

Mothers Grave Mitchell_FINAL

[00:00:00] **Mitchell:** I said this to you before, but this is the metaphor of my mother, and I think a lot of people can sort of relate to this for their own lives, but this is how I describe my mother, and now imagine being that person for 78 years, which is when you're in school, and you're a kid, and you're at your desk in front of a class, and you're leaning back on the back two legs of a chair, and there's that second that you think, you might go over, You know what I'm saying, when you catch yourself?

[00:00:27] My mother lived in that moment, I would say, for 50 years. In a moment of panic... What if somebody, what if I lose the, what if I don't pay the, what if it's the electric company? I mean, we literally taught us kids how to get the, to answer the phone and convince the electric company to give us more time.

[00:00:44] Like literally as children.

[00:00:45] **Dana:** How? How? What did you have to say?

[00:00:48] **Mitchell:** No, my mom's not home, but she said that you might call and she said that she went to the bank and blah, blah, blah. I mean, like a whole...

[00:00:54] **Dana:** script.

[00:00:54] **Mitchell:** ...a script to like lie to it, like utility companies.

[00:01:15] **Dana:** Hey friend, welcome to I swear On My Mother's Grave, a show that's part memoir, part conversation and in the case of today's episode, part Katherine Hepburn, more on that in a minute. I realized that this season so far has had a lot of maternal love, and some tear jerking moments. It's had a lot of people experiencing real, genuine grief and missing their awesome mothers.

[00:01:43] Which got me thinking that it might be time for a different type of motherly story. If you are a regular listener, first off, I love you and thank you for supporting and following this show for three seasons. You rock. You know that even when we tackle heavy topics, this show needs its moments of levity and laughter.

[00:02:02] Or else there's no place for that heaviness to go. I believe, truly, as humans walking around the Earth, we have to find humor inside complex emotions and heavy topics, or we might implode. It's just too much to carry. And that brings me to today's guest. If anyone can make a pathologically lying mother with lifelong financial troubles, unmedicated depression, and someone who never lived up to her potential funny and sympathetic, it will be Mitchell.

[00:02:33] He was born a natural storyteller. Mitchell is an incredible actor, comedian, circus performer who grew up in a Jewish home in Rhode Island and now lives in Chicago. In this episode, we will talk about how his bingo gambling mother never cleaned her stove, how she lived on Winston cigarettes and Oreo cookies, taught her children to lie to the electric company when bills were due, and married an alcoholic.

[00:02:59] We will talk about how his mother lived with undiagnosed depression for most of her life and how everything wrong with us is our parents' fault, but it is our responsibility to fix it. Mitchell said that his mother believed that if it wasn't in front of her, it did not exist. She couldn't see it, and it was clearly for self-protection.

[00:03:20] So before every interview, I do a mic check with my guests, and I ask them to tell me what they had for breakfast. It's a standard boring radio mic check that I had heard other producer audio people do. You ask your guests to talk for a little bit about what they had for breakfast and then you listen back to the audio to make sure you're good to go before you press record.

[00:03:39] My interview with Mitchell was recorded in 2022 in person and just for fun, I asked Mitchell to do his Katharine Hepburn impression for our mic check. Yeah. This is Mitchell Fane.

[00:04:05] **Mitchell:** Hillary, I want you to go to the office, start your motor, and I want you to go into the office and I want you to remove everything, and I do mean absolutely everything, that would absolutely subsequently remind you that you, you had ever been there, including that blue thing with the bulbs that you seem so fond of.

[00:04:19] And then, Hillary, I want you to write yourself a check for \$5,000, which I feel you deserve. And then, Hillary, I want you to get permanently lost. It's not that we don't want to know you, Hillary, although we don't. It's just that I don't think we're really the sort of people you can afford to be associated with.

[00:04:37] No, don't speak, Hillary. Just... Go. That's amazing. It's a great speech. What's it from again? "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?". Ah, yes. It's so brilliant. Start your motor. Hillary, I want you to 5, 000, which I feel you deserve. Get. Permanently. Lost.

[00:04:58] **Dana:** I love grabbing the...

[00:05:00] **Mitchell:** oh, God, it's so, it's so good. She's so serious.

[00:05:02] She's like, I want to tell you something, Hillary. I want you to go to the office. Start your motor.

[00:05:05] **Dana:** I need to see it again. It's been a long...

[00:05:08] **Mitchell:** I need to send you that clip Because you can find that clip because it's like, it's a perfect like minute and a half monologue.

[00:05:13] **Dana:** Did your mom, I'm just going for it, did your mom like Katharine Hepburn?

[00:05:19] **Mitchell:** My mom loved old movies. She liked westerns. My mother loved Alan Ladd.

[00:05:26] **Dana:** What's, who is that?

