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John Moe: A note to listeners: this episode contains mention of suicidal ideation.

We live in interesting times. I'm talking about America's current political climate, but—by not that far of an extension—I'm talking about American culture and society. What's been happening in the government extends out to the way we're living today in pretty profound ways. With the tariffs and the firings and the jolts to foreign policy—well, it can feel like a never-ending series of earthquakes constantly shaking the ground we stand on. What's gonna happen to the economy, to schools, to the function of government, to America's place in the world, to the world itself?

For many people, we are in a time of crisis. And when there's a crisis going on, when things are scary, one checks in on one's friends on their mental wellbeing. So, that's what we're going to do today. It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Today we're going to be talking to three of my friends, whom you might know from comedy and media circles and from podcasts. A little later, we check in with Ana Marie Cox and comedian Gary Gulman.

But first, Paul F. Tompkins is an actor and comedian. You know him from *Comedy Bang! Bang!*, *Mr. Show*, every podcast that's ever been created. He started in *Bojack Horsman*. He was in *There Will Be Blood*. Paul hosts the variety show *Varietopia* that will soon be touring around the country, and which is really funny and delightful. I've interviewed him about his depression before.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Paul F. Tompkins, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Paul F. Tompkins: Hello, John. How are you doing?

John Moe: Well, I'm okay. How are you doing?

Paul F. Tompkins: I'm okay! I think “okay” is the word of the day.

John Moe: (*Chuckles.*) Okay. There's a lot going on in the world. And for people who maybe have minds that get complicated once in a while, it can be a lot to take in. It sounds like your “okay” was a sincere okay, and not just a “Oh, I'm doing fine” with subtext writing beneath it.

Paul F. Tompkins: Um, I think that I— Yes and yes. It is okay, meaning (*chuckles*) okay in the fullest sense of “things are just okay”. (*Laughs.*) I mean, could be worse. Personally, it could be a lot worse. Yeah. But overall, you know, things are not great, and it's very much

anxiety inducing, and it's so strange to me— Or I don't know. It's strange. I don't know what word to use, but just that we are the people that are alive right now for this particular time in the world, that it does feel like a sort of luck of the draw kind of thing. Like, somebody's gotta be around (*laughing*) for when things are absolutely insane, and shit is just falling apart. Somebody's gotta be there! And it turns out it's us.

And you know, it's just wild. It's just wild to see all this stuff happening. And the thing that I find it hard to— The most difficult to contend with—and I think this is probably how a lot of people feel—is that you realize you are sharing space with people who so fundamentally see the world differently than you do. They're—the way they look at other people, the way they—what they determine is important in life. And it's really astonishing.

And I don't think it's fully half of people in this country—you know, speaking just for America. I don't think it's fully half. But it's a lot more people than you'd like that just absolutely see so many other people as not worthy of just human treatment! It's a really hard thing to wrap your mind around, and it's a very demoralizing and heart-hurting idea. Yeah.

John Moe: Is anxiety something that you were dealing with before this election, before this administration took power?

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Is it something that you were already grappling with?

Paul F. Tompkins: I would say for me it's more— I think I lean more towards stress than anxiety, where I feel overwhelmed a lot. And that's been a thing that I've always felt. You know, that's an experience that I tend towards very often. I do not have that kind of anxiety where I can't do things. You know? The closest I get to that is social anxiety, where, you know, there's some days that just the idea of going and being around a bunch of people seems really, really hard to do. And sometimes I'm able to push through that, and sometimes I'm not. I really try in those moments to not let people down if I have committed to something.

I feel like there's certain people in life, people that are close to you, where you can say, “Hey, you know what? I'm really having a hard time, and I don't think I can go to that dinner tonight.” Or that movie, or whatever it is. And then there's other times where you— I feel like, “Hey, you need to show up for this person, because they've shown up for you many times. And as difficult as this is, this one of those times where you really gotta dig deep and, you know, at least make it there and then see how it goes.” You know? Realizing that's kind of all that is expected of you really is this person needs you to literally show up.

