

# Mother's Grave Ep3 Glenbard North

## Transcript

[00:00:00] **Deb:** I didn't teach the same subject, and I was like, this young thing. Yeah. And she taught me stuff about how to teach and how to be here. Mm. So I had, when I started teaching, I, like, there were this, these group, this was a group of women. Jo was one of 'em. Like. They were like, this is how you are. Yeah. And so it was like, that's what it was.

[00:00:23] And so your mom, I mean, she was like this force of nature. Mm-hmm. I loved her. I feared her. One of the best compliments she ever gave me was, "That's the outfit I wanna see you in." (Laughter) Like, it was never, you know what I mean? And I just...she was this woman that had this style. Yeah. And this, and just, she demanded this presence, and demanded respect.

[00:00:49] Honestly, I'm strong because of her.

[00:01:09] **Dana:** Hi, and welcome to, I Swear on My Mother's Grave, a show about the loss of our complicated mothers. And not just in death, but really, really it's a show about me and you. It's about the living, the one left, the one who is trying to move through her issues, her guilt, her shame, her sadness, her messy, complicated feelings.

[00:01:32] I'm on a journey to forgive my mom, but really to forgive myself and how I treated her during her lifetime, and especially towards the end of her life when she was really sick, mentally and physically. With this podcast, I have been on a journey to find more love for my mom and what better place to find it than back in the high school classroom that she loved, ruled and taught in for 20 years.

[00:01:56] My mom taught at Glenworth High School in Carol Stream about 15 minutes from where I grew up. I went to a different school district in high school entirely, but I would visit her at this high school during my elementary and middle school days. I only usually went with her when I had a day off from my own school or a half day.

[00:02:15] And to be honest, the memories are foggy, but what's not foggy at all is the smell and the look of her hallway and her classrooms. The color of the tiled walls, the wooden cement, brass lab tables and countertops. The skeletons on the walls and displays of beakers and the yellow eye washing station right up front.

[00:02:35] The little desks just barely big enough for high school bodies, let alone adult bodies to sit in the charts of human organs and test tubes high up on shelves. I am not lying to you when I say that. I can remember the smell and the look of her classroom like it was yesterday, and so that's what I saw.

[00:02:52] Again when I walk into her former biology classroom this summer. My mom stopped teaching at the school in 1996, 1996, and this room looked almost identical. It was like walking onto a movie set of her life. It was intense. I'd been warned by the director of operations there, Eric, about how the room might feel like a time warp, but oh my goodness, he was not wrong.

[00:03:17] When I asked Eric if I could do an interview inside my mom's old classroom, he said, Sure, yeah, let me ask the district, and then he said, Sure, sure. So I talked with one of our other assistant principals, Deb Cartright, and asked her if she knew your mom since she's been here longer than me. And Deb said that she knew your mom quite well and that there were a few people that took her under her wing when she started, and your mom was one of them.

[00:03:41] Deb said that she'd be happy to talk with you as well if it worked out, and well, it worked out, and Deb joined me on a Saturday morning to sit among the classroom desks and chat about my mom, Jo Black. Deb is the voice you heard at the top of this episode. I also brought along my friend Mandy Walsh from Chicago, who was a student of my mom's back in the day, and who also lost her mom.

[00:04:05] In this episode, you will hear us seeing my mom's classroom again for the first time in over 30 years, and then sitting down next to the eye washing station and the wooden lab tables to talk about my mom's prowess and fashion sense. We're gonna talk about burnout and identity in your career as a mother and a woman.

[00:04:25] Whether or not my mom drank her own urine, cancer scares, biology, and how my mom made science sexy. This is Mandy Walsh, Deb Cartright and I inside Glenbard North High School.

[00:04:44] **Dana:** Whoa, whoa. Okay. Deep

[00:04:47] breaths. This looks...

[00:04:49] the same. Oh my God.

[00:04:53] Oh, this is amazing. My God,

[00:04:56] **Mandy:** It's, it's like a time capsule of a room.

[00:05:00] **Dana:** It literally feels like I'm in a museum. Yeah. Oh my God. Yeah. Look at this. I mean, the wood. The wood. So old. Oh my God. The peg board. Oh my gosh. Okay. I might, cry. I might cry! Ah!?! Look at this.

[00:05:19] Look at these, like the benches are the same. The stools look the same. What is coming up for you sitting in your classroom and tell us the years you went here. So

[00:05:30] **Mandy:** I was a freshman here at Glenbard in the fall of 89, Honors biology freshman year. It was my first honors class, and I do remember that morning walking up to this classroom, petrified.

[00:05:44] I mean, I was a petrified little freshman anyway, cause you know, you hear rumors with like, they're gonna throw pennies at you, they're gonna bully you. And I was like, Oh god. And walking up to this classroom and yeah, it was, it was like my first honors class of the day and seeing your mom and just like the fashion goddess that she was with the, the amazing hair with the wings and like awesome makeup and like super cool outfit and the accessories.

[00:06:14] And I was like, Oh, she's making science... sexy. (Laughter)

[00:06:22] Yeah, but I was...

[00:06:23] **Dana:** a fruit flies never looked so hot. Right? Yeah. Like chromosomes, you're like, Ooh, what's going on here? Yeah.

[00:06:29] **Mandy:** But I was also a little intimidated by her because I mean she had this presence about her, but then she started teaching. I was like, This is awesome. She's so cool. I had an interest in biology anyway, and she just kind of solidified that and I honestly, I thought every science class was gonna be as cool as her science class.

[00:06:49] And then sophomore year I was like horribly disappointed. I got to chemistry and I'm like, so where's the awesomeness that Mrs. Black had? Not here. You only had it for one year? Yeah, freshman year. And it was cool. I mean, we dissected everything like earthworms, starfish, frogs. We didn't do the fetal pig.

[00:07:12] Her other section did that, but then we did the fruit fly experiment for genetics, which was amazing. But she made me wanna be a better student for sure. You wanted to impress her.

[00:07:23] **Dana:** Yeah. Yeah. You were like, I hope she likes me. Yeah. Oh yeah. Tell everybody who you are.

[00:07:28] **Deb:** So, I'm Deb Cartright. I'm an assistant principal here at Glenbard North.

[00:07:32] And, um, I, I've basically spent most of my career here. I started here in 91. I taught before that, and this is my last year. But when I started, I was this young thing and Jo Black was my mentor and my person that just took me under her wing. And there were, there, there was this group of ladies and they really didn't hang out or know each other, but they were these strong women that taught me how to be, and I didn't know that I needed those lessons.

[00:08:02] But she's, why, like, I'm a little badass, I'm not gonna lie, but she's, she's the reason that I'm not scared to have conversations with people.

[00:08:12] **Dana:** Is that what you mean by badass? What do you mean by that? That you can talk to anybody...

[00:08:15] **Deb:** Students, you can talk to anything, professor, anybody, about anything. And you can do it in a way that you don't have to be confrontational or mean or anything.

[00:08:25] You're just having a convers- a mature, professional conversation. Jo taught me that, she taught me about relationships that we have to support each other. We're not there to like gripe at each other. We're we're supposed to be there for each other, helping the kids, cause that's our focus and our goal. Those are the things she taught me. It wasn't about being a teacher.

[00:08:47] Like I knew that I had that down. I was really good at it. But she, she just taught me how to exist here in this learning community and that that was. That was hugely important and she, and she was, there was a part of her that was a little bit frightening. I also knew that I could ask her any question, any question, and she wouldn't make me feel bad about it.