[00:05:27] **Mitchell:** Exactly. My mom is, we would deep cut as far as like old movies in my family. So my mother liked, her favorite actor was Alan Ladd. And Alan Ladd was a very pretty male star and did a lot of westerns, most famously Shane.

[00:05:42] Come back Shane! He was Shane and she loved him and she loved, she just approved of my love of them, really. I mean all my aunts, I mean you know that you're like. You know that your aunts have clocked you and your mother and grandmother when like you're outside playing like a just a regular kid on a Saturday afternoon in the backyard and your mother yells out the door, Mitchell Ida called and said, Hello, Dolly's on at 3:00.

[00:06:08] You know your family has clocked you.

[00:06:10] **Dana:** They know, they're like, they know everything. They know. They know everything.

[00:06:13] **Mitchell:** And you know, before we dive into my mother's mishegoss, Jewish family.

[00:06:17] **Dana:** What's mishegoss actually mean?

[00:06:19] **Mitchell:** mishegoss means craziness. Craziness, thank you. But it can be like, so and so is meshugana, is crazy, uh, this is meshuga, this thing is crazy, like this is a crazy, there's a craziness going on, or mishegoss is craziness.

[00:06:31] This is mishegoss, this is craziness. Ah. That's my Yiddish lesson.

[00:06:35] **Dana:** Yeah, thank you. This Lutheran is grateful. I mean, I've heard the word so much, but I go...

[00:06:39] **Mitchell:** It's one of those words that has almost become part of American slang. Yes. Yeah, I'll probably throw out several Yiddish words because that's just the way I talk.

[00:06:47] **Dana:** About your family's...

[00:06:48] **Mitchell:** about my family specifically.

[00:06:49] **Dana:** Mishegoss, mishegoss.

[00:06:50] **Mitchell:** I mean, here's a, here's a quick story about my, my mother and my grandmother that is just a funny story. My grandmother used to say to my mother all the time, Millie, which was my mother's name, Millie, Gay kaken ofn yahm! And Gay kaken ofn yahm literally means go shit in a hat out at sea.

[00:07:09] But what it really means is, go, go fuck yourself. Can I swear on this?

[00:07:13] **Dana:** Yeah, you can swear on this.

[00:07:14] **Mitchell:** It basically means, like, go, go fuck yourself, Millie, please. That's what my grandmother used to say to my mother. Because my mother was so full of crap. It wasn't my grandmother being aggressive or a bad mom.

[00:07:24] My grandmother was... Top notch, but just like Millie, please, gay kaken ofn yahm, please.

[00:07:31] **Dana:** And did your mom ever say that to you?

[00:07:32] **Mitchell:** Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But we would laugh because we knew what it meant. She'd think we didn't know what it meant, but we'd be like, please, please, please. I'm going to be an actor someday.

[00:07:42] I'm learning Yiddish. I'm soaking it all in. Go shit in a hat out at sea. I mean, you know, the, it's interesting because my grandmother, Bessie, was my mother's mother. It's one of those women who was raised. in a time where Jewish women, women in general, and I'm speaking specifically of Jewish women because I'm, I come from a Jewish family, had zero power.

[00:08:05] You had, your only hope was to either be from a good family or marry into a good family, right? And your only job as a mother was to raise your daughters to marry into, marry men who would then take care of them. You know, you couldn't even get, you know, a bat mitzvah is like a new concept. It's not like, it wasn't like a thing.

[00:08:22] So my grandmother, her parents, came from Russia, my, you know, my great grandparents, uh, and they're very poor and, you know, they were just Russian, poor Russian Jewish immigrants. And so my grandmother had my mother in 1935 and then Another daughter after that and then got was divorced by 1940, which, you know, it was shameful back in the day and suddenly she had to raise her two daughters and she also ended up having to raise her two younger sisters and her, her older brother's wife and daughter, my grandmother, all took care of.

[00:08:58] **Dana:** I have a dog.

[00:08:59] **Mitchell:** Right.

[00:08:59] **Dana:** That's it.

[00:09:00] **Mitchell:** Right. You know. Well, if my grandmother was tough. Guess what? She had a lot to do. Now it's all, you know, it's all hindsight. So I think that she didn't want my, she was culturally mortified. Now I didn't know this growing up because I thought my grandmother was the tower of... I mean just the tower of power.

[00:09:15] She was the matriarch. If she said show up on Sunday, you showed up on Sunday.

[00:09:21] **Dana:** Dressed up.

[00:09:22] **Mitchell:** She was a classic. Dressed. We, we were to be dressed, but not in this way that felt oppressive. It felt like oh, go on, Bessie's. In retrospect, I think she felt a lot of cultural embarrassment of having failed at the one thing.