And if you can just do that, the bare minimum? Great. If it turns around, that's even better. But if you can show up, put in an appearance, knowing that there's a possibility that it might be just feelings, and it might not be as bad as you think it's going to be. But at the very least just kind of, you know, get over there, and then take it from there.

John Moe: Has your sense of overwhelm, has your sense of social anxiety ramped up? Is it more present in the last month or six weeks since this change happened?

Paul F. Tompkins: I'm gonna say it's not—it hasn't increased in frequency, but it does feel different. Because now you are looking at things— There's part of it that's like, “Oh, I'm worried about this thing. And meanwhile, (*laughs*) everything else is so much more important than the thing that I'm worried about.” So, there's a guilt that comes with it, you know. That it's like, “Oh, I absolutely have to take care of all these details, which, uh, are stupid (*laughs*) compared to everything else.”

John Moe: Right, right. How's your news consumption been? Because I've been talking with some other folks about this, and they explain kind of the restricted diet of news that they put themselves on and when they're allowed to consume it and when they're not. It's like a toxic food of some sort.

Paul F. Tompkins: Yeah. I am on a I'm on a read-only kind of thing. I don't wanna watch. I don't wanna watch pundits. I don't want to see politicians' sound bites. I don't wanna—I can't. The video is a little too much for me. And I feel like I want to know what's—be aware of what's going on. But I don't wanna watch people talk about it! You know? I just feel like I don't get anything out of that except the feelings that media wants you to have, which is outrage or despair or fear. And you know, there's plenty of that already. And I would just rather literally just take in a timeline in black and white rather than see people discuss it and opine on it.

John Moe: You're gearing up for some live performances with *Varietopia*, a tour that's coming up that's gonna be very exciting, going to make a lot of people laugh—I'm sure—and bring people together. Does it feel different going out and trying to do comedy in such fearful and overwhelming times?

Paul F. Tompkins: I think yeah, it does. Because I am making a conscious decision to be just entertaining. I don't want to—I really want it to be a diversion for people. I want it to be a little 90-minute oasis. Because there's just so much.

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There's just so much people have to think about right now, and I think that there's certainly a catharsis you can have with talking about it in a funny way, but I don't know if that's where I am. You know, I think I just wanna go out there and be silly and be entertaining and, you know, have it be a reprieve for myself as well. You know? So, if we can all get together under one roof and have a nice time for a little bit—

And also I think that helps you feel—it certainly helps me. It helps you feel a little bit more hopeful, you know, that the world is not uniformly garbage, that there are things still that we can look forward to and that we can enjoy. And also, that we don't have to feel miserable and browbeat all the time. That's not our responsibility. You know? I think we do have a responsibility to be aware, and look out for each other, and help each other out when we can. But I don't think it's our responsibility to be just freaking out 24/7. You know, that's too much to ask, and it's also not gonna accomplish anything. You know? It's not gonna get anything done.

I will say that overall I have been—despite any doom scrolling or whatever that I'm doing, that other people are doing—I've started to feel a little more hopeful in seeing the reports of, you know, government agencies that are—or you know, at a local level or a state level—that are saying, “Yeah, we're not gonna comply with that. We're not going to—we don't take that seriously, and we're not gonna do that.” That kind of thing really does give me some hope that at least it's not gonna be easy. And it also makes me think that, in times of crisis, I think people are more likely to help each other out than they are to turn on each other. And I think that the idea that we're all gonna just tear each other apart because things get hard, I think, is a myth. And I think we are way more inclined to help each other out.

And I think that in the end, ultimately what's gonna save us is that it is easier for us to help each other out than it is for them to knock us all down. And they're gonna knock down a lot of people. But in the end, they can't knock us all down. And I think we're gonna be—I think we're gonna be looking out for people in ways that maybe we didn't expect to, you know? But if that's what it takes, if it takes physically having to like shelter someone or help them get somewhere, I'm down to do that. You know? I think that that's—if it gets to that point.

