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John Moe: Here's the bad news. Bad news first, which means I'll get to the good news.

Bad news: if your parents did a really poor job—filled you up with lies, tore you down, made you feel unimportant, told you that you were unimportant, made sure that you never had fun or experienced joy? Well, that's gonna mess you up and mess you up for a long time. You can move away from them. They can die, and they still are with you. Because they still built you—and poorly. If you were raised by harmful, toxic people in a harmful, toxic way, you have fundamental problems that are—and I'll raise my voice—not your fault. But they're there anyway. I'm sorry they did that to you. I'm sorry you have to live with it.

Okay, here's the good news. You can feel better. You can understand the damage. You can discover fun and joy. You can find your voice and find people who want to hear your voice. Here's more good news: you are worthwhile. You are entitled to fun and joy. You have value. And even if you're not so young anymore, you can feel better. And sometimes what can help is Bruce Springsteen. It's *Depress Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm not Bruce Springsteen. And I am so glad you're here.

Music: “Born to Run” from the album *Born to Run* by Bruce Springsteen.

In the day, we sweat it out on the streets

Of a runaway American dream...

(Music continues under the dialogue then fades out.)

John Moe: I really love this job that I have. And thank you for listening and for supporting the show. I love the job, because I get to meet the most fascinating people and then introduce them to you. Some of them are people I encounter a lot in my day-to-day life. Musicians, authors, comedy folks. I have a lot in common with them. We have some of the same friends. And once in a while, I get to meet and introduce you to someone completely unlike anyone I've met before.

Anne Abel is a New York based writer, storyteller, and social media influencer. She's older than most people you think of as influencers. Anne's 71, has hundreds of thousands of followers on Instagram and TikTok—where she talks about her life and major experiences, but also reviews bagels and pizza in New York. Anne has told stories with The Moth and written two books: *Mattie, Milo, and Me*, about a rescue dog she had; and a new one, *High Hopes*, about her lifelong struggle with severe depression and how a Bruce Springsteen concert in Philadelphia changed everything. She's not someone who went to a lot of concerts—or had ever been to any concerts—when she saw Bruce.

She was 59 years old at the time, never been to a concert. This book tells the story of Anne's trip a few years later to Australia to see eight Springsteen concerts—she went by herself—and the effect of that on her mental health.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Anne Abel, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Anne Abel: Thank you very much for having me.

John Moe: I very much enjoyed the book. We're gonna talk about that first Springsteen concert in a moment. But you know, we are a show that talks a lot about mental health, and what had your mental health been to that point in your life prior to that first Philadelphia Bruce Springsteen concert?

Anne Abel: I have suffered with severe recurring depression my entire adult life. And when I was in my 50s, for the first time in my life—I mean, I struggled. Really struggled in my 50s. Working out is the only thing that ever helps me. And my kids and my husband. But I just—One day, I couldn't work out. I just stopped functioning. And I went inpatient to Sheppard Pratt Psychiatric Hospital. I had what I was terrified of having, which was ECT: electroconvulsive therapy. And after six weeks, I went home; I was great. Then a year later I was back at Sheppard Pratt having more ECT. That's why it's called severe recurrent depression.

And then I started teaching English at the Community College of Philadelphia, and it was great. But then I fell back into the abyss, and I had a third regimen of ECT, outpatient. This was right before my first concert. And the regimen had to be aborted halfway through, because I was losing my memory.

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As a result, I didn't remember the July wedding of my son and daughter-in-law that was that summer. And then they came— We were living in Philadelphia; they lived in Boston. And then Labor Day weekend, Friday before Labor Day weekend, we got a call “Can we come visit you in Philadelphia? 'Cause we wanna see a Bruce Springsteen concert.” My daughter-in-law is a second-generation Springsteen fan. “Can we come visit you?”

I'm like, “Of course, you can come.”

“And can we— Do you wanna go to the concert?”

And I was like, “What? No.” I didn't even— I knew nothing about music. I grew up in really what was a cult. My parents didn't approve of music or fun. In 1964, when 73,000,000 people tuned in to watch The Beatles on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, 12-year-old me was not one of them. My mother saw me turning on the television. She said, “Turn it off. It's a waste of time. Go do something constructive.”

So, I knew nothing about music, but I first told them, “No, I don't wanna go to this concert. At seven o'clock, I'm in bed. I can count that day over.”

John Moe: Yeah. I wanna ask about— You said a cult. Was it like a real—?

Anne Abel: Oh, no, on the outside, we looked like a very nice, Jewish, middle-class family. My mother was a (*unclear*) counselor; my father, a professor. But inside it was brutal. It was brutal. I just tried to do everything I was told to do, and there were severe consequences if I didn't. I just— And like many abused children, I just wanted them to love and respect me. I didn't realize it wasn't right. I didn't realize what they were doing wasn't right. And I respected them. I admired them. I just wanted to do whatever I could to get them to love me. This went on for decades.

