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John Moe: A note to listeners: this episode contains mention of self-harm.

Do you like mysteries? Big fan of *Matlock*? *Murder She Wrote*? Do you dig a Hercule Poirot thing? Have a hankering for Benoit Blanc? Well, I think I might know why. Because I think I know a little bit about a lot of people who listen to this program.

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

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: See, those of us with interesting minds, those of us who deal with depression, anxiety, ADHD, trauma response—whatever it is. People like us are programmed to try to solve mysteries, or at least investigate them: gather clues, try to identify a culprit. That culprit? Usually not a person, but maybe it's a circumstance of childhood. Maybe it's a genetic predisposition.

We're searching for what caused this... thing. I don't know if it's a crime. Maybe it's a crime. This thing that happens in our head. Unfortunately, as we pursue these investigations, there's rarely a big reveal where the bad guy is caught. You don't see a parlor scene where like a mustachioed figure in black is accused and then confesses to the crime of messing with your head with all these mental health conditions, and then they're hauled off to jail, never to bother you again. It's messier than that.

Maybe that's why you like a mystery in the movies or on TV. It gives you some resolution that your own mental health mystery solving can't seem to do.

Anyway, I have a podcast to recommend for you, mystery fans. I mean, listen to this podcast and all of our fine Maximum Fun podcasts, but you may also want to give *Hyperfixed* a try. In *Hyperfixed*, the host, Alex Goldman, takes submissions from listeners about real-life mysteries they're trying to solve. Some are simple, like: where did this weird button come from? Others, more murky, like: should I have children, given the state of the world they'll grow up in? Alex tries to help people out, solve their mysteries.

Alex Goldman is a veteran radio and podcast producer. He used to be one of the hosts of *Reply All* on Gimlet, which was super popular. There's subtext in his work, because he—like a lot of us—is trying to solve and manage his mental health and the mysteries therein. Alex deals with depression, with ADHD, and with bipolar type 2, which causes hypomanic episodes.

He's got a pretty good bead on some of the causes of these issues and puts in regular work on what to do about them. I thought you might want to hear from him.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Alex Goldman, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Alex Goldman: Thank you for having me. I really appreciate it.

John Moe: Do you want the grand thematic question right out of the gate, or do you want something more coy to start off with? I ask you this as a podcaster yourself, you know.

Alex Goldman: You know, why ease me into the bath, if you could just toss me right into the deep end? Let's go for it!

John Moe: Okay. (*Chuckles.*) Good. Good, good, good. Well, your show, *Hyperfixed*—which I've enjoyed very much—is about curiosity and about solving problems. So, where is the chicken and egg about you living with mental health conditions that you attempt to understand, and you making a show where you go in search of answers to other people's problems?

(*Alex laughs deeply.*)

How do these two mesh?

Alex Goldman: I'm only laughing, because it's not something I've never looked directly at before. I don't—I'm not sure I know the answer.

John Moe: Okay. (*Chuckles.*) Okay!

Alex Goldman: I feel like I am a person who has this like very well-defined sense of justice, if that makes any sense. And there's a part of me where, whenever I see a problem in the world that feels like it doesn't have an answer, it like tweaks this very—this deep feeling I have of frustration with an unjust world. So, like being able to make this show kind of gets me there.

But as a person who has struggled to understand my own mental health, there's definitely a part—I would say that that kind of came after being a reporter. I didn't really have a good handle on it for most of my life. I didn't really understand what was going on with me. And I've only kind of figured it out in the past—well, I've only kind of started to figure it out in the past couple years.

John Moe: How old are you now, if you don't mind my asking?

Alex Goldman: 45.

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John Moe: 45, okay. Well, I want to ask about your hypomanic episodes that you've talked about, but I want to ask first about depression. How far back do you go with depression? How long has that been in your life?

Alex Goldman: Uhhh, it's been there as long as I can remember. It's kind of been—it's like definitely a family thing. It's a thing that I definitely inherited and that my son, at the very least, has definitely inherited from me. But I—I mean, I started going to a therapist when I was probably... eight or nine? Like, my parents got me started early. They could sense in me...

