

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.

Happy fall, y'all. I hope you're all wearing a mustard-colored or amber-colored cardigan right now, and you're walking around your neighborhood, kicking the freshly fallen leaves around you, and smiling as you listen to this episode. Maybe you're eating a fresh, crisp apple from the market, or drinking a spiced latte as you walk around in the fresh, fall air. That's what I hope for all of you. Happy fall.

Today's guest is one of my good friends. He has babysat my dog. He has read my tarot cards. He has spent Thanksgiving with my grandmother. I met this person in 2015 in Chicago, doing a play about a young boy coming of age and coming to terms with his sexuality, while also exploring the sexuality of President Abraham Lincoln. Yeah. The play was a trip. It was a trip.

My guest grew up in Dallas, Texas, and also spent a lot of time in Colorado. He lost his mom to breast cancer at the age of 12. When his mom was dying, she turned to him and said, "Go out there and find your tribe. Go and find your people." And he did, in the arts. He is incredibly intelligent, fiercely empathic, witty, generous, smart, and just a good person.

I wanted to quote right here, right now, before the episode starts, something he says later in the interview, so that you hear it right now, and I hope it moves you just as much as it moved me the first time I heard it. He says, "Death: it is the only way that we have things like loyalty and honor and love and generosity and care. Those things are only possible because of death, because if we didn't die, those things wouldn't mean anything."

This is Lane Flores. [end intro]

Lane: Middle school was when I was dealing with my own queerness, and coming to terms with that. And then I came out when I was 14 in high school in Dallas. And for about a year, year and a half, I was the only—I was a little bit of a poster boy for the gays at my school. Although I think there were one or two others, they weren't in my circles, and they were sports people, and I didn't ever hang out with them.

Dana: (laughs)

Lane: (laughs) The theater was on the other side of the school from the sports department. So I didn't ever know them. But then my junior year of high school, I

started dating a boy. Was it junior year? Maybe it was senior year, I can't remember. But he and I dated for a year, year and a half, and we were kind of like the gay couple that everyone invited to the parties to stir up some drama.

Dana: (laughs)

Lane: And we did. I was known as a queen of storming out of rooms, when I was in high school. I was very good at it.

Dana: (laughs) I can picture it. So you said that you didn't come out, or you were wrestling with your sexuality when you were 14. But you lost your mother when you were 12.

Lane: Yeah, I lost my mother when I was 12. And that's actually more around the time that I was wrestling with it. I came out when I was 14. I started to understand my sexuality, or started to seriously look at that, probably when I was closer to 11, 'cause I know she was still alive when I was starting to deal with that. But I never did get to have that conversation with her, which sucks. There are a lot of conversations I didn't get to have with her, but that was a big one, that I do regret not talking with her about. And one of those things that I have to kind of be kind to teenage, preteen me about in my memories, because I get so frustrated with him, (laughs) and it's hard sometimes to be kind to him from this perspective now.

Dana: What are you mad at him for?

Lane: Just not speaking out soon enough, and wasting time. The summer before my mom died, [05:00] she was going through chemo, and my cousin was visiting us, and she used to stay with us quite a bit, just throughout my childhood. She stayed with us, so me, her, and my sister would stay up all night watching movies, and we were just having a fun cousin summer, but then we would sleep all day long, 'cause we'd stayed up all night playing. And it meant that I actually didn't see much of my mother during that last summer, because she would wake up during the day, and be trying to do things during the day, and then obviously have to sleep quite a bit at night. And so it was a big waste of time, but I didn't know that at the time. But that's just a small metaphor for all of the time that I wasted. (laughs) It frustrates me still, to this day, that I didn't do that. But I was also a kid, and I was going through trauma.

Dana: Did she know, or did the family talk about how sick she was? Or were you hopeful, "Oh, Mom is just going through some treatment, and she'll get better"? Or did you know she was really sick, and you were in denial? Or do you not know any of these answers 'cause you were 11 or 12, and now you know the answer?