[00:09:11] She wouldn't make me feel embarrassed. Like I could ask her, I could ask her a question.

[00:09:16] **Dana:** I talk about that a lot on the show, like when I was a kid I would, I've never felt nervous to say I'm having sex. Yeah. I had an abortion when I was really young and I've talked about that on the show that I went right to my mom Yep.

[00:09:27] To say, I'm pregnant, I'm scared. And she's like, "here's what we're gonna do. Here's the deal. Here are the facts. Here's how you're gonna feel, and you'll be back at work in two days." Mm-hmm. as my dad is freaking out and my mom was so literal and Yeah. Just like calm and I, I didn't, I didn't feel any shame ever going to her with anything.

[00:09:44] Yeah. Mainly cause of biology. Yeah.

[00:09:46] **Deb:** I don't know that I learned that directly from Jo, but I'm that kind of person as well with my kids and yeah. I...but you raise your kids that they come to me for anything but you. There's nothing that you can tell me. Like I would, I would say to my kids, "there's nothing that you can tell me, and I still say this, that will surprise shock anything with me."

[00:10:05] I'm not gonna love you less because of it. My job is to come up along beside you and like, support you and yes. Am I really good at like fixing things? Absolutely. No. Your mom, she was terrific. I remember the fashion like you were talking about. Right, Right. Because I was a young, poor teacher, I could never touch or even get close to the lines that she wore.

[00:10:29] I knew what they were. I knew what they were. Yeah. But I, I could, I couldn't even touch that. And um,

[00:10:34] **Dana:** The Donna Karens the, who knows... her Ann... she had Donna. Karen. D K N Y. Yeah.

[00:10:41] **Deb:** Yeah. She had it all.

[00:10:43] **Dana:** And.. Donna Karen.

[00:10:44] **Deb:** Yeah. St. John knits and St. John. Oh, I remember the St. John knits. I remember, and I was, I, I would look at I'm like, That's St. John. And she'd, she'd look at me and just go, Yes...Yes. Its, and I, I and I, I just, Oh, and she would say, You would look great in something like this. I'm like, I can't afford this, Jo. I cannot afford this. And she'd look at me and say, "you can." But I still never owned one. Yeah. She was awesome. She was just this awesome human being.

[00:11:15] Yeah.

[00:11:15] **Dana:** I was going through some old papers and I found a lot of stuff like my mom's old, her own stages of mitosis. These are like, what are the, what do you call these? Transparencies you put up for notes. Yeah. The overhead projector. So all the stuff about cells and mitosis mm-hmm. and her drawings of fruit flies and, and it's all still true.

[00:11:38] Yeah. This is all, Yeah, this hasn't changed. Still true. And then some of the papers she's graded and some of her carbohydrates like materials and chemistry materials, and. I found a lot of letters of like recommendation from other high schools before she got here. Or from diff the district saying You should hire her.

[00:11:55] Cuz she was coming from Milwaukee. She'd also taught in Chicago Heights and there was this one from Des Moines that she taught in, I think college in 71. And this evaluation says that she's incredible with enthusiasm, her sense of humor, her punctuality, her personal appearance, her planning, her ability to overcome unexpected diversity, ability to relate to high school people.

[00:12:15] Mm-hmm. her firm, fair and friendly approach as a teacher. And the only two suggestions that said, it said suggestions, not criticism. For my mom, said: Voice, there are times when one can gain more attention by speaking softly as opposed to trying to carry the entire room and losing inflection, which is like maybe she was too loud.

[00:12:37] Okay. And then the second was teaching is not telling. Teaching is selling. Biology is absolutely exciting. It's not a matter of fact course or presentation. This material is so exciting and important that you should convey the impression that you hurry to school and miss breakfast, just so you could explain.

[00:12:53] Which is interesting cuz I missed breakfast today to get here. Yeah. Okay. That gives me creeps. I have chills. I have chills. So you could explain this specific information to these students. You're so excited to get there. So those are the two things that they said. Even though the whole letter is, you're, incredible. You're incredible.

[00:13:06] But think of this. Yeah. Deb, what do you, what do you take from that? What does that make you think of? My mom?

[00:13:12] **Deb:** Yes. Jo Black was loud. I, She was loud. I, but, and I Say that again, not as a criticism because I am loud. Yeah. So a strong voice. Yeah, strong voice and just. And, and yes, there are probably times where, if you like, And I will say that, and this was probably, this was probably true of Jo too.

[00:13:36] When you talk quieter, it almost makes people kinda, you lean in, you, well you lean in and people get a little, when I start to get quiet, people are almost afraid. Yeah, for sure. You know, and they're almost, they're like, Ooh, what's, what's, is everything okay? Is every, you know, I think being loud and I can understand this, it's enthusiasm.

[00:13:56] Mm-hmm. So Jo was enthusiastic about what she was teaching. Jo had a passion. She had, she had a passion for teaching. She had a passion for you. Cuz she would tell me stories about you. She was passionate. And if that's the only criticism that's, that's almost, that's like a criticism of being too passionate too caring about something.

[00:14:16] **Dana:** Or in '71 she was told this. And then by the time you met her and the, By the time her journey went, she was so enthusiastic that maybe she read this. Yeah. Because she was such a planner and was organized, she thought, I'm gonna take this, I'm gonna apply it. I'm gonna be, once I get into the classroom in, in 75, 76, 78, 70, I will be so excited to be there.

[00:14:36] Maybe she was more formal. Yeah. At the top. And that now she created these games. You know, she did these jungle jeopardy board games and trivia and she was really excited to teach.

[00:14:46] **Deb:** Well, and that's that, that is, and I would say this, I taught for 16 years become before becoming an administrator, which is different.

[00:14:54] Yeah. People don't usually do that. And I still love teaching and I still, one of the things that I apply, and this is true, is that, yes, teaching is not telling. So if you're sitting and getting, if you're just sitting and getting, you're not learning. I always tell people, The person that's doing the talking is doing the learning.

[00:15:10] So when you can get students also excited about what they're doing. Right. And your mom had a lot of ways of doing that. Yeah. Because they were. Do you know when you were a student, you were doing the biology? Yeah. That's when you're truly learning.

[00:15:25] **Dana:** Let's talk about urine. Yeah. There's a folklore that my mom drank her own urine.

[00:15:29] This is the transition. Are we ready for it? I'm ready for the urine.

[00:15:33] **Deb:** Yeah.

[00:15:34] **Mandy:** I saw it. I remember that day. I remember that day. And I feel like it kind of rippled through the school. Yeah. It was like, this is the day that Mrs. Black drank her urine, because I think she did it for every section of her class?

[00:15:51] But I feel like, cause I had her, I think it was third period, so it was like earlier in the day. But yeah, she was just like, if you need to survive you can drink your own urine. And she had, and it was, it was a clear plastic, so it was clearly. yellow in color and she just downed it and nobody knew what to make of it in the classroom.

[00:16:14] Cause it was like, is that, is that real? That she just

[00:16:17] **Deb:** Really, yeah. Was...

[00:16:18] **Dana:** an apple juice, right? Yeah.

[00:16:20] **Mandy:** Right. And, and we, everybody respected her cuz she didn't do it like, Week one. Week two. This was like further into the semester. Yeah.

[00:16:31] **Dana:** She has to gain your trust before she drinks her own urine.

[00:16:34] **Deb:** Imagine if that was week one.

[00:16:35] **Dana:** Yeah, day

[00:16:36] **Deb:** One. Day one. It was when you're freshman. Yeah, you're a freshman.

