

Mothers Grave Ep5 Rachel

Transcript

[00:00:00] **Dana:** Hey, friend, welcome back. Or if you're new, welcome to, I Swear on My Mother's Grave. My name is Dana Black and I'm glad you're here. This is a show about the loss of our complex mothers and not just in death. And, uh, it's funny too, that's what I like to yell at people. It's funny too. Get in here, You'll, you'll have a great time, but seriously, we do.

[00:00:41] We laugh a lot. The show is for the living. It's for you. It's not just about our moms. So seriously, thanks for pressing play and, um, if you need a good cry and a little bit of a laugh, this episode and this guest are here to help. Today's guest actually said that their mother always thought of them as a comedian.

[00:00:57] And would give them material and say, "Well, you can use it in your act. What act?" My guest would say. My guest, Rachel Matlow, is a producer, audio content creator and writer based in Canada. I found Rachel in 2021 when researching audio pieces about maternal loss. I was finishing up my last season and I just wanted more inspiration, especially from audio pros.

[00:01:21] Rachel's piece, title Dead Mom Talking, won the Third Coast International Audio Festival, Best New Artist Award in 2016. And I said to Rachel that a third coast prize would be like the equivalent to getting a Tony Award in theater in my book. It's super cool. As Rachel's mother was dying, Rachel recorded the two of them as they binge watched TV, traded dark humor and talked and laughed.

[00:01:45] And that way, months after their mom's death, Rachel could sneak in one more conversation with the person they needed to hear from most. From the moment I pressed play on this piece, I was drawn into their story, and I felt like I was being hugged by their mother's wisdom and wit her emotions and all the grace she showed at the end of her life.

[00:02:05] I was in my living room on the couch and I just sat there and cried. It felt really good to hear them together. It was comforting in a way, and both of them were complete strangers to me. I haven't stopped thinking about this piece since, and I also haven't stopped sending it to people connected to this podcast and saying, "Listen to this piece. It's glorious," and I hope to play it on my podcast someday. So I finally reached out to Rachel via email last year and they said, "Sure, and hey, I have a book coming out, so let's do an interview when it

comes out, and you can share the audio piece too." In this episode, we talk about Rachel's memoir titled *Dead Mom Walking: a memoir of Miracle Cures and Other Disasters*.

[00:02:48] We chat about how it's important to get your end of life and after death party plans in order. We chat about our mother's ashes and you will get to hear the ultimate exit interview in the form of their mother's final words of wisdom, humor, and musings about their extraordinary child. This is Rachel Matlow.

[00:03:14] This piece that you made, you interviewed your mom in the last month of months of her life and and your mom said, "if you wanna talk to me when I'm dead, you should go to my bench." And there is now this bench right in is it is in Toronto, but it's called Cedarville. Cedarville?

[00:03:28] **Rachel:** Yeah. It's just a ravine in a neighborhood called Cedarvale. So it's, you know, it's central Toronto.

[00:03:34] **Dana:** Okay.

[00:03:34] **Rachel:** Yeah. That is where her memorial bench is.

[00:03:37] **Dana:** Her bench is, it's a gravel path under tall trees. And you interviewed her, you recorded the conversations months before her death, and then you spliced this piece together so that you get one more conversation with your mom and the person you needed most to help you through your grief.

[00:03:51] And in this piece, your mom says a lot of things, but your mom said you are extraordinary and that you have in you anything that I gave you, including the things you might have to talk to a shrink about, which you laugh just like that in the audio piece. You have all these things your mom said that I gave you that were positive and helpful and you have all your natural, extraordinary qualities.

[00:04:12] And I just have complete faith that you will. That you might make mistakes, everyone does, but you'll be able to create a good life, a very good life. And so you are really, really gonna be all right. And I just know that for sure.

[00:04:25] **Rachel:** Mm-hmm. .

[00:04:26] **Dana:** And today I just wanted to know. With your book being out and we're gonna get to that.

[00:04:32] Do you feel all right? Do you feel like you're living a good life? I was thinking about you today. Yeah.

[00:04:37] **Rachel:** Yeah. Thank you. Um, and thank you so much for having me on and for reaching out and Yeah. You have a dead mom. I have a dead mom. Let's chat. Yeah. , let's chat. Um, but yeah, it's interesting cause it's just been seven years now exactly since she died. And I just find, yeah, I'm, the grief has faded. You know, there's still moments where it comes back and hits you, but I do feel in general that I'm much more OK. It was a lovely thing for her to say to me.

[00:05:11] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:05:11] **Rachel:** I mean, and, and I really do believe that she believed it. You know, I know how much she thought of me and she was my biggest champion in life.

[00:05:21] I carry that along with me in everything I do. So, yeah, I mean, I still have bad days. Life is still hard. It's been a pandemic.

[00:05:31] **Dana:** Mm-hmm. , the world is burning. Great.

[00:05:33] **Rachel:** Yeah. I'm, yeah. I'm not as weighted down by her death as I used to be.

[00:05:39] **Dana:** Is there some advice that she didn't give you that you wish you got? I mean, do you think back on what she said and you think, Ugh, I'm still looking for that around grief, or, I'm still, I mean, obviously you couldn't have asked for everything in that moment.

[00:05:56] You didn't know everything that was coming. Right?

[00:05:59] **Rachel:** Yeah. That's a tough one. I mean, it's hard to know what you would want. But I feel like there's lots of other places for me to get advice from in life.

[00:06:11] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:06:11] **Rachel:** You know, just people like you who've gone through something similar, you know, friends, books, films, like there's so many other places to get some good advice that I don't, didn't need everything to come from my mom.

[00:06:26] And it's not like , you know, she knew everything. Um, so, but the advice that she did give me was really great and I hold onto that. Yeah, it's usually things like, uh, what's the, you know, what kind of cheese should I buy? Uh, like I wish I could ask my mom that, like, she didn't write down all the best cheese, you know, , things like that.

[00:06:50] **Dana:** Yeah. Yeah. Uhhuh. Um, did your mom ever listen to her own voice? Did she ever listen to any of those back before she passed?

[00:06:59] **Rachel:** No. No, No. And I didn't even listen to anything back.

[00:07:03] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:07:04] **Rachel:** until after she died.

[00:07:05] **Dana:** Was it, was it immediate? Was it the, was the idea just to listen or did you know you wanted to make something with it?

[00:07:11] **Rachel:** It was really just the instinct, I guess, you know, being a radio producer...

[00:07:16] **Dana:** mm-hmm.

[00:07:17] **Rachel:** ...that I wanted to capture more of her before she died, like I wanted to... it started off really with just, you know, being inspired by story core and just, you know, asking, you know, Tell me about your childhood mom. Tell me about your parents.

[00:07:32] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:07:33] **Rachel:** Your life highlights, you know, just to have, you know, tell me the story of my birth again. So I wasn't even, I didn't even have an idea of what I wanted to create with it, or if I, like, I didn't even think I would share these tapes.

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

[00:07:47] **Rachel:** I just really wanted them for myself and then, you know, it also became like a really nice way to spend time together cause I could ask her all of these things that I don't know if I would've, if we were just hanging out.