Lane: No. I knew, 'cause she told me when I was—she was diagnosed when I was probably 10. And she told me at the time that it wasn't a bad stage, and that it was going to go away. And then she did go into remission for a while, after some surgeries. But the fact of the matter is when she was diagnosed, it was already Stage III or almost Stage IV, and they were like, "You've got only a couple of months to live." And so that was a lot of her hope speaking, and her, I think, not being able to tell me that she was dying. And so when it's remission, I as a kid didn't know that that was only a brief reprieve. I thought that it was done. And so then when it came back, I was really surprised, but then I kind of started to fall into a recognition of like, "Oh, this is going to be a much bigger thing than the last time." So I knew, I think, that it was happening. I don't know that I was able to process it or deal with it in any way.

Dana: That's hard.

Lane: It sucked. (laughs) It really sucked.

Dana: When you were wrestling with your own—you're young, you're wrestling with lots of things that you wanted to probably talk about with your mom—but you mean you literally knew that there was something going on in terms of your attraction to other men?

Lane: I suspected.

Dana: You suspected.

Lane: I suspected.

Dana: What would you have said? And was it anything you could have said to your dad? Or was it something you could only...

Lane: Oh, god no. (laughs)

Dana: Not at all, okay.

Lane: My dad and I at that time weren't close. I didn't know how to talk to him. And I didn't understand him. Like we just didn't have the kind of bond. I was a mama's boy through and through when I was a kid. In fact, at the funeral when she died, my dad coming up to me at one point and being like, "I know this is harder for you than anyone else, because you were closer to her than anyone else in her life." And I was 11 or 12 years old! (laughs) I was like, "Cool, cool, cool. I'll just carry that with me the rest of my days."

Dana: That's something you say to your 55-year-old, or the uncle, or the person—that is a really intense thing to say to a child.

Lane: Yes, well, intense things were said to me a lot during that time period. I think that's something that I have to be kind in my memory to the adults at the time, because they were also going through trauma. But that is also hard. (laughs)

Dana: And when you say you're a mama's boy, what does that mean? I know what the phrase means, but what is it mean for you?

Lane: It meant that she was the center of my life, like everything revolved around her, or she was the grounding force in my life. And so I could do without a lot of things, and my world would still keep spinning. But without her, or without the energy that she was enforcing in my life, everything stopped, everything changed.

And I worshipped her. I do think that there is, to a large extent, a kind of deification of her, especially after her death. This is something I've dealt with now, the past 20 years since she died, is navigating my own understanding of her as a human woman, [10:00] and as a mother, and as my mother—which are two different things—and as what I had then created out of that in my own head, that was never real, but that I have just essentially willed into being, because of the intensity of my emotion and my connection with her.

Dana: When you said you'd think about your mother as a woman, and then as a mother, and then my mother, and you said they were two very different things, what does that mean?

Lane: So something that I have done, that really very harmful for a while for me, was take the idea of motherhood, and put it somewhere in I think a really misogynistic way. And I think our society does this a lot. But you take motherhood, and you put it up as one of the hallmarks of being a woman. And that is a male-gaze thing. And it took me a long time to recognize that and understand that, and it's because I was doing that with my mother. My mother, to me, that was what she was. Her identification was, before woman, for me, she was my mother. And there was a conflation there, because she died before I was able to come to really any sort of full maturity—in any way, shape, or form—I was conflating that with all the women in my life, and especially older women I would, looking back now, first and foremost, as mothers or mother material, if you will.

Dana: And that means nurturing, that means...

Lane: Yeah, for me it does. It means all those things. But positive or negative associations, it's still an arbitrary thing that a young, male mind is putting on someone

without their consent. That's not something that they necessary were or were wanted to project.

Dana: And the males, the cis-males in your life, your dad or whatever: you can't connect with. You can't talk with. They're not there to really listen. They're not there to give you a hug.

Lane: Right, I did not have that same father thing happening, so much was just this. And so it really took me to a point of probably late high school/early college where I started to recognize that I was doing that, and try and correct myself. And that's been an ongoing thing in my own self-work, the kind of work that we're all doing, is not doing that anymore, letting people just be people before I put things for my trauma onto them.

Dana: That's nice of you.

Lane: (laughs) I try. I try really hard.

Dana: Did your mother have a life outside of the home?

