

John Moe: When I was in fifth grade, someone came around to my class to demonstrate different musical instruments to see if any of us wanted to learn to play any. The oboe was the prettiest sounding instrument, but I was also informed that it was the hardest to play. So, that was out. French horn also sounded great, so I chose that. And try as I might, ohhh, I was not good at it. I was not good at the French horn, could never make it beautiful. Quit, ultimately. Eventually—later—I started to write, which I took to much better. I had a knack for it. But more importantly, I loved it. I discovered that flow-state very early, where it's just happening. It's pouring out of your fingers. You can't type fast enough to keep up. It's wonderful.

I've written a lot over the years. Feel free to buy my books. And I don't want to get too spiritual here, but it puts me in touch with a higher state of being—much like the oboe and French horn couldn't quite. It also makes me understand myself better, to know the tools and obstacles I'm dealing with. I became a writing instructor—also not long ago—because I want to get other people in touch with all of this.

Today, here on the show, we're going to talk about mental health and writing and how they coexist, how one aids and hampers the other, and how you might find it really useful—book deal or not! Whether you ever show it to anyone else or not.

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

Imagine this music played on the oboe or the French horn if you can't handle the oboe.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Jonathan Edward Durham is a writer, a novelist. His book *Winterset Hollow* was self-published in 2021 and was really successful, which is a hard thing to pull off. It's set for a new edition to come out this fall. *Winterset Hollow* is about three friends who visit the home of a late, beloved author; and then there are surprises and peril.

Jonathan also writes online, which is a newer pursuit for him and one that is going great. He has a newsletter he updates regularly where he talks about his life, his mental health, his struggles with depression and anxiety and ADHD. Sometimes it's long stories or essays. Other times it's just one-liners, like “Which medication gets rid of

the voices outside my head? Because honestly, those are an issue too.” Or “One out of every ten blueberries are why I have trust issues.”

I found out about Jonathan in our Facebook group for this show, our group called Preshies, where our listeners quote him and share his stuff a lot. To the point where I thought, “Wow, I probably need to get this guy on the show.” I’m really glad we did.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Jonathan Durham, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Jonathan Durham: Thank you so much. Pleasure to be here.

John Moe: I gotta say, I kind of feel like you forced your way in the door though. Because we have this Facebook group called the Preshies, and anytime I’m on there, there’s a Jonathan Durham quote. (*Laughing.*) There’s a little picture of you and some really smart, wise, very funny stuff about mental health. So, I kind of felt like, well, at this point—you know, maybe this could stop him from taking over my show.

Jonathan Durham: I promise I was not targeting you and your group specifically.

(John laughs.)

The quotes do tend to get around a little bit. Sometimes I am even overwhelmed with my social media presence every now and then, so I don’t blame ya.

John Moe: Talk to me a little bit about that. So, you’re a novelist; you’re a writer. And it seems like you’ve started talking more about mental health online in your Substack and maybe in some other places. And it really seems—you really seemed to have found an audience for that kind of thing. Did that come about organically, or was that like a decision that you made?

Jonathan Durham: No, it was a totally organic thing. Actually, all of this came about kinda out of nowhere. I really wasn’t online much at all before I published this book. I didn’t even have a Facebook page. You know, the first edition of this book, I self-published it. So, I was in a position where I didn’t have any marketing behind me. I didn’t have any of that. And so, I thought, “Well, the least I should do is probably make an Instagram and a Facebook and that sort of thing.”

And I sort of did that for a couple months. And then I happened to say something funny one day, and it kinda went viral, and I started getting more followers, and people really started enjoying it. And I kind of thought, “Well, maybe this is something I could sort of do every now and then to sort of like introduce myself to new people. And maybe some of those people would actually read and enjoy my book.” And that's kind of how all that started. And then eventually, it became something I really started to enjoy, because people really started connecting with these little, interesting sound bites. And it started to mean something more than just a way to sort of get my name circulating.

And it's something that's—it's important to me now, and I do it every single day. And lots of people follow me just for that, you know—not just for the books. And it started to mean something to them and to me too. And so, it's sort of become its own thing. And it's been really interesting to watch all that happen, you know, in a way.

John Moe: Yeah. Do you remember—you talked about putting something out there that that really caught on. Do you remember what some of the earliest stuff that you wrote that caught on was? What you said?

Jonathan Durham: If I remember correctly, most of the early things I wrote were very book-centered, author-centered. Because the only people who really knew who I was were my readers. You know, slowly but surely I started to sort of talk about myself, I guess, a little bit; and things that I dealt with and were struggling with; or even just things that I loved, things that were important to me. And that really started to resonate with people too. You know, I think a lot of people who—I mean, I shouldn't be surprised; a lot of people who connected with the things I wrote in long form also connected, you know, with the things I wrote in short form. And so, you know, I just started talking more about other things. And eventually it became a way to sort of like open up to people, you know? Because I don't always get the chance to do that. None of us always get the chance to do that as much as we'd like, probably.

