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John Moe: I'll be honest; we spend a lot of time on this program talking about what's going on inside your skull—where the big, wrinkly, wet mass we call your brain lives. We talk about what's happening in there, how to affect it, how to make the big, wrinkly, wet mass do what you want it to do. Or at least—at very goddamn least—not do what you desperately wish it wouldn't do. Sometimes we talk about what meds you might swallow that get swished around inside you and in your system and then connect with your brain. Sometimes we talk about treatments where something connects to your skull and taps it or something, so that something desirable happens to your brain. And sometimes we even stretch out to talk about therapists, who sit nearby you and your skull and your big, wrinkly, wet mass of a brain.

But mostly, the reach of our conversation is pretty tight in its perimeter. The range of proximity is very short. Today, we're gonna lift up our head and our eyes, and we're going to look around the room and all around the home: the place we live in. We'll think about what the design of your living space does to your mental wellbeing and—yeah—how that affects the big, wrinkly, wet mass.

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

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: A little later in the show, some reflection for me on why I'm here making this program. That sounds broad. Maybe it sounds like a lead-in to fundraising, but don't worry. It's not. The MaxFunDrive isn't until next spring. But first, Dr. Beverly Walpole is a clinical psychologist in Ontario, Canada. She's also the founder of Haven Wellness By Design, a consulting service based around the psychology of home design. We're gonna talk to Bev—Dr. Walpole is fine being called just Bev—about home design, how it affects your mental wellbeing, and what you can do to make what's outside your skull better for what's happening inside your skull!

I don't think I've ever used the word skull this many times in an episode.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Beth, welcome to the show.

Beverly Walpole: Thank you, John! Such a pleasure to be here.

John Moe: How does one apply behavioral psychology to room design and arrangement? Because at first glance, those would seem to be wildly different things.

Beverly Walpole: Yeah? Do they feel like wildly different things? Tell me why.

John Moe: (*Laughs.*) Ooh! Now—now, see, I talked to a psychologist, and the first thing she says is, “Tell me why you asked that.”

Well, it seems like one is just how something looks, and one is how something feels. But I bet you're gonna tell me there's a connection between those two things.

Beverly Walpole: Mm-hm! And some of us will use the term neuro-aesthetics, which is essentially the science of how beauty and order heal the brain—how it feels in our brain when we see not only beautiful things, but things that have some sort of order and organization to them. It's just a comforting feeling.

John Moe: Okay. So, what are some components that go into that? Like, what—in the average home, in the average apartment or living room or bedroom—do you find to be the most key components in creating a good aesthetic that has one feeling good psychologically as well?

Beverly Walpole: Mm-hm. Well, that's a great question. I mean, I think it depends on what are the values/the goals of the person/the individual/the family—whoever's living in the space. And where are the pain points? What's not working so well? So, I like to use the analogy that your home is essentially a brain in physical form. And when your environment is feeling cluttered or overstimulating or chaotic or there's just—it's just not feeling good; there's broken things or old furniture that just isn't, you know, sparking joy anymore—then your nervous system truly interprets that and sometimes almost sends your whole being into that fight or flight mode. Right? So, it puts us on high alert, makes us feel like there's threat in our nervous system.

Our nervous system doesn't really have a great way of deciphering what's actual threat and what's perceived threat. And so, that's why people might even feel exhausted or overwhelmed when they haven't even left the house. All they've done is—you know—wake up, and go downstairs, and look at the dishes from last night. And they're already feeling kind of overwhelmed.

And so, on the flip side, even small changes—like a really beautifully lit corner; I mean, for me, I have my really comfortable space in the living room where I just have cozy things around me.

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And I have a salt lamp, and I have a lamb skin, and I have a comfortable couch, and I have my books, and there's bright light coming in, and there's plants. (*Chuckles.*) And I think that, for me? It just lowers cortisol. It sends that message to my amygdala like, “There is no threat. Everything is calm,” and it leaves more space for that joy and that calm that I'm seeking. So, yeah! Back to what I was saying at the beginning, it's this concept of neuro-aesthetics and the blending of the beauty with that nervous system regulation.

John Moe: So, in your home, is your whole house like that? Is your whole living space designed for a nice, neuro-aesthetic escape? Or is it just that one corner?

Beverly Walpole: Oh my gosh, wouldn't that be so nice?

(John chuckles.)

