

**Dana: [start 00:00] Welcome to I Swear on My Mother's Grave. My name is Dana Black, and in 2016, I lost my mom. And now I'm talking to other people who have also lost their moms. And I don't just mean in death, because there are so many ways you can lose a mother. And we're going to get into it. So, let's talk about our moms.**

**Today's guest is someone that, if you saw them in a grocery store, you would probably go up to them and say, "Hey, don't I know you? Have we met before? I swear, we have met before." Because they are that recognizable and that approachable. They're almost as if you're seeing a long-lost relative or an old friend you haven't seen in a while, and you're kind of trying to place where you know them and where you might have first met, because she has been acting on stage and screen for so many years at this point that you've seen her in everything, from films like Twister to Perfect Storm to North Country to Runaway Jury. She's been on TV shows like Boston Legal, Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, Gilmore Girls. She is an incredible artist, sister, friend, and an activist. She grew up on the North Shore of Chicago, and attended New Trier High School. She's also a fellow Virgo, and she never lets me forget it.**

**And, she learned how to use her microphone for this interview, because she took it out of its box finally, unwrapped the USB cord, and plugged it in to talk to me, on a Sunday afternoon, three days after what would have been her mother's 85th birthday. She is hilarious, empathetic, intuitive, ballsy—swears like a sailor, FYI—and is one of the most genuine and kindhearted people I have ever met.**

**This is Rusty Schwimmer. [end intro]**

Rusty: (laughs)

**Dana: So it feels inauthentic to not say that 45 minutes before this scheduled conversation, I texted you a photo of my mom with Henry Winkler. Because I forgot that I had a photo, and I was looking through photos, and I was looking at other things. And I sent you that picture, because the first film you ever made, in 1988, was directed by Henry Winkler, called Memories of Me. You played a strawberry. I still haven't streamed it.**

Rusty: Yes, I did.

**Dana: But it feels inauthentic to say that I sent you that photo, and then below it I sent you a photo of my mom with Sidney Poitier, because it was just such a beautiful photo, and I wanted you to see it.**

Rusty: Yeah, your mom was gorgeous.

**Dana: Well, sure. She looked good. Sidney looked alright. (laughs)**

Rusty: He looked fantastic.

**Dana: He looks great all the time.**

Rusty: Yeah, right?

**Dana: And I sent that to you, and you said, "Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god. Can I tell you about my mom and Sidney and the afterlife?" I mean, you had a whole story. And I said, "Can you tell it when we're recording?"**

Rusty: Yes!

**Dana: So.**

Rusty: Here it is!

**Dana: Yeah.**

Rusty: Here it is.

**Dana: Here it is.**

Rusty: So, without sounding like I'm fancy-pants and I'm dropping names left and right, please excuse me, people.

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: So, I am actually friends with Wolfgang Puck and his wife Gelila. And they had a wedding, and they invited me. And it was in the Isle of Capri. And, I mean, lovely, but I didn't have the money to fly myself to the Isle of Capri, as they say.

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: And I thought, they're not going to miss me. I'm friends with them. It's not like I'm intense friends with them. We enjoy each other. We've socialized. I've been to their home.

**Dana: How old were you?**

Rusty: This was just a few years ago. This was probably about between 10 and 15 years ago, that this happened, what I'm just about to tell you.

And so they had their wedding. I couldn't make it. And then they decided to invite the people that couldn't make it. And I didn't think that was going to be a big deal, but I realized later that they only invited like 60 people. So I was like, "Oops." And so I go to Spago, naturally—that's where they're having their little dinner with a few people. And I'm there with my friend Robert, and the great wedding dress designer Monique Lhuillier was there with her husband, and Forest Whitaker and his wife Keisha, who was hilarious, and Mister Sidney Poitier with his wife Joanne [sic], who's a jewelry designer. So I'm like, "Oh my god." And I knew that Sidney Poitier was going to be there. I didn't know that Forest Whitaker (laughs) was going to be there.

**Dana: But of course. Of course he's there.**

Rusty: Because I think that Gelila and Wolfgang were very, very well aware of my mother's crush on Sidney Poitier, and how much I loved him, and he was my idol along with Carol Burnett. [05:00] So I decided to wear my mother's pearls, that she had given to me. And they had this beautiful clasp that have lacquered pearls on them, adorned with emeralds. And so I decided I was going to wear the pearls, because my mother had a huge crush on him, huge.

**Dana: Him and Anthony Quinn, you say.**

Rusty: Yes, yes.

**Dana: Those were the two.**

Rusty: Right.

**Dana: You were allowed to watch those films, if they were in them.**

Rusty: Yes, right. So what happened is: I'm talking his wife. He's talking to Forest Whitaker. And I'm talking to his wife, and we're having a conversation, and she says, "Oh, those are lovely pearls." And I said, "Oh, funny story about this! They were my mother's pearls. And if I may be so bold, I'll just tell you now: we weren't allowed to watch a lot of television when we were kids. But we were allowed to watch Sidney Poitier films, because my mother was in love with him. She loved what he stood for, everything. I've seen all of his films." And she said, "Oh, well that's so lovely. That's so wonderful!" And I said, "Oh, and I'm wearing these pearls, just to have her with me." Right?

**Dana: Yeah.**

Rusty: And she says, "Oh, Sidney, Sidney, Sidney, I want you to hear this story." I'm mortified, but I tell the story anyway in this small group of people. And at this point, he

looks at me, and he says, "Do you talk to your mother?" And I said, "Every day, I talk to her." And he said, "Well, tell her I say hello." And I say, "Okay, I will." And just then, the clasp of my pearls unloosened, and the pearls fell into my lap.

**Dana: Wow.**

Rusty: I laugh, and I said, "I guess she says hi too." He turns to Forest and said, "Okay, was that God or science?" And I'm like, what? Apparently, they were having a conversation of God versus science.

**Dana: What.**

Rusty: Yeah.

**Dana: Separately, like related to the moment?**

Rusty: Yes, yes. As this was going—as I was telling Joanna about my mom.

**Dana: What? That's incredible.**

Rusty: Yeah, it's an incredible story. And to this day, I still can't believe it happened. And I still think to myself, because I'm an actress, do I keep adding sauce to it? Is this the real story?

**Dana: Right, right.**

Rusty: And yes, it is the real story. My mom really, really wanted to be there. (laughs)

**Dana: And she was. And she was.**

Rusty: Yeah, yeah.

**Dana: What did she love—I mean, I know why he's a legend and an incredible artist and what Sidney stood for—what did you mother say were the reasons why she admired everything about him?**

Rusty: I think that this was in the late '60s/early '70s, when she was really, really, heavily into civil rights. Loved his elegance, thought he was good-looking, which he is. And so there was the combination of all that. And she loved also the stories that he told, the stories that he decided to sign onto.

