

Wonderful 409: The Gristle of Living

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

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hi, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: This is a podcast, and we talk about it, on it, we talk about things we like.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: That is and are good, and that we're into.

Rachel: It feels like 100 years since we did this last.

Griffin: It hasn't been. It's been exactly, I think, one calendar week.

Rachel: Yeah, I guess so.

Griffin: It's been a long week, though, huh?

Rachel: Yeah, maybe. [laughs]

Griffin: [chuckles] Thank you all so much for listening, for joining us. I don't really—

Rachel: That'll be it for this week's episode. [chuckles]

Griffin: I don't really have much to talk—I mean, it's—we've been in sort of... I don't know, not survival mode, that sounds so dramatic. But you know, fighting off illness.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And you know, the Blues have had a really mixed sort of week, and that's been tough.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Obviously, most of the stuff happening in the world is pretty bad. And you know, I just don't—sometimes there's like fun stuff to talk about. It's like, you know, did you see what—did you see what Jim Carrey wore to the Golden Globes? Or like did you see what Matthew McConaughey wore to the—

Rachel: [chuckles] Traditionally, this is a fashion podcast.

Griffin: To the Emmys, or like who wore it best, Jim Carrey or Matthew McConaughey?

Rachel: Yeah, yeah.

Griffin: My two style icons!

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Do you remember that year where I really was inspired by Jim's work, and I wore the big, yellow sort of zoot suit from *The Mask* pretty much everywhere I went.

Rachel: [chuckles] No—

Griffin: And I painted my face green, and I'd run around and I'd be like, [sings] "They call me Cuban Pete."

Rachel: Are you sure I would have been there for that? Because *The Mask* is an—is an old film.

Griffin: This was 2022.

Rachel: Oh, wow? Okay.

Griffin: 2022 was my yellow zoot suit "they call me Cuban Pete" year.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Do you remember how I'd be like, "I'm the king of the rumba beat. When I shake my maracas, they go chick-chicky-boom, chick-chicky-boom." Do you remember? This was four years ago, so like—

Rachel: You know, at that point, Gus would have been like a year old.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And I was pretty busy with that.

Griffin: Yeah, no, this was the stuff I was kind of doing while you were kind of occupied with Gus stuff.

Rachel: [chuckles] You were like, "Hey, Rachel, can I go take a nap?" And then you'd go upstairs and you'd put the yellow suit on.

Griffin: Yeah, and then I do the whole dance—the whole dance scene.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: What a movie, The Mask. Do you think it holds up? Probably not.

Rachel: Oh, what is the movie—sorry, you talking about that time period in film made me think of the Brendan Fraser film we watched.

Griffin: Yeah. Is that gonna be your Small Wonder do you think?

Rachel: Sure.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Do you not remember the name of the Brendan Fraser film we watched?

Rachel: No.

Griffin: It's called Rental Family.

Rachel: Rental Family.

Griffin: We did watch that.

Rachel: That was my first Brendan Fraser—

Griffin: So, gang, listen!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I think I talked about this on Besties, because I brought it up—

Rachel: Oh, you did?

Griffin: In my like honorable mentions segment on that show. It's the first Brendan Fraser feature film you had watched, which is absolutely incomprehensible. Incomprehensible to me.

Rachel: You say that, but—

Griffin: Yes, I do. I do say that. And I mean it with my whole chest.

Rachel: [chuckles] But I would—I mean, okay, so The Mummy did come out around the time when I would see a movie like The Mummy.

Griffin: Rachel tried to gaslight me, frankly, let's call it what it is, where you were like, "I was too old for The Mummy." And I was like, "What the fuck are you talking about?!"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It had cross-generational appeal, first and foremost. Two, I'm pretty sure it came out right in your—right in your wheelhouse, right where—

Rachel: Yeah, I—

Griffin: Right where you were.

Rachel: I think—was George of the Jungle first?

Griffin: We try—we did figure this out. I do think George of the Jungle came first.

Rachel: Was he in Meet the Deedles?

Griffin: No, he wasn't in Meet the Deedles...

Rachel: [chuckles] I feel like my family, we were maybe soured on him unfairly by some poor cinema choices.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Early in his career.

Griffin: So, go ahead and like say what bad movie—like, okay, I will grant you Monkeybone!

