

Wonderful! 396: Make a Notification to Enjoy Childlike Wonder

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[theme music, "Money Won't Pay (feat. Augustus)" by Bo En plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hi, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: Welcome to Wonderful! It's a podcast where we talk about things we like, that is good, that we are into. And iTunes doesn't know where to slot us in—general information.

Rachel: Yeah, I'm curious about that, actually.

Griffin: Romance, sometimes. Because sometimes, if the hosts are in love, they'll put it in romance.

Rachel: Oh?

Griffin: Even though like we don't always talk about that kind of stuff.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It's like in the background, and a lot of the reviews talk about it. But like, I don't know, do you think this is a romantic show? iTunes seems to think so.

Rachel: Is there really a romance category on iTunes?

Griffin: Tim Cook seems to think so, when he hand-selected us for the romance category.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I don't even think it's called iTunes anymore?

Rachel: Yeah, Apple Podcasts?

Griffin: I should really... been doing this long enough, I think I should probably learn how some of this stuff works.

Rachel: Yeah, well, I feel like you make it a point not to know too much about what people think about what you do.

Griffin: That's right.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Right on the button, right on the money. That's a young man's game.

Rachel: It is, actually.

Griffin: It is—it's extremely a young man's game—a young man with thick and hardy nerves, that have not been frayed by decades of exposure to the internet.

Rachel: When we used to do Rose Buddies, I would really enjoy, because there was like a reality show podcast category.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: And we would...

Griffin: We did all right!

Rachel: We were competitive.

Griffin: We hung, man!

Rachel: Because you know, there's only so many podcasts talking about The Bachelor, and it was a hot topic for a while, when that show, you know—

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Was at its peak. But now—

Griffin: Now, they don't know where to put us. We're fucking wild cards.

Rachel: We're not typically breaking any news here. Although—

Griffin: We're the Joker, aren't we?

Rachel: We are tastemakers.

Griffin: We are the Joker! I feel like you stepped—you walked right over that.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Like the wild card in the deck, but also, like this agent of chaos.

Rachel: Oh, yeah? What's a chaotic thing we've done recently?

Griffin: I don't know, we did a whole episode about whether or not we wanted to fuck Halloween candy. That seemed like pretty...

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: That seemed a little bit—

Rachel: Again, I—

Griffin: On the chaotic side?

Rachel: I never agreed to that.

Griffin: You did actually explicitly agree to that. Don't make me out to seem like some sort of monster.

Rachel: Well, it wasn't like you sat me down and said, "Rachel, here's what I want to do. I want to do an episode where we talk about which Halloween candies are fuckable." [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: If you had—if we had had that conversation, I probably would have said no.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But you told me smash your pass was like a hot thing that the kids were talking about on TikTok, and so I was like, okay, well, I want to be relevant.

Griffin: I don't think... if we were to explicitly play that way, using the most literal definition of the terminology, I don't think there is a single Halloween candy that is... you know. And now it's getting gross and—

Rachel: Well, it depends how you want to get down.

Griffin: Circus peanuts?

Rachel: If you want to get down a certain way, they do make extra-long Tootsie Rolls.

Griffin: The—I wish you all could see the face my wife is—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's a sort of Spanky from The Little Rascals, like a little shrug like, "I don't know!"

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Do you have any Small Wonders? I've got one, if you want me to start, so you can have a little bit of time.

Rachel: Please start.

Griffin: I've talked about Physical: Asia. It's still hittin' so fuckin' right, you guys. It's still going so hard.

Rachel: It's our Olympics.

Griffin: It is—it is how the Olympics should be from now on.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I do—I do agree with that. My biggest gripe with the Olympics, so many people. So many people. How am I supposed to get connected to all of these different people?

Rachel: And they don't all stand around and watch each other the whole time.

Griffin: They do not do that. And talk about how—my god, guys... To really hone in for this Small Wonder, I want to just say, the shit people say on Physical: Asia to one another, in support of not only their own teammates, but like their competitors as well.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: We were watching an episode yesterday where they were doing like a fun, like a... like not for elimination, just a kind of fun challenge to see who can jump the highest.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Who can jump—and one dude, who's like a parkour athlete from Australia, was talking to one of the Korean competitors who actually won his season of Physical: 100, and did a bunch of big high jumps in that season.

And this guy says, in this gorgeous Australian accent, "I *love* watching you jump, bro."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Fuckin' great! There's one part—

Rachel: And they talk—and described it as, quote, "floaty."

Griffin: Floaty. There's one bit where there's like a duo challenge, and on the Korean team, there's like this huge weight lifter dude, and then this much smaller woman, who I think is a wrestler. And he's feeling like really self-conscious like, "I don't know if I can handle this." And she just looks up at him and says, "You're the strongest man under heaven."

Rachel: Oh, god.

Griffin: Jesus Christ, it sent a chill up my spine, it was so fucking good!

