

# MG Season 3 Ep4 Kevin Transcript

[00:00:00] **Kevin:** It happened at Thanksgiving. Ask all your gay friends. They came out on a major holiday.

[00:00:06] **Dana:** Major holiday. Yeah. No, you, I hear that a lot. You're like, all right. Yep, yep. It's like the stakes are vague. The emotions are vague, but it's an important time. It's the only time they can get away too. Right? You're like, it's a holiday and it's now the time.

[00:00:18] Yeah. Yeah. It's the

[00:00:19] moment.

[00:00:19] **Kevin:** We had been at my grandparents, my dad's parents. Um, my dad has two sisters. Each of them has a lesbian daughter. Um, the oldest is a couple years older than me, and she was at Thanksgiving with her fiance and was showing off the ring, and my mom was a fan of diamonds. She, she loved a diamond ring and so she was like super into the conversation looking at the ring.

[00:00:52] We got home later and we were sitting around the table, just my brother, my mom and I, and she said something about Kelly and her fiance and how she just didn't think it was right. You know, she's happy for them, but just doesn't think it's right. And kind of opened it up to, what do you think? And my brother jumped in and was like, I think, you know, we're living in a different time than, you know, when we were little.

[00:01:32] I think it's more accepted now. I think people should be able to live their lives and you know, be who they they wanna be and be with who they wanna be with. And my mom turned to me and said, well, what do you think? And I said, I think we should go in the other room and have a talk.

[00:02:13] **Dana:** Hey friend. Welcome to, I Swear on My Mother's Grave. I like to say that this is a show where you come for the grief, but you stay for the sass. Yeah, that's my new tagline for this season. You come for the grief, you stay for the sass. So welcome. If you're new here. Hi, thanks for being here and if you're returning, hi, and I miss you.

[00:02:36] I've missed you. Thank you for being so patient with me as I took some time away, I was trying to practice what I preach, and for those of you

who don't know, I lost my beloved grandmother of 96 years this summer. In June, and if you follow me on Instagram or you get the newsletter, or you've been listening to the show for a couple years, you know that my grandmother is pretty much like my second mom and was a sister to me and my best friend.

[00:03:05] I'm an only child, and I had my grandmother close to me, literally in proximity to me, uh, in my hometown for over 20 years. And I would visit her every day at her nursing home window during the pandemic because I couldn't get into the building and we would talk on cell phones through the window, and she is the love of my life.

[00:03:28] And she died this summer, about 45 minutes after her favorite show, jeopardy ended, and I was in the room with her, along with my husband and her caretaker. And I just, I feel so grateful that I got to be there and watch her transition out of this world. I was thinking during that time that. I, I felt so lucky to be there because I think I was there on behalf of my mom too.

[00:03:54] Um, my mom and her sister, my mom, uh, sister died in her twenties. So my grandma, my grandma buried both her children during her lifetime. And so I felt like I got to be there almost as a conduit for them, and I could feel their energy and I could feel their love kind of radiating through me at my grandmother telling her, it's okay, you can go.

[00:04:16] You've been an amazing, strong mother, grandmother, friend, wife, girlfriend, and it's, it's okay. It's time. You've lived a great life and you're safe, you know, and maybe they're reunited in the afterlife. My mom, her sister, my grandma's husband, who knows. But wherever she is now, I feel so at peace that I got to be there and that I had my grandma for as long as I did.

[00:04:46] For those of you who, who have been listening to the show know that I got married last year on the patio of my grandma's nursing home. Yep. I like to joke that it's every young girl's dream, you know what I mean? But it was, it was beautiful and romantic. And so my grandma died a year and a day after our wedding, and so yeah, she died the day after our wedding anniversary because, you know, she wanted her own day.

[00:05:08] You know what I mean? She wasn't gonna share it with us. So yeah, she brought us back to the nursing home, back to the place of wonderful memories and love, and I have to just bask in the goodness and the gratitude, um, and then cry, and then I get to cry a lot and look at pictures. But I'm back. I'm here. I needed that time to take a break.

[00:05:30] I definitely didn't wanna work on a grief podcast. Um, and because I'm my own boss, I was able to do that. So thanks for your patience and thanks for all the, the emails and the messages and the love and the support. You guys are amazing. So thank you so much, and I'm back ready to finish season three. We have five more amazing episodes to go with some incredible guests, and this episode today was supposed to be released during Pride month in June.

[00:05:57] I was so upset I couldn't get it done before my grandmother passed away, and I was like, that was gonna, that was gonna go out in June and dah, dah, dah. And then I realized... what we should be celebrating our L G B T Q I A, friends and family all year round. It doesn't have to just be in June, so we should be speaking up for them, loving them, supporting them, rallying for them, and accepting them all year round.

[00:06:20] And so here we are, August. What better time to celebrate Pride. Today's guest is a dear friend of mine, and this is an episode about how a Christian mother struggled to accept her son's sexuality even though she deeply loved him and he loved her. This is an episode about a son never wanting to disappoint his mother.

[00:06:42] It's about how his mother learned sign language later in life and worked with the deaf in the hard of hearing and how she avoided the spotlight for most of her life. Today's guest said, I think in general, my mom never accepted her fabulousness. She kind of got lost being the middle child and a family of big personalities, and then she got married and became a mom, and her life became all about her family.

[00:07:05] She didn't like the spotlight on her and never thought anyone would be interested in her story. This is her story told through her son. This is Kevin Bishop.

[00:07:22] The photo of you dancing cheek to cheek with your mom? Uh, I think it's like at your cousin's wedding.

[00:07:28] **Kevin:** Yeah.

[00:07:28] **Dana:** Right. It was six weeks before she passed.

[00:07:30] **Kevin:** It was, yeah.

[00:07:31] **Dana:** And it's such a beautiful photo. There's like one angle of you looking off into the distance and there's one where you two are looking at each other.

[00:07:39] And you said, this was my mom's first dance of her life.

[00:07:43] **Kevin:** Yeah.

[00:07:44] **Dana:** She'd been raised, dancing was a sin.

[00:07:46] **Kevin:** Yeah.

[00:07:47] **Dana:** But she'd always wanted to dance. She was nervous because she didn't know how. And this is a photo of her, she's not like 10...

[00:07:55] **Kevin:** no.