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I will grant you Monkeybone. Encino Man, fuckin', that's an important—that's an important—

Rachel: Encino Man, that's what I'm thinking of.

Griffin: Encino Man's an important movie.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: Monkeybone, not Chris Kattan's best work, I will say, in Monkeybone.

Rachel: I will say, your family's attitude towards film was different, I think, than my family, in that y'all like would just go for it. You would take a risk.

Griffin: Sure. Yeah.

Rachel: You would be like, "Yeah, you know what? Let's go."

Griffin: Blast from the Past, with Brendan Fraser and I believe Alicia Silverstone, at the—on the Blockbuster shelves? Absolutely, yeah, let's see what that's all about.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: But I—

Rachel: We were a big reviews family. Like any decision was made after looking at all possible reviews.

Griffin: Da Mummy, though?! To miss Da Mummy is like unbelie—you were watching—we watched a trailer for it, and I was—

Rachel: Trailer was pretty dry!

Griffin: It's set in the desert, so...

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Trailer wasn't dry, I was salivating at this trailer. You were basically like, "It just looks like Indiana Jones."

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: And it's like, yeah, dude!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: They did Indiana Jones in the '90s, and it was real good!

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: With Brendan Fraser and Rachel Weisz.

Rachel: Anyway, Brendan Fraser's performance, this is, again, my first one—

Griffin: In Rental Family.

Rachel: In Rental Family, was phenomenal.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: That movie's good.

Griffin: Yeah. There's some parts of it that I—that are, I think, not great. But it's a hugely crowd pleasing—I felt very, very, very nice watching that movie. It's such an endearing concept for a movie where he's a sort of out of work actor who gets hired to pretend to be mostly family members in different scenarios. But sometimes like he plays a journalist interviewing an old actor and author because he's feeling like, you know, washed up or whatever.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Or he is pretending to marry someone, so they can—

Rachel: The concept is there's this agency that takes requests from people, like saying that they need a person or a figure in their life to serve a particular role, and then this agency contracts them out. And the agency saw Brendan Fraser and was like, "Hey, sometimes we need an American man." [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah, it's set in Japan. It's set in Tokyo.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Which is always, I mean, I love—I love watching—I love watching movies that are like very much about how neat Tokyo is. [chuckles] There's not really a more sort of, I think... profound ways of kind of expressing that. But I think it's just neat when stuff's in Tokyo, because I think it's a neat city where I would like to go.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Do I have to do a Small Wonder too? It feels like we both went all in on Rental Family.

Rachel: [chuckles] I mean, I don't make the rules.

Griffin: We went biking with our boys this weekend. We biked to a playground, for me a couple times, nearby. And man, it's just good to be out there. It's good to be out there on my hog, and cruisin'.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Cruisin' these streets, these DC streets. Got a compliment, someone told me I have a cool bike the other day—

Rachel: Oh, really?

Griffin: While I was getting back home with Gussie, yeah. They were like, "Cool bike." And I was like, "Hey, thanks."

Rachel: Like an adult or a child?

Griffin: Two adults! And so I did a wheelie for 'em.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: They were like, "Do a—I bet you can't do a trick." And I did a trick.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: It was pretty cool.

Rachel: And they were like, "Dang!"

Griffin: Yeah. also went really fast on the bike, which Gus was delighted by.

Rachel: Oh, he did like that?

Griffin: He did like that, yeah.

Rachel: He was telling me to go faster, but I was afraid that if I did, he would be scared and upset, so I didn't.

Griffin: Nah, man, he's a—he loves the thrill. He loves the—he's got speed in his blood. He's his father's son.

Rachel: [chuckles] All right.

Griffin: You know how I love speed. How I love to go fast.

Rachel: You have gotten a speeding ticket before.

Griffin: Have I? Well, okay, it was a warning, first of all.

Rachel: Oh, was it a warning?

Griffin: Second of all, I can't believe you would like put me on blast like that in front of everyone.

Rachel: [laughs] Well, I was more acknowledging the fact that I guess you haven't even had one then, if that was a warning.

Griffin: No, that's the only one I've gotten.

Rachel: Yeah, I mean, so—

Griffin: You got a speeding ticket once in Austin while we were driving out to Canyon Lake.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: You remember that?