Another thing that gives me hope is that these guys are not that smart. (*Laughs.*) They're not that competent at this stuff! And they, like—it's— You can wreck things, yes. But I think that, in the end, that is gonna be their downfall is that they think that they know what they're doing, and they don't know what they're doing.

John Moe: Which is an inherently comedic premise too.

Paul F. Tompkins: Truly. Truly

John Moe: The person who thinks they've got it all figured out, but does not.

Paul F. Tompkins: Yeah. This will be the funniest fall of an empire ever.

John Moe: (*Laughs.*) Paul F. Tompkins, thank you so much.

Paul F. Tompkins: Thank you, John. Good to see you.

John Moe: You can learn more about what Paul's up to, including tour dates for his *Varietopia* show at PaulFTompkins.com.

Transition:

(*ADVERTISEMENT*)

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Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We're checking in with some friends during these extraordinary times. The very funny comedian Gary Gulman, coming up later in the show. But first, Ana Marie Cox is a writer, a pundit. She's been on our show before, written for *New York Times Magazine*, *The Guardian*, senior political correspondent for *MTV News*, founding editor of the (inaudible) blog. And Ana is a person in recovery from a substance use disorder and a person who deals with bipolar disorder type two. She's also a writing instructor, helping people get their thoughts and lives and struggles down on the page.

Ana Marie Cox, welcome back to *Depresh Mode*.

Ana Marie Cox: Always good to be here. Always good to talk to you, John.

John Moe: Always good to talk to you as well. We figured it's good to talk to friends. It's good to check in with people. It's good to, I guess, check up on people as much as check in with people—it's a preposition issue—to see how people who have interesting minds, people who have—

(Ana bursts out laughing.)

—people who have delicacies about their—well, let me not say delicacies. That sounds like food.

Ana Marie Cox: Yes. My mind of delicacies. My delicacy. I am a delicacy, my mind.

John Moe: You're the caviar of pundits. We just wanna see how people are doing—given the chaos of the world, given the terror of the world, given everything that's going on, given all the screaming that I do whenever I open social media.

Ana Marie Cox: *(Laughs.)* Given all the things. How am I, in Trump-adjusted terms? Whew. I love how hard that was to get to the actual conversation.

John Moe: I know, right? Yes.

Ana Marie Cox: Because speechlessness, right? Isn't that part of it? Like, just what to say. How do we even comprehend everything that's happening? I mean, other people have noted, and I will too, that the onslaught firehose of developments with this new administration is a tactic, right? Because that's what conmen do. Like, they rush in and start talking fast and start moving, and they just kind of depend on confusion to destabilize people and then to keep going. I mean, I think we can talk about a lot of what I consider sort of mental health techniques to resist. Do more than just take care of yourself. To resist and build something durable for the future.

And one of those things that's applicable to surviving as a person, you know, who understands or is knowledgeable about their own mental health—not even someone with diagnoses like you and me, just anyone who's like gotta deal with it—is pausing.

John Moe: Everyone's got mental health. Everyone's got that to deal with. Yeah. Pausing? Pausing.

Ana Marie Cox: Pausing, taking stock of the situation, breathing into the overwhelm, so that you can process and figure out if what you think is happening is really happening. Right? They are counting on a trauma response. They're counting on freeze or fawn.

John Moe: As opposed to fight or flight?

Ana Marie Cox: Yeah. And also, neither of those are actually the healthiest immediate reaction. Like, we need to take stock. We need to pause and know what is happening rather than let the onslaught just overwhelm us and confuse us. And that is a tactic on our side, in part because—not to get into the distinct policy stuff really fast—but like what the administration doing is illegal and unconstitutional, and they actually know that.

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And I think having some—like, knowing that we have tools and that they are not as confident as they seem is a really powerful realization. And that's—to get back to sort of metaphors with mental health—knowing your own agency, seeing where you are able to make your own decisions and what you do have control over. There's so much we don't, but there are some things that we can do, and that's actually very powerful.

