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John Moe: I like humans. I think they're interesting. I've mostly interviewed humans in my career, which is pretty long by this point. I've done things for fundraisers where I interviewed puppies one time, and another time I interviewed farm animals. And they're cute, but they have little or nothing to say. They're turkeys. Feral, free-roaming turkeys all over St. Paul, Minnesota—where I live. These turkeys confound me because they clearly have no thoughts in their heads, no plans for the day, no goals. They're just hanging out all the time. I shall not interview these turkeys.

No, give me the humans and the full scope of their perspectives and intellects and ability to form words and such. Among humans, sometimes I'll talk to somebody about one particular issue. Tell me about AI and psychosis. Fill me in on innovations in transcranial magnetic stimulation. Other times we go broad with insights across a variety of topics. Yeah, we're going broad this week.

I'm talking to a really fascinating human. Stay with the whole episode, because it goes places. It's an adventure. Here's what we cover: the guest's co-starring role in a much-anticipated new sitcom that's related to the show *The Office*; his history of ADHD, including how it affects his movie- and concert-going life; his visit as a Jewish person to a White Nationalist gathering; criticisms of that visit; the idea of being a victim; and finally, the intense, reality-warping power of grief.

It's a ride. Buckle up. It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Alex Edelman is a comedian, an actor, and writer. He's a one-person show maker, writing and performing stories from his life—kind of in the mold of Mike Birbiglia, who's a friend of Alex; or if you're old enough, Spalding Gray. Alex's show, *Just For Us*, played Off-Broadway, and then on Broadway. It was turned into a special on HBO, won a Tony and an Emmy. It was mostly about Alex, who was raised as an Orthodox Jew, attending— anonymously, at first—a gathering of White Nationalists in Queens. This is from the trailer for the special.

Clip:

Alex Edelman: And I see this tweet, and I sent it to my best friend in the world. And I wrote, “David, (*chuckles*) do you wanna come with me to this meeting of Nazis in Queens?”

(*Laughter.*)

By the way, nothing says White privilege more than a Jew walking into a meeting of racists and thinking, “This will probably be fine.” It's Queens, the most diverse

borough! You can't even get 17 Nazis together without a Jew being stuck right there in the middle of you!

(Laughter.)

John Moe: Alex Edelman was named one of *Time Magazine's* 100 Most Influential People in the World. He co-stars in the new sitcom, *The Paper*, which recently debuted on Peacock. It's from some of the same people who made *The Office*, and it has that same faux workplace documentary style. The setting is a Toledo company that makes toilet paper and runs a newspaper as well. Alex plays Adam Cooper, an accountant with lots of kids. Here, he's given some supplements by Ken—the company's head of strategy played by Tim Key—and Adam just takes them without hesitation.

Clip:

Ken (*The Paper*): Why don't you try these?

Adam: What are they?

Ken: Pills for men. Soldiers take them. *(Beat.)* Oh, there we go! Love that.

Speaker: What the hell did you just give him?

Ken: These are from a family-run business called Rudy's. They are what you might call male boosters. Perfectly safe male boosters.

Oscar: Rudy's as in the gas station?

Ken: I think they do sell gas, yes Oscar.

Adam: Extra potency. *(With a resigned dread.)* Oh god. I'm gonna get her pregnant again. I just can't have any more kids. Four is just about manageable, 'cause you get one per-hand per-adult. But five? I don't even— I've been thinking like how do you even—? How do you even do that? Do you use a foot? And then people think you're kicking them?!

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Alex Edelman, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Alex Edelman: Thank you so much for having me. I'm so, so excited to be here.

John Moe: *The Paper* has its roots in *The Office*—same style, some of the same people behind it. Oscar Nuñez is in it playing the same character as in *The Office*. Was that eerie? Because I assume you watched *The Office* like everyone did. Did it feel like you were in something you were already familiar with?

Alex Edelman: It didn't feel like being in *The Office*. It didn't feel like there were moments where I was like, “Oh man, this is so cool! You know, Oscar's right over there!”

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For a while, we had to keep Oscar a secret, and now it's the worst kept secret in the world. You know, Oscar's on the side of a bus. But in retrospect, like that makes all the sense. But there was a moment where like, “It's gonna be a surprise for the fans. His name in the show was like Felipe Dilla—or something like that. He was Felipe for a while. So, I'd be writing my script, and I'd be like— I'd have to Ctrl-F “Oscar” and write “Felipe” when I was writing my episode. But yeah.

John Moe: *(Laughs.)* Hope that there wasn't a storyline about watching the Oscars and have somebody say we were watching the Felipe's.

Alex Edelman: Oh, by the way, that happened once on the show.

John Moe: Did it?!

Alex Edelman: Yeah, that happened on the show. We were—*(laughs.)* 'Cause we had Ctrl-F'ed Oscars, and there was a joke about the Oscars. And they were like—

(John laughs.)

An at some point Greg Daniels laughed, and I'm like, “What?”

He went, “We Ctrl-F'ed, and—” You know.

John Moe: *(Chuckles.)* There you go.