And it sort of became like this strange, little therapeutic thing for me where I'd spend an hour or two every morning just sort of thinking about what's going on with me and what's going on with the world and talking about it. And you know, it's sort of become this great, little ritual for me. So.

John Moe: Well, I'm curious about that practice as—not therapy, but as you say, something therapeutic. Is it like journaling? Are you writing the same kind of things you would write in a private journal? It just so happens that you hit send on them, and then they show up on my show's Facebook page.

Jonathan Durham: Yeah, actually. I think that's a really, really good analogy for it. I think that's exactly what it is. It's just sort of a way to like get your thoughts out of your head and reflect on them from a distance in a way. And they start to sort of mean something different to you and you get a different point of view from them. And then also, when other people start commenting on them you get an even different point of view. So, it's like journaling times 10 or a 100 sometimes, where you really get to share your thoughts, yes, with yourself and like with yourself out of body, but also with all these other typically wonderful, smart, kind people. I think that's a really good analogy, actually. Yeah.

John Moe: So, let's go back to the beginning, what we were talking about with the book, *Winterset Hollow*. It's coming out in a second edition, published presumably this time by somebody else.

Jonathan Durham: Yeah, that's correct. Yeah, first time around I had to do it myself this time. It's being published by Hachette and Union Square. So, second edition coming and will be everywhere in October.

John Moe: Excellent. And I want to ask about what went into but can you— You've recapped it better than I probably can. Can you tell me a little bit about what happens in the book?

Jonathan Durham: It's a very, very strange, weird, little, twisty story—which are the things I like to write. It's a book about stories in a lot of ways. Basically, it's about a group of friends who are lifelong fans of a book. And this book is a—you know, let's say about a 100-year-old book about a community of animals who are sort of scrambling to get their yearly feast together. So, think, you know, *Winnie the Pooh* or *Redwall*, that sort of thing. And so, they take a pilgrimage to the estate of the author who wrote this book, who's long dead. And while they're there, they sort of discover some really, really disturbing truths behind this fiction that they've come to love. And from there, it gets pretty crazy and pretty wild and sort of takes a thriller turn. It just

spins into this this really, really wild adventure. And it all comes together in a really, really lovely way in the end.

So, it's kind of like this crazy combination of the books I loved as a young, young child and also the kind of thrillers I loved as a teenager. You know, I grew up in the '90s, so I was reading Michael Crichton and John Grisham and Tom Clancy and sort of all that stuff. So, it's this really strange combination of the two of those things, but I really love it. And you know, I've been lucky enough to have a lot of readers really love it too.

John Moe: I'm getting a *Narnia* vibe from it. Is there a *Narnia* element?

Jonathan Durham: A little bit. It's a little less fantastical than that, but everything I write has a little twist on reality. Not quite that far.

John Moe: Well, you've written about—online, you've written about dealing with depression, dealing with anxiety, imposture syndrome, some of these things. As someone who has written several books myself and dealt with depression and anxiety myself, I feel like writing books—I always am troubled, because I feel like it's not always the healthiest pursuit given what's happening in my mind. Like, the research, the writing, the editing, the publicizing, the revising, waiting to see how it sells. It's really intense, and it really can kind of screw with your sense of how good of a person you are or like how to evaluate yourself. And that really can seem to enhance the depression and anxiety—at least the risk for it. How has that been for you?

Jonathan Durham: It's been really hard. It's been easier as of late, and we'll get to that later. But I think any author will tell you it's tough. It's a constant internal battle. (*Chuckling.*) I've always said that, regardless of what book you read, regardless of what it's about, it's also about attempted murder; because I promise you that book tried to kill the author at some point during its writing.

(*John laughs.*)

It's hard. It's—(*sighs*) it's a hard thing to regulate, and it's a struggle. Because as an author, as you know, you want to regulate yourself as little as possible when you're writing, right? You want you want truth, you want rawness, you want all of that stuff.

John Moe: Yep. Open tap. Yeah.

Jonathan Durham: That's exactly right. And when you open that tap, kinda everything comes out of it—including all of those terrible things. So, to answer your question about how I regulate it, I don't always regulate it. I can't always regulate it. I do other things to try and mitigate it. I'm obsessive about going to the gym every day for at least an hour. I'm obsessive about getting outside to take the dogs for a walk each day and that sort of thing. But other than that, (*sighs*) I don't know if there's a magic trick to it. It's just something you kinda have to fight through. And I haven't found a way to cure it. I'm not sure anyone has. I'm not sure that's a thing.

But it's interesting; when I'm in the process of writing, it's not always that bad. But as soon as I finish something, it rreally hits me. Like, every time I wrap a project up, I just go and do a couple weeks or a month of like a pretty dark depression. And I don't know why, because I'm usually proud of the stuff I write. But I just—it's like that thing's not—the thing that makes me feel like I am who I am isn't currently happening, so it's—I don't know. It's strange. So, I in a way when I'm writing, I'm sort of at my happiest a lot. And then when I'm not, it's the other side of that coin, you know.