Whenever I talk about my son's mental health issues, I call it the darkness. I'm just like, "He has the darkness." I don't know—nothing—it's not like I woke up one day and did something that was deeply traumatic to him that caused him to develop a mental illness. It's just the darkness. It's just there. And it's a thing that some people have to contend with while other people don't.

And I don't necessarily—you know, that's just the luck of the draw, I guess.

John Moe: Was the darkness an acknowledged thing when you were growing up, when you were going off to therapy at eight years old?

Alex Goldman: It wasn't! It wasn't something my parents talked about. They sent me to therapy, and their pretext was like that they were sending me—they started sending me about a year before they got divorced. And I think that their pretext was like, "Well, we know our marriage is in trouble, and we want to make sure that this kid's getting taken care of in case we don't make it." If that makes sense.

John Moe: So, then what form did that take when you're that young? Like, what does depression look like on somebody that age?

Alex Goldman: Uh... I think that it's just—I mean, it looks very similar that to what it looks like in other people. I think the big difference is it's really hard to—I just didn't have the vocabulary to describe what I was feeling, if that makes sense. So, I knew like that something was bad. I knew the darkness was there, but I didn't know how to describe it or what it meant. I just knew that I was like... I felt a lot more hopeless than I think a lot of my peers did, and I was bummed out a lot.

And you know, I also think that I had—I mean, I know that I had undiagnosed ADHD. And those two things together can create like a powerful demotivator in a kid. So. You know, I was contending with both of those without really realizing what it was.

John Moe: When did you get your ADHD diagnosed?

Alex Goldman: Three years ago! (*Chuckles.*)

John Moe: Three years ago! So, there's a big gap in there. How did these conditions kind of evolve over the space of those years? Like, through the teenage years, what did the depression and the ADHD do to your life?

Alex Goldman: I would say the ADHD had a more severe impact on me as a kid, mostly because I just couldn't—I couldn't, and as far as I can tell, can't still do school. Like, I just

can't—I'm not suited for it at all. I remember very clearly going to class, and everyone taking notes. And I would go into class every day being like, “Okay, today's the day I'm gonna start taking notes like everybody else does.” And then by the end of the day, I would look back at my paper or at my notebook, and it was all just doodles. It was all just drawings. No notes. And I was just really—like, could not focus.

I think that there's a certain degree in both depression and ADHD of like frustration and willingness to give up. So, I would go to school, and I think I'm a pretty smart person. And I would do so fantastically awful in school that I would just be like, “You know what? (*Clicks teeth.*) I'm not going to go back to that class anymore.”

So, I just would stop going to classes. And that happened a lot. And the result of that—

John Moe: This was in college?

Alex Goldman: In high school too.

John Moe: In high school, you just wouldn't go? (*Chuckles.*)

Alex Goldman: Yeah. And the result of that was, you know, I was in summer school every year. I barely scraped by. The community college in my town, fortunately, did a thing where you could take classes there that would retroactively count as high school credits. So, after I turned 18, I just started taking community college classes, and then used those credits to graduate from high school.

But I was not—like, I was a terrible student. That continued into college too. I was never very good. And it was very hard for me to figure out why. Like, I couldn't figure out what made me different.

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I just knew that I was.

John Moe: Did you turn that against yourself? Because I just imagine like an inability to focus and stay on tasks that goes with ADHD, combined with the darkness of depression—you could start beating up yourself pretty hard with a combo like that.

Alex Goldman: Oh yeah, absolutely. And you know, the adults in my life didn't understand it either. And you know, nooo disrespect to my parents or my guidance counselors or whatever, but they didn't understand what was going on with me. They just knew that I would give up. And I can imagine it was incredibly frustrating to try and be, you know, giving this kid direction when he was just incapable of doing it himself. You know?

John Moe: Yeah. So, then did you end up going to college then, too?

Alex Goldman: I did go to college. And it was the same kind of situation where like I barely scraped by; it was through favors and understanding from professors. I had a pretty significant mental health episode in college where I was committed for about a week, which was terrible, and we can certainly talk about.

But! The side benefit of it was that it was a great excuse to turn everything in late.

(John chuckles.)