[00:09:36] And I don't think she was able to look and say what a successful life I've raised all these human beings on a dress sellers salary. She worked at a sort of a exclusive ladies dress shop in downtown Providence when that used to mean something. And I don't think she saw that as it turns out. I found some letters after she died.

[00:09:51] And I, she felt a lot of cultural shame about being, you know, the stereotype of Jews and being good with money and horrible stereotypes. I mean, they're like...

[00:10:02] **Dana:** what did she say in those letters? Or who were they to?

[00:10:05] **Mitchell:** It was to a friend who had moved to Florida and she kept in correspondence with her and we've, they were sent... to us after my grandmother died. So I'm saying, well, maybe you'd like to read your grandmother's letters, and was myself and my godmother. I know I'm Jewish, but I have a godmother who was my mother's first cousin, and my bestest, bestest friend in the whole wide world from the second I was born. She was my godmother.

[00:10:29] She was only 13 when I was born, but we were close until she passed away. Unfortunately, f*ck cancer. So, we got these letters and they expressed such regret and such, she talked so much about how she didn't accomplish anything, how embarrassed she was, and she, you know, she didn't make a good marriage, and how her daughters were divorced, like, me and my mother and my Aunt Miriam.

[00:10:51] **Dana:** And she never remarried?

[00:10:53] **Mitchell:** No. No. I remember her having a boyfriend at some brief period of time when I was a kid. So, I think what she did was she overcompensated with my mother and her daughter other daughter about letting them know how poor they were and I think she worked very hard to make sure everybody thought that they weren't.

[00:11:13] **Dana:** Mmm

[00:11:13] **Mitchell:** ...and I think it spoiled my mom.

[00:11:16] I think it spoiled my mom. And then if we're gonna deep dive there was a sexual menace in my mother's family my grandmother's brother and I know fact for a fact that he was that he was sexually assaulted his daughter, who was my godmother, which I didn't find out till many years later. And then I look at my, and I, and then when I, once I found that out, I started to look at my mother's behavior and some of the other women around that age in that family and their behavior is, I mean, I don't know for sure, but the trauma.

[00:11:52] My mother, we might as well dive in, right? My mother was a pathological liar among many things, and she had a gambling problem.

[00:11:58] **Dana:** Mm hmm.

[00:11:59] **Mitchell:** She married my father, who was a violent drunk.

[00:12:01] **Dana:** Mmm.

[00:12:01] **Mitchell:** And she had a lot of, like... She had a lot of behavior that was wildly self destructive.

[00:12:08] **Dana:** What does it feel like to say that right now?

[00:12:09] You just said all of that in one sentence. You moved from some abuse, right? And then you said, we're going to deep dive. Yeah. So there's just Dana. I'm kicking my leg at him. You can't see me, but I'm going.

[00:12:19] **Mitchell:** She's gesturing with her legs. It's very powerful.

[00:12:22] **Dana:** No, but like, what does it, and again, it's probably a story and a phrase you've said before.

[00:12:26] **Mitchell:** It has. I'll tell you what it feels like...

[00:12:27] **Dana:** But to say my mom's a gambler, a pathological liar, and she married a drunk.

[00:12:30] **Mitchell:** And she married a violent drunk.

[00:12:31] **Dana:** A violent drunk.

[00:12:33] **Mitchell:** To be honest with you, now that my mother's been dead since 2014, and having thought about this, and having, having, you know, discussed it with my own therapist, and stuff like that, it does make me have much more empathy for my mother than I did when she was alive, and I didn't really connect all those dots, you know?

[00:12:54] **Dana:** You've talked a lot about forgiveness.

[00:12:56] **Mitchell:** Yes.

[00:12:56] **Dana:** ...a little bit with me and

[00:12:58] **Mitchell:** yes

[00:12:58] **Dana:** ...emails.

[00:12:59] **Mitchell:** We talked about this thing too. It's like, and somebody, uh, a dear old friend of mine said to me years ago when I was, my parents was still alive. And this was many years ago, like 20 years ago, and I was, you know, in the heyday of my issues with my mother before I really set boundaries, you know, before she, you know, this was years ago.

[00:13:18] And also talking about my father, who I hadn't seen since I was 12. He just took off and we never saw him again. Thank goodness. By the way, he couldn't have left too soon. That doesn't mean I don't have scars from it or trauma, but...

[00:13:28] **Dana:** How would you say bye bye in a Jewish phrase?

[00:13:31] **Mitchell:** Oh, God. Oh, God. I don't even, I don't even know the proper Jewish phrase of saying, like, get.

[00:13:36] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:13:36] **Mitchell:** Get. Fuck.

[00:13:37] **Dana:** Fuck away.

[00:13:38] **Mitchell:** What are you waiting for? Just go.

[00:13:40] **Dana:** Bye bye.

