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**John Moe:** A brief note: there is mention of suicidality in this episode.

I'm gonna go egghead for just a minute here. Bear with me. Semantics! Semantics is the study of how the meaning of words and terms are used and how that usage evolves—so, how we decide what words mean, how that changes, and how that meaning is guided by the usage of those words. This isn't graduate school. Don't take notes. But I wanted to put out the term semantics before I used the term dad rock, because—related—dad rock can mean music liked by dads—old dads or young dads or middle dads. It can mean music that sounds like dads are making it. It can mean music that feels a generation older than what you, yourself, are or listen to regularly. It can also mean music, I think, that has a sadness to it. A world-weariness, a wistfulness to it, a sense of having been knocked around by life a little.

Dad rock is very important to me. I'm a dad. I love music. I've been in dad bands playing dad rock. I have attended concerts by Wilco and The National and The Hold Steady. But there is no official registry of dad rock. Is the Steve Miller Band in that classification? Pixies? MJ Lenderman? Aimee Mann? Answers vary. What is a constant, however, is how people use music—not just dad rock, but music—to imbue their life with meaning. Always have. Whether that's through dad rock or death metal or Wagner operas. People feel understood by musicians—musicians they've never met. They can feel empowered by that feeling of being understood to personally define themselves and evolve that definition, much like the semantic use of the term dad band! Sometimes, music can be a vehicle to take you to a truer version of yourself. It's *Depresh Mode*. Wait, is Depeche Mode a dad band? Shrug.

I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

Ooh! You know who else I've seen live a lot? Old 97's—and in solo performance, their frontman Rhett Miller. Here's Rhett now.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Niko Stratis is the author of *The Dad Rock That Made Me a Woman*. It's a memoir of her life in the Yukon in far Northwestern Canada and her long path to figuring out who she was and how dad rock served as a soundtrack and really guided that effort. Niko is a trans woman, and a lot of her story is about living in situations that aren't very understanding of that journey. Living in a small, conservative community; becoming a tradesperson in glasswork amid rampant hostile and potentially violent transphobia and homophobia. Along the way, there's a great deal of depression/anxiety/substance use disorder with alcohol, and despair. It's a mental health journey. Of course it is.

If you're on a journey of gender identity, you'll want to hear what Niko has to say. But even if you're not, you'll want to hear about navigating a complicated journey. Because, geez, plenty of us have to navigate those.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Niko Stratis, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

**Niko Stratis:** Hi. Thanks so much for having me!

**John Moe:** Sometimes people use the term dad rock as something of a pejorative, I think. It's kinda like dad jokes or dad bod.

*(Niko agrees.)*

And we dads just can't win, actually. *(Chuckles.)* But you don't— It's not a pejorative to you. How do you define dad rock?

**Niko Stratis:** You know, it's funny, 'cause initially I redefined the term for myself in a manner that is best described as a kind of manifesto almost that I wrote for myself—that I hope nobody ever sees or finds, 'cause there will be questions asked.

*(They chuckle.)*

But I sort of had this idea of, beyond it being— I think it's easy to read it as cringe or whatever if you're—an eternally-online person might say. But really, it is about sort of an earnestness and also this— I think about a lot—of the lessons my dad taught me were about learning through trying and failing. And I think so much of what I see in music that I would think of as dad rock is people that are sharing their experiences, often through failure, and saying, "These are the mistakes that I've made. Try to not make them the same way that I did."

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And not trying to say, "This is how you should live your life," but trying to say, "This is what I have done. Follow me as best you can, and let's see if we can get to the other side of this okay." And so, that's kind of part of it for me is, you know, it is earnest in its way but earnest in a way that I think we could use a lot more of. You know? Without sort of having this pejorative label attached to it of trying to sort of wave it away by saying, "Oh, that's—you know, that's dad rock or that's whatever."

I'm like, "Well, what is it about it that makes it work? That makes it feel meaningful in its way?"

**John Moe:** So, is the dad in your definition of dad rock just applicable to your dad?

**Niko Stratis:** No. I think the dad in my version is sort of like an amalgamation of people that showed me the way forward in one way or another. And this is me sort of taking a personal lens on it, and it is sort of inviting people that read the book to say, "Well, what is dad rock for me? Who showed me the way in the same way?" and opening this definition up to—as I did in the book—also try to remove it from the idea of gender. You know, like I wrote a little—

**John Moe:** Courtney Barnett is in there.

**Niko Stratis:** Yeah, totally!

**John Moe:** Sheryl Crow is in there.

**Niko Stratis:** Neko Case and all of these people. So, what are they doing? Because they're doing the same thing. They're serving the same purpose, you know? And what is a dad? I took the idea of a dad versus a father very seriously. Partially, I open— For a lot of people that crack open the book, people have asked me why I opened it with a quote from *M*A*S*H*, but I think the quote that I used kind of is a perfect example of what I'm talking about: this difference between dads and fathers.

**John Moe:** Do you have the book in front of you? Could you read that quote?

**Niko Stratis:** *(Chuckles.)* Uhhh, I could have the book in front of me. Hold on one second.

**John Moe:** *(Chuckles.)* Okay.

**Niko Stratis:** Here's the quote from the book. "I always assumed that that's how it was in every family. But when I see the warmth, closeness, the fun of your relationship— My father's a good man. He always wanted what was best for me. But where I have a father, you have a dad." Major Charles Emerson Winchester III, *M*A*S*H*, "Sons and Bowlers", episode 20, season 10.

**John Moe:** You don't see a lot of books open with a David Ogden Stiers quote. *(Laughs.)* But that is beautiful. I wanna get into a little bit more about the difference

between a dad and a father, but I also want to get into music, and I want to get into your story here.

Towards the beginning of the book, you talk about mixtapes. And you get back to mixtapes throughout the book. What were your first experiences with mixtapes? Like, what was on those tapes? Who made them, and what did they mean to you?

**Niko Stratis:** I had a variety of different— I'm trying to think of the very first one. I ever—the very first like mixtape I ever would've come across, and it's failing me. You know, a lot of what I wrote about in the book was my dad's, but also— You know, my sister is two years older than me, and when she would have suitors come a-callin', often they would make these mixtapes for her. And then I would steal them. This is the way that younger siblings operate is you steal things from your older sibling, and you hoard them away. And so, I would take these mixtapes, and I would listen to them a lot.