And so, that was like my senior year of college. It was very easy for me to—that really helped. But I mean, I think I graduated maybe 18 months after I finished going to school, because I had unfinished papers that I couldn't figure out—couldn't get the motivation to do. Like, they just wouldn't get done. So.

John Moe: What led to the inpatient stay?

Alex Goldman: I was struggling pretty bad. It was like deep—I went to college in western Massachusetts, which is incredibly cold and, in the winter, incredibly dark. And I was having some like interpersonal problems And I wasn't really like a person who ever self-harmed very much, but then one day I woke up and was like, “You know what? Today's the day. Today's the day I'm gonna start self-harming.”

And so, I did. And it wasn't anything super severe. I'm okay. But I went to—my roommate came home and saw me, you know, all cut up and was like, “Dude, you need to go to the hospital.”

And so, I went to the hospital, and they immediately were like, “Yeah, you need to stay here overnight.”

And I was like I don't—I didn't sign up for that. I don't want to do that. They made me stay. They basically—what do they say, 5150'd me? So, I was like forced to stay in the hospital. And a thing they don't tell you when you go to the hospital for mental health assistance is that if you go on a Friday, all the psychiatrists leave for the weekend. So, you're definitely there until Monday.

So, I was there on like a Friday, maybe—I think I got there a Thursday night, and then Friday morning they were like, “Yeah, well you're not leaving today, so you're just gonna have to get used to being here over the weekend.”

And I was like, “No, I didn't think I was gonna be here all weekend. This is terrible.”

But it was actually very good for me. Like, I'm very glad that I had that experience, even though I don't really wish it upon anybody. *(Chuckles.)* I feel like I was very lucky to go to a particularly good psychiatric hospital, where— ‘Cause I have also had outpatient interactions in bad psychiatric hospitals, and a bad psychiatric hospital is like actually really bad. So, yeah. It was...

John Moe: What happened there that made you so glad that you had been there?

Alex Goldman: (*Sighs.*) There are a million ways that people choose to cope with mental health stuff. And I would say that just about all of them are pretty unhealthy. And this particular hospital just did it—like, the way that they—their treatment method was: you wake up. The first thing you do is group therapy, and then you have breakfast, and then you do group, and then you do an activity, and then you do group. And it's like all day you are talking about what's going on with you.

And they break you the fuck down and rebuild you. There's really nowhere to hide. You can't do the coping skills, because you are like very much naked in front of all everybody, and they just sort of force you to talk. Which was terrifying and sucked, but also was probably the best thing for me at the time. So, I do think I got a lot out of it, even though it was extraordinarily painful.

John Moe: And then, as you came out of college and, you know, finally finished college and everything, did the depression, did the ADHD come under control, or was it still a struggle?

Alex Goldman: It remained a struggle. I mean, it's always been a struggle.

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I've had terrible motivation issues my whole life. And I think that I have managed to largely get them under control. But the side effect of getting them under control is that Adderall, which helps me immensely with focus, induces my mania. So. So, it's kind of a no-win situation with that.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: More with Alex Goldman after a short break.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We're back with *Hyperfixed* host Alex Goldman. He also writes the newsletter *One Cool Dude*, which I reference in the interview.

Well, let's talk about the hypomanic episodes. We've talked about bipolar type 2 on this show before, and the hypomania is not quite the full-blown bipolar 1 mania where, you know, you can tell that somebody is obviously raging. This is a little more subtle form. This blends into society a little bit more.

What have your hypomanic episodes looked like? And when did those start?

Alex Goldman: They started very recently, because I was only diagnosed—my ADHD was the first—my ADHD medication was the thing that kicked off the hypomania.

John Moe: Oh, okay! So, that didn't happen until—?

Alex Goldman: No, it happened like the first time three years ago. Which—yeah. Not awesome.

John Moe: Congratulations on solving your problem. Here's another problem.

Alex Goldman: *(Laughs.)* Exactly. So, let's see. I remember I was working at *Reply All*, which was the podcast I used to work on. And we had a story meeting. And afterward our senior producer was like, “Are you okay?”

And I was like, *(strained)* “Yeah, I'm great!”