John Moe: Oh my gosh.

Anne Abel: Anyhow. So, I said, “No, I don't wanna go to this concert.” But then they come. They come on Saturday. And Sunday morning—the concert was Sunday night. And I got on my bike, which is when I feel my best, and I thought, “You know what? I wanna go to this concert, because I wanna spend time with them.” So, we gave away their two tickets. We got my husband, and we got four tickets. And by the time we were going to the concert at six o'clock, I was already dreading it. You know, I just— I was dreading it. I wanted—

John Moe: And you had never been to a concert at that point?

Anne Abel: Never. Been. To a concert.

John Moe: That's the part, Anne—and I'm sorry to interrupt—but were you ever tempted to go to a concert? Was music just not part of your life, it sounds?

Anne Abel: It was not part of my life. I mean, just to give you some idea: when I was a junior in high school, applying to college—(*correcting herself*) a senior—my father, who never spoke to me, appeared in my doorway one evening and said, “I see you're not taking math this year. If you don't do something to make up for that, your life will not be worth living in. You're going to apply to engineering school, and you are going to major in chemical engineering if you want us to pay for college.”

I said, “But Dad—” I never spoke back at my father. I said, “But dad, I've never gotten above a C in math or science.” And this one—and so, I went to college to become a chemical engineer. You know, really, to this day, I can't add three numbers. It's kind of a joke in my family. So, I had so much to deal with. You know, well, maybe my classmates and dorm mates, maybe they were going to concerts, but I was just trying— I was just trying to get through and do what I had to do, which was to not flunk out of school.

John Moe: Yeah. Did you know who Bruce Springsteen was? I mean, he's been on the cover of magazines since the 1970s.

Anne Abel: I mean, yeah. I'm sure. I got *Newsweek*, I got *Time Magazine*. I'm sure I saw that picture with, you know, his butt on the thing. But I didn't— I had so many other things going on. I just didn't— When they said Bruce Springsteen, I go, “I've never—” You know, I didn't think, “Oh, that's weird. I never heard of that.” I'm sure I'd heard of him. I mean, who hasn't heard of Bruce Springsteen? But that was all I knew.

And then we get in the car, the four of us, to go to the concert. And I'm really dreading it. And one thing I used to do that I did like doing, when my— I have three sons, and they were Phillies fans. We would go— we had, you know, partial season's tickets to the Phillies. So, we would go to Veterans Stadium, then Citizens Bank Park. And I didn't like sitting in the sweltering hot, but I loved being with my kids and my husband. So, we get— That's where the concert was, at Citizens Bank Park. And we had to park so far away, further than we'd ever parked at baseball. And I mean, I was just dreading it. We get out, and I'm hobbling along.

But as we're walking along— I mean, I've seen tailgaters. But this was different than any tailgating I'd seen. You know, people, they all had these Springsteen t-shirts; they were barbecuing; they were offering— You know, you could hear the music. You know, not loud, but you could hear everyone was playing music. And they would offer us hoagies or pretzels—*(correcting herself)* or not hoagies—pretzels or whatever they were cooking. And it was just so different, you know? And that kind of started to get me a little— And I then I was thinking, “You know what?”

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I'm like, a baseball game—where at the end of the game, some of these people aren't gonna be happy, 'cause their team lost, here everyone's gonna be a winner at the end of the evening. And so, my spirits were kind of lifting. And then we get to the stadium, and I started having like deja vu when I used to be there with my kids. You know, it was— They were good memories. The smells. And then we sat there. I mean, never did it occur to me that—I think it was a 7:30 concert—wasn't gonna start 'til 9:30. I would never have gone if I knew that.

John Moe: *(Laughs.)* What were you expecting a concert to be like?

Anne Abel: I wasn't thinking anything. I had no expectations. I was only going 'cause I love my kids to spend time with my kids. And so, we're sitting there and I— Now, at this wedding, I didn't remember one thing from their July wedding. So, as they're sitting there for two hours, they're showing me thousands and thousands of wedding photos on their phones. And then all of a sudden, as the crowd mysteriously rose in unison, I rose too. You know, I guess just pulled up by the energy of the crowd. And up on the giant screen was the face of a man with the biggest, kindest smile I had ever seen.

And that just pulled me right in. And I would watch that, and then I looked down at the stage. We were on the third tier of the four-tier stadium, but I could feel the energy of this man down on the stage. The tap-tap-tapping, the strum-strum-strumming. That energy, I could feel it came up from him to the people in front of me and then up to me. And my heart just opened up for this man. And I was— You know, this woman, this 30 something woman was standing

in front of me. So, for while I was standing the whole time. But then she turned around and gave me a smile, and she was dancing and the next thing I knew, I was dancing!