And there's songs that I hear that in my brain today are still sequenced like they were in those tapes that I stole from my sister. And when I've asked her about them, she no longer has any memory of them. But I'm like, "That's the first time I heard "Mr. Jones". Or "Professor Booty" by the Beastie Boys." And it really introduced me to a lot of music I might not otherwise have heard. I grew up in the Yukon. I grew up in a very isolated place. We only had AM radio until the early 2000s. You know, like when the rest of the world was starting to do streaming radio, we had ads on the radio telling you how to dial into an FM station. So, that's where we were technologically.

And so, those tapes were really formative for me, because they were a collection of somebody else's taste that I could sort of get lost in my own way. And I could figure my way through it, and I could make notes, and I could say, "Well, I really liked this artist. You know, maybe I should go to the record store downtown and try to find an album from them" or whatever. And this was the purpose they sort of served for me.

**John Moe:** Yeah. So, when you listen to music— And we're talking about music I think because in your book, each chapter talks about a song but interweaves it with your memoir. I guess, what have songs always been to you? Are they a reflection of who you are? Do you find your current self in them? Do you find the self that you hope to be in them? What is the utility of a song?

**Niko Stratis:** That's a really good way of framing that. I mean, it's kind of a lot of things in its own way. I think partially the reason why I do it this way is—as I mentioned in the book—you know, I drank for a long time, and towards the end of my career as an alcoholic, I was a blackout drinker.

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And so, I have sort of erased a lot of my memories. But music is a tether to the world in a lot of ways for me. And looking backwards, it is this thread that connects me to all of these days and months and years that are long in the rearview for me. And even now, I think it is a really interesting way of relating to the world. It is context on otherwise a very flat surface at times. And so, for me, what was really important to me is that every song had to—every time I listen to one of the songs I put in the book, it has to conjure an image in my mind that doesn't go away. It has to be this indelible mark on my brain. And I think that's what music did for a me. It's almost like a card catalog that I can sift through, and I can say, "Okay, so this Springsteen song is gonna bring me back here, or this Sheryl Crow song is gonna bring me back to this moment." And it is—it sort of it grounds me in a place.

And I think this is the beautiful thing that art does is it creates memories where otherwise there might be nothing. And as we get older and as we lose more of our past—which is a thing that a lot of people find. And especially every year after I've turned 40, I just forget one new thing. But music is sort of always my way back, and it's important to me to hold onto that and to remember that those days aren't lost. They're just tied to these very specific things. They're stones in a river, but they're still there.

**John Moe:** Let's get some grounding a little bit. You've talked a little bit about the town you grew up in. I'm wondering if you can elaborate a little bit more, because it really sets the tone for everything that you become. Tell me about where you grew up.

**Niko Stratis:** Yeah. So, I grew up in the Yukon. Which I often describe to people as: if you go out your front door, and you turn left, and then you go left for a little while, and you go up a ways, eventually you'll hit the Yukon. It's nestled up—it's right next to Alaska. It's right up there. And I grew up there. My family moved there in the late '80s when I was a kid, and I grew up there. And it's a very isolated, very remote place surrounded by mountains—which is part of the reason why we couldn't get an FM signal until late. And it was a place where there was a very sort of homogenous nature to a lot of life.

You know, I was told from a young age that there was this unofficial slogan to the Yukon which is "where the men are men, and the women are too." And it creates this energy around you—right?—of this expected masculinity. And I grew up with that in my mind. And you know, we weren't a cultural hub. Bands didn't come through. We only had really like two record stores. We had one radio station. We had very limited access to these things. But I also grew up as a kid who really loved

music and film and TV and all of these things. So, I really held onto culture as a portal to the world outside of my own, because it was a world I worried that I might never see. It's like the town in that M Night Shyamalan movie, *The Village*, where I'm just on the outskirts of modern technology, but here we are churning butter by hand.

But it's also a very beautiful place. Literally, my parents still live in the house I grew up in, and I can walk out their back door, and I can be in the woods in 34 seconds. And I don't have to see a soul. And it's this very beautiful, peaceful place that was very challenging for me, growing up. Because I wanted to be something different. And in a small town, being something different is often met with danger. And I internalized that from such a young age, and I hid that part of myself away. And when you fill your body with all the things you're hiding from yourself and from everybody else—you know, that gets harder and harder as you get older. And we all manage that in different ways, and sometimes those ways are not perfect or bad. And you know, it led to a lot of self-destructive behavior, I will say. But also, I think it ultimately made the version of me that survives to this day.

**John Moe:** Yeah. I think that's maybe something that's lost on people who grew up in the suburbs or grew up in the city, that to be different wasn't just like an abstract notion of conformity. Like, it's a real safety issue.

*(Niko agrees.)*

You know, you need to be part of the pack, because otherwise you don't get resources, and you die. It's an animal thing.

**Niko Stratis:** Yeah! When I talk to people that grew up in more urban centers, or even close to—you know, some people would say, "Oh, I grew up in a small town," but a big city was an hour drive away, and they could go there on weekends to go to the mall. And we couldn't afford to fly to Vancouver, which was the closest big city, until I was a teenager. So, you sort of just live within the environment. I also grew up in a single-income, working class family. So, that also isolates you too, right? So, so often when people talk about their experience, they say, "Oh, you know, I found out that I was queer because I went to this underground punk rock bookstore" or whatever.

Well, we don't have those things in small towns. Because any building you walk into, everybody sees you, and everybody tracks where you go, and everybody knows your business. And it is this sort of like community-based surveillance that happens, where everybody's sort of keeping an eye on who's there and who's changing.

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And when you change, people know. And I know this firsthand, because when I did eventually come out as trans, I knew because people texted me and said, "I heard from a friend" or "I heard from so-and-so" or "This came through the wire." And that's how information travels in those towns.

**John Moe:** Well, you describe in the book a lot of depression and anxiety in your life. When did that begin?

**Niko Stratis:** From quite a young age. And you know, when you're young, you don't always have the language for these things. You just know that something is off. And my mom told me this story when I was a lot older—and it would've been good to know this when I was young, because it would've given me a lot of context—but I didn't talk for a really long time. And when I did, it was very little. And I went to this small school that was a couple of ATCO trailers on stilts that was doubling as a primary school. And I know when I describe where I grew up, it often it sounds like I lived in the turn of the century somewhere. But that's just how it works in small places.