Rachel: "You're the strongest man under heaven."

Griffin: That is, as far as I can tell, a title, like a tournament title that one can earn in the Korean weightlifting circuit.

Rachel: If that were in the Poetry Corner, like we would talk about that line for a few minutes, because it is remarkable.

Griffin: The earnestness, the face she gave him?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I immediately started to develop sort of like fan fiction romance—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Between these two actual human being athletes, just because of the delivery of this line. It's—

Rachel: And that may have been a translation...

Griffin: No, I'm pretty sure—

Rachel: Or did she say it in English?

Griffin: She was—she—no, it was a translation. She was referring, I think, to the—to the title that he possessed. But also, like, come on. So good.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Good fuckin' hang, this show.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Great fuckin' hang, this show. Really, really, really good stuff. Challenges go a little long, but now that they've—

Rachel: They do.

Griffin: Eliminated some of the teams, it's really good. There was just a four-challenge relay race style thing that was fucking incredible, must-see TV. Good stuff.

Rachel: Yeah, yeah.

[pause]

Rachel: Surely, that was enough time?

Griffin: The problem is that sometimes we get so fired up talking about the other person's Small Wonder that we don't—

Rachel: Well, and listen—right? Like the thing about being in a duo on a romance podcast—

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: Is you have to listen.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: So, I was listening.

Griffin: Good.

Rachel: Listen, I wasn't thinking about my own thing.

Griffin: No, why would you? Now my ears are open, though. And they're hungry.

Rachel: You know what I really enjoyed?

Griffin: What?

Rachel: You all, you and your brothers on McElroy Family Clubhouse brought back Master Jeff.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: For a second year. And I watched that, and I enjoyed it so much.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: I feel like the categories that you all impose—so, the pairings are random between Jeffs.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: And then the category is seemingly random too. And so, when you are facing Jeffs off against each other, you are focusing on that category—

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: As how you choose the best Jeff.

Griffin: Which is how you get huge upsets. Like Jeff Bukovinski, our friend from Huntington—

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Who had a really, really impressive run this year. I'm excited to see—

Rachel: Yeah, because his categories were like most approachable.

Griffin: Most fun last name. Like really, really good stuff.

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah. I really enjoyed that.

Griffin: Well, thank you, babe. Yeah, the season finale is coming up next week, next Tuesday, and I'll say, it's the most high concept thing we've ever done.

Rachel: Yeah, I've been seeing some of the art that McKay is working on, it's amazing.

Griffin: I'm very nervous and excited for that. So tune in next Tuesday, it's The McElroy Family YouTube channel, check that—check that shit out.

Rachel: I love when you guys get high concept.

Griffin: Oh, man! This about as high as it gets. I go first this week.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: I don't even have my phone out or anything, I'm just enjoying shooting the shit with my wife.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Okay, here we go. Are you ready? Lighthouses!

Rachel: You paused and took a drink after you said that, like I was gonna need a few minutes just to recover.

Griffin: No, I was just thirsty. I have a sore throat and I was thirsty, and I thought you might give me like a little like—

Rachel: Lighthouses.

Griffin: "Wow."

Rachel: You know, okay, here's the thing, tell me how far back your relationship with lighthouses goes.

Griffin: Um...

Rachel: I have almost no relationship with lighthouses.

Griffin: Yeah, no, I have—it's not like I grew up by the seaside with the, you know, a trusty beacon shining into my bedroom—flashing periodically into my bedroom window. Nothing like that.

Rachel: I just, I guess I am struggling to find a feeling about lighthouses. I mean, I think they look neat?

Griffin: I am talking, I guess, sort of about the icon—the icon of a lighthouse.

Rachel: Oh, okay.

Griffin: The symbolism, the metaphor of—

Rachel: That's nice.

Griffin: And actual real-ass lighthouses that are out there. I just think they're neat. They—I'm always kind of stoked to see one in real life. It doesn't happen that often. Sometimes, when you're at—like on a beach trip, you'll like, you know, be driving home or something, and see a lighthouse? Holy shit, that's awesome.

Rachel: Yeah, I think Tybee Island, notably, has a lighthouse.

Griffin: Tybee Island has a lighthouse. There were some, I think, down in Port A, or one of those Texas beaches we—South Padre maybe. I just, I also think they are hugely represented in a lot of... a lot of media, a lot of horror media. And I'll circle back on that later. I just think, as a symbol, they are really, really cool and interesting. And I think there's something really human about having sort of a fascination with lighthouses and the way that they kind of came about, because it's just a tall building with a light on top of it. And you kind of—you kind of get it, like that's nice—

Rachel: And somebody's got to be in there, right?

Griffin: No, most lighthouses are automated—

Rachel: Not anymore?

Griffin: These days. They have been switched over to an automated system.

Rachel: That's what was powerful for me, was thinking about like that lighthouse has like a tiny person that—not necessarily a tiny person.
[chuckles]

Griffin: Wow, that's interesting.