And she was like, “You seem a little wired today.” And I didn't really clock it at all. I had no idea what she was talking about. And she was like, “Keep an eye on it.” And I was like, okay, I'll keep an eye on it. But I wasn't taking her very seriously, because I was just like, whatever. I'm having a good day. Are you upset about the fact that I'm having a good day?

But as the day went on, I started realizing like— I think that actually I didn't realize it until the following day. So, that was a Friday. And then that Saturday, I was like, “Oh, I'm actually not sleeping, and I need to exercise compulsively.” Like, this is what I want to do with myself is like I don't want to eat. I don't want to sleep. I want to exercise nonstop.

And again, I think that there are a lot of people who might hear that and go like, “Oh, sounds awesome.” But it's actually... it feels like being led by the nose by anxiety a little bit. It doesn't feel good. It feels like you're having like a sort of like long-form anxiety attack. And the only thing that kind of staves off that feeling is to just constantly be moving your body and like not sitting still. And it is actually pretty awful. *(Chuckles.)*

So, it was really scary. I had no idea what was going on. I was sort of under the impression that that was the kind of thing that manifested early in life, like your early 20s, late teens. And I was 41. And I was like, okay, well, it can't be that. It's gotta be something else. Like, that can't be the problem. But that was the problem. And so, I was in this weird position where the one thing that fixed me was also a thing that like broke me very deeply.

And then, of course, mania—like, that kind of mania is followed by a deep, deep depression. So, I knew when I was on that high that like I was going to slide into something really bad and sinister. And I remember right as I could start to feel the effects of the mania wear off, that I started like mainlining medicine. I was like if I take enough Adderall, I'll just stay like this. I won't start feeling this incredible sadness that I can feel washing over me.

But that, as you might imagine, did not take. And eventually, I did slide into that depression. And it was like, again, severe in a way where it was like the first time I'd ever had a depression where I couldn't get out of bed. Like, it was hard to move. It was hard to talk. It was like really, really, really intense.

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John Moe: How long were you in the hypomanic episode before that crash happened?

Alex Goldman: I would say about five/six days, maybe?

John Moe: Five or six days. Okay.

Alex Goldman: Which also isn't great when you're getting four hours of sleep a night and like compulsively exercising. Like, none of that's particularly good for you. So.

John Moe: And were you still making *Reply All* at this point?

(Alex confirms.)

How was that? How is it to work on something and like collaborate with other people on a big creative project while going through all this? Were you able to work at all?

Alex Goldman: I was. But it was hard, and it was something I didn't particularly want to explain to everybody I worked with at the time. I kept it to sort of the folks I felt needed to know. It was a hard thing to talk about. *(Beat.)* Because it was new, and it was frightening, and I didn't have a good grip on like what was going on or how to deal with it. So, I was just like I don't want to burden my coworkers with this problem I'm having. I just want to— Like, I just wanted to cope and see how it goes.

John Moe: So, were you diagnosed with having bipolar 2, or were you diagnosed with just having a reaction to this ADHD med? Or do you know?

Alex Goldman: Well! There is no clinical diagnosis that is “bad reaction to ADHD medicine”. The only clinical diagnosis they could give me is bipolar. And it has happened since, so it's something that I just deal with. I live with now.

John Moe: What does that mean? How do you live with it?

Alex Goldman: Uhhh, how do I live with it? It's not super easy to live with. I live with it by acknowledging the symptoms of it and then trying to—god, how would I even say this?

I try to acknowledge the symptoms of it, and I try to then counteract them with like common sense. So, I will have sort of impulsive feelings and thoughts, and then I'll be like, “You know, I know that I want to do this terrible thing, or just stay up all night, or spend money impulsively, but what I should be doing is just relaxing and not doing that. And I should take some Klonopin and get to sleep, because that is actually what's going to help me deal with what I'm going through right now.”

But that's really tough! Because there's also a voice in my head being like, “Or! And hear me out here, you could spend a thousand dollars on a new computer right now.”

Because there is sort of this like—the symptoms of hypomania are like impulsiveness, and there's a lot of like profligate spending. I know some people deal with like risky sexual behavior. There's all kinds of stuff that goes into it, and I have to remind myself that when I have those feelings, that is not the rational part of my body talking to me. Which isn't always easy.

