

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

[00:00:00] **John Moe:** It's always good to check in with friends, see how they're doing, how they're holding up. It's always good to check in with friends when times are challenging and daunting, when climate change is going bananas, and there are hurricanes in the Pacific, and those hurricanes are hitting California where those friends live. It's always good to check in with friends when those friends have had a long history with mental health conditions, including plenty of time in inpatient facilities, and when those friends are also smart as hell and can share a lot of the wisdom they've gleaned from the bumpy mental health road they have traveled—friends who can articulate those experiences and do so in a really entertaining and dynamic way.

It's always good to check in with friends who have lost people in their lives. It's always good to check in with friends when those friends—that friend, I'll narrow it down—when that friend happens to be one of the funniest human beings currently walking the planet. My point is that it is always, always good to check in with Maria Bamford. It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

[00:01:09] **Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

[00:01:17] **John Moe:** I'm always glad when Maria Bamford is here, anywhere I can talk with her. She's just one of my favorites. Maria is a veteran standup comedian—many specials under her belt. She headlines all over the world. She's the creator and star of *Lady Dynamite*, a TV series loosely based on her own life that ran for two amazing seasons on Netflix. She also does voiceover work on billions of animated series. Maria Bamford is now an author—the author of a new memoir, entitled *Sure, I'll Join Your Cult*. I talked with her about the book, about cults, about her late mom and dad, and about the messed up mental healthcare system in America. It's always good to check in with Maria Bamford.

[00:01:59] **Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

[00:02:11] **John Moe:** Maria Bamford, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

[00:02:13] **Maria Bamford:** Thank you so much for having me, *Depresh Mode*, John!

[00:02:17] **John Moe:** The book is *Sure, I'll Join Your Cult: A memoir of Mental Illness and the Quest to Belong Anywhere*. The purpose of this book—how are you defining a cult, and what are some examples of cults to which you have belonged?

[00:02:30] **Maria Bamford:** I'm talking about like-minded groups. So, you know, the cult can be Target shopper or all the way to Jehovah Witnesses. It's a collective of people who have a bizarre set of beliefs that they adhere to at whatever intensity. So, I have belonged to many 12-step cults. I was also in—religion, also a cult. Episcopalianism. You know, these are looser cults, but they still fit you snugly like a diaper holding in a poop. And there's—you know, there's certain practices that you would never do. Episcopalians, I think it's not wear white (*laughs*) before Labor Day—after Labor Day. Uh, that's what I'm trying to say. (*Whispering.*) Don't wear white after Labor Day.

But yeah, there's certain wealth in the North American Episcopalian community. But yes, Suzuki violin. Show business I felt is definitely a cult, where you never know where you stand but everyone's all in. (*Laughs.*) Everyone's for whatever reason, like, “Drop everything!” You know?

[00:03:48] **John Moe:** We're all heading for Domsday together!

[00:03:51] **Maria Bamford:** Like, it doesn't—you know, you get a call at midnight. “It's Disney! I gotta run!” Like, there's just—so, it's very powerful.

[00:04:02] **John Moe:** When did you start identifying these things as cults and kind of realizing that “Oh, I've been joining cult after cult my whole life.” When did you put that together?

[00:04:12] **Maria Bamford:** Well, I think when they asked me to have this book deal is that I said to myself—I said—that's the punchline to one of my old jokes is that I had a girlfriend who I used to work with, and she invited me to this group called Lifesprings at the time, which is sort of a Tony Robbins offshoot type of thing, where you—you have to—

[00:04:34] **John Moe:** Mm-hm. Self-actualizing.

[00:04:37] **Maria Bamford:** Yeah, people are telling a lot of stories and crying, and then they say, “Yeeeah, now we need 900 bucks for you to go to the next level of success.” Little do they know, success is the laugh of a child, which doesn't cost anything—although kids are a hard crowd. Anyways. Yeah, so, I went to that. And I do think 12-step programs are cults in that they are very weird. Somebody goes, “Oh, they just weren't willing to work the program.” Yeah, of course they weren't! It's very strange. It's like pseudo spiritual, paternalistic language, peer counseling. That's a terrible idea! I mean, it is free, and that is one thing I will say for it. It is free, and they do have that rule. In order to be a member is that you say you're a member. You don't have to have—like, you could bring in a bottle of Jack Daniels and drink from it through the sieve of a birthday cake, and no one will say boo. But you just gotta keep it down, because someone's sharing—i.e., doing a quick set. That was my first time seeing standup was at church. Gotta see a white guy have a hot take on a weird story.

[00:05:57] **John Moe:** (*Laughs.*) And the one that kind of stood out for me was Suzuki violin. That's a cult that you belonged to as a child.

[00:06:02] **Maria Bamford:** Yes! Very disturbing.

[00:06:08] **John Moe:** Tell me about your experiences with that.

[00:06:10] **Maria Bamford:** Well, if you have offspring, one of the best things I think that would be a part of it is that you can convince them to do things to please you. At a very, very young age. So, that—perhaps two or three years old, let's say, you get them into gymnastics or French. Then, all of a sudden they're five years old, and you've got like a weirdly talented five-year-old who can do all sorts of flips and backhand springs or can speak French fluently. And that's when you move to France, unless you've already been living there, in which case—

[00:06:51] **John Moe:** Remain. Yeah.