Rachel: When you're far away, you imagine. [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: A tiny person that lives there, just like year-round.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And is always like in charge of like making sure ships don't crash.

Griffin: It is a—it is a time-honored profession that I also want to talk about, because that is also super interesting. So, lighthouses, y'all know, they serve as little warning beacons for ships, and I guess low-flying planes? To say like, "Hey, there's some land coming up.

So, get ready—get ready for that." Humans sort of backed into the invention of the lighthouse. Originally, the kind of idea was they would light, you know, huge bonfires on the tops of hills at night. Mostly though, less as a warning and more as like a navigational beacon, to like help sailors find land.

Not to say like, "Hey, sailors, land ho. Fuckin' slow your roll, or else you're going to crash upon the rocks and be lost to the—to Poseidon's fury." They eventually, humans, realize like, "Hey, if we put these big fires up on, you know, some raised platforms, you'd be able to see it from further away." And then you can kind of probably walk through the steps—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Of Sid Meier's Civilization that get you to—eventually to proper lighthouses. Ptolemy II Philadelphus oversaw the construction of the Lighthouse of Alexandria during his reign in Egypt, in the third century BC. The Lighthouse of Alexandria was roughly 100 meters tall, it was the tallest man-made structure on the planet for centuries, for a very long time.

Rachel: I wonder how they decided on the height? Like, there must have been some kind of equation of like, from this far away, it needs to be this tall to have the impact that we want it to have.

Griffin: I think when you make one that big that long ago, it's really just for flexing. And I mean, flex they did. It was one—it's one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It did finally get knocked out of the running by an earthquake, a series of earthquakes, but the final one in 1303 AD really put the Lighthouse of Alexandria right on its ass.

But it was the third longest lasting Wonder of the of the Ancient World, so, good on you. Obviously, the pyramids still reppin' the set, and I forget what

the other one is. In the 18th century AD, transatlantic trade, you know, started to really pop off, and lighthouse construction popped off in turn.

And that's kind of when lighthouses stopped being these navigational beacons like, "Hey, there's land over here." And instead, became warnings of like, "Hey, there's land over here." Because people had figured out way, way, way easier ways to navigate than to look for a big fire way off in the distance.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: That's where you get your, I don't know, sextants and astrolabes and stuff like that. I don't know if an astrolabe is actually a nautical navigation—

Rachel: I can't join you right now.

Griffin: I know. You gave me a face—you give me a face sometimes when I realize like—

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I am asking for help with something that you do not like possess—

Rachel: Yeah. My instinct when you do things like that is to grab my phone, but then I think like, no, I can just sit here. [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah, no, and I appreciate it. And let's—the body language honestly lets me know exactly what I need to know—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: One of the very most famous lighthouse architects was named Robert Stephenson. He was a Scottish—a Scottish fella, who engineered a bunch of innovations for sea-washed lighthouses, which is the term for lighthouses that are not like on a peninsula or in any way connected to the mainland, but are out at sea, like way out at sea.

Rachel: That must be why Robert Louis Stevenson threw that middle name in there.

Griffin: Maybe, to really separate himself—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: From the famous Lighthouse architect. Robert Stephenson's most famous lighthouse is the Bell Rock Lighthouse, which is off the coast of Angus, Scotland. It is 11 miles offshore and 115 feet tall, and it hasn't needed any major structural work done to it in over 200 years.

Rachel: 11 miles off shore?

Griffin: Fucking crazy, right?

Rachel: It really sticks out there.

Griffin: How do you do—how do you do—it was built in—oh, I don't have the year that it was built, but you know, over 200 years ago. How the fuck do you do that? Build a—build a huge lighthouse on a relatively small rock, 11 miles from shore? It seems really wild.

Rachel: Yeah, because I mean, here's the thing I know about ocean, is that it erodes—

Griffin: Everything.

Rachel: You know, everything over time. So how do you build something and you think like, "This one's gonna stick around though."

Griffin: There's certain like construction techniques that specifically Robert Stephenson kind of spearheaded.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: There's a certain type of rock, like a compressed lime or something like that, I forget the exact name of it, that proves like more... absorbent

and I guess less sort of erosion-vulnerable than other stones. I don't know. I don't know any—if I knew that shit, I would be a lighthouse engineer, and I'm—I simply am not. But Robert Stephenson was, and apparently a pretty fuckin' good one, because he made a bunch of lighthouses, and a bunch of 'em are still kicking. That one, the Bell Rock Lighthouse, is automated at this point. But can you imagine working that lighthouse, 11 miles from—

Rachel: 11 miles.

Griffin: 11 miles from shore! Crazy! I remember reading a fact about the Bell Rock Lighthouse that you could see it like 35 miles inland. Like it's a huge fuckin' thing.

Rachel: I have never wanted a painting of something more, and that is the lighthouse keeper walking that 11 miles out to the lighthouse, maybe like at dawn, you know?

