

***The following transcript comes from the original airing of this episode and may vary slightly from the updated audio.**

[00:00:00] **John Moe:** If you break your leg—and I sure hope you don't, but if you break your leg, that break in the leg bone is evident with the use of an x-ray. You can see the break. It's just a fact you have a broken leg. Likewise, there are many diseases that will show up as a result of a blood test. Chemicals go a certain way. They read the report. You have that disease. Fact. Something like depression is trickier, frustratingly tricky for people who experience it, because there aren't a lot of objective binary standards in play. It doesn't show up on x-rays or MRIs or CT scans. There's no depression chemical component that can be read conclusively in a lab.

And so, we're left with a lot of emotional and behavioral cues. Does the person sleep an inordinate amount or not sleep much at all? Feelings of guilt or worthlessness, difficulty concentrating or getting stuff done? Do they have low energy, fatigue? Those could be signs of depression, but someone could be depressed and not have those symptoms, or someone could have those symptoms and not be depressed. It's similar with anxiety disorders. You have a set of warning signs, but they might not all apply to someone's situation. Or the symptoms might be there, but it's not really a disorder. Mental health is tricky. It's one of the reasons we explore mental health every week here on this program.

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

[00:01:32] **Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

[00:01:40] **John Moe:** Felicia Day has dealt with depression and anxiety for a long time, and she gets out of bed and gets stuff done. She's a writer, actor, video maker, TV show creator and runner. She created and starred in the web series *The Guild*. She's acted on shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Supernatural*, and the newer edition of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. Felicia co-founded an online media company, called Geek & Sundry. Her success didn't make the mental health problems go away. Felicia Day's life today is not as hectic as it once was. She sold that company, stepped away from the melee of Hollywood, became a parent, got some good help for her mental health. And she's still working hard. She has a phenomenally popular Twitch stream where she hangs out, plays video games, visits with people. And Felicia has written, and she stars in *Third Eye*, an Audible audiobook that releases on October 5th and is available for pre order now.

[00:02:39] **Transition:** Relaxed acoustic guitar.

[00:02:46] **John Moe:** Felicia Day, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

[00:02:48] **Felicia Day:** Hey! Thanks for having me. I'm so happy to be here.

[00:02:52] **John Moe:** Tell me about *Third Eye*, the world that it exists in, and the people that we meet when we go there.

[00:02:59] **Felicia Day:** Oh yeah, right into it! Yes, I wrote a project called *Third Eye*. It is an Audible original, which means it's a very long form—some people describe it as an acted-out book. But also, I consider it a TV series, because I actually wrote it as—you know, in a TV series manner. I wrote 10 episodes. Everything's you know, written out like a screenplay would be, but we performed it and it's all audio. And it has been an amazing journey creating it.

It is about a chosen one who fails, and then 15 years later, somebody comes in her life and blows up her very low life, as—we're talking about depression and anxiety and all that stuff. And you know, this character is like the epitome of all of that. And it definitely was channeled from my own life. So, yeah, it is a fantasy comedy, but there's a lot of like, you know, feeling stuff in there. And self-image and, you know, being a failure is like the theme of the piece, and that's something that I wanted to channel into something. And I did.

[00:03:59] **John Moe:** And you—as well as writing it, you play this this failed hero as well?

[00:04:03] **Felicia Day:** Yes, I play Laurel Pettigrew, who was fated to be the chosen one of the secret supernatural world around us. And she didn't quite make it. So, what happens then? I love fantasy. I love sci-fi. I read, you know, many books a week. I'm a big reader, and I always wanted to sort of dive in and create—you know, I created a role for myself in *The Guild*, which was a web series about online gamers. Again, had a kind of depressed main character, who I played. But this one is actually the lowest of low. This character really—not only does she hate herself, but the world hates her and reinforces all of that self-hatred. And how do you live with yourself when you fail the world?

I just thought it was an interesting thing to think about since we have so many chosen one tropes in our world. What do we—what happens if we flip it on our heads?

[00:04:51] **John Moe:** When did you start working on this?

[00:04:54] **Felicia Day:** So, I started working on this project in 2015.

[00:04:57] **John Moe:** Oh, wow. Okay.

[00:04:58] **Felicia Day:** I know. It's been quite a while, and it's taken a long journey. I pitched it to Hollywood as a TV series, and it did not actually get bought. And I was super devastated. And I was actually more devastated because I was in the middle of a company I created on YouTube, making hundreds of videos a year. And I love working in new media, but it was not the right fit for myself. I was driving myself too hard. I had expectations that were, you know, all over the map. And I kind of lost sight of myself as an artist. And I personally felt like a failure at the time.