**Dana: Yeah. I also magically asked you if you would talk to me around this time. I said, "Oh, what about May 17th?" And you said, "Oh, that would be great, because my mother's birthday was Thursday, was three days ago."**

Rusty: The 14th.

**Dana: She would have been 85, right?**

Rusty: Yep.

**Dana: And Mother's Day was about a week ago. And you said, (laughs) "This would be a great week to talk about (laughs) my mother, the martyr."**

Rusty: (laughs) Yes. Because not only that, she died on May 10th, which was this year Mother's Day. The year that she died, in 1997, Mother's Day was the next day. So she died on May 10th. May 11th was Mother's Day. Her birthday was May 14th, and that's when we spread her ashes. And being ever the martyr—and this is what I always say—is (laughs)...

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: ...that my mother was such a martyr that she was like, "You only have to think of me one time a year."

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: And I'm speaking like a Jewish mother, and she didn't speak that way. She was a combination of me and my sisters and Tyne Daly. So if anyone knows Tyne Daly, that was my mother, big time, with a splash of us.

**Dana: How many sisters do you have?**

Rusty: There's four of us. And that's the other thing, just to let you know on that. I had shared with you some art that she had done. My mother was a painter. My mother had us posing a lot, just to keep us (laughs) in line, I guess. I was an actress then, 'cause I was like, "Oh, okay, let's see how long I can stay still while she draws me."

**Dana: (laughs) "The grace of my arms."**

Rusty: (laughs) At 7 years of age.

**Dana: At 7. "Look at my posture and my cheekbones." Did your mother have formal training as a painter, at all?**

Rusty: Yes. She did have formal training. This is something that's generational, you know. She was born in 1935, but I found this out after my mother died, from my sisters, [10:00] so I don't know how much of this is true or not. Like the game Telephone, things can be taken out of context, which is another thing I wanted to talk about. All of a

sudden, when your mother dies, she becomes some sort of saint, and you forget all these things. I'm sure you feel that way about your mother, and you're like, "Oh, wait a second."

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: "Am I ignoring the fact that some of this shit was fucked up?"

**Dana: Right. Or it goes, for me, sometimes I'm trying to remember the good stuff too. So I go back and forth between like, "No, she was actually really great. Can we come back to that?" And then there's days where I go, "She was the most incredible mother on the planet," and you forget all the darkness. So it fluctuates for me back and forth.**

Rusty: Exactly, right. So that being said, my sisters had said—one of them had said to me, and I don't remember which one—that Mom didn't pursue her painting as much, especially—doing it as much, like having shows or taking more classes, because my father told her, "What's the use? You're not that good of a painter."

**Dana: He told her that?**

Rusty: Well, allegedly. One of my sisters had said that, I guess. And if I'm trying to be correct on this, that Mom had said that. And it could have been that Mom was saying that just to (laughs) get us to stop talking to her and asking questions.

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: Who knows. The four of us are pretty spirited human beings, so there's that. And I don't know if it was that my father said that, but I do know that my mother had confidence issues. And so, it could have been a combination of all that, where she decided that that was going to be her answer, 'cause my dad said, "Eh."

Her confidence level was intense. She married my father right out of living with her parents. She walked from her parents' house to the temple to get married, and did not go back to that house again to live.

**Dana: How old was she?**

Rusty: 19.

**Dana: Wow.**

Rusty: Yeah.

**Dana: Wow.**

Rusty: Yeah. Yeah. So, even though, compared to a lot of women her age, she had an incredible amount of confidence and self-awareness, she still was lacking it because of —when you find out that women couldn't have a credit card in their own name until 1974, and my mother had already had all of her children by then—to think, like, how did she navigate that? And she still had her four daughters become intense women, strong women, so.

**Dana: Was she working as a nurse while she was...? I mean, she became a head nurse later on.**

Rusty: So she went back to school when I was in 6th grade, I think? And then graduated from nursing school the day before I graduated 8th grade. And she had just turned 40.

**Dana: Wow.**

Rusty: And she graduated nursing school. And so while all of this was happening also, Dana—this is what's crazy—is that my little sister was in and out of the hospital for two years, with back issues. And during all of this time, my mother was raising us, on top of the fact that she was in school, and she was going to the hospital, Rush Presbyterian...

**Dana: To deal with your sister.**

Rusty: Yeah. Which couldn't be farther away from the North Shore. And at that time we were in Glencoe. So going from Glencoe all the way to Rush Presbyterian, every day, on top of going to school, and on top of raising us—I don't know how she did it. And that's another question I want to ask her now.

**Dana: "How did you do that?"**

Rusty: Yeah. How many questions do you have for your mother?

**Dana: Oh my gosh. So many.**

Rusty: That you're like, "Dammit, I didn't ask her." Or she didn't answer it.

**Dana: Yeah, she wasn't in a place to answer then. Would she answer now? If she could sit in front of my grandma, what could they talk about?**

Rusty: Exactly!

**Dana: Which is something I talked about with my last friend, when we talked last Sunday. I was like, "God, I wonder what they could have hashed out, too."**

Rusty: Yeah.

**Dana: And questions—was your father working?**

Rusty: My father started out in advertising. He's a great writer, really quite a wordsmith, my father. He left advertising 'cause he's one of those people that can't work for another human being, and the idea of—in this day and age, we and our generations and the generations after us understand that working for corporations is a little bit more difficult. Then, nobody had that question. My father had that question, however. But he was miserable. And my mother said, [15:00] "Yeah, yeah, you're kind of an asshole right now."

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: "So why don't you just quit and figure out what you're going to do next." And so my father had a whole bunch of different jobs that wasn't really garnering a lot of money. But he's a professional washboard player in Dixieland jazz bands, also sells player piano rolls by mail order. He was also a DJ. He was also an antique store owner. All sorts of stuff. And my mother was all for it, because he was much happier. And you know, there was a lot of stuff that we had to forgo, because he wasn't making North Shore money. (laughs)

**Dana: And if you could ask her that today: "Were you really...?"**

Rusty: Really, really supportive.

**Dana: "Were you really, really supportive?" I mean, you can be supportive, and there's still that 10% of you that maybe is questioning. "Why can't he...?"**

Rusty: She never would have shared that with me.

**Dana: Never. Never would have. No.**

Rusty: And I'll tell you why she never would have shared that. Her first line of defense was always: "How do I protect my children?" It was always. It didn't matter how old we were. She was constantly protecting us. It was just a subconscious thing, on top of the fact that I think she was also protecting her husband. Last thing she would do would be to protect herself. And that was also a generational thing too, I think. I'm not sure. Or it was just that my mother was that giving human being, that unselfish human being.

**Dana: Do you feel yourself doing that too? I mean, are there days...?**

Rusty: Oh god yes.

**Dana: Yeah, where you go, "Yeah, I'm protecting everyone else but me."**



Rusty: Yeah.

**Dana: "And I'm looking out for everyone else.."**

Rusty: Oh god.