Uh, no. So, the answer is I have two seven-year-olds. And so, no. In fact, no, I would say most of my house is a little bit more chaotic. But I have designated a few spaces. And one of the things, when you live in a smaller area—so, if you live in an urban, dense area—I used to live in Toronto; before that, Vancouver. We didn't have a whole lot of space. And so, where we've decided will be kind of like the neuro-aesthetic space is that common area, like the main floor.

And so, we've designated other spaces to be where kids can have toys and just abundance and chaos—because that is important for their play, but it didn't really make sense to have that commandeer every space.

John Moe: You talk about how a chaotic, overstimulating environment, you know, might be really triggering for some people, might trigger a fight or flight response.

(She confirms.)

It varies, I would think, from person to person. There must be people who love a living space loaded to the gills with tchotchkes and kitschy items, and other people who would prefer just like almost as if they had barely moved in—just like almost nothing in the room. How can you tell what kind of person you are in order to figure out what kind of arrangement that you can make?

Beverly Walpole: Oh my gosh. I love this question! I actually have just created a little quiz. I don't know if you grew up in the era—for me, it was like, *YM Magazine*, like “what kind of personality are you?” And so, I have this question a lot. And I think people wanna know, “How do I know if I'm more maximalist, if I'm more minimalist, if I'm essentialist? Maybe I'm something I don't know.”

And so, I look at lots of different components, like are you a highly sensitive person? Are there neuro diversities that you're working with? Would you say you're more introverted, more extroverted? Do you like visually stimulating spaces? Do you like more minimalism? And we put all of that information into a little quiz, a little assessment. And so, people are welcome to get in touch with me if they wanna walk through that quiz. But essentially, it does come down to: do you feel good when you are around a lot of stimulating things? Versus do you feel better when your brain doesn't have a lot that it needs to focus on, pay attention to, and try to kind of interpret?

Because my brain, for instance—being a slightly more neurodiverse brain—if I have too much background information that I'm trying to filter through, it becomes work. It's cumbersome; it's hard for me. And so, when I want to rejuvenate, when I want to relax and restore, the last thing I wanna do is look at a million things. Whereas other people might love to look around and see meaningful items, lots of pictures, books from top to floor, beautiful wallpaper with lots of imagery. Like, that might be really calming for them. For my kind of a brain? No.

John Moe: Well, I would think too— You talk about some neurodivergence. I would think somebody, like with an ADHD kinda situation—yes, it would help them to have fewer things in there, but because they have an ADHD mind, they're more likely to end up with more things in there. And find it harder to declutter it, harder to sift that out.

Do you have any advice for people in that kind of paradoxical situation?

Beverly Walpole: Oh. I think that was an amazing point that you just made, John. I think that is a big, big, big piece of what people struggle with—especially people who struggle with issues that affect their executive functioning skills. So, organization, task initiation, seeing things through, seeing the bigger picture, tasks that involve good time sensitivity.

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A lot of times with ADHD brains, we have that time blindness. So, we think we have an hour; we actually have five minutes. But we're not really good at deciphering how long that time is. And so, you're right. It's harder for them to actually sift through the information visually. And it's harder for them to maintain that regulation and organization in their space. They might accumulate more things, have trouble organizing them, sending the different things to their homes.

And so, when I work with people who want to do some work in their homes to try to work on that wellness, one of the biggest things that I work with them on is letting go and kind of like reducing the number of things that have to be thought about. Because that does take quite a lot of bandwidth. And the interesting thing is a lot of people have trouble letting go of their items, of their objects. There's a lot of nostalgia, sentimentality, connection, and almost like grasping to things and objects. So, I really work with people. I have sort of a methodology that I take them through to help them shift their belief system about what these things bring to their lives to really help them organize.

Like, is this a thing that I must have, that truly sparks joy, that I would absolutely miss and long for if I didn't have anymore? Or is this a thing I'm hanging onto because I'm scared? There's a fear around that. You know, it's a fear that I might need it one day, or my mother—who's now passed—would, you know, roll over in her grave if she knew that I had given this away. It's those kinds of things that keep people holding on when truly it's actually not serving them anymore.

John Moe: So, that's interesting. So, that's where it stops becoming a matter of design, a matter of the pure aesthetic, and gets into “what have you attached to this object?” You know, then you get into all sorts of childhood issues.

(She confirms.)