[00:13:40] **Mitchell:** Stop telling us you're leaving. Just fucking go. I mean, you know, obviously lots of issues around that, but not about us leaving. That, that, that didn't happen soon enough. But I remember my friend saying to me that you only really resolve your issues with your complicated parents, if you have complicated relationships with your parents, when they die.

[00:13:59] Because then, for real, your brain... For real, let's go of that tiny little part of you that's 7 and still wants mommy or daddy to be mommy and daddy in the way that you needed or wanted them to be. And she sort of said this, you know, 20, 25 years ago, and I didn't understand it.

[00:14:19] **Dana:** Because your mom was still alive?

[00:14:20] **Mitchell:** My mom was still alive.

[00:14:21] **Dana:** So when she said it, that part of your brain...

[00:14:23] **Mitchell:** It's always got, you know, whatever. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Like, uh, I'm, I'm gonna get, I'm gonna get to a better understanding before that. I'm different. I'm different, I'm going to therapy, this whole thing. And she was right. My father died first, and like I said, I hadn't seen him in, I don't even remember how long, many years before he died.

[00:14:40] But I still had dreams about him, where he would show up. And then they stopped immediately after he died. And my anger at my mother. I mean, literally the last thing I said to my mother, she was in hospice. We were leaving. We gotta leave. We, we were like, my sister and brother and I all looked, both, looked, all, looked at each other and said, do do, she was unconscious, she was unresponsive.

[00:15:03] Do we need to be here? Do, do, do any of you need to actually be here at the, at the moment? And we were like, no, we, we didn't. We were there. She was comfortable. That's not something that either any of us wanted or felt comfortable or needed to do. And we all went out to the car, but I had forgot my backpack at the foot of her bed.

[00:15:22] So I go back in. So then I'm in the room alone with her. You know, and she's unresponsive, and I, I, I picked my back and I was like, I gotta say something, you know? So I just leaned in, and I whispered it in her ear, and I said, listen, Mill. I know that we've been mad at each other for a very long time and I just want you to know that I forgive you and I ask for your forgiveness and I love you.

[00:15:51] And then I kissed her on the forehead. And that's the last time I saw my mother. I think she died like an hour later, but by the time we got home, we got a call saying she had passed.

[00:15:57] **Dana:** Do you remember what your body felt like when you said that or when...

[00:16:01] **Mitchell:** I, when I said that or when you left? I felt, if you had said to me when I flew to Phoenix for this process. 'cause my sister said, I think you need to get here. She was living with my sister and brother in Phoenix all together. That would not, I would not have said, I'm gonna have a quiet, private moment with my mother's unconscious body. That's not gonna happen. But it, it just felt right.

[00:16:28] I thought, oh, I think we've talked about this. I am not a religious person in any way, shape, or form. I mean, I am A religious, but, I have a, I'm a spiritual person and I have a lot of my own, I'll call them superstitions because I think it's all superstition, but I have my own, and they work for me, and I thought this has got to be some sort of sign from the universe that I, I forgot my bag here, why would I forget my bag here, and now I'm alone with her, so I was proud of myself, I was proud of myself, that I sort of like, even though she couldn't hear me, I let her, I let her off the hook, and myself off the hook.

[00:17:06] Sometimes, to be honest with you, I don't think she heard me. I hope that she does, did, but I sometimes, not, not a lot anymore, but sometimes I'll, I'll shudder when I think about how unhappy my mother was through most of her life. Because that's the forgiveness part, right? It's like, I can be mad at her for this and for that.

[00:17:25] And when you're a kid, and you're, Mother, the person who you're relying on because you're a kid and you don't know there's options, is lying all the time. Stupid things. Things that weren't even like important, but also about really big things like paying her tax bill and losing the house and like big things and small things and gambling and lying.

[00:17:45] **Dana:** Is that all self preservation for her as well?

[00:17:47] **Mitchell:** I just told somebody the story the other day that my mother used to whisper on the phone. Because she was never sure of what she was saying to the person on the phone was...

[00:17:56] **Dana:** true

[00:17:56] **Mitchell:** ...the same story

[00:17:57] **Dana:** ...she told somebody else that could hear it, right?

[00:18:01] **Mitchell:** So they'd be like, Millie, I can't hear you. She's like must be something wrong with the phone. She would just whisper all the time and it was a manifestation of I said this to you before but this is the metaphor of my Mother and I think a lot of people can sort of relate to this for their own lives but this is how I described my mother and now imagine being that person for 78 years, which is when you're in school, and you're a kid, and you're at your desk in front of a class, and you're leaning back on the back two legs of a chair, and there's that second that you think you might go over, you know what I'm saying, when you catch yourself?

[00:18:36] My mother lived in that moment, I would say, for 50 years.

[00:18:38] **Dana:** Ooh.