And I would go out at recess, and I wouldn't talk to anybody. I would just kick this fence by myself. And every day she drove by, I would be out there by myself kicking the same fence. And I just really— Because I really struggled to talk to people, because I was so afraid of myself, and I had so many things going on, and my brain was really loud, and I didn't know why. And you know, I was sad all the time, and I couldn't really vocalize why. I was always kind of afraid to tell people that I was sad, because it felt like I was doing something wrong. And so, I sort of hid all those away in that same compartment I hid all my other secrets. And it just made me very sort of withdrawn and reserved, and I didn't talk; I didn't open up. I just kicked that fence.

And my mom said that she eventually just stopped driving by, because it broke her heart to see me out there, because she could see that something was wrong. But we lived in a time where you didn't talk about those things. And if I had come to her and said, "Look, I think I'm sad all the time," going to a therapist wouldn't have been the first conversation. You know? I sort of always had that vision of the beginning of *Return to Oz*, where the girl goes and gets electroshock therapy. And I thought, "What if that's me? Because I'm broken in some way." So, I kept all those things to myself.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Again, it's the safety thing.

**Niko Stratis:** Totally! Right? It's like the minute that somebody sees that something's off with me, that means I'm broken. And if I'm broken, bad things happen. And so, I just really internalized all those things in various ways and just sort of thought, "Well, nobody will ever know these secrets." And my secrets were "I really struggle with my own value, my own self-worth, and I don't really know who I am. And I'm scared of who I am. And my brain is always talking at me." I didn't know what intrusive thoughts were. And had I known, that would've been such a different conversation. But I just had really no idea for the longest time.

I just figured everybody's brain was like that, because you don't talk to people about it. Nobody says, "Oh, do you constantly think about dying in your head?" You know? When you're nine years old? Kids don't have those conversations.

**John Moe:** Right. Right. As far as you know, those are just thoughts. You don't realize that it's a condition. You know, that it's a symptom.

**Niko Stratis:** Yeah.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** More with Niko Stratis after the break. Her book and this interview put me on a bit of a dad rock jag—not that I'm ever far from one. Niko talks about several songs in the book that she considers dad rock. Here's one of them as we go to break: "Jesus, Etc." by Wilco.

**Music:** "Jesus, Etc." from the album *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* by Wilco.

Jesus, don't cry

You can rely on me, honey

You can combine anything you want

I'll be around

You were right about the stars

Each one is a setting sun

*(Music fades out.)*

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Back with Niko Stratis. Before the break, we were talking about keeping secrets about intrusive thoughts and thoughts of death, because you think maybe everyone has those thoughts but they're just not talking about them.

Do you now—where you are now—did some of that come from not feeling right identifying as male?

**Niko Stratis:** Oh, for sure! I mean, it was such a performance in its own way, and it was a performance I knew I was expected to play. I knew I wanted to not be a boy when I was a young kid, and I vocalized as such in the ways that I knew how. And it just wasn't really ever met with anything, because it just was sort of read as a joke or a cute kid thing. And so, I just sort of thought that these were all byproducts of these things I knew to be true in my head, but I also knew that they were bad or that they were wrong. And as I grew older, I saw that in movies and TV and all these other things. I'm like, "Oh, the things I want for myself are bad. So, this is why I'm sad all the time is because I want bad things for myself."

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"And if I want bad things for myself, I'm a bad person" or "I deserve this" or all of these things. And it is this—it's a real sort of aurora borealis of terrible ideas that lives in your head that you can never let out. Because once you let that out, then it's everywhere! And then there's no getting it back in, and there's no fixing it or making it better. It's just bad all the time.

**John Moe:** Yeah. And so—you know, you grew up in this town, and you write about— So often *(chuckling)* when I read authors—and they're often very skilled writers, very talented; I wish them all the success—but they seem to grow up, and then they go to prestigious schools, and then they get awesome internships and fellowships, and then they get book deals. And you spent a lot of time working in a grocery store and doing manual labor—doing skilled manual labor but working with your hands. And your story in these environments is full of these people who are homophobic, violent, threatening, toxic masculine men; and they all seem to love Kiss.

*(Niko laughs.)*

Which just, in my mind, checks out. 'Cause I just think Kiss is the goddamn worst. But as horrible as they were, did part of you think, "They're right and I'm wrong; They are how people are supposed to be," or did you clock that these are messed up individuals?

**Niko Stratis:** Sometimes I would. When I got a little bit older— The first time I ran into a toxic guy that likes Kiss, I internalized that as "I deserve this, because they're right, and I'm wrong" in that way that you're saying. You know, I entered the workforce from a young age. I got my first job when I was 13. I'm 43 now. I've had a job every day in my life since I was—for 30 years. And you know—but when I first started working, I didn't really know the world. I didn't really know myself. That was partially why I got a job—that, and to bring money into the house. But also, just I need to be out in the world.

And so, I assumed that, well, this is what I deserve for being the way that I am. You know? Maybe I stand wrong, or maybe I act wrong, or maybe I do whatever. And so, you know, when a guy is toxic to me about Kiss or when a coworker took me into the back room and beat me up, "I deserve all these things. I'm getting my just desserts for the secrets of myself." And as I got older—

**John Moe:** Did you think that they could convert you? That if you were around them, you would become one of them, and that's what you should do?

**Niko Stratis:** Sure. A little bit of a trial by fire. Like, they were sort of taking me to the anvil and hitting me enough times, and hopefully that would turn into a blade. And the fact that it never really did—I just learned to play the part so that it would stop hurting. And when I got older, I could sometimes see behind the mask of it, but I still couldn't really vocalize what I really needed or who I really was or what I really wanted. So, I was also never really being honest in my own way, even though I could see, okay, you are acting big and bold because you are missing something, or you have your own fundamental problems. We are all of us broken.