John Moe: That's kind of different from what I've heard from a lot of writers. Like, you often hear, “I love having written, but writing is itself is a kind of hell.” But it sounds like for you, the writing is—

Jonathan Durham: Yeah, it's very much the opposite.

John Moe: That's when you have flow. Yeah.

Jonathan Durham: You know, you were saying earlier about kind of journaling and things being therapeutic, and that's kind of how writing is for me. Most of the stuff I write is pretty personal in a way, and a lot of what I do is a is a weird way of just having a conversation about things I struggle with or have struggled with. And so, I sort of feel like I'm doing good work on myself a little bit most of the time when I'm writing. And maybe that's part of the reason why, when I'm not, it just hits me hard.

John Moe: Have you had the experience—and this has been the case with a lot of writers that I've talked to, where—through the process of writing about yourself, those things that happened to you, experiences you've had—you start to make connections like, “Oh, this this thing here earlier explains this decision I made here.”

Almost like you're crafting a character arc in a work of fiction, your character starts to have a clearer path that you will only discover through writing about it.

Jonathan Durham: Yeah, I think that— I think those are the best stories, to be fair. I think—you know, I've said that the hardest thing about fiction is inventing truth. And I think when you hit on something like that, I think that's kind of what you do in a way. And I think when people read that, they can feel it. So, I've definitely had that experience. When I wrote *Winterset Hollow*, there's kind of four main characters in that book. And they each started as—well, they're sort of one-line character sketches. Each started as an area of mental health I struggled with, so one of them was anxious and one of them was a depressive and one of them had imposter syndrome and one of them was angry all the time.

And as I wrote the book and sort of fleshed them out, I for sure discovered more things. (*Correcting himself.*) “Discovered,” maybe not. I came to understand certain aspects of myself better for sure. And definitely connected a couple dots. And I think that's part of the reason that I think that's a strong story is because— Yeah, I mean I definitely worked through a lot of stuff during that book.

John Moe: So, there's four main characters is that what you said?

Jonathan Durham: Well, no. There's more main characters than that. This is sometimes a tough book to talk about without giving too much away, but it's fine because it's been out there for a while. There's four main anthropomorphic animal characters in the book. So, like I said, think *Winnie the Pooh*, *Redwall*, that sort of thing. Each one of them is sort of based on that sort of archetype. So, there's four of them. And yeah, each one of them—each major character sketch started as a something I struggle with, you know, mentally.

John Moe: Mm. Was it by design? And just so listeners know, yes, (*chuckling*) we're a couple of writers geeking out about writing here. But I also—you know, I don't believe in in gatekeeping. I'm sure you don't either. Like, anybody can write.

(*Jonathan agrees emphatically.*)

And it's a good mental health exercise. It's a healthy thing, whether you publish it or not—whether you show it to anyone or not. But were you consciously saying, “Okay,

I'm going to take these mental health aspects out of my head, put them in a story, and see what they do, and learn about myself that way?"

Jonathan Durham: Well, no, not necessarily exactly like that. It came about a little more organically. So, one of the sparks for this story was I was sitting around one day sort of thinking about, actually, *Winnie the Pooh*. Because when I was a young kid, I loved that sort of thing. And I sort of thought about, "Well, it would be interesting if these characters—what would they do if they knew they were in a book? Like, if they knew somebody wrote a book about them, what would they think about that?" And then I started thinking, "What if they didn't like that?"

And that was sort of one of the seeds. And I always thought one of the interesting things about those characters in those stories was that they each deal with a human issue. Pooh's kind of an overeater, and Tigger has ADHD, and Eeyore's a depressive. And so, that all sort of organically worked its way into the genesis for my story. I didn't really sit down and think about, "Oh, I wanna work through some stuff through doing this," but it just kinda happened that way.

John Moe: And then ultimately, they all took on more dimension, and they didn't hew to that as much. Okay.

Jonathan Durham: For sure. Yeah, absolutely. So, that was—it was just a seed for them.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: More with Jonathan Durham in a minute. More of his history also, which you will want to know.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We're back with writer and author Jonathan Durham.

How far back do you go with depression and with anxiety? Has this been a thing for you your whole life?

Jonathan Durham: I would say it really started to get noticeable after high school, after I was out on my own without the structure I was used to growing up. And I think it got worse the older I got, to be fair. You know, I didn't really start (*sighs*) sort

of giving it a name until I was probably in my 30s. Because up until then, I had always kind of gotten by. You know, when I was in school, I was I was a good student, and I didn't really get into a lot of trouble and that sort of thing. And so, nobody really thought I had any issues. And because of that, I didn't either. So, I didn't really think about it much. I didn't really give it any credence. You know, I didn't look into it. I didn't think I needed help.