**Dana: "...but me."**

Rusty: Yeah. And that was a thing, that so many of my lessons are learned from the actions that my mother took. Whether they were good or not for me, doesn't matter. Because there's a lot of actions I take that is solely my mother, and thank god I took them.

**Dana: Such as?**

Rusty: My focus, my competitiveness—and both of these, I was kind of teased about. In the '60s and '70s, it was a little what they called "unattractive in a woman" to be focused and competitive. But my mother, as much as she could, fought for equal rights. She was ahead of the curve on saying, "Why can't a woman do that?"

**Dana: Yeah, my mom was one of the only people in her class who had gotten honors in chemistry and biology.**

Rusty: Oh, in science!

**Dana: Yeah, 'cause she's a biology teacher—or, was a biology teacher—so, science. And she wanted to be premed, and she was thinking about becoming a doctor, but she didn't go forward with that. But the same mentality of "I want to." She also loved fashion. She loved good clothes.**

Rusty: You could see that.

**Dana: She loved getting her hair done, but she really loved science and biology and zoology, all of it, and gardening, and the science of it.**

Rusty: Yeah, my mom was quite a gardener, quite a gardener.

**Dana: Did your mom have a favorite flower?**

Rusty: I think she loved lilies of the valley, because they'd only come out a certain time of year. And the smell—she was all about smells, you know. But, birch trees? That was a huge deal. She would take trees from wherever we were—we spent a lot of time in Minnesota—and she would find a little teeny birch tree, or a little teeny pine tree. Somehow, she would have some sort of, like, garden shovel in the back, and she would

dig it up, make sure that the roots were okay, and we would carry that back in our car, back home, and she would transplant it in the front yard. And we had birch trees, pine trees in the front yard that she had planted, transplanted from Minnesota.

**Dana: Wow. I don't think my mom ever transplanted trees—more plants than trees for her. Like, she loved impatiens, all over the place. There was this big mound of them surrounding a tree in our front yard, so it was like, they just encircled the tree.**

Rusty: Cute!

**Dana: Yeah, she loved impatiens.**

**You were in your 30s, right, when you lost your mom? Is that right?**

Rusty: Yeah, I was 34.

**Dana: Right. I was 36. And your mom was 67 when she died?**

Rusty: No, she was four days shy of 62.

**Dana: 62.**

Rusty: Yeah, so there it was, an auto-immune disease that Venus Williams has. It's called Sjögren syndrome. But that's not really why she died. She died of cancer that you could get from the medication—we still don't know. We do know the biggest issue was the fact that she didn't have an immune system to fight the cancer. So that's what it was.

**Dana: How long was she fighting it?**

Rusty: She fought Sjögren's—we didn't know a lot of the medical stuff until after she died. Of course, she was protecting us. [20:00] See? Protect, protect, protect. She got Sjögren's at 33. And shy of 30 years, she lived with Sjögren's. And at that time, nobody really knew what auto-immune diseases were.

**Dana: They're still learning every day.**

Rusty: And so this one is similar to lupus, if anybody out there is listening. It's very similar to lupus and stuff like that. If she were alive today, she probably wouldn't survive this, so, yeah. A lot of people say that she lived so much longer than the doctors thought, just because of her will. She's a stubborn, stubborn woman.

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: Yeah, stubborn.

**Dana: Yeah.**

Rusty: And she loved life. She loved it, loved it.

**Dana: And it must be hard, when you're in the medical field, to know you have something—there must be a complicated sense of: if you're already a strong-willed person who's protecting your family, but you're also a person who's a nurse caring for others, and you know more than others sometimes about the science.**

Rusty: Well, she became a nurse—she went back to school to become a nurse after she was diagnosed, which was very interesting. So I look at it now and make that assumption that that's why she said, "That's it. I'm going to go back into nursing." Which was something that she wanted to do earlier in her world, in her life. But I think she knew that she was on borrowed time, that she never really discussed with us, that she was on borrowed time. And so if we asked her that question, I'm sure she'd answer, "Aren't we all on borrowed time?" So, I don't know.

**Dana: Did you see symptoms or signs or...?**

Rusty: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

**Dana: You saw it physically.**

Rusty: Oh yeah.

**Dana: You saw, "What's going on? What is this? What am I looking at? Mom, what's wrong?"**

Rusty: Right, but I didn't see it like my little sister saw it. I left—I think the last time I lived in that house, I was actually 17 years old, last time I lived in my parents' home, because my first day of college was when I turned 18. So the day I turned 18 was my first day of college.

**Dana: And then you never moved back in, you never went there, never.**

Rusty: Never. Never. Yeah, never. I mean, I hung out, of course.

**Dana: Right.**

Rusty: We were very close. But no, I did not live there. And I know my little sister, when we talk about it years later—my little sister talks about what she saw, and we've pieced a bunch of things together. That's one of the advantages of having sisters or siblings, is

you can say, "Do you remember this, when Mom was sick?" Or, "Do you remember this, when we were younger, blah blah blah?" And that's, you know, one of those advantages. But it also can be a disadvantage, you know, because when you're dealing with your own grief with your mother, or your own relationship with your mother, and they're saying, "No, Mom's not like that." And I'm like, "Well, she's like that with me. That's what I remember."

**Dana: Or resentment, that they got to see something you didn't. Or they're resentful of you, that you got out before she got worse.**

Rusty: That's right.

**Dana: I could only go to my dad, who'd been divorced from my mom for many years, to get answers about how sick she was. And he's like, "But I'm not married to her anymore. And I'm resentful of my own—I have my own pain and my own life, now. And I can come back in time with you, but what you're telling me, and what you had to watch in those final years," my dad's like, "I don't even—I don't know how to help you, because I wasn't there, but I can imagine it was difficult." So that's hard, and I wish I had siblings to talk through that with. And yet, that's still just as complicated.**

Rusty: Yeah, it is. I mean, you might get some answers, but then some of those answers will be complicated. Like for instance, the story that I told earlier, about my dad saying that she wasn't good enough. I did not hear that from her.

**Dana: You heard it from your sister.**

Rusty: My sister, right. And my sisters might have made it up to help themselves out. Who knows? I don't know.

**Dana: And we all have different versions of the truth.**

Rusty: Right, our versions of the truth, exactly, exactly.

**Dana: That's kind of amazing that you got to remember her, the way that you—I mean, you saw her, of course, after you left for college, I just mean...**

Rusty: Oh god yes.

**Dana: ...you kind of got to live in this—you didn't have to see her day-to-day.**

Rusty: Like, in so much pain.

**Dana: Pain, exactly.**

Rusty: Yeah, yeah. I think I was with her the last three weeks of her life, or a month? And that was a blessing as much as—[25:00] I'd say the first ten years after she died, I would have huge, huge flashbacks, that some people might call it PTSD. I don't know if that's what it was, because the vocabulary did not exist in society then, in major society then. But for the longest time, I was like, "This might be a curse, that I was with her when she died." And I was with her when she had this. And then I was with her when this happened, and this happened, and this happened.