Rachel: Yeah, I've gotten a couple speeding tickets.

Griffin: So, I guess we've all sinned and fallen short in the—in the sight of God.

Rachel: [chuckles] Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Yeah, I guess I'm just saying, based on my record, it seems like maybe I'm the one that loves speed more. [chuckles]

Griffin: Huh... Maybe. I've never thought about it, but you do like to—you do zoom. So, do you go—you go first this week, I believe.

Rachel: I do.

Griffin: What would you like to discuss today?

Rachel: Okay, it felt to me like it had been a while since we have visited a particular corner.

Griffin: *Oh?*

Rachel: So, I would like us to put on our robes and go to the poetry corner.

Griffin: [sings] *Bum-bum-bum-bum-bum-bum—robes?*

Rachel: Yeah? That's part of the fiction now, I've decided, that there are ceremonial Poetry Corner robes.

Griffin: Okay. I didn't know if it was like a ceremonial robe situation, or if it was like a comfy bathrobe situation.

Rachel: I think either is okay, as long as it's a robe. [chuckles]

Griffin: Gus likes to play a game whenever I wear my bathrobe.

Rachel: Ah, this story is cute.

Griffin: I wear clothes under it. It's important that you know that part of the story first, is I—

Rachel: Griffin is—

Griffin: I will be dressed, but I'll wear—

Rachel: Clothed.

Griffin: A bath robe to be—

Rachel: For sure.

Griffin: For warmth. But then he wants to play a game called Peas in the Pod, and it's basically just he sits on my lap, and I wrap the robe around him too.

Rachel: Mm-hm.

Griffin: And he pretends to be a pea. And he wants other peas to be bullies, and I have to like protect him from the bully peas.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: That part of it is probably, I don't know, something we should dive a little bit further into.

Rachel: [chuckles] Yeah.

Griffin: But he's four, I don't think he's getting bullied at preschool or whatever.

Rachel: But there probably are bullies. We've seen that preschool class. There's probably bullies in there. [chuckles]

Griffin: Don't say that! I don't think that's true. Anyway. [sings] *Bum-bum-bum-bum bum-bum, bum-bum-ba-ba*, hear the poetry calling, tossed salad and scramble poems.

Rachel: Thank you, honey.

Griffin: You're welcome. I put a little—

Rachel: Did it feel like it had been a while?

Griffin: It did.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah. I didn't know what—I started—I did like almost like a British accent in the voice, and I don't know why, but I think that's just because it's been a minute. Who we talking about today?

Rachel: The poet we are talking about is Dorianne Laux.

Griffin: Okay!

Rachel: She has six poetry collections and two craft books. So, are you—does that—

Griffin: I don't know what that means.

Rachel: Do you know what that means?

Griffin: No.

Rachel: No? Okay, so, it's not unusual for creative writers to write a book telling you how to write creatively.

Griffin: Oh, okay, yeah.

Rachel: So, she has a book called Finger Exercises for Poets, which I really love.

Griffin: I do like that.

Rachel: Which I think is kind of a way to take the pressure off a little bit?

Griffin: Is that like a clever name, or is it genuinely like, you know, chapter one, index wiggle.

Rachel: No, there's exercises for poets, like writing exercises for poets.

Griffin: Oh, okay. But it's not about like building your grip strength or whatever.

Rachel: No.

Griffin: Okay. That is important for poets.

Rachel: I don't know how you'd make a whole book out of that.

Griffin: Yeah, I don't know either. I mean, I wrote a whole book about making podcasts, and that's like nothing, so...

Rachel: Yeah. [chuckles]

Griffin: God is that—is that our craft book? I guess so.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Interesting.

Rachel: You've done a craft book.

Griffin: Yeah. Did her craft books also not sell very well?

Rachel: [chuckles] I don't know.

Griffin: Is that sort of a trend?

Rachel: I don't know. I did see, though, when I was reading about her, and this, again, is a very common thing, the students in her class read her book and did some of the exercises from her book. This is a thing, again, in the academic space, that you do. [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Where you teach a class, and you have the students buy your book for the class.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I mean, not a terrible idea.

Griffin: No. I mean, hey, sounds like a winning business model.