[00:07:59] Right. I don't think I would've just sat and listened to her for hours. And I think there's also something about the microphone too that maybe gave me permission to ask things that maybe I even wouldn't, you know, wouldn't have asked. And in a way where she probably answered things in a way where maybe she wouldn't have given such full honest answers before.

[00:08:18] I don't know. But she kind of knew it was a exit interview of sorts. So.

[00:08:22] **Dana:** I would be nervous. I, I feel like if I was doing that with someone who wasn't feeling well Right? Wanting to be respectful, Right? Of how they were feeling physically too. Like, I don't wanna push, I don't wanna push, I don't wanna, you know, be disrespectful of...

[00:08:39] **Rachel:** mm-hmm.

[00:08:39] **Dana:** Right. Which you probably weren't, but...

[00:08:41] **Rachel:** yeah, we did about half an hour at a time, or maybe an hour until then she would get tired and I'd turn it off, revisit it another day.

[00:08:50] **Dana:** Yeah. We'll come back to it.

[00:08:51] **Rachel:** Mm-hmm.

[00:08:53] **Dana:** I'm trying to get my grandma to talk to me and I think there's times that. She'll do it, but then there's lots of times she doesn't want to.

[00:09:00] And so again, I do feel, I feel gross. Like I'm like an, it's not like an ambulance chaser, but I feel, you know, I go, "am I pushing too hard to get content for my 95 year old grandma, even though it's now or never?" Right. And also, her voice has been going for so long that I might be just past the point of no return.

[00:09:16] It's hard to understand her. Right. And then it feels gross. Like, am I doing it for me or am I doing it for the show? Am I doing it for this other, like being clear on why I want it sometimes.

[00:09:27] **Rachel:** Mm-hmm. . Yeah, I don't think. You know, you need to worry that much. Like, like I think, yeah, if she's like tired and doesn't want to, but I mean, my mom even said it was actually really nice for her.

[00:09:41] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:09:41] **Rachel:** Like, I think it's also really nice to give somebody kind of this platform and this space just to be listened to, especially, you know, towards the end of their life. You know, it's an opportunity for them to also maybe work out things, talk about events, reminisce. Um, so I don't think it's just like necessarily even selfish that it's just for you, this also

[00:10:04] **Dana:** mm-hmm.

[00:10:05] **Rachel:** and also could be really nice for her. Yeah.

[00:10:07] **Dana:** And that's a way to frame it, you know, for someone. Who's nervous about doing this? Cause I feel like a lot of people, even in my life have said, I wanna interview people, but I don't know how to do it. Or I don't know how to start, I don't know what to say. Mm-hmm.

[00:10:22] and or I'm like, go call them now. Call them tonight. Ask them, ask them that question or don't wait, you know?

[00:10:29] **Rachel:** Mm-hmm.

[00:10:30] **Dana:** I try to give that advice and even if it isn't recording, I say, pick up the phone or send that letter or, but if you wanna start recording 'em, do it. You know, just use your phone, use your voice memo. Right. You don't need a fancy device.

[00:10:42] **Rachel:** For sure, for sure. iPhone voice memo.

[00:10:45] **Dana:** Right.

[00:10:46] **Rachel:** And, and often like you do, maybe feel a bit self-conscious at the start or the other person does, but I think once you actually just start engaging and talking about stories, you know, that's the great thing about audio is it's not very intrusive like a camera is.

[00:11:03] You can kind of forget it's even happening. Uh, and so then I think, you know, You'd probably become more comfortable.

[00:11:11] **Dana:** Yeah. It's such a great piece and yeah, I just don't have, I don't have a lot of my mom's voice, so I think that's also why.

[00:11:16] **Rachel:** Mm-hmm.

[00:11:17] **Dana:** I lost a lot of her voice memos or voice messages to me, and all I have is like really sad , a sad recording.

[00:11:25] I took like, you know, two in the morning she was crying and upset about something in her past and I was in her room. It was just late at, you know, really it wasn't two in the morning, but it was late at night and I just turned on my phone cuz I wanted to remember it. And now I listen to that, I'm like, this is all I have.

[00:11:42] This is. Depressing. You know, why didn't I get...

[00:11:45] **Rachel:** Yeah.

[00:11:45] **Dana:** Why didn't I get the good stuff? Why wasn't I called extraordinary? No, I knew that she, she loved me too, of course. But I just, we didn't, I didn't, I didn't save the happy birthday messages and the

[00:11:55] **Rachel:** Mm-hmm.

[00:11:56] **Dana:** Right. And that's why I just found it. So it was almost like your, your mom was getting to be all of our moms.

[00:12:03] **Rachel:** Aw.

[00:12:03] **Dana:** Like hearing that piece, other people who have heard it, that I've shared it with was like, that's what I needed to hear. Right.

[00:12:08] **Rachel:** That's funny cause I've been told that so many times in my life by people. Like, I wish your mom was my mom.

[00:12:13] **Dana:** Oh right. Yes, exactly.

[00:12:14] **Rachel:** And I would always like roll my eyes and, Yeah. Yes. Well that is, it's nice to share her.

[00:12:19] **Dana:** Right.

[00:12:20] **Rachel:** And yeah, she did give great advice. And there's also just something so comforting about hearing your mom's voice.

[00:12:26] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:12:27] **Rachel:** No matter what she's saying. You know, just hearing Yeah, that's true. The voice that's true. Can be very comforting.

[00:12:35] **Dana:** We're gonna take a little break in the middle of this interview, which I've never done before, so that you can hear Rachel's glorious piece, Dead Mom Talking, which originally aired on CBC Sunday edition in 2016.

[00:12:49] Enjoy.

[00:12:59] **Rachel:** Hey mom, I'm here. Your bench looks really good. It's just what you wanted. You really have missed a lot in the past year. Your after party went really well. Lots of people came, and I even did standup comedy about you. You know, you've always been a source of good material and you'd be happy to know that Harper is out, Trudeau got in. Oh, and the second season of Transparent is really good. I wish we could have watched together. And the holidays and birthdays haven't been the same without you bringing up something inappropriate at the table like furrries. I miss that laugh. I really wish I could talk to you.

[00:13:47] **Elaine:** Yeah, that's a common thing. I keep reading that people are here, that if only I could just pick up the phone once and talk to her again.

[00:14:00] If you want, just talk to me. Just think you're talking to me.

[00:14:05] **Rachel:** Okay. But it's not the same as you actually being alive and here right now.

[00:14:11] **Elaine:** It's not the same. But no, it's not the same. No, it's not the same.

[00:14:17] **Rachel:** I sometimes just think you're on a really long silent meditation retreat. I don't know where you are, but I wish you were here.

[00:14:27] **Elaine:** I know. I wish I were here too.

[00:14:32] **Rachel:** I just don't know how to get through this without you. I mean, I, I knew I would be sad, but I never knew I'd be this sad. What would you tell me if you were here?

[00:14:45] **Elaine:** I would tell you that everybody has a lot of sadness in their life. Everybody does, no matter what they look like on the outside. And sometimes you go for a quite a long time with everything great, but everybody does suffer. And so it's not weird or wrong or not socially acceptable to be sad.

[00:15:04] **Rachel:** I know it's not weird, but I'm not always sure I know what to do.