**Dana: Like I'm never be able to erase it from my mind. I'll never be able to get past this. I'll see it in my dreams, I'll see it...**

Rusty: Right. And now it's a gift. Now it's a gift.

**Dana: And why do you feel that way? Why does it feel like a gift, to you?**

Rusty: Because then I can take a look at my own aging, and the other people I love and their aging, and that they're deteriorating, and their wishes to do things as they are still alive. It gives me great lessons to see that, as painful as it was and as horrifying as it was. The things that are horrifying now, that other people—they will crumble—doesn't even make a mark on me now, because of that, because of the way that I can process trauma, I guess.

**Dana: And hold space with someone.**

Rusty: And know when someone says something bullshit. (laughs) You know what I mean?

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: And, you know, like when, you know, my friends lose their mothers, and some people say certain things, and I'm like, "Yeah, you might not want to say that to them." And, "This was my experience with that." Or when someone has just lost their parent, and I said, "Yep. Uh-huh." And they say, "I feel guilty for thinking this way." And I go, "Yeah. You won't after a while. You'll be okay." (laughs)

**Dana: Exactly. (laughs) But it's true. It's until you go through it. Like, I'm sure I texted things to friends on Mother's Day that I would never text now.**

Rusty: That's right. That's exactly it.

**Dana: And even though everyone's intention is always good, always good.**

Rusty: Always, always.

**Dana: So you always have to take it with a grain of salt. But know that, you know, some people don't want to hear that. And Mother's Day is just another day to a lot of people. It's just a Sunday.**

Rusty: Yeah. I remember at one point someone said to me—it was like six months after my mom died, maybe not even six. It could have been three. I don't know. Somewhere in there.

**Dana: Sure. There's no—what is time, after a loss like that.**

Rusty: Right. And someone says to me, "How are you?" And I said, "Eh, shitty." And they go, "Why?" And I go, "Cause my mom died?" And they were like, "Yeah, but wasn't that a while ago?" And I just stared at them. I just stared at them. Because I thought at least they would shut up after I just said to them, "Because my mom is dead?" (laughs)

**Dana: (laughs) You know, it sounds loaded to me. (laughs)**

Rusty: (laughs) And, not surprising, that was a person that had not lost their parent.

**Dana: Absolutely. And I think—and again, it comes back to intention, even when the intention is the opposite.**

Rusty: Oh yeah!

**Dana: I had a really good friend who was much younger than me, we were sitting in a car together, and she said, "Do you mind if I call my mom?" And I said, "Why, because mine is dead?"**

Rusty: (laughs)

**Dana: And she said—'cause it's my humor, and she knew that I was kidding—and she said, "Well, I just don't want to upset you." And I said, "I promise you, she'll still be dead after the phone call."**

Rusty: (laughs)

**Dana: "Give her a call." You know? That was the most authentic thing I could say, because it felt funny. But again, is that humor deflecting that I also am resentful that this woman gets to call her mom, and wants to call her mom—and that's a whole other conversation. So I actually wanted to ask you that: were you someone who called your mom every day?**

Rusty: I didn't call my mom every day, but we talked at least once a week, at least.

**Dana: And who would call who? Was it always you? Was it sometimes her? Was it always her?**

Rusty: It was both of us, mostly her. Mostly her, but it was definitely both of us.

**Dana: So when you were on set, or you're busy, you're living in L.A., you're doing shoots, you're filming: you'd make time. You would always make time.**

Rusty: Sure. Oh god, of course I did. I think it's because it was a given in our family. You know, Sundays at home growing up were huge. [30:00] First of all, even if we decided to sleep late, my mom would climb into bed with us, and be like, "Good morning, sweetie. What's going on?" And she'd sit there and rub your head and do all these sorts of things...

Sorry.

**Dana: No, that's weird, that got me too! My mom loved to climb into bed. She slept with me sometimes.**

Rusty: And she'd wake us up, and you know, just be like, "Okay, it's Sunday. It's a beautiful day out. Blah blah blah blah." And Sundays were always family. And we'd have brunch with our cousins, her brother Gus, who's still alive to this day, so whenever I miss my mom, I can go see Gus.

**Dana: How old is Gus?**

Rusty: He's 93.

**Dana: Yes! My grandma's age. Alright Gus!**

Rusty: He's awesome, he's awesome.

**Dana: Does he live in Chicago?**

Rusty: Yeah, he lives in Highland Park, still lives in Highland Park.

**Dana: Nice.**

Rusty: I think they left the North Shore for maybe two years, and that was it, he and my Aunt Ruthie. And so we would have brunch every single Sunday. And brunch would then turn into dinner.

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: (laughs) And my first cousins and I are really close, because of that. And those were our Sundays, and they were huge. And so when I was out of town, Sundays Mom would call, or I'd call Mom, Mom and Dad. And so it was one of those things that family was a huge deal, so it was a given that we would talk. It was a total given.

I may also say at this point: I was the one that probably had the most challenging relationship with my mother of my sisters. And my mother kept saying the reason it was is because she and I were so much alike. And so it was contentious at times, but my mother, even if I said the most horrible things to my mother, she would still keep the conversation going.

**Dana: Like, you're on a phone call, and you say something that...?**

Rusty: Like, "Mom, you suck. You did this to me."

**Dana: "I'm blaming you. I'm upset."**

Rusty: Yeah. And she's say, "Alright, well, you coming home for Christmas?"

**Dana: (laughs) "Let's figure this out."**

Rusty: "Let's figure this out," or "You're coming home for Christmas," one of these things. I was probably so angry—I was in therapy at the time—and I was probably so angry at my mother that she couldn't get a word in edgewise, that she wrote me a letter. And I kept the letter.

**Dana: What were you angry about?**

Rusty: I was angry about the fact that she would keep her feelings in, that it was bad that she kept feelings in. And that I was having a terrible life because I had to learn how to take my feelings out, and not keep them in just like she did. And that it was her fault (laughs) that I kept my feelings in.

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: (laughs) And so my mom wrote a letter going, "I'm so sorry. This is how I deal with it."

**Dana: Like, "This is who I am."**

Rusty: "This is who I am, and I can't share with you my feelings, like you do with me. It's just not something I can do." And that was when she also admitted that her first and



foremost job in this world was to protect her children. And that's where I got that, in that letter.

**Dana: What emotions weren't you seeing, or truths? What were you trying to get out of her?**

Rusty: I think it was her fears that I wanted to know, because of course it had to do with my fears. I mean, come on, I was in my twenties when shit was going down. I was in my late twenties. I was in L.A. I had just ended a long-term relationship with a guy that I was living with. My parents, my family loved him, but they didn't know what was going on in our relationship. I think he liked my family more than he liked me, and I completely understand why.

**Dana: (laughs) Stop.**

Rusty: (laughs) No, seriously, my family's kind of awesome, and they're a little fun. And once they like you, they bring you in. They're like, "You have no choice. You're coming over for dinner."