Rachel: She is a pretty, hugely celebrated poet. She was finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, for her book *Only as the Day Is Long*. Which, it's easy to forget that they give out Pulitzer prizes... pull surprises for writers, particularly poets.

Griffin: Hey, you're saying it that way has made me realize that it kind of sounds like you're saying "pull it surprises."

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Pull it—pull it!

Rachel: I did kind of stum it—

Griffin: Pull it! Surprise!

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Is what it sounds like you're saying.

Rachel: I did kind of stumble over it.

Griffin: No, I mean, I think when you say it normally, it sounds like you're saying it's time for a pull it surprise.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Pull it, and then the surprise happens.

Rachel: [chuckles] She has taught creative writing at a variety of universities in Oregon and North Carolina, and yeah, she's won a Pushcart Prize, she's won National Book Critics Circle Award—well, I guess she was a finalist. This is the thing I kind of love, I think a lot of people get notified that they're a finalist, and I—to me, I feel like, well, that's enough.

Griffin: Oh my god, yeah. I'd love to be a Pulitzer Prize finalist. I'd love to be a finalist for any kind of—

Rachel: Well, she was a finalist for a National Book Critics Circle Award, what I was talking about, but she was also a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.

Griffin: I've been an iHeartMedia finalist for the best ad reads for like nine years running now.

[both chuckle]

Rachel: I would love if you guys started putting that in your résumé.

Griffin: Yeah. This is—I truly feel like this is the year. But this isn't about me.

Rachel: [chuckles] Okay, so the poem I want to read is from her book, *What We Carry*, and the poem is called *Family Reunion: Camera in hand*, I

call out to them, one by one, in twos and threes, working up to the group shots, the family portrait.

My nephews, scrubbed clean, dressed in red, hug each other's mirror image and smile the same smile. Head to head, their dark hair mingles as the shutter clicks. Now I sit the baby between them, my niece, who has my eyes, my nose, a stranger's wide mouth.

The flash going off in her face makes her love the small black box I hold so much, she is willing to pose forever, as if I held the force of the sun, a gorgeous toy and all her days balanced in my hands. Grandmother squeezes in, holds her babies' babies in her diminishing lap, circles the shoulders of her son, her daughters, my own shy daughter, and pulls them into the frame.

The fine lines of noses and chins, a painter's signature stroke. I take picture after picture, the windows growing darker with each bright flash, each face held up to the repetition of light. But when I look to see how many frames are left, I find the tiny window in the camera is empty, remember the film left on my dresser 500 miles away.

I smile at my family, ask them to stay where they are just a few minutes longer, as I press the blank shutter again and again, burning their images into my own incorruptible lens. Picture after perfect picture, saving them all with my naked eye, my bare hands, the purest light of my love.

Griffin: There's so much going—there's so—what a generous poem that is.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: here's so much good stuff happening in there.

Rachel: Yeah! Yeah! No, it's—I mean, it takes on a lot. And what I love too, like I—first of all, I believe this really happened to the poet.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I don't know if it did or not, but I believe it reading the poem. And I

also love that it is this circumstance that you could potentially treat in your life as a disaster.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Like, "I got all these people together, it's maybe the only time they've all been together. Like, I'm all ready to take these photos, and I realize I don't have film in my camera." And that's like a story that you could carry shame around for the rest of your life.

Griffin: I imagine there's a poem that could be written by someone else who was there like, "Yeah, my aunt like pranked us all, basically."

Rachel: [chuckles] Yeah.

Griffin: "She was like, "I got it in my mind camera." And I was like, I can't put that in my Aura Frame, you know?"

Rachel: [laughs] But yeah, she turns it into this, I mean, one, beautiful poem, and also just this kind of reminder that sometimes just the experience is enough. You know?

Griffin: Yeah, of course, yeah.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I think that's an important and lovely message. It's certainly one I think I subscribe to, because I don't take a ton of pictures when we're like out doing something that is like so—

Rachel: Do you—but do you feel like your mind camera is good enough?

Griffin: Oh, Christ no, but it's like...

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I want to be in it, you know? I want to be in—be in the moment. I don't know that my mind camera is particularly reliable, but I don't know.