[00:07:55] **Dana:** ...5, 15, 20. She's in her like 50s, right? Or 60s.

[00:07:58] **Kevin:** 56. Yeah.

[00:08:00] **Dana:** Tell me, I mean, I don't wanna unpack religion with you all morning.

[00:08:03] I dunno how much time we have, but I was upset about that part.

[00:08:06] **Kevin:** Yeah.

[00:08:07] **Dana:** Right. The sin part. I just, yeah, tell me about that. 'cause when I saw that, I, I just had to lead with it 'cause it really took me. I don't know. It took me, it took my breath away. Yeah.

[00:08:16] **Kevin:** Um, it was a really big honor, emotional moment, I guess when, um, I got to share the first dance that my mom had ever had with her.

[00:08:32] Um, so a little context, my mom grew up in a family where her dad was a minister, very conservative family. Her mom, my grandmother basically ran everything behind the scenes. Right. So, and it's a small community in Kansas, so there was a lot...

[00:08:54] **Dana:** mm-hmm.

[00:08:55] **Kevin:** ...of how is the family perceived in the community. So she was raised that dancing was a sin. I remember. Growing up that was taught to me as well. I wanted to go to middle school dances and high school dances and that sort of thing. And I remember...

[00:09:20] **Dana:** because the sexuality of it, right? Is that the idea?

[00:09:22] **Kevin:** 'cause dancing is sexy.

[00:09:24] **Dana:** No, it's sexy. It's hot baby. I've seen Flash Dance, yes. That's the idea though, right? Like bodies touching or that was the, am I correct?

[00:09:31] **Kevin:** Well, and where it takes place, it takes place in, you know, bars or clubs or that sort of thing. And there's a lot of stuff that stuff going on there that, you know, we shouldn't be associated with. We shouldn't be seen in those places doing those things.

[00:09:53] Um, and so it was really interesting for me because I did, I pushed on my parents a little bit and I. My mom did let me go to middle school and high school dances. I later found out that she called my grandma before I went to my first dance to talk her, talk to her about this.

[00:10:18] **Dana:** Like get her opinion, like...

[00:10:19] **Kevin:** yeah. To see if it was, you know, okay for a kid to go to a dance. I was also raised, we didn't go to the movie theater. Looking back, it's all stuff that seems so innocuous to me, but at the time it was just, that's the way I grew up. It was commonly accepted. So I say all of that to give context to why my mom had never danced.

[00:10:48] You know, it was really hard for her to let go of the beliefs she was raised with, even though she could kind of let go of it with her kids for herself. There was still some sort of block. And I think at the point we were at this wedding, knowing her illness was fairly progressed, I think she was at the place where she was like, I'm gonna do the things that I wanted to do, and she was super self-conscious. Because she never learned to dance, and I'm like, nobody knows how to dance. We all just get out here and move.

[00:11:30] **Dana:** Right, right. Did she say in that moment, did she say, this is my first, or did you know, like you knew this was her first dance, or did she or She said it? She, yeah, out loud.

[00:11:40] **Kevin:** I asked her to dance with me and she was really hesitant.

[00:11:46] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:11:46] **Kevin:** And I think wanted to make the memory for me more than even for her. She spent the last part of her life. I've got Kleenexes here because this is gonna get tough, but she spent the last part of her life doing everything she could to make memories with my brother, me and her grandkids. My mom pushed herself through significant pain and discomfort.

[00:12:18] Physically and emotionally to do all of these things, to come visit me and Corey to spend a week at Disney where she could, she didn't have a lot of physical stamina at that point. She never complained. She never hesitated in terms of maybe I don't want to do this today.

[00:12:43] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:12:43] **Kevin:** She just did it.

[00:12:44] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:12:45] **Kevin:** Because she knew for us it was, she was making memories.

[00:12:51] **Dana:** Yeah. I wish she could have danced at your wedding.

[00:12:57] **Kevin:** I know.

[00:12:57] **Dana:** I know. Yeah. I kept looking at that photo thinking I'd read it wrong. I, and I was at your wedding in Mexico. It was amazing. Yeah. But I looked at the caption of that photo and I thought, God, it looks like a wedding photo- like it looks like the dance with your mom.

[00:13:12] **Kevin:** Yeah.

[00:13:13] **Dana:** You know, and then I was like, no, this is his cousin's wedding. This is a different moment, but. I was like, oh.

[00:13:19] **Kevin:** It was tough not to have her there. But also, again, the belief she was raised with, like having a gay kid was a, a challenge for her for a long time.

[00:13:34] And I think, you know, I wonder would she have attended? Like, would it have been too much? And so as terrible as it sometimes feels to think this, I wonder if, you know, watching this wedding from the other side, whatever that might be, was maybe more joyful and less of a, I don't know, like a contradiction for her. In her feelings.

[00:14:14] **Dana:** Mmm. Than having to be present physically.

[00:14:16] **Kevin:** I don't know. Yeah. You know, I think,

[00:14:17] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:14:17] **Kevin:** I give my mom a lot of credit because she came a long way over the years, but I know it was really, really tough for her. We had some difficult conversations around it, um, to the point where, you know, I had to at one point say, we can't have this conversation anymore.

[00:14:48] Every time we have a conversation like this, like you might as well be punching me in the gut physically. Like that's what it feels like to me. And that I know was tough for her because she would never do anything to hurt her kids, but, the way she saw it, she was looking out for me. And the way I saw it was, no, this is, this is painful. You're inflicting pain.

[00:15:21] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:15:23] **Kevin:** And to her credit, we didn't have that conversation ever again after that.

[00:15:28] **Dana:** And she just accepted, didn't accept, but let it lie. You mean like isn't gonna fully ever accept it, but would she include Cory though, your husband? Would she wanna know about him? Would she want to Right, ask questions about his life or, or would she almost pretend like it didn't exist, you know, that part of your life?

[00:15:51] **Kevin:** Yeah, it was a journey. Honestly, we probably went through all of that before we got to the place where it was. Um, I. It was okay to talk about. I mean, I always talked about stuff. I'm pretty open with my life.

[00:16:12] Um, but yeah, it took a while for them, both my parents to ask or to feel comfortable coming and staying at our house, which honestly they only did once. Um, now my mom passed in 2009, so Cory and I had at that point only been together for four or five years. So still long time, but you know.