John Moe: What does a pause look like? How do you determine when you are going to pause and what happens when you pause? What does that mean?

Ana Marie Cox: *(Sighs.)* I think— You know, a lot of people are talking about turning off social media, and I think it is less turning off than it is sort of responsible dipping in and out and responsible exposure to good sources of information. And at the same time, I support all feelings and reactions. *(Chuckles.)* Every—you know, like do what you gotta do to get to tomorrow. Right? Tap out if you gotta tap out. I do think that planning on hopelessness, seeing hopelessness as something—seeing hopelessness and alienation and disengagement as thinking that might be what you do forever will not help you or the world.

But I think strategic disengagement—*(laughs)*. And also, just I feel a little weird speaking from a place of authority. I can only really speak to my experience—right?—to try and share that. So, rewind a little, I guess. My experience with hope and hopelessness and overwhelm— You know, I always come back to my recovery, always. And what I know for myself is that I may have a day where everything feels like the end and that I am hopeless. And what I know from experience—and again, this is part of the like what do I think is happening versus what is happening—is that I have been hopeless before and then, at some point, not hopeless. And trusting that experience.

John Moe: How do you find hope?

Ana Marie Cox: Hope is a muscle; it's not a feeling. Hope is sometimes not as useful as courage. I was interviewing Emily Atkin, who's a climate journalist. And I asked her, “How

do you maintain hope in the face of like climate news?” Right? Like, things look really bad. It looks kinda like we're screwed, totally screwed. It's the end. Earth is boiling.

She's the one who said hope is not as important as courage. And she said, “Think of the Avengers. The Avengers don't fight Thanos 'cause they know they can win. They do it because they have to. Right?”

Every time in my life that I have been hopeless, at some point I have not been afterwards. And I wish I could be like, “There's a magical-ness to that, and I know what that magic is, and I can give you that spell.” But the real solution to hope is to not completely give up on life. Because if you keep going, something—that means you have hope inside you. That was my big revelation in this incredibly dark time I've had for the past few years that you and I have been talking on and off through, was that even when I felt my most hopeless—

Like, for me, to bring it back to my recovery, even when I felt entirely hopeless, I didn't take a drink. Which means some part of me wanted to continue going forward. I didn't do the worst thing one can do. Which means somewhere inside me, there was something that thought things might get better. And I let that part carry me forward even when 99% of me might have felt like my world was ending, and I have no chance, and the future is so grim I don't know if I wanna continue.

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John Moe: As this administration has taken hold into this barrage—alarming news, distressing news, depressing news has come forward—have you been tempted to take a drink? Is that how it works?

Ana Marie Cox: Don't want them to win. If I take a drink, I'm off the table. If I take a drink, I'm no good to anybody. I cannot support my friends. I cannot take in someone that maybe is worse off than me. I understand—I know people who have relapsed in the face of this, but that isn't a death sentence. Not yet. If you still have breath in you, there is hope. I mean, that sounds corny, but like, again, I come back to this. Hope is not a feeling.

John Moe: It's a practice. It's a muscle. Yeah.

Ana Marie Cox: Yeah. It's a muscle. And if you wait to just feel hope, like, “Oh, you know what? Yeah. Like, you know, things are gonna be better,” sometimes I actually call that optimism. And optimism and hope are different things. Optimism is glass is half-full. Hope is I have water. We only really think about hope when we're hopeless, right? When hopelessness is the alternative.

So, you and I have spoken frankly about suicidal ideation, right?

(John confirms.)

And it's something that—I don't like the word “struggle with” for some reason, but like it's a thing. It's a thing. It's a thing. It's thoughts that have occurred to me, right? And for most of

my life when I've had that, I thought— And I've just fought against it so hard. It felt like a battle. It did feel like a battle. What I thought was that to be free of those things would mean that I would want to live. I thought the opposite of suicidal ideation was like, “I can't wait to wake up in the morning. Like, isn't life amazing? Isn't life grand?! I want to live! I want to live! I want to live!”