So, I was just doing anything to focus on a project that made me feel like I was on the right track again. And I knew I needed to write something. I needed to write—I knew I needed to write something for myself as a performer.

And, you know, this is the character that came out of it. Unfortunately, she didn't come to life in TV format, and I had to shelf the project for like three to four years. And then, I talked with Audible, and they loved the project, and I signed on thinking I would have a staff of writers to write, you know, upward of 400 pages. And unfortunately, covid hit, and those plans went into the air, and I just dug down and I wrote the whole thing myself over covid.

[00:06:10] **John Moe:** Oh my gosh.

[00:06:11] **Felicia Day:** Yeah. So, it was not only an amazing experience in that I would never have chosen to do a lot of this stuff, but at the same time I am so much better a person for having gone through it. I think that's probably life, right?

(They chuckle.)

[00:06:25] **John Moe:** Well, I want to find out how depression and anxiety informed this particular project, but let's back up. Like, when were you discovered by depression and anxiety? When did you get your first big break—discovered at the soda fountain by Big D and Big A?

[00:06:42] **Felicia Day:** Oh, wow. I mean, I know that I've lived with anxiety my whole life. I think now, you know, with the—as you get farther from a section of your life, you're like, “Oh, wow, that's what was going on!” I was homeschooled, and I wasn't around a lot of other people. So, I didn't really have a relative sense of myself with my peers. I always compared myself to, you know, people who were a lot better than me—adults—at everything. Right? And so, I was in a weird place. I had a baked-in idea of myself as something that was—someone who was not good at things, even though I'm like the biggest overachiever ever. And I know I'm a perfectionist, and I know I have imposter syndrome.

And I lived with so much anxiety, because I wasn't actually in the world for so long. I went to college at 16. I was a violinist—kind of a violin prodigy. And I was in a small music college. So, it was like 250 people there. So, I was kind of in a safe, small place, even in college. And so, then when I moved to Hollywood, when I was like 20, it was a wakeup call, man. And the harder you work, the further you do not get in Hollywood. It is not one-to-one like getting an A in college.

[00:07:50] **John Moe:** It's not a meritocracy.

[00:07:51] **Felicia Day:** Nope! Nope! So, it was very hard for me. You know, that's when I think the depression really hit me. But out of all of that, I started playing video games obsessively in

my depression. And then, I turned that into a web series, called *The Guild*, about online gamers. And that kind of gave me a sense of purpose again. But then, my anxiety kicked in, because I was so desperate to hold on to what was giving me meaning and getting me out of that depressed place that I drove myself way too hard. And this is like back in 2006 and '07—you know, this is a long time ago that I did this.

And I turned that into a YouTube company, called Geek & Sundry. And that's when everything just broke me, because not only was I making 12 episodes—you know, 12 really cool scripted episodes of TV a year for the web, but I was making hundreds of videos. And it was non-scripted, and I wasn't acting in a lot of it. I was producing, and I was flying around the world, and at the same time I was acting. And I got to the point where I was completely clinically burnt out, and that was a very sad place to be.

[00:08:54] **John Moe:** I want to back up to the video games. You said that you were depressed, and you started playing video games obsessively. Was one a response to the other?

[00:09:04] **Felicia Day:** You know, I didn't feel fulfilled in my daily life. I was always knocking on doors and getting rejected for every reason under the sun. My face, my voice.

[00:09:12] **John Moe:** This is out of college, you're in Hollywood?

[00:09:14] **Felicia Day:** Yeah, I'm in Hollywood, and I'm struggling, and nobody thinks it's cool that I have a math degree. Nobody. Everybody thinks it's weird that I play video games for fun. No one cares that I was, you know, like the Wunderkind of the violin at University of Texas. Nobody cares about any of that stuff. And so, because I had always based my self-worth on achievements and what I did outwardly, I didn't understand how to deal with all of the rejection. Because underneath, I think I wasn't really fully formed inside. It was all this outward stuff. And that's what *Third Eye* is about. It's about a failed prodigy. And so, in my journey, I realized a lot of my anxiety and especially depression is just not being fully formed inside, because I was so focused on the outwardly facing achievements that other people would praise me for. And so, that's kind of the heart of Laurel, the character in *Third Eye* and me as a person, you know? If you build your world where everything is nice and beautiful on the outside but ill-formed on the inside, then any kind of impact on that outer shell will expose major weaknesses, which it did with me a lot.

[00:10:22] **John Moe:** So, did you—and I guess does Laurel, in the story—have a positive sense of yourself before you kind of run into the buzzsaw of reality, when you were coming out of college or when she was a prodigy?