[00:16:44] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:16:44] **Kevin:** That was their, that was their first and...

[00:16:46] **Dana:** wow.

[00:16:47] **Kevin:** My mom's only visit to our home and it was great. We had a great time. I have a note that she left. When they left that said what a wonderful time they had and that she loves us both. And you know, it's, I'm so glad we got there. But again, I feel like her illness played, it accelerated all of this for her,

[00:17:18] **Dana:** which is like a co what a complicated blessing. Like Right. You're like, oh good.

[00:17:23] **Kevin:** Yeah.

[00:17:24] **Dana:** It pushed it further for her to accept and have more memories and love me and say, and grab onto me, and, and yet it took her, you know, yeah. Wait, if it in her fifties, like I'd rather it didn't propel and it didn't, it accelerated the end of her life, but it also accelerated progression and yeah, progressive even.

[00:17:43] Yeah.

[00:17:43] **Kevin:** That's

[00:17:44] **Dana:** ...ideas. Yeah.

[00:17:45] **Kevin:** Yeah. Honestly, hard for me...

[00:17:47] **Dana:** yeah.

[00:17:47] **Kevin:** ...to think about sometimes too, because I'm so grateful for the result. Right.

[00:17:53] **Dana:** Right.

[00:17:54] **Kevin:** That I wish that there hadn't had to be the suffering...

[00:18:00] **Dana:** mm-hmm.



[00:18:00] **Kevin:** To get there.

[00:18:01] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:18:02] **Kevin:** Um, on all our parts, but especially for her, the physical, um, the physical suffering and the emotional stuff.

[00:18:12] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:18:13] **Kevin:** But,

[00:18:14] **Dana:** yeah. Did you grapple with your faith? I actually have never asked you this.

[00:18:18] **Kevin:** Oh yeah. I've, I've been through it.

[00:18:25] So again, it's pretty complex because it goes beyond just what are your personal beliefs into I. Uh, not only who am I as a person, but who am I as a part of this family who is also somewhat well-known in the community. So, um, interestingly, my cousin was in town this week and we were talking about it. So my mom's brother's, uh, oldest, who is my age, and we were talking about how all the grandkids, we were part of the family business essentially.

[00:19:03] You know, it didn't make a lot of money being a minister in small town Kansas.

[00:19:08] **Dana:** No

[00:19:08] **Kevin:** . But we were part of the machine

[00:19:11] and

[00:19:11] **Dana:** to get the message out to also Yeah, tend to be like beacons of goodness right. Out there in the worlds and in the community, right?

[00:19:20] **Kevin:** Yes.

[00:19:20] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:19:21] **Kevin:** And my grandmother had us singing in church and my granddad had a radio broadcast, so we were on the radio.

[00:19:34] They would take us around to different churches where he would be a guest minister and we would perform.

[00:19:41] **Dana:** Oh yeah, you were touring show. Cool. You were, yeah. You were on tour.

[00:19:44] **Kevin:** We were... yes, yes, a hundred percent. Um, so anyway, all of that to say your, your faith is sort of interwoven with your family when it's, when you're in that situation and you feel such a connection to your family that you don't necessarily question the other part.

[00:20:12] Right. The faith part. I think as I got older, I definitely had more questions and you know, like I. Um, other people in the world don't believe this. What does that mean for them? Mm-hmm. You're right. Mm-hmm. And then once I got to college, I think that's where I really started, first of all, finding out who I was as an independent entity, you know, outside of the family biz.

[00:20:42] Um, and that's where I really started questioning a lot. And I was also raised that if you, you know, you should pray about the things that you're grappling with or you're struggling with. And my sexual orientation was one of those things because I was hearing messages that people, you know, that are gay or lesbian or trans are, we should show compassion, but they're clearly...

[00:21:19] they have problems. So I spent a lot of my life praying like, please make me different, God. You know, like, please, this is gonna be hard for me, painful for my family. Honestly, that was probably my biggest concern. Um,

[00:21:39] **Dana:** did you, did you ever pray to just be accepted?

[00:21:44] **Kevin:** I, and this is how I came out to my mom.

[00:21:48] I could tell that whole crazy story, but the, the gist of it is I stopped praying to be changed and started praying to have this space to be the person I was meant to be. And that's when I found myself more at peace with who I was. That's what I told my mom. I'm like, I did all the praying to be different.

[00:22:17] I did all the praying to be the person that I was taught to be, and all that did was cause me more turmoil. Um, and when I changed my prayer to I wanna become the person that I'm meant to be, everything changed. Like I became more fully myself. Um, I think people started to see a light in inside of me that maybe had been, I don't know, somewhat hidden before.

[00:22:57] Um, and that's honestly when things in my own life started to kind of get on a track that I was happy with, I was doing more, you know, I was getting cast more in shows. I was getting these opportunities to sing in different venues, and I was thrilled with the people that I was surrounding myself with, the friends that I had, you know, chosen to be my family in Chicago.

[00:23:29] And life just suddenly felt light and joyful. Um, aside from knowing that this was super painful for my mom, that was hard. And that was honestly my, my biggest fear in coming out was hurting her because we've been so close and she's been so supportive of me in so many ways. I didn't want that to... somehow be diminished or go away.

[00:24:05] **Dana:** Did you do it right in front of her? Like were you sitting across from her?

[00:24:09] **Kevin:** I did. Yeah. Actually it happened at Thanksgiving. Ask all your gay friends. They came out on a major holiday.

[00:24:17] **Dana:** Yeah, major holiday. Yeah. No, you hear that a lot. You're like, all right. Yep, yep. It's like the stakes are vague. The emotions are vague, but it's an important time.

[00:24:26] It's the only time they can get away too. Right? You're like, it's a holiday and it's now the time.

[00:24:30] **Kevin:** Yeah.

[00:24:30] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:24:31] **Kevin:** We had been at my grandparents, my dad's parents. Um, my dad has two sisters. Each of them has a lesbian daughter. Um, The oldest is a couple years older than me and she was at Thanksgiving with her fiance and was showing off the ring, and my mom was a fan of diamonds.

[00:24:55] She, she loved a diamond ring and so she was like super into the conversation looking at the ring. We got home later and we were sitting around the table, just my brother, my mom and I, and she said something about Kelly and her fiance and how she just didn't think it was right, you know, she's happy for them, but just doesn't think it's right.