[00:15:10] **Elaine:** Well, one thing is just to sit with it. That's the Buddhist way. You just feel the loss and the pain and it'll move. It'll move a lot faster than if you try to like just check it away or suppress it, or, you know, you're just better to say, I'm missing my mother right now.

[00:15:29] **Rachel:** I'm missing my mother right now.

[00:15:32] **Elaine:** If you're sad, be sad because it's life. You can't, you know what I mean? It's, unfortunately, people die. We all die. So, and the people left behind are the ones who really suffered.

[00:15:44] Like, I mean, the person might be terrified of dying beforehand, but I don't have any worries about going to hell or heaven.

[00:15:54] **Rachel:** I'm glad you have a sense of humor about it, but as the person left behind, what else can I do when I miss you?

[00:16:03] **Elaine:** Uh, you could, I have a lot of diaries that are usually like, Oh, I'm so unhappy, I da da, but I'm not gonna throw them out.

[00:16:11] If you wanna read them, if you wanna know about my sex life, you can. (laughter)

[00:16:15] **Rachel:** Mom.

[00:16:17] **Elaine:** Um, but it is a way you might want to, or some of them are, start them or read pieces. I, I think it would be... you know what I mean? It would really bring me back cuz they're all handwritten and they're, um, pretty raw.

[00:16:29] **Rachel:** I wish they could really bring you back, but I'll still give them a read at my own risk.

[00:16:36] I just can't get over the fact that you won't be here to see some really big things in my life. Like if I get married or have a kid.

[00:16:47] **Elaine:** Oh, kripes, there's nothing you can do except I wanna tell you this and I want you to remember it, that I couldn't be any prouder of you than I am today. But I wish I could see that. I do. Mm-hmm. I mean, I wish I could see everything that goes on in your life from now on. I just had a thought.

[00:17:11] **Rachel:** Yeah.

[00:17:12] **Elaine:** If you do have a daughter, could you give her Elaine even as a middle name? Sure. Okay. I would like that. Well, only if I have a daughter, . I know. But if he did or a dog, I mean, how many dogs are named Elaine? It would be very interesting. . . (laughter)

[00:17:29] **Rachel:** Yeah. That wouldn't be weird at all. But it already sucks for small things like you not having been around for my birthday, so I can't imagine what's gonna feel like if you miss the birth of my kid or dog.

[00:17:48] **Elaine:** Well, when you concentrate on gratitude and what you were given, you can't feel sorry for yourself. Like you can't do both at the same time. It actually is an a possibility. So I would like actually consciously look for some gratitude at that moment. Like I've been given a lot in my life and I've had real losses in grief too, and one of them is that I wish my mom could be here, but everybody gets both.

[00:18:13] I mean, reframing is a good idea too sometimes. And I don't mean it sounds cheap sometimes, but, But I think it's a really good thing to do. So reframing, you know, mum, you've really been there for me and it's been good to talk to you during these times and I wish I could in the future to reframe it in that I had a mother who did give me that.

[00:18:34] I've got some of that inside me now. It's part of me. And I did get some really good mothering and I mean, it's a complicated relationship, but I think ours has been great and that great is better than perfect. Way better.

[00:18:54] **Rachel:** I agree. It's been great. It hasn't been perfect cause perfect is...

[00:18:59] **Elaine:** Impossible.

[00:18:59] **Rachel:** Yeah, it's impossible. But it's been real and honest.

[00:19:02] **Elaine:** Yes. Yes.

[00:19:04] **Rachel:** And a lot more than that.

[00:19:06] **Elaine:** Yeah. We have a good time together. It's like yeah.

[00:19:08] **Rachel:** We had so much fun. Yeah. And we support each other and you know, you really think you're in me.

[00:19:16] **Elaine:** Yeah, I do. But also we are like, we're a mother and daughter, uh, son, and we're, we're very entwined. So like, you'll never forget me. I mean, the grief will fade. Um, and it's funny with me, and I don't know if it'll happen with you, but every once in a while I'm just hit by it. And, you know, every once in a while I'll just think of my father and just really wanna talk to him and, and, and, and with my mother, it's quite often on the radio.

[00:19:55] I don't know why, but they play. I'll be seeing you. And that was our song. And, and it makes me cry . So...

[00:20:04] (song plays) I'll be seeing you in all the old familiar places that this heartened mind embraces all day through in that small cafe. The power across the way, the children's carousel, chestnut tree, the wishing well.

[00:20:41] **Rachel:** That song also reminds me of Grandma. Now it makes me think of you and all the places we used to go to together, like the art gallery.

[00:20:50] **Elaine:** Oh, I know.

[00:20:52] **Rachel:** Drinks on the roof of the Park Plaza.

[00:20:55] **Elaine:** I know.

[00:20:56] **Rachel:** Walking in this ravine.

[00:20:58] **Elaine:** Well, we've been very lucky.

[00:21:00] **Rachel:** We really were.

[00:21:02] **Elaine:** We really have been extremely lucky.

[00:21:06] **Rachel:** I just wish somebody would've told me that the luck was gonna run out so soon. I wish he didn't have to leave me.

[00:21:25] **Elaine:** I don't wanna leave you either. So like from right now, I think, well, I'm not going to some, some way or another...

[00:21:37] a light bubble flicker or something will happen and you'll know I'm around.

[00:21:41] **Rachel:** Mm-hmm. , it's just so hard to fathom that we will never be together again.

[00:21:49] **Elaine:** I know that the dialogue doesn't stop, like it's, it's final, but the person is, has been and is so a part of you that. You know, you can feel like I used to feel my dad's presence around me quite often and whatever that meant and whatever the reason it felt like being embraced or helped or held or something.

[00:22:14] **Rachel:** That sounds really nice, but I don't know if that makes sense. I mean, am I going to feel your presence like a ghost in the room?

[00:22:22] **Elaine:** Okay, Rachel, you think that you're so rational, but you're sitting here on a bench talking to a picture.

[00:22:29] **Rachel:** Touché. And I do feel very connected to you right now, but I know you're dead. I was there when it happened. 7:23 PM on July 6th. That's when you took your last breath.

[00:22:47] **Elaine:** Really let yourself feel it and cry if you need to. Cause if that shifts, you're clearing away something. Um, and if not, it's just getting more stuck.

[00:22:59] **Rachel:** Yeah, but I still feel like there's this expectation that I should be able to get over it. Like I'm not supposed to be feeling this down.

[00:23:10] **Elaine:** Well, I understand you're feeling down and there's no time limits to grieving or no way it goes. It can go in waves where there's a wave where you're not actually truly suffering for a couple of months and then bang, it hit you again. Like you just don't know. So it's normal to feel the way you do for sure. As I'm sure you know.

[00:23:30] **Rachel:** I don't know what's normal. Is it normal to miss you this much?

[00:23:35] **Elaine:** Again, let yourself just feel it. And then here's what I'm telling you. You are one of really everybody in the world, and I mean you can escape it by dying when you're a baby, I guess, but you can't really escape suffering in pain if you live long enough illness, old age, nobody can. It's part of who we are and it's part of life. And it really sucks that for both of us that I had to go before I went.