[00:06:52] **Maria Bamford:** It's not that big a deal that your child speaks French. I would hope they speak French. But yes, Suzuki violin, the whole thing I think was begun the '50s by a Japanese man named Shinichi Suzuki—I'm probably pronouncing that wrong. His theory is that Japanese is a very difficult language. And yet, children learn it. And so, why shouldn't children learn to do other very difficult things like—he didn't say Krav Maga, but violin, piano, etc.—and children will learn to do difficult things when it pleases their parent, where it somehow involves survival. Because everybody wants to stand on a box and sing for Papa if it means the meals are gonna keep coming.

It's a theory that works. And, um, yeah, I learned to play the violin at around three. My mom said, "You can't quit till you're 12." Well, at that point, you've got enough—you know—emotional dogs in the fight that you realize how much money your parents have put into it, how much time, how much pride. So, you feel the weight of that burden. So, you keep going 'til you're at least 21. Anyways, get your kids involved before the age of three in an art form—really anything! Bookkeeping. And they will be weirdly good at it until they age out. And then, you're no longer a prodigy when you're 19 and people are like, "Oh my god, you're really good at QuickBooks!"

[00:08:33] **John Moe:** Right, and if you're 19 and not a professional violinist, getting up and playing it when your parents' friends are over is more frowned upon, I think.

[00:08:43] **Maria Bamford:** And nobody wants to hear that shit! Maybe, maybe when you're under five people wanna hear it and go, "Oh my god, that's crazy!" But then, anywhere between—

[00:08:55] **John Moe:** For just a moment.

[00:08:56] **Maria Bamford:** —5 and 45, nobody wants to hear the violin. Nobody. Even other violinists. Even other violinists. I have to say, it's like the guitar. Like, unless you're extremely good—did you see the video of Joshua Bell playing in the subway of New York with a hat?

[00:09:14] **John Moe:** Mm! Very accomplished violinist.

[00:09:18] **Maria Bamford:** Yes. No one noticed or looked irritated trying to get to their destination. That's how music affects people when you bring it in front of them and go, "Pay attention! Keep looking!"

[00:09:33] **John Moe:** Look at me, Papa.

(Maria laughs.)

How long did you last playing the violin? Did you make it the full 10 years?

[00:09:39] **Maria Bamford:** Oh, yeah. Yeah. No, there was a lot of money riding on me, and so my parents got me a fancier violin to make sure that you really feel like it's important to spend more time alone in a practice room. And *(sighs)* it's very confusing, 'cause you think your child loves what they're doing. "Oh, they love it! They love—they love designing clothes. They've done it since they were three. They love—" Do they? Or do they love the smile on your face when you talk about it on the phone to someone else? I think that's what they may love. Just that's my concern. It's too late.

[00:10:27] **John Moe:** It was cacophonous.

[00:10:28] **Maria Bamford:** Yeah, you gotta get in super early so that, also, it's combined with love and affection. My mom—physical love and affection. My mom would take the violin and hold it with me, along with the bow, and then we'd spend a half hour together. So, it was combined with tender TLC until I was around six, *(whispers)* and then I was on my own.

But yeah, you gotta start 'em early with the cults. Otherwise—my husband, he was asked to join the Jehinky Winkies—Jehovah Witnesses—at around eight, after he had found out about Christmas. After birthdays. Suddenly, they're taken all the way. No, thank you. Yeah, you gotta get 'em in early.

[00:11:14] **John Moe:** When my wife was very, very young, she took violin lessons. And the only way that her mom could get her to practice was to feed her French fries as she practiced the violin. So, she would play, and French fries would be delivered to her mouth. It was not a long-term solution, but it worked for a while.

[00:11:33] **Maria Bamford:** That—well, how long did she play for?

[00:11:36] **John Moe:** I don't think for very long, 'cause I think the fry model became somewhat unsustainable.

[00:11:42] **Maria Bamford:** Right, right. And fries get cold. Fries get cold.

[00:11:46] **John Moe:** Fries get—yeah, they're hard to keep at the right temperature.

[00:11:48] **Maria Bamford:** And then, you also feel lo a bit logy after about 20 fries. So, yeah, comedy—which is also, you know, cult-like in its—I love arguments about comedy where people start to get really mad about what's funny. That makes me laugh. *(Laughs.)*

[00:12:09] **John Moe:** The acrimony itself makes you laugh.

[00:12:11] **Maria Bamford:** Who—do you remember what we're talking about? We're talking about comedy, jokes, people who make noises and faces. Some people are writing—not me!

(They laugh.)

I did write this book. I did write this book.

[00:12:32] **John Moe:** You wrote the book, and it's beautiful. And in the book, one of the cults that you talk about is mental health itself and the mental health, I guess, industry counts as a cult.