Lane: Well, she did—I guess yes and no. When I was a kid, she was a stay-at-home mom. That's what she wanted to do. That's what she wanted to be, and it was a lot of how she identified. When she got sick, I think there was an attempt—and I think part of it had to do with money, but part of it was also a denial and also refutation of the illness. So she went out—she had gone to college and studied interior design, and been an interior designer before I was born, for I think the first three years of their relationship, before they had me. She was a designer. So she went back into—she got a job in real estate, helping sell homes, and had business cards and stuff—I still have some of them—just the last year and a half before she died. She'd already been diagnosed. Like I said, I think a lot of it came out of knowing what was going to happen, but wanting to participate life anyway. And that's something that at the time, I wouldn't have put that together, but now, it's something that's so important to me, and I respect so much. I mean, my mother was incredibly courageous in that way. And part of why I idolized and kind of deified her is because of things like that, just really brave. She's also really fucking funny. (laughs)

Dana: (laughs) So you've shared with me—at least twice I feel like it's come up—where when she was dying, she told you to go out there and find your tribe and find your people, and to go find the thing that makes you feel good. And that's courage. So I'd love you to talk about that, but I also love you to talk about the weight of someone telling you, "Go out there. Go find your people. Go be happy," and then if you don't go out there and find your people, or you don't succeed, or you don't be able to become a famous playwright or whatever, what that feels, the pressure of that.

Lane: Before she died, I was having troubles fitting in, [15:00] and I was being a little dick kid.

Dana: (laughs) When you say "fitting in," what does that mean?

Lane: I mean I was very gay and struggling to accept that, and everyone knew. (laughs) It wasn't like it was a secret.

Dana: You were barging out of rooms.

Lane: Yes, I was storming. But I was struggling a lot. I didn't have many friends, and I was struggling with bullying and stuff. And she was now on deathbed. She was on bed rest. She wasn't leaving bed at this point. But she was still lucid, and so we could have conversations. And she told me, "I want you to go and try to get into the theater class at school." This is in middle school. And I was like, "Okay." And I did it for her. And then I signed up to do tech on the school play. And I came back and I told her, and she was like, "I'm so happy. You're going to love those people. I'm just glad that you're doing it. I'm glad you're doing something." 'Cause this is before I had anything. I hated sports. I didn't have a community. I didn't have a team. I didn't have things like that. And I was going through trauma, so I hated everything. (laughs)

And so I signed up to do tech on this play. And then I got into this theater class, and my theater teacher was like, "Are you signed up to..." I remember we were doing improv one day, and she afterwards was like, "Are you doing the school play?" And I was like, "I'm going to do tech on it." And she was like, "Absolutely not. You're going to be in the play."

Dana: (laughs)

Lane: And I was like, "I don't really want to." And she was like, "No, you're going to be in the play. I'm going to make you do this."

Dana: That feels like what every real tech person would say.

Lane: (laughs)

Dana: Every stagehand or crewperson would be like, "No, I don't want to be in it."

Lane: "I don't want to."

Dana: "I specifically would like not to be the focus. I'll be over there."

Lane: The point is that I don't like being seen, and I've been trying to not be seen.

Dana: "I kind of hate everyone. I'll be over here."

Lane: I'm doing this for my mom.

But then she made me do the play. And I got a small part in the play.

Dana: What was the play?

Lane: It was a melodrama called *Snake in the Grass*. I can't remember the name of my part. It was this little one. But then the boy playing the lead had to quit to do basketball, and then they made me the lead.

Dana: What?

Lane: Yeah. And then they made me the lead of the play.

Dana: (laughs) This is like a TV show about a kid...

Lane: It was ridiculous.

Dana: ...about a kid whose mom is dying, and she says, "Go find your tribe."

Lane: (laughs)

Dana: And you get the lead, 'cause somebody drops out to go do fucking sports.

Lane: So I ended up getting the lead. And I was Sheriff Billy Bold.

Dana: I could see it.

Lane: I still have the movie, if you want to. I still have the recording.

Dana: (laughs)

Lane: But then my mom passed away. And so she didn't actually get to see it, or ever see me perform. But it was just this crazy string of events. And they postponed rehearsals then at that point, for me. The school was really cool about like, "We want to make sure you can still do this." I think my theater teacher at the time...

Dana: Oh, you were in rehearsals. It hadn't gone up. You were in rehearsals.

Lane: Yeah, we hadn't gone up. And then it happened.

Dana: Had you told her about any of the lines or rehearsals?