But I also still never felt safe saying that. Because like you said—you know, like when I worked in construction, almost every job I ever had I worked with at least one person who said, "If I knew a child that was gay, I would kill it." And I just thought, okay, this is where we're at. This is the environment with which I work. So, I knew that I had to sort of keep those secrets to myself, because otherwise who knows what would happen? I was often put in positions where I was trusting the person I was working with literally with my life. I worked with glass. If something was to go wrong, I could die, and I knew people that did. So, you sort of keep all these things to yourself in this very real way of fearing for your own safety.

And often I think, as queer people and as trans people, we talk about our own safety or fearing for ourselves. And sometimes it feels a little abstract, and often it was. But there are those distinct moments of— Fearing for my own safety was very real, because the danger was right there in my hands. It was a shared load in its own way.

**John Moe:** This is just really interesting to me, because I talk— I've been hosting these shows for 10 years, and I often talk about mental health as, you know, a mental condition, a drama that plays out within your mind. But in terms of your depression, your anxiety, your gender identity; given the world that you lived—in both in the Yukon, in the construction trade, and in the glass trade—it is really a matter of life and death. So, you know, this idea of "I could become who I really am, but I might die in the process," where are the negotiations there?

**Niko Stratis:** Yeah. And I spent a lot of time dreaming of my own death in its own way, because it was a surefire way of escaping the life that I thought I was gonna be stuck in forever. You know, the older that I got and the more I realized what I wanted and the more I realized that what I wanted I might never be able to have, that's when I started to design my own death in one way or another.

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Whether it was fake or real. I really started to think it through, because I thought, "This is my only way out." And I lived with that every day. And you learn to live with that every day. I've had intrusive thoughts since I was a kid, so when those intrusive thoughts turned to more concrete actions, it just felt like part of the process.

**John Moe:** Well, because it would be an end to the struggle that you're locked in at that point.

**Niko Stratis:** Yeah. Then the voices go quiet.

**John Moe:** Right, right. You know, something I found really interesting in your story is that I feel like I hear a lot about someone realizing their gender identity early and then doing something about it—coming out, transitioning, doing whatever they decide to do as a late teen or young adult. And it took you a lot longer. You were well into adulthood.

**Niko Stratis:** Oh yeah.

**John Moe:** Was that cultural, or was something else happening in your life that made you take so comparatively long? *(Clarifying.)* Understanding that a lot of people go through an entire 90-year life and never make that transition themselves.

**Niko Stratis:** Sure. Yeah, I mean it was a bit cultural, like you say. It wasn't exactly zeitgeisty in the way that it eventually would be. When I did finally come out— I tried to come out a few times before, and it just never really took. A friend of mine describes it as tipping a coke machine over, where you never fully do it in one push. And so, I had tried to come out before, but the words were never there, because I didn't fully know them. And you know, you think about the year that I came out, like a year or so before, the thing of—the "trans tipping point" was on the cover of *Time Magazine*. And suddenly, it was a national conversation in a way that it had never been when I was younger.

And I thought, okay, so maybe now was the time. Because when I say the words, people are gonna know what I'm talking about. Whereas before, when I had tried to come out to people or when I had even tried to come out just to myself in private, the words were never fully there. And if they were, they were never perfect. So, it was this— But also, you know, because I worked in this really masculine job in this masculine environment, and I never thought I could have anything else. I don't really have a full high school education. I went to trade school afterwards. I became a journeyman when I was 21 years old, and then I worked in glass with my dad, and after that I started my own construction company.

But you know, I have two very distinct memories of people telling me to my face— Once, I was figuring out the designs for a Walmart, for an entrance that I designed and engineered and built myself. And I was looking at it in the parking lot; it was the middle of winter. And an old man walked up to me, and he said, "What are you doing?"

And I said, "Oh, I'm just sort of looking."

And he said, "Well, I can tell you what you're doing."

And I said, "What's that?"

And he said, "You're doing what happens if you don't graduate from high school."

And multiple times people would say stuff like that to me. And you internalize this, right? "I don't deserve anything more than what I have. I haven't earned it, because I don't have—"

You know, earlier you mentioned people that live in small towns that eventually go on to some level of prestige, or they get to go to some nice school, or whatever. And like, I never had that. I went to a trade school. The guy who did the best in my class would show up every morning, eat a hotdog, and throw up in a garbage can. So, that was the level I had to beat. *(Chuckles.)*

And so, I just sort of internalized this "I don't deserve it." And so, my I spent almost my whole adult life thinking "I don't deserve anything beyond what I have." Even now! Like, I have this career that I never would've dreamed possible. And every morning when I wake up, I have this thought of "but I don't deserve it." And that is an impossible thing to shake, because I've just— I lived my whole life being told I don't.

**John Moe:** I run across this all the time. The thing that you're told earliest is the hardest to shake.

*(Niko agrees.)*

Because it seems like the ultimate truth. And for people dealing with depression, there's this sort of "yeah, but" quality. No matter what else happens. "Yeah, but you still suck. Yeah, but you're still a loser." You know, all these things. Or you know—or you're weak, or you're not really a man, or— You know, anything like that.

**Niko Stratis:** Yeah. You know, it's this thing of— You know when you get a review on something you've made, and somebody in a scathing critique manages to hit the nail on the head on the one thing you've told yourself is like your biggest flaw that you see in yourself? And when someone sees it and hits that nail, you think, "See? I was right all along. Look at how bad I am" or "look at all these terrible things about me." Which is why I don't read reviews of stuff I do anymore. But it is that same— It is that reinforcement of your own negative self-talk that is the hardest thing, because you can never fully shake it.

**John Moe:** Yeah, yeah. Well, and it doesn't matter— You could read 50 other rave reviews, but it's that one that you feel is true.

**Niko Stratis:** Oh yeah. I think about the negative ones all the time. The ones that I've read, I think about those every day. And I don't think about as often the emails I get from people saying, you know, very lovely, very touching things. Those ones are harder for me to remember, because I have the brain that I do.

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And my brain focuses on the bad things, because it is constantly telling me that I do not deserve anything that I have.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Yeah. 'Cause that's the earliest authority that you have.

*(Niko agrees.)*

In your book, I found that it was kind of— And I loved the book. I think it's just so, so well written.

*(She thanks him.)*

It's kind of impossible to keep track of where, as an adult, you're living; you're constantly moving; you're going to different Canadian cities; you're going back to the Yukon. And you always seem to be driving a completely different car or truck than the last one that was mentioned.