**Dana: And you'll be having corn.**

Rusty: Yeah, and you'll be having corn.

**Dana: So, get in.**

Rusty: And lots of vegetables from the garden, exactly.

And so I guess the deal was, is that I was dealing with all of my fears, and trying to get things going in my late twenties, and I was living in shitholes, and not wanting get money from anybody, and do it on my own. [35:00] And it was hard, living there? So I started going to therapy, trying to figure things out, 'cause I just felt like a mess. And through that whole thing, they were basically saying the things like, "You're not taking care of yourself. You're taking care of other people before you're taking care of yourself." And I was like, "That's Mom. That's Mom. It's all Mom. All Mom." And so I was like, "It's her fault I'm doing this. It's her fault that I got in this place." So I think how I tried to do it, (laughs) in my very immature way, was try to say, "Mom, you've got to let your feelings out." And what it really was was, "Thanks a lot, Mom. Now I've got to figure out how to take care of myself before I take care of others."

But remember, this is also 23 years after she has left this earth that I figure this out. But when I turned 30, my mom and I had a very, very, very close relationship. We got through it. So between 30 and 34, we were golden. We could laugh at each other. We

could laugh at all of our shit, and understand how we were so much alike. And so thank god for that. Thank god. You know.

**Dana: And some people I don't think process. It doesn't behoove them to talk about their fears sometimes. And that doesn't help them.**

Rusty: That's right. It doesn't.

**Dana: So we can't force that on people, especially my grandma. She's gotten to this point in her life. She doesn't need to talk about burying both her children on a Sunday.**

Rusty: Yes! Oh, fuck.

**Dana: She just wants to talk about getting her hair done again. So don't push it. She'll talk when she wants to talk.**

Rusty: That's right.

**Dana: And ride through those moments where for 45 minutes she's going on about something about her past, and then the next minute she's talking about having eggs for breakfast. And that's fine, let her roll.**

Rusty: Or, "I wish I could have kept that purse."

**Dana: Yeah! Oh sure.**

Rusty: (laughs)

**Dana: That's way more important than, (laughs) "Do you think my mother was an addict?" And she's like, "Anyway, is Chico's open during the pandemic or not?"**

Rusty: Yes! (laughs) Oh my god, Chico's.

**Dana: Oh, Chico's.**

Rusty: My mother loved Chico's.

**Dana: My mother had so many Chico's jackets.**

Rusty: So did my mom!

**Dana: Yeah, and the little bags that held the jewelry? The little...**

Rusty: Oh, my mom, she didn't do that. She had a huge-ass bag, because my mom had tissues. Part of the medication—she was on, like 24 pills when she died. My mom had

a runny nose all the time, because of the side effects of a lot of the medication. And so she always had a tissue with her. And she would put the tissue in her sleeve, or she'd put it in her cleavage, or she'd put it somewhere if she didn't have pockets. And that's why with that big purse that she had, there'd be like 5 million tissues wadded up, but they were all clean. (laughs)

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: 'Cause, she'd take the tissues from the tissue box, throw them in the purse—but there'd be, like, little candies. She loved jellybeans. There'd be some things. So she never left that, even after her children grew. She still had the big-ass purse, because she had to carry everything in it, to have something if we needed it.

So cut to: we're cleaning out the closet, six months after she dies. We're, like, emptying out pockets, and it was like, "Oh, there's Mom's tissue." And it smelled like her. And we would smell her tissue, and we were totally into it, and crying and laughing. And we're all sitting cross-legged, in a circle, the four of us, and going through stuff in the bedroom where she actually died. By the time we finished folding her clothes, and figuring things out, and who's going to save what and where it's going to go, we had a foot-and-a-half mound...

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: ...of kleenex in the middle of all of us. And we laughed and cried and used the tissues.

**Dana: Used the tissues!**

Rusty: (laughs) Yep, absolutely. And then I used her tissue move in a movie later, years later.

**Dana: Really.**

Rusty: Yes, I did. And it's still in there. If you want to see the tissue move, it's in the movie *The Informant*.

**Dana: Oh.**

Rusty: With Steven Soderbergh directing, and Matt Damon.

**Dana: (laughs) You used the tissue move.**

Rusty: I used the tissue move, and it made Soderbergh laugh. So that was good. And I was like, "That was my mom." My mom. My mom.

**Dana: And you said you played your mom—I mean, we were talking about how, when you were auditioning for Twister, which is a very famous movie, yadda yadda yadda. You auditioned for Dusty. You didn't get Dusty. Your name is Rusty, but you got a mom-role. You got Mrs. Thornton, who is a mother. And you were saying, "Oh gosh, how many times have you played your mother? I could go on." And to be honest, I started thinking about it, and I realized, I actually never play moms. I'm never cast as a mom, ever. But it doesn't mean I can't bring my mom to the role.**

Rusty: That's right.

**Dana: Well, I had to think back on it, and to be honest, [40:00] the only time I feel like I've used her is her dance moves. So I feel like I've used her dance moves...**

Rusty: Nice! (laughs)

**Dana: ...on stage, in a role that was totally a mom. But it was more of, I was playing an older sister, and I just threw the dance move in, which I wish I could do on the podcast.**

Rusty: Well, we should also share with our audience members that we have taken a couple of trips to a place where a bunch of women can get together and sit around a campfire, and one of those days in the campfire, one of those nights, we all imitated our moms' dancing. And there were some good moves there.

**Dana: Ooh, man.**

Rusty: Some good moves.

**Dana: A little Lindsay Page mom move.**

Rusty: Yeah.

**Dana: The slo-mo.**

Rusty: With the slap. (laughs)

**Dana: The slo-mo slap. (laughs)**

Rusty: Yeah, the slap on the thigh.

**Dana: It was a shimmy and a side slap.**

Rusty: (laughs)

**Dana: My mom does a lot of snapping, a lot of snapping. And it's a lot of snapping.**

Rusty: (laughs) My mom did, like, an individual jitterbug move.

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: So that's what it was.

**Dana: But I think I only feel like my mom when I'm hosting a party. When I'm trying to wrangle a group for a photo, I'm really bossy. Like, telling everyone where to stand, where to go. And then every time someone opens a gift, like at a bridal shower, a baby shower, or a birthday party, in front of the group, they open the gift, and they say, "Oh, thank you so much." And I go, "Okay, so, you wanted the green shirt, I know. But I wanted to go with blue, because I couldn't find your size."**

Rusty: (laughs)

**Dana: "Okay, this store, you guys, this store..." And I tell a whole fucking tale about this gift. I've stopped the room. It's now time to explain the gift. "And if you don't like it, I'll return it. But I think you'd really—I think this is actually going to look better on you than what you wanted." My mom always had a story for the gift, and quantified it. It was funny, always, but she wanted to explain the tale of buying it.**

Rusty: The care she took.