Griffin: Yeah, probably—

Rachel: I just like—

Griffin: Probably not walking, though.

Rachel: Just a nice silhouette. Well, you know, I mean, in my painting, he's walking. [titters]

Griffin: On the water? Is it Jesus Christ?

Rachel: Well, there has to be a path from the shore to the lighthouse, right?

Griffin: This is what I'm saying, my love, this is a sea—

Rachel: Or was it by its—like a buoy?

Griffin: A sea—a sea-washed lighthouse. There was a small rocky outcropping—

Rachel: Oh?

Griffin: 11 miles from shore. That's what I'm saying, how do you get all that stuff out there?

Rachel: I assumed there was like a path all the way out there?

Griffin: No, no-no-no, this is fully, fully, fully surrounded by water, 11 miles at least, in every direction.

Rachel: Oh, well that ruins my painting. [chuckles]

Griffin: Well, except unless it is Christ... You know, then it's like a bunch of different symbols, all at once. And I think art critics are gonna see that and be like, "It seems like you're maybe biting a lot—"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: "A lot of—a lot of flavor here." So, lighthouse keepers are—in the past, they were traditionally maintained by like families. It was a job passed down by families who, you know, lived in these coastal towns, traditionally, close to the lighthouses.

Lighthouses were kept by lighthouse keepers or light keepers, or wickies, because they would have to trim the wick of the—of the lighthouse, you know, quite frequently. And I very, very much like that term. In the US, wickies were part of the United States Lighthouse service, which got folded into the Coast Guard in 1939.

So, I don't know how much of the Coast Guard now is dedicated to the upkeep of our, you know, of our lighthouses, but I can't imagine someone else kind of took that role on. It seems like it makes sense for the Coast Guard to have it. That's what the lighthouses do, they guard—well, they guard you from the coast, by warning you, "Hey, there's coast up ahead. Keep an eye out."

Rachel: Yeah, it's hard to imagine what kind of training and what the path would be to that career at this point.

Griffin: Yes, there isn't a lot of work in that department at this point. Almost all of them—I mean, almost a majority of lighthouses that have been in service, just simply aren't anymore. Like, the light doesn't go. The build—the towers are still there, and that's cool. The ones that are still running are almost all like fully automated, because like that is an incredibly hard and isolating—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And I have to imagine pretty psychologically treacherous gig. Which brings me to my next point, which is that lighthouses, for that reason and a few others, have been a staple in horror stories and films, because of the isolation that they require of the people that keep them, and also the kind of dread that they—that they represent, as warning symbols.

And you think about being out there in the middle of a dark and stormy night, like it doesn't get much scarier on a dark and stormy night than when you're a lighthouse keeper, 11 miles from shore. And so, that's—that is why it has been such an icon in horror.

There was obviously *The Lighthouse*, which was the—I think Robert Eggers is the director? The guy who made *The Witch*. I actually haven't seen that movie, but I really want to. It's got Robert Pattinson and Willem Dafoe as two lighthouse keepers that slowly just kind of go mad—

Rachel: Wow.

Griffin: In a light—yeah, no. The clips and trailers I've seen make it look pretty—like they're puttin' on a real—puttin' on a real performance. But then there's also like *Shutter Island*, *Annihilation*, *The Fog*. *Uzumaki* is one of my favorite Junji Ito stories, which is very lighthouse focused. There's a game franchise called *BioShock* that is very lighthouse heavy.

So, when I say like lighthouses are iconic, I don't mean like in a popular kind of way, but more in like they represent a lot of different... ideas and themes. And oftentimes, those ideas kind of conflict with each other. They are both a, you know, *Birdhouse in Your Soul*, like this little lighthouse themed night

light that keeps you feeling safe, right? That's what the song is about, I think.

Rachel: It's a blue canary.

Griffin: No, it's a blue canary... he says something about a lighthouse, doesn't he?

Rachel: There is a lighthouse?

Griffin: There's something about a lighthouse in the song. Anyway, I'm mixing up way too much shit right now. But you see a lighthouse and you think like that's cool, and you have to imagine it brings some comfort to, you know, old sailors who see it and they're like, "Oh, we're almost home." Or, "Hey, look out, that thing is—" But it also represents like kind of this creepy, towering sentinel overlooking the scene.

Rachel: Yeah, of course.

Griffin: Like it's—I find that really, really interesting, the way that it represents a lot of different things in a lot of different stories and, you know, throughout history. And there are not that many in operation now because, you know, we have Google Maps and shit. Like, there's way easier ways to know where the land is, and so they are not as necessary anymore. But I still think they are—they are a very neat relic of our past.