[00:16:39] **Mandy:** You're, yeah. Who was this woman telling me I can drink my own urine and she just did it. And then I feel like we just moved on in the class. Or maybe we talked about like the kidneys maybe and like the filtration of the body. But yeah, it was like we all loved her.



[00:16:55] We all adored her at that point. But she did this thing that was like, I don't know what to make of

[00:17:02] **Deb:** That. Because you don't wanna think it's disgusting. No, because it's Jo Black. Yeah. So it's not disgusting. She's like in a blazer. Yeah. Well, she's doing it. And earrings on,

[00:17:13] **Deb:** I never saw it, but I can't remember.

[00:17:16] And as, as I was driving here today, I'm like, I'm pretty sure Jo Black drank her urine and or am I mix or did I. Did I dream it? That's, yeah. On the way here I'm like, I'm pretty sure. And then you have these memories that you, you you put together and then I'm like, no, I'm pretty sure it was Jo, but that doesn't seem like something Jo would do.

[00:17:36] But then I remember like her telling me like about, or maybe I came up to her and said, cause you talk about the ripples through the school. Yeah. And going, Jo, did you really, you drink your urine today? She's like, Yeah, I do it every year. I, it was, it was something like, I do, I do it every year. I'm like, Why?

[00:17:53] You know? Because I remember having a conversation with her about why would you do that? And she's like, well you do it if you need to survive.

[00:18:01] **Dana:** So she's proving that point to that.

[00:18:03] **Deb:** Yeah. And your kidneys are this great filtration. So you explaining this, I'm telling you she explained the same thing to me and I, I will say,

[00:18:11] I have thought of that over the years, and not that I've been in a situation where I need to survive, but if I needed to survive, would I drink my urine? Mm-hmm. and I that's in there. I'd absolutely do it. Yeah.

[00:18:21] **Mandy:** Well, and then like all of these survival shows came out like Bear Grills and alone, and like you see people doing that and I'd be sitting there with my husband and be like, Yeah, my freshman biology teacher totally drank her own urine.

[00:18:35] Yeah, I knew that. And he's like, No. I'm like, Yeah, yeah.

[00:18:39] **Deb:** I wonder if she knows or realized the impact she had on people. Like, the thing you remember from high school is that your biology teacher drank urine and, and nobody felt, again, nobody was disgusted by that because the kind of person she

[00:18:53] **Dana:** was, I mean, I'm not gonna, we're not gonna take a turn yet, but I don't, I actually think she did know.

[00:19:00] I think, I think some of the sadness of my mom's life is part of her is knowing that like she had this identity and she was loved by so many people. , and there's letters in this, I'm letters right here on this desk from students that she kept, and she won the Illinois Math and Science Award at least three times.

[00:19:19] She was nominated. People sent letters to the principal here to say like, We love Jo Black. So I think as my mom pulled away from teaching and then was just a CEO's wife, and then dealt with some of her own pain and sadness, and her body started to deteriorate, which I also wanna talk about in terms of biology and DNA

[00:19:35] like my mom's body failed her and she taught about the human body and yeah. I didn't, I, Yeah, I thought we were gonna have fun. Uh, we're gonna have fun, but I was, I'm gonna, we're gonna get there. But I think my mom did know, but it was hard for her. She talked about it a lot. Yeah. She'd be like, I was so loved.

[00:19:54] I was so good at what I did. Mm-hmm...people still remember, you know, kind of trying to buff up her own identity and reminding even me or my dad or her mom, like I was legend in this classroom that we're sitting in. And I, I don't know, I... And so I'm chasing, like I knew that she was great, but I didn't go through her papers.

[00:20:13] I don't sit here and go through all her, but I've had to sit with these and really remind myself. Mm-hmm...you were incredible. Yes. You were sick. Yes. You dealt with mental health and addiction, but you were mm-hmm. unreal. Yeah. And I, but I think losing this job is she made the choice, which I also wanna talk about when you get burnout as a teacher, she didn't wanna be resentful of teaching.

[00:20:36] Right. But she also was scared, If I leave this, who am I?

[00:20:40] **Deb:** And I think that is, that is honestly something that as women, right? Our identity is so who we are and who we are to other people. Yeah. It's

so important to us. Right? So I think we're always walking through these thresholds in life, almost, these identity thresholds.

[00:20:56] And as you go through this change or whatever in your life, you have different roles. The role that your mom had with you. The role that she had with her students, with her colleagues, Right. Like all of that stuff. It's then finding that when that changes. Mm-hmm...now who am I now?

[00:21:13] **Dana:** And she probably thought when she was here, she wasn't being a good mom.

[00:21:19] Yes. Or I'm not with my daughter enough, so she quit to be with me my senior year of high school. Even though my dad's like, I think she was too involved. She, she was too over- she was trying to be with you so much because she was about to lose you for college. Right? Yeah. But yeah, I don't know. Like, do you feel that burnout sometimes happen or going, If I'm not really in the zone of being a principal, like if I'm wanting to be elsewhere, then, should I keep this job.

[00:21:46] **Deb:** Oh yeah. Absolutely. So I have three kids. I have a son that is 27, a daughter who's 25, and then another one who, another daughter who's 21. Wow. So, okay. Yeah. I was like, Let's go. Yeah. It was fun. Do they go here? No, they didn't. And when they were little they wanted to, they wanted to, And then when they were in high school and they went to Wheaton Warrenville South.

[00:22:10] Oh, okay. Right where I went. Yep. Yep. They, they went to Wheaton Warrenville South, and it was always, they were happy to go to Wheaton Warrenville South, because then I was here as like the assistant principal and they still complain that they would like, yeah. They would like there to be a little bit more mom and less assistant principal.

[00:22:29] And, and now I'm actually saying that they've said that to me. Yeah. They, they've said that to me recently. They and I, and now I, at my age of 56, I, what I've said to my kids is, look, you grew up in this house. You know how I am. If you think I'm gonna change the way I'm saying things and doing things. Mm-hmm.

[00:22:47] I'm very sorry. That's not gonna happen for you or for me. I think we're all gonna have to get by it. Know that I love, you know, that I care about, you know, that you're the most important thing. That's it. When I was, when I was here, and I actually took a few years off, I call 'em the breeding years to

have my kids and like they were younger, like to be with them and do things and I, I love them to death.

[00:23:10] There's nothing that I love more, but I couldn't...

[00:23:13] **Dana:** closer to the mic. Closer to the mic.

[00:23:15] **Deb:** Yeah. So I really love them. They're the most, But I couldn't wait to get back into teaching. Really? Yeah. Because that was, that was such a part of my identity. So I understand how that relates with your mom. That's so much of who you are.

[00:23:29] And it always has been because I was a teacher before I had them. Yep. I'm a teacher after they've all, I'm still here. And as I face retirement personally, I kinda, I'm like wondering, Ooh, now who am I? Yep. Because I'm also not there, because they're old, I'm not, They're out of the house. Mostly. One's not, but they're on their own out of the house and they don't need me for as much.

[00:23:52] This place doesn't need me. Like I can see where your mom and what is that then do to how you perceive things and find yourself. So I like that's a real that so I can understand that. That's a real realistic thing that's happening in my head right now, whether it's teaching or anything I think as females, we go through this where we're just walking through, okay, now this is different and now this is different.

[00:24:23] And then it's finding who you are and as you crossed through that other threshold and that's not easy, that

[00:24:30] **Dana:** is not done. You still have it. Like I don't have kids. Mandy doesn't have kids, but I'm still going through my own transition of what's my career, what's my life? Where am I gonna live? Am I moving away from Chicago?