[00:12:44] **Maria Bamford:** Well, I think—in that there are a lot of memes out there that make you feel like an idiot. You know? Like, “Hey, you! Ask for help! *(Giggles.)* Hey, tell someone!” And you know—

[00:12:57] **John Moe:** They never specify who you should tell or whether that person can do anything about it.

[00:13:03] **Maria Bamford:** Who, how, were they are. Oh, BetterHelp.com. I'm sure that—do they sponsor you, John?

[00:13:07] **John Moe:** Uh, not at the moment. They have in the past.

[00:13:11] **Maria Bamford:** Not yet? Okay. Alright. Well, not that they're not the greatest. I hope you find excellent telehealth. Telehealth, problematic because it's not IRL F-to-F—in real life, face-to-face, which is the whole point of care. Care. I had a therapist through BetterHelp who texted me, “Christine, of course you're stressed. You just had a baby.” Uh, again, my name is Maria. I am a 52-year-old woman who is barren. And I get it. The therapist, she's toggling a bunch of clients at once, but that is the thing that's gonna be missing in telehealth is the glazed overlook in someone's eyes, when they're on a screen. Also, you gotta have money or the wherewithal to make these appointments. Like, what?!

[00:14:08] **John Moe:** And the more you're suffering, the less equipped you are to navigate a system as Byzantine as the American healthcare system and the American mental healthcare system.

[00:14:17] **Maria Bamford:** Oh my Christ!

[00:14:19] **Transition:** Upbeat acoustic guitar.

[00:14:21] **John Moe:** Just ahead, more with Maria Bamford on that Byzantine American healthcare system, plus advice on joining cults.

(Music ends.)

[00:14:35] **Promo:**

(Sci-fi beeps.)

Music: High energy, bright synth.

Adam Prianca: *The Greatest Generation!* Maximum Fun's irreverent, filthy-mouthed *Star Trek* podcast is a big deal!

Benjamin Harrison: How big? It's the only *Star Trek* podcast big enough to have a live show tour! And we are inviting all *Star Trek* fans and MaxFunsters everywhere.

Adam Prianca: We're calling the Share Your Embarrassment tour. We're going to celebrate and roast *Star Trek V*.

Benjamin Harrison: That's the one where they killed God! We're gonna be in a bunch of cities, and GreatestGenTour.com has all the info and ticket links.

Adam Prianca: That's GreatestGenTour.com for dates and ticketing info for the Share Your Embarrassment tour!

Benjamin Harrison: Come share your embarrassment with us!

Adam Prianca: And grow stronger from the sharing.

(Sci-fi beep.)

[00:15:21] **Transition:** Relaxed acoustic guitar.

[00:15:23] **John Moe:** Back with comedian Maria Bamford, and we were talking about what you gotta deal with when you have a mental disorder in America today. You'll hear dogs barking in

the next segment. I'm not sure whose dogs they are, but they're not your dogs. They're dogs on the recording. Don't worry.

(Music ends.)

[00:15:41] **Maria Bamford:** I went to—uh, okay, Los Angeles. I went to the Department of Social Services yesterday with a friend about housing, emergency housing. So, we went down there, *(laughs)* and we waited in the two-hour line with the island of misfit toys that is America, that we're all—everybody's struggling, but there's people with kids. There are people with disabilities. There are people holding a sleeping bag with some Rastafarian hair that I don't think was a choice. Two hours to get in there, go through the metal detector. Oh my god. Are we gonna see someone? We see someone. Oh, it's the wrong person. You gotta go to a different hall. Gotta see—okay. Another position.

Now my friend is extremely—she can talk a good game, like she's good at—

[00:16:26] **John Moe:** Presents well.

[00:16:27] **Maria Bamford:** Presents well, etc.. We finally go through the fourth—I think it was probably the fourth wall. No improvisers were there. And—but so, we saw this person who apparently was the last person who was at table eight. Table eight, let's call him—let's call him John. No, not—! That's your name. That's terrible. I'll think of a—what's a more creative name? Um, mmm, Muriel. Muriel. We saw Muriel. "Muriel", we said, "Okay, she needs emergency housing."

She said, "We don't have any."

Then we said, "Okay. There's nothing?!"

And then, she said, "No. They do have this pilot program, but you'll have to apply through this other thing with Social Security, and then you'll have to go down to that building, da-da-da, ba-ba-ba-ba-bap. And they'll give you \$400 towards a voucher that will go towards housing in Los Angeles."

Then we had a follow-up question, which was, "Where will they take these vouchers?"

And she said, "Ooh, I don't know!"

Is—are we on a show?! Because this is so good, the buildup and then the denials of—but I just feel like there are these things where you think, "Oh, yeah, you've gotta go ask for help," and then you feel confused when it's either really not good help or—like, I know I went into the hospital thinking, "Oh, somehow maybe I went to the wrong hospital." It's like, no! It doesn't matter whether you pay a shit ton of money or if you're at county, it's not gonna be good. It's

gonna be a holding place where you maybe won't have the access to kill yourself. That is what it will be. There may be some food and a place to lay down, but just don't feel worse if the care is a lot worse than you had planned for. You know? 'Cause there's ads. There's ads where people are running in daisies, you know, or a person in a soft sweater is listening to you intently. That's not happening. That's just not happening.