And that lasted, like I said, until I was probably in my early 30s or mid-30s. But looking back, I struggled with that stuff for sure. I just didn't know what it was and I didn't know how to deal with it. But once I started getting older and sort of started recognizing what it was— And you know, social media and that sort of thing was probably a big part of that, because I had never been part of discussions about those things previous to that. And so, that sort of let me in on other people's experiences and the way they talk about it. And I sort of went, “Oh, okay. This is all sounding very familiar.” And that started my own sort of internal discussion about those things.

And the more I learned about it, the more I noticed it.

John Moe: What kinds of things did you notice?

Jonathan Durham: Well, you know, I had always chalked up being a solitary person to just that. I just don't get out much, or I'd just rather be on my own. And it turns out that wasn't necessarily the case. I was just depressed a lot of the time. And there were there were a couple instances of different things like that where, looking back, I went, “Oh, that makes sense.” You know, I said, “Well, I like my familiar surroundings; I like my schedule to be predictable; I'm very picky about this, picky about that.” And sometimes when I would—even when I would go visit family, for instance, for about a week or so, after three days I would often change my flight and leave. And in my mind at the time, you know, I was just, “Well, I just need to be home with my familiar things.”

And it made sense to me, and I never once thought, “Well, look, maybe there's something—*(chuckling)* maybe there's something larger going on here.” You know, it's “Why can't you be in an unfamiliar space for three days? You know what I mean? Why can't you be on somebody else's schedule for three days?” And I didn't think that was abnormal. But you know, looking back, of course that's—you know, that's a little

abnormal. It's a little out of the ordinary, you know. And there's a reason for that. And so, there's definitely been things like that in my life for sure.

John Moe: So, when you talk about figuring this out when you were in your early 30s, was that when you started using social media? Is that how you figured it out? Or did it reach a crisis point of some sort?

Jonathan Durham: Yeah, it kind of did. You know, I started... I moved to LA when I was in my early 30s to be a screenwriter, and I was a fairly unsuccessful one for I think about six or seven years. But when I was out there— I don't know how familiar you are with Los Angeles. It can be a great place. It can also be an awful place. It's very context dependent, right? So, if you don't have a lot of money and you're not particularly successful and you're not great at networking and making new friends, it can be a pretty bad place to be. So, for a long time I was in one room in a shitty apartment, you know, just kind of by myself trying to hammer out a career as a screenwriter.

And that was I think the time where it really started to reach a crisis point, like you said. Because it just compounded and compounded and compounded. And I didn't have any structure to fall back on, and I didn't have any success to feel good about. And my family wasn't there. I don't have any family out there. And I didn't really have any friends either. And it was six years of writing what I thought was good things that nobody was able to enjoy, because the only people who would ever read them were interns and studio executives and my manager and my agent. And it was just—at the end of that, I was like, “What am I—? What am I even doing, man? What is this all about?” And then! COVID hit.

John Moe: Oof.

Jonathan Durham: COVID in Los Angeles was a whole thing.

John Moe: So, you're even more isolated; you're even more locked inside. The depression, I'm sure, cranks up.

Jonathan Durham: It did. And the entertainment industry also shut down for 18 months. So, I'm looking at this going, “Well, what's gonna happen at the end of this?” You know what I mean? What am I gonna do? And somehow, some way, that was actually the time I sat down and wrote *Winterset Hollow*. And I did it in the unhealthiest

way possible. And I still don't know how that happened, but— Well, I mean I literally locked myself in my room and I chain smoked, which I don't anymore, thankfully. You know, when I needed a couple hours of sleep, I would have a couple drinks and pass out for three hours or five. I mean, it was bad. But it's like I just needed— I don't know, I just needed something to hold on. Like, I just needed something to show for everything. And somehow, some way, I found that. But yeah, that was probably the big low point after all that was going on, for sure.

John Moe: Well, it seems like that— (*Sighs.*) I mean, that's when it moves from a mood to a disorder, right? Like, when it when it starts to interfere with the healthy functioning of your day-to-day life.

(Jonathan agrees.)

And so, then you moved? Did something happen that said, “I'm moving out of LA?”

Jonathan Durham: Not immediately. You know, after I sort of found what I thought was a home for that book and I had a couple people that were close to me read it and people started to enjoy it, I started to have a reason to sort of try to get my act together a little bit, I guess. So, I started exercising. That's not a thing I did previous to that. I started small by taking a mile or two walk every day and sort of worked my way up to eventually running and going to the gym and that sort of thing. And like I said, I stopped smoking and started getting online, you know. Just because I'm an author now, and I think that was a big part of feeling less isolated too, in a weird way. And then I felt good enough about myself that I went on Match.com one day and eventually met somebody really special who's currently my husband.