Rachel: Yeah, there's something, it's like the, you know, the idea of like somebody that lives in like a clock tower or, you know, like somebody that has this job that is very high up in a very confined space.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And kind of the like, the quiet responsibility of that.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Yeah, it's—

Griffin: And the light, I have to imagine, would be... get kind of annoying after a minute. Don't you think the light would get a little annoying? Just like kind of going around and around. It's like, chill, man. When we turn on party lights for our kids at night to dance to, after like 30 minutes of that I'm like, I have a headache.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I can't imagine that being my life and house and job and career, and family legacy. But—

Rachel: Well, you know, lighthouse families, hit us up.

Griffin: Hit us up—if you are a lighthouse family, I deeply, truly want to hear your story. Wonderfulpodcast@gmail.com, hit us up.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Great.

[theme music plays]

[ad reads]

J. Keith van Straaten: Hey, I'm J. Keith van Straaten from Go Fact Yourself, and I'm here with Max Fun Member of the Month, Josh Mentor, who has been a Maximum Fun Member since 2016! Hello, Josh!

Josh: Hey, J. Keith, how you doing today?

J. Keith van Straaten: I'm so well, and thank you so much for being a listener and supporter of our show. What made you decide to support Max Fun in general, and to support our show, Go Fact Yourself?

Josh: Jordan Morris on Jordan Jesse Go has a thing that he likes to say, which is, you know, you tip your bartender a buck a beer, you tip your podcast or a buck a month.

J. Keith van Straaten: Mm-hm.

Josh: You know, I get way more use out of Max Fun podcasts than I do like Disney Plus or Netflix.

J. Keith van Straaten: Well, it's something we very much appreciate. And by the way, when was the last time Netflix selected you as a member of the month?

Josh: Exactly!

J. Keith van Straaten: Exactly. Josh Mentor, congratulations, and thank you again for being the Max Fun Member of the Month.

Josh: Thanks so much, guys.

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[break]

Allan: Walkin' About is the podcast about walking. It's a walkumentary series where I, Alan MacLeod and a fun, friendly guest go for... a walk about! You'll learn about interesting people and places, and have the kind of conversations you can only have on foot! We've got guests like Lauren Lapkus.

Lauren: I figured something out about this map, like how to read it.
[chuckles]

Allan: Betsy Sodaro.

Betsy: I had no clue, that's awesome and nuts!

Allan: John Gabris.

John: This is a great first date for like broke twenty-somethings, you know?

Allan: And more! Check out Walkin' About with Alan McLeod, on Maximum Fun.

[break]

Rachel: All right, my topic this week—

Griffin: Yes?

Rachel: This is the closest we've ever gotten, I think, to overlap.

Griffin: Oh, shit?

Rachel: My topic this week is also about a kind of light.

Griffin: Okay?

Rachel: But it is a Christmas light.

Griffin: A Christmas light?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Just one?

Rachel: Well, Christmas lights, plural.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: But I'm just saying, in the category of light, this is—

Griffin: No, yeah, I mean, it's definitely, we're—

Rachel: If we're talking about a lighthouse...

Griffin: It's a high up light.

Rachel: And I'm talking about a Christmas light, we're both talking about lights.

Griffin: That can be high up, yeah, for sure.

Rachel: We're both talking about lights.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: You know?

Griffin: Absolutely.

Rachel: So...

Griffin: No, for sure!

Rachel: We're getting there.

Griffin: You seem like you're...

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: You seem very defensive right now, which is strange, because I'm not attacking, I'm here for it.

Rachel: I'm saying that I have been waiting the whole time we've been doing this show for this remarkable moment of synergy where we both bring either the same or very closely the same topic, without talking about it.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And I would say this is closer than maybe we've ever been.

Griffin: Okay. I think you're—I think you are right. This is the closest we've been. I feel like the longer we do the show, the less likely it's going to

become that we're—since we're having to really reach out there and really think about stuff we're into, outside of our immediate reach.

Rachel: Well, here's the thing, we spend every day together.

Griffin: True.

Rachel: And have overlapping interests. It seems likely it's going to happen some—

Griffin: Yeah. Yeah.

Rachel: Anyway.

Griffin: So, Christmas lights, I—yeah, hell yeah. I'm really, really excited about—

Rachel: I was thinking about the thing I like specifically is when you are in a like a city or community, and they put 'em out on the street.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: You know? And you start seeing the trees and—or like lamp posts or whatever. And that's when like the spirit really gets me.

Griffin: Yeah, for sure.

Rachel: Like kind of the seasonal like splendor of it.

Griffin: I really—

Rachel: We also have a neighbor that every year puts up kind of the same like light situation on their like landscape area.

Griffin: It's really inspiring.

Rachel: And as soon as that thing like automatically like clips on at night, I'm like, we're here!

Griffin: We're here. It's holiday time.

Rachel: [chuckles] It's happening.

Griffin: I do... we don't really live in a part of DC where like the streets are decorated for the holidays. And maybe DC—maybe that's not like a big city thing, but in Huntington, very, very much so. Fourth Avenue, they would like decorate the entire street with lights and shit.