[00:24:40] I just got married so it's the same. And I know my mom, I know that she was trying to be a good mom by wanting to spend time with me. I don't know. Did your mom ever struggle with that stuff? With identity and quitting? She,

[00:24:53] **Mandy:** I don't think, cause she was an administrative assistant and, and I don't know if that was her passion.

[00:25:00] No, I know it wasn't her passion. But she grew up in Chicago. She went to Catholic school, she went to a vocational high school, which taught her to be basically a secretary. So like that wasn't her calling. But she did pride herself on that, on her job a lot. She worked for Pfizer Pharmaceuticals for a while and retired with, with them, and she was very proud of her job there.

[00:25:29] I think heading into retirement was a little easier for her, cuz it wasn't, it wasn't what got her up in the morning, you know, that job paid the bills that mm-hmm. was, you know, what put food on the table and you know, me through school. And so it, it wasn't quite the same. But I will say she, um, my grandmother lived with us.

[00:25:52] She moved in with us when I was in like sixth grade. Mm-hmm. until she died in her nineties. She lived with my mom. So my mom was her caretaker and when my grandmother died, there was that kind of, Now what. And unfortunately my mom didn't really get a chance to figure that out because she was diagnosed with cancer and then she died like within a year of my grandmother passing.

[00:26:16] So like, but I think that's, you know, it, her, her thing was more like I was out of the house. My grandmother was the thing that drove her and then that was gone. So yeah. I mean, yes. But it wasn't a career thing. Yeah. As

[00:26:32] **Deb:** much. Well, and you know, it's, you know, both of you're sharing about, my mom passed away a few years ago too, and it, not at a young age.

[00:26:39] She was 84 years old. Right. But you guys had, it sounds like good relationships with your mom. **Dana and Mandy:** Mine was not great. Yeah. Ours are tricky too. **Deb:** Well, mine, mine wasn't tricky. Mine was actually like not good. I don't think we liked each other. Yeah. But I'll tell you, I went, after that happened, I had to do, I had to go to therapy.

[00:26:57] I'd never done that. And I realized that, and I think this is again, a real important thing for women. You don't wanna say, Okay, I've gotta be vulnerable. But I had to be vulnerable enough to allow someone to help me and because I needed it. Cause I was like, Okay, I can't hold this together. Like I, something is wrong.

[00:27:14] I'm always really great at holding things together. This is not working for me. And it was probably the best thing. When

[00:27:19] **Dana:** did you realize that? What...was there a moment that that happened for you?

[00:27:22] **Deb:** Uh, I was crying in the middle of my kitchen and I couldn't stop, you know what I mean? I was just letting, I was letting it out and uh, I'm like, I can't, I, I can't do this

[00:27:35] I can't do my job. I can't do my mother thing, my daughter thing. I, I didn't like doing it. Now it's gone. And I was her caretaker too. I'm like, what sort of fresh hell is this? You know, After, you know, not

[00:27:49] **Dana:** Did you feel obligated to do it even though you didn't? Well, she's my, yeah, she's my mom. I know, but just that you dad, you still have to, you don't, a

[00:27:55] **Deb:** Lot of people don't believe I know.

[00:27:56] I just like, That's your mom. Yeah. Like you, that's your mom. So there was no way I was gonna not do it. But there were boundaries that I, I was like, I can't, there's some things I cannot do Yeah. That we're gonna have to pay people to do, but I, I always arranged that. And, um, there is something about your mom moving on that changes you.

[00:28:15] Yeah. As a woman, I don't know whether it's good or bad. Again, it's just one of those walk through that threshold. Mm-hmm. of now I'm different.

[00:28:23] **Dana:** Right. Yeah. Did she change in those last moments, like months together? No. It feels cheesy to say, like you guys must have had a, a moving experience where you got closer together in those last months.

[00:28:36] But we know that doesn't always happen. No,

[00:28:39] **Deb:** No, no, no. It was, it was not like I, I always, in my life with her, I felt like the reason she had me was to do things for her. That's what I, I always, I, I thought that was my role is I'm the one that does these things. For, For all. For always. Yeah. And it wasn't I, as far as taking care of her, I thought I was taking care of her from the time I was 13.

[00:29:01] Like it wasn't, that wasn't anything. Yeah. Yeah. But it, it is. Um, yeah. I don't, I, we did not have a moment where the, there was like this sudden tenderness or anything like that. It was just like, Okay, here's, And I was,

unfortunately she had a stroke. It was not something she was gonna really come back from.

[00:29:20] I knew the life that she wanted. I'm like, Okay, I gotta respect that. And she had a living will, and I'm like, we're gonna do end of life. And, and that, that was hard. I still think about that. I still have, I'll have some feelings that go around that as well, where I'm like, uh, you know, did I do the right thing?

[00:29:35] But I did, and I don't know. And you can't go back and change it. I can't go back. It doesn't matter.

[00:29:40] **Dana:** Yeah. And should I go live with my mom and give up my whole life and be her care? No. No. And I don't regret it. But you go, other people would've said, "well, that's, that's my mom. That's my mom. And I gotta go. I gotta go live in her house and give up everything and care for her or bring her into my home." And I just knew we've talked about this, Mandy and I have, and is that really what I wanted to do? No. I'll find you someone and you'll love her. Yeah. And she did. She doesn't want me in there all the time. She wants a person she doesn't know.

[00:30:08] **Mandy:** Yeah. I have a question.

[00:30:09] **Mandy:** Can I, can I ask a question?

[00:30:10] **Dana:** Give me a...how dare you? (Laughter)

[00:30:14] **Mandy:** Do you have siblings? Yes. Okay. So.

[00:30:17] **Deb:** yeah, two older siblings. Two boys. Okay. Um, did they do anything? No. And I will say that in the microphone. Yeah, um, they did not help out. No. I mean, I grant they lived outta state, but at the same time, both retired.

[00:30:31] Okay. Could have done more. Yeah. When I would, when I would say, hey, this is what I need help with, they would say, Well, you know what you should do. And I'd be like, Okay, I

[00:30:40] **Deb:** Don't tell me what to do. I asked you for help with the thing I'm trying. Yeah. And here's the thing. Guess what, you know, like, shut up, so mm-hmm.

[00:30:45] Um, and like, it's just not gonna work. Yeah. But, and then I then at some point there's this. No, I, uh, I get it. Like this is, this is where I am and there's this acceptance. Do I look back? Could I have been kinder? Could I have been nicer in certain things? Yes. But again, that's not the relationship that we had.

[00:31:06] And then I would think, you know, I always knew at some point she's not gonna be around forever. What, what will I feel like when she's gone? And so I think about that, and then I was surprised at the feelings that I had mm-hmm. . Um, and one of the things that my therapist even said was, um, you know, sometimes it's hard, like when you have a strained relationship with someone, losing them is harder than if you had this warm and fuzzy accepting relationship.

[00:31:32] And I was like, yeah. And then I think about that. There's, there's parts of me with my kids where they like me and they do wanna be around me. They seek me out, which I'm very thankful for. And you don't just make them

[00:31:45] **Dana:** And you don't just make them do things for you? So that line of trauma is not...?

[00:31:49] **Deb:** No. No, that's not, I, I would never do that.

[00:31:52] I would never do that. But yeah, I do expect them to listen to me. I'm just gonna say there you Yeah, I know. I'm like, And now it's kind like, I know some things. If you'd like my advice and you wanna ask for it, that's great. You're, it's not gonna come, you know, sweetly to you, but it's, this is how it's gonna come.