And that, probably more than anything, lit a fire under me. You know, that was actually the reason I stopped smoking and started sort of seeking healthier behaviors and that sort of thing. But still, I didn't look for help for any of my mental health issues. And didn't, actually, until a couple of years after that. Because moving in with him and starting to share my life with somebody in a way that I hadn't before actually unearthed a treasure trove of new issues that I didn't know were there, because I'd never had a reason to experience them before. And so, I actually took a pretty serious nosedive mentally when that happened.

John Moe: Like what kind of issues?

Jonathan Durham: I just didn't realize what a challenge it would be to share my life with somebody in that way, to be that close to somebody else's emotions and to sort of have to feel those things and to have that affect me as well. That's a big one. And I didn't know how to handle that. And just to have to account for somebody else's life and their schedule and their needs and all of these things. I didn't know how to handle that, and it put me in a really weird place. I didn't know how to deal with it, and I didn't write well for—two years? Two-and-a-half years after that?

So, I was in this spot where I had this book that was fairly successful and everybody was looking for something else from me, including myself. And I couldn't find that. It took me a long time to sort of like work through those things and figure out that I probably couldn't do it on my own. And really, only in the last five or six months have I been in what I consider a good place. You know, with proper medication; that's made a huge difference in my life. And healthy habits and understanding how to share my life in a healthy way. And definitely on the upturn as of late! (*Chuckling.*) But it's been a wild ride, you know.

John Moe: Talk therapy? Did you go in for talk therapy?

Jonathan Durham: A little bit, yep. Tough for me to find. I sort of bounced around between a couple therapists. That's sometimes a hard thing for people to find one they really connect with, you know. But that certainly helped, and finding the right medication helped tremendously as well. So, you know. This last chunk of my life has been by far the happiest and most productive that I've had. And I'm writing well again, and this second book is going great. And I'm—you know, my Substack—you know, I do the column thing, and I do these short stories. So, we're working on a compilation of short stories too. It's flowing well. And I'm feeling good about all that, finally.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Just ahead, writing helps Jonathan a lot. Maybe it could help you. Learn about his practices, and maybe you want to borrow some of his practices.

Promo:

Austin Taylor: Howdy, there! So sorry to interrupt whatever amazing show you are listening to. But! It's time for an ad. I'll be so quick and get you back to your show, don't worry.

(Exciting techno music fades in.)

I'm host Austin, one half of a podcast called *Secret Histories of Nerd Mysteries* that I make with my good friend, Brenda. We talk about the pop culture stuff you like—like *Thundercats* and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* Did you know that the *Thundercats* are cousins with Farrah Fawcett? Or that *Yu-Gi-Oh* once caused a riot? You probably want to know more. You can find us on Maximum Fun or wherever you get podcasts every single Tuesday.

(Music fades out.)

Promo:

Music: Fantastical, medieval style synth.

Griffin McElroy: *(With a wise, aged affect.)* The wizards answer eight by eight.

The conclaves call to demonstrate—

Their arcane gift; their single spell.

They number 64—until!

A conflagration! 63.

And 62, they soon shall be,

As one by one, the wizards die,

'Til one remains to reign on high!

(The music picks up tempo.)

(Returning to his normal speaking voice.) Join us for *TAZ Royale*, an Oops, All Wizards battle royale season of *The Adventure Zone*, every other Thursday on MaximumFun.org or wherever you get your podcasts.

(Music ends.)

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We're talking with Jonathan Durham.

What kind of what kind of routine—? I hate to use the word discipline, but like what kind of structure have you put around writing? Because sometimes having a mandate, even if it's just issued by yourself to yourself, to do that kind of work—that can be really great or that can be maddening for people. So, how do you handle that?

Jonathan Durham: Well, so it used to be maddening for me, because I thought I knew it worked best for me. And it turns out that wasn't the case. So, what I used to do was split my writing day into two halves. Right? I used to write a couple hours before dinner, and then my husband would come home, and we'd spend time together. And he wakes up early, goes to bed early. So, when he would turn in I would then try to write for a couple hours afterwards. And I thought that was what I needed. However, recently—since I've been on some medication that requires me to take it early for it to sort of kick in during the day—I've actually discovered that a normal workday works best for me. You know, wake up at 7, have coffee, sit down, get ready to go; about 8/8:30 I start writing, and I write till about 4 o'clock. And that's been ten times as productive for me as the other way around.

So, you know, it's just funny sometimes the things you think work best for you turn out to not be the case. So, yeah. So, that's what I do and then I go to the gym after that. And then we have dinner and spend the night together. And then you know, sometimes I'll still write a little bit more later at night, but I don't feel like I have to necessarily now. If I'm in the mood, you know, I do it. But yeah. So, it's been really important for me to stick to that, for sure. Life changing, even!

John Moe: Yeah, yeah. Well, that's such great news. You've also dealt with some neurodivergence issues—with some ADHD, correct?

(Jonathan confirms.)

I wonder if you can recap, just for our listeners' benefit, the story you told about breaking Napster.