*(Niko chuckles.)*

What's going on with that?

**Niko Stratis:** You know, for a time I would buy any vehicle I could get for under $700. Actually, my cap was eight—in high school, I bought a 1988 Datsun Maxima for $800, and for a long time that was the most I'd ever paid for a car. And that was because that car had a tape deck that automatically reversed, which was high technology in 1988. And even when I bought it in 1998, it was still pretty high tech. But I drove a lot of cheap vehicles, because—surprisingly, when you live in a small town, the need for a vehicle is higher. Like, I live in Toronto now. I almost never need a car. But when I lived in the Yukon I needed a car all the time. So, I went through a lot of them.

And you know, I did— Because I went away to Alberta both to go to trade school and also just to sort of seek another place where I might fit in, and for some reason I went to Alberta every time. Which people that live in Canada would be like, "Yeah. I wouldn't try there. I would maybe go to a different city." *(Chuckles.)* But I would— You know, and I went where friends from high school lived or where the friend of mine who sold drugs lived or whatever, where I knew I could crash on a couch for a little while; or if I slept in my car in the driveway, it was okay. And I bounced around a lot. I stayed with my sister. Just sort of seeking some place where the answers might come to me.

I never really wanted to do the work for the answers of myself, because they seem too scary. But I sort of hoped that just by virtue of being in another city, they might just appear by magic. And so, a lot of it was just putting a lot of miles on crappy vehicles until they died. And then, you know, my Chevy S10 was crushed into a cube. And you know, my Plymouth Acclaim died on the train track somewhere. And all of these beloved vehicles of mine that are just lost. And they had—every one of them had a mixtape in them when I lost them too, and I wish I had the mixtape back.

**John Moe:** *(Devastated.)* Ough! Oh my gosh, that's terrible. Did you buy cheap cars because it's all you could afford? Or because you thought you didn't deserve better cars?

**Niko Stratis:** *(Chuckles in surprise.)* This is good, because I haven't had— I haven't done therapy in a while, so I get to do a lot of this right now.

*(John laughs.)*

This is perfect for me.

I mean, it's kind of both. Like, I kind of always— I always gravitated to a vehicle that felt it had a little bit of character in its own way, and a lot of the cheap vehicles I did had their own sort of uniqueness to them. And you know, I grew up poor. You know, my family could never really afford very much. And when I got into the trades, I didn't start making money hand-over-fist the way that people always talk about "oh, you get a skilled trade under your belt and then you're making money for the rest of your life." Well, that's not necessarily true, especially if you're drinking a lot.

So, I sort of was like, "Well, I could buy a Honda Accord for $424, and that car will serve me until it doesn't." And everything was disposable, because I was kind of disposable. And you saying this is the first time I'm fully realizing that out loud. And I'm glad that you noticed this, because I very intentionally put details about different cars in the book. And it is interesting to me what people draw from it. And you are one of the first people to say, "I've noticed that you had a lot of cars."

*(They laugh.)*

So, thank you for seeing that, because that was a very intentional thing that I did.

**John Moe:** Well, yeah! You're always naming the year, make, and model. It's not just "my car," it's—you know, it was hard to miss.

**Niko Stratis:** Specificity is the soul of narrative, as they say. So, I really sort of took that to heart when describing my vehicles.

**John Moe:** Yeah! Oh, good. I'm glad you did. You know, and then as you're going along on this journey, there's—the depression's still there. The anxiety is there. The feeling of being in the wrong gender identity is there. And then there's just so much booze—and you've already brought this up, becoming a blackout drunk. Were you aware—was this a conscious self-medicating thing? Or like what—? Now, you know, with age and whatever wisdom you've accumulated, what was behind the drinking?

**Niko Stratis:** Lack of options. Because I started drinking at a young age with my other punk rock friends, because we kind of had nothing else to do. You know, when you live in a small town that's isolated, there wasn't a lot of other—you know, we also lived in a place where it was winter ten months out of the year. And it's dark a lot, and you kind of don't really have anything else. So, drinking just sort of feels like the best way to get through all that. So, I started doing that from a young age, and then I just never really stopped. And it only—it's exponential growth on a problem. I didn't think I had a problem for a long time, because it was manageable.

[00:35:00]

And now when I tell people stories about when I would drink, they just sort of look at me like I've told them about the time that I fought God. Because when I tell stories about drinking, it is—you know—"I drank two cans of original flavor Four Loco and then fell out of a tree."

And they're like, "You drank two cans of the stuff that will kill you?!"

And like, "Well, yeah, but that was after a couple of beers and a flask of whiskey." And this is just how I lived! And it was also this very— I always liked to get as close to the line as I could and then see how hard it would hurt if I touched it and then see how far over it I could go.

**John Moe:** What's the line?

**Niko Stratis:** Just kinda like a third rail sort of thing. What is the line moving throughout the world that should stop me in my tracks, should tell me there is a barrier here? And instead of me knowing that there was a barrier there, thinking "what happens to me if I go beyond that?" And part of that is self-destruction. And part of that is a sort of desire to live without being able to fully vocalize that. And so, both of those things are colluding with alcohol. And there we go.

And it was just this thing that everybody around me did all the time. People didn't quit drinking where I grew up. They just drank until suddenly they were gone. And so, that was just it for me. And my grandfather drank until he was gone. I never met my dad's dad, because he drank until he was gone. And my dad quit drinking before I was born, and I never grew up in a drinking house. But everybody else I knew did, and it was just a culture that I adopted. And when I moved to Toronto—where I live now—I made it less than a year before I was like, "Oh, this is a problem. I can no longer live like this. I shouldn't go to a fun party and have a great night and wake up the next morning—and the first thought shouldn't be, 'I really want to die.'"

So, I thought, "What is causing this?" And it turns out, this way that I've been living for most of my adult life was the reason why.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** More with Niko Stratis in just a moment. Another song Niko brings up in her book is "Depreston" by Courtney Barnett.