[00:32:08] And so that didn't keep going. So we do, I do have good relationships with my kids at the same time. They, I, there's that healthy respect. Mm-hmm, they know that I'm the mom. Mm-hmm. And we're, we're probably not, we're not gonna be friends. Do we enjoy being around each other? Yes. So like that I feel is like this hurdle.

[00:32:27] Yes. Mm-hmm. that I was able to accomplish after having the relationship I did with my mom. Yeah. Where it was this hurdle that I could get through with my kids and I have to run. I'm sorry.

[00:32:38] **Dana:** I'm sorry. My last thoughts on Jo before you go. Oh. Just so, well, what let's just say when you walked in here a couple minutes ago, and you said, yep...



[00:32:47] I have my back to you. And I turned and you said, “Oh my God. Yeah. You look like your mom. You're your mom.” I mean, this is fake. This yellow, this is this hair.

[00:33:00] **Deb:** You are your mom. Yeah. Yeah. You are your mom. And I think that's, that's a huge... it is. I just like, she was so, dear to me. And so a lot of things, and so yeah. Just good to know. Yeah. Take that.

[00:33:19] **Dana:** There was a note that said your mom is like a true friend. Yeah. To everyone. And I, you know, not, it's not a humble brag, it's a full brag that I really, I get a lot of people who tell me, you make me feel like you're my friend quickly.

[00:33:32] Like we are. You respect me, you listen to me, you hear me. And I was like, I get that from my mom. And, and anyway, just finding that again was like, oh, I guess that's kind of like something she did, you know? Yeah.

[00:33:42] **Deb:** That's the, that's the truth. Yeah. I think she made people feel valuable and that's, you know, like truly valuable.

[00:33:50] And that's, that's amazing to be, to have that, letting people know that they matter. Yeah. Yeah. That's what I remember about her. And that she just, again, she was smart and pretty and mm-hmm, and stylish and. Oh, oh. You're the best. Thanks for being here. Hey, it was so, it was my gosh. So great to, great to meet everybody.

[00:34:12] Um, really, you know, awesome and go panthers. Yeah!

[00:34:17] **Dana:** Go Panthers.

**(DANA VOICEOVER AFTER DEB LEAVES)** Yeah. Deb had to go about 30 minutes into our conversation, but I was so grateful for the time that she could give us on an early Saturday morning, we hugged and said goodbye, and then Mandy and I sat back down in our little classroom seats and kept talking.

[00:34:35] I asked Mandy about her cancer scare and recovery from ovarian cancer and a full hysterectomy that she had during a global pandemic all without her mom by her side. I realized that after I listened back to this conversation, I never mentioned in the room the fact that my mom also had a full hysterectomy.

[00:34:54] My mom never really told me why, but I always assumed it was because she wasn't having any more kids and she just wanted it gone. But I don't know the real answer. The irony was not lost on me, that we were sitting in a biology classroom, Mandy's high school classroom, talking about cancer. Our body's changing, our dead moms, and overcoming the fear that comes along with all of it and living to tell the tale.

[00:35:21] **Dana:** So friend, now that you're sitting here, it was just me. We talked about how you feel being in the room after many years, but I don't know how you're feeling after you've gotten over cancer, during a global pandemic. You're feeling better, you're healthier, but you know, you did all of that without your mom, and I wanted to talk to you about that on the mic in this classroom.

[00:35:43] Oh, wow.

[00:35:44] **Mandy:** Yeah. I am feeling good. In April of 2021, I had a total hysterectomy. It was a radical hysterectomy. It was not laparoscopic. They had to, I have like a 12 inch scar on my abdomen. I had stage one ovarian cancer, and even that. It is weird to say because I'm extraordinarily lucky and that I didn't have to have any treatment afterwards.

[00:36:10] It is astounding that I didn't have to have treatment because, uh, I have pictures somewhere on my phone that my surgeon sent of me on the table. You don't see my face, but you see my uterus and, and ovary, which are the size of basketballs. They were enormous. Whoa. I just both were both. Yeah. Yeah, they're huge.

[00:36:34] I mean, they're just too lumps and everybody's like, Well, what's that and what's that? I'm like, I don't know which one's which. The human body is nightmarishly elastic to quote, I think it was Patton Oswalt who said that. Yeah.

[00:36:47] **Dana:** And you know, right now, Jo Black would wanna see those photos, would wanna talk about, you know what I mean?

[00:36:51] Like my mom would always be like, Let's talk about the ovaries, let's talk about the, yeah. She would look at plants member and she'd say, "this is the biology of the plants." Yeah. She would wanna see all of that. Yeah. And be really interested and respectful, but would want to talk

[00:37:03] **Mandy:** about it a hundred percent.

[00:37:05] Yeah. I think she and my surgeon would get along really well. Dr. Stephanie Munns. Shout out to her shout. She's amazing. She's like, You're gonna want these photos. I'm texting them too right now. And this was like the day after my surgery where I'm like, no. But yeah, I, yeah. And you know, it was like the pandemic hit and everybody ate, so I put on some weight and I'm in my mid to late forties, so things are changing and so any differences in my period was like, I'm in.

[00:37:37] I'm 46, like it's fine. And then I started getting uncomfortable and I was like, maybe it's my gallbladder. And I went to my primary care physician and she was like, I'm gonna get you a CT scan. And like two weeks later I was having the surgery. It was that fast. And because they were so big, I really thought I need to start giving my stuff away.

[00:38:05] I really did. I thought this was it. I remember going for a follow up appointment and sitting in the room and I hear my surgeon, she's on the phone with somebody. She's clearly talking about a patient, and she comes in, she's like, did you hear that? I'm like, well, yeah, but I didn't listen because I'm not an asshole.

[00:38:26] I'm not gonna, ease drop on your phone call. She's like, That was a Cleveland Clinic. We got your stuff back. It was stage one. You're fine. We don't have to do chemo, we don't have to do radiation. And I just burst into tears in the room and it was really, the next several weeks were, they were just, my recovery was really hard.

[00:38:48] Like I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep. I was really uncomfortable and it was really emotional. And of course, you know, part of that is cause you know, my hormones were super jacked and I'm on a hormone pa patch now that, you know, tempers a lot of that, but like just bursting into tears of just, I can't believe how lucky I am.

[00:39:09] I can't believe this bullet that I dodged.

[00:39:12] **Dana:** Gratitude can be so emotional. Just like sorrow, right? Yeah, yeah,

[00:39:16] **Mandy:** Yeah. And Cori Pasko like put together a GoFundMe so I didn't have to worry about bills and like, food train, which you were amazing and brought stuff and like, you know, just the outreach of people and finding out how much people care is super overwhelming and beautiful.

[00:39:37] And I was like, I gotta pay this forward. I don't know how to pay it forward, but I'm gonna figure it out. But I remember being in the hospital, you know, and that was weird. It was before Delta really hit. So I was lucky in that Chris, my husband, husband was able to come and sit with me for like six hours, which is not enough.

[00:39:57] I don't know if you've ever been in a hospital, but it's, It's better than none. None. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Like I couldn't get out of there fast enough, but I was just like, I kept thinking about my mom and like how she would've handled all of this and I don't think she would've handled it well, Dana.

[00:40:15] **Dana:** No. What do you mean?

[00:40:17] I think she would've freaked out the covid stuff or, or the diagnosis. I mean, she had her own diagnosis that went really fast, so that's interesting. Yeah. But I think all of...