[00:10:34] **Felicia Day:** No, because I think—and you know, we listened to this very early on. We kind of get the back story about her failure and how she was. I mean, if you are deemed a prodigy when you're nine years old or three years old or whatever, you don't know anything else

other than being identified with being amazing at one thing. Right? And you know, as I did research about failed prodigies, I saw so many—so much of myself. You know, I wasn't like the biggest prodigy in the world, but like you see that when a kid becomes known for that one thing—even like child actors, I see it a lot. You don't get to form yourself as a human. You don't get to experiment, because you have the safety of being known for something and a path that's laid out for you. And why would you not just continue to try to do everything, because you're getting all this praise? You know, you're getting all this reinforcement of how wonderful you are and how unusual you are for how young you are that you're doing this thing, whatever it is.

And when you grow up, people catch up with you. You might be an overachiever at 10, but at 15, you might be a has-been, right? So, it's a really hard thing to navigate, especially during childhood when you're—that's your job, to form yourself. And I think that's what I've been trying to overcome for like 40 years. Like, who am I inside? What do I actually like doing? How do I spend my time pleasurable for my own fulfillment as well as for everybody else?

[00:11:57] **John Moe:** Hmm. Did you get any answers on that?

[00:12:00] **Felicia Day:** I mean, I definitely see a pattern. I mean, like the internet is a perfect place for me to have thrived early on, because I was used to putting on a show. I was used to putting on a very neat, tight package. But when the internet didn't like some of the things I did on YouTube, because I was making hundreds of videos a year, it was really, really devastating for me. And it was very personal, every single negative comment. And you know, that threw me back into it for depression. Because again, I didn't have any resilience on the inside. I didn't have any intrinsic motivation for some of the things I was doing. And so, you're just kind of like, you know, standing on a stalk of wheat being blown by the wind, right? And that's not a way to be, because then you have no stability for yourself. You know, you have no sense of taking care of yourself, and it's really hard to navigate. You got to build that thing up inside, or you're just going to break all the time. In my opinion.

[00:12:53] **John Moe:** Yeah. So, how do you square the idea of you had this depression—which, you know, so often can just be a kick to the stomach and you're just out of commission—with this incredibly productive period of your life? Like, how can you be depressed and still be making these hundreds of videos and acting on TV and doing all these other things that you did?

[00:13:17] **Felicia Day:** You know, I think it's just a unique personality of me, which also kind of ties back into how I'm broken in a little bit of a way—you know, a lot of ways. I'm extremely go-getting in a lot of ways. And in fact, my brain will drive when my heart doesn't want to go somewhere. And I think that's probably another reason why I kind of look back at that failed prodigy thing is that my brain and my heart were never integrated. You know? Like, my brain sees that I'm being praised for things. I do things that people like, I am doing something significant. And yet, on the inside, my heart is like, "Don't do this. Don't work this hard. Don't

do these videos. Like, why aren't you writing?" I can't write because I'm too burnt out. Well, I feel like a failure. I can't be a failure, so I have to make more videos, right? I can do the thing that is easiest in front of me versus like stopping everything and just taking stock and being like what am I doing? Why am I doing it? I happy doing any of this?

And you know, I don't even think that I really slowed down to do that until covid, to be honest with you. You know, I could see myself incrementally over the years once I would sort of crash and burn, you know, getting a little bit more awareness and a little bit more therapy and a little bit more help. But you know, I had a child, and learning how to parent her told me that I wasn't parenting myself in any way. And because of my anxiety, you know, a lot of physical things happened to my body after I had a kid, and I got on a low dose of Lexapro, and being able to remove that constant sort of like electric sting underneath everything made me realize a lot of things about myself. And it coincided exactly with covid.

So, I have to say I'm not—I mean, I'm not going to say I'm the perfect person and I'm completely great for the rest of my life, but I will say that, at this point, I know I'm making decisions that are right for me. And it was a combination of being forced to unplug, becoming a mom, and realizing that everyone needs to be parented, including ourselves, by ourselves. And the low dose of medication that allowed me to sort of back up and look at myself in a way that was not always just desperate anxiety. Does that make sense?

[00:15:32] **John Moe:** Yeah. So, it sounds like you reached a place where you could stop more so than a place where you crashed.

[00:15:39] **Felicia Day:** Yes, I crashed before, in about like 2012/2013. And that was complete burnout. That was just me driving my car into a wall at 400 miles per hour, because I needed to prove to everybody I was still a genius. And you know.