Alex Edelman: I forgot about that until just now. But yeah, there was one line that it was— It was the coolest. It was the coolest shit in the world. It felt like a new thing though. It's so interesting, 'cause whenever anyone's like, “Ah, *The Office* spinoff,” or “*The Office* reboot,” I'm like— It's set in the same world, but you know. I don't know that we spent a lot of time being like, “Well, in *The Office*— If it was like *The Office*, it would be like this.”

It felt like a different show. I mean, it is. It's like a spiritual sequel. But Jesse Thorn, your Maximum Fun compatriot, very astutely and fairly was like, you know, “Are people gonna compare the two things?”

And of course, they're free to. But you know. Also there are, you know, people who will be like, "Oh gosh." You know, people who are gonna be like, "Oh gosh, I love *The Office*., and this is a—" You know, we hate reboots. But like, this isn't really that. It's like—it's a spiritual successor in the same visual language. But I think we wrote it without a ton of thought beyond not wanting to do exactly what *The Office* did. So, occasionally I pitched something, and someone would be like, "Season four."

And I'm like, "Ah, fuck!"

John Moe: "Darn it!"

I've been kind of binging a lot of your work, catching up on things again. And last I heard—or at least at some point in some fairly recent clips—you talk about being tested many times for a variety of neurodivergent conditions.

Alex Edelman: Oh, that's true.

John Moe: First of all, how many times tested are you up to as of today, as of taping?

Alex Edelman: Well, the joke is that it's 12, but only one was in the last decade.

(John affirms with a laugh.)

But yeah, I've been getting—I was evaluated. But I always wondered—and I think some of the jokes are about this—like, how useful it is to get tested as an adult-adult. It's like... the joke I told the other night was:

There's no—it's not school. Like, I'm not gonna be on a second date, and she's like, "This isn't going well. I wanna leave."

And I'm like, "I get time and a half, actually."

(John chuckles.)

You know, like... So.

John Moe: I get to do the goodnight kiss at my own pace.

Alex Edelman: Yeah, 1,000%. Sorry, I get a proctor for this date.

(John laughs.)

The thing is though, I was really annoyed—or I've become really annoyed by the sort of fetishization of neurodivergence. Do you know what I mean? You see people—

John Moe: What do you mean? Expand on that.

Alex Edelman: I 1,000% will. But John, when I say that, is there a thing that pops into your head? I will—

John Moe: *(Laughing.)* Fetishization?

Alex Edelman: Of neurodivergence?

John Moe: Um, no. I mean, I have people close to me who are neurodivergent, and it just—to me, it's just about the issue of, you know, is this treated as a disorder, or is it seen as “these people's minds work a certain way?”

And, you know, I wouldn't want to call it a superpower, because I know that there's a lot of inconvenient things that go along with it. But it's just, you know, like being a Red Sox fan or being left-handed. It's just the way some people are.

Alex Edelman: Yeah, well I'm both of those things. So, it's a—so, devastating.

(John laughs.)

But being—I would never say—

John Moe: Did you have to test for being a Red Sox fan?

(Alex confirms.)

Show you pictures of Nomar Garciaparra?

Alex Edelman: They went, “Sorry, you're positive for hopelessness.” And I'm like, noooo!

(John laughs.)

Yeah, I mean, that's a very... what I mean is a lot of people my age—I feel like I hear a lot of people saying things like, “Oh, I'm on the spectrum.”

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And there's no thoughtfulness around that in any meaningful way other than “occasionally, I miss social cues, and I want permission for it that sort of rids me of accountability” or something. So, I was always—

So, I have another joke where people are like, “I'm on the spectrum.”

And I'm like, “We're all on the spectrum. That's how spectrums work!” You know?

(John agrees with a laugh.)

But yeah, the truth is I've... yeah. When I was a kid, there was a lot of it. 'Cause my parents were like, "Something's really wrong here." And I was on Concerta for a long time. Which is 30—I was on like 36 milligrams of Concerta a day, which is a lot of Concerta.

John Moe: What does Concerta do? What is that?

Alex Edelman: It's like—I assume it's like any of the Adderalls or something like that. Uh, if I do a cursory... I've never looked it up.

(John chuckles.)

Concerta is a type of ADHD medication.

Yeah. And you take it— It's a schedule two controlled substance. I don't know what that means. But yeah, it's—

John Moe: It means your prescription might take a while to be filled, usually.

Alex Edelman: Oh, really?

John Moe: Yeah, sometimes.

Alex Edelman: Yeah. It's like Ritalin. It's like—it's Ritalin. I was— It's methylphenidate. So. God, the use—the presence of the “meth” in any drug gives you a real pause, doesn't it? When everyone's like, “It's methyl-blank,” you're like, “I stopped listening after that first syllable.”

John Moe: *(Chuckles.)* So, do you just not worry about whether you have a diagnosable acronym involved in what you have?