And as I've gotten some relief from it—especially in the past few years—what has become clear is the opposite of suicidal ideation is not thinking about suicide. It just doesn't occur to you. You're just— Which is I think the normal thing?

(They chuckle.)

Normal people don't walk around being like, *(clicks teeth)* “Yeah, life. Isn't life great?”

John Moe: Average people. I don't think there's such a thing as normal people. But average people, sure.

Ana Marie Cox: Okay. Well, it's like when people not having suicidal ideations, who are basically balanced, are not walking around and being like, “I'm so glad I chose life today.” Like, *(laughs)* “I'm so glad I'm not thinking about dying. I don't wanna die! I wanna live, I wanna live, I wanna live!”

Like, that's great if you feel that way. But that's not the opposite of suicidal ideation. The opposite of suicidal ideation—which is hopelessness, right? Hopelessness and suicidal ideation are like—that's like super related, right? So, the opposite of suicidal ideation is just walking around, having your life. Right? So, I think sometimes the opposite of hopelessness is not needing to summon hope, because you are just walking around in the world doing the best you can. Right? Like, the next right action in this particular world that we live in, we can talk about what that is. And I think that the next right action is easier to do if you think it's gonna work out in the way that you want things to. But the next right action is always the next right action, whether you have hope or not.

But if I take food to the free fridge—which I like to do when I'm feeling hopeless—what I would love is if that meant that some person who needed to eat could eat. And maybe that person would then have like something in their life that would open up. And because they knew they were going to eat or had something to eat, they would be able to take an action that builds—whatever; pays it forward. But you know what? That doesn't actually matter.

John Moe: Do you want to talk about your workshop?

Ana Marie Cox: Oh yeah, sure.

John Moe: Because I think it's a little connected.

Ana Marie Cox: It is. So, my recovery workshop is very directly connected. Right? I do an 11-week writing through recovery workshop in the winter and fall, and it is called Writing Through Your Recovery.

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And it's kind of based on the idea— Like, when people are like, “Oh, you'll help me write my memoir and get it published,” I'm like, yeah, no, that's—(*chuckling*) no.

John Moe: It's more about the process.

Ana Marie Cox: I will help you connect with your experience, and my hope for you is you write the truest version that you can, and that'll probably be pretty good writing. True writing is good writing. And then you keep going. You know? But the thing that I'm kind of excited about is I'm doing something new, which is definitely related. I'm toying with calling it *The Slow Burn*, and it's about creating a sustaining practice. And where it relates to this is it's kind of the anti—I've been thinking it also as the anti-artist's way. 'Cause it's not about discipline. It's about self-forgiveness and doing what you can today and like sustaining yourself and not aiming for like the three pages a day.

I think it sounds to a lot of people like, “Well, what good is a writing practice if you're not like doing a thing?” And I guess my hope—my hope—is that I can communicate something about what I've learned, which is I've been a writer— What I realized and what inspired me is I've been writing for 40 years. You know? Like, my first short story was called *The Midnight Honker*, and it was a ghost story about a guy that died on his way to pick up a date. And then, you know, he always showed up at night every year and honked his horn (*laughing*) in front of the house.

John Moe: There's something not scary about a horn honking.

Ana Marie Cox: No, it's not scary at all!

John Moe: (*Chuckles.*) Where can people get information on your writing workshops?

Ana Marie Cox: Oh, that's AnaMarieCox.com. They can get information on mutual aid in Austin. A lot of mutual aid places have Instagram accounts for some reason. I don't know (*chuckling*) like why that's the place they gather, they congregate. But you can probably find your local free fridge. They're usually all over the country. If I was gonna tell people like how to survive: find a place where people are helping each other on a regular basis. And that is the most sustaining thing I've found.

At the same time, if you can't summon the energy today, rest today. That's the next right-thing today. You know? Something that someone told me in early sobriety is: “Sometimes sobriety is about making the bed. Sometimes sobriety is about leaving the bed unmade.” Which just, I broke my brain against over and over.