[00:24:08] But you have, like, you're, you're extraordinary and you have in you anything I gave you, um, including the stuff you might have to talk to as shrink about. (laughter) Um, but you have all those things that I gave you that were positive and helpful and you have all your natural, extraordinary qualities. And I just have complete faith that you will, you might make mistakes, everybody does, but that you, you will be able to create a good life, a very good life.

[00:24:51] And so you're really, really gonna be all right. And I just know that for sure.

[00:24:59] **Rachel:** Thanks. I don't know if I totally believe that right now. But I guess I'll take your word for it. I love you. I'll talk to you later.

[00:25:58] **Dana:** I love that piece. I, I do. It was so interesting to read cause I heard that obviously, you know, um, when I first found it almost a year ago and then I read the book just recent, your book that you just came out just recently and so I didn't even know anything about your mom. Right? So.

[00:26:15] **Rachel:** Mm-hmm.

[00:26:15] **Dana:** Then going back and listening to that audio piece after reading the memoir was, was a whole new level of understanding. Yeah.

[00:26:23] **Rachel:** Right. I call it the E True Hollywood story, like of what really happened. Um, Yeah. Whereas like Dead Mom Talking, I feel ...

[00:26:34] **Dana:** mm-hmm.

[00:26:34] **Rachel:** you know, it's a short piece and it's kind of framed as like, what do you need to, you know, it's like a mom giving advice to their her child about like how to cope with the grief,

[00:26:47] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:26:47] **Rachel:** of, of losing her, you know, in that first year. Um, so it's really focused on that conversation, you know, and how, you know, so many of us wish we, if we could only have one last conversation. So I thought, you know, I'm gonna

[00:26:58] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:26:59] **Rachel:** Natalie, Nat King, call this, you know, and make it happen. The magic of audio editing.

[00:27:07] But of course you know. The book is, Yeah. How I joke, the whole story of how, you know, my mom actually.

[00:27:14] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:27:14] **Rachel:** you know, when she was diagnosed with cancer, tried to cure herself with herbs and magic against my wishes. Uhhuh . There's a lot more to say, needed a book.

[00:27:23] **Dana:** Yes. And you say that your mom handed you, your mom was a writer and handed you this like rabbit talisman, then said, Someday, someday you're gonna write a book.

[00:27:31] Do you have any idea what she meant by that or thought by that? Or what was the book about? Or was it about her? Was it about your life? Was it about journalists? What's it about?

[00:27:39] **Rachel:** I think it's funny because. You know, in my mom's head, she also thought that I was a comedian that

[00:27:46] **Dana:** Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:27:47] **Rachel:** you know, she was my muse.

[00:27:48] So she would always be like, Well, you can put that in your act. I'm like, What? Act,

[00:27:52] **Dana:** What? Act.

[00:27:53] **Rachel:** Like I'm not like, you know, So think in her head she just thought, Well, I guess, uh, not comedy act. You can write a book about me. I don't know. But it was also something I think I had hinted at, like, I love memoirs about families, interesting families.

[00:28:12] And so I kind of thought, you know, maybe one day I would write something, but it wasn't until like my mom basically handed me this whopper of a story that I thought, I could write a book. So, yeah, I don't, I don't know what she was thinking, but yeah. (laughter)

[00:28:31] **Dana:** Yeah, cause humor is huge. In, in, it's like on the front page of your memoir about how we're laughing at my mother's cancer.

[00:28:41] **Rachel:** Cancer Yeah.

[00:28:41] **Dana:** How are we able to do that? There's so much relief in that, and I, I feel the same way. You know, I'm crying and laughing on this podcast at the same time sometimes, or you're know, there's so much irreverency around death and you have to, but it feels like a cliché. So then it's like, well, is it always funny?

[00:28:58] No. And sometimes I struggle with even trying to describe this show. I'm like, Oh, we laugh a lot. We talk a lot. Trust me, it's about legacy and being someone's child, and, and then we cry and, but deep down it's, it's deep grief, like, you know, and it's individual grief. It's not someone else's story. And so I have, I want to be respectful.

[00:29:22] Like you want the reverency, but then you wanna be irreverent as well. So, you know, and you do a lot of humor through this whole book. You're, you're telling us really scary things and we're frustrated along with you, depending on our point of view of where your mom is at in her journey. And then you're immediately making a joke about as shaman, or like asparagus and herbal cures and, you know, I think, I don't know, like, is humor, is it essential or does it feel sometimes like

[00:29:54] excuse or like an escape?

[00:29:55] **Rachel:** Right. You're kind of covering something up. I mean,

[00:29:58] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:29:59] **Rachel:** Think, I think like everything...

[00:30:01] **Dana:** and I use it to deflect, you know, I've done, of course we've all done it right? Too much. Ooh, I'm using it too much to deflect. Yeah.

[00:30:06] **Rachel:** For sure. But I think that's kind of a negative mm-hmm. maybe way of looking at it. And I think that can happen.

[00:30:12] But I also think it is a way into actually accessing the really hard truths of life. And that the truth is like, just like everything in life, there is humor in cancer and in dying. And for us to pretend like there's not, like, that's just not true. You know? Like, and especially the way my mom lived and approached her treatment.

[00:30:37] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:30:37] **Rachel:** There was a lot of humor in it. Like, you know, she's like, trying to cure herself with flax seeds in her champagne and yes, zapping her cancer cells with this rife machine and talking out loud to her cancer cells and yes, the scorpion oil, the cannabis oil, the, you know, like, yes. It was funny. So...

[00:30:58] **Dana:** And picking and choosing what worked for her, right? Like yeah, what worked for her, you know, or what felt like, Yeah, this, this'll do it. And it's like, No, that's part of it. You know, you're still drinking sugary water, right? Yeah.

[00:31:13] **Rachel:** Yeah. I mean, it was fun- like, the thing is, we were always a funny family and my mom and I were at like shared this sense of dark humor.

[00:31:20] So that wasn't gonna change just because she got cancer. Like, if anything, it gave us more material to work. And I think, yeah, humor it, it can be used to deflect, but it can also be really disarming and like I said, like a way into accessing these, these difficult truths. You know, It, it can make that uncomfortable feeling that comes with talking about death go down easier, like deflate some of the tension, the anxiety, and I mean, it's also part of the Jewish and queer tradition, so it, it comes naturally.

[00:31:54] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:31:55] **Rachel:** But of course, you know, there are moments. When there was no humor at all, like...

[00:32:00] **Dana:** yeah.

[00:32:01] **Rachel:** There, you know, and I, I just, I hope the book does strike that balance between the funniness of it all and also the awful reality of death too.

[00:32:10] **Dana:** Absolutely. And, and in many ways the ashes is like the, the epitome of that, especially when you talk about...

[00:32:15] **Rachel:** oh my God.

[00:32:16] **Dana:** ...the tag, well, we're talking about the stones, but even the joke of tags and ashes and this ID and a number, like, you know, like you throwing that, that reference in there, but like these mysterious stones being found inside her ashes and saying even her ashes were extraordinary.

[00:32:33] Um, there's that word again. And can you tell the ashes story? Because I was fascinated with the story to begin with because I'm struggling to know what to do with my mom. My mom's ashes. My mom's ashes are still in the bag, in the, in the box as well. And my mom died in 2016, so I was like, Oh, what did, what did Rachel do?