[00:18:39] **Mitchell:** In a moment of panic. Oh no, what if somebody, what if I lose the, what if I don't pay the, what if the electric company, I mean we literally taught us kids how to get the, to answer the phone and convince the electric company to give us more time.

[00:18:53] Like literally,

[00:18:54] **Dana:** how, how, what was your, what did you have to say?

[00:18:57] **Mitchell:** No, my mom's not fine, but she said that you might call, and she said that she went to the bank, and blah, blah, blah, I mean like a whole...

[00:19:03] **Dana:** Script.

[00:19:04] **Mitchell:** A script, to like lie to like utility companies.

[00:19:07] **Dana:** I mean, I, I'm assuming, right, it's psychological, there's something else going on, there's also an issue of money, like not having it, but,

[00:19:12] **Mitchell:** We all know, listen, if you're prone to, people say money, this like, this is my new, When people say money can't buy happiness, I say, fuck off.

[00:19:20] I'll tell you what it does buy. It buys peace of mind. And peace of mind allows you to experience happiness when it comes by you.

[00:19:27] **Dana:** Yes. Well, that's why I feel like if you're sitting on the edge of your seat and you're going to be at any moment you can be kicked and pushed over, you'd think that she would then want to spend her life.

[00:19:36] Not almost falling over. To stop the lying and...

[00:19:41] **Mitchell:** to stop to pay the bills. She couldn't do it because that you just hit the crux of it. She wasn't waiting for him to kick her over. She was doing it herself. She couldn't stop herself from doing it herself.

[00:19:51] **Dana:** She knew there's no back behind her.

[00:19:53] **Mitchell:** There's no back behind her.

[00:19:53] She kept doing it. Because she'd gotten addicted to chaos, because she didn't understand there was another way, because she didn't believe that she deserved it. I mean, all of those things that I can say in retrospect, you know, we can look at a psychological profile of a person, but what it made for was a woman who was...

[00:20:10] Very nervous all the time. I mean, she smoked like a chimney. The flip side is that she was very well liked. My friends loved her. You know, she's very charming.

[00:20:18] **Dana:** So complicated, isn't that? That's so complicated. People loved my mom. Oh, she's so fun. She's so fabulous.

[00:20:24] **Mitchell:** When I started to come out to my friends about My mother being, and it was when I moved to Chicago, when I moved away, it's, you know, of course that happens, you know, the wild duck syndrome, where you're like, I'm sophisticated and you're all trash, you know.

[00:20:36] **Dana:** Yes.

[00:20:37] **Mitchell:** You know what I'm saying? It's like that trope. Yeah. Somebody goes off to cause and they come back, they left and they were Steven and now they're Stefan and they know everything and you're just awful provincial and mom. And so I was kind of. In that place too, right?

[00:20:48] **Dana:** And so, yeah, I was like, I'm never going to get married and I would never go to a bridal shop if I did.

[00:20:52] And I totally just went to a bridal shop and I'm getting married. Like, I was like, and it's in the suburbs. I'm absolutely just absolutely no, but I'm so different.

[00:21:00] **Mitchell:** Exactly. So I was sort of in that place, but also like, starting to realize that my mother was quite difficult, and there were issues in the way of having a grown up relationship with her, and it wasn't just me being an immature kid.

[00:21:13] **Dana:** And how did, when did you realize that? Do you have an example?

[00:21:16] **Mitchell:** I mean, it happened during college. I mean, I knew, I mean, she was, we knew, I mean, we knew as kids, I don't know how to explain it, like, we knew as kids, but as kids, we needed to rely on her. There was some hope that it was just eccentricity, not that we had those words, but like, And so, like, for example, my brother and sister and I do the same.

[00:21:35] Of course, you can't see this on a podcast, but we would, uh, I have an older brother and a younger sister, but I've always been the emotionally brave one. And so, we do this quick eye check whenever my mother would say anything, where we just, with our eyes, without just looking back and forth between Steve and Sandy and I, my brother and sister.

[00:21:50] In which we would, with no words, decide if what my mother was saying was true. Because often times, if it wasn't, we still had to get our needs met. Like, hey, hey Mill, we always called her Millie, or, or Mill. We never called her Mom.

[00:22:02] **Dana:** Never.

[00:22:03] **Mitchell:** Because she didn't respond to it.

[00:22:05] **Dana:** You would try it, and she wouldn't turn around, or...

[00:22:07] **Mitchell:** Oh, we always tried it. Mom! Hey mom, mommy, no, what is it honey? I mean like, she couldn't hear it. I don't think she like was, I was conscious. She literally couldn't hear it. I think she felt responsible enough to be anybody's anybody. So like, hey mom, hey mill, are you going to go food

shopping? Because there's no, there's nothing in the house for dinner, which was a passive aggressive way of saying, are you going to provide us food?