Rachel: From Poetry Foundation's like bio on her, they quote an interview she gave for a website called Read Write Poem. It says, "Poems keep us conscious of the importance of our individual lives, personal witness to a singular life seen cleanly and with the concomitant well-chosen particulars, is one of the most powerful ways to do this. Craft is important, a skill to be learned, but it's not the beginning and end of the story."

Griffin: I like this lady a lot. I like—I like all that a lot.

Rachel: She says, "I want the muddled middle to be filled with the gristle of living."

Griffin: [yells out] That's crazy!

Rachel: The gristle of living.

Griffin: It's so wild how poets are just kind of doing it always. Like if you don't—there—

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: When you reach a certain saturation point, you're just kind of always doing a poem.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I think that's incredible.

Rachel: [chuckles] Yeah, so again, six books. Her most recent one... is, in fact, the Finger Exercises for Poets, which came out in 2024. I am probably going to get that.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: Because she mentions when—she gives advice to her students. She says, "I encourage poets to write. Unless you're writing, you're not a poet, you're just an ordinary person walking around in the world."

Griffin: Man, that's like every writer but, I feel like, ever.

Rachel: I know. I know. And what I like, I mean is, it's so easy to get intimidated by the process.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And so, honestly, exercises are probably not a bad way.

Griffin: Sure. I think the suggestion there is like, you just gotta—you just gotta do it, man. And that's—I feel like that is a very gentle way of putting it, compared to like Stephen Kings on writing. Like, "If you're not writing fuckin' 10,000 words a day, you're a piece of shit."

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah.

Griffin: "You're a shit head and you'll never make it in this business."

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: That's great. What was her name again?

Rachel: Dorianne Laux, and it's spelled L-A-U-X.

Griffin: That's awesome. That's a cool name, too.

Rachel: I know!

Griffin: Damn. Cool one, babe.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

Griffin: All right, I'm gonna do mine now.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: My thing this week is antibiotics. And I feel like I should couch this one pretty hard, because I don't know that I have brought a topic to the show that is in a kind of roundabout way like responsible for countless deaths, also, across the globe.

Rachel: Yeah, people have a lot of mixed feelings about this one.

Griffin: As they should! Because like, obviously, antibiotics are a sometimes food. The overuse and misuse of antibiotics in humans and like, you know, somewhat more preventably, like in livestock, is contributing to something called antibiotic resistant bacteria—

Which is just responsible for an escalating amount of, you know, super bugs and really, really gnarly stuff. The World Health Organization has sort of sounded the alarm on antimicrobial resistance as a global threat, top 10 global threat. And there's lots of different people sort of encouraging—

You know, both practicing moderation in how they are prescribed and cycling through antibiotics, but also like investing in heavy R&D to develop newer and newer antibiotics to kind of fight this thing. So, it's like a huge issue that is only going to get bigger over time.

Rachel: That said, our family has had to be on antibiotics quite a lot lately.
[chuckles]

Griffin: Yes, that is true. I think—all of that out of the way—and we'll get to like the great stuff that antibiotics have done, because it's been truly obviously transformative. But like practically speaking, it is pretty rad that in instances where you are sick with a bacterial infection, there is this kind of last line of defense that human beings have come up with to stop it. And knowing that that is kind of there for you is, I don't know, it's such a—such

a... "relief" isn't maybe the right word, but like it's nice to know that the option is there.

Rachel: Yeah. Well, and that it can have such a positive effect so quickly.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: I mean, in our experiences, you know, we've had a number of ear infections and sinus infections, and it just seems like it's getting worse, and it's been bad, and it's been weeks. And we're like, what are we supposed to do about this? And then like three days into the antibiotic it's like—

Griffin: Bing-bang-boom.

Rachel: Hugely different.

Griffin: Yeah. So, antibiotics, some of this stuff you probably know already, like penicillin and all that—all that jazz. But the earliest use of antibiotics can actually be traced to northern Sudan, as early as 350 to 550 CE.

Rachel: Wow?

Griffin: Yeah. So, scientists have like studied skeletons from, you know, folks from that era, and found high levels of tetracycline, which is an antimicrobial. And they believe that that came from beverages that they were making, fermenting grain with a bacteria called streptomyces. And there are so—such a high concentration of tetracycline found in these skeletons. There's a biological anthropologist named George Armelagos who's quoted saying that the, you know, the huge amounts of tetracycline they found in those skeletons suggest that, "They had to know what they were doing."