[00:32:49] I'm, I'm riveted. And then all of a sudden we're down a journey of mystical stones and rocks with hands raised in the air.

[00:32:55] **Rachel:** I still, well, I have a lot of her ashes too that I haven't done anything with. Yeah, I mean, you you did some sprinkling. Yeah, I did some sprinkling in the ravine, but I'm, We still have a bunch, and I still, But the thing is, it's, uh, there's no expiry date on them, you know?

[00:33:08] They're good.

[00:33:09] **Dana:** Yeah, you're good.

[00:33:10] **Rachel:** So there's no rush to figure it out, but it would be nice to put them somewhere.

[00:33:14] **Dana:** Somewhere. I'm, I'm with you where you said they're just bull. It's not, You said it, they don't. They're meaningless, right? You, or that's not the exact word, but I feel the same way. They're of no comfort.

[00:33:25] **Rachel:** Yes.

[00:33:25] **Dana:** And yet I don't know what to do with them. And they're sort of the last thing I pack or the last thing I bring. Like when I moved my two apartments, it was like, Oh, here are the ashes. Should I, So they just sat shotgun . My last place. I was like, Well, how I'll strap 'em in. And mom came along and it felt like my own, you know, like short film.

[00:33:44] But yeah, tell me this ash story. Tell us this, this moment of finding these particles.

[00:33:51] **Rachel:** Such a mystery.

[00:33:52] **Dana:** So great.

[00:33:53] **Rachel:** Yeah. So when, uh, we got the ashes back, I just, uh, I, I pinched a bit of them right away into a little jar cause I, I got this, uh, you know, little necklace on, I don't know, cremation jewelry.com, like a little pendant.

[00:34:11] I thought, okay, like, I'm gonna go for this like a Billy Bob/Angelina look for her, her...

[00:34:16] **Dana:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:34:16] **Rachel:** after party I'm gonna wear, put some of her ashes in it. Um, and so right away in this little jar I found, yeah, a little stone, like a little, it was like the size of a dime. It kind of looked like a, a sweet tart, like it was a bit thick.

[00:34:33] And you know, with these, it was like a, a, a rune, you know, it had these two stick figures with together, side by side with their hands in the air. And I was just like, What the fuck? (laughter) like, yeah. I was, you know, it's like kind of the equivalent of like a fly in your soup, but like, but like, just like, what is this?

[00:34:57] How, you know, It doesn't, I've never seen it before. And so, you know, I, I, uh, I called the, the funeral home .

[00:35:08] **Dana:** Yes. And it was just, Hello? Hi. Excuse me.

[00:35:11] **Rachel:** Yeah.

[00:35:12] **Dana:** Quick question. Found something.

[00:35:14] **Rachel:** And you know, they just thought, you know, I was like, could it have, um... like, I was like, Do you clean out the, you know what it like the oven.

[00:35:24] I don't know what they call it. There's like a name for it, but in between, you know. But yes, they assured me. Uh, but you know, I guess we thought maybe it could have got lodged in maybe one stone could have got lodged in from the person who was cremated the day before and then it came out with her stuff.

[00:35:40] So, you know, I, I have a sense of humor. I said, I'll let this go. We can laugh about this. Mom would find this funny.

[00:35:47] **Dana:** Mm-hmm. .

[00:35:47] **Rachel:** Okay. And then, um, you know, a few months later, or I don't know how long, but then I went back to the ashes.

[00:35:57] **Dana:** Do you know why did you were just, you just went back to him to look at him, or you were curious or?

[00:36:02] **Rachel:** I think just to maybe get some more, or. Maybe it might have been when we were getting ready to sprinkle some at her, her memorial bench.

[00:36:12] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:36:12] **Rachel:** But whatever. I found more stone. I found like another one and then, then I actually like took it all out in like a pitcher basically and sifted through it all.

[00:36:22] And that's when I found her teeth caps and the screw that was in her elbow. So like I knew that this was hers, you know, you always have that fear, like what if they give you the wrong ashes?

[00:36:33] **Dana:** Oh yeah.

[00:36:34] **Rachel:** It was her.

[00:36:35] **Dana:** Yeah. Yeah.

[00:36:35] **Rachel:** But then there were several more of these stones, they just kept coming and some were broken in half.

[00:36:40] So it's like as if they went through that processor that crunches the bones and and such. I do not know where they came from. You know, the last seven weeks of her life I was living with her 24/7 in a different apartment. So it's not like we even brought her stuff over. I'd never seen them before. Um, but you know, everybody started having their theories about, you know, the biggest one was everyone thought my mom swallowed them.

[00:37:10] **Dana:** Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:37:10] **Rachel:** And I just really don't think she would've done that. Like, she was a little bit quirky and Yeah. It's hard to say . It's hard to defend her after all that the miracle cures she did.

[00:37:20] You're like, absolutely

[00:37:21] **Dana:** not.

[00:37:21] **Rachel:** She wouldn't have done that. That's too far.

[00:37:24] **Dana:** That's too much. Let's be honest though. Potentially.

[00:37:27] **Rachel:** Yeah. Yeah. She took Scorpion oil, but this No.

[00:37:31] **Dana:** Yeah, no. She draws a line. She draws a line.

[00:37:34] **Rachel:** But like, I also knew Yeah, I, I, I also knew, like, yeah, she went into that cremation box basically like in a t-shirt, in a diaper. Mm-hmm. , like I was there. Mm-hmm. , like there was no mm-hmm. . So, I mean, I think somebody else at the funeral home, like thought they were putting it in somebody else's box and probably tossed them into my mom's.

[00:37:58] Um, but then I was also like, well, you know, I asked the funeral home. I was like, Do you think you could maybe check in with the people who got cremated? Mm-hmm. the day before, like the families. And I was just like, but they were like, what would we say? I was like, I don't know, like asked them if they're missing something or just check in.

[00:38:17] I don't know, like, but yeah. So it's still a mystery, but I think what's more interesting is, you know how this, they were not unlike something my

mom would've owned. Oh, and this is kind of just fits the whole story and you know, what other people read into it because I think people did think my mom was kind of magical and so it wouldn't be surprising that her ashes, her ashes were magical as well.

[00:38:46] **Dana:** You say she was so persuasive that, that she could get you to consider any possibility. Even that she was magical.

[00:38:53] **Rachel:** Mm-hmm.

[00:38:54] **Dana:** And then I love, I love that their hands are up in surrender. That maybe you say, maybe it's us

[00:39:00] **Rachel:** surrendering. Yeah. But you know, once again that's, maybe that's us just reading into it. I don't know. Yeah. Maybe she's having the last laugh. I don't know.

[00:39:07] **Dana:** She wants you to put this in your act. This is in your act.

[00:39:10] **Rachel:** Yeah. Like yeah. She's just giving me more material. I, I mean, I think someone just dumped them in the wrong box and then the person in the funeral home is not gonna say, Oh yeah, I did that. Like.

[00:39:20] **Dana:** Right.

[00:39:21] **Rachel:** They don't wanna get fired and I don't wanna get anyone in trouble, you know?

[00:39:25] **Dana:** Yeah. You're just like...

[00:39:25] **Rachel:** it was an honest mistake... but it would just like, just like to know.