**Dana: And she's just like, "Ooh, I love this." And everyone's going, "Oh, I love this gift." And I go, "Right? I know. So there's this store. It's on Lincoln."**

Rusty: (laughs)

**Dana: And then it's like, "Let's move on. There's other baby gifts to get through." But I need to talk about it.**

Rusty: When my mom really comes out in me is always in nature.

**Dana: That's awesome.**

Rusty: Usually in nature, yeah.

**Dana: My mom used to walk around her garden, and tell me what was the, like, reproductive organs of the female plant. The teacher.**

Rusty: Oh my god, the teacher, the teacher.

**Dana: Yeah, the teacher. And I would learn all about the plants.**

Rusty: Cool.

**Dana: And then fruit flies, and all of that stuff.**

Rusty: What is it about fruit flies, that your mom shared with you, that I'd like to know?

**Dana: She talked about chromosomes. (laughs)**

Rusty: (laughs)

**Dana: Stuff like that. I don't remember! I really don't remember.**

Rusty: Did she talk about cytoplasm?

**Dana: Sure, I'm sure that came up.**

Rusty: (laughs)

**Dana: I used to grade tests, and she'd let me grade it.**

Rusty: Cytoplasm.

**Dana: Psychoplasm.**

Rusty: Psychoplasm, that's right.

**Dana: Psycho.**

Rusty: Psycho- or cyto-? Psycho-?

**Dana: I don't know.**

Rusty: I remember C-Y-C...

**Dana: Psychoplasm... I don't know. I'm going to look it up.**

Rusty: ...L-O, yeah.

**Dana: Cycloplasm. But she would have them...**

Rusty: Cycroplasm.

**Dana: ...in little vials, and they'd sit on the dining room table.**

Rusty: Really?

**Dana: She would dissect pigs—not in our house, but I would go to her classroom at Glenbard North, and see the pigs and the frogs and the this and the that. And I guess she used to talk as the frog. Students said she used to do the frog's voice, and she was a whole stand-up act.**

Rusty: So was it high school biology she taught?

**Dana: Yeah, it was high school.**

Rusty: Hence the pig, yeah.

**Dana: Yeah, she taught Billy Corgan biology.**

Rusty: Right! Oh my god, I love that.

**Dana: And she has a poem written by him that I've kept. Like, he wrote some science poem, and I have it.**

Rusty: Doll, that's worth thousands.

**Dana: Yeah, it's fun. Yeah, I know. I was like, "This is so cool." But other roles? If you wanted to talk about another mom role.**

Rusty: Sometimes it was snippets, like, yeah, a gesture. Like, there's still one that I'm saving, that I haven't—I've been always wanting to put it into certain roles, and I go, "Nope, that's not it. That's not it. That's not it." I'm saving it. It's this thing, it's called—some people call it "doll eye" where you basically just close one eye. So you can see me—people can't see me, but I'll do it right now. If you can see it, here, I'm going in. Okay, here we go.

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: See that? Yeah.

**Dana: Closing one eye.**

Rusty: So my mother...

**Dana: Keeping one eye open.**

Rusty: Yeah, keeping one eye open, and not looking like it's a—it's like a doll's eye. And so she would do that whenever something was ridiculous. Like, most people would do an eye roll. She does the doll eye, and she'd be like, "Lovely. Wonderful." Like, that's not good.

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: And most of the time, it was me making myself ugly. And my mom would be like, "Oh, that's attractive."

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: With the eye.

**Dana: And sometimes the doll eye gets stuck.**

Rusty: [45:00] It just stays there.

**Dana: It stays there.**

Rusty: It just stays there, just stays there.

And the big deal with my mom was how to make my mother laugh at the dinner table.

**Dana: Like, competing with your sisters for it?**

Rusty: Yes.

**Dana: Or were you just competing with yourself?**

Rusty: Yes. Well, and after a while it was competing with myself, 'cause my mom—I know my mom thought I was funny. But my sister Lisa was probably the funniest, and still is the funniest. But a lot of times her funny comes from things that she didn't even realize she just did. (laughs)

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: So it was hilarious.

**Dana: Did she watch a lot of your work? I actually don't know if I've ever asked you this, until this moment.**

Rusty: You know, I'm going to honor what went through my mind at this point. My mother was so scared for me, that I would get rejection after rejection after rejection,



that she didn't share with me a lot about how she felt about me being an actress, or what she had seen me do. I didn't know what it was at the time. I was graduating high school. It was my last show in high school, and it was a big deal at our high school. We had a lot of people, a lot of famous people come out of our high school.

**Dana: That's an intense theatre program too there.**

Rusty: And I don't think I'll ever play to that large of an audience again, in a show.

**Dana: (laughs) You peaked.**

Rusty: I think our auditorium sat 1,600 people.

**Dana: What?**

Rusty: And it was always sold out. So, yes.

**Dana: Wow.**

Rusty: So, there I was, playing on Broadway, but it was in Winnetka, Illinois. (laughs)

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: And after the show, everybody came down to the dressing room, and everybody's like, "It was great! You were amazing!" And my father, who was the actor in the family, kind of was like, "This is so great! And when you did this, and when you did that!" And my mom's just sitting there, like a deer in headlights. And I said, "Mom, mom! Did you like it?" And she was like, "Yeah. Yeah," all like neutral-faced, monotone. And I'm like, what? Okay, I guess, maybe she's angry at me. I don't know what's going on. I couldn't read her, or I didn't have the time to read her. I was 16 years old. I didn't know.

**Dana: You just killed in Winnetka. (laughs)**

Rusty: Right, (laughs) in mini-Broadway. And she was like, "Okay, I'll take the flowers home, put them in the toilet," 'cause there were so many flowers, "Put them in the toilet for you, blah-di-dah-di-dah." And I went home. Years later, years and years and years later, that vision came up into my mind—thank god, my mom could tell me—she was still alive to tell me—and it was after a while that you could see that I was going to be fine making a living as an actor. And I said to Mom, "Weren't you ever—you were scared for me? dah-dah-di-dah. We'd have a conversation." And she goes, "I knew then that you had to be an actress, that it was something that you were meant to do." And I said, "I'm sorry, excuse me?"

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: She goes, "Yeah."

**Dana: "Why didn't you say that that night many, many years ago?"**

Rusty: 'Cause I was like, "What I remember..."

**Dana: "Here's what I remember..."**

Rusty: And she goes, "'Cause I was scared shitless for you. I was scared shitless for me, for you, for our family, and what was going to come, what was going to come. Because I knew then." And I was like, "So that neutral face, monotone was you basically saying..."

**Dana: "You found your purpose."**

Rusty: "...fuck. (laughs) You found your purpose."

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: So there's that grief that keeps going, and it brings me to this thought.