[00:40:27] **Mandy:** it, all of it. I don't think she would've handled Covid well. She didn't, she...it's so funny cause I wanted to ask Deb, and I've asked this to you too, like now that now that my mom has gone, I've been able to more objectively look at my relationship with her and really be able to see it for what it was all of her strengths, but all of her weaknesses as well.

[00:40:54] And like my mom wasn't really, she, she was not shy about making it known when she, when I hadn't seen her in a while. So I cannot imagine that Covid would've gone well.

[00:41:06] **Dana:** Yes. Um, like guilt. Mm-hmm. and the, and even Deb saying how amazing my mom was, but also scary. Uh, uh, my mom could be really nasty. She could spin, and again, some of that is from addiction later, but like, sure she was firm and funny in all those, but you're like, but she could also cut and then make me feel, why would I wanna come visit you if you're so always so angry when I'm not here?

[00:41:29] And then when I show up that this guilt of not visiting you enough, Right? Yeah. Or, or just the, yeah. So I agree. Like, we've talked about this a little. Mm-hmm...but, but objectively being able to say, but she was awesome and awesome and awesome over here. Mm-hmm...cause I don't think putting anybody on a pedestal is doing anybody a favor.

[00:41:45] So she was a real human being with like all these flaws and yeah. Being able to see your mom as that is important. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:41:54] **Mandy:** Covid wouldn't have handled it well, me being in the hospital, she would've...wanted to go out.

[00:41:58] **Dana:** You mean she'd be like, I'm going to the store. I'm getting on an airplane in the early days, or what do you mean?

[00:42:04] **Mandy:** I think she would. No, I think she would've been okay because I mean, she, before she had the lung cancer diagnosis, she had Pulmonary Fibrosis. So she struggled, you know, like she was immunocompromised, so she got that. But I think in terms of me being able to visit, I see that would've been like nightmare.

[00:42:25] **Dana:** She would not have respected that.

[00:42:27] Those boundaries. Yeah. I don't care.

[00:42:28] **Mandy:** Be like, I care. Yeah. Because if I get you sick, you're going to die, you're going to die. So there was that. But I think me being in the hospital with surgery and, and all that, I think she, she just would've been a mess. I don't think she would've handled it particularly, particularly well.

[00:42:48] And I know that would've come from a place of, of love, but I, I don't know if she, my mom was extremely strong until she wasn't. Like, she, she could hold a lot, but once she broke, she would break pretty hard. And I think this would've, would've been difficult for her. So in a way, I was grateful that she didn't have to go through that.

[00:43:17] **Dana:** Did you like talk to her when you were in the hospital? Did you, you know, like pray or ask her for her healing power, you know, trying to get spiritual with your mom? No,

[00:43:30] **Mandy:** I, I, I didn't, I I will say what I did have was her sister, my aunt came to, to visit. Yeah. And I think in a way that was a good substitute.

[00:43:44] I hate saying substitute, cause that sounds like, I don't know, sounds shitty, but, you know, like it was like a surrogate mom thing. So she, she really stepped up and kind of filled that role. It's funny when you talk about the spiritual part of it. I was at Resurrection Hospital Catholic Hospital. But the chapel was closed to people, so on the TV there was a station of just a camera in the chapel with a live feed of the chapel, so you could pray.

[00:44:19] It was really creepy, It was really bizarre. It was super bizarre.

[00:44:24] **Dana:** On the way here, we drove by your, your elementary school? That was mm-hmm...a Catholic school. Mm-hmm. on the way here. Yeah. St Isidore. Yeah. Yeah. And your mom was raised Catholic, but mm-hmm...you weren't?

[00:44:36] **Mandy:** Yeah, I...was raised Catholic, but um, I would say I'm a recovering Catholic more than anything at this point.

[00:44:43] Yeah.

[00:44:45] **Dana:** That's your mom, like when you were in high school, do you remember her as a parent in these, these days when you were in this classroom?

[00:44:52] **Mandy:** She was working at Pfizer at, at this point, she had recently switched jobs and started at Pfizer, so she was really into that. She was a lot of fun when I was in high school.

[00:45:03] I feel like my senior year was the year that we kind of butted heads a lot. Yeah. Yeah. I think there was that like, you're gonna be leaving soon. Yeah. But I remember we had a lot of, a lot of fun, like freshman, sophomore year, Like I had friends, but I still had my mom. I, my mom very much. I, looking back now with that objective lens, realized like she really wanted a friend more than a daughter.

[00:45:32] That was cool for a while, but I think, you know, in high school you then wanna make your own friends and yeah. Yeah. People at your own age, so, So...

[00:45:43] **Dana:** She didn't have boundaries? Is that what you mean? I think

[00:45:46] **Mandy:** so. I mean, there were some things that she, there were things that I, I wish she hadn't said to me. Like my, my relationship with my dad is extraordinarily strained.

[00:45:54] He's not a good dad. Yeah. But I remember when they were getting a divorce, she would just say things about my dad and like it was like, maybe I shouldn't have known that, you know, even though I'm not close with him, I don't know how much more she might have contributed to that relationship being strained because she was kind of jealous.

[00:46:18] She was a jealous person. It feels weird to say that about your own mother, but you know, like, this is horrible. But when she passed, we were

pulling photos for her memorial and I was going through photos of, of my wedding day and seeing, like we had people come over to her house to get the makeup done and we had food and all the things and like, and not in looking at those candid photos of like me interacting with my future mother-in-law or bridesmaids and my mom off to the side, just kind of looking slightly pissed that the attention was somewhere else.

[00:46:57] I was like, and I, and I realized, I think I had a little of that in me for a long time, but I've gotten therapy and mm-hmm. and worked past that. So yeah. I think she wanted me all to herself a lot of the time.

[00:47:13] **Dana:** Yeah. Yeah. It's just you. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Only child. Yeah. Yeah. Same as we know. Yeah. Cause

[00:47:20] **Mandy:** We talked about how like, in so many ways your mom was a superhero to so many people and you think your mom is a superhero and that they're not a human being who's complex.

[00:47:32] Complex. And so,

[00:47:34] **Dana:** You know, she died. I always, random people reach out to me like, I loved your mom. She was an amazing teacher. I saw the obituary. Yeah. You know, I nominated her for this, you know, Illinois Math and Science Award. I'm the all these people reaching out and I'm like, she is amazing. I'm so and so thank you for reminding me and thank you for loving my mom. But, if they knew that I didn't call her back sometimes or was mean to her, they'd probably be like, How could you? She was so incredible. And you're like, But you knew her as a teacher. You didn't, you didn't know her as her as my mom. So it is tricky.

[00:48:02] But then I feel guilty, like, was I the bad one? Am I the one that didn't work hard enough? And it's spirals, But yeah. What else is coming up for you? Being here, walking through the auditorium? You did theater, you did the sound design, you did tech. Mm-hmm. , just didn't know if any memories with your mom being here, sitting in the seats.

[00:48:23] Yeah.

[00:48:24] **Mandy:** You know, it's funny, like I feel like my, my, my life at school was so separate from my life at home. Yeah. With her. I mean, she came to see the plays that I was in and worked on and stuff.

[00:48:37] **Dana:** Do you saying when she were on the stage instead of behind?

[00:48:40] **Mandy:** No, because I mean, she was, she was fully supportive when I was on stage versus off stage, but, my senior year we did Noises off Here and, which I wasn't in.

[00:48:50] Mm-hmm. I was bummed about that. But I did makeup and, and we had to turn the set around. It was this whole thing. But she like, she was always like, I love Noises Off so much. I'm like, Yeah, but I wasn't in that one...