Then you get into all sorts of—you know, just the symbolic logic. The Joseph Campbell of it all. It becomes much more of a therapy exercise, doesn't it?

Beverly Walpole: Exactly! Which is where I started developing some of these courses in my education around helping people design their homes, which really starts with laying the foundation. And it—like, you have to peel the onion way back, and you have to start from a place of like, “What are your values? Like, what is even important to you? Why do you wanna make this change? What would be different in your life?” And then figuring out, “Okay, if I wanna get over here, and I wanna like have this new renovation to my living room, and I want some new sofas, I have to get rid of all these things first to make room for that. But that piece is really hard for people. So, I actually walk them through, essentially, steps in how to let go and then become an organized person.

So, I really use lots of evidence-based, psychology tools. So, James Clear is one of the authors that I refer to, and he wrote *Atomic Habits*. And it's essentially looking at not just purging one time and making space, but becoming the version of yourself that you want to be that's gonna allow you to sustain some of those healthy lifestyle behaviors and organizing in the long term.

John Moe: Is it largely—like, if we could purge things from our life and, you know—and I mean that, “the things”, both in terms of some old set of China and our relationship with our parents where we never felt valuable enough for them. (*Chuckles.*) Like, if we could clear all this out, is that the main ticket to having a more calming, psychologically more nurturing living space?

Beverly Walpole: What a beautiful question. I mean, my instinct wants to say yes! That that would help a lot. That that would be a huge step forward in the path towards just finding that calm. And really, I like to say to people that your home should feel like a sanctuary. It shouldn't feel like another source of stress. And healing really would be so much easier if the space that you lived in felt safe. So, I guess if safety, for you or for whomever, means like fewer things to have to think about and organize and find space for? Then yes. For me, truly, fewer things has been like a big part of that healing.

John Moe: Yeah. Does it work the other way? Like, we've talked about if you can work through your issues related to the credenza, it's easier to get rid of the credenza. Does it work the other way? That if you get rid of the credenza, that will help the issues that you have with your memories associated with it?

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Beverly Walpole: What do you think? I think that's a good question! What do you think?

John Moe: I think it would be hard to get rid of the credenza if you still have a lot of issues attached to it. But I could see it being kind of liberating if it's no longer in your house. I mean, I say this as somebody who—I grew up in the Seattle area, lived there most of my life. And then, you know, after I was well into my 30s, we up and moved to Minnesota, and we got rid of a bunch of things that I had been carrying around since childhood. Because it was easy to just tote them from my parents' house to my own.

(*Beverly “wow”s.*)

And I felt a lot of liberation, because—out of necessity—I had to not bring so many things with me. It was a Band-Aid yanked off kind of thing. But you know, that was by circumstances. I could have talked myself into keeping those things easily.

Beverly Walpole: Yep. Yep. I guess— I love that. I think that's a great answer. And I would say I've yet to find a person who's let go of something and then truly regretted it, unless the circumstance was such that it was taken from them. Like in a fire, or there was a situation where they had no agency in that decision.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We will talk more with Dr. Bev Walpole after the break.

This issue of stuff in your house and the weight of it is really interesting to me. Because what among the items in your living space—think about this today. What is giving you present day value, and what is weight that you're carrying around because you feel like you should? What is the figurative or literal weight of keeping that thing around? Is your back sore from carrying it, or does it provide a healthy anchor to something meaningful and good that you need today and tomorrow?

Also, a little later in the show: an update on what I talk about when I talk about mental health.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with Dr. Beverly Walpole.

You know, when I think of home design, I think of magazines that seem to be made for people who are able to afford to pay a ton of money for simplicity. It almost seems like a privilege thing to have so little clutter.

(She agrees.)

Is there a price point that's hidden for simple, elegant design?

Beverly Walpole: Oh. Is there a price point that's hidden for simple, elegant design? Um. Share more. Share more. Like, what do you mean?

John Moe: When I see, you know, those design magazines or just like things about these beautiful, elegant homes where there's almost nothing there except like one 18th century farming implement on a table or something. *(Chuckles.)* You know. It seems like these are all wealthy people who can afford to have such simplicity. And maybe—you know, maybe they have all their other stuff stockpiled in some well-appointed storage facility somewhere. Like, is it a—you know, can only rich people afford to live with more simplicity?