[00:15:54] **John Moe:** And that's what geniuses do, is they drive their cars into walls. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:15:58] **Felicia Day:** Exactly, exactly. I mean, you know, it didn't really work out, you know, but at that time—I wrote an autobiography at that time, and I felt like, "Wow, I'm almost there." I felt like I'd gotten out of a lot of the—because I do believe, you know—I mean, depression is a very complicated—you know, it's a complicated thing. And sometimes it's chemical, and sometimes it's circumstantial, and it's so many different varieties where you end up in a place where you just can't go on in a lot of ways. And so, for me, I feel like my brain was driving me to a place, because I wasn't listening to myself at all. And I think that's just a type of personality and also that sort of overachiever person, the perfectionist needing to be best at everything. And it really didn't serve me well at all, ultimately.

[00:16:44] **Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

[00:16:47] **John Moe:** More with Felicia Day about burnout and boundaries after the break.

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[00:17:40] **Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

[00:17:42] **John Moe:** Back with media polymath Felicia Day.

(Music ends.)

When you were driving yourself to burnout with all the work you were doing—and I think, you know, a lot of people listening to this probably don't make a lot of YouTube videos, but they work hard at things, and they have commitments, and they have a life that they feel like they need to keep up with. Were you conscious of, okay, this is the depressive part, this is the anxiety part, this is the two of them winding together, heading me towards this end or this crash? Or was it just, I'm hanging on; I'm going as fast as I can?

[00:18:23] **Felicia Day:** No, it was like—I mean, I didn't even—I mean, I had friends who wanted to intervene during *The Guild* years. They were like, “You have to go to therapy. Your anxiety—because I didn't enjoy one second of the behind the scenes. I enjoyed the end product, and I enjoyed the fact that it meant a lot to other people. But again, I didn't exist in this transaction at all, I realized. And so, yeah, it was—I knew, you know, some things, but I was not self-aware. I was just going after something that finally gave me some validation as to who I am and what I could do. And you know, that was a first step to find something that meant something to me, but you know, parsing that and understanding the motivations and, you know, I got a lot of things done. But I don't know if a healthy me would have done it, but also a healthy me would have been a lot more healthy the whole time, right?

(They laugh.)

[00:19:16] **John Moe:** Yeah, that's the thing about being healthy. Yeah.

[00:19:18] **Felicia Day:** Yeah, exactly.

[00:19:20] **John Moe:** I mentioned on, on BlueSky that I was gonna be talking to you and see if people had questions. And Danny, one of our listeners, says, “How much does Felicia think overwork and overcommitment contributed to how strongly her symptoms came on?”

[00:19:34] **Felicia Day:** Yeah. It's a 100%. I mean, 100%. I would—and you know, it was almost—it got to be pathological in pleasing other people. You know, I would do any podcast. I would show up to any store. I would do anything and—because it felt like I didn't own my own time. Once I became popular, I gave myself completely to the popularity—right?—and the online-ness of it all. And that's why like I think it's super destructive, especially for kids. You know, now looking back at—you know, the prodigy syndrome is one thing. Like, yeah, as a math genius or a violin genius or whatever, but when you're posting pictures of yourself, and you're getting that feedback, and people are showing you what they like from you, and it's not necessarily the thing that is leading you to happiness. It's showing you, especially for women, like what do you look like? Where are you going to put your time? Into what you look like, because that's what's getting me clicks and likes and all this stuff.

It's so incredibly harmful. I at least—I didn't go down a lot of paths 100% to like setting my whole life onto the internet for, you know, clicks. But at the same time, I was always like looking for opportunities to please other people, completely neglecting myself. And that is somewhere that led me to overwork and crashing and burning and, again, trying to go back to Hollywood and get some praise from them and being rejected again after all of what I accomplished and that knocking me down again. So, you know one of those dolls that goes like this, that has sand on the bottom—it's like a punch doll?

(John confirms.)

That was me! With any slight breeze or slight comment, it was like, whack, whack, whack, whack, whack! And that's—

[00:21:09] **John Moe:** But getting back up again. Because that's how you're built.

[00:21:13] **Felicia Day:** Yeah, exactly. And you know, sometimes you feel so weighed down, you can't get back up again. And yeah, I do believe that the anxiety is how I'm wired, and I have had to customize my whole life around minimizing my anxiety, but the depression was certainly, I think, more self-input. I drove myself there with my overwork and my inattention to who I was—am.

[00:21:38] **John Moe:** So, then after you crashed, after you started to rebuild, after you had your child and had to slow down, did the depression go away because the circumstances were different?

[00:21:51] **Felicia Day:** No, because I left my company when I had my child because of a lot of medical issues—probably anxiety based. I was having a very hard time carrying a pregnancy. And when I finally had my child, I was like, “I can't do this anymore. I can't.” You know, I mean, it's a train that hits you when you become a parent, and it's like are you going to make room for me? Or are you not? Because you have to. Like, I drove a truck in your

house. (*Laughs.*) I'm parking right here in your bedroom, like what are you gonna do about it? So, it was—and it was also a question of like—I'm sure that some people who are workaholics go right back to work, you know. Like, they have to. We all have to go—you know like there are circumstances around parenthood and especially motherhood that are like we need to break it down, and it's a whole other conversation of like how do you maintain that career, that perception of you as a woman, becoming a mother. Creating space for all those things is absolutely impossible, you know? And you have to be—it's a war of attrition with time versus care.