[00:25:29] And kind of opened it up to, what do you think? And my brother jumped in and was like, I think, you know, we're living in a different time than

you know, when we were little, I think it's more accepted now. I think people should be able to live their lives and, you know, be who they they wanna be and be with who they wanna be with.

[00:25:57] And my mom turned to me and said, well, what do you think? And I said, I think we should go in the other room and have a talk.

[00:26:08] **Dana:** Wow. Wow.

[00:26:10] **Kevin:** And so we did. And tears. Lots of tears.

[00:26:15] **Dana:** Both sides.

[00:26:16] **Kevin:** Both sides.

[00:26:16] **Dana:** Both sides are crying.

[00:26:17] Both sides.

[00:26:18] **Kevin:** Yeah. Wow.

[00:26:19] Wow. The first, yeah, it was a lot. The first thing she asked me was if I was HIV positive.

[00:26:29] **Dana:** Um, which you also hear is a, again, a big fear of parents who, when their kids come out or they learn their kids are gay, their biggest fear is them. Yep. Dying

[00:26:36] **Kevin:** late nineties.

[00:26:38] **Dana:** Yep.

[00:26:38] **Kevin:** So...

[00:26:39] **Dana:** Yep.

[00:26:39] **Kevin:** Still a huge, huge, um, challenge.

[00:26:43] **Dana:** But don't you think she turned to you because maybe, I mean, she turned to both her sons, but then she didn't let it lie.

[00:26:49] Then she turned right at, looked right at you and asked you that. Almost like, I know, or, or, or I don't even know, I don't wanna put words in your mom, but like that feeling of I'm gonna look to my other son.

[00:27:01] **Kevin:** Mm-hmm.

[00:27:02] **Dana:** And be like, where are you at? I don't know if it's some subliminal, like, is now the moment.

[00:27:07] Tell me the truth. Right? Yeah. But you tell me. I don't, I don't wanna assume that your mom knew anything about your sexual orientation, but...

[00:27:15] **Kevin:** I think it's possible. She never, we never talked about it, um, in terms of whether or not she knew. So I think it's possible she did, you know, amidst all of our sobbing together.

[00:27:33] Tell me I love you. That's never changing. Um, and she felt really badly that I hadn't been able to, or hadn't felt comfortable to tell her before. We were a long way off from acceptance at that point still.

[00:27:54] **Dana:** But that she could still articulate those two things is pretty extraordinary.

[00:27:57] **Kevin:** Yeah, I think, and I mean, that speaks to who my mom was as a mother.

[00:28:03] Like she, again, it was, her kids were first in her life, um, no matter what. And I think, you know, we challenged her in a lot of ways. I didn't, most of my life I was the closeted gay kid who just wanted to be loved and adored, right? So I got good grades. I sang every time my grandma or my mom asked me to. I followed all the rules.

[00:28:31] I tried to make sure everyone else followed the rules. Because I, I didn't want anything to potentially, um, I don't know, like disappoint my mom and I got away with that for a long time, and then I didn't.

[00:28:53] **Dana:** Yeah. Ugh, ugh.

[00:28:55] **Kevin:** You know, my brother also, um, He and his girlfriend at the time got pregnant before they were married, which was also a big thing for my mom and you know, dad as well.

[00:29:10] But the way, again, the way my mom was raised and had raised us, we were just like given it to her left and right.

[00:29:19] **Dana:** Yeah, right.

[00:29:20] **Kevin:** And it was all kind of around the time same time ...

[00:29:22] **Dana:** what guys got for me. Yeah. You start dealing drugs and like you've got, you've got a whole, yeah, a whole other life. I was gonna go back to what you just said about singing, because that was something that you told me.

[00:29:33] You are a beautiful singer. I. Um, musical theater and cabaret. I mean, you, you were a great singer, but you said that your mother loved to hear you sing and that, um, that was like her favorite thing. Was there, was there something that you sang that she loved the most? You know, was there a, did she have requests, you know, or a favorite show you did?

[00:29:55] **Kevin:** Most of what she would request me to sing was something at church. Um, she actually had me do a whole, uh, sort of set, recorded on CD of songs that she loved to hear me sing. My granddad again, like having this radio program. He also had a recording studio at home. And so, um, yeah, I recorded all of these songs for her, which meant a lot.

[00:30:34] It was, um, around the time she was getting sick. And so she, I think, played that CD a lot. But it was a lot of songs about, well, the stuff we grew up singing in church. So a lot of songs about Jesus, a lot of songs about heaven. Um, yeah. And I think that, I think that was comforting for her, knowing that she was ill.

[00:31:09] She had a really strong faith up to the very end. Um, she very much believed in heaven. She was looking forward to seeing her grandparents.

[00:31:21] **Dana:** Yeah. Yeah. What was her heaven? What do you think her heaven is? Is it, is it seeing her grand, her, her parents, and is that what she...

[00:31:28] **Kevin:** it's a very literal interpretation of what's in the Bible, like streets of gold, mansions.

[00:31:35] **Dana:** Oh.

[00:31:35] **Kevin:** And I remember toward the end, she was really feeling awful physically. And I remember her saying, I'm ready. I'm ready to go, which was

hard to hear. Um, and her friend who was there at the same time, uh, said, well, your mansion must not be ready yet. And she said, that's okay. I'll stay with grandma and grandpa until it's done.

[00:32:13] **Dana:** Oh my god, Kevin. It is not even fucking noon. I'm not even religious and I'm over here losing my, wow.

[00:32:26] **Kevin:** It was...

[00:32:27] **Dana:** I hope that happened for her. God, I hope that happened for her. But I do hope she had like good plumbing put in when it was ready. You know what I mean? You want all the things done when you move in.

[00:32:36] **Kevin:** Yeah.

[00:32:36] **Dana:** But like, I hope she had diamonds. Was she given diamonds? Was she, you know, what did she get, did she get to dance up there? Did she get to do all the things? Well, what is, I'm not like, what do you think I'm ready means? Like she was in pain and she didn't wanna be in pain anymore. She was ready with her god. She had loved her children to the most she could. I wonder what that means, that phrase. I'm ready.

[00:33:00] **Kevin:** She was really tired, so my mom had ovarian cancer. Um, she was diagnosed in 2007. She passed away in March, 2009. She did respond to treatment pretty well for a while, and then it stopped working and it stopped.