[00:18:48] **John Moe:** Right, the incompleated puzzles with pieces missing. That's standard furniture though.

[00:18:55] **Maria Bamford:** (*Laughs.*) Yes. I had a friend who was having a mental health emergency. This was during George Floyd protests, and we went to the psychiatric emergency care. On the big screen TV playing—and my friend is a Black man—was the George Floyd murder happening in real time.

[00:19:17] **John Moe:** (*Softly.*) Oh my god.

[00:19:17] **Maria Bamford:** Playing over and over and over again. We had to ask him, “Hey, can you turn fucking something else on, weirdos?! Like, the cartoon channel? Like, are you fucking kidding me?”

[00:19:28] **John Moe:** Or nothing, perhaps.

[00:19:30] **Maria Bamford:** Or nothing? Or—I so—and yet, I feel for those workers, 'cause I think, “How are they so out of it? You know, what kind of pain must it be for them working in a place where they cannot or are unable to help everybody or give the level of care that they wish they could?” I know the DSS (*mumbles*) person yesterday could not look us in the eye, (*laughs*) like looked over us the whole time. I think because—I think there's some real grief in knowing you don't have—you have nothing available. So, anyways, it's no one's—I don't know whose fault it is. Can we find someone to blame today?

[00:20:19] **John Moe:** Okay. Um, the Romans. I don't know.

[00:20:24] **Maria Bamford:** The Romans! Hold on one sec. I'm just gonna— (*Clattering and banging off-mic.*)

[00:20:28] **John Moe:** As we talk here, we're talking over Zoom, and the door opened a short time ago. And a pug and then a smaller pug entered the room.

[00:20:38] **Maria Bamford:** Yes! Two pugs. One is a pug chihuahua. It's Max, who is the older pug. We like an old pug. We don't like anything that has been around—we like a dog who's been around the block and really doesn't wanna go around the block again. And then, we have a chihuahua pug, Muffin, who is a new type of dog for us. She is two years old. And it is a bizarre amount of energy she has.

[00:21:04] **John Moe:** Right. Yeah. You like to get the dogs with miles on them.

[00:21:09] **Maria Bamford:** Yeah, I like the equivalent of a 15-year-old Kia. Kia Rio.

[00:21:16] **John Moe:** Right, where the odometer's rolled over at least once.

(Maria agrees with a laugh.)

Now, when you've had successful mental health care, have you found that it was because of an institution that was working really well or a doctor or a therapist that was especially gifted? Or was it dumb luck? Or was it you and your wisdom and strength?

[00:21:44] **Maria Bamford:** I think number one, lowering the bar to accessing it. So, it's like I think getting any eyes on your situation in the community—if that's people at your coffee shop, get to know everybody's names and make eye contact with them. And my—and again, 12-step groups, which are completely—I get it when people don't like them, but they are free. So, I go to those to get human connection. But it has been, I think, a lucky, lucky strike when I've gotten somebody. I had one great psychiatrist who was so lovely in the psych ward, who came in and said—he sat on my bed, and he said, “Tell me everything from the beginning.” And to tell someone who's manic “tell me everything from the beginning” is really generous. It's generous. *(Laughs.)* And so—

[00:22:35] **John Moe:** You are gonna be there for a while, aren't you?

[00:22:37] **Maria Bamford:** I tried to keep it tight, but now what I've found—'cause I tried to see that person afterwards. And it was—you know, he's pricey. And I think that has been the real game changer is money, I'm sad to say. On some level it's—I was able to get help for OCD and specific things with a chunk of change. So, I currently—the therapist I have is also out of network. And yeah, I just wanna say that, because I think—

[00:23:09] **John Moe:** It's important.

[00:23:10] **Maria Bamford:** Yeah! I just—and it's difficult for the therapist, because I have friends who are therapists who—doing the paperwork processing and all of that is crazy, and it's very difficult to see people who either don't have insurance or, you know, have Medical or Medicare. And I think that terrible therapy just is memorable. It's just really very funny. Have you ever seen a—what's your most terrible therapist story?

[00:23:42] **John Moe:** My most terrible therapist story? I mean, there was one therapist I had who might've been really good, but I might've just—it might've just not been a match. Where she talked about the importance of scheduling in your life and to plan things out and to put them on a schedule. And then, she had a lot to say about how she and her husband schedule sex with one another. And I'm like okay. But some sort of—I don't know, prudishness or just an

unsavoriness kind of went off in me. Like, I don't know how I walked into your bedroom via your day planner. You know?

[00:24:32] **Maria Bamford:** She was sponsored by a Franklin Covey.

(John laughs.)

Um, yes. There's sometimes when disclosure from a therapist is comforting. We have a couple's therapist, Carol Grisham, who I've spoken of in my work.

[00:24:46] **John Moe:** Dr. Carol Grisham.