Lane: No, she wasn't lucid anymore. By the time that I moved from being a stagehand to a small role in it, she had already lost lucidity. And she was on so much morphine at

that time that there was just no way to really get that through. In many ways, it was a very fairy tale thing, but it was just one of those dark fairy tales, where you get something, but there's a lot of payment involved.

Dana: How did you feel once the show was over? This exciting thing happens. You find this new thing in the midst of trauma, in the midst of losing her, then you've got to keep going on with your life. But did you process, "I enjoyed this. I enjoyed being on stage." Or, "I didn't. I didn't like it." I don't know how you fell.

Lane: Oh, no. I loved it. I loved it. It was a really saving grace. And more even than being on stage—and this is something that has always been a thing for me in theater specifically—is that more even than the performing, I had finally found a community. And that was really what got me through.

Dana: When you kept going as an actor, when you kept pursuing this career—as you went to college for it, and you're an actor now in Chicago—every time you take a gig, every time you audition for something, every time you're working on a role or trying to approach a character, are you thinking about your mom? Is there inherent trauma in just the act of rehearsing or acting?

Lane: I don't experience that a lot as an actor. I think because that whole part of my life, while it came out of this experience, like my involvement in the theater came out of my experiences...

Dana: [20:00] But it wasn't part of your life before.

Lane: It wasn't. I had never auditioned. I didn't audition to do that play. I didn't audition to do any plays in middle school. It was just, I was put into things. And then I didn't start auditioning for things until I was in high school, and then I was in a different locale as well. I was back in Texas at that point, so it felt very removed from her, in that sense. So I don't have trauma there.

It does come up a lot in my writing. I don't think I've been able to write a word that didn't somehow come back to her in some way. She's just in there in everything. I'm about to workshop a play that I wrote last year, and when that happens, I'll have to do some more redrafting and stuff of it. But just going back and looking at it now, I'm like, "Oh, this is just another play I wrote about my mom." (laughs) Everything keeps coming back to her in that way. And I think that it's because there's something about self-generation when we're talking about creating things. Like the actor, we have to do it. We have to generate things from our lives, because the character is always going to be a little bit through our gaze.

But when you're writing something, specifically when you're writing new stories, because there's so much freedom there—the character can say anything I want them to say—so much of what their saying is coming directly from me, in a way that sometimes acting isn't that. We're translating, when we're acting, the voices of the playwrights and the performances that have come before, all the other artists in the room: we're translating that through our bodies and through our voices out into this new message. And so we are a conduit for it, and some of us goes into it. But it is so much more than that. When you're writing, so much of it is just from you. And so I find a lot more of her there.

Dana: Well, I keep thinking about what you said earlier in this conversation. You talked about that experience of her telling you to go find your tribe, how it went from being a stagehand to the lead, and then she dies; that it was this dark fairy tale. And I also know that you sort of write in a—there is a fairy tale aspect, there is an unnatural and otherworldly element to how you write, not a literal living-room drama. So that's interesting, that she's coming up, but she's still not coming up literally. Right?

Lane: Yeah.

Dana: Then how is she coming up? Is she taking on different forms? Or not even her, but the loss of her is coming up? Or is anger coming? Is all of it coming up? Because it's just like this podcast, to be honest. And you said earlier too that it sucks. All you said was, "It sucks that she's gone," and then you stopped speaking. And so I keep thinking about this podcast as a form of talking about my mom, and how wonderful it is, and isn't it great that I started this thing.

But then I have days, like kind of today. I don't kind of want to do it. I don't really want to fucking process it.

Lane: (laugh) True.

Dana: But that's sometimes how I feel when I start going, "I'm going to write a story for The Moth," or, "I'm going to journal about it." I'm like, "I don't know if I want to keep talking to my friends." But then I have days where I just want my mother back. It's like, "Nah, I don't want to put a Facebook post up about my mother, and make some beautiful story." I mean I do, because I want to share it, and I want to get it out of my body. That's why you're writing. That's why I'm doing a podcast. I want it out of me. But truthfully, I don't want to have to do the podcast. I want to have just my mom back, and being healthy and being not riddled with cancer, or being not an addict who's dealing with neuropathy and depression.

Lane: I think it's talking to the same kind of stuff that we were talking about earlier. When is it performative? Even if it's performative for you.