John Moe: Yeah. Well, that's—it's balancing the voices, isn't it? The wise voice vs. the impulsive voice. And I've talked with people who deal with this who say it's so alluring, because it can feel like I'm living my best life. Even if other people are looking at me a little bit funny, you know, in that moment, I feel like I am at the top of my game right now. And that's a hard siren song to resist sometimes.

Alex Goldman: You know, when you spend your whole life being told, “Hey, you're a slob,” and you don't get things done, and you get really confused by stuff, and you will pick something up and then put it down immediately and lose it; those brief periods of time where I am able to not only stay on top of things, but work super hard, I can be really creative—that is super seductive. Like, I am in a great place sometimes, in terms of like productivity, when I am manic.

That's not to say that I think it's a net positive! ‘Cause it really fucks my life up! But there is a certain part of it that's really like—it's very seductive. Because it's very easy to push through the brain fog of ADHD when you suddenly have like infinite energy and don't need to sleep.

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John Moe: Does it—? And I understand a lot of diagnoses are insurance terms. You know, this is how you get an insurance company to pay for something by saying that you have major depressive disorder. You have generalized anxiety disorder. Do you consider yourself having bipolar type 2 disorder?

Alex Goldman: Yes, I do. I think that, like everybody who has it, I've learned to figure out my triggers, and I've managed to get it pretty much under control. But definitely it's a thing that sneaks up on me sometimes. And another thing is like—when you're depressive, and you have bipolar disorder, it's a very weird thing to suddenly have a good day and go, “Oh, am I having a good day because I'm having a good day? Or am I having a good day because I'm just in the beginning of a manic episode?”

Who can say?

John Moe: Right. It's like that line in *Spinal Tap*. You're so busy having a good time, you don't realize what a bad time you're having.

Alex Goldman: (*Laughs.*) That's actually really profound.

John Moe: (*Laughs.*) You're managing the ADHD; you're managing the bipolar. How are you managing the depression? Is that something that you have to be conscious of and working on all the time?

Alex Goldman: I mean, I do. I take medicine for it. I take, you know, an SSRI, and I do manage it.

The darkness is always there. And it's a thing that I have to remind myself, in the same way that I have to remind myself that like the extreme joy I experience when I manic is not rational and probably in aggregate not good for me; I have to remind myself that the extreme sadness is too. Because I can get really wrapped up in that feeling, and just kind of rot.

It's a real struggle in those moments to be like, "Well, actually, I know that it's very—it seems like it'd be a lot of fun to like, you know, get high and watch a movie. I think that like in aggregate, it might be better for you to go out with your friends." And that's a constant fight. (*Chuckles.*) So. You know.

Everything is a situation of management. And in my more depressive moments I get very angry about that. I'm like, why did I get saddled with this? What did I do to deserve this brain?

John Moe: Right, why can't I just live life? Why do I have to be managing life all the time and always, you know, at the controls of this crazy ship?

Alex Goldman: And there are a lot of very kind and helpful and loving people in my life who simply don't and can't understand. Like, they don't experience this stuff. And so, they don't know what it means for me. They're like, "Well, why can't you just, you know, see the bright side of things?" I've heard that a lot. Why can't you just look at things in a happier way?

And I'm like, well, where do I begin? (*Laughs.*) There's a lot of reasons I can't. And it's because I have a—my brain's all fucked up. (*Laughs.*)

John Moe: Yeah. Yeah, I would love nothing more than to just look on the bright side of things. (*Chuckles.*)

Alex Goldman: Seriously. Seriously!

John Moe: Why don't you smile more, and you wouldn't have such leukemia? "Why don't you go for a walk for your broken leg?" kind of thing.

Alex Goldman: And I mean, I know everybody has my best interest in mind, and they're not doing it to be malicious. But it's just like impossible to explain to someone like, "Hey, I actually have a condition that is not dependent on like how happy I behave, and it's going to stay like this no matter what. And everything—like, I don't think you understand the degree to which I'm actually fighting right now."

That's a hard thing to explain to people and not have them be resentful and not be resentful myself. You know what I mean?