[00:24:47] **Maria Bamford:** Oh, she's not a doctor, she's an LMFT. And she is a delight. And sometimes she'll share—both Scott and I have problems with anger management. Scott does some yelling. I do some—what I do is I like to threaten suicide while crying, which I thought was just kittenish. And so, she will tell us tales of her own anger management problems where, “Well, my daughter-in-law just will not drive with me anymore, because I gave this guy the finger, and she said, ‘You don't know who has a gun.’ And I said—” She does not seem like anybody who would ever give anybody the finger. So, it is hilarious. But I totally understand that too much TMI from your therapist.

[00:25:33] **John Moe:** What have been—I mean, you've talked in your comedy about some less than savory therapy experiences. What are some that stand out to you as good train wrecks to talk about?

[00:25:44] **Maria Bamford:** Okay, well first I'll say—just so we have some idea of reality—let's create a gray area. Dr. Rodney Boone, who is an OCD specialist; he was delightful. He still practices in Glendale, California. And let's give a shoutout. I go to a therapist who is also an OCD specialist now who's in South Pasadena, Dr. Anthony. Yay. Very great. Really appreciate their work. Yeah. Uh, high hopes. High hopes.

What I have right now is a psychiatrist who is—he's in my network, so it is free. I think it's 20 bucks, maybe it's 20 bucks. He texts me. We have done only text appointments for I believe, three years.

(John “wow”s.)

And because I don't—part of me doesn't care about my own body, 'cause I know—I'm on some meds where you're supposed to do blood tests every once in a while. Never asks for blood tests. Never—he never wants to see me in person. He always says a text counts as an appointment. I'm like, alright! Alright, Dr. Shaw, you crazy cuckoo berry.

[00:26:54] **John Moe:** Does he use the emojis?

[00:26:56] **Maria Bamford:** It is getting there. Yeah, I'm looking into seeing—there's somebody—again, somebody who costs money, a psychiatric nurse practitioner who is in my neighborhood who I hope to see, and she sounded very nice on the phone. So—but that's also—I have plenty of money. My parents have both died. They had generational, colonial—colonial—wealth. And they're dead. And I also had two seasons of a sitcom once, and so that means we have bought our house outright.

[00:27:32] **John Moe:** Nice.

[00:27:33] **Maria Bamford:** And it has a pool, so I can afford to. Because I—yeah, I think it's just important to mention to people money, because sometimes—it's like—feels like, “Oh, just, go get some—ask somebody or—” I went to the GLBTQ Center for free therapy once, and it was a master's student—which that was very therapeutic in a way that she was like, “What are you going to do?! So, you're—you have no place to—so, you're gonna live in your car?!”

And I was like, “I'm gonna be fine! I got friends, I'll just call somebody! God!” So, in that way it was helpful, but I also thought—I saw a therapist, and I was trying to tell her about my intrusive, violent, and sexual OCD thoughts and, um—have you ever wrote somebody a check for 75 bucks to call the police? I did. And um, police never came. Cops never showed up, because it is Los Angeles. And they are busy. *(Laughs.)*

[00:28:34] **John Moe:** Wait, who do you write the check to?

[00:28:36] **Maria Bamford:** You write it to the therapist, and because she's a mandated reporter, she says, “Heads up. And is this gonna clear? I just wanna make sure.”

[00:28:49] **John Moe:** Should I cash this now before the car arrives? Yeah.

[00:28:52] **Maria Bamford:** Before the car arrives? Yeah.

[00:28:56] **Transition:** Relaxed acoustic guitar.

[00:29:00] **John Moe:** Back with more Maria Bamford in a moment.

(Music ends.)

[00:29:09] **Promo:**

Music: Sophisticated electronic harpsichord music.

Travis McElroy: Hi, I'm Travis McElroy.

Teresa McElroy: And I'm Teresa McElroy.

Travis McElroy: And we're the hosts of *Shmanners*!

Teresa McElroy: We don't believe that etiquette should be used to judge other people.

Travis McElroy: No. On *Shmanners*, we see etiquette as a way to navigate social situations with confidence.

Teresa McElroy: So, if that sounds like something you're into—

Travis McElroy: Join us every Friday, on Maximum Fun or wherever you get your podcasts.

(Music fades out.)

[00:29:34] **Transition:** Upbeat guitar.

[00:29:35] **John Moe:** We're back with comedian and author Maria Bamford. Her new album is called *Crowd Pleaser*. It's on all the streaming services. Here on that album, she talks about her late mother.

[00:29:46] **Clip:**

Maria Bamford (*Crowd Pleaser*): Yeah, my mom could squeeze joy out of an AT&T customer service call.

(Laughter.)

"You know, Reggie, can I—I just gotta ask you. We have been on the phone for over three hours. Is your phone hot?"

(Laughter.)

"Now, I know you're in Mumbai, and I'm just gonna be a curious kitty. Are you Hindu? Well, are you going to the river pilgrimage?"

(Laughter.)

"You're going. You're going, it's called the Kumbh Mela. Kumbh Mela. Well, that's great. But it's hard. Yeah. Oh, I get it. No, we don't do Thanksgiving out town anymore, 'cause it just gets crazy. But yeah."