Beverly Walpole: I think no. I think what you're saying around... sometimes you see these visions that are just like, “Come on. Like, nobody even really lives there. That just looks like

a staged space.” And it's not lived in, and it doesn't look comforting! And it doesn't look healing, and you don't actually want to spend time there. In fact, you'd probably be worried to sit on the couch for fear of leaving any kind of a mark.

I remember my next-door neighbors growing up; we weren't allowed to go into their living room, 'cause the carpet was white. And the mom really liked to have like the vacuum lines to show it had just been vacuumed.

(John “wow”s.)

So, we weren't allowed to be in there. And I don't want my family to feel that way. I think when you have a small space—like, I don't have a lot of room. That's pretty much the entire main floor of my house. I would say it's not coming from a place of privilege or wealth so much as like necessity. Like, prioritizing the mental health and the wellness piece is absolutely at the highest rank. Like, that is what I need to do to feel okay. And so, we have fewer things because of that. But it doesn't mean that it should not feel lived in. And I think it really does come more down to like: how do we then share the space, and how do I teach my children to be stewards of this space? To take care, to contribute, to have a purpose.

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Because I want them to feel equally responsible for maintaining, you know, this beautiful space. It's not Mama's job! No. No, it's not just my job.

John Moe: Well, so I wanna talk about what you do with people that you work with. But short of hiring a designer who is also a therapist, (*chuckles*) what can our listeners do in their own homes? Like, where do they begin the process of making a good, neuro-aesthetic living space? A place where the design, the layout, what's in there is going to benefit their mental health?

Beverly Walpole: Right. If people wanted to just simply start, I would say start with one space in your home. And it could be either a space that you already love and just want to amplify, or it could be a space that's driving you absolutely insane-o. And you would just clear. Like, clear one space. Think about how that feels. How else can you kind of pay homage to that space? Can you make it a sanctuary in some way? Maybe put a diffuser there, some nice textures there. I can put a plant there as the light's shining in. Are there things that you can do to amplify that neuro-aesthetic component of that one space? And just see that one space. If you do that, maybe there will be sort of seeds planted for building on that momentum.

John Moe: How about the overall layout of a room? Like, does it make a difference psychologically if, when you walk in, you walk straight up to the back of a sofa? Or does it matter if the chairs are by the windows? Like, does it get that granular about the psychological effects of arranging a home or a living space?

Beverly Walpole: I think it can. Not everybody wants to go that granular. A lot of our Haven projects do provide what's called like a wellness style guide where we would actually talk

about layout and actually get into things like fengshui, where kind of the way the energy moves through a space can be impactful. For instance, like if you are in an open concept space right now—like, even just looking at my space, and there's a sofa right there; if that sofa were turned and the back was to me, then it would really cut off the space.

And I think it's important to just be really intentional. Like, what is that space for? Do you want to create a division? Or do you want the feeling to be openness, connection, conversation? So, I like to have people really think about “what is the purpose of this space?” and what can you do in terms of layout and alignment and furniture placement that's really gonna support that?

John Moe: It seems like you're saying that it's not as important to transform your entire home. Like, if you've got a home with lots and lots of rooms, you don't need to make every one of them a pristine spare psychological sanctuary.

(She agrees with a chuckle.)

You just need a sanctuary to run off to. You just need to do this in part of your house.

Beverly Walpole: I agree. I think that is true.

John Moe: What is the psychological effect of—well, of having that sanctuary space, and what is the psychological effect of not having that sanctuary space? You know, my kids are a little older now, but we've gone through some chaotic times (*chuckling*), in terms of what kind of shape the house is in on a day-to-day basis. Like, what does that do to the human mind, as far as you can tell?

Beverly Walpole: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Well, you know, I'm sure you've heard the sentence like “cluttered space, cluttered mind.” I believe that. I also feel that our homes are mirrors. Like, they're mirrors for how we are doing. And so, let's think about depression and anxiety—which are two of the disorders that I work a lot with. It's essentially like the nervous system's way of saying like, “You've been pushing too hard. Like, I'm on high alert, and I gotta shut down now. Like, it's just been too hard, too much.”