**Dana: It's a grief that keeps going. That's a great way to say it.**

Rusty: My dear friends that still had their mothers, or still do at this point, have shared with me years later, "I'm so glad." 'Cause I would say to them—they'd be bitching about their mother—and I would say, "At least your mother's alive." And I would say it so harsh. And I knew that I was being harsh, but I wanted them to get the picture. And a few times they'd look at me, like, "What the fuck?" And I'd make them really uncomfortable. And I didn't care that I was making them uncomfortable. When my mother died, there were so many fucks I didn't give anymore. And a few of my friends have come back to me since those times. They've said to me, "I needed to hear that." One of my friends now who—she'd be bitching about her mom for many years, because her mom was challenging—just this last Mother's Day said, "I'm so glad you had that conversation about your mom, and me [50:00] being fortunate that my mother's still alive. Thank god for that. Thank you." And I was like, "My work is done here."

**Dana: Did it force her to reach out more? What did it do for her?**

Rusty: It made her think about what she was bitching about her mother about, and was it really that important. And so she was starting to understand what her priorities were. Because then she was like, "Oh shit. I thought my mother was going to live forever. And now I see that she's not, when you told me that." (laughs)

**Dana: But then talking to someone who might feel like, "Why would I reconnect with someone who wasn't a mother to me?"**

Rusty: I would completely honor that.

**Dana: And that's so complicated.**

Rusty: It's a different thing. This was about...

**Dana: I get that. I just go, it's so interesting to think what the word "motherhood" even means, right, and how loaded that is.**

**A beautiful thing you told me was that your mother used to reference "her perfect children".**

Rusty: Oy.

**Dana: Would you tell us a little about that?**

Rusty: (laughs)

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: Maybe that's another reason, now that I think about it, that was another reason why I was in therapy and angry at my mother. (laughs)

**Dana: Just one, maybe two reasons. (laughs)**

Rusty: My mother would say—and she was saying it, of course, in a joking way—"my perfect children." Well, my sisters tell me, now, as we're all in our fifties and sixties, that they loved it when my mother would say that. I was horrified when my mother would say that, because then I actually took it figuratively, literally, everything. I took it like, "Holy shit. If I'm not perfect at this, I'm going to jinx it all. And all of a sudden, I'm not her perfect child anymore." And of course it was a very subconscious thing.

**Dana: And what did perfect mean to you?**

Rusty: Everything.

**Dana: Everything.**

Rusty: Everything. I think what she really meant by "perfect children" is, "They're alive. They're thriving. They're loving. And they're fabulous." That's basically all she meant by

"her perfect children." It doesn't matter if we had one eye, or we had no face. We'd still be perfect in her eyes.

**Dana: Did your sisters, did that drive them to therapy too? Have you guys talked?**

Rusty: No!

**Dana: You must talk about it.**

Rusty: No! It did not drive them to therapy. They were fine with it!

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: What drove them to therapy were other things, but that was not one of them. That was one of them that drove me to therapy. But they thought that was lovely, that my mother said that.

**Dana: It's a beautiful memory. (laughs) "We're her perfect children."**

Rusty: I'm like, "This is the worst!" (laughs)

**Dana: You're like, "I can't be perfect!"**

Rusty: "This is the worst!" (laughs) I now, of course, look back at it fondly, and say, "That is the cutest damn thing ever." Now that I understand it.

**Dana: That's hard, though. I think about that a lot with my grandma. My grandma, even to this day, talks about how my mom was perfect: the perfect daughter, the perfect wife, the perfect student.**

Rusty: Well, no wonder she doesn't want to talk about addiction, you know.

**Dana: Of course she doesn't, 'cause she was, "How could this happen to someone who was so beautiful..."**

Rusty: She's perfect.

**Dana: "...and so perfect, and could dance and do ballet and play piano, had to be the stronger sister to her sister who had disabilities."**

Rusty: Correct, correct.

**Dana: So I think she was pushed to be perfect too. And then was a corporate wife, and was a teacher, and a mom...**

Rusty: Had perfect bows in her hair.

**Dana: ...perfect bows, jewelry, worked out. So when your body starts failing you, it's hard to pretend that—you're still trying to still stay perfect and keep this facade, when yet...**

Rusty: How do you do it?

**Dana: ...everyone around you is like, "Something is wrong." And your body starts failing you.**

Rusty: Exactly. And harmony, harmony, harmony, harmony. Harmony, unless—my mom wanted harmony, unless you fucked with her children. Then she was like, "All bets are off. I will fuck you up."

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: She was intense. People were scared of her. People were really scared of her. I have friends to this day that will not call her "Ann," will still call her, "I loved your mother, Mrs. Schwimmer." (laughs) Mrs. Schwimmer, Mrs. Schwimmer. My mom.

**Dana: (laughs) Well, and you said they wouldn't like it when you called her "Annie."**

Rusty: Right. Yeah. If people called her "Annie" that she didn't (a) like (b) know, she'd be like, "It's Ann. It's Ann."

**Dana: (laughs) Maybe the eye would come out, the eye doll?**

Rusty: No, she was relaxed when she had the eye doll. When she was tense, she would just do that scary-ass, thousand-mile stare, you know.

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: Oh, she was scary. Yeah, she was really scary. By the way, she never hit any of us. She didn't need to. She didn't need to. She would say—and my sisters and I just brought this up on a Zoom meeting—my mother would say, "I love you very much. But I don't like you very much right now."

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: (laughs)

**Dana: [55:00] And what would your body do?**

Rusty: Dread, dread, dread, fear—everything would go inward, you know. Like, your stomach would collapse. Your whole body would collapse into your stomach, if that happened. 'Cause you knew, "Oh my god, I must have been a real asshole," because she was patient. She was very, very patient.

**Dana: Did your mom ever tell you a secret that, like, only you knew, something that your sisters might not have known? Or she said, "That's just between us"? No?**

Rusty: No. No, I'll tell you why. I'll tell you why. My mother never had any of us—she never compared one daughter the other. She never had any of us competing. If our competition with each other was happening, it was because of her, ever because of her. She treated us all intensely as individuals. And each one of us thought either we were Mom's favorite, or somebody else was their favorite, because Mom didn't have favorites. And I say to my friends that are mothers now, especially of girls, "Don't you dare compare one daughter to the other. Don't you dare." And I think that that is the single biggest reason why my sisters and I have no competition, we get along, and they're my best friends. It's because my mom was all about that.

**Dana: And you're all perfect.**

Rusty: And we're all perfect, right. So she never, ever, ever—I don't think she ever told me a secret that—as it got closer to her death, she said a few things, but I think she would have said a few things if my other sisters were there too.

**Dana: You were just there. You were the one present.**

Rusty: I just happened to be there, yes.

**Dana: And you shared what she said to your sisters?**

Rusty: Oh, hell yes.

**Dana: Yes, I assume all of that then was just conveyed: "Yeah, here's what she said."**

Rusty: Absolutely, yeah. She had no problem sharing her joy.

**Dana: Some people can't do that, at all.**

Rusty: And she had no problem sharing her joy.