[00:30:40] **John Moe:** You mentioned your parents, and I met them from a distance once when we did a show together, and they were in some box seats. But I feel like I know both of them already from all the talking that you've done about them, and they've both passed in recent years. And I'm wondering how you're doing.

[00:30:59] **Maria Bamford:** Uh, yeah. It's just so sad. I mean, I think like anybody has felt over just—it just sucks. You know? My mom died of lung cancer about four years ago, and she was kind of the hub to all activities in our family and connection and love and fun and good times. And then—so, that blew. And then my dad—my dad kind of—he did—really did his best. He went to all the therapies, and (*mimicking an elderly voice*) “I went to go see the grief group. And then, I went to—and I’ve been volunteering, and I asked out every woman in my age range. (*Clears throat.*)” He dated. He was 82. He met this woman named Mary, who was wonderful. They dated for about a year. It was just great.

And then, he got some sort of—and I’ve heard this is sort of a thing—sort of a depression/anorexia where he kept getting worried about gaining weight or just kept eating less and less. And you know, we would get really mad at him about it. Just like, “Hey, you’ve got eat.” And he just kept getting thinner. And he was about—I think about 125, 130 pounds, like 5’10”. And so, then he got covid, and he just died within 48 hours. And my dad always had depression, and so I wonder if part—yeah, part of it was that. Just feeling like he—because that was heartbreaking. When he went to the hospital, he had fallen over in the house. And when I came back to the house, the book he had open was *The Mindful Way Through Depression* by Jon Kabat-Zinn, which I cannot—don’t do it. Don’t mindfully go through depression. There’s no reason. Knock yourself out with a hammer. Like, there is absolutely no reason to feel all the feels of depression!

I don’t know if you’ve ever been on the razor’s edge, not wanting to exist because you’ve been in so much—in such a sense of suffering, but you don’t need to also pay attention to it. (*Laughs.*)

[00:33:39] **John Moe:** It kind of makes itself known already, doesn’t it? Yeah.

[00:33:44] **Maria Bamford:** Yeah. Oh, lord.

[00:33:45] **John Moe:** When—with the loss of your dad or with the loss of your mom, did you have any setbacks to your own mental health? Because of the grief?

[00:33:53] **Maria Bamford:** I’m on meds, so not—you know, I think it was the normal amount of grief that most people would have in my—yeah, I wasn’t completely taken out of the game. And yeah, I didn’t think—I really, you know, when my mom died, I just thought, “Oh, there’s no way I could make it without her.” And then, of course you do. And that was surprising. And she told me that. She—you know, she had been a hospice person, and she had lost her own parents. So, she was like, “Honey, you’re gonna be fine. You’re gonna be fine, kiddo.” And I was like, huh, okay. And she was right! But also, yeah, I take meds. So, things are pretty steady and—but yeah, I think I feel the level of—an appropriate level of sadness. And definitely I think, you know, some of the things where it’s like I try to—some of my go-tos when I feel anxious or OCD things, like trying to control things or—like, whether that’s my weight. That’s the cult of thin, you know, where it’s like, “Oh, there’s some perfect number. There’s a number out there

and (*aggressively*) it doesn't matter what it is! Is it the—is that—was that it?! I don't know now!"

Like, it's—I find I do that with finances too. Like, finance is like, (*gutturally*) "What is it? Is that a good number?! Is that nooot a good number?!"

[00:35:38] **John Moe:** And the difference between the good number and the bad number can be like four. A very small number between them too.

[00:35:45] **Maria Bamford:** Oh, well, yeah. There's that there's that new app, Noom, where they—monstrous! Monstrous. They have you weigh yourself every day. That's the thing they try to get you off! You know, you're not supposed to do that, to keep yourself from being—yeah.

[00:36:05] **John Moe:** Obsessive.

[00:36:06] **Maria Bamford:** Getting an eating disorder. Yeah, It's just, "Oh, I put on a quarter pound." Well, and then they put a psychological thing with it, like going like, "Well, you know, notice what did you—" You know, it's like nobody needs to be looking into their phone thinking about a quarter pound. Like, ugh. Anyways, am I sounding grumpy?

[00:36:27] **John Moe:** No, you're sounding insightful.

[00:36:30] **Maria Bamford:** (*Laughing.*) I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry.

[00:36:31] **John Moe:** And Noom has never been a sponsor of our show, so you know, that one's—pretty comfortable on that one. So, you know, with your career, with comedy, with acting and voice work and all that you do, do you feel like you are an active member of that cult, or are you just—? It's just your job and you stand outside the cult.

[00:36:50] **Maria Bamford:** Oh, yes! Oh, yes. I love being a part of it. I am definitely—I'm in, I'm in, I'm in. I don't—

[00:36:59] **John Moe:** You've got the robes. You know, you're at the compound.