[00:33:25] It was January or February of 2009. She, um, they basically told her there's nothing else we can do, and that was a whole conversation as well where I lost my mind. They called, my parents, called and talked to me about it. And I could not accept that. Like there has to be something else. Um, we all sobbed. Um, but it didn't take much time being off treatment before she started feeling really terrible and the treatments were no joke either.

[00:34:11] **Dana:** Right, right, right.

[00:34:12] **Kevin:** Like, you know, chemo is...

[00:34:14] **Dana:** no joke.

[00:34:14] **Kevin:** Awful.

[00:34:15] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:34:16] **Kevin:** But she was really tired. She was in a lot of pain. She couldn't do much of anything. She was on some pretty heavy, uh, medication to manage comfort. My mom was somebody who was constantly moving. She was, you know, she was kind of, I would call her personality understated in general.

[00:34:51] Like she had a great sense of humor, but it took a while to get her to laugh. And she very rarely just cackled, right?

[00:35:00] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:35:01] **Kevin:** She had friends. She didn't wanna be the center of attention, but she was always on the go. She, um, Whether she was working, she was a sign language interpreter for deaf and hard of hearing change.

[00:35:16] **Dana:** We're gonna, yeah, we're gonna make, I'm, we're gonna gonna get to that, we're gonna totally get to that.

[00:35:19] **Kevin:** And then, um, she was always at my grandparents' house helping them with stuff or shopping or whatever it was. She just didn't sit still. And I definitely get that from her. Um, so being at this time and place where she wasn't able to do any of that, I think she was just, she didn't feel like herself anymore.

[00:35:47] And that was probably the hardest part. She wanted to be with her grandkids and playing and, you know. Yeah.

[00:36:00] **Dana:** Yeah. Like what's an existence if you can't be out in it? Um,

[00:36:05] **Kevin:** Exactly.

[00:36:05] **Dana:** Yeah. What did you said to me earlier, like in an, uh, a message that your mom got lost, you know, being the middle child and a family of big personalities and she became a mom and she got married and her life became all better family and she didn't like the spotlight on her, which is what you just alluded to earlier.

[00:36:24] **Kevin:** Yeah.



[00:36:24] **Dana:** And she never thought anyone would be interested in her story.

[00:36:27] **Kevin:** Oh yeah.

[00:36:28] **Dana:** When you hear that back, what do you think that is? Is that humility in like, living a life of faith? You know, um, I don't, or am I now I'm just like, make it a Hallmark TV movie of this. Yeah. But...

[00:36:40] **Kevin:** I think there's some of that. Yeah. I also think, um, so I'll paint the picture here.

[00:36:48] My granddad, her dad, huge personality. Big, you know, he was a minister. Loved to be up in front of people.

[00:36:58] **Dana:** Takes, takes the energy in the room. The energy in the room is him.

[00:37:01] **Kevin:** Yeah. Laughing with people, um, telling jokes. He was a big personality. My grandmother was also a big personality, but again, sort of behind the scenes, we all knew she was running everything right.

[00:37:21] She managed the money, she managed their social calendar.

[00:37:25] **Dana:** The home.

[00:37:25] **Kevin:** She right the home. Everything was grandma. And she's actually, you know, between my granddad and my grandma, we spent more time with my grandma. Um, my mom's older sister, was the defiant one in the family. Right. She did all the things that you were not supposed to do, drink, smoke, go to the bars, you know, dance.

[00:37:56] Um, and then my mom had a younger brother who was the boy who did everything my grandmother wanted him to, and I think still is, even though my grandma's now gone, but you know, really, um, stood out because he, he was, I don't know, my grandma wanted a teacher in the family. He was a teacher. My grandma, you know, wanted another minister in the family.

[00:38:28] So he decided he would do that as well. Um, and I think my mom just kind of, she, she did all the right things. She wasn't an uninteresting person at all, but I think in that mix, the way she grew up was just overshadowed by these other, other personalities. She didn't, she had a lovely voice as well. She

could sing. She didn't ever wanna get up and do that. That was like her parents' thing or her kids' thing.

[00:39:04] **Dana:** So when did you hear her sing privately with like you guys or you'd sing together?

[00:39:09] **Kevin:** Yeah, yeah. Yeah. She would, when we were really little, she would sing to us. Um, also, you know, going to church every week. Right.

[00:39:18] **Dana:** That's true. Right, right.

[00:39:20] **Kevin:** And her parents did get her, I remember one time specifically, they got her to get up and sing with them, and I think she was super uncomfortable, but she sounded great. So I don't, I don't know that her parents encouraged her in the way that she encouraged my brother and I to do things.

[00:39:48] And she often talked about how, you know, she was questioned a lot as a kid when she would make a decision, well, are you sure you wanna do that? Are you sure that's the right thing? And I think that also caused her to kind of be a little bit more timid in how she approached some things.

[00:40:11] **Dana:** Yeah. As a child. Yeah. Like somebody says that to me at 40 and they're like, you sure you wanna do that? And I'm still like, I don't know. What do you think?

[00:40:17] **Kevin:** Right.

[00:40:17] **Dana:** Like as a child, I can barely make decisions now as a child. Yeah, of course. You, yes, of course. I'm questioning everything. I don't know anything. Um Right. Yeah. But like thinking of, yeah, how timid, how could you move forward?

[00:40:29] Yeah. And then that for the rest of your life, you're never sure I. If it is the right decision and should I do that? Should I step out? Which proves and, and I, we don't have to transition just yet, but like that proves that why That's so cool that she was like, I wanna go work with with people who are deaf.

[00:40:45] **Kevin:** Yeah.

[00:40:46] **Dana:** And I'm gonna make that decision to go do that for myself. But I think I cut you off. Yeah. You were gonna say something.

[00:40:50] **Kevin:** Oh yeah. I was just gonna say she, I love that she told us that, like, that was one of those moments where she reflected on her own upbringing and she specifically said, I have tried and continue to try so hard not to do that to you and your brother if I said I wanna do theater.

[00:41:15] Okay. If I was going to, you know, study music and theater in college, never got pushback like it was okay. You do. What you wanna do.

[00:41:29] **Dana:** I wanna go back to the, the deaf and, um, the, the sign language work because Yeah, you said that one of the things that you found most inspiring about her was that she took that sign language class with some friends on a whim and she ended up loving it.