[00:22:31] I'm 12. You know what I mean? Sandy's nine, Stephen's 14. Like, what's going on? And since she would, for example, she'd say, you know, well, when your Aunt Miriam gets out of her job, we're going to go shopping? I'm like, okay. Hey, what if we, Stephen, Sandy, and I would do a quick project. That's a lot. What if we ride our bikes off to Bessie's house, my grandmother, And we have dinner over there, we'll just surprise her.

[00:22:53] And she said, oh, that's a great idea, I'll call and tell her you're coming over.

[00:22:55] **Dana:** Hmm.

[00:22:57] **Mitchell:** So as children, even if we didn't understand the magnitude of it, we understood that we had to check in to get our needs met. It wasn't, it was in college, but I really start to understand that her limitations, like, I went to college 45 minutes from where I grew up, maybe 50.

[00:23:13] **Dana:** Where'd you go?

[00:23:14] **Mitchell:** I grew up in Rhode Island.

[00:23:15] **Dana:** Right.

[00:23:15] **Mitchell:** So I grew up in the northern part of the state, and I went to school in the southern part of the state, and the whole state is 45 minutes from top to bottom. What was the college? University of Rhode Island.

[00:23:22] **Dana:** Oh.

[00:23:23] **Mitchell:** You are high, as they like to call it, as opposed to URI good weed.

[00:23:27] And so, um, And so, um, I'd be in a show, because it was, you know, it was the theatre department, and it would take 30 conversations, I'm exaggerating, but the number of times I'd be like, Alright, well, when is your show? Mom, it's, you're coming on Sunday, it's at 4 o'clock. Alright, well, I got it, I got a plan, I got, like, Literally, Millie, you could leave at 3:15 and you'd make it before the orchestra was done. Why are we having this come? Why are you so freaked out about going 45 minutes from your house, which is a disaster,

by the way, because she was not a homemaker. Unlike my grandmother, who literally had floors you could eat. You could eat off of. Eat off of, yeah.

[00:24:04] And her daughters were both, both a mess. I don't.

[00:24:10] **Dana:** Hoarder?

[00:24:11] **Mitchell:** Not hoarder.

[00:24:14] **Dana:** Okay.

[00:24:14] **Mitchell:** Just didn't clean. Smoked like a chimney. Walls were yellow. That's the house I grew up in. I don't think my mother ever cleaned her stove.

[00:24:21] **Dana:** Ever.

[00:24:23] **Mitchell:** Ever. Ever. So when we got old enough, it became clear, like, that was, when we were kids, people would come over because they loved my mother and they loved coming over, but, like, then we started to become embarrassed because we started to become aware of, like, go to our friends houses.

[00:24:39] **Dana:** I think some of that clocking in that you talked about that looking at your brothers and Seeing if she was lying or not to get your needs met You told me when we had drinks a couple weeks ago. You mentioned that you have a really good bullshit meter So looking at other people and which is interesting as an artist too that you can sort of see through other people's lies or right?

[00:25:01] **Mitchell:** It's true.

[00:25:01] And I know it makes me sound like, I know it sounds sort of, uh, pretentious in the, in the real definition of the word. I think like, oh, I know things, but...

[00:25:10] **Dana:** or you're psychic.

[00:25:11] **Mitchell:** Or I'm psychic. I don't think I'm psychic. I think because I was lied to as a kid, my meter for what's truth and what isn't truth is highly attuned.

[00:25:20] And just today I was on, on, uh, Foster Beach with some, uh, young people from the show that I'm in, fabulous, fabulous, fabulous young people. And I said these words, to this one young lady we were talking about, I said, later this afternoon I'm going to go talk about my, my awful mother, or like mothering and stuff like that, mother issues, and she nodded, with like, I, I, I see you, I hear you, and I was like, okay, I see you, I hear you, you're in the club, I get it, she was just letting me know, and I said, I think it's so important, and it can happen at any age, it doesn't have to be, I, you know, I figured it out in my 40s, but I think, if you figure out, for real, that we are not what happened to us, we are what we do with that.

[00:26:03] And I think my mother just What happened to my mother, whatever it was, her childhood, her marriage, whatever, it became who she was. Her whole identity was this person who didn't, I joke that in my, that some family are passed down silver or property or generational. We were, we were passed down the idea that we don't get anything.

[00:26:27] You know, like what we learned in my family tacitly was that other people have stuff and we just better be grateful if someone invites us along someday. That's, that's the lesson we would...

[00:26:37] **Dana:** You were never explicitly told that.

[00:26:38] **Mitchell:** Nope, nope. I remember my therapist, my first therapist, Susan, who I loved, my first therapist in Chicago, said something I thought that really changed my brain thinking.

