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

I've been making podcasts about mental health since 2016. Nine years. I've written a book about mental health. I've given speeches about it all over the country. I've talked with countless people dealing with mental health conditions. I've talked with researchers, politicians, artists, everyday folks. I've written a weekly newsletter about mental health for many years. I've put a lot of work into this, and I have something to tell you. Nobody has it all solved. Nobody has it licked. Nobody is 100% fine and will be fine forevermore. It don't work like that.

Some people are doing great at the moment, which is wonderful. It doesn't guarantee they always have been or always will be. I believe—and we've talked about this on the show before. I am of the belief that there's no such thing as some people who experience mental illness and some people who don't. I think everyone either is experiencing something or has or will. So, who gets mental illness? Everybody. And if you are going through something right now, you know that mental health is a present tense proposition. It's something you're managing, doing your best, trying to keep track of what works and what doesn't. There are ups, and there are downs. Good days, bad days. It's messy.

Also—and we've talked about this before—professional success and achievement don't solve mental health problems. Even if you're a social media star with millions of followers and you've written a bestselling book, you're still dealing with this stuff. The fight doesn't stop. I know this, but I was reminded of it again in this week's interview, which featured a surprise and a reminder right up towards the top.

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

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Tiffany Jenkins is the author of two memoirs. In 2019, *High Achiever: The Incredible True Story of One Addict's Double Life*. It was about her substance use issues that eventually led to felony convictions and her incarceration. And she's the author of the newly published *A Clean Mess: A Memoir of Sobriety After a Lifetime of Being Numb*, a *New York Times* bestseller. And that tells the story of what happened after Tiffany was released. It tells the story of falling in love, getting married, and why that marriage ended.

Online, you can find Tiffany under the title Juggling the Jenkins on Facebook, Instagram, all over the place. Millions and millions of followers. In these channels, on these platforms, she shares everyday observations as a mom and a member of society, and she talks openly about her mental health—past and present. Besides being in recovery, Tiffany deals with anxiety issues and depression and OCD. We spoke to her a week ago when—and we didn't realize this going into the interview—she was making some big moves to help her mental health.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Tiffany Jenkins, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Tiffany Jenkins: Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited.

John Moe: How are you today?

Tiffany Jenkins: Today specifically? I am good.

John Moe: Okay. Good.

Tiffany Jenkins: I just went to a thrift store. Which is like a treasure hunt for me. So, that always puts me in a good mood. But it varies day to day.

John Moe: Yeah, yeah. Well, you recently wrote on Facebook about—you said, “It's imperative I direct all of my focus at this time to my mental health. I won't go into detail yet for personal reasons, but essentially my brain is not where it needs to be, and it's up to me to ensure I take the proper steps to get it back on track.” I wanna invite you, Tiffany, to share what's happening with your brain if you want to. And if you don't, that's okay too. But I mostly want to ask how the effort to getting back on track is going.

Tiffany Jenkins: Absolutely. Thank you. I didn't know what we were gonna talk about today, and I thought I might have to pretend like everything was okay.

(John laughs.)

So, I'm glad that we're opening with the real stuff.

John Moe: Well, we'll talk about the book, but I want to—I gotta go for the news hook. I gotta go for the most recent thing.

Tiffany Jenkins: Absolutely. So, I am in recovery from addiction specifically. This year, if all goes according to plan, I'll have 13 years drug and alcohol free.

John Moe: Congratulations.

Tiffany Jenkins: Thank you so much. In the time that I've been in recovery, I've learned to become very self-aware, which is both a blessing and a curse. But in this circumstance specifically, something has been off with me for a little bit.

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And I could feel it in the way my fuse is so much shorter than it usually is. The rage that I feel is disproportionate to the situation that's going on. And for some reason I am being so hard on myself to the point where I have said my loved ones would be better off without me here. And it's not that I want to take my life. What a way to open the show, by the way!

John Moe: Yeah, (*chuckles*) welcome, everybody.

Tiffany Jenkins: (*Laughs.*) It's not that I want to take my life, but the internal pain and confusion and sadness that I feel makes it so that I'm not necessarily interested in participating in life. And I get very existential, and I'm like, "What are we even doing here? Who decided I had to be born, and I have to go through the charade of paying bills and doing all this?" And so, right now I have decided to take a break from my job—which is—essentially, social media is one aspect of it—because I was using it as a distraction. I was comparing myself to other people. I was becoming obsessed with how many likes I was getting, how many shares.

And I wasn't doing it because it brought me joy. I was doing it because I was trying to stay relevant, and it wasn't making me happy. And I can't balance my family life and my work and my mental health, so I'm just focusing on my mental health. Because the money and the fame and all of that doesn't mean anything if I'm not here to enjoy it.

John Moe: Yeah. Yeah. Well, did it get blurry? Has it gotten blurry over Tiffany the Person and Tiffany the Brand? Because the company you work (*chuckling*) for is also named Tiffany Jenkins, and you're— You know, you have to balance that.