(*They laugh.*)

But I finally think I've started to understand it.

John Moe: It makes sense.

Ana Marie Cox: Thank you so much for having me on, John. It is always sustaining to talk to you.

John Moe: It's always a pleasure. Thank you my friend.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We'll check in with Gary Gulman after the break.

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Alexis: Or coffee, Ella. We're not all Brits.

Ella: (*Chuckles.*) Then join us.

Alexis: Every Thursday, at MaximumFun.org.

(*Music ends.*)

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We’re back and checking in to see how our friends are holding up these days.

[00:35:00]

Gary Gulman is a comedian and monologist. Gary has put out several acclaimed standup specials, including *Born on Third Base* and *The Great Depresh*, which is a brilliant and very funny chronicle of his struggles with depression. He's also the author of a memoir, *Misfit*.

Gary Gulman, welcome back to *Depresh Mode*.

Gary Gulman: It's good to be back. Thanks for having me, John.

John Moe: How are you holding up?

Gary Gulman: I mean, personally, pretty good. I'm okay. But there's this governor on my joy, which is the current status of America and the government and the fascist actions and expressions, and the Nazi salute. I mean, it's just— There's a thing with depression where it's difficult to tell is this normal sadness? And...

John Moe: Right. Right. Am I having a rational response to this thing, or is it a distortion?

Gary Gulman: Yes. Yes. And so, then it becomes, “Well, what is this doing to my illness, to my mood?” And part of it is sometimes it will push you into that next area, which is illness. So, if you're sleeping way too much, if your appetite has changed, or you're not sleeping enough, or if you start blaming yourself for things, or feel that somehow you're personally doomed more than other people, or that this is what happens to me, and— Then it starts to creep into the disorder of depression rather than—

It's a problem in our language that depression and depression have the same name. But.

John Moe: Right. The disorder and the feeling.

Gary Gulman: And the feeling, which we have every right to! But I read an extraordinary article in *The Atlantic* today, by Dr. Richard Friedman. And he—full disclosure, he happens to be my psychiatrist, but he is also a writer for *The New York Times*, and now for *The Atlantic*.

And he was just saying, yeah, if you're feeling lousy about this, then your brain is working. And optimism can actually, in this case, be a hindrance. Because if you are telling yourself that everything's fine, then you will not take certain actions.

And one of the things I've found in dealing with this is to join others, and to go to protests, and to amplify other people's messages, and to share ideas. And I understand the necessity to separate ourselves from the news. I've not gone into a total ban on news, but there are limits to how much news I'll take in. I'll take in the breaking news, and I'll read several articles every day, but I find it a much better use of my time to go to the—to find out where the next march is and then go.

And I know that what can be discouraging— And I remember this from during the Black Lives Matter protests. Sometimes I would go to them, and there were only nine or ten other people there. And I think everybody wants to join in the march on Washington, but I'm sure there were tributaries to that raging river. And you may find out about another march that will be better attended, or you may make a friend who gives you insight into the causes that you're working for. And also, more than anything, when you're depressed, you need to avoid isolating. And so, being with these like-minded people who are on the right side of history can be very comforting and also productive.

I mean, another thing that I started doing was to watch a lot of documentaries about people who lived during difficult times. So, I found this great documentary about Larry Kramer on HBO Max and what he was dealing with in terms of the HIV/AIDs crisis in the '80s. And I mean, talk about fighting Goliath. It was—he was fighting an army of Goliaths, and just

ignorance, and fear, and bigotry. And he made enormous changes, and he saved countless lives.

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And I'm sure it was grueling! And I'm sure he was discouraged at times. But those types of people—and just reading about Nelson Mandela and James Baldwin and Malcolm X, we are not in unprecedented times. It's just that many of us have not lived during these times. And the thing that always gives me hope is that during every different time that we speak of, while it was a different time, there were people doing the right thing. And they have a name for it. These people were heroes. And they proved to be right, and it was worthwhile. And in some cases, they didn't get to see—they didn't live to see the change that they contributed to. But I think the effort is still worthwhile.