[00:39:31] **Dana:** It was so great to read. It was so, uh, I was riveted. I was like, what else are we gonna find? And then you included that photo, which was so great to see them.

[00:39:42] Cause I was trying to picture them in my head and then to see them there.

[00:39:45] **Rachel:** Mm-hmm.

[00:39:46] **Dana:** I was thinking a lot about the feeling of having to be a caretaker for someone and the toll that that potentially took on you, you know, when you look back on it, or now that this book is out there and thinking and, you know, thinking about caring for her and like living in that perpetual state of when is she gonna die?

[00:40:07] You call it a morbid game of hot potato and how you navigated those feelings of dread and anxiety. And obviously you talk about therapy a lot in the book and some of the, you know, stuff you've learned after her death and how you, how you move through the world. Yeah. How did it, you know, be a caretaker for someone and living in that state and for someone who might be listening, who is caring for someone and waiting for the shoe to drop? It's a hard, That's a hard state to be in.

[00:40:31] **Rachel:** Yeah. I mean, it's not like I have, uh, a natural caretaker personality. It's not like I was like, Oh, please, mommy, let me take care of you. You know?

[00:40:40] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:40:40] **Rachel:** Uh, you know, I can barely keep a plant alive. Like, but the truth is, like, my mom was a really good friend of mine and I wanted that time with her.

[00:40:52] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:40:53] **Rachel:** So, and I, I needed her too. It wasn't just me taking care of her. I...

[00:40:58] **Dana:** Right.

[00:40:58] **Rachel:** I needed something from her as well. So it was actually like really good for me. I took a, a leave of absence from work and, and lived with her for Yeah. The last seven weeks of her life. And it was, it was a very special time like, Yeah, there was a lot of anxiety underneath the surface that was arguably going on for years of that tick, tick, tick.

[00:41:23] When is this? When is the other shoe gonna drop? When is she gonna die? When will you know this become terminal? Um, but for those actual last seven weeks where I got to take care of her, it was actually a very lovely time because, you know, there was no more fighting or bickering between us. You know, for the most part.

[00:41:44] We had a really good time together watching thrilling TV and talking and laughing a lot. And, um, and, and yeah, it was also healing to have that time with her. We both learned how to be more vulnerable with each other. You know, my mom had a hard time letting people help her and she never wanted me to lean on on her.

[00:42:04] **Dana:** And she didn't wanna lose autonomy.

[00:42:06] **Rachel:** Yeah. She wasn't good at. You know, putting herself in, in the care of others, hence, you know, not letting the doctors help her. Um, but she slowly let herself lean on me and, and I think it was healing for her because she got to rely on me and see that it wasn't as scary as she thought.

[00:42:24] So I think the experience for both of us broke, broke new ground in our already great relationship. And yeah, we had some very deep unguarded, intimate conversations, and I asked her about things she never talked about. I, I was able, I think, to get a greater understanding of who she was and her past experiences that informed the decisions she made about her cancer treatment or lack thereof.

[00:42:48] I really have positive feelings about that time, even as anxiety, uh, producing as, as it was, and you wouldn't do it any other way. No, I don't think so. No. I, I think we are also really fortunate that we are able to have personal support worker help as well, and that, you know, she had what they call a good death, you know, it's, even though it was untimely and I don't think it had to happen when it happened.

[00:43:18] She had a chance to say goodbye to people and she was comfortable and not in a lot of pain, you know, and we had time together. So all things consi, you know, was a good time.

[00:43:29] **Dana:** Yeah. I think about like, if I, like my mom needed a caregiver and I made sure to find it for her, but I don't know if I could have been the one, if I, if even if I needed it to, needed her.

[00:43:41] Like you explain, I don't know if I, I don't know if I'm cut out for it. I don't know if my patience level...

[00:43:47] **Rachel:** Mm-hmm.

[00:43:47] **Dana:** ...could do. And especially, you know, the bickering and the fighting, which you also were really honest about, talking about when you

would try to come at your mom with different approaches or be like, This time I'm just gonna come with love and I'm gonna come with understanding around her treatment and let her decide how, what she wants to do.

[00:44:02] And then, you know, you do your best every time you visited not to fight, but, or get into arguments. And I, I tried that a lot with my mom too. And then sometimes you just go back into the old patterns because you know, your mom isn't gonna change as, as we know. And I just don't know if I could have been, I don't know if I could have gone and, and been with her in those last weeks of my mom's life, I just, I don't know. But you can't look back. I mean, with, it's already, it's done. Right. You know, you talk a lot about your mom and her childhood and she wanted to be a different parent to you and not do what her mom did with her. And she was like, I'm gonna go live my life. And, and even when you're, you say even when you're a parent, like, so you say in the book that your mom said, A lot of people told me I was crazy for leaving.

[00:44:49] Like I left and I went and did my, I went and traveled and did the things I wanted to do. But sometimes you have to stop thinking about everyone else. And it's your life, even when you're a parent and you say, I wonder about that now. And then you also talk later about, it's ironic. You learn like through therapy that your mom, you know, she wanted to see you as a separate person because she actually gave you what her child needed, not what you needed.

[00:45:12] And that your therapist said to you, you needed her to be more involved when you were young and I was thinking a lot about the inner child and all of that, and I don't know, I don't know exactly where to start with all of it, but , it's, it's interesting.

[00:45:27] **Rachel:** It's a lot.

[00:45:28] **Dana:** It's a lot. Yeah. Hit it! No, I'm kidding. It is. It's, it's a lot. And you talk a lot about like, you know, your mom would deflect and wouldn't wanna talk about stuff, and you're like, you know, why didn't I, you know, looking back now, you know, you would talk about, I could, you couldn't express your sadness without just as quickly justifying her choices that your mom was making and you were undoing what you were saying as fast as you were saying it.

[00:45:56] Like, who were you protecting?

[00:45:57] **Rachel:** Mm-hmm.

[00:45:57] **Dana:** In those arguments, you know? And in those moments. And I did that too. Yeah. I would wanna justify her. Yeah. Like protect my mom.

[00:46:03] **Rachel:** Well, I think it's like the feminist in me always was kind of on her side. Like I really, she was such a strong role model. Mm-hmm. and I respected that she had her own life in addition to being a mom and a wife for 18 years.

[00:46:25] Yeah. I really understood it and felt compassion, but I guess until therapy after she died, then I was able to maybe hold both, still feel that way, but also honor the parts where I felt maybe let down, or that I didn't get everything that I wanted. So I think it just made me, you know, it made me realize that I think my mom gave me a lot of what she needed.

[00:46:51] I think this is what a lot of our parents do. Like they're kind of healing their inner child by saying, you know, her, her mom was too involved. So for me, she's gonna be so, you know, hands off parent. But I don't know if that's what I really needed. You know, I probably needed, parents that were a bit more involved.

[00:47:12] But I think it's also really hard to judge. Like I'm not a parent. And I think especially for women who are often expected to give up so much more of who they are than, than the dads and especially our mothers who came from different generations, I think there was a lot more struggle for them to assert themselves as full people in the world.

[00:47:36] And my mom really prized her, her independence and her autonomy. I mean, I think that's also what got her in trouble with her lack of medical treatment.