(John chuckles.)

And it was just like nothing I'd ever experienced in my life.

John Moe: So, was it the music that was moving you? Was it Bruce, or was it the energy of the crowd? Like, did you enjoy the music?

Anne Abel: Oh my god! No, I didn't understand the lyrics at this point. But the man on the stage, number one; the people around me— You know, there was this—it was just everything. It was him. You know, his energy, his enthusiasm, his humanity. It just lifted me! And the music— You know, I didn't understand the lyrics, but I felt the music. You know, the— And the people. It was just everything. And that was on a Sunday. Saturday, my husband and I were in Chicago at Wrigley Field where he was playing. And then my husband told me he didn't like Bruce Springsteen. He didn't like stadium seats. So, for the rest of the fall, I— You know, if there were concerts that I could drive to, I would go.

John Moe: For Bruce or concerts in general?

Anne Abel: No, just Bruce Springsteen. He made me feel— He gave me hope. His concerts gave me hope. His concerts made me feel alive. And for the— I had never done the three letter F word. The first time I did the three letter F word was at a Bruce Springsteen concert.

John Moe: What's the three letter F word?

Anne Abel: Fun.

John Moe: *(Beat.)* Fun? *(Laughs.)* You had never had fun?

Anne Abel: Never. No. I mean, I enjoyed my kids. I got gratification, but fun was not allowed in my family. Music— It was— No, we didn't do fun.

John Moe: But you never— After you grew up and married and had kids, you didn't go to Disneyland with your kids? Or you know—

Anne Abel: Went to Disney World. My husband says first prize is one week in Disney World; second prize is two weeks in Disney World. *(Chuckles.)*

John Moe: Sounds like he's maybe not so much fun either.

Anne Abel: No, he— My husband isn't very fun. *(Beat.)* I don't know where we're going with this, but—

John Moe: (*Chuckles.*) Well, we're talking about the effect of this concert, and I'm just marveling that—

Anne Abel: Well, if you know someone who's depressed, depressed people don't have fun. When I made plans to go on this trip to Australia, I was dreading it. I was not thinking it was fun. 'Cause depressed people do not— They wouldn't be depressed if they could think about fun.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Coming up: Anne goes to Australia, sees Bruce onstage and back at the hotel!

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with Anne Abel, author of *High Hopes*. Pretty major Bruce Springsteen fan, it's fair to say, who traveled to Australia alone in her 60s to catch eight Bruce concerts.

Did depression lift as a result of that first Springsteen concert, and did it stay lifted in the days and weeks it followed?

Anne Abel: No. If only you—all you had to do was— I don't know. I'm severely depressed.

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John Moe: Yeah.

Anne Abel: And one of my favorite lines about Bruce is when he says that “I can't give you life everlasting, but I can give you life in this moment.” And that's the thing. And I've been to other concerts since then, many other concerts. But that's the thing about a Bruce Springsteen concert. You are in the moment. You are just anchored to that moment with that man, with that crowd, with that music. You aren't thinking about the future moment, the past moment, you are just in that moment. Just— You want for nothing more. Or I don't. When I am there, I have it all. I am there with this man, with these people, in this place, and there's nothing more I want.

John Moe: Yeah. Yeah. And just to give you my qualifications, I have also seen Bruce in concerts, so I know a little bit about what you're talking about.

Anne Abel: No, I know, but I mean, I studied— Afterwards. I went on E Street Radio, and I knew nothing, and I was terrified of the host. So, I spent like three or four months just learning everything I could about all kinds of music. I saw Jay-Z, Beyonce, Elvis Castello, you name it. I went to London to see Chrissie Hynde. And I just— I went on a crash course to learn music, so I've been to lots of concerts.

John Moe: How old were you when you went to the first Springsteen concert?

Anne Abel: 59.

John Moe: 59! So, you had this kind of music discovery at 59 that you didn't get to have with the Beatles on *Ed Sullivan*—which is a moment that so many people I've talked to of your generation talk about. Like, "That's the moment music began for me was seeing that show." You were blocked from seeing that show, but you got that payoff anyway at 59.

Anne Abel: With Bruce Springsteen.

John Moe: Yeah. Yeah. Now I've been—like I said, been going to concerts my whole life. I don't think I've seen anyone eight times, and I know I haven't crossed the planet to do it. Where did you get the idea to go to Australia by yourself for a series of eight concerts by Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band?

Anne Abel: I've now probably seen 30 of his concerts, but anyhow. Okay, so. A year after my first concert—and I'd gone to a few others that, you know, had been equally wonderful. Almost 13 months after my first concert, I had been teaching at the Community College of Philadelphia for five years. It was very good. All of a sudden, in 2013, I had the class from hell. I mean, it was— And the fifth week of the semester, after having one desk too many thrown at me—and I really, literally mean thrown at me—I just walked out the door. It was a Monday in October. I walked out the door. The sun was shining on me; the trees were— And I just thought, "I am never coming back here. I deserve better than this."