Tiffany Jenkins: Well, the tricky thing for me is I started this talking about marriage, motherhood, addiction, and mental health. And my marriage fell apart a couple of years ago after some things happened. And so, I didn't wanna go public with it and get millions of strangers involved, so I kept it to myself. So, that was a huge part of my life that I couldn't talk about anymore.

I personally don't feel comfortable putting my kids on the internet now that they're older and they have like peer teasing and things like that going on. So, all of the things that made me me, that made me—you know—popular at the time, I can't talk about those things anymore. So, I find myself just wondering, you know, "What am I doing?"

John Moe: Yeah. Well, I'm glad you're taking a little step back. I mean, your book *A Clean Mess: A Memoir of Sobriety after a Lifetime of Being Numb* is a bestseller. Congratulations. And it's a new book, which means you're out there promoting it, which means talking to strangers like me—we met a few minutes ago—about some very difficult times in your life. And given the many struggles you've had, some of which you detail in the book, how is that working? Like, going out, promoting it, bearing your soul and then talking about your soul over and over again to strangers?

Tiffany Jenkins: Well, honestly, I haven't at all in weeks. I haven't done anything. They paused all the press for the book.

(*John "wow"s.*)

I haven't been promoting it. I'm supposed to be, but it would be— It would be fake if I did it right now. If I were to get on there and say what I wanted to say, it would be, "Hey

everybody, I'm really struggling, feeling a bit dead inside, but I have a book. You should read it. If you want. No pressure. Love you, bye.” (*Chuckling.*) That's what it would sound like.

John Moe: (*Laughs.*) Yeah. Well, thank you then for doing this interview here. You mentioned these passive thoughts of “maybe I shouldn't be here.” Is that passive suicidal ideation?

Tiffany Jenkins: I believe so. I've never really had that before. I have attempted to end my life back in jail in 2012. But since then, never. I'd been so on the opposite end of the spectrum where—I have OCD—where the idea of me dying or something happening to my kids is debilitating for me. And so, to have these thoughts like, “Wait, maybe these people would be better without me,” it's—I know something's very wrong.

I couldn't ever do it, especially because one of my children has some additional needs, and I know that no one will ever love them the way I love them and take care of them the way I take care of them. So, that love alone is enough to just keep me safe until I can get my brain to the professionals.

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Which I start tomorrow intensive outpatient therapy.

John Moe: An IOP?

(*Tiffany confirms.*)

Okay. Alright. So, (*sighs*) yeah, it's passive SI, if I may use the casual term. (*Chuckles.*) It's so mysterious, because it's not like this burning desire to take action, but it's like “What is this warning sign of? Why is the engine light going off in my car?” kind of thing. And then you've gotta like move backwards and try to identify where it's coming from.

Tiffany Jenkins: Exactly. And that's it. Like, I went to Legoland recently, and it was sponsored. They were paying my family and I to stay there.

John Moe: Nice.

Tiffany Jenkins: And I wasn't even there for three minutes, and I ran from the park in tears. Because I was so overwhelmed and overstimulated and angry. And I sat by this tree, and I was like, “Look, you did it again. You let your anxiety ruin another event for your family. You ruin everything. They'd be better off if you weren't around. They'd have more fun if they had a different mother raising them.” And those thoughts are so fleeting that within an hour later, I'm fine. I'm perfectly fine. I'm like, “Let's eat ice cream. Everything is great.” And these mood swings are just so back and forth. It's unusual for me.

John Moe: Is that—as far as you can tell—coming from the OCD? Is it coming from the anxiety? Is it coming from the recovery from addiction? What is it?

Tiffany Jenkins: That's what I wanna get help trying to figure out. I definitely think a lot of it has to do with OCD, because I have been researching. I've convinced myself I have ALS. I've got millions of photos and videos in my phone of different parts of my body that are twitching. And you know, perceivably there's something there to me when I'm recording, but I imagine if you watched it, you'd be like, "There's nothing here." And I get obsessive about it and try to blame my behavior on this. Like, it coincides. It's so weird. Whenever I start to feel rageful and out of control, I'm also convinced I'm dying of something, and I won't stop until I've joined every forum, I've posed every question, and I'll convince myself by the end of the day that I have it. And I'll grieve the diagnosis that I haven't even seen a doctor to receive.

It's so weird! Our brains, I'm telling you! I don't know what's going on up there, but I'm like, "I need more than just an hour every two weeks." Because I do have a regular therapist that I see as well as a psychiatrist. But it's just not enough. And you know, they have me on—we're trying the medicine shuffle, and I still feel not great mentally. You know what I mean? Like, all the things that it's supposed to be fixing— So, I don't know. So, I'm just looking forward to just handing it over and being like, "Here you go. I'm willing to do whatever it takes to help you help me. Let's do it."

John Moe: It's so interesting. And I think this happens— I end up talking to a lot of creative people in on this show and in the work that I do. I talk to a lot of musicians and writers and comedians. And I hear this so often, where you take data points, and you start to form a narrative around it. Because you do have such an active and strong creative mind that you—you know, you'll hang a narrative on it. So, like if something is twitching, then you just get a couple data points, and it becomes ALS. And it's sort of— You know, or it becomes, "I am a terrible person" or "no one will ever love me," whatever it is. I kind of—I always think of the constellations, how like there's four stars up there, and someone decided that's a bear. You know? (*Laughs.*) When it's just these stars! And I think we can't help it. I think it's part of making sense of the world. And then some people's brains just try to make sense in a different kind of way.