[00:47:45] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:47:45] **Rachel:** It just made me reflect on that more. You know, I don't judge her in a negative way necessarily, but I've just been able to also hold more space for my feelings as well.

[00:47:59] **Dana:** And the anger has dissipated you'd say in your life in terms of the choices of, of, you know, not getting traditional medicine or I guess, yeah, Western you still have moments? Cause I, you know, I, I'm mad at my mom for a lot of the medical stuff she didn't do, so.

[00:48:18] **Rachel:** Mm-hmm. Fair enough. Yeah. Like, it's, I don't know if it's so, so much anger, but I do feel like pissed off sometimes and frustrated like, I'm not letting her off the hook. It's not like, it's okay, I forgive, you know, I'm still like, that was a stupid decision to make and I'm not gonna probably ever get over that, but I think I'm just a lot more at peace.

[00:48:45] It doesn't eat me up inside maybe the way it did before. So I think coming to a greater understanding of who she was and, and trying to learn and have more compassion about the experiences in her life that maybe led to her rejecting medical help, I think is, makes me more compassionate. Yeah. So, but I hold both, I, I hold the compassion, but I'm also.

[00:49:09] Yeah. I'm still pissed off a lot of the time. You know that she's not here.

[00:49:14] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:49:15] **Rachel:** Like I'll probably be pissed off for another 10 years or until I actually thought it would been time for her to die, you know?

[00:49:21] **Dana:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. I like that you channeled some of it into the letter to Michael, though. I really did. I I needed that. I needed that.

[00:49:28] **Rachel:** Michael, The evil herbalist.

[00:49:30] **Dana:** The evil herbalist.

[00:49:30] Yeah. twirling a mustache, right?

[00:49:34] **Rachel:** Yeah. Or like a long ponytail or something.

[00:49:37] **Dana:** Or, or something. Right.

[00:49:42] **Rachel:** You know, when I first started this project, I thought like, this is just gonna be a funny book. Like, I'm just gonna tell funny stories about doing aiwaska with my mom. Like, I'm just gonna make fun of her for a couple hundred pages. This'll be easy.

[00:49:55] **Dana:** Right.

[00:49:56] **Rachel:** Um, but you know, maybe I was partly tricking myself cause I think a part of me knew that I actually needed to make sense...

[00:50:04] **Dana:** mm-hmm.

[00:50:04] **Rachel:** ...of what happened with my mom's death to, to figure things out. Cause after she died, like I was very confused and stuck and constantly ruminating over everything that had happened and the insane choices she made, not to get proper medical help.

[00:50:20] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:50:20] **Rachel:** Um, and, you know, I had some half big theories of maybe why she did what she did, but I hadn't actually dug in deep. And so, you know, the whole part, the whole last part of my book with my therapist actually happened in real time while I was writing the book. Like, I, I would literally bring my laptop...

[00:50:36] **Dana:** Hmm.

[00:50:37] **Rachel:** ...to my therapy sessions and, you know, tell her about some of the scenes and be like, what's really happening there? So I think it was like only in the process of, of writing the book and really sitting with what happened and going over and over it again, that I was able to come to some of the realizations that I did and, and find some sort of acceptance and peace.

[00:50:57] And in some ways it was actually like more painful sitting in it again afterwards in the writing process.

[00:51:03] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:51:03] **Rachel:** Because when it's actually happening, you're in survival mode and there's kind of this adrenaline and natural anesthetic that happens, you know, in the shock of the moment where you're just trying to get through it.

[00:51:16] So I think in some ways, going over it again afterwards was more painful. Cause I could feel it in ways I, I wasn't able to feel it when it was happening. So I think just the process of writing, I mean, is cliché, but I think it was healing because it, it gave me the, the space, uh, and the time to, to not only think about, but to really feel what had happened.

[00:51:41] **Dana:** Yeah. And you talked too about like, you would make those jokes with friends or those things you would say that you, looking back, you're like, was it that funny? You know.

[00:51:49] **Rachel:** Mm-hmm. Like all the chocolate bars and smarties with, uh, yogurt that I took for lunch as a kid.

[00:51:56] **Dana:** Right.

[00:51:57] **Rachel:** Cause no one ever made me my lunches. I mean, it's funny, but that didn't think it was so funny.

[00:52:05] **Dana:** Therapists.

[00:52:06] **Rachel:** Therapists, Yeah.

[00:52:07] **Dana:** And what about the, so like the after party. That's something too that was, was interesting that, that she had say in planning this event. Yeah. And what's, what a gift that is. There were so many things that, yeah, it was like the fortunate of the unfortunate, There were so many things that was like, That's incredible though, that you get that and that your last day on earth, you got to go to the hospice place that you wanted to be in. And there were just so many beautiful gifts that came from something so horrific.

[00:52:37] **Rachel:** Yeah. And it's like a credit to my mom too, that she was able to talk about all her end of life wishes and exactly what she wanted. You know, she wanted that bench. I mean, I also think it speaks to her like controlling control freak nature.

[00:52:52] Like, I will plan what you guys will eat at my after party. Like, chill out mom. But, you know, I'm, I'm really happy that we were able to have these frank, you know, conversations about, her dying death re- you know, the Yeah. What she wanted for the after party, all those things. Um, which I just think is so important to be able to talk to your parents about that.

[00:53:21] Like, it's gonna happen whether you pretend it's not happening or not. Like, so it's such a gift.

[00:53:29] **Dana:** So you would tell people just go for it. Like if they, if to really, if they even when they're not sick. Do you think that there's a way to talk to your parents about wills and estates? Right?

[00:53:37] **Rachel:** Yeah. Exac especially, Yeah.

[00:53:39] Like totally just normalize it. Yeah. You know, I tell my dad all the time, You better clean all the stuff out of your house cause I don't wanna have to do that when you die.

[00:53:49] **Dana:** Totally. It's such a burden.

[00:53:50] **Rachel:** Do it now.

[00:53:51] **Dana:** It's such a burden and it's so stressful. Yes. Do it now. Yes. No, it's so true. I, I'm a big proponent of, of that and especially, Yeah. Do not resuscitate all those things, right?

[00:54:04] Mm-hmm.

[00:54:06] In the stress of the moment, I don't wanna...

[00:54:07] **Rachel:** Yeah. I think even in your thirties, forties, you know, make a whale. Like, don't keep putting out, like nobody wants to talk about these things, but it is gonna happen. And so it's, I think it's better just to kind of normalize talking about death and dying, cause it really is just a part of life.

[00:54:26] **Dana:** Mm-hmm.

[00:54:28] **Rachel:** And, and I think it's, it's also good to know what your loved ones want. So like, I didn't have to think, what music am I gonna play at her after party. I knew she wanted, uh, Leonard Cohen

[00:54:43] **Dana:** has, has, has, um, family members, I believe maybe it was little, Molly was getting a letter from her, maybe a piece of jewelry or have, have any of them, have those already been received or is that, or is that a secret that maybe Well, the book is

[00:54:58] **Rachel:** in the book.

[00:54:58] Yeah. She's gonna get. I was like, Wait a minute.

[00:55:01] **Dana:** Wait, did I just ruin spoiled it?

