who have died.”

And so, I liked this idea of jumping in space and time, because— And I don't—you know, this can get a little esoteric, but I believe—my sense is that life and time are happening all at once as infinite expressions of itself. Our minds make sense of it—of that entropy—by



creating a timeline. And that's how we experience life; we move forward through it. But there is a sense in me that this is all happening all at once on infinite levels. And so, I wanted in some ways that to be accessible to people, even in very subtle ways.

**John Moe:** Mm. Well, it's an extraordinary read. It's some tales that definitely had me chattering my teeth in fear and in cold. and I live in Minnesota, so the cold really needs to be something to get to me. *The Color of Everything: A Journey to Quiet the Chaos Within*. The author is Cory Richards.

Cory, thank you so much.

**Cory Richards:** Thanks for having me. I really appreciate it.

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

**John Moe:** *The Color of Everything: A Journey to Quiet the Chaos Within* by Cory Richards is available wherever books are sold.

Our show exists because people donate to it. They get something out of it. They want other people to get something out of it. It does cost money to make. We thank you if you have already supported the show. If you haven't, no worries. It's easy to do. Just go to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join), find a level that works for you, and then select *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows. It's that easy. Maybe it's five bucks a month, maybe it's ten bucks a month—just whatever you can swing, swing it to us. We really appreciate it.

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We'd love to hear from you. We'd love to have you hang out there with us. Our electric mail address is [DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org](mailto:DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org).

Hi, credits listeners. We finally got our big snow here in Minnesota. It's nice, and it's pretty now. But check with me in March about how I feel about it. It'll be easy to find me to check in, because I'll be the one... screaming.

[00:55:00]

*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*

**Maddox:** I'm Maddox from Washington, DC. And it's not always going to feel like this.

*(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!