[00:41:40] She went on to become an interpreter for deaf and hard of hearing kids in mainstream public schools. And you said that you love that she found something that was just hers and she had this big impact on people's lives, although she never acknowledged it.

[00:41:53] **Kevin:** This is one of my favorite things about my mom and to me it says again, who she was as a person outside of being a mom, being married, being the child of my grandparents.

[00:42:11] So this was after my brother and I were both out of the house. Is that true? Actually, no, it's not. We were in school still and there were a group of people from church that wanted to take this sign language class on a win, and so they did.

[00:42:30] **Dana:** She was like four forties.

[00:42:32] **Kevin:** Yeah, she would've been in her forties and she really enjoyed it.

[00:42:36] I don't think she was thinking of it as a potential career for her. She just thought it was really interesting. So there was a level two class, so she decided to take that, and then she decided to take more, and then it was like, oh, there's an opportunity,

[00:42:57] there's a deaf uh, girl going to school, a public school in a town nearby.

[00:43:05] Would you like to interpret for her? And so she took that opportunity. She loved it. It was hard because like, you know, kids in school, it's a lot. But she loved kids and...

[00:43:19] **Dana:** She would follow her around from class to class, is that what you mean? Yeah. She'd be with her all day.

[00:43:24] Yep.

[00:43:25] Wow.

[00:43:26] **Kevin:** All day long.

[00:43:27] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:43:27] **Kevin:** The thing about deaf and hard of hearing students in public school, at least at the time, I'm not as connected to that community now as I was, but your job as an interpreter wasn't just to interpret what the teacher is saying, but it's also what other students are saying.

[00:43:52] So you're nonjudgmentally...

[00:43:55] **Dana:** whoa.

[00:43:56] **Kevin:** Having to interpret everything that's going on around so that the, the child, the student was able to interact in an independent way. It was their job to react what was, to what was going on. Right? Not my mom, but she I think, has a talent or had a talent for that, in part, the technical skill of just learning the language and being good at interpreting, but her heart was right for that work, if that makes sense.

[00:44:32] She really shined in that space and she got to know the student, got to know the family. She worked with multiple students over the course of her career. Many of them, she kind of brought into our family as well. So it was as we were, I was probably in high school, middle school or high school, and she started, you know, introducing the students that she was working with to us, like, come over for dinner or, you know, so let's go get ice cream.

[00:45:11] And it was really cool. It was just, I didn't get, it's, it was her space. Like we didn't have anything to do with that.

[00:45:19] **Dana:** Right. And you probably don't know, you might've been interested in signing, but you didn't know how to do what she was doing, right? Yeah, just her and your dad was like, just her thing. She wasn't, her mom didn't know how to do that.

[00:45:30] I'm assuming like, It's...

[00:45:32] **Kevin:** no.

[00:45:32] **Dana:** ...just a skill that she had. Right. And she didn't have to share it almost. Well, she, she could share it. I just mean it, it was her moment to shine and her thing. And, and maybe she wanted you to learn how to sign with, you know, with her, but you know, it's, and we did. Yeah. I'm sure.

[00:45:47] Were like, let's try. I could spell my name right. I could, I can do that. But that's all I can do. And having,

[00:45:51] **Kevin:** having the kids around, uh, we got to where we could communicate without her being present, my mom being present, which was also cool. Like you're exposing us to a totally different culture essentially than what we had been exposed to.

[00:46:10] And that is something I appreciate so much because growing up where I did it wasn't super diverse. You didn't run into a lot of people who were, you know, living life against the norms. And so, to be exposed at that age to people who were like, had some differences in families that communicated in a different way.

[00:46:41] As simple as that sounds, it's actually really profound when you're young to see that.

[00:46:50] **Dana:** Yeah. And if, if, again, we're going back to faith and she did it with non-jd, you know, she wasn't judgmental. Yeah. Right. You said you have to have compassion, patience, acceptance. Like, hello, that's, isn't that the Bible? And giving of yourself?

[00:47:03] Um, I mean I think she was probably paid for her work, but she still...

[00:47:07] **Kevin:** Yes.

[00:47:07] **Dana:** Kind of an act of service in a way for someone who needs that, who needs that support. So that's good.

[00:47:14] **Kevin:** My favorite about, favorite things about some of her stories of interpreting were when she had to swear

[00:47:23] **Dana:** Yes.

[00:47:24] **Kevin:** When she learned the sign for bullshit and fuck.

[00:47:29] **Dana:** Oh, do you know? Do you know them? Do you...

[00:47:32] **Kevin:** I do.

[00:47:33] **Dana:** Let's see 'em.

[00:47:35] **Kevin:** Um, I think, oh, bullshit. Let's see. Maybe I don't remember that one, but fuck, I remember it was,

[00:47:43] **Dana:** ah, I feel like I've seen that before.

[00:47:44] **Kevin:** And there's sound with it.

[00:47:45] **Dana:** Yeah. Right. 'cause you're going up against Yeah. Yeah. Your own, um, what are these called? Wrists.

[00:47:52] **Kevin:** Wrists

[00:47:52] **Dana:** Yeah. But she can't be if she's not being nonjudgmental.

[00:47:55] **Kevin:** Yeah.

[00:47:56] **Dana:** She can't take that out of the, that'd be false.

[00:47:58] **Kevin:** Exactly.

[00:47:58] **Dana:** You'd be removing something that somebody said. Right. You said that you're you, that she loved, that you cared deeply about other people and how close you were with your brother and, and that was a big worry for her when you were kids.

[00:48:12] What does that mean that you and your brother wouldn't be close? Like when you wrote that?

[00:48:17] **Kevin:** Yeah.

[00:48:17] **Dana:** What does that mean?

[00:48:18] **Kevin:** So my mom and her older sister, They, they had an okay relationship as adults, but they fought a lot as kids. And growing up, my brother and I fought a lot. We didn't get along. We're very similar in a lot of ways and we're very different in a lot of ways.

[00:48:41] And a lot of it was, you know, I'm the, I mentioned this before, but the older gay kid trying to keep it all together and he's like, I don't care. I'm just doing what I want. I'll break all the rules.