Tiffany Jenkins: Yes. And I am— that's how I know something's off with me. Because I'll put in my symptoms, and it'll say vitamin insufficiency, poor diet, or lack of exercise, or it's ALS. And I'm like, "Well, it's gotta be the last one!"

(*They chuckle.*)

You know, I haven't exercised or eaten well since I was a kid. Like, I don't take care of myself at all, but I'm like, "Oh, it's that one," like automatically.

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Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: I might not need to say this, but I'm going to. We at the show are honored that Tiffany took some time out to talk with us and to you during this difficult time. We're also glad she's taking care of herself by going to an intensive outpatient program. More with Tiffany Jenkins in just a moment.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with Tiffany Jenkins, author of *A Clean Mess: A Memoir of Sobriety After a Lifetime of Being Numb*.

Well, let's talk about the book. Let's talk about *A Clean Mess*. You choose to open the book with a story about your then-husband and drugs. And it's a very strong anecdote. It's a very gripping story. Why did you choose to start with that incident?

Tiffany Jenkins: I think because the way that it kind of catches the reader off guard in the beginning is the way that I was caught off guard. This book had already been, essentially, written and submitted when everything happened. And so, I had to take the manuscript back and make it reflect the truth about my life currently. And so, it was a different opening before. Which the old opening is still in the book. It's just not the new opening. The new opening is like, "Hey, this is where I'm at right now, and we'll get to that later. But you have to know how I got here and why this is so big."

John Moe: Well, it's interesting because—yeah, there's a time jump. You know, 'cause you start with this husband and this situation involving drugs. I don't wanna spoil everything about it, but it gives a sense of things being ominous and things being unstable and things being threatened and things being fragile. Which is, I thought, a really powerful depiction of being in recovery from addiction as well. So, I thought it really resonated quite well.

Tiffany Jenkins: Thank you. I appreciate it. For some reason in both my books, I love time jumping. And I have to constantly ask like, "Is it too much? Am I giving people whiplash?" But I like to keep things exciting. I like to keep people guessing. I like to add surprises in there so that they never know, you know, what to expect or what's coming next, so that they keep reading. Especially in this day and age, trying to keep people's attention is so difficult!

(They laugh and John agrees.)

Because information is being hurled at us so fast.

John Moe: Wave something shiny in front of them. And from there, I guess we get to what was the original opening of the book. We hear stories about your life in a halfway house. For people who haven't read this book or your previous one, can you fill us in on the legal trouble and the mental health trouble, really, that put you in that situation?

Tiffany Jenkins: Absolutely. I was addicted to drugs for around 10 years, towards the end of my addiction during bout of clean time. So, I had gone to rehab in 2009, because I thought I was supposed to go, not because I wanted to go. And I ended up leaving the rehab and getting alcohol immediately that night to celebrate. Because I didn't think that alcohol was my problem. I thought it was just the pills. So, as long as I stayed away from those, I'd be good. In that time, I ended up dating a police officer, thinking that his love would be enough to keep me clean. And at some point in our relationship, I ended up relapsing and hiding my drug addiction from him for around two years. And I was charged with around 20 felonies.

John Moe: 20 felonies.

(Tiffany confirms.)

And that this involved theft, right?

Tiffany Jenkins: Yes. So, it was a lot of theft. Pawn broker dealing in stolen property. And there was three gun charges as well. Grand theft of a firearm, because I sold guns for drugs.

John Moe: Stolen guns?

Tiffany Jenkins: I stole them from my boyfriend. And you know, in my mind there was a million ways I justified it, but there was no justification. I put guns in the hands of drug dealers. And at the time, I didn't think twice. I thought I just need to get enough to not feel like I'm dying, and then I'll be able to come up with a plan to get myself out of this pickle.

But the law got involved before I had a chance. *(Chuckles.)* It's not funny. That's nervous laughter. Sorry.

John Moe: No, well—I mean, I think people who haven't gone through addiction—

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—or, you know, haven't been in the situation you were in—can sometimes have a hard time understanding it. Like, is it—when you were in that situation where you were to the point where you were stealing guns from a cop and selling them to drug dealers, when you were committing all these things, was it “I need to stay high. I need to do whatever I can to stay high, 'cause being high is great”? Or was it part of an escape plan? Like, “By doing this, I can get out of this situation. I can get better.”

Tiffany Jenkins: I had started using just for fun. And to be rebellious. It made me not worry. It made me not feel anxious. It just—I felt nothing. And it was great. And I chased that feeling. And then there was a night that I was lying in bed, and it felt like my bones were in a vice grip. Like, it felt like I was getting eaten by a million ants at once and I had the flu. And I called my best friend.