John Moe: Have you...? How's your opinion of you? Like, do you still see yourself as a bad person because you have all these things? Or are you giving yourself a break, because you never chose to have these goddamn conditions in the first place?

Alex Goldman: I don't think I really give myself a break, unfortunately. There are certain things about me that I did not and would not recognize for a long time that like now I have been able to be like, "Oh, okay." Yeah, actually that's—like A) there is a part of me that is like actually really good at certain things, and B) like, not all of this is your fault.

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And it's really—it's a hard line to walk, you know, to be like, "How much of this is a condition that I'm dealing with, and how much of it is me not taking responsibility for my wellbeing and not taking care of myself enough?"

I'm constantly walking back and forth between those two poles. Those feelings about myself and about the world are not at all static. They change all the time.

John Moe: I want to talk about talking about this, I guess. (*Chuckles.*) Because you've, in your Substack *Cool Dude Zone*, you brought up a worry that by talking about your mental health and connecting with other people about mental health, you're actually giving them permission to be miserable rather than forcing them to find their own way out. Is that still a worry that you have? That talking about all this stuff might actually be compounding a problem?

Alex Goldman: In some ways, but I do think that that might be me hearing other people saying, "Hey, look, you should just be happier." (*Chuckles.*) Like, I do think that there's a part of me taking on other people's like "why are you so sad" feelings about me. And I've tried to do that as little as possible.

But I do know people in my life who also suffer with mental illness and manage to use that as a way to cover for... like, to not work on themselves. And I don't mean that unempathetically. I really do know how hard it is to be in that position. But I also know that like we gotta fight twice as hard. Like, we've really—we struggle in a way that no one else does. And like we just—you just gotta keep doing it. And like there aren't really any... (*sighs*). No one is going to fix you. You have to figure out how to deal with it.

And that's really hard. It's a really hard thing to feel about myself. It's a really hard thing to feel about other people. But I've also been in situations where I've been like, "You know what? I can't have this person in my life anymore." Not because they're bad. Not because they do bad things. But because it's... they're not dealing with the thing that is haunting them, and it's affecting me being around them.

John Moe: Yeah. Well, it's tricky. Because how do you... (*sighs*) how do you encourage that fight? Encourage that person to make the most out of what they're doing? Encourage yourself to make the most out of the short life that we've been given while also acknowledging the cinderblock chained to your ankle? You know?

Alex Goldman: Exactly. And I also consider the fact that—you know, like I said, I dealt with this for most of my life before actually being diagnosed properly. So, it's been a long time for me to try and figure out my way through this. Not everybody has that luxury, and like not everybody has insurance, and it's really hard to get good mental health care, because it's incredibly expensive. There's all kinds of ways.

One of the things that I think about all the time is the hardest thing for me to do as a person with ADD is to remember to refill my medication prescriptions. And it's because I have—*(laughs)* it's because I have ADD! It's not because—but like, I also have to set like 15 reminders on my phone every day to deal with it. And I can't just say like, “Oh well, I have ADD. I can't. I can't do—I'm just gonna miss my medications.” Like, I can't make those kinds of excuses for myself.

And I think that's what I was trying to say in that moment. *(Inaudible)* thing. Not to blame people for their illness or to tell people to—you know, that like, “Tough shit. You gotta get it together.” It's more like you have to recognize that this thing is going to be working against you at all times. And you have to figure out ways to do it, to like live healthily, or as healthily as possible. ‘Cause it's not going to happen—like, no one's going to do it for you.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with more from Alex Goldman in a moment.

Promo:

Music: Playful, upbeat music.

(A phone rings.)

Hannah: Hello?

Clint McElroy: Hannah?

Hannah: Yeah!

Clint: It's Clint McElroy! Hi Hannah!

Hannah: Oh my god, hello!

[00:35:00]

Clint: I don't know if you know who I am.

Hannah: Oh, I do. I love *The Adventure Zone*. It is probably my favorite D&D podcast.

Clint: You've been a faithful member of Maximum Fun since March of 2019. And this is them rewarding you as our Maximum Fun Member of the Month.

Hannah: It's awesome. I love it!

Clint: So, what made you decide to become a member of MaxFun?