[00:55:05] **Rachel:** She doesn't know what it, You don't know what it is? Well, maybe I did. You do know what it is? Uh, yeah. I'll tell her not to read it, but yeah, she, that's for when she's 16. That's cool. So that'll be kind of fun. Yeah.

[00:55:18] **Dana:** Well, on my show I usually ask people, and if you wouldn't mind telling me your mom's name and, uh, how you feel about her right now, today, in this moment. Like what's been coming up for you during this call?

[00:55:32] **Rachel:** Hmm. Uh, well, my mom, her name was Elaine Mitchell, and yeah, she was, uh, a bright, shiny light and yeah, I guess I just. Yeah, I still, I still have conversations with her in my head. I still kind of get a kick out of her. I think she'd get a kick outta me. I think she'd think, would think this book thing is pretty funny.

[00:55:57] And I, I think she would have a lot of delight in it. I think she'd be happy that I continue to make fun of her. So she does live on in certain ways and yeah, it's, it sucks. It sucks that she, she died I think, too soon, but the larger part of me just feels more, like, feels very grateful for the time we had together.

[00:56:18] And you know, like you, you, you read that quote of hers where she says that I have everything, uh, in me that she gave me, including the things I talk to my do, I I that I really do talk to my shrink about. Like, she wasn't, wasn't not just a joke, but you know,

[00:56:34] **Dana:** It's for real.

[00:56:34] **Rachel:** Both all of it, everything, it all, I'm all, I'm happy.

[00:56:38] I'm happy that I get, uh, all those things in me.

[00:56:42] **Dana:** And only the good die young. Yeah.

[00:56:44] **Rachel:** Yeah. Right. Only the Yeah. That was really, I think a humble brag.

[00:56:48] **Dana:** Yeah. That moment when you say it's the saddest moment. I was even reading the book going, ugh, you know, as I, I, that's, that's that irreverency, like, I laugh, I think I might have si as a laugh, but I was also like, ugh.

[00:57:02] **Rachel:** I was like, Come on mom. It's not, you're not, you're 27 club.

[00:57:05] **Dana:** Well come on soc-. You're, you're, Yeah. But it was, but it was so mixed. It had all the feelings just reading it with her champagne in the air and didn't even wanna drink it. But

[00:57:15] **Rachel:** yeah, you're not, She had a good sense of humor, you know? She, and she kept that till the end.

[00:57:20] **Dana:** Well, thank you. I appreciate you talking with me. I love your audio piece. I love the book and

[00:57:26] **Rachel:** Thank you.

[00:57:27] **Dana:** The book is called That Mom Walking: a Memoir of Miracle Cures and Other Disasters. Yay.

[00:57:32] **Rachel:** Thank you. Thank you Dana. I really enjoyed, uh, talking to you.

[00:57:49] **Dana:** About two months after this conversation, I did finally do something with my mom's ashes. Well, some of them maybe. I was inspired and amused by Rachel's Mom's ashes story. Maybe I was tired of hauling the box around with me from Chicago to Northern Michigan and all the Airbnbs we were staying in as we keep searching for our dream home.

[00:58:11] But maybe it was just time. It has been six years since her death, and for the first four years, her asy remains lived in the top closet of my Nana's bedroom and her retirement home. But when my Nana had to move to a nursing home during the pandemic, that box became mine. More inherited items, more weight to carry.

[00:58:31] Last month, myself and a few amazing friends slash team members launched the first ever Mother's Grave retreat in Antioch, Illinois. This was gonna be a place for people to come to the lake, stay in cute cottages and process complex feelings around the loss of our mothers to either death or estrangement, a place to rest, find community, burn stuff in a fire, laugh, tell stories, and take a load off.

[00:58:54] We asked the participants to bring three objects with them. One to keep on site or return home with you, one to burn and one to give away. These objects could be related to their mothers or to themselves, like photos or poems or jewelry or fabric, cause we were gonna build an altar together as a group, and these objects would live on the altar and we would bear witness to them collectively.

[00:59:19] And so, because I was not only the producer of this retreat, but a participant as well, I needed to think about my three objects, like what was I

gonna bring? And I decided that well, I think my mom is coming with. So the night before I left Michigan to drive to Illinois, I asked my amazing husband to help me open up this box of ashes.

[00:59:41] I asked him to hold the bag upright while I cut off the thick plastic twist tie. I used a spoon from the Airbnb and I, I promise, I promise you all. I washed it. I washed it, y'all and I started moving the ashes around. They were gray, brown, and really coarse, which I know makes sense, but you sort of expect it to be smooth like sand, and it's not.

[01:00:05] I wanted to find mystical stones in my mom's ashes, but all I experienced was a flashback to a moment at the funeral home before her cremation, when the funeral director asked us if my mom had any implants or devices inserted into her body during her lifetime. I had to tell him that. Yes, yes. She had a battery inserted into her back about 15 years ago, and it didn't do her any good.

[01:00:31] She was in pain for the rest of her life with crippling neuropathy, and now I'm here sitting across from you in this funeral home, declaring objects in my mother's body. Back in the kitchen with the ashes finally open. I thanked my husband for his help and said, "Okay, now I just need to pour a little bit into a Ziploc baggy and finish packing for this retreat."

[01:00:54] My other two objects were sheets of prescriptions for Hydrocodone, Oxycontin, and Vicodin, and two beautiful pieces of costume jewelry: earrings, pink and emerald green. I gave the jewelry away to a fellow participant on the last day of the retreat and asked the group to collectively burn my mom's prescriptions in the fire with me, but her ashes sat on the altar the entire time.

[01:01:20] In little sea shells I found at the beach. And on the last day of the retreat, over the words release written in the sand, I poured my mom over the lake. Smiling with joy. She will forever be a part of this property, this property that means so much to me, this retreat experience. And yeah, I felt a lot of joy doing it.

[01:01:45] And speaking of joy, it feels like the rest of her ashes might need to go to, let's say, Hawaii at a, um, all-inclusive resort, potentially adults only. Um, flying business class. Yeah. Yeah. I think she'd like that.

[01:02:07] **Elaine:** You can't really escape suffering and pain if you live long enough. Illness, old age. Nobody can.

[01:02:15] It's part of who we are and it's part of life, and it really sucks that for both of us that I had to go before I went. But you have, like, you're, you're extraordinary and you have in you anything I gave you, um, including the stuff you might have to Dr. Rin about. Um, but you have all those things that I gave you that were positive and helpful and you have all your natural, extraordinary qualities.

[01:02:52] And I just have complete faith that you will, you might make mistakes, everybody does, but that you, you will be able to create a good life, a very good life. And so you're really, really gonna be all right. And I just know that for sure.

[01:03:33] **Dana:** The second season of, I Swear in My Mother's Grave Podcast, would never be possible without our editor, Amanda Roscoe Mayo, our music composer, Adam Ollendorf, our graphic designer and illustrator Meredith Montgomery, and our copywriter, Rachel Claff. 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...

[01:03:55] well for, 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. And if you haven't signed up for a newsletter, you can do so at our website, which is danablack.org. You can hear all about this incredible season and some upcoming live events we're curating just for you.

[01:04:17] I hope you'll come back. Come back, come back. Don't leave me like my dead, mom. You know what I mean? Come back.

[01:04:24] Talk to you soon.