Dana: Even if it's healthy. I'm putting a Facebook post up sometimes 'cause it's healthy. It feels good. I want to get it out. And then I want people to see that post, or read that play, or listen to this podcast. Of course you want them to get something from it. You want them to feel less alone.

Lane: Well, and I want to share my grief. The feeling of other people experiencing this with me, it's less just all on me. And a willingness to share those things, when we're talking about art, like a play or like a podcast—when we're talking about consuming art, people are willing to share those things in a way. If I sit you in a room and just start telling you all the sad stories about my mom, and start crying—I don't want to put that onto people. But if I can share it in art, then it's a way for me at least to—not process it; I think that word is so complicated and loaded—but it's a way for me spread this out and lessen the load in just one of the holes in my heart. I can kind of spread it out over multiple. And people are willing to take that on, and to be there with me, [25:00] and to examine that with me, and to examine it in their own lives, because I've presented it now in a way that is to a certain extent universal. And I think that that's what this kind of stuff does in a positive way.

But I understand the question of, "Well, how much is this me just performing again?" Maybe for me, or maybe even for her. How much of this is me trying to set up some sort of a monument?

Dana: How precious is this? How precious is this? And everyone's lost someone, so get over it. "Get over your mom," or "Get over your dad," or "You didn't have it that bad. You at least had a mom." And then I start feeling guilty. I go, "Well, I had her for," how long? 36 years? And she was really great for a lot of it, and amazing. And then I don't want people to misinterpret anything. Just like your play, people will misinterpret it. Or they're going to take your story and then put all this stuff on it, just like any playwright.

Lane: Just like any play.

Dana: That must be hard. So I'm curious too, about when you start putting something so personal out there, and then you're in a talkback, and they're like, "This is a play about..."

Lane: (laughs)

Dana: "...global warming." And you're like, "Well." I mean, maybe. Maybe that's in there too. (laughs) The loss of the earth, Mother Earth, Mother mother.

Lane: It's a theme!

Dana: It's a theme!

Lane: It's a recurring theme.

Dana: But it also kind of doesn't matter if they put something on it. That's what art is. They're going to put something on it. But how has that felt then, transitioning from acting to writing, putting something so personal out there that you have intentions for it, when the intentions might change?

Lane: Oh, what a question. I do think that there's a recognition that has to go into it for me, of the transactional nature of empathy, that I am asking you to be vulnerable by being vulnerable.

Dana: So I'm going to Brené Brown you right now, and I'm going to say, "Wow, Lane, that's gorgeous."

Lane: (laughs)

Dana: Say that again, and say it slowly.

Lane: I am asking you to be vulnerable by being vulnerable.

Dana: The transactional...

Lane: Oh, sorry. That is a transactional nature of empathy, is that I offer this up to you, and if you choose to take it, you are also then offering something up, because by taking it, you are becoming vulnerable as well. And I think the hardest thing as a writer so far that I've experienced—I have yet to have a play really produced.

Dana: (laughs) Well, theater is having a tough go right now.

Lane: (laughs) We're having a moment. We're having a moment.

The hardest thing about it, is when people refuse that gift, because they don't want to pay something. And that's hard. And that's the preciousness that I have to take out of it, is like, "Well, they're refusing that gift, maybe because they can't pay something right now." And I have to be okay with that. And it's great when people do take it, and when people do offer up their vulnerability by taking mine. That's awesome. That's a really wonderful thing to feel, that we all feel as artists. But if they don't, that has to be okay with me, as much as it hurts, or as much as it feels like you're missing the point, or you're missing the message, or as much as it feels like you're not seeing me. Maybe that's just because they can't: they don't have that capacity right now. I don't know other people's trauma. And it's not my job to center myself in their life.

Dana: And just because I'm willing to talk about my mom or you're willing to write, doesn't mean everyone's ready to do that as well...

Lane: Doesn't mean everyone's ready to.

Dana: ...ready to talk or laugh or joke or process or not process. We all come to it at different times, which is also what I'm trying to explore in talking to people, is how grief is not universal.

Lane: It is not universal.

Dana: It is so complicated.

Lane: I listen to a lot of true crime podcasts.