[00:26:48] And I think a lot of people feel this and they don't know that this is it. Susan, my therapist, said to me, When someone grows up like you... You have an extra couple of steps, so you have to be given permission to imagine that you get to have stuff or have the imagination to do or get stuff.

[00:27:08] **Dana:** Hmm.

[00:27:08] **Mitchell:** There's so many steps, whereas if you grew up in a house that's more functional and more, you know, people are doing things, they're succeeding, success is acknowledged and, and, you know, the word college didn't even come into my house until I came home one day and said, am I going to college?

[00:27:21] Because my friends were like, where are you applying to college? And I'm a smart person who did very well in high school, even though I didn't

go very often. So my friends were like, where are you going to college? I was like, oh, I don't know.

[00:27:31] **Dana:** I haven't thought... no one has presented this?

[00:27:33] **Mitchell:** Dana never thought about it.

[00:27:37] So she was just like how you gonna go to college? And I was like, see what I mean? Like, it wasn't even, it was, it was a silent understanding that that just.

[00:27:49] **Dana:** Cause she didn't go to college.

[00:27:50] **Mitchell:** No. I'm the proverbial only person in my family.

[00:27:52] **Dana:** For real?

[00:27:52] **Mitchell:** Of that part of my family.

[00:27:53] **Dana:** Sister? Brother? Nope.

[00:27:57] **Mitchell:** My brother, my brother went for a little while, but his school was not, school was not for...

[00:28:00] **Dana:** yeah.

[00:28:00] **Mitchell:** ...for my, my brother.

[00:28:01] **Dana:** So then does anything you've gotten since then, like plays, jobs, partners, lovers, money? anything you've received in your life, you, do you believe that you deserve it?

[00:28:12] **Mitchell:** On my better days.

[00:28:14] **Dana:** How about today?

[00:28:16] **Mitchell:** Yeah.

[00:28:16] **Dana:** Okay, great.

[00:28:18] **Mitchell:** Yeah.

[00:28:18] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:28:19] **Mitchell:** I mean, more so as I get older, of course, right? I, like the time I say this all the time, once again, doing visual graphics that people can't see, but like, uh, if the time of the feeling of like, I don't deserve this and to the end of that period of time when I feel like, okay, I deserve it, that space gets shorter and shorter and shorter as I get older.

[00:28:40] Right? I still have that thing like, Oh God, I hope you don't get found out. I caught the identity police tapping on your shoulder and you turn around and say, I'm sorry, who exactly the fuck do you think you are? And the moment where I feel that to, saying that's bullshit. That's just an old tape.

[00:28:56] That's just crap that I've been carrying around It's it gets that conversation gets shorter and shorter and shorter, which is good, but I carried it around a long time, you know?

[00:29:05] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:29:06] **Mitchell:** This idea that like I was that any... anything that happened to me was just people being nice and sort of taking pity on me which I said this is sort of a not a transition but like I think a lot of people who grow up with shitty parents can become very narcissistic.

[00:29:25] We don't like to think of ourselves that way because often we're fighting against our narcissistic parents. Because my mother was narcissistic to the end. It was all about her. But I think sometimes when we fetishize our own pain and our own trauma, and we hold it so dear and so precious, we become the narcissist because then it becomes all about our pain and trauma.

[00:29:44] **Dana:** Well, and if your mom's whole identity was this thing that was crippling.

[00:29:47] **Mitchell:** Right

[00:29:47] **Dana:** And your whole identity is you're taking on your mom's pain or like making it about me and the trauma that I went through and then...

[00:29:55] **Mitchell:** Like even just making it about like how I stopped being like my mother.

[00:29:58] **Dana:** Exactly right that's its own identity.

[00:30:00] It's still be. Yes. That's it. Yeah, right

[00:30:01] **Mitchell:** Yes, it also has do with me, right? That's like another identity taking on her identity is not mine. Taking on, being reaction to her identity is not mine.

[00:30:09] **Dana:** Is not yours...

[00:30:11] **Mitchell:** and so

[00:30:11] **Dana:** ...is that kind of what you feel when you said, like, we only start healing once she passes?

[00:30:16] **Mitchell:** Yes, because that part of my brain that could like what Joan Didion calls magical thinking, right? The year of magical thinking.

[00:30:23] **Dana:** So good.

[00:30:24] **Mitchell:** This part of your brain that really, that really believes somewhere that someday they're going to say the thing that's going to dissolve all the little iron, you know, iron thick blocks in you because of your parent. And that's. And yes, as irrational as that is, it lives, I think, until they pass.

[00:30:44] And then they pass and you go, I mean, it's only been since she's passed that I've been able to really, like I say, sometimes I shudder. And I think how unhappy she must have been for so much of her life. I mean, she found joy, you know, she found joy in my, my nephew, or my grandson. And she certainly liked to play the slots.

[00:31:04] **Dana:** Yes.