Hannah: You know, it was so long ago, I'm not sure what the exact moment where I decided was. I think I've kept it up intentionally, because a lot of those different podcasts have been there for me when I felt really alone and sad and just needed something to laugh at. (*Chuckles.*)

Clint: Aww, well, that's—Hannah, thank you so much. Thanks for being a member. Thanks for being a *TAZ* fan. Thanks for all the nice things you had to say about me, specifically, and I guess my kids. I guess. Indirectly.

Speaker: If you're a MaxFun member, you can become the next MaxFun member of the month. Support us at MaximumFun.org/join.

(*Music ends.*)

Promo:

Jackie Kashian: Jackie Kashian. Hi, and welcome to the MaximumFun.org podcast, *The Jackie and Laurie Show*, where we talk about standup comedy and how much we love it and how much it enrages us.

Laurie Kilmartin: We have a lot of experience, and a lot of stories, and a lot of time on our hands. So, check us out. It's one hour a week, and we drop it every Wednesday on MaximumFun.org.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Talking with Alex Goldman, host of *Hyperfixed*.

You launched *Hyperfixed*, and it's your own business venture. You're in a business that requires self-promotion, self-branding. A lot of people want to hear from you. A lot of people want to hear your innermost thoughts and your innermost struggles. People are investing their time and their money in this idea of the brand of Alex.

And you know, I empathize with that (*chuckles*) from hosting a podcast and being in a somewhat similar position. How is that necessity of running that business and all that openness squaring with your privacy and your boundaries?

Alex Goldman: Uhhh. It's been good, and it's been bad. I would say it's more good than bad, if I'm being honest. I think people are really kind to me, and I think that there's a certain element of that—I'm not going to pretend that part of that is not because I am a White dude. I think that's sort of like the easiest way to live on the internet.

John Moe: (*Chuckling.*) It's hard to ignore, yeah.

Alex Goldman: But there are—people are generally really kind. People also have very strange ideas of what boundaries are appropriate. I've had a lot of people ask me really weird stuff about my personal life. I can't go on Reddit at all, because like people are out there saying incredibly bizarre things about me. (*Chuckles.*)

Not only is there like a lot of assumptions out there, but there's a lot of people who are like—who want my openness to a degree that I'm not comfortable with. And like, I do think that I'm really open. I do think that like a tenet of my reporting and my work over the past decade is that I am a chronic oversharer. Like, I think that I give up a lot of information about my personal life—way more than I honestly think I probably should for my own benefit.

But one of the things I constantly try to remind myself is that the reason that people like my show and like the thing that I make is because they see themselves in me, or they see themselves in my work, and that that should be an incredible compliment. And it is! The caveat here is that, like I also need to be able to have a life outside of it.

So, like I don't have my kids on my show. I don't post pictures of my kids online. That's really important to me. And there's other stuff that's just like not in the public sphere. Which, you know, is—I think—smart of me. And I think it's a good decision. It's also hard, because people want more from me.

And when I say like, “Eh, no, that's out of bounds,” sometimes people are like, “Well, what the fuck? You know, you talk about your mental illness on the radio all the time. Why is that particular thing out of bounds?”

I think that's a fair question. But also, it's still out of bounds. And that's a hard thing to convey to people.

[00:40:00]

And I say that, again, knowing that people have been incredibly kind to me, and like more often than not, people are really cool. And like, I'm very happy to be interacting with the people that I get to interact with because of the stuff I make. I feel very lucky. But, um. Also.

John Moe: Do you judge yourself on downloads, on revenue, on the amount of attention you get, the social media numbers that you're able to pull? Does that shape your idea of who you are?

Alex Goldman: It used to. That used to be a much bigger thing for me. Not so much anymore. I think I've got a better handle on that. And I realized that like that is not a mark of my talent or ability. My talent and ability are based solely on what I make.

And to be clear, I have also had it pretty lucky in terms of like the reach of the things I've made. You know, I made—*Reply All* was really popular. And like, it's a very different landscape right now than it was when I was making *Reply All*. But like, I'm still doing fine, and like I'm getting—the show's growing at like the pace I sort of expected it to. I'm feeling good about where I'm at.