Dana: (laughs)

Lane: I promise this has a point. And one of the things we talk about now in a way that we didn't back 20, 30 years ago, is that when you see—if there's an issue, like someone got murdered, and we see that the husband is on TV and he's not crying, there's a public perception at one time that like, "Oh, he must be cold," or "He must not have feelings. He doesn't care, so maybe he did it," kind of a thing—[30:00] where that's not necessarily the case, or we can't assume that anymore, because people process grief so differently. Not everyone is a crier. Or even if they are a crier, maybe about other things. I myself tend to cry at things that are happy. That's really what gets me.

Dana: Yeah, you do! You do.

Lane: I do. I weep when things are joyful.

Dana: You do.

Lane: That is what always gets me. But I'm not much of a crier at sad things, even in my own life. But that doesn't mean that I'm not feeling that grief, or I'm not experiencing that. And so we can't assume that about other people.

Dana: Is that because you were so angry for so long? You talked about being angry as a kid. What do you think the crying for joy is?

Lane: I think it's a—digging down that psychological pathway...

Dana: (laughs) What does your therapist say?

Lane: I think the reason that I don't cry about sad things is because I was so sad and angry when I was a preteen and dealing with both my mom dying and coming to my own terms with my own sexuality, didn't know what was going on, and if I cried when I was sad, then I was a target all the time. And so I think I learned, or I built neural pathways to protect myself, to be able to deal with that grief without that response. But I never had to do anything like that for joy, 'cause joy wasn't something I was feeling a whole lot at that time. And so when I started to really experience, especially in the theater and the arts, those beautiful moments of joy in pieces, I was more mature at that point, and able to be open with how much emotion I would be coursing through me in those moments. And so now it's something that for me is a catharsis of and a celebration of that.

Dana: Going back to kind of being resentful of, "I don't want to have to process this shit. I just want my mom back." Do you then find yourself being resentful of others who still have a mom, or got to have a mom at least till you were 31? Let's say you lost your mom today. We can't say what it would be like to lose our moms in a different point in our lives.

Lane: I have moments of resentment, for sure. But it's changed and evolved, what that resentment looks like. It's been very, very different at periods in my life. So when I was in college, it was that I don't have someone to come be my cheerleader, the way she would have been. Or I don't have a home to go back to, the way I would have if she had been around, that other people I went to school with did. When I came to Chicago after that, is a lot of, "I don't have the financial help. I don't have any sort of rock, in that way." Now that I'm in my thirties, it's a lot of—I have friends, "I've been on the phone with my mom for an hour and a half, and as soon as I'm done, I'll be able to give you a call back or chat with you." Small things like that just are like little spikes of pain, that'll always be there.

Dana: And some days they're heavier than others.

Lane: Some days they're heavier. Some days they're a lot heavier, absolutely. It's never going to go away, we know that. But the larger feeling of all-consuming rage and grief that really defined my teens has faded, has ebbed, mostly just because I didn't have time for it, if I wanted to be productive with my life. It's hard to be grieving all the time. And so you build these little ways to deal with it in your life or whatever. And then eventually you get to a point where you're not thinking about not dealing with it; you're just not dealing with it. And then you get into therapy and have to deal with it again. (laughs) And it's a vicious cycle, but it's what we have to. It's the human experience.

But it's drawn me a lot to pieces of art that I consider to be death-centric or grief-centric, because I do believe that it is the most powerful thing that we as humans have to define

the qualities that we aspire to having, is death. It's the only way that we have things like loyalty and honor and love and generosity and care. [35:00] Those things are only possible because of death, because if we didn't die, those things wouldn't mean anything.

Dana: (laughs) Jesus, you need a podcast!

Lane: (laughs)

Dana: That was so beautiful. That was beautiful, friend.

Lane: Thanks.

Dana: Is that because of the art that you've been consuming, or the art that you've been making, or both?

Lane: A little bit of both. That the art that I aspire to make...

Dana: ...in the world...

Lane: ...that I recognized that I am attracted to, because of the art that I consume.

Dana: Is there anything that you wanted to talk about, in terms of like, customs your mom passed down, or things that you guys did together, or just something you wanted to share a story about?

Lane: My mom was really into practical jokes.

Dana: You keep saying how funny she was. I love this.