Rachel: Yeah. [chuckles]

Griffin: Which is like rad. That is a very, very long time ago. And then like, you know, early 16th century physicians started sort of using mold to treat infections. And that obviously took off with Alexander Fleming, who is the one credited with discovering penicillin's applications in 1928.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Penicillin was employed widely during World War Two, lowering the mortality rate for, you know, soldiers with severe wounds and amputations by nearly 15%. But at that time, it was kind of difficult to mass produce, and it wasn't made available for civilian use in the United States until 1945.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: Which is—

Rachel: That explains why the life expectancy was so low, even in a time period where they did have penicillin.

Griffin: I have the fact—I have this statistic for life expectancy. I'm gonna save it, because it's fucking bonkers! It's absolutely bonkers.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: It's so much bigger than you probably think it's going to be. So, there's, obviously, there's lots of different types of antibiotics that—there's lots that work in different ways. The term "antibiotic" sort of broadly applies to any treatment that kills or prevents the, you know, growth and flourishing of bacteria. Some of them have a kind of broader effect for cases where like the patient's exact illness isn't exactly clear. And then there are some that are like way more specific for when, you know, the offending bacteria has been sort of identified in a patient. The way that antibiotics work, I had—I didn't really know this, because I didn't go to doctor school or anything like that, I just—

Rachel: Yeah, I don't—honestly, I just—I assumed it was like, it kills the bacteria. But that's probably not...

Griffin: No, I mean, that's basically it.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: But the way that it does that I think is like kind of interesting. There are things in the kind of cellular structure of bacteria that is—that—not present in human cells. And so, antibiotics target those specific things that are inside of bacterial cells and not inside of human cells. So like penicillin, its main mechanism is cell wall synthesis inhibition. Literally, it prevents bacteria from forming cell walls. So, they just kind of goosh apart like a bunch of idiots.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: They just fall apart because they don't have the thing that sort of contains all of the rest of the stuff inside of them. But then there's other antibiotics that can like block proteins or enzymes that bacteria need to reproduce or survive. There's some antibiotics that slow the metabolic processes of different bacteria, so they actually just starve to death.

But in all of those cases, like it's... it will never not be astonishing to me that human beings have figured out how to synthesize these like laser-guided smart medicines that bust up one type of cell, while leaving our cells like completely unaffected. I recognize that that is a sort of fundamental underpinning of most medicines.

Rachel: Yeah, most medicines. [chuckles]

Griffin: But that's still wild to me, right?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Like the invisible microbial world like we have learned how to target in such a way, I don't know, I just—it's obviously way outside of my area of knowledge or expertise, but it's—

Rachel: I'm sure there's a Sawbones episode about this that goes into more detail.

Griffin: There's probably many, many Sawbones episodes that go deeper into that. So, you know, antibiotics have fundamentally changed humanity,

basically, since their introduction. There's an NIH study that quotes the average life expectancy in 1900 at around 47 years old.

Rachel: God...

Griffin: And in 2023, it was 78 years.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: So, that's 31 years.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Childhood mortality rates like plummeted, right? Because before antibiotics, like the leading cause of death was communicable diseases.

Rachel: Yeah! God...

Griffin: And since that changed like that—the childhood mortality rates, because they vastly affected kids more than adults with more developed immune systems, like that statistic particularly like just completely fell off the map.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: There are things that were not possible before antibiotics, like for instance organ transplants. Couldn't do one of those without some sort of antibiotic treatment to go along with it.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: A lot of sort of sort of surgical procedures, not just organ transplants, but more commonplace sort of surgical procedures, not only became possible, but the ones that already sort of existed, all of a sudden, you had this thing to treat the wounds created by the surgical processes that made surviving those surgeries like way, way more possible.

So like, it's not just the fact that communicable diseases were made far less life threatening by antibiotics, a lot, a lot, a lot of different treatments became safer to do because of antibiotics. It changed medicine, basically completely, it changed—I mean, humans are living for three decades longer, right?