But as soon as I was in my car making a U-turn, I was panicking. I was terrified that without the structure and focus of the classroom, I would fall back into the abyss. My kids were grown and living on opposite coasts. My husband was traveling. Listen. I'd had ECT three times. The one I'd had a year earlier; I ended up with atypical jaw pain. I mean, 24/7, because when they do the shocks through your brain, even though they put a plate in your mouth, I had clenched down. It took them six months to be able to bring this pain under control. I was not doing ECT again. I was 60 by now. I knew myself as well as any mental health person. I wasn't going inpatient. And somewhere I had seen that Bruce Springsteen would be touring in Australia in February. This was October.

And even though I really hate to travel; I hate to be alone. And remember, I hadn't known who this guy was 13 months earlier. I went home. Without even taking off my coat, without saying hello to my dogs, I sat down, I googled "Australia travel agents", wrote to the first five who popped up on my screen. And the next day when one—the first one who called me, I booked the trip. That was it.

John Moe: Did it strike you as an unusual thing to do? Or like—did it seem big and risky, or did it just seem like this is a sensible thing to do given what I like?

Anne Abel: Well, I called my husband, and I told him, "I quit. Do you wanna go with me?" He's on sabbatical. He is a professor.

He said, "I understand you quit. You were having— You know, it's a blah, blah, blah. But I don't like Bruce Springsteen, and no."

Was it—? What were my alternatives? I'm severely— I was not going inpatient again. I did not wanna fall into the abyss of depression again. I needed structure. I needed focus. I wasn't gonna be sitting on my family room couch just figuring out what to do. So, maybe— And I was terrified. But one thing about me, I don't let fear stop me from doing things that I think are good for me.

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So, I needed a lifeline, and I grabbed onto this lifeline. This was my lifeline. All I needed to do was just get through these 26 days. And really, I was terrified. Before the trip, if I could have just disappeared from this earth and not left anyone sad behind me, I would've done that. I was so afraid of going. I did not—

John Moe: What were you afraid of?

Anne Abel: What was I afraid of? I was afraid of alone. I was afraid of traveling to the other side of the earth. I don't like to— I don't like to travel, and I need my routine. I don't like to travel! I don't like to be alone. And I'm chasing this aging rockstar across the world. I mean, what was I afraid of? I didn't know! You know, everything that's unknown, I was afraid of. I didn't wanna do it, but I had no other choice. And I did not go on the trip to change. But I came— I went for structure and focus, but I came home a different person. For the first time in my life, when I came home, I had— For the first time, I had a positive ball of energy and a story about me that I was proud of. A story I wanted to tell.

John Moe: Were you thinking of the concerts as like treatments, like ECT sessions? Except they were concerts?

Anne Abel: No, I was thinking of them as structure. Eight nights on these 26 days, I would have a— And I told the travel agent, “All I wanna do,”—she kept trying to sell me add-ons. “Nope. All I wanna do is work out, go to eight concerts, and write.” Now, I wasn't surprised by the first two. But I suffer with severe writer's block.

Growing up at the dinner table, my father would say, “You can listen but don't speak.” And until the days each of them died four years ago, they told me not to speak to them, 'cause I had nothing interesting to say. So, you can see why I might have writer's block. I went back to school in my mid-40s and got an MFA in creative writing, and I wrote for a million different editors. And if someone said to me, “Go write 5,000 words about that tree in your backyard,” whenever he wanted it/she wanted it, he would have that piece.

But if I looked out the window and said, “I really like that tree. I'm gonna write about it. I wanna write about it,” after five minutes, I would be under my desk saying, “So what? Who cares? This is stupid.” So, I suffered with writer's block, but as I was— And in the five years I'd been teaching, I wasn't thinking about writing. I was happy teaching other people to write. But as I was thinking about the trip, my will to be happy must have bubbled up inside me and reminded me that I wanted to write. So, that's what I did on— And I ended up staying just in the same hotels as Bruce Springsteen and a lot of the band, and there was nothing—

One thing that, when I would be really depressed at home before this and I just needed— I would just go sit in a like Whole Foods parking lot. And I would just watch people, 'cause I love being a fly on the wall. But I had never been a fly on an A-list wall. And I can also be invisible. So, I would end up sitting (*chuckles*) on a bench next to Tom Morello or MA Weinberg. Our shoulders were touching. They wouldn't even see me. So, it was like— So, it was great. It was really— That part was really fun.

John Moe: I thought that was so interesting in your book, how—you know, like you say, you're staying at the same hotel as Bruce's band, and you're running across the band and Steven Van Zandt and sometimes Bruce himself, who you characterize as being shorter than you might think.