Alex Edelman: I mean, I definitely— I've been over diagnosed for ADD and ADHD. I have the most of it. I have like— I'm the most ADD/ADHD person I know. It's like—I spend a lot of time beating myself up for my own inability to focus, or— Sometimes I can be crazy focused too. Sometimes I sit down— When I'm off on draft for an episode, like when a TV show is like, “Go write an episode,” I sit down, and I'm like— I can get it done. And I can write an episode of television in like two/three days. So, I really can like bang it out.

But yeah, I have problems with sitting still. I get really antsy. Every partner I've ever had has had to contend with it. Like, physically sitting still in a space for a long time is hard for me.

John Moe: So, like watching a movie, hard to do?

Alex Edelman: Hate it.

John Moe: Yeah?

Alex Edelman: It's gotta be an amazing movie, or I gotta be really interested in seeing it. I remember like— I feel like I would go to see like Jesus Christ or something, and after an hour I'd be like, “When's this guy gonna...? (*Heckling.*) Do the fish thing!” You know?

John Moe: (*Laughs.*) Right. Is that same with concerts? Do you get antsy to leave a concert?

Alex Edelman: I hate to admit this. I sometimes show up like an— I show up an hour or two hours late to a concert. Because I don't want see three hours. I wanna see an hour of concert, and I wanna see the— And so, I'll check online at SetList.FM and see what I can see. If I'm a fan of the band— Also, sometimes—this is pretty horrible, but sometimes I'll go to a concert, and I will go out to the lobby and write for like 25/30 minutes on the steps that go out to the balcony on my notepad.

(*John “wow”s.*)

And then if I hear a song I like, I'll go back in. But I like to go to concerts solo for this reason. Because— I do a lot of stuff solo, because making someone else beholden to that, it's... I don't know. I feel bad about it. I wish I was a little bit... I've just sort of learned to live with this. Like, this is a— I could take medication. I really could. But the medication makes me really upset. It makes me sad. And the come down is really— I've heard this from other people who take ADHD medication that the flip side of it is pretty dark. Which is why I don't take it anymore because it made me really... It made me upset. So.

John Moe: So, you're more just about accepting that, you know, this is the way you watch movies; this is the way you see concerts. Like—

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I mean, that's kind of what we're talking about with like accepting the neurodivergence as just a way to live, not as it being worse or better than what the normies deal with.

Alex Edelman: Yeah. Well, I mean, standup comedy is really great art form for that, where it's like here is a bunch of small things that become a big thing. And then, oh my god, I'm doing a big thing. Like, my solo show—my last solo show was an hour and 20-something minutes. And I never—in the, you know, 500+ performances of that show—ever wanted to be elsewhere. Maybe twice in the 500. There was a show in Berkeley, California that I was just not enjoying. And I think there was one of the like 200+ New York shows I got sad, or I got upset.

The show carries a lot of baggage for me too, *Just For Us*. There's a lot of good stuff about it, but also there's a lot of stuff that makes me sad. So, living in that big, fulsome space, I didn't have trouble focusing. But I also think that's because I got to build that house myself in my own ADHD brain. So. Anyway, sorry. Maybe that doesn't make sense, just that standup building—

John Moe: No, it makes total sense. I mean, something that I learned about ADHD—just by doing as many interviews as I have—that I didn't know before, I thought it meant that you just couldn't concentrate on anything. And I met this guy—young guy. He was in college. And he had the world's record for fastest typing on this sort of alternative keyboard, like not a QWERTY keyboard, a different arrangement of a keyboard. He had the world record for being the fastest typist in the world.

And he says, “And I have ADHD.”

And I'm like, “Wait a second! How much practice goes into mastering that skill to where you can get a world record?”

And he says, “No, you don't understand. I could give all my attention to typing on this keyboard, and everything else just falls away. That's the disorder part of it for me. Like, you know, I can dive in; I can concentrate on one thing. It's just that everything else suffers.”

Did that happen with you with putting together *Just For Us*?

Alex Edelman: That's how it goes is like— That's how it goes with everything. But yeah, *Just For Us* is like... Also, you know what I loved about *Just For Us* is I had permission to do that. I had permission to get on stage, and the whole world falls away. It's just me. It's just me for an hour and a half, and that's my space.

And you know, the funny thing is, on the back of that show—what was really special for me after a point on that show was like, truly, I was lost in that world. I was like insulated from everything in this performance and totally invested in the micro. People were like, “How'd you not get bored?”

And I was always like, “I'm bored right now! I'm bored talking to you!”

John Moe: You're bored offstage, but you're not bored onstage.

Alex Edelman: No, I am my most— I have the most permission I have to do anything. People are like, “Wow, you never stop moving. You're always running around.”

And the truth is, if you watch *Just For Us*, I'm always running around. But then there are moments of great stillness. Like, there's a 27 second pause towards the end of the show where no one says anything. I'm just quiet. And Alex Timbers, who directed the special, did this amazing job—amazing!—of just letting that— Alex encouraged that stillness to expand in a way that no one else ever had.

You know, other people had identified it. My director of the live show, Adam Brace. Bart Sher, another great director, went, “God, that pause. There's really something there.” But Alex blew it open and really, really made it a thing. And so— But it was the permission to be fast! And then slow. And the permission to be loud! And then still.