She said, “Have you done a pill today?” And I said no. And she said, “Do one. That's probably why you don't feel good.” So, I went, and I got a pill, and *(snaps fingers)* instantly all of that physical and mental pain went away. And that was the night that I stopped doing drugs for fun and started doing them because I had to in order to not feel like I was dying. And in my opinion, with that level of desperation comes a whoooole drop in morals and drop in values. And for me, I had gotten myself into this wonderful relationship. I was clean from my drug of choice at the time until I was offered. And the addiction was just as powerful then as it was the day that I stopped doing them.

And so, I said yes knowing that I was gonna have to break up with my boyfriend, going over to his house to break up with him, and him not noticing. And that was when I got to have my cake and eat it too. I got to, you know, have fun and keep up appearances that I had my life together. But the fun turned into physical pain eventually when I didn't have it. And I would tell myself—like, when I was in that physical pain of withdrawal, I couldn't do anything. I couldn't think. I couldn't do laundry, I couldn't communicate, I couldn't show up. And so, I needed to not feel sick in order to think clearly. And I would always tell myself, “I'm just gonna get enough for today's. I'll get clean tomorrow.” And then it never happened. It just never happened.

John Moe: Did your (*sighs*)— did your charisma develop? I ask this— My late brother was addicted to meth.

Tiffany Jenkins: I'm sorry.

John Moe: And when he was using, in order to get what he needed, he became the most charming, eloquent version of himself he could possibly be. It was really phenomenal, but it was all in the service of this goal that he had. Did you go through that?

Tiffany Jenkins: I did. I did. And you have to be a really good manipulator in order to continue in the lifestyle. So, like I would start a lie on Monday, because I knew I would need to use it on Thursday. And every word outta my mouth was a setup for what I needed. And you had to be good. You had to be able to work people like puppets in order to get what you need from them. So, I would— I'd call crying and say, “My power bill's gonna get shut off. I just need \$40.” And then block that person after I got the money and never talk to 'em again, or make up excuses. You know, and I did it to everybody. And eventually all the bridges were burned, and people knew better.

John Moe: Yeah, that's so much work. So many huge life events happened in a really short period of time, as you describe in the book. This is after you get out of prison, and you're in this halfway house. You know, marriage, becoming a parent, divorce, handling an anxiety disorder. And you—as you say, you've been sober for a long time. How did you stay sober after having so severe an addiction, then—you know—hitting all these enormous challenges in front of you? How did you stay sober for that?

Tiffany Jenkins: Not by myself. I can tell you that. It's 100%, without a doubt, my fellow friends in recovery—the people who came before me and knew the way, and held my hand, and showed me the way. It's the people who showed up for me when I needed someone, even when I didn't know I needed someone. I could not have done it alone without the selflessness and the unwavering love of those who understand, you know, addiction and a life after addiction.

John Moe: And those were people you met in recovery?

Tiffany Jenkins: Yes, and they're all still my best friends to this day. We met in halfway houses, you know, 10/11 years ago. And we're all still best friends. We've raised our children together.

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We celebrate all their birthdays together. It's really incredible.

John Moe: Yeah. Well, it's other people who understand you more than the normies do, I suppose.

Tiffany Jenkins: Yeah. And they want to help. They almost force it on you. They're like, "Get in the car. We're going to a meeting." And it's because they care. And so, for me, it's not easy to ask for help, and it's definitely not easy to accept help. So, admitting defeat in those moments is something I've gotten much more comfortable with thanks to the loving generosity of those who've shown up for me.

John Moe: You talked about having OCD, you talked about having anxiety. And I know you've dealt with depression as well. Did all those predate the substance use disorder? And was the substance use disorder a means of self-medicating for those conditions that existed before?

Tiffany Jenkins: I believe that I've always had anxiety. I definitely believe that there's been a level of depression. I did not even know I had OCD until I was filming the *Anxiety Club* documentary.

(John "wow"s.)

And through the course of that treatment that I received during the film, I was diagnosed with OCD. And that's when I found out about it, and that's when everything clicked. And looking back, I could definitely see some OCD tendencies, but I wasn't diagnosed until—I wanna say it was two years ago now, maybe, during the *Anxiety Club*.

John Moe: Wow. How far back does anxiety go? What's the earliest, behavior or thought that you would ascribe to it?

Tiffany Jenkins: I would cry more nights than not, because I was so terrified that my parents were going to die while we slept. And so, I would obsess about it and had visions about it. And when they would leave the house, I would get real upset. 'Cause I'm like, "What if you die in a car accident, and I never see you again?" And you know, other kids would be playing on the playground. I wouldn't go, because I didn't wanna fall and hurt myself and have my mom have to pay for an ambulance. Because I knew that, you know, it was expensive. And just worrying about things that kids my age should not have been worrying about.

John Moe: Wow. How old were you then?

Tiffany Jenkins: I—(sighs) god, it was in the apartment that we lived in, so I had to be around six or seven when I would have those night terrors and the ruminating thoughts about my parents dying. And then they both died anyway, so. (Laughs.) I was like, "That's pretty rude. I knew it! I called it!" (Laughs.)

John Moe: When did your parents die? Because your dad was later than your mom, right?

Tiffany Jenkins: Yes. My mom died; she was 46 years old, and she lived five months from her diagnosis to her death. It was so crazy. She died of lung cancer. And my father died when my son was around five months old, so that would've been 2014.