[00:48:55] **Dana:** Right. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:48:56] **Kevin:** He is, he lives his life on a different time schedule and you know, I would get frustrated because I'm driving us to school and he doesn't care if we're on time and mom and dad are already at work, so I'm just screaming at him.

[00:49:12] And so you... and there were times where we, I mean, we physically fought a lot as littler kids and

[00:49:23] **Dana:** Like wrestling.

[00:49:24] **Kevin:** Yeah.

[00:49:24] **Dana:** Hitting.

[00:49:24] **Kevin:** Oh!

[00:49:25] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:49:25] **Kevin:** Yeah. My dad told me as an adult, he's like, I remember you were out in the yard. And I saw you on top of him with your hands around his throat, and I ran out and pulled you off and said, Kevin, you can hit him, but you can't kill it.

[00:49:46] So we had a very, a rough relationship

[00:49:49] **Dana:** And don't blow this, this family tour for us. You know what I mean? Yes. We, we have to hit the road at seven.

[00:49:56] **Kevin:** Right.

[00:49:57] **Dana:** You've gotta get your hat on and your, you know. Yes. Shiny.

[00:50:00] **Kevin:** I don't think my dad cared as much about that. Can't, he was sort of like, okay.

[00:50:04] **Dana:** Yeah. But your mom was like, I want them to love each other and

[00:50:06] **Kevin:** Yeah.

[00:50:07] **Dana:** Yeah. When I'm not here and they're, I want them to be...

[00:50:10] **Kevin:** and I think she, she got to see that. Yeah. In us as adults, we are super close now. Um, we text every day or two, like we just constantly in contact. He's an amazing person and she also saw him take care of me after that, coming out situation. So we had our whole breakdown and she, we got through that part of the conversation and I went back out into the other room and my brother immediately goes, let's take a drive.

[00:50:54] And she saw us go out and we just drove around for hours and my brother was so amazing and so supportive of me. Um, and our relationship has just become really wonderful over as adults. Uh, and I think she was really happy and relieved to see that, to see how close we were and how much we enjoyed spending time together.

[00:51:28] How close I was to his kids when she was, they were still pretty young when she passed. Um, they're adults now, which is crazy. Um, so I think she, and honestly I think that helped during her illness and through the transition of her passing to know that we were all gonna be there and support each other.

[00:51:59] Um, that was one of the hardest things for her being ill, was knowing she was leaving us all. And I think it helped her to know that we were all as tight as, as we were at that point and still are, and we were gonna be okay.



[00:52:19] **Dana:** Yeah. You're lucky that you have him, you know now, and...

[00:52:23] **Kevin:** yes.

[00:52:24] **Dana:** Yeah. You're lucky. Um, how do you honor, I know tomorrow's Mother's Day, but people won't be listening to this, you know, for a while, but Yeah.

[00:52:33] But in, so aside from all that, but it is tomorrow, but how do you honor your mom? Um, not just because of holidays, but how do you honor her? You know? Is it through your life's work? Is it through your, your friendships? How do you honor your mom? Do you have an altar? What do you do?

[00:52:52] **Kevin:** I, um, the room I'm sitting in right now, I have a lot of stuff.

[00:52:58] I have photos of her. I have, um, a ring that she used to wear often because it meant so much to her. And as an interpreter, you weren't supposed to have a whole lot of flashy jewelry, but she had a little flash, a little sparkle on one finger that she, uh, always wore. And so I have that, I have this little guardian angel figurine that she gave to me that's really cute.

[00:53:35] I think the way that I honor her the most is just treating people with love. She, her relationships with people, we're all about showing love to them. Um, and that's, especially since her passing how I try to live my life, I think that almost everyone deserves. To be treated with love. Um, and some days that's hard.

[00:54:17] Some days that's easier. Some people that's more difficult. Um, but she really, she really valued the people in her life. And I think that for me is the, the biggest way I, that she lives through me. I don't know that I'm consciously always making the choice to honor my mom in specific moments, but I often reflect back on situations and I identify where my mom showed up in that situation.

[00:54:56] **Dana:** Do you have an example of that? You knew I was gonna do that? You know, I was gonna be like, Kevin, tell, do you have a moment? Tell us how. Tell us what. Tell us why.

[00:55:03] **Kevin:** So, I love to. Um, I love to give people little gifts and my mom, my mom was the type of person, I was 34 years old when she passed. I got something every year for Valentine's Day and for Easter, um, until she passed.

[00:55:31] I still have the little tin that the candy came in for Valentine's Day, that last Valentine's day.

[00:55:38] **Dana:** When I was a kid. My mom had like a gift closet, you know, you could open up the closet and there were gifts for neighbors or friend, like, you know, almost like a white elephant, but like, if she needed something yeah.

[00:55:47] She could grab it. And she loved giving little things to people and she'd be like, lemme look in the closet. I love that. If not, I have to go buy something, but I might have something like another candle or a cute whatever display. Yeah. But yeah, a G gift closet. Yeah.

[00:55:59] **Kevin:** So I honestly, like when she passed that first Valentine's Day, that first Easter, that the stuff didn't come, um, it, it was really hard.

[00:56:13] And my grandma, her mom was still alive. Both my grandparents were still alive at that point. And so my grandma sent me something that first year.

[00:56:25] **Dana:** That's sweet.

[00:56:26] **Kevin:** It was sweet. It was, and I appreciated it. But I also guarded that space pretty, pretty heavily. I was like, no, that was something my mom did.

[00:56:39] **Dana:** And so when you give gifts, you feel like her.

[00:56:41] You feel like your mom. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:56:44] **Kevin:** For a long time. Um, I would on Easter Valentine's Day do something like what my mom used to do for me, for Cory. You know, like I'd make up a little Easter basket or whatever. And, um, just because it made me feel good and it made me feel connected to her in that way. My mom was cool.

[00:57:09] **Dana:** Yeah. Yeah, she was.

[00:57:12] **Kevin:** I, yeah, I wish I had had more time with her. She was challenging just like all humans, but in such a loving way. She used to given, given her background, uh, this is appropriate, but she used to say, just remember, no one loves you more than your mama, except Jesus.

[00:57:43] **Dana:** You're like, uh, you're like, uh oh. Right. You know? Yeah. Oh, here, here, here she goes. So on that note then, yes, my friend, my, my friend of many years, will you tell me your mom's name in this moment, how you're feeling about her right now after this call with me on this podcast? What do you feel besides the fact that your mom is super cool?