Like, I think if I lived in a world of my own design, I wouldn't have the same trouble focusing, but I'm aware that people that try to do that usually die in a rainforest somewhere or something. So.

John Moe: Yeah, you gotta collaborate in life to some extent.

Alex Edelman: Yeah. But I'm starting a circus with this guy, Bailey? So, it's just gonna work out totally fine.

John Moe: Okay. *(Laughs.)* Oh, good. That sounds very promising.

[00:20:00]

Alex Edelman: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: He's not really starting a circus. That was a joke. There are a lot of jokes in his *Just For Us* special. It's not all about crashing a White Nationalist gathering and the awkwardness that ensues. Let's listen to a bit more of the special as we go to break.

Clip:

Alex Edelman: So, there's this gorilla named Coco. Has everyone heard of Coco the gorilla?

(Cheers and applause.)

Yes. Coco the gorilla, for those of you that don't know, is a gorilla that spoke fluent sign language. And in 1999—this is true—Coco met Robin Williams. And a couple of years ago, they told Coco that Robin Williams had passed away, and Coco went, “Coco friend. Coco sad.”

(“Aw”s from the audience.)

Yes. Which is sad. But on the plus side, *(getting louder)* how funny was Robin Williams that even gorillas are like, “This guy!”

(Laughter.)

He's unbelievable! My comedy barely works if you're not from the Upper West Side. Robin Williams crossed the species barrier. Brilliant comedian.

(Laughter.)

Also, and obviously, did they have to tell!?

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We are back with Alex Edelman, and we've been talking about his award-winning, hit Broadway show *Just For Us*. He mentioned the TV special of it was directed by Alex Timbers, but also mentioned an original stage director, Adam Brace. Remember that name. We'll get back to it later, and you'll want to hear about that.

In *Just For Us*, I saw some criticism that you got online for visiting a White Nationalist meeting. People were upset that you—especially, you as a Jewish person—would, I guess, platform what these people were saying. Were you prepared for that criticism? Or did it cut you deep to hear that criticism?

Alex Edelman: I mean, this is the first I'm hearing of it. But uh... I mean, no. The truth is, hey, if you're really that concerned about White supremacist rhetoric, take it up with the guy in the White House right now. You know? Who doesn't seem to have a problem—whether or not he himself is a White supremacist is definitely up for debate, because I'm really wary of people who, you know, inflate things. But he did have dinner with Nick Fuentes and Kanye West at Mar-a-Lago, and that seems less of a thing.

But in terms of platforming them— Let me engage with this in a more considered way, I guess. Someone I really respect, a writer named—or a guy named Dan. Dan Pasternack raised a very valid concern. And I hope Dan will know that I'm invoking his name lovingly and not his way of like bashing this very valid opinion. But I think his concern was that they were too cuddly or too humanized. And the truth is, I thought it was important to present that, because White supremacy doesn't always scream in your face. In the show it does. But sometimes it arrives in the form of—

The challenging aspect of this is that they are human beings, and that they come from places sometimes of legitimate frustration. They've— You know, these people are disenfranchised, or they feel voiceless, or they feel taken advantage of. And their— You know, their response to that is antisemitism or White supremacy or racism or misogyny online. And so, looking that in the face felt pretty important to me.

And also, by the way, I say this very freely. The show is—the show is slightly... like, a lot of the stuff is exaggerated or underexaggerated. Like, it's—you know, I played down things and played up things and made curatorial decisions like can no longer like remember that well. But I was reminded of it, because I saw an earlier version of the show performed by somebody else. Meaning there are other people doing *Just For Us* now.

John Moe: Oh, wow! Okay.

Alex Edelman: So, I went to go see it in Minnesota. And they had given this kid—a really lovely guy named Ryan Levin. Someone had accidentally given him an earlier version of the script, which was truer to the actual event but less polished in terms of its comedy and in terms of its like thesis statement.

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And so, watching that was really bizarre, because the Nazis—or the neo-Nazis, or whatever you call 'em—they came off so differently. And so—sorry, this is a craft-oriented answer where maybe you were asking a like ethics-oriented question. But like—I don't feel that. I don't feel— That doesn't keep me awake at night. But what does keep me awake at night was, if you did the show now, one of the things that you wouldn't need in the show is me digging on Twitter for White Nationalists. Because now they're front and center in my feed.

(John agrees solemnly.)

And it's not just my algorithm, because I've tried to reset my algorithm a couple of times. Like, really engaging with different stuff or muting certain words or... or blocking bunches of people. Tranches of people. Like, I'll block any account. Where for a while, Twitter was just—for me—videos of people dying. Like, people getting hit by buses or getting caught in dam spillways. And I would block them! Like, I didn't want—

And everyone's like, *(mockingly)* “Well, you design your own algorithm.”

I didn't want to see this. Like, I wasn't engaging with it out of perverse curiosity. I don't ever want to watch a video of anyone's life ending. But like, these algorithms are so messed up now, they're serving these to us first. And I don't know why, but—like, yeah. Sorry. We're far afield from the very cogent question you are asking.