John Moe: Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry.

Tiffany Jenkins: Thank you. My stepdad passed away two years ago, also from cancer. So, I live at the doctor's, basically. I'm like, "Keep scannin'! 'Cause it's coming for me." (*Laughs.*)

John Moe: (*Laughs.*) Well, I was gonna say, "And then, here's Tiffany worrying because she's got a muscle twitch that it's ALS." I mean, there's irrational fears, and then I guess there's sort of an informed irrational fear.

Tiffany Jenkins: Thank you. That's validating. Yes. I don't think my therapist would agree, but definitely I think you're right, though. I think you're right. I mean, when you lose people, it makes it hard to wanna get close to others. Because you know that pain of experiencing love or letting someone in and then having them not be there anymore. And so, for me, I think life is so fleeting, and I know how fleeting it is. But instead of that just being a passing thought, it's the very first thought in my filing cabinet. And it's just open all day every day. So, even when I try to get to the other files, that one's just staring in my face like, (*sinisterly*) "You could die any second."

John Moe: Mm. Was the substance use your way of dealing with the anxiety? Like, did it get to the point where like that's the thing that finally quieted those voices down?

Tiffany Jenkins: 100%. Yep. Yeah. That first sip of alcohol that I took, it was my senior year, and I was captain of the cheerleading squad. I had great grades. Everything was amazing. My stepfather was a police officer. And I had this sip of alcohol, and it made me feel nothing for the first time. And I was like, "Holy cow, is this what normal people feel like?"

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And I chased that feeling so much and so quickly that three months later I completely dropped out of high school.

John Moe: Was it a thing where that first sip wasn't enough? You just needed to have more and more until you obliterated yourself?

Tiffany Jenkins: Well, it was disgusting, and it was definitely enough that night. I was like, "That's terrible!" But then the feeling kicked in, and I forgot all about the taste. And so, the next day I was like, "Man, school's really hard, cheerleading's hard. My parents are jerks. I just wanna feel that feeling that I felt yesterday again." And so, I skipped school and hung out with those same kids, and drank again, and decided very quickly that not feeling anything was so much better than feeling everything.

John Moe: Mm. What happened after you dropped out of high school? What did you do?

Tiffany Jenkins: I just couch hopped, basically. I was on my own. I stayed with friends, random people. I wasn't doing hardcore drugs at this point. I was just smoking, and you know, partying and having fun. And at that age, I guess it was normal for all of us to just hang out at random apartments and stuff. And my parents were very confused. They were very disappointed. At one point I did go to live with my dad, who was also an alcoholic at the time and did drugs at the time. He's actually the reason that I'm clean today.

John Moe: Why is that?

Tiffany Jenkins: Well, he came to visit me in jail and informed me that he himself had gotten sober, because he'd been diagnosed with cancer also. And I was like, "What does this mean?"

And he's like, "It means you need to get out of this jail and get your life together, so we can do this recovery thing together as a family." And you know, he said, "I love you no matter what. I'll always love you. I'm your father. There's nothing you could ever do to make me change the way I feel about you."

And just having him have faith in me when I didn't have any in myself and love me when I didn't love myself gave me the motivation to begin writing letters to the judges and begging to be sent to rehab. And ultimately, I was. And I wanted it this time, unlike the first time. And so, I dove in headfirst. And me and my dad got our one-year medallions together, and it's one of the most special memories that I have. It's on video. I watch it all the time. And yeah. So, if it—I mean. He paid for my first few weeks at the halfway house. He took me to doctors' appointments. He was everything,

John Moe: And he had an ultimatum too. Like, wasn't it he told, "If you don't stop drinking, you're gonna die a lot sooner."

Tiffany Jenkins: Yeah, absolutely. That was the reason that he decided to do it. And it inspired me. It really did. And it was very cool, because I got to know my father better—in that short amount of time that we had together before he passed—better than I'd known him my whole life. 'Cause it was all superficial up until that point.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Tiffany is featured in this new documentary, *Anxiety Club*, which spotlights several comedians who deal with anxiety. This is from the trailer where Tiffany is engaging in some exposure therapy.

Clip:

Music: Bright, playful backing music.

Tiffany Jenkins (*Anxiety Club*): I am scared of getting murdered. I have a horrendous fear of the ocean. I think about my kids breaking their neck and getting paralyzed a lot.

Speaker: Write the statement “maybe my kids will die.”

(Someone laughs.)

Tiffany Jenkins: That's excessive!

Speaker: Just to write that line.

Promo:

Music: Bright, exciting synth.

John-Luke Roberts: Hello, I'm John-Luke Roberts. And I would love for you to give my podcast, *Sound Heap with John-Luke Roberts*, a try. It's basically a parody of every type of podcast imaginable made up with loads of brilliant comedians. It was named the Best Scripted Sketch Show by the BBC Audio Drama Awards. It was a finalist for Best Comedy Podcast at the New York Radio Festival, and it has just been nominated for Best Comedy at the British Podcast Awards.