Rachel: Yeah. [chuckles]

Griffin: Like it's crazy to me that this invention, which, you know, the people responsible for it received the Nobel Prize, and it's pretty well-deserved I think, because they nearly doubled how long humans live. Like, that's a really, really bonkers statistic that is like pretty bracing.

So like, this is something that, you know, if you look at the pattern of human history and medicine, like... was discovered and changed everything. And now, is something that like we have to keep kind of like working on, and we have to keep figuring out best practices for, and we have to keep investing in, you know, studying microbes and how to prevent the growth of antimicrobial resistance.

Rachel: Yeah! That—

Griffin: Because that's—there's a natural part of AMR, that's the acronym for antimicrobial resistance, that is like kind of inherent to like the cycles of humanity. Like that stuff just kind of hap—but obviously, with these treatments, we have also sort of sped that up to a rate that, if we don't do something by like 2050, it is going to be an enormous issue.

Rachel: Mm-hm.

Griffin: And so, something must be done, clearly.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: There's clearly a huge, huge, huge other side to this coin. But like I don't know, man, on paper, the numbers here are just fucking wild.

Rachel: And I will say, you know, if you have young children—has been our experience that it is not uncommon for them to get an infection, and then a month later, a different or same infection.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And so, there are a bunch of different kinds of antibiotics. So, I always make sure to let the doctor know like, "Hey, he was just on this one last month."

Griffin: Right, yeah.

Rachel: "Can he take it again?" And usually they're like, "Oh, no, we should probably do a different one."

Griffin: There's another like enormous issue, which is like the accessibility of these treatments is not equal around the world. But the side effects of AMR are felt around the world, right?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: So like, by, you know, not making antibiotic treatments available equally to every country in the world, like you are also kind of sticking those countries with the most negative parts of this. It's a thing that obviously like I'm not—I'm not particularly well-versed in, but like it's such a crazy like chapter in human history, just a real turning point for the entire kind of like medical world.

And you know, I think I'm thinking of this right now because Henry's been sick for quite a while now, and has been taking antibiotics and has started to improve. And I don't know, just on a personal level, like it is—it is always kind of nice to know that that option exists if you are thoughtful about how it is sort of applied.

Rachel: Yeah, no, I think that we have gotten in a habit that if the kids have an illness that sticks around for longer than a week, or if they're waking up at night—and luckily, our youngest now is old enough to be like, "My ear hurts," which is like, ah, thank god.

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Rachel: I mean, for me, honestly, there is relief that comes from knowing that the thing they have can be treated by antibiotics, because it works quickly.

Griffin: Right. Assuming it's not a viral infection. Like, that's another issue, is—

Rachel: And doctors, I mean, every doctor we have, I think, has been responsible about that.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Of being like, "Hey, I don't think I can give you any."

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: Like this one—this one you can't do anything for. Like croup is terrible.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And there's not a lot you can do for it. And they won't try and give us antibiotics. They will tell us honey. [chuckles]

Griffin: Honey and a steamy shower!

Rachel: [laughs] "Have you tried a humidifier? Have you tried the magic that is honey?"

Griffin: Honey is pretty lit, though, I will say. Do you want to know what our friends at home are talking about?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Hannah says, "My Small Wonder is making steady progress at physical therapy. I'm stronger than I've ever felt, and I'm so grateful to my team for believing in me until I could find belief in myself."

Rachel: Ah, that's awesome.

Griffin: That's really, really awesome. I'm so happy for you, Hannah. What was the—what was the sort of PT—oh, a guy on Survivor got medevac, he tore his Achilles.

Rachel: Kyle.

Griffin: Kyle, in the first—oh, sorry, spoilers, I guess. I guess you've—it's been a week, so...

Rachel: Yeah. [chuckles]

Griffin: I think we're outside of the—but a guy like tears his Achilles in the first episode of Survivor, and has to be medevacked. And posted an Instagram story of like his whole PT journey from basically that moment over the last, whatever it was, eight months or something like that. And it's so inspiring! My god.

Rachel: Yeah, like learning to walk again.

Griffin: And having a—god, if I got medevaced from—that's—I think that's probably one of my worst nightmares, is that I would ever get cast on Survivor, and then would injure myself terribly.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Because like, I know I would, like I know I definitely would.

Rachel: So—

Griffin: To see someone take it in stride like that is like, I don't know, it was—it was more moving than I expected an Instagram story to be.