Rachel: I think if you get out like closer to kind of the more trafficked areas, they do.

Griffin: Yeah, I'm sure—yeah, I bet.

Rachel: I mean, not in our like, you know, neighborhood.

Griffin: No.

Rachel: But I know what you're talking about. Austin used to do that on—do you remember? Like—

Griffin: Oh, for sure!

Rachel: Sixth Street, and then I think Second Street also.

Griffin: Man... I hope DC brings back that thing at the—at the Nationals Park.

Rachel: I looked, Enchant, it's not coming this year either.

Griffin: God dang it, guys! They used to do a thing where the Nationals played—

Rachel: It's in like Los Angeles and Vegas.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And for whatever reason, it has not come back to DC.

Griffin: They would fill this entire baseball field with Christmas lights and this huge like Christmas light maze and display and ice skating, and it was so great.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And they've stopped doing it, bummer. Okay.

Rachel: Yeah. Anyway. So, I was like, what—how did that—how did that start?

Griffin: Christmas lights?

Rachel: Christmas lights, yeah.

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: Because right back in the olden-olden days, it was like candles on a tree.

Griffin: That's like a Yule deal, right?

Rachel: Well, so here's what I found. So, 1841, Queen Victoria's husband, Albert, put up this like Christmas tree, and kind of introduced the world this idea of a Christmas tree. Kind of saying like, "This is an important thing that we're going to do, as royal people." And then everybody was like, "All right." Like, "Let's get to it."

Griffin: I always assumed that the Christmas tree started as a Yule—like a, you know, a Yule tradition that, you know, when Christmas was kind of like, "We'll take some of that, thank you very much."

Rachel: I think what like popularized it is what I'm talking about.

Griffin: Okay, sure.

Rachel: This idea that everybody is like decorating specifically for Christmas—

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: In a very specific way.

Griffin: Dig it.

Rachel: In the US, President Franklin Pierce put one up at the White House in 1856.

Griffin: Who?

Rachel: Franklin Pierce? President Franklin Pierce, never heard of him?

Griffin: No.

Rachel: Hm.

Griffin: Literally, not once in my life. This is a Mandela Effect thing. I've never heard this man's name before.

Rachel: 1856, I mean, it would make sense that maybe you hadn't.

Griffin: Was he like one of like... where was he? Like 20, 21, somewhere in there?

Rachel: I don't know, bro?

Griffin: I mean, there's just like a huge—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Chunk in the middle where I'm like, no fuckin' way.

Rachel: Yeah. [chuckles]

Griffin: I would say between—

Rachel: I think about him around like Martin Van Buren times, but I'm not 100%.

Griffin: Know him. If the—if they've been included in a They Might Be Giants song. Again, to circle back to the Giants for the second time this episode. You do not have to Google which president—

Rachel: No, I'm looking up Franklin Pierce—

Griffin: Can I tell you something? Oh, I forgot his name until you just said it again.

Rachel: He's the 14th president.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Serving from 1853 to 1857.

Griffin: Okay, cool. Yeah, so, yeah.

Rachel: Often regarded as one of the worst in US history. [laughs]

Griffin: Yikes. Uh-oh. Dang, pal.

Rachel: Get him. [laughs] Okay.

Griffin: Because Lincoln was 16, right? And so, he must have—14, he must have—he must have really been responsible for some of the Civil War stuff. Hm.

Rachel: Probably, maybe.

Griffin: You already here first—[laughs] I don't know anything!

Rachel: I always get really nervous—

Griffin: [laughs] I don't know anything.

Rachel: When you ask me any follow up questions.

Griffin: Yeah, no, I know.

Rachel: Particularly when it's about like our nation's history.

Griffin: Yeah, dude.

Rachel: Which I'm not strong on.

Griffin: It's not that—it's not that I don't know this stuff. I did at some point. I just made the choice to not keep learning about this stuff—

Rachel: Now I gotta look up Martin Van Buren and see if I was right about—Martin Van Buren was eighth president, so—

Griffin: No, he's old-school.

Rachel: Pretty far before.

Griffin: Yeah, yeah.

Rachel: Okay. Christmas trees. So, by the 1870s, fresh-cut trees were being sold in Washington Square Park, and ornaments at Macy's. Like that the... that time was when people started saying like, "I want one of those in my house."

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: 1882, a person in New York City named Edward Hibberd Johnson hired Thomas Edison, then a 24-year-old inventor, as a consultant for the Automatic Telegraph Company. Edison made a great impression.

Griffin: I bet.

Rachel: And left to start his own company, and Edward Hibberd Johnson followed him. When Edison patented the light bulb in 1880, Johnson and others invested a total of 35,000 to form the Edison Lamp Company, to sell the bulbs.

Griffin: Okay. And he was like, "What if it was way smaller, and there were 1000 of them?"