Surely, if there are three things you can trust, they're the BBC, New York, and Britain. So, give *Sound Heap with John-Luke Roberts* a go today. Available from Maximum Fun and all the best podcast apps.

(Music ends.)

Promo:

Music: Cheerful, chiming music.

Alexis B. Preston: Hi, I'm Alexis.

Ella McLeod: And I'm Ella.

Alexis: And we're the hosts of *Comfort Creatures*.

Ella: We could spend the next 28 seconds telling you why you should listen. But instead, here's what our listeners have said about our show. Because really, they do know best.

“The show is filled with stories and poems and science and friendship and laughter and tears, sometimes. But tears that are from your heart being so filled up with love.”

Alexis: “A cozy show about enthusiasm for animals of all kinds, real and unreal. If you greet the dog before the person walking them, or wander around the party looking for the host’s cat, this podcast is for you.”

Ella: So, come for the comfort, and stay for Alexis's wild story about waking up to her cat giving birth on top of her. So, if that sounds like your cup of tea—

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.

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John Moe: Back again with Tiffany Jenkins.

I'm really interested in the idea of families and mental health and what we inherit from our parents and what we pass on to our kids. Positive, negative, neutral, or strange. What has carried over from your dad into your role as a mom?

Tiffany Jenkins: I think— So, the thing specifically from my father I would say is just the creativity and the humor. My father was an artist, and he was silly, and he was always doing things that made my mom very upset—like spray painting the carpets and making paper mâché volcanoes on the walls and like really ridiculous stuff when he— *(Chuckles.)* I'm assuming he was on drugs, but *(laughs)* I think that I'm super goofy with my kids, and that reminds me of him. We're very artistic. That reminds me of him when I paint. But mostly, as far as being a mother, I attribute so much of who I am to my mom, actually.

John Moe: Oh, really? In what way?

Tiffany Jenkins: She was just— You know what? She was frigging right about everything. I was wrong about everything. And it wasn't until I became a mother that I realized it. And I'll

be talking to my kids, and I'll say something like—this is gonna sound terrible. (*Mean and gruff.*) “I'll give you something to cry about!” Like, I don't really talk to them like that, but like I'll say things that my mother used to say. Like “because I said so.” And it used to drive me crazy, and I'll find myself saying it and channeling her. But she was so wise, and she was just—she was a goddess. She was beautiful. She was funny. She was outgoing. She was so loving and so nurturing, and she made every holiday, every event, feel like such a huge celebration.

She really enjoyed celebrating people. And I do that with my kids now, and I go all out. Like, the last day of camp, I just got them a cake and a balloon and goggles and snorkels. And I'm like, “Welcome to your last week of summer. Let's eat snacks.”

John Moe: Nice.

Tiffany Jenkins: And I just— It reminded me of my mom when I did it.

John Moe: And what's different from how you were raised—from your mom and dad, what have you changed as you've become a mom yourself?

Tiffany Jenkins: Oooh. I like this question. I think for me, I try to explain things to my children a lot more. I remember being very frustrated because my mom would say, “Because I said so,” or “Just do it”, or “Don't argue.” And I remember thinking that made me feel like I was just a slave to her, and I didn't understand the reasonings behind what I was doing. And she would make jokes like, “Can you go down and get me a pack of cigarettes?”

And I'm like, (*nasally*) “No, Mom, come on.”

And she's like, “Why do you think I had you?” Like, joking? But I never want my kids to feel like I'm using them. And anytime I reprimand my kids, I explain to them why. And here's the thing: it's not good. There's too much explaining now. Like, they don't— They need explanations for everything, and I've gotten myself in a real pickle, so I'm not sure that was a good move.

(*They laugh.*)

John Moe: Yeah, I told my kids when they were younger—they're mostly older now—that when they are bored and want me to do something with them, I say, “This is why we had so many of you is that you should be (*laughing*) occupying each other instead of instead of me.”

There's a lot of information about recovery from addiction out there in the world. There's a lot of dialogue. It's—you know, I think you and I probably grew up in a time when it was a lot more hush-hush, and there's a lot more out there in the world. What isn't being said enough? Like, what message aren't—especially people who are using and want to be recovering or people in recovery, what are they not hearing enough of, do you think?

Tiffany Jenkins: I think it's shifted. At first, my answer would've been positive, happy endings. I think that there wasn't enough of that on the internet, because the programs are so

anonymous that a lot of times people wouldn't see examples of people overcoming. They would just hear the bad news stories and things like that. So, I think there's been a shift in that people are becoming more aware. But for me, I think just realizing that it could happen to anybody—literally anybody. Doctor, lawyer, president, mom, daughter, it doesn't matter. Addiction is powerful and you don't know you have it in you until you feed it. And so, I think for me, knowing that there's no such thing as a lost cause.

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Seeing countless, countless, countless people overcome addiction and get their kids back and get their families back and buy houses and start companies, it's happening every day. So, having a little bit more love and empathy towards addicts, as opposed to hatred and judgment, goes a very long way. Not that I don't understand the anger, 'cause I totally do. The side effects of our situation is like stealing and breaking your heart and ruining your trust. Like, I understand the anger. But loving in those moments really does make such a huge difference.