Anne Abel: Barbara Carr.

John Moe: And Barbara Carr, his manager. And you seem to consciously try to get close to these people. Like, you're literally sleeve-to-sleeve with Steven Van Zandt on a couch, without actually meeting them. Like, you briefly meet Tom Morello for a picture who's from Rage Against the Machine, who was touring with Springsteen at the time.

Anne Abel: And also, Jay Clemens. Jay Clemens, and Cindy (*trying to remember the last name*) DeSau? And that was before my first concert. I got them to do photos with me.

John Moe: But so, you literally are rubbing elbows with some of these people, but not talking to them. What was going on with that boundary you set up for yourself?

Anne Abel: Alright, well, there's two things there. I didn't— They don't want to talk to me. I don't wanna hound them. They're on— You know, they're not on the clock there.

John Moe: But there's your voice again! There's the voice of your parents again saying what you have to say isn't interesting!

Anne Abel: No, look, what am I gonna say? “Oh, take—” I already got my picture taken with them. I wanted to just listen to them. It was like— I'm a sociocultural anthropologist at heart. I wanted to— It's in the book, the conversations I overheard. There was the time Tom Morello and maybe it was Max Weinberg were putting their stuff in a van there.

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And I just sidled up with, you know, my back to them. And I heard one say to the other, “He came up to me in the bar after the last concert and told me we were we were off in the fifth measure.” This is in the book. “We were off—” You know, like that to me was amazing! I was more interested in hearing them speak. Now, the other thing is Bruce Springsteen. I did not want to meet him for a couple of reasons. For me, he's a magician. He performs magic on me in a concert. I don't— You know, I don't make any pretense to know what he's like as a private person, but I do know what his persona is like on stage. And I didn't wanna meet this man and find out that, like Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz* when she pulled the curtain back and found that the wizard was just this like curmudgeon guy. If I'd been over there so many

thousand miles from home and found out that Bruce Springsteen was a bad guy? *(Chuckles.)*
I just couldn't deal with that.

So, you know. So. And that was one thing. The other thing was I didn't know what I would say to him. How do you say in one minute to this man who has just moved you across the world how much he means to you? I just didn't have the words to say that, so it was just better for many reasons.

John Moe: Was there one concert among the eight that stood out for you as the best?

Anne Abel: That's the wonderful thing about— And I actually have a section in my book that I really like. I'm driving to my eighth and last concert in Brisbane. And I'm thinking— And I was really excited to be going home. So, I was excited. But then I'm thinking, “You know what? There have been seven great concerts. Every one has been different. You know, his energy, he's let it out in different ways, blah, blah, blah.” You don't expect— He's a master performer. Like, you don't expect a master baseball player, you know, to hit a home run or a grand slam every game. I'm mean, there's no way. Bruce Springsteen doesn't need to hit the equivalent of a home run or grand slam tonight. Not every one has to be terrific.

John Moe: He's already in Cooperstown.

Anne Abel: Well, yes. And so, I go to the concert. You know, it's my last one. I will tell you— And I have a great reading I love from my book about the beginning of that eighth concert where I'm just like, “Okay, tomorrow I'm going home. Yeah, I've been there, done that.” And he comes out on stage, and wow. You know, so every concert was special and different... and wonderful.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Imagine parents telling their child, “Don't speak to us, because you have nothing interesting to say.” Imagine them saying that until they died. Imagine the damage. Imagine all the work that someone would have to do to address that damage. More with Anne Abel, author of *High Hopes*, in just a moment.

Promo:

(Pleasant chimes.)

Manolo Moreno: Hey, it's Sue the Subway train.

(Pleasant chimes.)

Hey, guess what, Sue? I just inherited a game show. And I have to continue it, because there are people out there who like to curl up into a ball and listen to it.

(Thoughtful chimes.)

Yeah. It's a podcast where listeners submit game show ideas for others to play on air.

(Cheery chimes.)

Well, it is! In fact the dumber the better.

(Querying chimes.)

Right, right. It's called *Dr. Gameshow*. Some curled up balls consider it a tradition while others call it a train wreck.

(Unhappy chimes.)

No, not you, Sue. It's *Dr. Gameshow*. If you're the sort that likes to listen to people competing for refrigerator magnets, then curl up into a ball and listen to *Dr. Gameshow* every other Wednesday on MaximumFun.org.

(Bright chimes.)

Promo:

Music: Paramore inspired pop punk music.

Sequoia Holmes: Are you a five-star baddy? If you answered yes, then *Black People Love Paramore* is the podcast for you. Contrary to the title, we are not a podcast about the band. *Paramore Black People Love Paramore* is a pop culture show about the common and uncommon interests of Black people in order to help us feel a little bit more seen.

Jewel Wicker: We are your co-hosts.