Lane: She's super-funny. I've more stories about my mom being a smart-ass than I have sad stories about her. Again, she's very witty, and I think that, whenever people tell me I'm witty, it's a very special compliment to me, because I attribute that directly to my mother. She could be crass. The big thing that she did was she would do practical jokes.

And so Halloween was our big holiday when I was a kid, because it was my mom's birthday. She was born on October 31. So we would have big Halloween things, like level of Christmas was our Halloween at our house. We decorated the yard. We went all out. We had all this shit.

Dana: Costumes, everybody?

Lane: Costumes, all the costumes, all the things. But we would also have a month-long Halloween celebration.

Dana: (laughs)

Lane: And so it would be lots of Halloween things going on. And during that time, she would always do things that would just terrify me and my sister. She loves scary movies. I love scary movies now, as a part of that as well. But one time she drove us to a graveyard, in October. And it was like 7 P.M., the sun was setting, and she was like, "Let's go to the graveyard for the sunset." And my sister and I were like, "Yeah, okay! Okay." So she drove us to this graveyard. We get out of the car, and we're looking around like, "Wow, this is crazy." And then my mom hops back in the car, and drives away. And she just leaves us (laughs) at a graveyard.

Dana: Was this where the trauma started? (laughs)

Lane: Possibly! She leaves us there for like 15 minutes. And my sister at this point is bawling. And I'm just looking around like, "What do we do? We're in a fucking graveyard." (laughs) And it's turning into nighttime, and it's October. And then she drives back. She essentially just did a drive around the block, and then came back up. She pulls back up. She's laughing her ass off in the front seat, just like, "You should have seen your faces!" And she did shit like that all the time.

Dana: (laughs)

Lane: And I loved it. We would be scared and stuff in the moment, of course. But I couldn't get enough of that. And so if I ever have a child—I don't know that I will—but if I ever do, practical jokes will be a big part of my parenting.

Dana: Did your mom have a favorite costume? (laughs)

Lane: Well, kind of. She had this mask. Another thing that we did a lot in the Halloween month was, we would play hide-and-seek, only it would be, we would have to play. It'd be like enforced hide-and-seek. My sister and I would be minding our own business, doing nothing, playing in one of our rooms, and then my parents would just shout from the other room, "Hide and seek!" and then would turn off all of the lights in the house except the one in the room we were in.

Dana: (laughs)

Lane: And we would have to try and find them in the dark. And they would always pop out of things, wearing this scary mask. I'm still afraid of werewolves to this day.

Dana: This mask.

Lane: Because I think it was a werewolf mask, yeah. And she would pop out of nowhere. And this game would always end with my sister underneath the kitchen table, crying, every single time. That's where it ended.

Dana: (laughs)

Lane: But they loved it. (laughs)

Dana: Now that's a dark fairy tale.

My mom and dad had these old people masks, so old man/old woman face, and put them on. But they would dress up, and then both wear these two masks, and greet people, when they've had parties, or open the door. They didn't always dress up. So when I was in elementary school, my best friend Angela and I chose to wear them as well. So we were fifth graders. I was of course the man—I had a deep voice back then—I was the man; she was the woman. And so we were these little kids playing old people, which is also weird.

Lane: That's terrifying. That's a horror movie right there.

Dana: Yes, that's the horror. That was weird. My parents, was weird just 'cause they were my parents. It was like, "You're not old. Like, you're not that old." But they were still adults. We were freaky. And we were in suits, and she was in a little dress. I had a walker. It was very bizarre, in fifth grade.

I like to end every conversation asking my guest if they would me their mother's name and how you feel about her in this moment, today, after this conversation. What's your feeling, and how're you remembering her?

Lane: [40:00] Her name was Sarah: Sarah Jane Flores. And I think I feel about her right now the way I trained myself to feel, which is grateful. But sometimes things poke through that—and it's happening right now a little bit—where I'll always wish that I had more to be grateful for. And I think that's human. But in a way, I'm just glad that I have that capacity to be grateful, 'cause there's just nothing I've experienced quite as earth-shattering as all of this. But again, that was a training. I wasn't grateful for a really long time. That I couldn't recognize that that's something that I needed for a really long time, so I'm grateful now too that I can be too, absolutely.

You're the best. I love you.

Dana: I love you. Thanks for sharing today.