And I was forced to do that, but then I kind of jumped back in the Hollywood boat. I was like, oh, let's do more Hollywood stuff. And that, again, didn't work for me! Because it's not a great fit for me. You know, in some ways it has been, as an actor and a performer, but the stories I wanted to tell over and over again are just not the stories that they want to tell. And I wasn't in a place where I didn't take it personally. I was still in a place of desperation until the whole world shut down. And I just played video games for a couple years and wrote, and it was the best healing experience for me, because I removed myself from a toxic relationship that was me and Hollywood, in the important ways. You know, like for me going forward after the experience of *Third Eye*, writing it with Audible and discovering that I can write 400 pages on my own. I do have stories I want to tell. They aren't stories that necessarily will be (*snaps*) bought immediately by Hollywood, but there are so many other ways to tell the story.

And I—you know, it's almost full circle going back to *The Guild*. Nobody would make that show. Nobody wanted to remake that show, but I made it for six years in my bedroom. We had millions of fans around the world. I've made *Third Eye*. I did—the project never would have been this cool if I had ever made it for TV, 'cause there would have been other people, you know, weighing in. That's just the format. So, like if I can take my writing and write it as a graphic novel, or an audio series, or a stage play, and then I act—which I love—on sets for Hollywood? That's like my dream spot. And I feel like that's where I'm at now, but it did take so many years to get to the conclusion of, you know, some things aren't working for me. And just because people think you should be doing this or it's impressive to people in suits doesn't mean you need to be on this road.

[00:24:25] **Transition:** Relaxed acoustic guitar.

[00:24:27] **John Moe:** More with Felicia Day in just a moment.

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[00:25:22] **Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

[00:25:24] **John Moe:** We're back with Felicia Day.

(Music ends.)

Does it ever get confusing to you like where the public Felicia is, and the private Felicia is? Like, establishing the boundaries of what people can know about you and what—you know, what line they're not allowed to cross when you're when you're as public as you are?

[00:25:46] **Felicia Day:** It is. And I think I made some smart decisions early on. I keep my personal life completely off. You know, my brother and I have done some stuff online, but not like personal things about our past. You know, I wrote an autobiography. I was like, "This is it. This is the curated version of what I'd like you to know about me." But you know, I'm very genuinely me online, but I'm not—I don't think I'm driven for attention. You know, I never was like somebody to be that glamorous. I always was about the work more. And so, I think protecting my personal life and—you know, I showed my baby a couple times on Instagram, but never again. 'Cause she's, you know, six now, and she's large enough to recognize, and I'm not going to choose that for her, to be recognized.

[00:26:27] **John Moe:** Autonomous human being now. Yeah.

[00:26:29] **Felicia Day:** Exactly! She's a person. And maybe if I went back, I wouldn't have shown any pictures of her. But we did it, and that's fine. So, yeah, I think for me, the work has always represented me. And I think that was part of the reason why I kind of drove myself into a wall in that having a non-scripted—generally non-scripted YouTube channel, making hundreds of videos a year, I became Felicia Day personality versus Felicia Day the writer and creator of *The Guild* or actor on *Buffy* or whatever it is. You know, these other shows and other things I was on. So, I think becoming a personality was something I always resisted, and it was part and parcel of having a YouTube company. And that was where I started to feel like, "What am I doing with my life?" But I was so burnt out, I couldn't write. And I just had no stories, because I was literally throwing everything that occurred to me in the moment online for content. And that doesn't give you fodder to create something long term. That's just my personal opinion.

[00:27:26] **John Moe:** Yeah. So, then now you have—I was looking at your channel, and it's—you play video games and talk with people who you're playing video games with, and you talk to the people who are commenting about the video games that you're playing. Is that a more liberating experience? Is that an easier experience than some of the YouTube work that you've done in the past?

[00:27:52] **Felicia Day:** I mean, yeah. I don't have any crew anymore. And when I left my company, Geek & Sundry, I did not—I couldn't, you know, be on YouTube. So, I don't do

professional YouTube videos now. I do some short form content on TikTok and Instagram, but that's one minute. And I do it with my phone, and nobody's helping me, right? Doing bigger videos is just—web video is not—I can't pay people \$100 to come in and do a professional TV show anymore. You know, like attempting to do that. I can't do that in my position to pay people so little or legally with a union. I mean, we were a union show, but like, there's a standard. I think reputation is like you can't ask people to work for favors when you're—you know, have a bigger reputation. It doesn't feel right.