And it's okay to take a step back and spend some days licking our wounds. But I think ultimately the reason why we persevered over the years is because people didn't give up and say, “Well, this is just the—this is what's normal now.” This is not normal, and we need to raise our voices. And I think we will, ultimately, but there are a lot of obstacles. And I do recommend everybody read this article in *The Atlantic*, by Dr. Richard Friedman. And I think it's stark. It is not going to allay any fears, but it will make you understand that what you're feeling is okay, and it is not necessarily the end of your responsibility—in terms of we can throw up our hands and give up, or we can make our voices heard.

And in some ways it's never been easier to make our voices heard. It's just been never harder to make our voices believed and understood, it seems. It's all very depressing, and we need to keep doing the things that got us out of our depression, if that's our situation. So, that's another thing. Don't let it keep you from doing the exercise or the meeting with friends. And that's, uh—that's a long answer to your question.

(They laugh.)

John Moe: No, that's good. So, where has your depression been lately? Is it far away? Is it right at the edge of your brain? Are you in it and swimming through it? Where would you place it?

Gary Gulman: I mean, my illness is in my rearview mirror by six or seven years. But my understanding of my thoughts... I guess—*(sighs)* I feel depressed about the situation, but I do not feel... depressive symptoms. I'm also—

John Moe: Okay. Yeah. In that you're feeling something, for one thing.

(Gary confirms.)

You're not dead inside.

Gary Gulman: Right. Exactly. And I still get moments of joy and pleasure, and I'm enjoying things that I do. And then unfortunately, when I come out of the reverie of enjoying playing

basketball or reading, I realize that we're in a very dangerous time in our history. And I'm not a pessimist, but I'm not PollyAna either. I think that we have a lot of hard work ahead of us. And unfortunately, a lot of people are going to suffer. And I think what a lot of people do is, "Well, it's not me who's suffering, and I'm not seeing it." But if your eyes are open, you can see it. There's plenty of coverage of this. And so, understand that since November—I mean, it's like we are being run by a collective of C. Montgomery Burns from *The Simpsons*.

(*They chuckle.*)

John Moe: Just a whole army of Mr. Burns's. Is it hard to, I guess, not doom scroll? To limit your news consumption? To cut it off and go play basketball? Has that been hard for you to do?

Gary Gulman: I mean, I've been doing this for years now. I did it throughout the pandemic. I had to limit it, because I'm always walking on a tightrope. And I think if your depression is—if you're just coming out of it, now is not the time to immerse yourself in doom scrolling. Now is the time to keep doing those things. And if you have to ignore the news, then I completely understand that. I'm talking seven years out from my last depressive episode. And so, I'm—what is the word I'm searching for here? Vigilant.

[00:45:00]

I'm vigilant about my mood and my mood. And my mood doesn't seem to be—my disorder does not seem to be coming back because of my paying attention to the news. And that's good, but if I were to have a day where it kept me from getting out of bed or I felt like, "Oh, I don't even enjoy doing my job anymore, because it feels useless and futile to try and make laughter during these times—" And there is—I cannot ignore that this is a very strange time to be doing standup comedy. But it's also a time when I do think that it helps for people to get out and to laugh together and to have a live experience together. I just hope they're also consuming other pieces of art and things that make them uncomfortable. And also the news.

We can't turn into *The Mask of the Red Death*, by Poe, right? Where we're just—I think it's by Poe—where we're just diluting ourselves. And it reminds me of Huxley's *Brave New World*, where everybody just entertained themselves into a complete delusional funk. And so... Are you looking up *Mask of the Red Death*?

(*John confirms.*)

And is that—is it Poe?

John Moe: Yeah, that is Poe. You nailed that.

Gary Gulman: Yeah? Okay, good.