**Music:** "Depreston" from the album *Sometimes I Sit and Think, Sometimes I Just Sit* by Courtney Barnett.

*We drive to a house in Preston*

*We see police arresting*

*A man with his hand in a bag*

*How's that for first impressions?*

*This place seems depressing*

*It's a California bungalow in a cul-de-sac*

*(Music fades out.)*

**Promo:**

**Music:** Cheerful, chiming music interspersed with animal sounds.

**Ella McLeod:** Hey, Alexis.

**Alexis B. Preston:** Hey, Ella.

**Ella:** What animal has the most teeth?

**Alexis:** I would guess a shark.

**Ella:** A snail?

**Alexis:** No, snails don't have teeth.

**Ella:** They have thousands and they are freaky looking.

**Ella:** No, I don't want that to be true.

*(Alexis giggles.)*

Okay. Did you know that the hippocampus in your brain is named after the half-horse, half-fish sea creature found in Greek mythology?

**Alexis:** I didn't know that. Buuut we are meant to be doing animal trivia, and hippocampus isn't a real animal.

**Ella:** Well, that doesn't matter on *Comfort Creatures*.

**Alexis:** You're right. It doesn't matter at all. *(Laughs.)*

**Ella:** *Comfort Creatures* is a cozy show for lovers of animals of all shapes and sizes—real and unreal.

**Alexis:** If that sounds like your cup of tea then join us every Thursday for new episodes on MaximumFun.org.

*(Music ends.)*

**Promo:**

**Music:** Soft, inspiring piano.

**Kumail Nanjiani:** Are you a celebrity? Are you searching for meaning, connection, and a little levity these days? Hi. I'm Kumail Nanjiani: actor, writer, and—yes—a celebrity too. And I've got four words for you: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*.

*(The music swells.)*

Are you tired of junkets? Red carpets? Sick of the endless spicy snacks you have to eat? Do you want to connect with someone who gets your work and laughs with you a little?

Join me, André3000, Tom Hanks, Tina Fey, and many more, and become a guest on *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* from NPR and Maximum Fun.

*(Music ends.)*

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** We are back talking with Niko Stratis, author of *The Dad Rock That Made Me a Woman*.

The songs that that are in there—you know, some wonderful songs. You talk about some REM and some Radiohead and some of these songs. What were these doing for you, especially during these tough times? Were you gathering strength from them? Were these songs keeping you alive? Was the biography of the band—because there's a lot in these chapters too about the history of these bands and these recording processes—what was that doing for you?

**Niko Stratis:** It was kind of keeping me alive in its way. It's like a healing balm. I used to never really have advantages around me, even though I worked with glass. So often, when I cut myself, I would just wrap my wounds in tape. I had a lot of duct tape on my arms. Or I would like, you know, wrap it in a paper towel and duct tape, and then call it a day and keep going. And often, that's what those songs were. They were tape on the body that was holding it all together.

[00:40:00]

And I think know the creation of a song or a piece of art—if it's serving this purpose of finding all things together—I think knowing that often there was struggle, or often there's this other thing going on with this person that is driving the thing that they create—I think knowing that really helps you feel connected to it in some way. It also makes it mean that much more of, "Okay, so maybe I'm not alone. Maybe—you know, maybe because Michael Stipe is having these problems, that it's okay that if I have them too, because he's Michael Stipe, and he's the coolest guy in the world." Which I still maintain that Michael Stipe is one of the coolest people to ever live.

*(John agrees.)*

And just of like, "Well, if he's getting through this using these things, or if he's moving through these things and he's creating these beautiful piece pieces of art, maybe something good will happen to me eventually."

And it is this life raft you hold onto. And they were just— Or sometimes they're just affirming! Sometimes if you're— Often when I listen to sad songs is when I'm in a really bad space. And often they just make me feel better, because it makes me feel less alone. There's a lot of songs that I didn't put in the book just because they just didn't work. But they're songs that I think about all the time. Like, if I'm sad, you know, I put on this song "God in Chicago" by Craig from The Hold Steady.

**John Moe:** Craig Finn.

**Niko Stratis:** Yeah! Because it is such a devastatingly beautiful, sad song.

*(John sighs wistfully in agreement.)*

And it makes me feel less alone in my own sadness when I'm feeling that way. I think that song is incredible, because it works for that. But this is—you know, as I've gotten older, I've learned to live with the depression and anxiety because I know it's never going to go away. So, now I sort of have to learn to manage it or live with it or learn how to sort of accept it and almost find the beauty in it.

And I think this is just a natural byproduct of reaching an age I never thought I would see. I never thought I would hit 40, and now I'm 43. So, what do I do with all these sad feelings I thought I would be rid of by the time I was—you know—38 or 39? But when I was younger, they were just a life raft.

**John Moe:** "Tired Eyes" by Neil Young does that for me.

**Niko Stratis:** Sure!

**John Moe:** Oh my god, yeah.

**Niko Stratis:** I think everybody has at least one song that they're like, "Okay. I'm just—I'm bearing the weight of all of these sad and terrible things. I need a song." Like, this is the Aimee Mann catalog for me. I'm like, "Okay, I'm sad. Let's listen to some Aimee Mann and really get into it."

**John Moe:** Speaking of beloved artists, where did you get your name?

**Niko Stratis:** *(Laughs.)* It's a mishmash, because— And this is my—I've had I had multiple names when I was first coming out, but I landed on Niko. I had been at a friend's place, and she had a picture on the wall of Nico from The Velvet Underground. And I saw it. And you know, Nico's wearing this pinstriped black-and-white suit and walking through Times Square. And I was like, "Well, this is such a cool photo." But then I was like, "But there's also all the terrible things I know to be true about Nico. And you know, a bit of a problematic history." And I thought about how much Neko Case's music had meant to me, which I write about in the book. And I just really liked the name.

You know, it's funny when you get to choose your own name, 'cause I chose a very kneejerk reaction name when I first came out, and I still never liked it. And I never liked saying my first name my whole life. And the first time I ever said Niko and referred to myself—looking at this photo of Nico, listening to Neko Case, I thought, "There we are." And it just felt like home, and it was this nice way of honoring Neko Case, who's been an artist I've loved for most of my life, for as long as I can remember. Which is, admittedly, not that far back. But here we are. And also, just—you know—claiming these things of beauty that I found around in the world and not wanting to tie myself— I didn't wanna steal either of their names, but I thought what if I combine them together and turn them into one?