So, to me—I mean, I love my Twitch channel. The only reason I have YouTube videos right now is because I have a mod, RocketSoup, who outputs them there so that fans can enjoy them off of Twitch if they need to. YouTube is just not, you know, a place I do anything but shorts now, but I love Twitch. And I had a manager—I was looking for a manager, and I interviewed a lot of people, and one of them was like, “Why are you bothering with this Twitch thing? You're not making enough money; you don't have enough fans.”

I was like, “And goodbye.” Because since 2015, I have streamed video games, and having that small audience there to just chat with and—outside of any business needs—just having that casual conversation and doing what I love, which is video games, which I love—that is like the highlight of my week, you know, doing that three times a week. I could see myself—my retirement plan is like doing it 8 hours a day from like, Seville, Spain or whatever.

(They laugh.)

And writing books and self-publishing them. That's like my dream retirement right there. Because I'll never stop doing it, because I love it. I love community. I love building community. And I don't need millions of people, I mean the millions of people enable to do some cool things, but at the end of the day, it's those few hundred or few thousand that are there every time I stream who I'm like, “Oh, yeah, I know you, and if I meet you in person, I'm gonna probably give you a hug. ‘Cause I feel like, you know, we kind of hang out together.” That's really something that—and I think it's handed down from like when I was a kid. I had no friends. You know? The online world, the AOL and like Prodigy, the early internet showed me that you can communicate with people online. And you know, it's kind of like that's my baked-in socialization as a person. And I don't think it's unhealthy, unless you're going to tell me it is.

(They laugh.)

[00:30:13] **John Moe:** I don't think it's unhealthy, no. I mean, I know several people who that's where their social life mostly is. And I think it's really short-sighted and old fashioned to say, “Well, that's, that's not the way it used to be. So, therefore it shouldn't be this way now.”

(Felicia agrees.)

I think it's great. So, are depression and anxiety no longer factors in your life, no longer problems for you?

[00:30:37] **Felicia Day:** No, I mean, I certainly wouldn't say that. I will say that the low dose of Lexapro has made a huge difference in my life. And I also was diagnosed with PMDD, which is extreme PMS essentially. And I happen to be an extremely sensitive person. I'm sensitive to what other people think of me. I'm sensitive to emotion, and I'm also sensitive to any hormonal shifts in my body. So, like you know, a couple times a month—as my cycle goes—I become so anxious that I can't sleep, and I have insomnia. And when I get insomnia, I have extreme mental—I'm very affected by lack of sleep. In fact—and I went a couple years when my baby was a not a good sleeper, and I would get like three to four hours a night.

And I did kind of step into that place where I was so depressed, and I couldn't get up in the morning, and then I could not sleep at night. And it became the cycle that I did everything to figure out a solution for aside from medication. You know, two years in, I finally did. And I was like this my transformed life, and it evened out my world in a way that I can function a lot better.

So, I do attribute it to medication, because otherwise I just couldn't get a handle on myself, because my body physically was just sending me all over. And I was—from one day to another, I could never feel stable or know that I would not wake up and just not want to get out of bed. Or I would be so upset, you know, I couldn't even read a book that was exciting, because it would make me so, you know, hyper stimulated that I couldn't sleep all night. And then, that would just roll over into a whole week of suffering. And it was just a terrible experience. So, like diagnosing myself and seeking help was like the best thing I could ever do, and I just never gave myself the room to do it.

[00:32:21] **John Moe:** Hmm. So, the PMDD, which is premenstrual dysphoric disorder, for people listening—that happened in a postpartum kind of way? That happened when your daughter was very young?

[00:32:33] **Felicia Day:** Yes. It happened when she was—she just didn't sleep from like one to two. And after that year of waking up every two to three hours, I was breastfeeding as well. And so, when I weaned her, that's when things really—my hormones were just out of whack, and they could not get a handle. And I couldn't—even though she was starting to sleep the whole night, I couldn't get a handle on my own sleep. And when I don't sleep, I become mentally ill. I mean, I really do, in a lot of different ways. And so, yeah, it was a rollercoaster I couldn't get off. Even though she was sleeping, I would be like, “Why can I not sleep?” And that anxiety about not sleeping affected my ability to sleep and over—and it just kind of accelerated. And everything fed into itself with the hormonal fluctuations, everything. It just fed into a horrible situation.