Jonathan Durham: *(Laughs.)* So— Yeah, so as many children of the '80s and '90s will tell you, at some point every teenager—well, not every teenager; most of us carried our music around in our cars with us, right? Because we all had CD players or tape decks and that sort of thing. So, I had a giant 100-disc binder of all my favorite CDs that went everywhere with me. And it was my pride and joy. You know, I still love music. I did love music then. And those binders were great, because you could kind of just hand them to somebody and go, “Here.” You know what I mean? Like, “Here is my taste in music.”

John Moe: “This is me.”

Jonathan Durham: Like, “This is my personality. Feel free to leaf through it.” You know? So, freshman year of college, somebody broke into my car and stole that. And I was heartbroken. Because not only was it like all my favorite music, but it was, you know, thousands of dollars' worth of hard-earned money and that sort of thing, right? And so, that was about the time that Napster was just starting to like catch fire on college campuses.

And a friend of mine was like, “Well, hey. You can just go here and find all that music, and then you can just burn it onto CDs.”

And I thought, “Well, that's great!” You know, I didn't really feel bad about it, because I had already purchased all the music. So, I was like—it was kind of a no-brainer. I said, “Great.” So, yeah, one night I sat down. It was probably over the course of two or three days now that I think about it. But fired up the coffee machine, and I was visited by the ghost of blessed hyperfocus. And I downloaded, I mean, 100 albums—mmm maybe some more, you know—worth of music. Yeah.

John Moe: Gotta pay yourself for the trouble a little bit.

Jonathan Durham: Yeah, exactly, man. And you know, back in that day, there wasn't a ton of bandwidth to go around on campus networks. And I used so much of it that campus IT actually took notice and discovered the website I was using. And so, the

college paper actually wrote a story about it, and everybody else kind of started using Napster too. And it got to the point where they banned it on campus. And then that sort of started to populate in campuses around the area and spread and spread. And then a couple months after that, you know, Metallica was testifying before Congress about it. So, uh *(laughs)* I'm sure I wasn't the only one to be responsible for that, but yeah. So, uh...

John Moe: Yeah. Because you just couldn't leave it alone, James Hetfield had to go sit at a table.

Jonathan Durham: *(Unclear.) (Laughs.)* I had to do it 100%. I had to do all of it as fast as possible. Yeah.

John Moe: Is that hyperfocus thing, is that—that's an ADHD thing, right?

Jonathan Durham: Yeah, I think it can be. I think there's sort of other—I know a lot of autistic people often say they have hyperfocus. For me, it usually comes at the wrong time. I'm usually hyperfocused on the wrong things. You know, in my past it's often been coupled with procrastination, you know? Where it's like, "I know I have to do work, I know I should do work, but I really need to finish this." Even though this, you know, isn't important at all.

Sort of managing that has traditionally been something I have struggled with, for sure. You know, the problem with that is that you can't pick and choose when to engage it. Like, it just sort of comes and goes on its own.

John Moe: Yeah. So, you—I mean, it seems like you got on some good meds; you did some introspection, and you've done a lot of work on this thing. You're in a good place now. Do you feel like you got it licked? You got it solved? Or are you just on a winning streak that may end?

Jonathan Durham: Uhh... you know, language like that scares me sometimes.

(John affirms with a chuckle.)

Because I've been wrong about that a number of times in my life. So, like I don't think I would ever use those words necessarily, but I'm certainly in a better place than I ever have been. And I hope it continues. And like, I think as long as I do my part to help it

continue, I think it will. But I mean, life happens, man. And you know, I just— I wouldn't say I have it solved, but I'm on a good path for sure.

John Moe: Are you better off because you're doing all this writing, like this journaling, this sort of sharing yourself with the world? Has that made your mental health better?

Jonathan Durham: I think so. You know, like I said before, I feel my best when I'm writing. And those little posts that I write for me count. You know, and sometimes more than the other stuff. You know, I don't necessarily think writing 1,500 words a day, you know, is necessarily better than writing 20 if those 20 words mean more than those 1,500 words do. And sometimes that's the case, you know. And sometimes I will put something out there that just resonates with more people than I ever thought it would in a way I never thought it would. And that makes me feel great. It makes me feel worthwhile and valid and like what I'm doing matters. You know. So, yeah, I think it's helped me too.

There's obviously another edge to that sword, you know. And sometimes you put something out there that doesn't resonate with people or that people don't like. It doesn't happen as often as you think it would, but it does happen. And that doesn't make you feel great. But in my experience, the pros have far outweighed the cons of doing that.

John Moe: So, you're making connections to the world, which feels healthy. You're also writing and making connections within your own mind and your own personal story, which is healthy as well.

Jonathan Durham: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. It's—yeah, it's all very healthy and constructive. And I enjoy it, which is the important thing too, you know. I mean, there's nothing else I'd rather do, so I'm more than happy to do this for the rest of my days if that's the case. You know?