John Moe: Mm. You're a comedian, and you're very, very funny. You've dealt with very difficult things also, for a long time. How have you learned to use humor and comedy to heal instead of to deflect and avoid?

Tiffany Jenkins: *(Beat.)* Is that not what we're supposed to use it for?

(They laugh.)

I think I've been doing it wrong! I think the one good thing about having this—whatever this is—is that people tend to listen more if you're making them laugh. So, instead of just lecturing them and talking at them and spitting facts about why drugs are bad, I'm able to use humor and bring awareness and light to those really dark places that people don't feel comfortable talking about. It somehow makes it more digestible. And the fact that I am able to do that is very cool, and it's an honor.

John Moe: And again—I mean, I don't feel too bad looking at your Facebook, because it's public. And it's, you know, been the foundation for a very successful career in a lot of ways.

(Tiffany agrees.)

You are in a relationship now that seems to be going very, very well. How is that going for you in terms of trusting it? In terms of relaxing into it? In terms of just not responding with anxiety to a relationship?

Tiffany Jenkins: Oh, I—listen. I messed up. Thankfully, I have met an angel who understands mental health, who experiences their own mental illnesses, who has had extensive therapy themselves and knows how to love somebody like me. And the trust just came, because there hasn't been a single second in this relationship where I've questioned how he feels about me or what my place is. Like, the man is so great at expressing his love that trust just comes naturally. He's incredible. And I have tried my best to push him away,

especially lately. Because I'm like, "He's too good. He's too nice. I'm really trying to be a jerk, and he's just not going anywhere. What's going on?" (*Chuckles.*) And—

John Moe: "What's his move?! What's he planning here?!" Yeah.

Tiffany Jenkins: Yeah. (*Jokingly.*) So, he's gotta be a serial killer if he can put up with this; something's going on.

But no, he's just—he's a great dude. And he's— It's wild, because I think for a really long time I just kind of was going through the motions of life thinking "This is it; this is as good as it gets." And it worked while it worked. But now that I've had time to heal and become independent and learn that a life after marriage is a thing and that I have a choice whether or not I settle, I felt so empowered. And he makes it easy. He just makes it so easy. He's a gift. He's a real gift.

John Moe: You don't have to answer this one if you don't want, but what are you hoping to get out of your intensive outpatient program?

Tiffany Jenkins: Ah, tools. I'm hoping to get toooooooools to use, because there's nothing worse for me than feeling like I'm completely out of control of my emotions. And that's how it's been feeling lately. It feels like they are running me. And so, like I'm having fits of crying for no reason, and I'm having trouble getting outta bed. And I am all of these things. I really just want someone to be able to. Help me get to the root of it, figure out where this is coming from, what's causing it, and how I can work towards healing every day—whether it be like implementing worry scripts into— That's what I did during that documentary. Do you know about the documentary?

John Moe: Oh, I was gonna ask about it.

Tiffany Jenkins: Okay, sorry. I just keep talking about it, and I don't wanna sound like a broken record, but the documentary changed my life, being a part of it.

(*John affirms.*)

And I did a bunch of worry scripts and things like that, and those really helped me at the time with my OCD surrounding my children.

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Because I was pretty much destroying their childhood. And now it's something different. I'm not worried about them hurting themselves anymore. I'm worried about my purpose on this earth and who I am. And when I only have my kids half the time, who am I the other half of the time? Who am I if I'm not making videos on the internet, if I'm not paying for everything and keeping everything afloat. But I just— I gotta find my sense of self, and I want to work on my self-esteem also, so that I can view myself in a better light and start to love myself again.

John Moe: What's a worry script?

Tiffany Jenkins: Uh, the most traumatizing thing anyone's ever made me do, ever in the history of things that I've done.

John Moe: (*Laughs.*) Okay!

Tiffany Jenkins: So, the worry scripts were mostly about my kids. I—I... there's no way to say it without sounding cuckoo for Coco Puffs. So, I'm just gonna say it. Like, my kids weren't allowed to eat hot dogs. They weren't allowed to eat spaghetti. They weren't allowed to eat grapes unless I cut 'em into quarters. Like, I had to watch them. I had a de-choker in every drawer in the house. I had fire ladders by every window. I wouldn't leave them alone in a room without me, because I felt like they were too young to be unsupervised. (*Chuckles.*)

And the worry script specifically is a script of a movie starring me and my kids where one of them dies. In detail. So, the therapist was like, “What kind of shampoo do you use? What do you listen to when you're in the shower? Do you have a towel in the shower with you or out of—?” And I gave her all the details, and she wrote this script.

Like, I went upstairs to wash my hair with my Herbal Essence, and I heard footsteps running up the stairs. And it ends with me running out of the shower and holding my daughter as she dies in my arms. And I had to read it over and over and over again until I stopped crying and became desensitized to it. And then I would take a break, and then I would go back to it later and read it again and again and again until I was desensitized to it. And I had to do it five times a day. And it took two days for me to—

John Moe: And then you felt better?

Tiffany Jenkins: Yeah. During the filming, they had me get rid of the de-choker. Which really pissed me off, 'cause I'm like, “You guys do know she's gonna choke the minute this goes in the garbage can? And it's gonna be your fault!”