And it was a real two years of suffering. It was a lot of suffering. And I could only thank my GP for being like, “Why aren't you on this? Why don't you just try it? Because I can't diagnose all

your other systems.” So, you know, all your—because I had—I went in to the GP for the first time in a couple of years, and I was like, “These are my symptoms.” And he’s like, “I can’t treat, you know, your stomach problems and your acid reflux and all these problems until you treat the underlying problem, I believe, of a lot of this.” Which was anxiety.

[00:33:50] **John Moe:** And that’s when the Lexapro came in.

(Felicia confirms.)

Oh, wow. So, how did that go when you first started taking it? Like, what differences did you notice and how soon?

[00:34:02] **Felicia Day:** I mean, it was two—it was two weeks of not getting worse. And then, after that, I gradually was like, “Oh my gosh, I can sleep. I can sleep.” And I got healthier and healthier, and I could sleep. And when I slept, I could sleep better and better. And I have a couple—you know, I grind my jaw on it, and I have very lucid dreams, and I have, you know, a couple of things. And I tried to get off of it last year, and I suffered for six months in a way that I’m like, “Why? Why am I doing this to myself? This works.” And it was after seeing a psychiatrist and she diagnosed me with the PMDD, and it was like, “Oh, this makes sense why two times a month, I can’t sleep for six days each.” And I’m like, this is half the month. I’m not functional. I can’t do this anymore. And so, I was like, this is me; this is life. You know, and I feel great. And I—you know, it was a very long process. But let me just tell you, it was worth every step.

[00:34:52] **John Moe:** Hmm. So, the PMDD is under control now? It’s managed?

[00:34:56] **Felicia Day:** I mean, yes, along with—I have to be very strict with my sleep, you know, patterns and sleep health. I don’t watch TV. I don’t look at my phone. I don’t really have a lot of caffeine. I know that two weeks out of the month, I don’t eat a lot of carbs. I mean, it is a lot of things. I take calcium. I take D supplements. I take Vitex berry, which is a chasteberry which increases your progesterone slightly. It’s an herbal thing. And these are all subscribed—these are all—were given to me by my GP or my gynecologist or my psychiatrist. So, like I’m not telling you to start taking pills without consulting experts.

[00:35:31] **John Moe:** Go to the doctor first. Yes.

[00:35:32] **Felicia Day:** I will say that, yeah—I mean, I’ve learned along the way, okay, it’s a little bit better if I do this. It’s a little bit better if I do this. It’s a little bit better if I do this. And now, yeah, I’m on a schedule, but I want to be functional every day. And I don’t want—and if I teeter off of the schedule, then I crash. And it’s—yeah, it’s not a good feeling. And it’s like I’d rather be healthy.

[00:35:52] **John Moe:** Was it a conscious choice to take your mental health and the experiences you've had and the things you've learned and bring it to the character of Laurel in *Third Eye*?

[00:36:04] **Felicia Day:** Absolutely. I mean, I went on a retreat, and I was like I have to write something. And this is the character who came to mind. And you know, I didn't realize it was about a failed prodigy and tied into my—until I started working through it. And I was like trying to dig into her as a character. And I was like what's wrong with this character? Oh, she's a failed prodigy. Hey, I'm a failed prodigy! So, in fact, doing the writing led me to a lot of my own issues that then helped me kind of progress my own healing and functionality through that. I mean, it really is—you know, because, again, I don't have—I didn't have enough self-awareness of myself at the time and care for myself enough to figure out my own issues. But through a character, I was able to go back to, you know, myself and solve some of my own problems and be a little more functional.

[00:36:50] **John Moe:** It's like a role-playing game.

[00:36:52] **Felicia Day:** It was like a role-playing game! That's great! I love it!

(They laugh.)

[00:36:56] **John Moe:** I can't be the first one who's thought of that, I'm sure.

[00:36:59] **Felicia Day:** No, but I mean, I've never—I haven't heard it, but I'm going to steal it from now on.

[00:37:02] **John Moe:** Okay, good.

[00:37:03] **Felicia Day:** Thank you.

(They laugh.)

[00:37:05] **John Moe:** Why didn't you just stick with the violin and the math?

[00:37:09] **Felicia Day:** I was running away from something. It was a lot of my past. And I will say that I knew I wasn't good enough because of my anxiety would not let me enjoy my violin, you know, as much as I probably could have. I basically knew that I wasn't going to be a superstar as a violin, and I would be playing Handel's "Messiah" and teaching, you know, kids and being in an orchestra. And I saw a future where I knew what that future was. And I think for me, I always am trying to jump headfirst into things I don't know. I don't know whether to scare myself or just do other things, you know? *(Chuckles.)* I don't know what it is, but I love diving headfirst into formats and ways to tell stories that I've never done before. I can't seem to repeat myself.