Rachel: Mm-hm. Okay, so, back to the candles on the Christmas tree being obviously a fire hazard. At the Edison shop, where they're selling these lamps and bulbs, this Johnson fellow decided to set up a tree by the street window, and hand-wired 80 red, white and blue light bulbs, and strung them together around it.

Griffin: So, that's—that was the first—that was the first design, and it was hugely patriotic, it sounds like.

Rachel: Yeah, I mean, I think, you know, other people may have done this, although it's pretty unlikely. Light bulbs were pretty expensive back then, and electricity was not super common.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: But he had the sense to call a reporter and say, "Come look at my tree with these lights on it."

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And then the reporter like wrote a story in the Detroit Post and Tribune, describing and saying, quote, "One can hardly imagine anything prettier." This became an annual tradition for him, and he also went bigger. So, by 1884, he had gone from 80 bulbs to 120 on his tree.

Griffin: Damn!

Rachel: So, a string—

Griffin: They must have been big ass bulbs too, right?

Rachel: Yeah, oh, for sure, for sure. So, a string of 16 kind of flame-shaped bulbs, that were kind of the size of shot glasses, sold for \$12, which is about \$350 in today's money. [titters]

Griffin: Nice, dude!

Rachel: So, I can't imagine everybody was like running out the door.

Griffin: I also have to imagine that the even phosphorescent and glass in cases they may have been, probably still pretty dangerous.

Rachel: Oh, yeah, for sure.

Griffin: I bet the heat that shit gave off was... substantial.

Rachel: Yeah. My mom has a lot of stories about like her childhood, them using these like old Christmas lights, and how just dangerous it was, and how no child was allowed to go anywhere near it. [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah, beautiful. I love it.

Rachel: But by 1914, a 16-foot string cost \$1.75.

Griffin: Okay, we figured it out.

Rachel: So, you know, you waited around for a little while. And then by the 1930s, color bulbs and cones were everywhere.

Griffin: This is—this is it. No matter what time period it is, if you just, if you're—if you wait. If you're not an early adopter, it's gonna work out for you better in the end.

Rachel: I know. I know. It's like TVs, right?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And computers and everything.

Griffin: I would have been one of those suckers buying those fuckin' \$350 turbo bulbs.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I love—I love gadgets and gizmos, you know I would have been up on—and to celebrate my patriotic spirit and Christmas spirit too? Damn.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: They would have snookered me but good.

Rachel: I know... So, I was kind of curious, I was like, why does it make me feel so good to see these things?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Like, is there some kind of psychology behind it? And obviously, there's like the nostalgia and the connection to like pleasant memories—

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Like from your past. But there was a study in the Journal of Environmental Psychology that found that people who decorate for Christmas early report an increase in happiness. Some of the reasons are that the glow of Christmas lights, especially in dark winter months, has been shown to boost the brain's production of happiness chemicals such as serotonin. Which makes sense, right? When everything gets gray and cold, like a nice light—

Griffin: Oh, for sure. No, I definitely get it. And that does—it does hit right. I have to wonder how much sort of tail leading the dog there is of like, if you're the type of person who can get it together enough to decorate your Christmas stuff early, maybe you also have a preponderance for happiness—

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: That some of the rest of us might lack.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Is that—is that a possibility?

Rachel: Or you are so hungry for it, because you need it so badly.
[chuckles]

Griffin: That's another—yeah, that's possibility too.

Rachel: I gotta admit, I'm feeling that way a little bit this year, of like maybe we should go real early.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Because I feel like I could use that boost. Another thing I saw in this article was that the twinkle of Christmas lights can spark a sense of childlike wonder, which has been shown to reduce stress and increase relaxation.

Griffin: That sounds like it was written by the Christmas tree lights company.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh-huh.

Griffin: That one sounds like that one song from Spirited, where they talk about—

Rachel: Yeah, I was just thinking about that, where they're like trying to push Christmas trees.

Griffin: We're bringing back Christmas—god, dang, I love that fuckin' movie, man! So stoked for it to come—

Rachel: It's a really—I get excited about watching it. But yeah, no, I will say like if you go, for example, like downtown and it's like all like prettied up with these lights—

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: It does kind of allow you to look at something differently.

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: And kind of be like surprised and delighted, which is like a nice feeling when you are used to seeing things be a certain way.

Griffin: I also really like when you have a bunch of little lights, especially when they're kind of like obfuscated a bit by the branches of the tree, you get like that like weird sort of corona effect around them.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: That is like, I don't know—

Rachel: I love—I am not this kind of person at all, but like when they really go hard around like each branch? Oh, it's incredible.

Griffin: Yeah. Hey, do you want to know what our friends at home are talking about?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Nicole says, "My Small Wonder is a living billboard. I live in Massachusetts—" wait. Yes, MA is Massachusetts. I needed a second. There's a lot of M ones.

Rachel: True.

Griffin: "I live in Massachusetts, and local ice cream brand Friendly's has a billboard made out of trimmed shrubs. I've seen bush and rock billboards showcasing companies, municipalities and football teams. In an era where advertising is inescapable, these billboards are far less flashy, but far more pleasing to look at."