**John Moe:** Do you like saying it now?

**Niko Stratis:** I love saying it now! It's so much easier for me now. You know, when you have to say your name at a coffee shop— Before I transitioned, whenever I would say my name, it would always be spelled wrong. Because I would just like trip over it getting it out, because I hated it so much. And now, it's so much easier—and not just because I have less than the amount of syllables in it, but it just feels right whenever I say it. And I never knew that it was supposed to. I never knew it was supposed to feel right when you refer to yourself.

**John Moe:** What ultimately led to identifying as a woman, doing the name change, and overcoming this history of shame and culture that told you not to do those things?

**Niko Stratis:** I thought I had nothing left to lose. I was in a really bad place. I was very actively suicidal. I was extremely depressed. I was sort of shuffling through the days. And I had mentioned earlier that I've tried to come out a few times, and generally when I tried to come out in the past it had been to partners. And then they rejected me upon hearing the news, and then I just sort of went about my life. And I was in this relationship that wasn't really working out, and I was in this really bad— To sort of paint a portrait of depression: I would get a pizza from Domino's or I would get McDonald's, and I would lie in the bathtub, and I would prop a laptop up on my top of my toilet, and I would watch TV. And I would eat food in the bathtub, and I would just let it float there.

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And I would have a bottle of bourbon that I would usually need to go and get something else. And that was how I would spend most of my nights. And at a certain point, I thought, "I have nothing left to lose." And I had been listening to a lot of "Dancing in the Dark" by Springsteen and thinking of that line "when I changed my clothes, my hair, my face." And I just thought like—that line spoke to me so much and still does. And I just thought like, "I literally have nothing left to lose, and if this doesn't work, this is it. I no longer need to see any more days beyond this one. Once I get rejected for this, it can all be over, and I can go away."

And I had planned to, you know, sort of end it all after this because I thought, "I have nothing left to do in this life."

**John Moe:** And you had no expectation that anything would work, because nothing had.

**Niko Stratis:** Yeah, in a million years, I never thought— Because again, I didn't deserve it. And so, I told the person that I had been dating at the time, and she said to me, "So, what do you need?"

And I just had never been asked that question before. And I thought about that a lot, and I still think about that a lot. I just did a reading in a— I went to a music festival in New Brunswick, and I was doing a reading. And I stopped my reading, and I told this story that I hadn't planned to tell. And I landed on that point in particular, because I think that in all of the depression and anxiety and all the—the crushing weight of so many things, one person who—again, I am not on speaking terms with anymore—but regardless, this person saying, "What do you need?"

changed my entire life. And I think that more people taking the time to say, "So, what do you need?" really could turn a lot of pages to see what's written on the things that we never thought we would get to.

**John Moe:** Because it made you an acter in this scenario? Like, you were no longer just having to be at the mercy of everything else; it gave you initiative. Is that why it was so powerful?

**Niko Stratis:** Yeah. It gave me a little bit of agency in a world that I just never thought that I was owed or deserved it. It allowed me to chart a course. And it's just that nobody had ever once asked me where I wanted to go. And I think about that a lot, of what would've happened if somebody would've asked me what I wanted earlier. And it just never did. Everything was told to me. Everything was imposed upon me. Everything was a structure built around a life. And here was somebody saying, "So, what do you need? How do we get out?" And had that not happened, I would not be here to talk about it. But there we were.

**John Moe:** And did you answer this person?

**Niko Stratis:** Yeah. As clumsy as I could. You know, I was like, "Maybe, you know, I'd buy a pair of pants or something." And I had this like big depression beard, and I shaved that off. And I hadn't shaved my beard in 15 years. But I shaved it off that night, and I saw my face for the first time. It was stark white where the beard had been, because it hadn't seen the sun since I was—you know—20-something, if that. And everything kinda changed after that. And I just didn't really know what to do, because I had just never expected anybody to give me the agency to say, "What do I need in this world?"

And then I was off to the races.

**John Moe:** And then it worked? It made you feel better?

**Niko Stratis:** It made me feel better and then worse and then better. *(Chuckles.)*

It is this sort of—it is this—it is a wavelength, right? That first day, I just felt like I could do anything. And then the weight of it got a little hard. And you know, I had to do the coming out to people thing, which is a bit of a game a give and take. And it felt really good sometimes when I told people. Like, sometimes it was a challenge, but sometimes I had the greatest conversations with people that I'd known for decades. And other times, it was the last conversation I ever had with somebody. But every time I did, I knew this is me deciding to do something. This is me deciding to show people who I am. And I just never thought that was possible.

And that really sort of carries you a long way—or carried me a long way. And you know, it got hard after a while. Because things got hard and this is a hard path to choose. The first year is pretty rocky. But it eventually all sort of leveled out in its own way.

**John Moe:** How did your story become a book?

**Niko Stratis:** *(Laughs softly.)* I'd been writing for a little bit again, and I have a job that I just still don't feel like I deserve—because I didn't go to school for it, and I never came up as a writer. You know, I'm a glassworker from the Yukon. What business do I have being a professional writer?

But I wanted to write from a very young age. And I had been writing a lot on the internet. You know, I was writing for various publications, most of which are out of press now because we've done away with the media environment. I had read the book *Go Ahead in the Rain: Love Letters to A Tribe Called Quest* by Hanif Abdurraquib—who you've spoken to, I know. And that book kind of changed my life, and it changed what I thought music writing could be in a really big way. And I was extremely lucky that the same series that book came out, they wrote and said, "Do you wanna pitch us a book?"

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And I said, "Yeah. Can it be anything I want?"

And they said, "Show us what you got."

And I kind of didn't wanna write the book that I ended up— I tried to go down a different path, and it just wasn't working. And when I came up with the idea for this one, the idea of it came together overnight. And so, I just sort of followed it. And I just thought, you know, I'll see where this goes. And I've never written anything that long. You know, like I've been writing online, and I've been writing some personal stuff online, but never to the degree that the book is. And it just sort of ballooned from there.

**John Moe:** You're a trans woman. It's 2026. Trans people are a lot more open and a lot more visible, but they're also I think increasingly discriminated against. Governments are out to get trans people. How are you doing with all that?

**Niko Stratis:** *(Chuckles dryly.)* Good and bad? You know, I say a lot that I chose a hell of a time to be a Canadian trans woman writing a book for the University of Texas Press that talks about being trans.