So, yeah, I think the idea that I would be a violinist forever or a math teacher, it just wasn't—it didn't have the “what's going to happen next?” factor. And I guess with writing and acting, I'm always, “What's going to happen next? What job's going to drop into my lap?” It's the freelance addiction, I guess, or maybe a lotto. I don't know! (*Laughs.*) I don't know. But for somebody who's pretty risk averse, I don't know. I got attracted to a weird career. So, anyway. Yeah.

Yeah, but for me—like, I mean, mental health is so important. I've written two books that kind of dovetail into that. My autobiography, where I kind of highlight my ascent and, you know, sort of the breakdown. And if you read it with—having listened to this, you probably will read a lot more angst than is on the page, because I was kind of covering a lot. Not a lot, but a little. Trying to make it seem a little bit more upbeat and comedic. And then, I also wrote a book called *Embrace Your Weird*, which is like a workbook trying to uncover your creativity, trying to discover who you are—especially after a big life change. 'Cause I wrote it right after my baby, and I was like, “Who am I?” And I was very depressed again. Like, you know, you have these moments where you just lose touch with who you are, and you're just confused and where do I go? How do I do? And it's designed to like have a bunch of exercises that are fun to dive into to kind of take your past and your future and your present and sort of like get direction again and a sense of self.

And so, yeah, to me, I never want anyone to suffer. And I hate the fact that, you know, there are people walking around who carry this anxiety balloon with them and not realize that it's not them. And I wish I had been more self-aware. So, I guess for me I just want to urge everyone to keep putting one foot in front of the other. You don't have to settle. You don't have—it doesn't have to be who you are. You are underneath it all. And these are other things that, whether it's your body or the external or combination of thereof, like there are ways to find a better way. And I just want to urge everyone that, because it really affected me. And not—I wouldn't go back and redo anything, because this is the journey I needed to be on, because this is the person I want to be. And I have the kid I want, and I dreamed of. But at the same time, you know, it would have been nice if I had just been a little more self-aware and, in a sense, parented myself as well as I parent my kid. Because if I had done that, I would not have driven myself to do the things I did 100 miles per hour into a wall. So, (*laughs*) thank you!

[00:40:23] **John Moe:** Julie on BlueSky says, “I have no question for Felicia, but I would like to say that I know firsthand that she knows exactly what to say to fans to send their hearts soaring. She's good people.” Felicia Day, thank you so much for being with us today.

[00:40:34] **Felicia Day:** Aww, thank you! Well, thank you, John. I really appreciate it.

[00:40:42] **Music:** “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

[00:40:47] **John Moe:** For more about Felicia Day, please consult the entire internet. Our program exists because people donate. People support our show. If you have done that already, thank you. You are help getting this program out in the world, and it's helping people. If you haven't joined yet, it's easy to do. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join. MaximumFun.org/join. Find a level that works for you, and then select *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows. Be sure to stop by our merchandise store. We've got all sorts of cool things—t-shirts and mugs and *Depresh Mode* sweatpants, which are funny to me. That's at MaxFunStore.com. Be sure to hit subscribe. Give us five stars. Write rave reviews. That helps us a lot.

The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available 24/7 for free in the United States by calling 988. 988, easy 3 numbers to remember: 988. The Crisis Text Line, also free and always available. Text “home” to 741741. Our Instagram is [@DepreshPod](https://www.instagram.com/DepreshPod). Our Twitter is also [@DepreshPod](https://twitter.com/DepreshPod). If you're on Facebook, look up our mental health discussion group, Preshies. Our *Depresh Mode* newsletter is available on Substack. Search that up. I'm on Twitter and Instagram, at [@JohnMoe](https://twitter.com/JohnMoe), with an H. Please use our electric mail address, depreshmode@maximumfun.org, to get in touch with us.

Hi, credits listeners. The biggest college in the United States is Texas A&M with 74,869 students. The smallest college? Deep Springs College of Inyo County, California. Has a grand total of 26 students. The football games between these two are amazing and brutally one sided.

Depresh Mode is made possible by your contributions. The show is produced by Gabe Mara. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. We got booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote our music, including our theme song, “Building Wings”.

[00:42:42] **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

[00:43:19] **Josh:** Hi, this is Josh from Boise. Remember, you can't be yourself wrongly. There isn't a rulebook, and there never was.

[00:43:29] **John Moe:** *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

(Music fades out.)

[00:43:43] **Sound Effect:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

[00:43:44] **Speaker 1:** Maximum Fun.

[00:43:45] **Speaker 2:** A worker-owned network.

[00:43:47] **Speaker 3:** Of artist owned shows.

[00:43:48] **Speaker 4:** Supported—

[00:43:49] **Speaker 5:** —directly—

[00:43:50] **Speaker 6:** —by you!