Sequoia: Sequoia Holmes.

Jewel Wicker: Jewel Wicker.

Ryan Gilyard: And Ryan Gilyard.

Sequoia: And in each episode, we dissect one pop culture topic that mainstream media doesn't associate with Black people, but we know that we like.

Jewel: We get into topics like ginger ale, *The Golden Girls*, Black romance, UNO, and so much more.

Ryan: Tune in every other Thursday to the podcast that's dedicated to helping Black people feel more seen. Find *Black People Love Paramore* On MaximumFun.org or wherever you get your podcasts.

(Music fades out.)

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We're back with author Anne Abel.

I have to say that I love the idea of flying to Australia to see eight huge stadium shows. That sounds like a blast. But I can't afford that. I don't think all that many of you can afford that. The cathartic power of music is something I do believe in.

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But that affordability gap stayed with me. And even though it got a little tense, I had to ask Anne about it.

You know, reading this book you have the means to take this trip to Australia. You have drivers and concierge services everywhere, same hotel is as the band, every convenience you would want. Do you worry that people reading this won't relate to how much privilege that you have to be able to do a trip like this?

Anne Abel: Privilege has nothing to do with depression. Money just means you have more choices. That's what money— One of the things about money is you have more choices. So I was able to do this, but someone else could do this trip and go to these concerts. You can— You don't need to be privileged. I don't think only privileged people go to Bruce Springsteen concerts. So, this is my experience.

John Moe: You talk about how when you flew back, you were changed. How were you changed?

Anne Abel: Well, I mentioned earlier that I had this positive ball of energy I'd never had before. And for the first time in my life, a story about me that I was proud of and wanted to tell. Not about the tree out back. About me. And there were two factors for that change. One was the kindness of strangers in Australia. At home? My friends rolled their eyes that I was chasing this aging rockstar across the world. They didn't appreciate, care, or understand that I was fighting for my life. But in Australia, many people called— I was embarrassed to tell people when I first got there what I was doing there. But when I did, many people called me courageous. Young people told me they wished they could get their mother to get off a couch

and go to a movie or volunteer at a church bazaar—things they had done before they retired. And it was Bruce Springsteen who changed me also.

I believe we see art through the prism of our own eyes, through our own experiences. And so, I saw Bruce Springsteen onstage. Now this was in 2014, before his memoir came out. I didn't know anything about him. I didn't know he was depressed. And I'm not saying I only liked the depressed songs, but there were— For example, in Sydney, he did a solo encore of “Dream Baby Dream”. Growing up, I'd never been allowed to dream. I'd never even thought about dreaming. I was so busy trying to do everything I was told to do and hoping that each achievement would have my parents finally accepting me that I never thought about what I might want to see or do.

I was once at a comedy show, and the comedian turned to me. I was in the front row, spotlight and all and said—asked me what I had dreamt about as a kid. I didn't wanna spoil his wonderful show, so I just nodded, and he moved on. But that night in Sydney, watching Bruce Springsteen sing “Dream Baby Dream”, I felt as if you were imploring himself to dream. The music filled me and lifted me. I floated out of the arena that night feeling as if I could dream. It didn't happen right away, but I believe that once you feel something, it's easier to recreate it. So, that was one thing.

Another night, he went back and forth across the stage saying over and over, “How do you get through the day? How do you get through the day and stay alive inside?”

Watching him go back and forth doing this, I thought if Bruce Springsteen can say this to an arena full of fans, I must not be the only one feeling like this. It's okay to struggle. It's okay to struggle and try and try again. He was validating. And then of course, Bruce Springsteen is so much fun. One night he sang—I think it was “10th Avenue Freeze Out”—“It's alright to have a good time.” When I heard that, I took it as a 100% okay. It was okay for me to have fun, finally, after 60 years.

So, those are just a few of the highlights of some of the concerts and how they move me and how his words move me.

John Moe: How's your depression today?

Anne Abel: Well, to be honest—I'm better than I—(*stuttering*) I am still depressed. I don't know, maybe other people are different. I don't think you get rid of depression, but I am so much better than— I'm better than I have ever been in my life. And that was the first step. That trip to Australia was— A transformation that began with that trip continues today. I am now— I came home.

[00:35:00]

My husband had been unhappy at work, but I didn't do anything. We moved to Chicago for what was supposed to be four months. My first day there, I said to my dogwalker, “What do you do when you're not walking dogs?”

And she said, “Well, I host a storytelling open mic. There's a string of them across the city. And I also tell stories at The Moth.” I had never heard of storytelling. I had never heard of The Moth, but I knew I had one story to tell. So, I started going to open mics, and then a friend took me to The Moth. He made me put my name in. I got up; I told a five-minute story about Australia. I won that night's story slam. People had so many questions. You know, I had been told I had nothing interesting to say my whole life. Now, people at The Moth, people at story shows, people inviting me to come to curated shows, they were— People were telling me something different.