I do think that I used to compare myself a lot more to other radio producers and go like, “Oh, I'm making a thing that's not as good as those people. And I wish that I knew how to do that.” They're—my—

John Moe: Because it doesn't sound as good, or because it isn't hitting the same numbers?

Alex Goldman: Doesn't sound as good. I've never been like a big numbers person. I like people listening to the things, but I'm much more interested in... kind of making things where I'm like, “This is really special.”

I think that I'm good at interviewing people. And I think that I'm pretty bad at editing and structure. And that's been a real struggle. It's very hard not to compare myself to other people. And again, I think that's an attention thing. It's really hard to sit there and go line by line. It makes me want to crawl out of my skin. And especially at *Reply All*, when we used to do edits, the edits were like six hours long. We were doing—it was insane. We'd sit there and go word by word, just trying to make it as exact as possible. And it just made—it felt like having my flesh peeled off. (*Chuckles.*) It was the worst! Because my brain is absolutely not suited to it. So.

John Moe: Because of the ADHD. Yeah.

Alex Goldman: Yes. I think it's gotten a lot easier. It's gotten a lot easier now. I think that I'm better at doing—I think I'm better at making things now than I was then. Both because of medication and just because of experience. And I also know—I also kind of realize that I don't have to be that good at that. Other people can be good at other stuff. And I can be good at what I'm good at. And I can rely on those people. I don't need to compare myself to great people that are really good editors.

John Moe: You talked about this (*sighs*) necessity to manage the balance that you have of wanting to get the ADHD under control, not having the steps that you take to get it under control, trigger hypomanic episodes, keeping the depression in check as you go along. This sort of, you know, high executive functioning management scheme that you need to be running.

What's your goal going forward? Are you hoping to not have to make as much of an effort for that? Are you hoping to make peace with that? Or what's—what do you hope you get to with your mental health?

Alex Goldman: Uh... (*murmuring to himself*) what goal am I trying to get to?

My goal is just to like—is to like hear—is to like be far enough away from the darkness where I can see it and be like, “Meh, not today. I'll deal with that another time. Like, I don't have to put up with that.”

There's no defeating it. I had a shrink once who told me you're either advancing toward or retreating from fear. You're never in a neutral relationship with it.

I think that's sort of like—I want to just always be advancing on fear. I want to be fighting it. I want to be fighting.

John Moe: Advancing, like getting a little bit—? Like, winning more and more of the battle?

[00:45:00]

Alex Goldman: Yeah. I want to be conquering fear all the time and pushing back against things that make me feel terrible.

But if you think about it as like a thing where you can be losing maybe a battle, but there's still a war going on, and there'll be other chances to fight? That's kind of—that's sort of like the thing I tell myself when I'm sort of on my back foot. You know like okay; I didn't do a great job today. I spent most of the day on my couch. Tomorrow is another day that I can do stuff and not watch, you know, three seasons of the *Mandalorian* or whatever. You know?

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

John Moe: (*Chuckles.*) Well, Alex Goldman, I appreciate talking to you, and congratulations on *Hyperfixed*. It's a wonderful show. And thanks for being with us.

Alex Goldman: Thank you so much. I really appreciate it, John.

John Moe: *Hyperfixed* is available wherever you get your podcasts.

Hey, have you ever wanted to make your own podcast? Alex has his; I got mine. What about yours? I'm teaching a one-day online class on February 1st, 2025, called “How to Write Your Podcast”. It's a writing class where you'll learn from me, personally, how to develop an idea, find your story, write it, and speak it. It's being done through the Loft Literary Center, and space is limited. And again, online, so you can join from anywhere in the world. But go to LoftLiterary.org, search up my name for more details.

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Hi, credits listeners. My band, Math Emergency, is playing Sunday afternoon, March 16th at the White Squirrel in St. Paul. I'll see you there.

Depresh Mode is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We got booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, “Building Wings”. *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

Music: “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller.

I'm always falling off of cliffs, now

Building wings on the way down

I am figuring things out

Building wings, building wings, building wings

No one knows the reason

Maybe there's no reason

I just keep believing

No one knows the answer

Maybe there's no answer

I just keep on dancing

John: I'm John from Cleveland. Breathe. You've got 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!