John Moe: Yeah. Well, I mean, I just wonder if you— Because you talked about kind of designing this world that you're in control of, but also acknowledging that that is a—you know, that's not how the rest of the world works. And so, how do you kind of preserve good mental health, good peace of mind, good clarity when your job is so public? And you know, inherently public, inherent to the comments and criticisms of strangers. And it involves so much vulnerability. Like, how do you protect yourself? Because it like I don't think everybody listening to this show will launch one-person shows on Broadway, but I think they all deal with balancing their public self or the way they present on social media or something with their—you know, preserving themselves.

So, how do you go about doing that?

Alex Edelman: I mean, I'm committed to a principle. Not even a set, just a principle. And there are moments where that principle seems really unfashionable or really not the right thing to do in the sense of like what is politically right to do. But that principle is that... *(sighs)* I wish it was like a less po-faced way to say this, but it's that we sort of need to talk to one another, and that everything begins and ends with how we do that. And so, having that guiding principle means—

Like, for instance, Israel and Palestine. People—it's a huge issue, obviously. And people in my life feel very strongly in many different directions, 'cause I'm from an Orthodox Jewish background, and I live in a world of lefties of various stripes, almost my entire peer group. And so, people's feelings about the conflict run the gamut from extremely Zionist to, you know, total abolition of the Jewish state and beyond. Or total abolition of Israel and beyond.

But a thing that holds me steady there is the idea that, you know, there needs to be a way for people to have discourse about it, otherwise it's never gonna resolve. And so, like that's actually—when you think about it, if you're utterly committed to one approach, and that approach is very like heart-forward, brain-forward, it sort of inures you against— Like, it's comfortable, publicly.

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I'm like very comfortable publicly occupying that opinion, because it comes from a place I actually believe because I was raised, you know, Orthodox Jewish. It's very Talmudic, that idea that you would just listen to everyone and try to figure out a way that aims for the center of fairness and empathy. So, criticism... when you do that, criticism becomes a part of your process. Criticism becomes a part of your like— You know, after every show for hundreds of shows, I stood outside. And anyone who had a complaint or a criticism or a compliment could come up to me and offer it. And I used to solicit it.

I would go, “If you have a complaint, please—” It's in the special actually. It's in the special. “If you wanna talk to me, I'll be outside afterwards. If you hated the show, tweet at me.” You know. There's a joke after that too. 'Cause—but like, yeah. I've always thought of criticism as part of my process. I will admit it's a little bit scarier with a little bit more profile, but you know. Like...

John Moe: Well, I remember talking with Chris Gethard, who did a one-person show.

Alex Edelman: I love Chris Gethard.

John Moe: Chris is wonderful. And his was about a suicide attempt, and the hard times he'd been having. And he said that he used to do Q and As after every performance. He ultimately stopped because he felt like he was incurring a lot of what he called psychic damage. You know, just because— And I've run into this to a much smaller scale when I give speeches about mental health. People will come up and tell me about the worst things that have ever happened to them, the most traumatic events in their life. And it's hard as an empathetic human being not to take some hit points on that, not to take some knocks. Has that been a problem for you? That people—you know, on something that's so personal as Jewish identity, as the state of politics and identity in America and where America is going. I mean, is that sustainable, to take that forward of a public position?

Alex Edelman: Some days, no. The psychic damage— I've never heard it put that way, but antisemitism— I've heard everyone's antisemitism stories. The worst is when you hear someone's antisemitism story and it's not valid. When people tell you about antisemitism, and I'm like, “That doesn't sound like antisemitism. It sounds like someone just doesn't like you,

and they don't like you because of something to do with, you know, who you are, and not the group that you're from.”

John Moe: Who you are as an individual.

Alex Edelman: Yeah. It feels like they've taken issue with you. And then it was hard to hear about—it's hard to hear from people who've experienced very real antisemitism. That's devastating. A lot of people have. My friend—I won't say her name, because it's a recognizable first name—or distinctive. She has a kid who was walking in Times Square and got a caricature with his friend from one of the caricature artists. And they drew him holding bags of money with planes going into the Twin Towers. And it's like—

John Moe: (*Softly.*) Oh my god.

Alex Edelman: And I was like— And he came home and said, “I think something happened.”

And I'm like, “Yeah! Buddy. That's—pretty cut and dried!” You know?

John Moe: Yeah. Not a lot of subtlety there.

Alex Edelman: But yeah, I hear about people's things. And it's like sometimes you almost are shocked at the magnitude. Or—yeah, John, I don't know that it's sustainable, hearing about the worst things people— But to be fair, there is the flip side of that. Which is if you had the time— Someone, came up to me, and they were telling me about antisemitism they were experiencing on campus from a specific person.

And I said, “Okay, so what are you gonna do?”

And they were like, “What?”

And I was like, “What are you gonna do? 'Cause now you're just complaining. So, what are you actually going to do?”

And they're like, “What do you think I should do?”

I was like, “Talk to this person! Or get a person that knows both of you to mediate a discussion between the two of you! Which is like: why are you doing this to me?!”