(*They laugh.*)

It would've kept me up later on tonight if I found out I was wrong about that. But I mean, I guess the thing is also that there are probably certain people in our lives that we need to avoid, because they are trolls in person who voted for this guy and support his action and rationalize and reconcile his actions. And it reminds me so much of the movie *Cabaret*, where people were seeing Nazis on the street. And some were more accommodating than others, and some cozied up, and some found them absolutely reprehensible. And I think that's where we have to be is that the—how do we separate the Nazi from the Nazi sympathizer? I mean, the Nazi is nothing without the Nazi sympathizer.

And so, I have certain inklings in my life of who supported this fascist regime, and I don't even go through the steps of being polite anymore. I just like to cut them out of my life. You don't have to go to that extreme, but I'm more of a black and white person, I guess.

John Moe: Is it harder to do comedy these days? Are people less willing to laugh because they're so scared and distracted?

Gary Gulman: I mean, I think that the things you say have to be really sharp. And lazy bashing of Trump, people are sick of that. And it's infuriating to me, because people never—people in the audience never got sick of comedians doing cheap, hackney jokes about Biden's age. And the audience would eat it up. And now the audience is—they're tired of hearing how bad Trump is. So, things have to be really sharp. And I think if my audience wasn't already tending towards leftwing liberal progressives, I did—

Whenever I posted about doing shows for Kamala, I would lose 100 followers here and 100 followers there. And I always wanted to say, “What about my act and what I talk about led you to think that I could support this level of cruelty and lack of compassion and empathy?” I just—

And my wife said the funniest thing, she said, “The reason why you have so many people from the MAGA camp at your show is because you're so fucking funny.”

(John chuckles.)

That they put aside your politics because you're a good comedian.

(John agrees.)

And I gotta say, if you show up, fine. I guess I'll take your money. But I will say several things that you will disagree with and will offend your very sensitive ideas of your leader and your hero. I'm just—I'm not a political comedian, but I think if I were to go an hour and a half without saying how I truly feel about Musk and Trump and this fascist takeover, then I need to maintain some integrity of my person.

John Moe: Gary, it was great to talk to you. Great to hear from you, and continued good health and success.

Gary Gulman: Thank you so much, John.

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

John Moe: GaryGulman.com is where to go to get more of Gary, including tour dates.

[00:50:00]

He’s traveling around the country doing his unique brand of very funny and very moving standup.

So, those are some friends checked in with. Maybe you should reach out to some of your friends, perhaps even a phone call where they can hear your actual voice. I know a phone call can be a lot, but we live in some extreme times. Ask someone how they're holding up. It might make them feel better; it might make you feel better. We're all we got, after all.

Depresh Mode exists because people fund the show. People hear the show; it helps them; they know that it helps others, and they contribute. We really need to hear from you. MaximumFun.org/join is where you go to become a member. It takes a very short amount of time. You just figure out what your monthly contribution will be—whatever works in your budget—and then you hit *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows, and then you're a member. And we really, really appreciate it, because then we can keep making shows, and we can keep helping you and others.

Be sure to hit subscribe. Give us five stars, write rave reviews. That helps get the show out into the world as well.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached in the US and Canada by calling or texting 988. It's free. It's available 24/7.

We're on BlueSky and Instagram, [@DepreshPod](https://www.instagram.com/DepreshPod). Our *Depresh Mode* newsletter is on Substack. Search that up. I'm on BlueSky and Instagram, [@JohnMoe](https://www.instagram.com/JohnMoe). Come see me there. You can also come see me at the Preshies group on Facebook. Join up with that; a lot of good people hanging out, sharing their experiences, helping each other, supporting each other, talking about things, sometimes just having some laughs. It's a good place to hang out. Join Preshies if you can. I'll see you there. Our electric mail address is DepreshMode@maximumfun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. There is so much great poetry in the world. And I don't think I've been reading enough of it. I’m gonna try to change that.

Depresh Mode is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Ragu 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 and 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

(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!