Lane: Absolutely. Thank you for inviting me to do this.

Dana: [start outro] I actually did this interview this summer, and I learned after the interview that Lane was applying to go back to school at Loyola here in Chicago for the Classics, specifically Greek and Latin language and culture. And he got accepted! So I recently reached out to him and said, "Hey, we talk about your writing a lot in this episode. Maybe you'd want to share some of your writing, if it's about your mother? Maybe a piece of a play or a poem?" And he said, "Yeah, I actually have a poem called demeter." And Demeter was the Greek grain goddess and mother of Persephone, in case you didn't know. Yeah, I just learned that recently myself. So she doesn't get talked about all the time in myth, but when she does, it's always extremely important, which is also kind of how the Greeks talk about mothers in general. So when she comes up, it's a big deal.

So here's Lane reading his poem demeter.

Lane: summer is the darkest

time for what it

remembers. watch agave light

slurry through thickness and

fold back into loam, dark

mulch, inventor of flowers

and sacred oak roots. here most

i am afraid. how can I say to her (genius, germ, gentle progenitor, architect of wormholes in dirt and space) how can i say i fear You

mother?

You joined the curdled soil

before I knew the length of

shadows. now

all the storms wear Your face. the corn too darkens with fullness. how strange,

She is the most and the least like a

human. unobserved, except

in memoriam. so goes the earth

Dana: So thanks for listening and go check out our website at mothersgravepod.com... it's like, how do I transition out of that poem? (laughs) I don't know how to do it. I have been trying for the last hour and a half. It's difficult. (laughs) So watch this transition: If you guys like dark things like that poem, go check out our website for ghoulish behind-the-scenes images... see, it's just too difficult.

So go check out our website at mothersgravepod.com, and you can see behind-the-scenes images of this episode; pictures of Lane as a little baby, in his Halloween costumes; pictures of his mom as a witch. You can also see photos of Angela and I in our old-people masks that we talk about in this episode. And on our website, you can also learn [45:00] about the Black AIDS Institute, which is a leader in ending HIV in Black America. This institute is really important to Lane. They are revolutionizing the HIV service industry to center and uplift Black experiences, to allow Black people to live their fullest, healthiest lives with dignity, care, and respect. You can read more about them at our website, or go to blackaids.org.

I want to thank Lane for talking with me and for sharing that gorgeous poem. I also want to thank Suzi Pond, one of my oldest friends, with Redbird Media Group for editing and producing this podcast; Alice Anderson for sound mixing; Na'Toria Marketing and Design for our website; Meredith Montgomery for the logo and individual episode designs; and Matt Chapman for his theme music. And special thanks to Jill Wolf (my therapist), Heather Bodie, Lora Nicole, Danny Bravman, Jonathan Baude, and all of my friends for your love and support. It means a lot. Thank you.

I never ever went as a sexy devil or a sexy witch for Halloween, ever. In college I went as a dead prom queen once, but I wouldn't say it was sexy, since I had a slit in my throat with blood coming down, white face makeup on, a pageboy wig, and I'm sure I was high for most of the night. I don't remember a lot of it. I also went as a grown-up Teletubby my sophomore year of college. When I was younger, I went as Nurse Ratched from Cuckoo's Nest, way before the TV show, way before it was popular. I went as a large gumball machine, with a big bag around me, and individual balloons inside. Yeah, hot. When I was eight years old, I went as Doc Brown from Back to the Future, and almost everything I was wearing—and most Halloweens, everything I was wearing—was stolen from Glenbard North High School, where my mom taught biology. (laughs) She got so much stuff from that theater department and from that biology classroom that I used in my costumes. When I was Doc Brown, I was wearing a full lab

coat; pants; large goggles; lab gloves; a garter belt around my waist that she put glass test-tubes in, and little beakers—I think it even had a large lighter on me, but I can't remember, but now that I think about it, that feels very dangerous—and pencils in my little pocket protector; and a big, white, crazy, hair-going-every-which-way wig. Doc Brown, eight years old.

My mom let me do whatever I wanted, the weirder, the better. "Go for it. Do what you need to do." She was really creative, and really encouraged that in me. Come on, as a fifth grader, I went as an old man, in fifth grade. Yeah, my mom was cool.

Talk to you guys next time. [end 48:14]