[00:58:10] **Kevin:** Um, My mom's name was Debbie Bishop, pre-marriage Debra Lee Pefley. I bring that up because I wanna highlight who she was outside of the context of her family, and what am I feeling? I'm feeling so much. You, you can see me right now. I feel like I'm beaming because I just am so full of love for her and even with the challenges that we experienced, so grateful. Just really grateful for who I had as a mom.

[00:59:12] **Dana:** I was lucky enough to get to attend Kevin and Cory's beautiful wedding in Mexico in 2017. About seven months after my own mother died, I remember I packed her swimsuit cover up to bring with me and some of her fancy diamond earrings. 'Cause I was in that phase of honoring her through jewelry. I had also just left my job of six years and was trying to wrap my head and my arms around my grief and this new phase of my motherless, jobless life.

[00:59:41] So what better way to start the new year, then fly alone to Cancun to a gorgeous beachside resort. And I remember Cory and Kevin joking about doing a destination wedding and how a lot of people probably wouldn't come and it would be small, but boy were they wrong. Leaving Chicago in the dead of winter for a beautiful resort wedding was exactly what people needed and craved.

[01:00:02] And also Cory and Kevin are beloved. So many people from all over the US and even some from overseas came to celebrate their commitment to each other and to drink margaritas and get massages in cabanas in the sand and swim together and visit Tulum, but witnessing their love up close. That was the best part, and I, I know Kevin's mother was there in spirit.

[01:00:26] I never got to meet her when she was alive, but I know that watching her son recite his vows under a beautiful arched canopy covered in flowers, as 80 friends and family sat facing the ocean and beamed into the sun, would've made her weep with joy. I just, I can't imagine how it couldn't have, regardless of faith, his mother was there in the image of her son and in all of us who love him and want him to thrive just like she did during her lifetime.

[01:00:57] The spotlight was on Kevin, and that would've made her smile. When I was working on this episode, I asked Kevin what he would tell his mother about his life, his wedding, his marriage, his grief, his work, if he could talk to her today. I asked him if he would share some of those feelings with me and well with all of you.

[01:01:18] So here is Kevin again. Oh, oh. And I also asked him if we could play some of him singing the old timey country gospel music. His mother liked so well. This song is from a CD he made for her called How Great Thou Art. Yep. That's the title, and the song you will hear is called I Know Who Holds Tomorrow.

[01:01:44] Talk to you soon.

[01:01:46] **Kevin:** Hey mama, I miss you.

[01:01:52] I feel strange to say that when I feel like you're so present in my life in so many ways, and yet it's been 14 years since I've been able to give you a hug or call you on the phone.

[01:02:11] I still sometimes reach for my phone and think, Ooh, I can't wait to tell mom about whatever it was that happened that day. You are very missed and yet very present. And I'm not sure exactly how that happens at the same time, but I'm so glad that it does. I know that things weren't always easy, and I know especially.

[01:02:43] When I came out, that hurt you a lot. It really challenged a lot of the things that you believe so strongly, and I want you to know that I appreciate all of the work you did to reconcile that because you love me so much, I want you to know that I knew that and I recognize that and I appreciate it, and I love you for it.

[01:03:20] There's so many things over the last 14 years that I wish you had physically been present to experience with me. Um, I wish it for both of us. I wish it selfishly for me because I would've loved to have had my mom see some of the amazing shows that I've done or, you know, watch me grow into all of these new, um, career paths I've taken to come and see my new house or to be at my wedding.

[01:03:55] I, I think sometimes about whether or not you would have been comfortable coming to our wedding. I like to believe that whatever is on the other side of this transition from our physical lives, that there's a great

understanding there. And that all of those things that you struggled to reconcile but worked so hard at because you loved me so much, that all of those things became clearer for you.

[01:04:35] And from that perspective, I think you would've loved being at our wedding. You would have loved the beach. You wouldn't have loved the wind blowing your hair, but you would've loved the beautiful beach in Mexico. You would've loved seeing all of our friends and family surrounding us with all that love.

[01:05:01] I like to think that I would've gotten to dance with you. I think back to that dance at Lisa's wedding all those years ago, and that being your first dance ever and how honored I felt that and continue to feel that you chose to have that experience with me. I would've loved to have had that again at my wedding.

[01:05:28] But I feel that you were present for it that day. I felt, I don't know how else to describe it, but the love from my mom. It's familiar and you know it when you feel it, and it was there that day. So I want to thank you. I wanna tell you once again how grateful I am to have had such an amazing, amazing mom who was willing to work through so many things that were so challenging for her because she loved me so much.

[01:06:08] I love you, mom, and I hope that half your light shines through the person that I am now.

[01:06:27] I don't know about tomorrow. I just live from day to day.

[01:06:46] I don't borrow from his sunshine, cause the skies may turn to gray.

[01:07:21] And I don't worry 'bout the future, 'cause I know what Jesus said. And today I'll walk beside him, 'cause he knows what lies ahead.

[01:07:53] **Dana:** The third season, which is crazy to say of I Swear on My Mother's Grave podcast would never be possible without our editor, amanda Mayo, from Cassiopeia studio. I also wanna thank our music composer, Adam Ollendorff, our graphic designer and illustrator Meredith Montgomery, our copywriter Rachel Claff and Tony Howell and Jonathan Freeland for all of their work on our beautiful website.

[01:08:15] And as always, thank you to Heather Bode for her emotional, spiritual, social. Physical for well, for all of the help over all of the years. Thank

you and all of you. Thank you for listening, for subscribing, for reaching out, for telling all of your friends. I know that this club, this complicated, messy club.

[01:08:35] Isn't fun to be in, but I'm so glad that you're here. I couldn't do this without you, so thank you for being a part of this community. And if you haven't signed up for our newsletter, please do so at our website, which is [dana.black.org](https://dana.black.org). Not just because I wanna sell you stuff, but because I wanna keep talking to you and you talking to me.

[01:08:54] So go check that out. There's personal stories, I'll tell you about the season and you'll learn about some live retreats that we're curating. One retreat at a time. So, yeah, thanks for being here. I hope you'll come back. Will you come back? Don't leave me like my dead mom. You know what I mean? Come back, please.

[01:09:11] I'll talk to you soon.