And so, what we're trying to do in this like wellness design is just create more opportunities for our nervous system to heal. Because oftentimes, people will leave my office with all kinds of beautiful insights, but then they go home to the very chaotic space with their chaotic family. There's no boundaries. Everything's everywhere. And they can't do that work at home. It's just not conducive. It's not facilitating the work that needs to be done. And so, I think that—yeah, I think that it's important for us to not necessarily get rid of these disorders or—you know, eradicate it from our personality, and we don't wanna be a depressed person anymore. But instead to like listen to these like nudges and these whispers, like—

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Why are we feeling not-so-great? And could there be something that we do in this space to enhance how we're feeling?

John Moe: So, it's not as simple—it's not a chicken and egg kind of situation, where you either need to clear up your mental health before you can clear up your house or vice versa.

Beverly Walpole: Absolutely not.

John Moe: But is it—is it a tonic? Is it a healing act to get your living space kind of cleaned up and cleared up? If—you know, and again, if you're dealing with depression, like picking a sock up off the floor can feel like moving a mountain.

(Beverly agrees.)

You know, but does that have a medicinal effect?

Beverly Walpole: Ooh! Love that. Does it have a medicinal effect? Absolutely. I remember reading the book, a long time ago, *The Happiness Project* by Gretchen something. And essentially it was. She was going through this sort of like midlife crisis, I think. And this existential suffering was happening, and she just started like clearing out a closet. Like, that was the first thing she started with. Before moving onto the relationship or all these other things. And I think some people wanna start with their thoughts. Right? They wanna start with that internal work. And then other people wanna just start picking things up. They wanna start moving.

And I've kind of looked at it from this perspective of like it's a hybrid. Like, let's do both. Let's change how we're thinking about this. Let's move some of these limiting beliefs out of the way that are keeping us really stagnant. And let's kind of open up this growth mindset while also really just starting that behavioral activation; just like making those little, small movements in the direction of change that—when stacked—are really beneficial to our overall health.

John Moe: Okay, so making, a move, picking up a sock is—

Beverly Walpole: Yeah! Do it!

John Moe: Yeah. It clears up the space, and it at least signals that you can make some progress on some of the other stuff as well.

Beverly Walpole: It's not just clutter though! I mean, it's really not just clutter. Like, it's other things like, um— Okay, so sleep. Like, I work a lot with teenagers who—notoriously, their sleep hygiene is not so great. *(Chuckles.)* Right? There's a lot of staying up and scrolling. And so, I talk a lot about the temperature of the room and whether or not there's light coming in the room and, you know, the cozy textures and blankets that need to be there. And yes, the clutter, but also— I had this one client once who had the hardest time falling asleep. Like, she talked about being tired. She would go to sleep. She would go to bed; she would close her eyes. And she was talking about how she would have this like to-do list in her mind, and she couldn't let go of that.

And I was like, okay, let's work on that insomnia piece. And then I came to find out that she had this huge whiteboard with all of the lists of to do things that she had to do right beside where she was sleeping!

John Moe: Oh no! (*Chuckles.*)

Beverly Walpole: Right?! So, I was kind of like, “Let's maybe move that. Like—”

John Moe: It's like a prop for a stress dream.

Beverly Walpole: Right?! (*Laughs.*) Yeah. So, it's just—it's like things that I think for a lot of us are intuitive. But honestly, John? Not for everyone! Just not!

John Moe: Yeah. In terms of specifics in a home, are there certain paint colors best suited for people with—say—depression or anxiety or other specific mental health conditions? Are there styles of sofa (*chuckling*) that one should avoid?

Beverly Walpole: Yeah. Yeah, okay. So, here's like a general, very, very generic and general rule is that any of the colors in the like cooler tone—so, blues, greens, grays—tend to evoke more feelings of like calm, soothing. You know, that regulation piece. And in fact, there's been research that's been done looking at these colors on walls in hospitals when cancer treatments are going on. And it really kind of—it brings down cortisol levels for people when we associate certain colors—yeah—with the experience. So, I would say cooler tones calm. Warmer tones—oranges, reds, yellows—tend to evoke feelings of like energy, connection, conversation, joy.

So, it depends on what we're looking for. I remember having, in my second- and third-year university, my room was already painted when I got there. And it was painted—one wall was like coral, and the other one was like a bright yellow. And my bedspread also just happened to be like a bright orange. Like, it was the brightest room.

(*John “wow”s.*)

It was so happy! (*Laughs.*) Like, I felt—I loved my room. It just felt so great. So, I would say if you're struggling with your mood, you might wanna consider colors like yellows and oranges to kind of like get that serotonin bursting.