Rachel: One of my fears is that I get injured and I'm not even on Survivor.

Griffin: I can't even imagine.

Rachel: [chuckles] How embarrassing would that be?

Griffin: What a waste. Joshua says, "Putting furniture outside with a "free" sign on it and having it be gone within like an hour, a privilege of city living."

Rachel: Oh, I love that.

Griffin: Hell yeah, dude.

Rachel: I love that. Because you know, you can try a bunch of things and like try and arrange something via internet or whatever, or Listserv or something. And then sometimes you just have to put it on the street.
[chuckles]

Griffin: I put a bookshelf out when I lived in Chicago and I was moving to Austin, I put a bookshelf out with a "free" sign on it. And then like I went inside and brought some boxes out to my car, and then I went inside to get some more stuff, and by the time I came back out to like put more stuff in my car, someone had already grabbed it.

Rachel: When I lived in Chicago—

Griffin: Chicago's the best for this.

Rachel: My first apartment, we got our couch and our dining room table, like we basically furnished a whole room from the alley.

Griffin: Crazy.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I love it.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Thank you so much for listening to our show. Thanks to Bo En and Augustus for the use of our theme song, "Money Won't Pay." You can find a link to that in the episode description. And thanks to Max Fun for having us on the network. Go to maximumfun.org, check out all the great shows they've got going on over there.

In one week, on March 10th, my Choose Your Own Adventure book called *The Stowaway*, it's gonna come out. You still have time to pre-order it now at bit.ly/griffinstowaway. It is \$10. And I'm very proud of it, it's great for middle grade readers, targeting sort of ages eight to 12. But it's a big sort of sci-fi survival romp.

Rachel: And you know what I was thinking about?

Griffin: What were you thinking about?

Rachel: There are probably a lot of people at home that are fans of *The Adventure Zone*, and they're like, "Oh, man, it would be so great if I could have Griffin McElroy run a campaign for me."

Griffin: Mm-hm?

Rachel: This kind of, I would feel like, would scratch that itch?

Griffin: It's, yeah, it's me in book form.

Rachel: Because he's telling a story, and then he's saying, hey, which one are you going to choose?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But you don't have to roll a dice.

Griffin: There's a bunch of different endings. There's some wacky ones.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Some serious ones.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But yeah, bit.ly/griffinstowaway. It would be a huge help for me.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: If you are thinking about reading it, if you pre-order it, it is—there's so much about the book publishing world that I still don't understand, despite the fact that this is my ninth book.

Rachel: Wow, really?

Griffin: Yeah, dog. I mean, there's seven TAZ graphic novels.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: The last one, by the way, comes out in July. As long as you're pre-ordering books, you're definitely going to want to grab that one.

Rachel: [chuckles] Yeah.

Griffin: That one's theadventurezonecomic.com. Yeah, so, please think about doing that. We got merch over at mcelroymerch.com. McElroy Family YouTube channel you should follow. We're doing a bunch of video game streaming, like nearly every day of the week, me and Juice and Trav are playing stuff.

I'm doing the Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask randomizer, where I get killed in one hit. It's called Trial by Fieri, it's a— it's a real disaster, but it's a lot of fun. That's all over at The McElroy Family. Or you can follow @McElroyEntertainmentSystem on Instagram, that's where all of our gaming stuff gets pushed to.

Rachel: Wow, a lot of stuff, huh?

Griffin: Yeah! I mean, genuinely, we're trying to do a lot more stuff this year. That's it.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: We're just trying to do more stuff, trying to make more stuff. And hopefully people are down with that, because it's been very invigorating, I think.

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah, I feel like it's been a creative force for you all. It seems like you all are kind of in a—in a new artistic zone than you were before.

Griffin: Yeah, it's been—it's been nice. It's been nice to have that to look forward to and... yeah. Hey, that's gonna do it for us this week on Wonderful. Be sure to join us again next week on Wonderful. I'm kind of doing The Besties outro right now, which is a different flavor, definitely.

Rachel: Shouldn't the best lovers make...

Griffin: The world's best love?

Rachel: [titters] Ew.

Griffin: Ew! Your parents listen to this show!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: They should, though. Bye, everyone!

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

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