You know? And they're like, “What if they're not willing to hear?”

And I'm like, “It will heal you. Trying to have the conversation will heal you.” I was like, “I promise. It won't heal you all the way, but it will have some effect.”

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Like, I think the reason I like doing the show was it was a look at Jewish identity without victimhood inherent in it. *(Beat.)* Does that make any sense? Do you know what I mean?

John Moe: Yeah. Yeah. If you could describe it a little bit more though, that'd be great.

Alex Edelman: I mean, like... I was really curious about what my Judaism looks like when antisemitism is pulled out of it. And the funny thing is like there's not a ton of antisemitism in the actual event. The thing's more about assimilation. It's more about the inability to ever truly blend in as White in—you know, in spaces where people are conscious of their own Whiteness. And so, like trying to divorce that as much as possible from like a bad thing that happened to me. Because you could argue that the show is about a bad thing that happened to me, but I'm not really like a victim in the show.

Like, I go to this thing. I go to a space I'm obviously not welcome in, and then at the end they tell me I'm not welcome. *(Chuckles.)* Like, it's— If you look at early— I just remember, early on in the show's life cycle, trying very hard to trying to pull out any instance where the central character had victimhood as part of his—as part of the experience. And...

John Moe: You were trying to eliminate you as a victim in this situation?

Alex Edelman: I just don't—I just... Maybe this goes hand in hand with like the autism thing a little bit. Like, I just— I've stopped seeing victimhood as useful. Like— And also, I have real appreciation for people who don't—who have legitimate grievances when it comes to victimhood and don't lean on it and let themselves be defined by it, by other people's perception of them.

Like, Dylan Mulvaney, you know, the— Do you know who Dylan is?

John Moe: Yeah. Mm-hm.

Alex Edelman: Dylan Mulvaney for those listening and don't know, Dylaan's like a young trans woman. A really, really funny, bubbly, trans woman who briefly was the focal point of a lot of vitriol, because she did a partnership with Bud Light. And at home you're like, “Oh yeah, now I remember.” There was a time when like half the country was wishing bodily harm on Dylan Mulvaney or saying horrible things about her. Or— Dylan never talks about it. Not because it's like, you know, super painful—or maybe it is super painful, but like when it comes up in conversation with Dylaan, she's pretty sanguine.

But like, I really love that that's not Dylan's story now. 'Cause if half the country wanted to kill me, I might bring it up from time to time! You know? It might be part of my—maybe part of my elevator pitch. “Hi, I'm Alex. You know, half the country really wanna hate me.”

So, it's like, I just am— And I also think it obscures identity. It obscures the useful parts of identity, victimhood. It obscures the things about it that are fulsome and interesting and something that you can personally define for yourself. If you see your identity through the lens of your own victimhood exclusively, that's a different crime. It robs you your ability to draw lessons and loadstars and ideas that could be like models for you. And so, like I really

wanted to make something about Judaism that reckoned with its relationship to Whiteness, but wasn't too tied up in victimhood.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with more from Alex Edelman in just a moment. Here's a bit more from *The Paper*. Alex's character, Adam, is talking with Marv—the CEO of the company, played by Allan Havey.

Clip:

Adam: Hey, Marv. November 1984. A profile of a certain up and coming local businessman that you might recognize.

Marv: Whoa! Look at that kid. What happened to all my hair? (*Chuckles.*) I don't know.

Adam: And also, we got your obituary.

Marv: What?

Adam: As a prominent Toledan, we will have it ready to go for you the second you die. Maybe even a little bit before. “Marvin Putnam, the end.”

Speaker: Hey.

Adam: Hey. I was just showing Marv sometimes that he was or will be in *The Paper*. Like, “Marvin Putnam, the end.”

Marv: (*Laughing uncomfortably.*) Stop saying that.

Speaker: “Graduate of DePaul. Putnam lettered in tennis before joining Hamilton Mills in 1982. For the next 40-blank years, he oversaw the financial...” Wow. Not exactly Warren Buffet.

[00:40:00]

Promo:

Music: “My Life is Better With You (*My Brother, My Brother and Me Podcast Theme Song*)” by Montaigne.

Travis McElroy: You know, we've been doing *My Brother, My Brother and Me* for 15 years. And maybe—

Justin McElroy: (*Interrupting.*) CHRIST. (*Laughs.*)

Travis McElroy: Maybe you stopped listening for a while. Maybe you never listened. And you're probably assuming “Three White guys talking for 15 years. I know where this has ended up.” But no!

Justin: No! You would be wrong. We're as shocked as you are (*chuckling*) that we have not fallen into some sort of horrific scandal or just turned into a big crypto thing.

(*Travis and Griffin agree.*)

Travis: Yeah. We don't even really know how crypto works!

Griffin McElroy: The only NFTs I'm into are Naughty Funny Things, which is what we talk about on *My Brother, My Brother and Meeee*.

Justin: We serve it up every Monday for you—if you're listening. And if not, (*laughing*) we just leave it out back until it goes rotten!

Travis: So, check it out on Maximum Fun or wherever you get your podcasts.