[00:37:02] **Maria Bamford:** I don't wanna follow any of the rules, especially if somebody told me what the rules were. I need—immediately need to question them, and I like to mock things from within something. So, that's—it's not a great trait. Nobody really wants me on the team, but I like to—including in all my relationships. I go, "Huh! What is—what's suspect about our friendship?" You know? (*Laughs.*) It's not a great quality, but yeah, I love to be included. Oh my god. Invite me to anything. I also do—I wonder if that might be a possible shortcut to getting a little bounce in your oxytocin if you join a cult—an actual cult for just a week. Like, let's say you get into Scientology. Just a week, but go all in. Like, go all in. You're going to every

seminar, every day. You take all the tests. You get all—you know, pay \$6,000 a day to get all your levels done as quickly as possible.

Then, pull out abruptly. Pull out completely. That that might give you—you know, light your brain on fire with just a sense of danger. Yeah. I don't know. I'm just suggesting this. I'm not a professional psychiatric nor psychological counselor.

[00:38:33] **John Moe:** You're just advocating that people join Scientology for just a little while.

[00:38:39] **Maria Bamford:** Scientology or whatever. Baptists! I think Baptists are very—if you get in for just one week, you go to all the potlucks. You go Wednesday night—that's another thing Baptists do. They go on Wednesday night. You try to get on all the groups. You—yeah, just all in and then pull out!

[00:39:01] **John Moe:** Then gone!

[00:39:03] **Maria Bamford:** Yeah. It's like—yeah, just like that *Top Gun* scene where it's like you're gonna—or what is it? The *Star Wars* scene when they say, “Oh, they're gonna hit the Death Star,” and then you—

[00:39:12] **John Moe:** That's *Star Wars*. Yeah. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:39:13] **Maria Bamford:** It's that feeling of relief and joy that you're not—you're not in a cult anymore. (*Laughs.*)

[00:39:21] **John Moe:** Can you be in comedy without buying into it on a cult-like level?

(*Maria confirms emphatically.*)

I mean, I know you say you're not—that you're fully in, but can others do that? Is that a possibility?

[00:39:37] **Maria Bamford:** Yes! Yes! Yes! Okay. Now, Los Angeles, New York, there are open mics every night of the week. But wherever you live, whatever burg, I can pretty much guarantee you if it's over 50,000, you have at least one open mic a week. Now, whether that's music or not, that's gonna be a problem. But sometimes music—what that means is those gosh darn musicians, instead of giving each other a time limit, they say two songs. And then, one of the songs is “Old Man River”. And then the other one is—what's the one that's so long? Lynyrd Skynyrd.

[00:40:21] **John Moe:** Uh, “Free Bird”?

[00:40:23] **Maria Bamford:** “Free Bird”. (*Whispering.*) “Free Bird”. So, choose wisely. But yeah, you go all in. You can do standup. I think there's Zoom open mics every night of the week

at every time of day, worldwide. So, English speaking, open mics—I'll Google it, if you don't want to. And just get into it! Get into it. 'Cause you only get three minutes, but then you start worrying about it almost all the time. You only get three minutes of time for your material, and material can be anything. It can be you reading a letter. It can be you just mumbling. Don't create barriers for yourself of what standup is or is not.

You start going to these shows. You go seven—as many times as you can in one week, then you stop abruptly. Well, number one, everyone's gonna ask where you went. Number two, you're gonna feel the withdrawal. You're gonna say, "Huh, miss that rhymed act I heard out of Alabama that was not only misogynist but body positive." What—you just hear so many wonderful things. And that's what I think any religion does or any new set of beliefs does. Yeah. Get into—yeah, like a gym. Join a gym that's really upbeat. Aren't there some gyms—?

[00:41:53] **John Moe:** For a week and then drop out?

[00:41:55] **Maria Bamford:** Yeah, for a week and then drop out. Yeah! If you get really into it, and then learn everybody's names in the gym. Take, you know, as many classes as you can a day. You know, just—and talk it up. Start talking it up. You know, like, "Oh my god, this is so great. I'm really gonna do something. My body is—I'm changing it into—I'm becoming a bear." And then, stop. These are just ideas. And I don't—they haven't been tried. They haven't been play tested. They haven't been double blinded—studied. Is that the thing?

[00:42:39] **John Moe:** With the control group. Yeah.

[00:42:41] **Maria Bamford:** With a control group?

[00:42:43] **John Moe:** Yeah. I can confirm, by the way: yes. Lots of Zoom open mics.

[00:42:48] **Maria Bamford:** I go to one every week with my friend Vance. It's Open Mic of Love. And it's usually—what?—12 of us who are on there. And—

[00:42:56] **John Moe:** There are tons and tons, it looks like.

[00:42:59] **Maria Bamford:** Oh, I love it! See?! God! Also, 12-step programs. So many! Every single kind of 12-step program you've ever wanted to go to and not wanted to go to. You can lurk in the background. And sometimes they'll ask you—they'll ask you just to make sure that you're not a Zoom bomber. But usually, you don't even have to identify yourself. Just say, "I'm here for—just here to listen." You can enjoy all different kinds of stories of obsessions that you've never even thought to have.

[00:43:34] **John Moe:** So, it sounds like you kind of endorsed the idea of a controlled cult membership.

(Maria confirms excitedly.)

Like, perhaps not diving in irretrievably for the rest of your life.