Rachel: Oh?

Griffin: And Nicole also sent a picture.

Rachel: Can I see the picture?

Griffin: Yes. I don't have it pulled up.

Rachel: Do you want me to talk about Franklin Pierce for a while, while you look for it?

Griffin: Absolutely. Absolutely not. Here it is.

Rachel: [chuckles] Oh, that's great!

Griffin: It kind of looks—

Rachel: See, I would think of that as kind of like topiary, a little bit.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I was thinking like a traditional billboard you would see on a highway, except it was covered in plants—

Griffin: No, yeah.

Rachel: And it was hard for me to figure out how that would work, but yeah—

Griffin: This is very much like when you go to, you know, Magic Kingdom, and there's like all that stuff, you know, etched into the—into the hedge, and what have you.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I always do really like that a lot. Kings Island did that shit a whole bunch, and I always found it very charming. Misty says, "My Small Wonder is the Spot the Station app. It pops up a notification on my husband's phone

when the International Space Station is in our area, and we step outside and watch it pass overhead together and marvel at how far space exploration has come in our lifetime."

Rachel: Oh, wow?

Griffin: This one hit me wild because it sounded familiar to me, but also mind-blowing at the same time. So, is the idea that like your—the app says like, "Hey, get out the telescope." You can't just see it with your naked eye, I'm assuming?

Rachel: You might be able to?

Griffin: It's... it doesn't seem like it would be that—

Rachel: Was there like a blinking light or something? How would you know?

Griffin: Yeah? No, yeah, there's probably blinking lights on it.

Rachel: I mean, I know that it's further away than an airplane, but I'm picturing something similar.

Griffin: But closer than the Moon!

Rachel: You got me. [chuckles]

Griffin: Thanks to Bo En and Augustus for the use of our theme song, Money Won't Pay. You can find a link to that in our episode description. Thank you to Maximum Fun for having us on the network, it is an honor. And there are so many amazing shows on this—on this network that you should go and listen to, and let them enrich your life, and support them in turn. We have a very special live show coming up in December. It's December 6th, in our hometown of Huntington, West Virginia. I say our, my hometown of Huntington, West Virginia.

Rachel: Yeah, but this time, when you say we have a live show coming up, that includes me.

Griffin: Yeah! It's gonna be—so, traditionally, Candlenights has been sort of a MBMBaM-focused thing. This is gonna be a lot more kind of like, I don't know, McElroy Family Clubhouse style—

Rachel: I'm picturing like—

Griffin: Variety show.

Rachel: Yeah, like a real old-timey like, like feel good hour of family activities. Although, it's probably more than an hour, huh?

Griffin: It'll be more than an hour, almost certainly, yeah. We've—it's packed to the seams. And it's going to be live and in person for the first time in a really, really long time, at the Keith Albee, in Huntington, West Virginia, on December 6th. You can get tickets over at bit.ly/candlenights2025.

There's also virtual streaming tickets. I believe on December 19th, the video on demand will be available, you'll be able to watch it—watch it there. It really is like—I mean, obviously, it's a holiday tradition for us, because we make the thing.

But like, I don't know, sharing that with everyone and having that be like part of a holiday, part of the tapestry of holiday tradition like is truly a very, very touching and special thing for us. And it's going to be great! Oh, and all the proceeds go to benefit Harmony House, which is an amazing organization we've worked with a lot in Huntington.

They work to end homelessness by providing housing and different support systems, and they are a really, really great group that needs help now more than ever. So, again, bit.ly/candlenights2025 for tickets to that show. We've got some merch in the Merch Store. Oh, shit, you know who's back? The Final Pam.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I found the hard drive in my office closet from—it was called 2019 PC dump, and she was on there.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: And all the other data on the hard drive had been destroyed. It was just my Fallout 4 save. And so, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Final Pam's creation on Monster Factory, me and Justin have made a new mini-series of Final Pam episodes—

Rachel: Yeah, the first one is up as of this recording. How—

Griffin: The second, I believe, may also be, by the time this goes up.

Rachel: Oh, yeah, by the time this comes out?

Griffin: Yeah, so—

Rachel: Cool.

Griffin: That's over at our YouTube channel, The McElroy Family, on YouTube. Check it totally out! We got merch too, some Pam-themed merch as well, over at mcelroymerch.com.

Rachel: Oh? Great.

Griffin: Very fun. That's it, thank you so much for listening! We'll be back with a new episode next week, so... we'll see—we'll see you then. Set your—set a reminder. You always forget. You all—not you, the listener. You always forget.

Rachel: Make a notification to... enjoy childlike wonder.

Griffin: Make a notification to enjoy childlike wonder today.

Rachel: [chuckles]

[theme music, "Money Won't Pay (feat. Augustus)" by Bo En plays]

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