John Moe: That's funny. When you described that room and all those contrasting bright colors—

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—I thought you were gonna say, “And it made me so stressed out, because it was so loud!”

Beverly Walpole: Oh. I was also very stressed out. But it was happy.

(John laughs.)

There was just like a lot of charge. There was a lot going on. Yes.

John Moe: Okay. Okay. Now some people are gonna listen to this show, and they're in their car. You know, people listen to podcasts in the car. They're on their way home from work, they're listening to this on the way home.

They swing open the door, and they're like looking at where they live—you know, be that in a big house or a small apartment. And they're thinking, “What steps can I take right now to make this a psychologically better place? How can I improve the neuro-aesthetic of my home today?” What would you tell them?

Beverly Walpole: Yes! Okay. Well, if you want just the general guidelines and rules, I would say: can you create more biophilia within your home? So, natural elements within your home. Can you bring in more woods? Can you bring in more stone? Can you bring in a water element? Can you have plants? Is there natural light being filtered in? Like, pay attention to any option, any opportunity where you can enhance nature in your home. Because there just is an abundance of research that promotes that—in and out. Like, being in nature outdoors, awesome for your mental health. Bringing it into your home, also awesome for your mental health! So, do that. Do that.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: That's Dr. Bev Walpole. She's a clinical psychologist in Ontario, Canada—also the founder of Haven Wellness By Design, a consulting service based around the psychology of design. That book she mentioned, *The Happiness Project*, is by Gretchen Rubin.

Coming up, I've been talking to you for years now about mental health. The reason I do so after the break.

Promo:

Music: A bright, playful tune.

Emily Fleming: I'm Emily Fleming!

Jordan Morris: I'm Jordan Morris.

Matt Lieb: And I'm Matt Lieb.

Emily: We are real comedy writers!

Matt: Real friends—

Jordan: And real cheapskates!

Matt: On every episode of our podcast, *Free With Ads*, we ask, “Why pay for expensive streaming services when you can get free movies from apps with weird names?”

Emily: Each week we review the freest movies the internet has to offer—classics like *Pride & Prejudice*.

Jordan: Cult classics, like *Point Break*.

Matt: And “holy (*sensor beep*), what did I just watch?” classics like *Teen Witch*.

Emily: Tune in every week as we take a deep dive into the internet's bargain bin.

Jordan: Every Tuesday on MaximumFun.org or your favorite pod place.

Music:

Free with ads!

(Music fades out.)

Promo:

Music: Funky, upbeat banjo music.

Dan McCoy: *The Flop House* is a podcast where we watch a bad movie, and then we talk about it.

Elliott Kalan: Robert Shaw in *Jaws*, and they're trying to figure out how to get rid of the ghoulies. And he scratches his nails and goes, “I'll get you, ghoulie.”

Dan: He's just standing above the toilet with a harpoon. No, I was just looking forward to you going through the other ways in which *Wild Wild West* is historically inaccurate.

Stuart Wellington: You know how much movies cost nowadays?! When you add in your popped corn, and your bagel bites, and your cheese curders.

Elliott: Sure. You can't go wrong with a Henry Cavill mustache. Here at Henry Cavill Mustaches, the only supplier!

(They laugh.)

Narrator: *The Flop House*. New episodes every Saturday. Find it at MaximumFun.org.

(Music fades out.)

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Welcome back. This episode is coming out on Labor Day, September 1st, 2025. On August 24th—a week and a day ago—I did something that I do every year, first on Twitter and now on BlueSky. A thread. It changes a little every year. It's always just off the top of my head. I don't enjoy it, really, having to write this. It's more of an obligation. But it's healthy, and I thought I'd share it this year. I'll just read this thread verbatim.

“Okay, there's something I need to do every August 24th. I need to tell you to not give up on your mental health, yourself, this world, or hope. My brother, Rick, should be turning 63 today, but he died at age 44 due to depression and other mental health problems. He shouldn't have. Here are some reasons Rick died. Our society treats mental illness as a character flaw. It blames the sick person in a way we never do with cancer or other diseases. Depression throws a blurry curtain over the world, then tells you that's how the world really looks. Our medical system is expensive and incredibly hard to understand and get help from. Our mental health system, even more so. And the people most in need of help are often the people least equipped to navigate it.