*(John laughs.)*

But luckily, the U of Texas Press has been nothing but supportive and really lovely. It's hard! You know, it's hard when you have— There's very few trans people that have sort of—a kind of public standing like I do. Which is not to say that I'm a celebrity or whatever, but people follow me. People engage with me. People are aware of my work. And people reacted really harshly to the idea of the book, partially because of the title—which is a bit funny but also very serious. A lot of people— Because I also write about music, and I write about culture, and I speak about culture, and I really like to talk about, you know, "what does culture tell us about our lives?" and all these things. I get a lot of emails from people that say that I don't deserve to be the person to have those conversations.

And it has been a really hard thing for me after the book of thinking, "If I wasn't a trans woman, the reaction to this book would've been different." Because it's easier to accept somebody using culture to tell these stories if they're not somebody like me; somebody that has—you know, people that—we've had sort of this very harsh spotlight turned on us. A lot of people like to scapegoat us for various problems in the world, or they just don't trust or don't like us, or all of these negative things. And it's been a challenge, despite the book doing fairly well. It's been a challenge even for my own mental health to say, "Well, I deserve for this book to be doing well. I should be trying to, you know, get to do new things because of it" or whatever.

Like, those things have been really hard just because we live in such a terrifying environment—for a lot of people, not just trans people. I think about when I came out and thinking about seeing Laverne Cox on the cover of *Time Magazine* and being like, "Well, now's the time." And that feels like a lifetime ago. Like, it just feels like we've gone back to before that magazine existed.

**John Moe:** What are you listening to these days?

**Niko Stratis:** Well, this morning I listened to Randy Travis a lot, which is not very cool of me. But here we are.

*(John chuckles.)*

I haven't been listening to a lot of new music lately. I've been listening to a Japanese jazz artist a lot, because that's just been something that has been really speaking to me as I get older. But also, because I write about music, I get a lot of PR stuff. So, I do always try to keep abreast of new music, because I never want to be a person that is getting older that is no longer aware of what the kids are

listening to. It's not always for me, but I do always like to engage with and be aware of stuff.

But I don't often get to listen to new stuff for anything other than the work. I've been listening to a lot of the song "Forever and Ever, Amen" by Randy Travis, just 'cause it entered my mind, 'cause it's a song my mom loves. But I wish I had a cool, new answer for you. But, uh.

*(John laughs.)*

There's a band called Ratboys that I really like that I've been listening to a lot that also speak to me in a very sort of dad-rocky kind of way. And I always like to find new things that I can just sort of obsess over. You know, the band Wednesday which has been sort of—

**John Moe:** Oh, I love Wednesday so much.

**Niko Stratis:** Wednesday has been really good for me. That's been the soundtrack of a lot of— I try to go for a walk every day. And I have a dog, which makes it easier. But I always like to have a band that I'm gonna sort of obsess over on my walk. And Wednesday has been that a lot lately too.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Yeah. I've been listening to Wednesday a lot. I've been listening to Friendship a lot. And that Ryan Davis album I've been listening to so much.

**Niko Stratis:** Yeah. I've been listening to *The Surprise Deal*, a soul record that came out a couple months ago.

**John Moe:** Right! Yeah.

**Niko Stratis:** Because it's a really incredible, really beautiful record. And I've been listening to that a lot lately too, just 'cause I never expected we would get one more. So, that's been nice to have. 'Cause it is joyful in its own way, even though it's talking about grief and loss and all of these things.

**John Moe:** The book is *The Dad Rock That Made Me a Woman*. The author is Niko Stratis. And Niko, I just want to tell you honestly—and please take this in—I just think you're a phenomenally talented writer, and I can't wait to read what you write next.

**Niko Stratis:** Thank you so much. It's so kind of you to say, and it's it is a very hard compliment for me to internalize. But I will tell my partner that you said that, and she will say that that's true, and that's close enough for me. Thank you.

[00:55:00]

**John Moe:** Here's one more song Niko Stratis mentions in her book, *The Dad Rock that Made Me a Woman*. Neko Case, "I Wish I Was the Moon".

**Music:** "I Wish I Was The Moon" from the album *Blacklisted* by Neko Case.

*Chimney falls and lovers blaze*

*I thought that I was young*

*Now I've freezing hands and bloodless veins*

*As numb as I've become*

*I'm so tired*

*I wish I was the moon tonight*

*(Music fades out.)*

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

**John Moe:** Hey, we put out a special episode on Friday of last week. It was a talk with Marcus Schmit of NAMI Minnesota about the situation in Minnesota and the stakes of that, and what people are doing, and what people are facing. It's a really good conversation. We put it out as a special episode. It's like 20-25 minutes long. So, be sure to hop back into the archive and check that out.

We're doing a lot of work! And we're putting out a lot of shows, because it's important, and we're trying to help people. To do that, we need your help. If

you've already donated to the show, if you're already a member, thank you so much. And the world thanks you; the people who are helped by the show thank you. If you haven't yet become a member—oh man! It's so easy to do. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join and there you pick a level that works for you. Maybe it's five bucks a month—five stinking dollars!—or 10 or 20. Whatever it is. Whatever works for you. We would love that help. We need, frankly, that help. Then you just pick the *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows, and then we're all off to the races together. Be sure to hit subscribe. Give us five stars. Write rave reviews. That gets the show into the world as well.

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. On Instagram at @DepreshPod. Our newsletter's on Substack. Search up *Depresh Mode* or John Moe there. I'm on BlueSky and Instagram at @JohnMoe. Our Preshies group is on Facebook. A lot of people hanging out there, supporting each other, sometimes talking about the show, sometimes just talking about cats. It's a nice place to hang out with nice people. Our electric mail address is DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. I've been diving back into Netflix to watch *Lady Dynamite* all over again. And it stars friend of the show and my friend, Maria Bamford, and it's kind of loosely based on her life and her bipolar disorder and how she's just managed different things. And it's so screamingly funny and humane. *Lady Dynamite*. If you haven't already checked it out, do so. Maybe you watched it a long time ago. It's worth a rewatch.

*Depresh Mode* is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, "Building Wings". You could consider that song dad rock if you want. I'm not sure. Jury's still out.

*Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

**Music:**

*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!