**Dana: Yes, that's a gift.**

Rusty: It's kind of genius.

**Dana: Well, you don't either, my friend.**

Rusty: Oh, I got that from my mother. I'm very, very similar to my mother, very similar. And I'm okay with that. I'm not as graceful as my mother. My mother was super graceful.

**Dana: Did you in hindsight realize she was graceful, or did you always see it?**

Rusty: I never defined it that way, but I saw it, yeah. I saw it that way. She was just graceful in the sense that she could make anybody feel at home.

**Dana: That was my mom too, for a long time, so good at it. Like, I recently had a friend who met my mother in 2010. My mom was sick then. And she'd never even met my mom. My mom was sick. But she still saw her and was like, "Your mom, I thought was, like, either a politician, an agent..."**

Rusty: Wow.

**Dana: She was just so incredible at talking to people.**

Rusty: And also put together.

**Dana: Yeah, put together, knew how to run a room, knew who was who.**

Rusty: Sounds like you. Sounds like you.

**Dana: So I was like, "Well, that's where I got it." And everybody always thought she was just so fun and engaging, welcoming you, welcoming you into her home, to her class: a great equalizer of people. She would talk to children the same as she'd talk to adults.**

Rusty: That's exactly how my mom was too. Oh my god, the two of them would have gotten along.

**Dana: For sure.**

Rusty: Very much so.

**Dana: We'll get their Chico's jackets on and run around.**

Rusty: And talk about biology.

**Dana: And garden. And not share their feelings.**

Rusty: Right, right, exactly.

**Dana: Well, sometimes my mom would.**

Rusty: But then my mother would probably go in, and she'd be like, "What pills are you taking?"

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: "Why are you taking those?" Do you know what I mean? (laughs)

**Dana: She'd try to care for her.**

Rusty: She would!

**Dana: And then my mom, the scientist, would be like, "Alright, I want to talk about some doctor stuff, some nurse stuff." Like she loves medicine...**

Rusty: (laughs)

**Dana: ...so she'd also want to chat about it. My Mom had surgery on her knee. She had something removed from her knee, and she was not fully asleep. She was young, and she said that she stayed awake to see it.**

Rusty: (laughs)

**Dana: I don't know if this was a memory that was wrong. She had something removed from her knee, and I don't know if it was stitches, it was something...**

Rusty: I bet you it was a cyst. It was a cyst.

**Dana: And she wanted to see it.**

Rusty: And you could do, like, localized anesthesia.

**Dana: She wanted to watch the doctors. She wanted to see what it looked like coming out. And I just was like, "Okay, Mom."**

Rusty: Yeah, my mom was the same way. (laughs)

**Dana: So I think you've said it already, but will you say your mother's name again? What feelings do you feel in this moment, today, on this phone call? Tell me your mom's name.**

Rusty: If I say her name as "Annie Schwimmer," the feeling is different than when I say, "Ann Schwimmer."



**Dana: Well then, let's hear it.**

Rusty: [1:00:00] Annie Schwimmer is everybody's favorite neighbor, everybody's favorite aunt, everybody's favorite nurse, person who could give an incredible party, make it look like it's nothing. That's Annie Schwimmer.

Ann Schwimmer: incredible nurse, knew her shit. If you have any bullshit that you bring to the table, she will out you in a second, and will tell you that it's bullshit. Or she will pause long enough for you to retract the statement. That's Ann Schwimmer. Ann Schwimmer, the protector of her children. If any of her children's friends came, and she could see an ulterior motive, she didn't like them for the rest of their lives. (laughs)

**Dana: (laughs)**

Rusty: So there's a difference.

**Dana: Yeah, you saw both. And the mom who was scared and nervous for you to go out into the world and become the actor that you were so destined on this earth to be?**

Rusty: That was Ann Schwimmer, yeah.

**Dana: I love you, friend. I'm grateful to know you.**

Rusty: I love you, too.

**Dana: Thanks for doing this.**

Rusty: I'm so, so grateful to know you. And by the way, the conversation that you and I had, about your career in the car as I was driving you home, and the things that I was telling you, is exactly what my mother would have said to you.

**Dana: "Don't be a fucking manager. Now, get out of my car." (laughs)**

Rusty: "Get the fuck out of my car." My mother would have said that. My mother would have said that to you. And she would have said, "How dare you not share your gifts with the world."

**Dana: Well, I'm trying to in any way I can, and this is one of them. So, thanks babe. You're the best.**

Rusty: I love you.

**Dana: [start outro] Yeah, so Rusty's referring to the time when I told her I wanted to become a talent manager for actors, and she told me to get out of her car. She was**

pissed. But I'm an actor, right? I wanted to have a back-up plan and keep my options open, in case this whole easy acting-career-thing didn't work out. But she lovingly and supportively talked me out of it. So thanks, friend. You're the best.

If you wanted to see some behind the scenes of this interview, you can go check out our website, which is [mothersgravepod.com](http://mothersgravepod.com). You can see some of Rusty's mother's painting, pictures of her mother's pearls that are referenced in this interview, and read about how you can support the United Negro College Fund, which is an organization which Rusty has been supporting for over 20 years. They are the nation's largest and most effective minority education organization. They donate over \$100 million in scholarships to students every year, and their website is [unconf.org](http://unconf.org). Check it out.

I want to thank Rusty for talking to me. I also want to thank Suzi Piker, one of my oldest and dearest friends, for agreeing to be my editor. I want to thank Na'toria Marketing for their awesome website design, Meredith Montgomery for her gorgeous logo, and Matt Chapman for his beautiful sound design. And special thanks to Jill Wolf, my therapist, Heather Bodie, Lora Nicole, Danny Bravman, Brian Golden, Jonathan Baude, and all of my friends for your love and support.

Oh, and my mom's name was Shirlee Jo. She dropped the "Shirlee" in high school and just started going by "Jo": Jo Black. Her nickname was Jo Mama, and when the movie Meet Joe Black came out? Yeah, she thought that movie was about her. It was, like, for her. It was a sign.

When I think about my mom, today, as I launch this podcast, I feel really anxious. And I feel really nervous about putting something out into the world that she has no say over. She has no approval of. And I'm sure there's going to be things that I say or share or talk about that she wouldn't like, that if she were here, she'd say, "That's not true. That's not the full story. I don't remember it like that." And maybe that's true, but she isn't here. And I hope that every time I'm having a conversation with someone, or I'm talking to you all, I remember to look to my right—because that's where the picture of my mom is, nestled amongst my Spanx and underwear and all the jewelry I inherited after she died—[1:05:00] and I remember to look at her, and honor her, honor my opinion of her. But I also want to remember that I'm honoring myself. I'm the one living. I'm the one still here. I can only talk from my point of view. And so, I hope she forgives me. And I hope I start feeling less alone and sad and angry and frustrated and emotional and confused. Yeah, that's what I hope.

Talk to you soon. [end 1:05:51]