“Rick drove a delivery truck. He didn't have much money or insurance or time. So, society told him he was bad, and he had the system basically keeping help away from him. But he had access to a gun. That was super easy for him to get. He died because he thought he'd screwed up irreparably and would never be forgiven.

[00:35:00]

“As if he chose mental illness, as if anyone would. His daughter was born three months after he died. He thought he was such a fuck up that she'd be better off without him. She isn't. She's 18 now. 18 years without him. The rest of her life without him. Again, as if he chose substance use disorder, depression, and everything else. He didn't. But often, if you try to tell yourself that it's not your fault, that you deserve—automatically deserve, deserve by dint of existence—care, depression plugs your ears. So, friends, you gotta shout. You gotta keep shouting and listen to everyone shouting for you.

“I spent my childhood and much of adulthood thinking that I had to earn the benefits of humanity: kindness, personhood agency. And I had to earn that by achieving. I had to prove myself worthy of being a person. And when I was told that “rights” meant not having to achieve, I was frankly shocked.

“You deserve help on your mental health journey. You are automatically deserving. You are automatically a good enough person that others care for you and want you in this world. You might need to make some changes, but you deserve care. And who is this “you” I’m talking about? The subset of society that is said to be mentally ill, the 23.1%? No, it’s everyone. It is you. Listen, you won’t get through this life never catching a cold, spraining an ankle, getting cancer or heart disease. Something is going to happen to your body along the way, and something mental will happen to you too. Or has. Or is right now. Shit happens. Fucking shit fucking happens to your goddamn mind.

“We are all the mentally ill, okay? And we all deserve help. And that means you. Now, where do we go from here? Let’s talk about that. Right now in America, (*sighs heavily*) goddamn. I sense doom and despair all the time. And importantly, I’m a White, cisgender, straight guy; so all I can do is imagine how much scarier it is for those not in those groups. We are up against it, and we don’t know how it turns out, and our minds are more in peril. It sucks. So, getting help? Hard. Believing you deserve help? Hard. Trying to get better when sociopolitical sewage is dumped on you constantly? Very. Fucking. Hard.

“It’s hard for me too. I’ve battled depression since I was a little kid. I win lots of days—brutal fights. Meanwhile, losing hope is easy.

“This is where I’m supposed to bring it all together for a rousing conclusion with a pithy phrase. I’m not sure I have one. This is all improvised. I’m writing this whole thread on my iPhone. I paused *Alien Earth* to write it. Here’s what I got:

“Fuck shit up. Fuck shit up, you beautifuls. They make it hard to get care? Fuck shit up and get it. Fuck shit up and see yourself as a worthy person. Some entities don’t want you to. Fuck their fucking shit up. You do matter. We want you around. You are important. So, defiantly, fuck shit up. I wish Rick was alive. When he died, my son Charlie was five, and we had to tell him that his uncle had gotten sick and died. And that was true. And it could have been prevented. Let’s prevent it for someone else. Let’s fuck shit up. I’m glad you’re here.”

And then I added, parenthetically, “I host a podcast about mental health. You can look that up. Listen to the new one, not just the old one. I also wrote a mental health book with the same name as the old podcast. That’s all. And bye.”

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

John Moe: A reminder: our show does exist because of funding from our audience. If you want to become a member—and I hope you do—please go to MaximumFun.org/join. Be sure to hit subscribe. Give us five stars, write rave reviews. That gets the show into the world.

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

We’re on BlueSky at [@DepreshMode](https://bsky.app/profile/depreshmode). Our Instagram is [@DepreshPod](https://www.instagram.com/depreshpod). Our *Depresh Mode* newsletter is on Substack. Search that up. I’m on BlueSky and Instagram at [@JohnMoe](https://bsky.app/profile/johnmoe). You

can join our Preshies group on Facebook and hang out with me and our other listeners there. Talk about mental health, support each other, talk about the show. Talk about whatever you want, make jokes. Our electric mail address is DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. I used to not be a fan of Billy Joel's music, and I used to think that I didn't like Billy Joel.

[00:40:00]

Now I'm still sort of mixed on his music, but I watched this HBO documentary about Billy Joel, and now I like Billy Joel as a person. So. Good job, documentary. And good job, Billy Joel.

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

Maybe there's no answer

I just keep on dancing

John Moe: I'm Jack Probst from St. Louis, Missouri, and I'm here for you.

(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!