[00:49:03] **Dana:** I read that's the one she like, one was that I was in Mother . Yeah,

[00:49:07] **Mandy:** you're like fun. Right. Come on.

[00:49:11] I mean, I'm glad that she appreciated theater for, you know, the greater sense of theater.

[00:49:16] **Dana:** She saw you and things in Chicago as you went on to do your career.

[00:49:20] **Mandy:** Yeah, yeah. Yeah. You know, I mean there's some things since she's passed that I'm like, I wish she had been around for that. Yeah.

[00:49:27] **Dana:** My mom couldn't see me in shows since like 2008 on cause she couldn't really walk or, you know, she couldn't come into the city.

[00:49:33] So she didn't see a lot of the my, my last work, the last 10 years.

[00:49:39] **Mandy:** Did she ask about it

[00:49:39] **Dana:** Oh, yeah. She kept all the programs. Yeah. I would give her a program and when she died, I found all the programs and notes and like reviews that she had pulled from the internet or papers. They were all in like a drawer.

[00:49:49] Not every show I did. Mm-hmm. But she kept, yeah. So again, that's when I go, I'm a horrible person. My mom kept these beautiful things of me, and here I am trying to talk trash about her on a podcast... No, I'm trying to, She's a full woman. Yeah. And I'm trying to come to terms with how I treated her. Right. As you know, my show's about me.



[00:50:07] Really, it's about my journey. It's not even about her. It's not even about her, but right. But like, yeah, she was supportive, but, but she couldn't, she couldn't fully support me in everything I did. Yeah. And your mom tried too. Yeah. It's like she tried. Yeah, she tried. Did she like Chris? I was gonna ask you this.

[00:50:24] **Mandy:** She did like Chris. Well, and it, it's funny. I'm an only child. So like I think Chris became the son. Yeah. She never had. Yeah. And like, you know, we'd both be in the same show and she'd be like, Oh, Chris was so great. And be like, again, mother. I was in it too. You remember me off to the side.

[00:50:41] **Dana:** I remember my wedding recently.

[00:50:43] My grandma was saying at the wedding on the nursing home. My grandma kept talking about how great Jonathan looked. I was like, "you know...like, can I get a little a something? Yeah, no." She just loved Jonathan's suit and I was like, "can we, hello I was in a dress!" Yeah. But I guess on my mom's wedding, my grandma said to my mom, this is true.

[00:51:05] "Everybody kept saying I looked like the bride" cause my grandma looked so beautiful. So that's a whole thing to unpack about my grandma telling my mom she looked incredible. "They thought I was the bride." She said. "A lot of people thought I was getting married" and I and I said to my grandma, "You told that to my mom."

[00:51:19] She's like, "Yeah, I told it to her later." I said, "you didn't say it on her wedding day. I hope." She was like, "No, no. She knew I looked beautiful though." It's a very competitive relationship. Anyway.

[00:51:27] **Mandy:** Ooh, I actually like talking about your mom and like her relationship with her body and all those things. Like there's a, there's one thing that, like another memory I have of her in this room, it was towards the end of class and I don't know why we were working with stethoscopes, but she put hers in and the rubber tip for the ear wasn't, it had fallen off and she didn't know and she put it in and I think she ruptured her eardrum.

[00:51:54] Oh my God, your mom. I know that that's incredibly painful. She was like, "ow, that hurts. Okay, well I'm gonna go to urgent care." Yep. She was like, just super calm about it and I just find it like, So I know your mom's tolerance and like understanding of the body was like, high,

[00:52:17] **Dana:** high. And so when it got really bad, Yeah, it got really bad.

[00:52:20] So it was like she could handle a lot and or could ignore a lot until she couldn't. Right. Yeah. Was like, whew, you've got crippling pain. Yeah. All over your body. Yeah. That's sad. Yeah. But she could handle a lot. She used to like break her leg or like she wanted to walk. She would wanna like walk herself to the hospital once. And then during her surgery she asked to, she was only under like twilight, so she asked to watch the procedure on her knee. Oh wow. Of course she did. Course she did. Freak. But that's cool. That's cool. She's cool. But yeah, she had a high. That's really true. It's interesting to think too, if we dissect what Deb said, like Deb talked about her beauty like six times sitting here.

[00:52:59] Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm, which is also part of my mom's trauma. Like staying beautiful, staying healthy, staying thin. And then when she couldn't stay the way she wanted to look and how sick she got, that's just like, that's interesting cause that's how I'm. That's beautiful. That's how she remembers her. But that's also a point of contention for my mom.

[00:53:19] Right. You know? But even though I'm sure if my mom was here, she'd be like, That's right. That's right. You know, Say it louder. Right. But that's part of her, I think her comparativeness. Yeah, the

[00:53:28] **Mandy:** Comparative. I think my, my mom went through this similar thing and in fact, like I pulled some photos and I purposely pulled photos.

[00:53:36] Show me, oh yeah, have to get up. I pulled a lot of photos of when she was younger, because that's the way she would wanna, be remembered. Yeah. You know, because like...she doesn't, right. She was on so much Prednisone. Right, right, right. From fibrosis that she put on a lot of weight. Um, she had had a thyroid issue, so when she was treated for that, her eyeballs swelled, you know, like Barbara Bush had the same issue.

[00:54:03] So yeah, there's, there's that vanity thing. And you know, even after I had the surgery and I lost so much weight, like I looked skeletal and awful. Um, this is her bowl- I told you she bowled a lot, so I brought some of, Yeah.

[00:54:19] **Dana:** Right. This is her bowling. It's a championship. What is this? What does this stand for?

[00:54:24] **Mandy:** Uh, women's something bowling. I don't know.

[00:54:27] **Dana:** Bowling champions. It's a photo of her mom with two bowling balls. Now they are placed, they're on a place, on a table in front of her, but they are placed, they are where the boobies would go. Right. And then there's two hats, Cowboy hats, sort of like on the either side. I don't know where that one was.

[00:54:42] 1980. I thought I'd end our little conversation asking you to tell me your mom's name as we do, and how you're feeling about her right now, today, in this moment sitting in your old biology classroom.

[00:54:59] **Mandy:** My mom's name was Priscilla Harbut, her maiden name was Filipowski. Sitting here, I miss her today and I, I'm feeling a little more, like I said, you know, there's that, that objective lens now that she's not here to look at our relationship, but I, I feel a little more at peace with her and I know she did the best that she could with what she had.

[00:55:31] **Dana:** And this is a poem that was written to my mom called Mrs. Jo Black, six slash seven. So I don't know if that was a classroom or a class number, but it was Mrs. Jo Black six slash seven and a cat named Boo. And it's from the late seventies, I think '78. And it was written by Billy Corgan of the Smashing Pumpkins, who was a student of my mom's.

[00:56:00] So I will read it cuz my mom has clearly kept this. I think she wants me to sell this on eBay. I'm not sure. But it's Mrs. Jo Black six slash seven and a cat named Boo.

*A lady who sat behind a lab table, who will often be referred to in this fable, managed a strange troupe, a particular group they met in an autumn day.*

*[00:56:20] The lady instructing her ways to many confused and helpless teens, they hit it right off. Knowledge they sought in that wonder of room 215. Through fruit flies and shattered test tubes through benedicts and agar cubes through digestion. We all had a gas through genetics a few of us passed with an alien from space, a sock of tall stature.*

*[00:56:44] They studied the human race with that lady of mirror, Mrs. Jo Black, a guy named Louis, a girl who knew Kung Fuey, some girls who went Mo, and then there was Lane, Phil, Pam, Pam, Fred, Ed, Lynn, Noel, Himey, Tracy, Lori, and Billy too. It's been neat. It's been fun. We'll never be beat. Six slash seven is number one.*

[00:57:05] *Love the author, Billy.*

And my mom wrote in pencil to the left of his signature, Billy Corgan Smashing Pumpkins, and she circled Billy Corgan in pencil. And then a bunch of the students signed the piece of paper. She wrote the Billy Corgan Smashing Pumpkins later. But clearly she kept this and then she must have gone back in when he became famous and then wrote that

[00:57:25] **Mandy:** Six seven is tell me it's period six, seven, because they overlapped in a weird way.