[00:43:46] **Maria Bamford:** No! Of course not! I mean—and this is the best thing they say. This is a cult saying of 12-step groups: take what you want, leave the rest. And then, sometimes people of are—nag on you in those groups, as groups always do. There’s always a shaming process where someone will go, “Oh, you’re not really working the steps. You’re not really working—” Yeah. No, I’m not. *(laughs.)* I’m here for the snacks. Who’s dumb now? Who’s the idiot?

You know? Like—*(stammering)* No, I’m poolside. I’m poolside in all these programs.

(John chuckles.)

I’m on a lounge chair with my feet barely skimming the water.

[00:44:30] **John Moe:** Right. I’ve got a cocktail. It may be a mocktail depending on the group that I’m sitting in on.

[00:44:36] **Maria Bamford:** Yeah. Oh my god. Have you ever ordered a—I was at an overeaters anonymous meeting where somebody came in with McDonald’s, and the confusion that erupted. It was so wonderful.

[00:44:50] **John Moe:** Wow. Did they just sit there and eat it during the meeting?

[00:44:53] **Maria Bamford:** Oh, yeah! Yeah. But then there was so much like, “Well, we wanna be welcoming—” You know, that sort of—you’ve gotta be welcoming to the person. And this is what they’re coming for! Is that they cannot stop, you know, whatever it is. Chowing down. And so, hey, fair enough.

[00:45:14] **John Moe:** Fair enough.

[00:45:15] **Maria Bamford:** If you could just—if you could dip the fries in the shake a little more quietly.

[00:45:21] **John Moe:** The fries while you play the violin.

(Maria chuckles.)

The book is *Sure, I’ll Join Your Cult*. The author is Maria Bamford. She also has a new special that you can hear on streaming services, called *Crowd Pleaser*, which is incredibly delightful, as is Maria! Maria, thank you again, as always.

[00:45:40] **Maria Bamford:** Thank you! Thank you again for having me, John Moe. And yes, thank you!

[00:45:46] **Music:** “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

[00:45:52] **John Moe:** Maria Bamford’s book *Sure, I’ll join Your Cult* comes out on September 5th and is available for pre-order now. Her new comedy album, *Crowd Pleaser*, is available on streaming platforms right now. Next time on *Depresh Mode*: emotions are tricky things. Families are tricky things. Emotions in families? Oh boy!

[00:46:15] **Lydia Loveless:** We’re the kind of family that like if someone’s bored, it’s a reason to be mad at them. They’re like not trying hard enough. And I always assumed that what I was experiencing was boredom, and I just needed to find a way to entertain myself. And I realized, you know, when I got older that I was just deeply sad. *(Laughs.)* That’s what it was.

[00:46:32] **John Moe:** Why does that make you laugh?

[00:46:34] **Lydia Loveless:** I don’t know. Uh, ’cause it’s awkward to not. You know? *(Laughs.)*

[00:46:37] **John Moe:** Okay. Alright. That’s fair.

Lydia Loveless joins us. If people donate to the show, we can have a show. If they don’t, if they stop their memberships, then the show goes away. Let’s not make the show go away. Let’s keep hanging out with wonderful people and learning things. It’s easy to donate. If you haven’t already done so, just go to MaximumFun.org/join. That’s MaximumFun.org/join. Find a level that works for you and select *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows. If you have already done so, thank you for your support. We have a merchandise store. We have t-shirts, mugs. We have *Depresh Mode* sweatpants, which is always funny to me. It’s at MaxFunStore.com. That’s MaxFunStore.com. You can sort by show. You can find all of our *Depresh Mode* merchandise, and it makes it a wonderful gift to show that you care and are insightful. Be sure to hit subscribe. Give us five stars. Write rave reviews. That helps people find the show.

The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available 24/7 in the United States for free by calling 988. The Crisis Text Line, also free and always available. Text “home” to 741741. Our Instagram and Twitter are both @DepreshPod. If you’re on Facebook, look up our mental health discussion group, Preshies. Our *Depresh Mode* newsletter is available on Substack. You can search that up on Substack. I’m on Twitter and Instagram @JohnMoe. Our electric mail address, depreshmode@maximumfun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. If you’re looking to get more sleep—which is good for mental health—be sure to check out my other show on the Maximum Fun network: *Sleeping with Celebrities*. We

got celebrities who put you to sleep. It's very restful. *Depresh Mode* is made possible by your contributions. The show is produced by Gabe Mara. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, "Building Wings".

[00:48:40] **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

[00:49:16] **Joni:** This is Joni from Toronto. I just wanna say if you're here, you are not alone. There are so many of us in this boat. And I am so glad that if we have to be in this boat, at least we're all in it together. I'm so glad you're here. Standfast.

[00:49:35] **John Moe:** *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now!

(Music ends.)

[00:49:47] **Sound Effect:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

[00:49:48] **Speaker 1:** Maximum Fun.

[00:49:49] **Speaker 2:** A worker-owned network.

[00:49:50] **Speaker 3:** Of artist owned shows.

[00:49:52] **Speaker 4:** Supported—

[00:49:53] **Speaker 5:** —directly—

[00:49:54] **Speaker 6:** —by you!