And I was a little crazy, but it worked. And I have— So, I actually reached back out to that therapist that I was in during the filming, and I'm like, “I need help, but with something else.” And so, that's what we're getting ready to start—with somebody else, with a different provider now. Because since the film and everything, me and her have gotten really close, and I wanted to have a new provider who I could be mean to.

(*They laugh.*)

Because I do! I'm gonna be pouty. I turn into like a pouty teenager when I have to do stuff I don't wanna do, and I don't know what's up with that. But I wouldn't wanna do that to Natalie. So. (*Laughs.*)

John Moe: Okay. Yeah, that's kind of you. Tell me about the movie. Tell me about *Anxiety Club*. What is it?

Tiffany Jenkins: Oh, it's so cool. It's a movie about comedians with anxiety. And the majority of people in the film are standup comedians, so they go out on stage cold and try to win over the audience. I do comedy where, yes, I'm doing theaters, but the people coming to the theaters already know who I am, and they already like me. So, I don't have to try to win them over, which is way less scary than what the other comedians do. But they wanted somebody in the film to go through intensive exposure therapy on film to document the process and let other people see what it's like. And I volunteered as tribute.

(They chuckle.)

And so, basically the film goes into detail about the different comedians' lives, the different situations that occur, the different issues that they have with their anxiety. And I'm weaved in there just crying and taking my kids to jump parks and *(laughs)* doing these exposures. It was the most traumatizing thing I've ever done. There were so many crazy exposures that I had to do that I did not— It sounds like a joke. Like, if people were just— Like, if I told somebody, “Yeah, I had to lick my hand, and my husband chewed crackers and licked his hand, and we had to high five, and I got sick in a garbage bag.”

(Beat.) What?

Like, it sounds so preposterous that a doctor would make me do that. You know what I mean? *(Chuckles.)*

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But it's for science! And it works!

John Moe: Right. *(Laughs.)* There's so many mental health treatments that just sound completely bananas.

(Tiffany agrees.)

And then you do them, and— Like, EMDR.

Tiffany Jenkins: I was just gonna say, the light!

John Moe: Just seems ridiculous! But then it's like, “Oh my god. I'm not traumatized anymore.”

Tiffany Jenkins: I was just gonna say that. Absolutely.

John Moe: Well, Tiffany Jenkins, congratulations on the book *A Clean Mess: A Memoir of Sobriety After a Lifetime of Being Numb*. And *Anxiety Club* is the film that put our dear friend Tiffany through hell.

(Tiffany confirms with a laugh.)

And best of luck and congratulations on your ongoing journey, and I hope it goes great.

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

Tiffany Jenkins: Thank you so much. This was a really great interview. I appreciate you having me, and your voice is so soothing!

John Moe: (*Chortles.*) Thank you!

Tiffany Jenkins: Thank you!

John Moe: I really liked this episode, and I'm so honored by Tiffany and by every guest who shares the journey that they're on, bumps and all. Triumphs and setbacks. I mean, look, if someone tries to tell you that they can for sure solve any and all mental health issues that you have completely and forever, they're probably trying to sell you something. Or they want you to move to their compound. The reality is that it's a lot of work. It's a lot of maintenance. And sometimes, through no fault of your own and maybe without explanation or hints, you lose a few steps. You get knocked back a bit. Here at our show, we're trying to help you move forward again as best you can. Trying to help you minimize those setbacks and get you back on track.

I wish I could say that it will all be easy at some point. Maybe it will. But we don't know. At least we have each other.

And also—new topic—your financial support helps us carry that mission out to help people along on their journey. If our show has helped you, maybe you can kick us a few bucks, so we can help you some more and help other people. We actually need donations to keep making shows. It's easy to do. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join. You can join at the \$5 a month level, \$10 a month, whatever makes sense for you and your budget. And if you've already donated, if you're already a member of the show, thank you so much.

This fall, I'll be teaching some more writing classes, including podcast writing and memoir writing in Minneapolis. I'm doing a four-week memoir class. It's gonna be so fun and supportive and helpful. Just go to LoftLiterary.org for that and search John Moe. Also, on September 21st, my band Math Emergency is playing our farewell show. Our guitarist has moved to Nebraska. We're playing at the Amsterdam in downtown St. Paul. If you're in the Twin Cities, come check it out. Just google Amsterdam Bar and Hall Math Emergency. You'll find it. And on September 30th, there's a reunion of my comedy variety show, *Wits*, at the Fitzgerald Theater in St. Paul. Google *Wits* and Fitzgerald Theater. You'll find it.

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Hi, credits listeners. My kids think I like the band Friendship so much—and I love this band; fantastic band, Friendship. They think I like it because the singer sounds like me when I sing. But I don't think he does. I think he sounds like H. John Benjamin on *Bob's Burgers*.

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

Music: “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller.

I'm always falling off of cliffs, now

Building wings on the way down

I am figuring things out

Building wings, building wings, building wings

No one knows the reason

Maybe there's no reason

I just keep believing

No one knows the answer

[00:55:00]

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!