[00:57:30] Oh, so he was in, He was six, seven. Yeah. This is

[00:57:33] **Dana:** Incredible. Thanks Billy. Thanks, Jo Black. Do you wanna walk, talk? **Mandy:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**(DANA VOICEOVER)** [00:57:35] **Dana:** So I don't know if it's every high school or school, but in this particular high school, they don't use textbooks anymore. Everything's online. And I get it. I get it, but I'm like, oh my gosh, how old am I?

[00:57:55] That, that felt so shocking to me. But it's true. So as we were walking around the room, we were looking at the beaks and looking at the drawers and opening doors and just reveling and how the room felt identical to how it felt in the nineties. And we came upon a section of books, which again felt like a relic.

[00:58:16] Books, textbooks. And we started picking them up and something crazy happened.

**(BACK IN THE CLASSROOM WITH DANA AND MANDY, HEARING SOUNDS FROM THE ROOM)** [00:58:17] **Dana:** Okay. They say there's no...there's no that, no, no kids use books anymore. Right? Cause everything's on their laptops. But look at, are these, who uses these then? These are like anatomy books, you know, of the frog. So maybe they just use these in the classroom.

[00:58:40] But this is okay. These are the old ones cause my mom. Yeah, I remember these. So these are some of the old books, cause my mom kept her, um, biology books. Yeah, maybe that was the one edition. Maybe.

[00:58:53] **Mandy:** Biology. Well, it says Black on the side.

[00:58:57] **Dana:** Oh my God. Yeah. My mom wrote on everything and she even wrote... Oh my God. I don't know if like, oh, sorry, I'm having no moment.

[00:59:05] I'm having, cause my, so my mom, I didn't bring it today, but you remember how I kept her stapler from the classroom? Like her stapler had her name on it. Yeah. Yeah. Oh yeah. Oh my gosh. Holy shit. This is probably her writing. Oh my God. [laughing] Cause I was like, that book's like her book. Oh.

[00:59:24] **Mandy:** Oh wow. I'm looking, I'm paging through this and I'm like, Yeah, I remember this book.

[00:59:29] **Dana:** Humans, deer, science terms, look at how big the, the print Kingdom Monira.

**(DANA VOICEOVER)** [00:59:47] **Dana:** My mom really did write her name on everything, staplers, pictures, plates, carving knives, even a rake on the handle. I found it in her garage after she died. It was written in black Sharpie on the handle. Her last name Black. Don't steal her rake people. I remember telling someone this and they said, "Oh yeah, it's cause she's a teacher."

[01:00:10] She wrote her name on things. That makes sense. So you know who to return it to. Once a teacher, always a teacher. When I was a young kid, she used to let me grade her student's papers with an answer key. I would use a red pen and sit at the dining room table and grade quizzes on fruit flies and chromosomes.

[01:00:26] I even got to put star and smiley sticker faces on the quizzes that got a minus and above. As a kid, I also used to play pretend classroom like most kids might. I would make a mock classroom of teddy bears and dolls and imaginary people in my room, and I would hand out paper and quizzes to them and grade them.

[01:00:45] And we even went on field trips to collect leaves and branches outside. Remember, I was an only child. I never really wanted to be a real teacher, but I always thought somewhere in the back of my mind, would I be good at this? Could I be a teacher like my mom? Chromosomes are a thread like structure of nucleic acids and protein found in the nucleus of most living cells, carrying genetic information in the form of genes.

[01:01:16] My mom taught for over 20 years, and when she decided to retire or leave Glenbard North, it was a huge deal. Like she didn't wanna do it, and she said she did it because she didn't wanna become a jaded teacher. But I think she

really left because she wanted to spend more time with me before I left for college.

[01:01:36] I knew that she was about to lose a huge part of her identity and her purpose, and I was about to have a mom who was real focused on me, maybe too focused on me, and I'm sure I didn't appreciate it at the time that she was around and helping me and doing things for me and being great because I was too busy living my senior year life and focused on college, leaving her and my dad many states away in New York.

[01:02:01] So this episode...is not about what comes next for my mom or for me, cuz that journey gets a lot harder and it's not filled with as many shiny stickers. But my mom was always a teacher, whether she retired or not. She was always a thinker, a lover of young kids, curious. I might not have become a teacher myself yet, but she did inspire so many other students to follow in her path, like the teacher inside that classroom at Glenbard North today.

[01:02:35] His name is Joe Larson, and he was a former student of my mom's. Yes. His name is Joe, and my mom's name was Jo. Yeah. Yeah, you heard that right. So, Joe and I never got to meet up as the school year was starting up again and a formal interview just wasn't possible. But he wrote to me and said, "Dana, I can tell you that your mom, Mrs. Black, was one of the best teachers I ever had in school, and she inspired me to be a science teacher. She was tough and demanding, and I never wanted to let her down. She made our honors biology class memorable and fun to walk into each day. She made us laugh all the time and not take ourselves too seriously.

[01:03:15] She was the reason education and being a science teacher was something I wanted to pursue, thanks to your mom." So, I have had to record this quote a few times this morning because I just couldn't seem to get through it without crying. I'm not totally sure why. I think it's because someone who I don't know is telling me how amazing my mom was, how she inspired him, how she changed the trajectory of his life, and I am still grappling with anger towards her and maybe, maybe I'm jealous of this former student turned teacher for getting this pure part of my mom, this inspiring and awesome part of my mom.

[01:03:56] He got the classroom teacher. I got a mom and some of her genetics, which I'm proud of. I also inherited a lot of those fabulous Donna Karen outfits.

**(BACK IN THE CLASSROOM WITH DANA AND MANDY, HEARING SOUNDS FROM THE ROOM)** [01:04:16] **Mandy:** The beakers. Yeah.

[01:04:19] She drank urine outta one of these beakers...that's what it was. One of these, she drank.

[01:04:27] **Dana:** That's what it was. That was what it was.

[01:04:39] **Dana:** Quick thanks to Glenbard North High School, Eric Johansen, Deb Cartright, Joe Larson, Mandy Walsh, and Jessi DiBartolomeo for her audio and tape support in the classroom. The second season of, I Swear on My Mother's Grave podcast would never be possible without our editor, Amanda Roscoe Mayo, our music composer, Adam Ollendorff, our graphic designer and illustrator Meredith Montgomery, and our copywriter, Rachel Claff.

[01:05:07] Thanks as well to Tony Howell and Austin Heller for all their work on the website. And to Heather Bodie for her emotional, spiritual, social, and physical, well...for all the help. Thank you. And to all of you, thank you for listening, subscribing, reaching out, and just being a part of this community. I'm so grateful you're here.

[01:05:25] And if you haven't signed up for our newsletter, you can do so at our website, which is [danablack.org](http://danablack.org). You can hear all about this incredible season and some upcoming live events we're curating just for you. I hope you'll come back. Come back, come back. Don't leave me like my dead mom, you know what I mean?

[01:07:08] Come back.