John Moe: And there is something inherently comedic about mental health problems, I think. (*Chuckles.*) 'Cause it can just be so ridiculous uh to the point of farce. And I think a lot of your writing really captures that, of just like, “What is going on?” Like, the disorientation, the *I Love Lucy* conveyor belt sense of it all, the absurd.

Jonathan Durham: (*Laughs.*) Well, I mean, I think you're right. It is absurd. I think that's the appropriate word for it. Because, you know, sometimes you— I mean, you think about—we have this this this propensity to think about ourselves as separate from our brains sometimes. And I mean, we are. We are our brain, so it's like, “Well, what are we—what are we talking about? Like, what are we fighting against? Like, what team are you on? Like, you're my quarterback, man. Like, what are you doing throwing it to the other team and dropping the ball?” (*Chuckles.*) You know what I mean? Like, what?

You know. So, you're right, it is absurd. It is absurd to want to do something and not be able to do it! You know? I mean, I struggled with executive dysfunction for my whole life. And I mean, I still do to some degree, and it's insane. It's insane to sit there and go, “I need to pay this parking fine” or “I need to get my car registered.” Like, I know I need to do this, but I just can't. I just can't do it. I lived in LA for seven years before I registered my car there. Seven years.

John Moe: Yeah, yeah. ‘Cause you just—you couldn't do it.

Jonathan Durham: ‘Cause I just couldn't do it, you know? And it's—you're right, it's absurd. I mean, that's the only word for it. You know?

John Moe: There's a story Dick Cavett told me one time about how depression is like—it's like you're in a room, and five feet away from you— And you're sitting in a chair, and five feet away from you is the cure for depression in a bottle. But you just don't want to get up. (*Chuckles.*)

Jonathan Durham: I mean, gosh, that is so true, man. You know, my husband, for the four-and-a-half years we've been together, has been very, very good about, you know, “You need to go talk to somebody. You need to see a doctor. You need to do this; you need to do that.” He would print out lists of doctors that were on our health insurance in our area and leave them for me. He would call and make appointments, and I wouldn't go to them. And all of this stuff. And he would do that for years and years.

And I actually just wrote about this the other week. You know, some people write about the moment they decided to get healthy as some like blinding revelation or a sermon or a sign or whatever. And like, for me, it was just a Tuesday. It was just a day

I felt okay. And then I thought I could handle making that phone call. And that's all it was. But it was also the four years before that. It was like all the effort that was put into trying to get me there, and all of... not making me feel guilty for that. So, it was almost like it was just that one day where, because of all of that, I didn't feel like I deserved to feel that way. And that was it!

John Moe: Glad that Tuesday arrived. Jonathan Durham can be found online at JonathanEdwardDurham.com. Jonathan, thank you so much.

Jonathan Durham: Thank you. It was a pleasure to be here.

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

John Moe: I want to thank Jonathan for talking with us. You can look up his stuff online; it's all over social media. Just start with googling Jonathan Edward Durham and enjoy.

My daughter and I recently drove to Chicago. All things go; all things go. And we listened to podcasts on our way, including an interview with Candace Lightner, founder of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, or MADD—M-A-D-D. And Candace Lightner told her story about her 13-year-old daughter, Carrie, being killed by a drunk driver in 1980. And Candace was mad. She was mad that the driver had recently been arrested on another DUI hit and run, mad that he actually left Carrie's body and fled the scene, mad at the whole system that didn't do more to prevent what happened, mad at the mild sentences drunk drivers were getting, mad at the shrug society gave to the whole thing. So mad, she started MAD. Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Great acronym. Memorable and accurate.

So, we're listening to this podcast in the car, and I was reminded of the episode we did December 15th last year with Dr. Ryan Martin, who's an expert on anger. And he talked about anger being a signal that your mind is sending you that an injustice has been committed. It's an alarm being tripped. And anger also is an emotion. It's a feeling that happens to you. You don't choose to be mad. You don't select it. All this

to say, being mad is not wrong. It's not bad. It's not something to be avoided or feared. It's involuntary. Now, your behavior—what you do with your anger—is your responsibility. That is on you. But anger is so often shamed and feared when it really is powerful and useful. Your mind is calling you with something to say, and you oughta listen! You ought to say, “Oh, I'm angry. I better check my voicemails from my mind, find out what the injustice is.”

And then what you gotta do is evaluate. You gotta do a little Q&A with yourself, right? So, okay, you say, “I'm mad because of an injustice. Is this an injustice against society that I'm mad about? Is it against other people? And are they people who I know, or are they strangers? Or is this an injustice against me alone? And if it is an injustice, am I being fair?” Right? Like, “Is this an injustice against what I know to be right and wrong in my wise adult mind? Or am I evaluating it based on an earlier version of my mind that just somehow got reawakened? Also, is there anything I could do about this? Or do I just have to, you know, take the L?” So, the alarm's going off. You gotta figure out what the injustice is and then your course of action.