And people had so many questions about my trip to Australia that it inspired me to write this book, *High Hopes*. Now, I suffer with terrible writer's block. And I was writing this book, and an editor had it. It was taking her forever. It was during the lockdown. And someone said to me—kept saying, “Write about Milo. Write about Milo.” It was this rescue dog I had gotten by accident. And it was—

And I said, “I can't write about Milo.” But then I found 50 pages I had written 15 years ago. Anyhow, I wrote it. It seemed like a more straightforward story than *High Hopes*. I thought, “Well, I'll get *Mattie, Milo, and Me* out into the world, and I'll come back and do *High Hopes*,” which is what I did.

Meanwhile, a year ago, the publisher said, “You should get on social media to promote *Mattie, Milo, and Me*.”

And I was like, “Oh no.” Facebook to me was social media, and I dreaded it. But I had a—I was now in New York. I had moved to New York. That's part of the transformation. I never went back to Philadelphia. My husband and I and our dogs moved to New York City. A different dogwalker came, and I said, “Do you know anyone who does social media?” And she gave me the name of this 19-year-old computer science major at CUNY here in New York who did social media for her company. Well, I now call—his name is Arseni—I call him Maestro or Steven Spielberg. Since November, we've had 21 viral videos. I have over seven—almost 800,000 followers.

I did it to promote my book, and as soon as I went viral, *Mattie, Milo, and Me* is still selling; the book about my dog is selling. But I will tell you, people started writing to me, “Your voice is so soothing. Your voice is calming. You're so relatable. You're so interesting.”

And I was like, “This is crazy. This is surreal.” I have— My parents, my whole life, had told me I had nothing to say and to be quiet. And now social media was telling me something different. It was as if it were the antidote to my parents' toxicity, which isn't to say I wake up in the morning and go, “Wow, another great day to tell a great story.” And Arseni doesn't tell me in advance what videos we're going to do, because when he does, I say, “I can't do that.”

But I don't feel like the person my followers describe. But I think about what they say. And when Arseni says, “3, 2, 1, go,” I turn off my brain, and I go. And I can't tell you how many people write all how I inspire them. (*Stammering.*) At the beginning, this one woman kept writing. I said, “What is your story? How am I inspiring you?!”

She said, “I’m in my 80s. I have late-stage lupus, and thinking about you helps me get through my day.” And I get this every day.

John Moe: So, you had been told for a long time that what you had to say wasn’t interesting by the people—and I’m so sorry that happened, Anne. Those people shouldn’t have said that. They weren’t supposed to say that. That’s not their job. And then now you have all these people saying that what you have to say is fascinating. Given how ingrained the first message—that you weren’t interesting—is in you, who do you believe?

Anne Abel: Well, I think— Who do I believe? I mean, rationally? Rationally, I believe these people think that about me, but I do not feel like that. And I tell you; I am so much better than I used to be. The only thing that helps me— I work out; I’m 72, and when my body is, you know, behaving, I work out for 50 minutes. 45 to 50, either on a bike or— Every single day. And every morning, I wake— I will tell you. Every morning I wake up. And you said I can swear. Every morning I wake up, and I feel like shit. I feel like a loser. I feel like a total loser. I turn my brain off. I have breakfast. I love newspapers. I read the newspaper, and then it’s time to work out. And when my husband’s not traveling and he is here, I say, “Oh, I feel so horrible.”

And he says, “This is your hard—the worst part of your day.”

And I hobble over to my elliptical. And even though I have never worked out and not felt better—because that’s how depression is—

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I stand there and I think, “There is no way I am going to feel better after this.” But then I say to myself— Every single morning, I say to myself, “Okay, just look at this like an experiment. You feel like crap now. Get on. Let’s see how you feel when you get off.” I have to say that to myself, and I’m very disciplined. The only non-negative word either parent ever used to describe me was persevering. And I’m writing my third memoir, hoping it will be called *She Tried, and She Tried, and She Tried*. Because I do. And I used to tell my kids, “I want you to write that on my tombstone.” ‘Cause I will do anything if I think it will help me, no matter how horrible it is. I— That’s what I do.

John Moe: Do Bruce Springsteen’s studio albums have a positive effect on you? Or does it need to be a live performance?

Anne Abel: No! No, no, no. Are you kidding? I get in the car; I turn on E Street Radio.

John Moe: Okay. What’s your favorite album? What’s your favorite song of Bruce Springsteen’s?