(*Music fades out.*)

Promo:

Ella Hubber: Alright, we're over 70 episodes into our show, *Let's Learn Everything*. So, let's do a quick progress check. Have we learned about quantum physics?

Tom Lum: Yes, episode 59.

(*Pencil scratching.*)

Ella: We haven't learned about the history of gossip yet, have we?

Caroline Roper: Yes, we have! Same episode, actually.

Ella: Have we talked to Tom Scott about his love of roller coasters?

Caroline & Tom: (*In unison.*) Episode 64.

Ella: So, how close are we to learning everything?

Caroline: Bad news. We still haven't learned everything yet.

Ella: Awww!

Tom: WE'RE RUINED!

Music: Playful synth fades in.

Ella: No, no, no! It's good news as well. There is still a lot to learn!

(They cheer.)

I'm Dr. Ella Hubber.

Tom: I'm Regular Tom Lum.

Caroline: I'm Caroline Roper, and on *Let's Learn Everything*, we learn about science and a bit of everything else, too.

Ella: And although we haven't learned everything yet, I've got a pretty good feeling about this next episode.

Tom: Join us every other Thursday on Maximum Fun.

(Music ends.)

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We are back with Alex Edelman. I wanted to ask you—you mentioned Adam Brace—who's your friend and collaborator, heavily involved in developing *Just For Us*—and he passed away from a stroke. I want to ask about him in relation to you. But first, can you tell us who Adam was?

Alex Edelman: *(Beat.)* Yeah. Um... yeah. Adam was... a British writer, director, dramaturg. He actually referred to himself as a directurg. We met when I was 21 and living in London. And—or maybe I was 22. But I was a college student. And we met at a birthday party and... just became really tight friends. And he directed my first, second, third solo shows. *(Choking up a little.)* All my solo shows thus far. And he was one of my closest friends and this big, huge presence with very bad teeth and a very good smile, as one of my partners once put it.

And I... I really love the guy. And I really... (*unclear*). And he—yeah, he had a stroke. He had a stroke in... in early May of 2023. Or no, in April of 2023. And died a few weeks later, right before we started on Broadway. And so, doing the show after that was a very tough... (*Tightly.*) It was a very tough experience. Because, um—yeah, just because I really was doing this thing that I had built with my friend, and it was going on to success beyond my wildest dreams. And he was not there to see... see it through. So, that was tough.

John Moe: I think we—(*sighs*) you know, here in our show, we struggle sometimes with how to talk about grief in the context of a show about mental health. Because I mean, I've lost people very close to me, and it felt like my mind broke. Like, it just—just cracked and fell apart. But it also makes sense that if you love someone, of course that loss would be devastating. That's rational. And we grieve because we love.

Alex Edelman: (*Softly.*) Beautifully said.

John Moe: Did it feel like something broke in you when that happened? Was there a rupture and repair necessary at that point?

Alex Edelman: I mean, I have a lot of feelings around it. I think that's a beautifully put... way to try to... understand the effects of it. 'Cause you're right; in a show about mental health, you're dealing with a heightened—you know, a sine wave of emotions on an already unlevel playing field. So.

(*John agrees.*)

[00:45:00]

Sorry to be visual there.

John Moe: (*Softly.*) No, that's good.

Alex Edelman: But like... yeah, I feel like I really—I feel—I feel a lot of guilt for continuing on without him. Which sounds silly, but you know. 'Cause obviously he would not have wanted me to stop. And also, it was his work too, so. Kind of silly to—

John Moe: Does the success make you feel guilty?

Alex Edelman: Oh yeah. For sure. In my darkest moments, I worry I made some Faustian bargain that I'm not aware of... that I would never make. I would literally give anything for more time with Adam. There were... benefits to it too, which made me feel guilty. The benefit was if I was locked in on the show before, I was really locked in now (*laughs dryly*). Because I couldn't be... I couldn't be laissez faire about a thing that was gonna be our last work together. Um.

John Moe: Did it go from being a conversation—like, a collaboration that was a back-and-forth—to being a true monologue?

Alex Edelman: No. No. It became a conversation where one person wasn't there. And that was the hardest thing about it was because... you know, I just really loved this guy. And you know, ultimately—I don't know if this is the way for other artists or other people who make things or even people that post on social media. I did it—it was—other people got to look at it, and I made money from other people looking at it. But it was really for Adam. You know, like I made the thing for this other person who was there. And for Adam's friends.

You know, a big part of—a big part of Adam passing away though, *(sniffles)* it left this huge hole. And then all these other people rushed into that gap for me—some consciously, others unconsciously. Adam's partner, Becca; his brother, Tim; other comedians who had worked with him in the UK were very present. Also, my friends and family. But my friend Binj Pasek in particular. Benj Pasek and Jenji Kohan. And Mike Birbiglia. Who by the way, is like—

Mike Birbiglia produced my show Off-Broadway, and I can never say enough good things about the guy. 'Cause like, you know, he's not cuddly. But like—and he's a parent and an ambitious creative himself. So, he's always working. But when I really needed him, he really showed up. And he did it in a very quiet way that he would just show up and like play basketball with me, or just show up and do my voice exercises onstage, or just show up and offer some quiet wisdom. And he changed my life in a— Alex Timbers did the unenviable job of stepping into a dead guy's big shoes and, you know, directing a special.