Not long after I had this conversation with Ryan Martin, I had occasion to use the procedural technique that I'm talking about. See, we have this thing happening in Minnesota—my home—where the federal government has kind of gone to war with us. Thousands of masked troops grabbing people off the street, disappearing them, taking them to hellhole federal detention facilities hundreds of miles away, taking children, shooting people to death who pose no threat. More recently, just last week, saying that they're gonna cut off federal funding for things like Medicaid to Minnesota. To just Minnesota. And I've been writing about it and talking about it, including here on the show. Because I have a platform and because my friends and family elsewhere worry about what's going on here in Minnesota. They want to know about it.

So, I wrote about it on Facebook, right? And this guy I went to high school with—haven't seen since—jumped on my Facebook and said, “You know, ICE is just arresting people who broke the law, so everything they're doing is okay.” Notably, he did not sound mad, because to him there was no injustice. What was happening here in Minnesota was justice to him. And dear listener, I got mad. I got so mad. I deleted the comment, unfriended him, blocked him, posted about it, made a special post

about it where—among other things—I said that this guy had stupid hair in high school. I got like really, really mad.

I felt kind of embarrassed about my response, actually, from when I got mad. And then I remembered what Dr. Ryan Martin said to me on my own show: that there is nothing wrong with anger. Anger is a tool. Anger is an alarm going off. Anger could be a response to injustice. Not something wrong with you personally for feeling it, just an alarm going off. So, it was time to inquire. Was it injustice that this guy posted to Facebook? No, people do that. Did what he said indicate injustice? Yes, because of course, they're not simply arresting people who broke the law. They're arresting people of color indiscriminately, arresting American citizens, arresting Native Americans. They're entering homes without warrants or probable cause and taking people. They're yanking them out of their own cars. They're attacking peaceful protesters and observers, spraying them with tear gas, and sometimes killing them. That's injustice.

The further injustice is that a lot of people think what's happening is justice. Either because they don't know what's actually been happening in Minnesota, or because—and this is hard to say and even think in America—they do know exactly what's happening here, and they wish it to continue. That's their version of justice. When I talk to friends here in Minnesota about something other than ICE, we know that it's only a matter of time until the topic comes around. It's inevitable. And everyone I know is mad because of injustice. I don't know if they make that association, but I now do. And it feels like it makes the whole thing more actionable. Like we can do something about it. Like it did when Candace Lightner got mad and started MADD.

We talk about the injustice and what to do about it. We've been interviewing our own anger, listening to the alarms, figuring out the best course of action as a result. And it takes us out of being mad and into being determined. Like anger being healthy, our response has been very healthy for our community. It means parents and non-parents staking out schools at arrival and dismissal, volunteers outside the Whipple Building—ICE headquarters—with blankets and a warm ride when someone gets released in the middle of the night, kicked out into a Minnesota winter. We've been doing stuff. It sucks that we have to do it. And ICE is still very much here. And we're going to keep doing stuff, because we got mad and because we listened to that.

(Music fades back in.)

We love making our show. We can only do it when people support it. That's the only possible way. I'm sorry, but it's true! If you already donate to support the show, thank you so much. If you don't, I ask you to, because we just try to make this thing that goes out into the world and tries to help people's minds through the difficult times that they face and that we all live in. So, all you gotta do is go to MaximumFun.org/join. Find a level that works for you. 10 bucks a month, 5 bucks a month, 20. Whatever it is you want to do is great with us. And then select *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows, and then you're on your way. So, we really appreciate that. Another thing you could do is hit subscribe, give us five-star reviews—ratings and reviews; write those up. That gets the show out to people who it can help.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached in the U.S. and Canada by calling or texting 988. It's free. It's available 24-7. We're on BlueSky at [@DepreshMode](https://www.bluethumb.com/@DepreshMode). Our Instagram is [@DepreshPod](https://www.instagram.com/DepreshPod). Our newsletter is on Substack. You can search that up. I'm on BlueSky and Instagram at [@JohnMoe](https://www.bluethumb.com/@JohnMoe). You can join our Preshies group and read all those posts from Jonathan Durham (*chuckling*) and a few from me and from other people too. There's lots of cats, also. And dogs. And it's a bunch of nice people hanging out, and I'm there too. So, I'll see you then. Just search up Preshies on Facebook. Our electric mail address is DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. Getting back to the oboe for a minute: when we moved into our new house—well, it's not new anymore, but when we moved into our house in St. Paul, we quickly found that the neighbors two doors down were a couple who both played the oboe. And one of them happened to be one of the best oboe players in the country. Like, she was an oboist for the symphony here. And the other one was also a very good oboist, but she was a teacher. And so, the first one would practice, and the second one would teach. So, you never knew whether you would be hearing the sweetest, closest to heaven music you've ever encountered coming out of this house or if it would be a seven-year-old playing “Hot Crossed Buns”. It was just—you never knew. It was thrilling.

Depresh Mode is made possible by your contributions. Our team includes Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, “Building Wings”. *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

Music:

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!