Anne Abel: Okay. I don’t go by albums. My favorite favorites—well, I have a few, but my favorite is “Dream Baby Dream”. I just— And I know that’s not his song. It’s a cover, but I still love it. And I love—and I know this one’s a really tacky one, but I love “Waiting on a Sunny Day”. I just— I like the energy. I just like everything about that one. “If I Shall Fall

Behind”, that was another song I heard for the first time when I was in Adelaide at my first concert. And it was the most beautiful song I had ever heard. And standing in the audience, I just reflected back on 35 years of marriage and how naive we are at the age of 25 when we take our vows, and how many times I had lost my way, and my husband Andy was always there, holding out his hand, waiting for me.

John Moe: Do you have the experience—? I've had this experience with his songs where they mean something—they mean one thing when I first hear them, which in my case was when I was like 15, and then they mean something else later on. Like, “the river” means something completely different to me than it did before. Do you find that like the interpretations that you have, the associations that you make with the songs, evolve over time?

Anne Abel: Well, you have to understand, I didn't start this when I was 15.

(John affirms.)

My development was pretty much— So, I can't say—

John Moe: Oh, I think you've done a lot of developing since you went to that concert.
(Laughs.)

Anne Abel: Yeah, but I can't— But I'm— You know, 15 is not 59 or 62.

(John affirms.)

But when I hear— Oh my god, when I hear these songs— You know, like I hear the one when I was in Sydney, even reading about it in my book, like I remember that moment, those moments when I was hearing “Dream Baby Dream”. It was so, so profound for me, that moment watching him. I get the chills just talking to you about it. Like, it was just so— I'm just standing there. I'm at this concert. I'm not looking for a life-changing—you know? And all of a sudden, this man comes out, and I'm just—and he just connects with me. And it moved me in a way that, really to this day, I get the chills when I hear or even just think—! I can bring myself back to that concert in 2014. It just— It was so profound for me. And there—you know, there's other moments like that.

John Moe: The book is *High Hopes*. The author is Anne Abel. And Anne, thank you so much for being with us today.

Anne Abel: Okay. Thank you very much for having me.

Music: “Dream Baby Dream” as covered by Bruce Springsteen.

Yeah, I just wanna see you smile

Now I just wanna see you smile

Yeah, I just wanna see you smile

Come on, dream on, dream, baby, dream

Come on and open up your heart...

(Music fades out.)

John Moe: It strikes me that Anne didn't pick the hits as her favorites. Never mentioned “Born to Run” or “Thunder Road” or “Born in the USA”. “Dream Baby Dream”, which we just played a little of, is off the *High Hopes* album. But like she said, her history with Bruce is from lots of shows and the E Street Radio channel on SiriusXM. She doesn't have the historical context of what the hits were. She doesn't remember that. She doesn't know what the big albums and not-so-big albums were. It wasn't part of her experience when those albums came out. Because she had her rock and roll discovery moment—and we've all had them, usually when we're young—she had that at age 59. You can't be too old to have revelations. I promise.

[00:45:00]

And hey, parents, be kind to your kids. Listen to them. Tell them that what they have to say is important, because it is. And if your parents made you feel unimportant, please know that you are important. And you can find ways to feel that way. And also, go to shows! I'm not young anymore, but I love going to concerts! Whether that's a big-ticket arena or stadium thing, or some obscure band playing at the corner bar. Music is beautiful, and it is a benevolent and accessible form of sorcery.

Hey, our show exists because people fund it. That's the way that we're able to get out there and help people and share these stories with you. Thank you for all the kind words that you've been sending in for so long about the show. That helps. What also helps is dollars (*chuckles*), because we need that in order to keep going, quite frankly. If you're already a member of *Depresh Mode*, thanks. If you're not, it's so easy. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join. Find a level that works for you: 5 bucks a month, 10, 20, whatever makes sense. And then select *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows. Be sure to hit subscribe. Give us five stars, write rave reviews.

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We're on BlueSky at [@DepreshMode](#). Our Instagram is [@DepreshPod](#). Our newsletter's on Substack. Search up *Depresh Mode* or John Moe; you'll find it. I'm on BlueSky and Instagram at [@JohnMoe](#). Join our Preshies group on Facebook. Just search up Preshies on Facebook. A lot of people who listen to the show gather together, talk about the show a little bit. I'm there; I'm hanging out. Other people are just supporting each other, having a laugh, showing pictures of their dogs. It's a nice hangout. Our electric mail address is DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. I saw Bruce at the Tacoma Dome in 2000. The only tickets we could get were behind the stage. But Bruce didn't forget about us. He regularly spun around and rocked out directly to us. Thank you, Bruce. By the way, pick up Warren Zanes's book, *Deliver Me From Nowhere: The Making of Bruce Springsteen's Nebraska*. I interviewed Warren about that book on this show a few years ago. *Deliver Me From Nowhere* is about to come out as a movie. Jeremy Allen White from *The Bear* plays Bruce.

Depresh Mode is made possible by your contributions. Our 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

(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!