Like, everything changed. And there were really bad things about it. And there were some—and there were infinite blessings to it, also. Does that make sense? Like—?

John Moe: *(Softly.)* Yeah. Completely.

Alex Edelman: So, that's a real— And also, I've kind of lost... some days I feel like I've lost the plot on the show a little bit. Like, I used to be able to talk about it more cogently, and now it's so muddled for me with like... with, um—with grief and feeling. Some of it very public, some of it intensely private. You know. In some ways the thing I always wanna talk about, and in other ways, it's a thing I just can't bear to think on.

So, it's such a powerful emotion. It's always there. And then, by the way, the psychic damage of people telling me about the people that they lost.

(John agrees empathetically.)

That fucking sucked. And also, someone wrote a review in a major newspaper saying the show— They gave the show a very nice review. But they also said it'd be better if Adam hadn't died.

John Moe: *(Whispered.)* Oh boy.

Alex Edelman: And they're right. That's the thing. They're fucking right, John. Like, yeah, obviously the show would be better. He had a— He was a value add. From a purely emotionless, sociopathic, mathematical perspective—

[00:50:00]

—this person was like a +10 on anything, let's say. So, obviously the show is gonna be 10%, 20%, 100%— It's gonna be worse. And living with that and knowing I was doing a show that wasn't as good as it could have been... that was really, really hard. And the guilt when that show won a, you know, fucking Tony or an Emmy—like, it was compounded. (*Wobbling.*) So, yeah. Sorry. That's...

John Moe: Don't be sorry. That was beautiful.

(*Alex mumbles something unclear.*)

I'm coming away from this conversation really glad—looking forward to watching *The Paper* and really glad that you're working on it. Because it seems like—

Alex Edelman: Oh my god.

John Moe: It seems like it's a good place and a caring place and a healthy place for you to be. And I'm glad that you're getting that.

Alex Edelman: I really— I think part of the reason I took that job was because, one, I wanna learn from Greg Daniels and Michael Koman, who were the two guys running it. Because they're both big parts of my comedy psyche and big parts of the... big parts of like my comedy makeup. Like, Michael did those great early *Conan* stuff. You know, *Nathan For You*, *How To with John Wilson*. Like, beautiful, handmade, funny, brilliant things. And Greg Daniels is Greg Daniels. And I was really excited to get in there with a bunch of writers and actors that I liked and be part of a group after having lost someone so close to me.

And that was really—that was— You know, it wasn't just the opportunity to. I said no to a lot of acting stuff. Like, I never in my heart hungered to be an actor until, you know, recently. Now I'm doing a bunch more of it, and it's really nice and rewarding. I do a couple roles in some movies and maybe more television, and you know—God willing—maybe wind up back on *The Paper* if that's how the cards fall. But yeah, just being back in a collaborative experience was so big for me that that's why I took the job.

John Moe: Yeah. Alex Edelman, thank you so much for your time.

Alex Edelman: Thanks so much for having me, John. And I hope it wasn't too... I don't know. Too much of anything or other stuff. (*Laughs.*)

John Moe: It was just the right amount of everything.

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

John Moe: You can catch the whole first season of *The Paper* on Peacock now. All episodes are there. Alex said in the interview, God willing, he'd end up back on *The Paper* if that's how the cards fall. Well, that's how they fell. *The Paper* has just been renewed for a second season. *Just For Us* is on HBO Max, online.

Our show exists because people support it, people give to it. Thank you so much if you're one of those people. (*Chuckling.*) You know, we do this show every week. I'm kind of running out of ways to say, “Hey, we need you. We need your support in order to keep this show going.” But it's really true. That's the model. It's a membership model. Please become a member. Give 5 bucks a month, 10, 20, whatever you can afford, whatever makes sense for you. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join. Be sure to hit subscribe. Give us five stars. Write rave reviews. That gets the show out 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://www.bluethink.com/@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://www.instagram.com/JohnMoe). Join our Preshies group on Facebook. A lot of good discussion happening over there, people hanging out, making some jokes, supporting each other, talking about the show. I'm there. I'll see you there. Just search Preshies on Facebook. Our electric mail address is DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. The other day, my daughter and I went to get our annual banana split. We do it once a year. But when we get to the local ice cream shop, they were out of bananas. “If I go get a banana and bring it back, will you make us a split?”, I asked.

“Sure,” the manager said. “And you know what? Here's \$3. Can you bring us back some more bananas?” So, that's what we did, and we got our split. It was a lesson in something, but I don't know what.

Thank you to listener, Caitlin.

Depresh Mode is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me.

[00:55:00]

We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, “Building Wings”. He sings with the band Old 97s, and you should listen to their music more often—as well as Rhett’s solo stuff. *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

Becky: I'm Becky from Michigan, and I believe in 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!