[00:31:05] **Mitchell:** She was happy at the, she was happy at the casino. My sister, because, at some point, you know, you can't fight a tidal wave, when they were living in Las Vegas together for a long time. I was going to say, yeah, did she ever...

[00:31:14] **Dana:** Vegas. I thought, I thought that you told me this, but then I was like, wait, did she get to Vegas or not?

[00:31:17] **Mitchell:** Yes. Oh, she lived in Vegas. Yes, yes. And once a month, my sister would give her \$150 and drop her off, and she'd love nickel slots.

[00:31:26] **Dana:** For like an afternoon?

[00:31:28] **Mitchell:** Until it was gone.

[00:31:29] **Dana:** Oh my gosh.

[00:31:31] **Mitchell:** Until it was gone.

[00:31:32] **Dana:** What did your, did your mom ever talk about what that rush was like?

[00:31:35] **Mitchell:** She didn't even admit it.

[00:31:36] **Dana:** She never, no?

[00:31:36] **Mitchell:** No, she never admitted to anything, Dana. Nothing.

[00:31:39] Never.

[00:31:40] Never.

[00:31:40] **Dana:** Did you ever ask her point, point blank? What do you like about

[00:31:43] gambling? What, or like, what is the addiction about? What is...

[00:31:46] **Mitchell:** I brought it up all the time. Never.

[00:31:48] **Dana:** Wow.

[00:31:50] **Mitchell:** She'd say, I just like bingo, the slots. I play slots. I played bingo. I mean, when we were in high school, we'd go out and she'd say, remember to play my numbers.

[00:32:01] So we'd have to play her numb, her, you know, numbers in Rhode Island. You'd spell that N U M B I Z numbers, play my numbers. And if we forgot. Oh, the drama. Angry. First, we'd come home and she'd be sleeping on the couch because she'd just slept on a couch for 30 years.

[00:32:17] **Dana:** Wow.

[00:32:18] **Mitchell:** Next to like, her full denture set on the back of the couch, like just on the back, just sitting there.

[00:32:26] **Dana:** Am I allowed to laugh at that? I can't.

[00:32:28] **Mitchell:** It's f*cking funny. Don't get me wrong. Even when she was alive and this was all happening. It was goddamn, yes, we would fucking sister. I, not to be mean, but we would just howl like with the teeth on the couch having like, you know, chewed through a, like a pack of double stuffed Oreos at two in the morning and a, you know, carton of Winston's,

[00:32:46] **Dana:** Hey, there's worse ways.

[00:32:49] **Mitchell:** Oh, there were worse ways to, I mean there her there slow suicide was Winston's and Oreo cookies.

[00:32:53] **Dana:** What were your mom's numbers, by the way?

[00:32:55] **Mitchell:** Oh God, I don't know. I wish I did. I have to tell you something. This is no exaggeration. I have never gambled ever in my life.

[00:33:05] **Dana:** You won't touch it? Is it almost like when your mom's an alcoholic, you sometimes don't want to touch a drink?

[00:33:10] **Mitchell:** Yes. I do not. I don't. I don't go to the bingo with friends. I don't go to the bingo. I do have to tell you about going to the bingo, but I won't. I don't buy lottery tickets, I don't like it. So I never gamble. I don't buy lottery tickets. I just... I just don't. I don't touch it. I see what a disaster it is. Oh, well, this is actually a joyous story.

[00:33:27] So my, the women in my family, the old Jewish ladies in my family, not my grandmother, my, uh, my mother, my aunt Miriam, who was her sister, and then my great aunts, Ida and Dottie, who were my mother's sisters. They went to the bingo at least once a week, mostly two, but at least once a week come hell or high or the bingo and it was always in the basement of some of Catholic Church in Cranston, which was where I grew up, which is a very Italian, St. Rocco's or St. Bartholomew's or something like that. St. Anne's or something. Just bingo. And it was always this basement with long tables and, um, and, uh, like a, refreshment, you know, like somebody would be making hot dogs and hamburgers and, you know, like greasy spoon kind of thing. There was always some, and we got to, when we got to go with them.

[00:34:24] Oh, my God. It was so fun. We should not have been in there. All that smoke. I mean, so much.

[00:34:28] **Dana:** Oh, yeah. And you were a young kid?

[00:34:30] **Mitchell:** Kids. But, oh, God, I loved it so much because they'd give us a card to play. Of course, we couldn't gamble, but we'd give so it wasn't, you know,

[00:34:37] **Dana:** Oh, the blotters?

[00:34:39] **Mitchell:** The blotters. My mother played like 30, 40 cards at a time.

[00:34:42] **Dana:** Would she win sometimes?

[00:34:44] **Mitchell:** Occasionally, but not enough to like change our lives financially. I mean, it was just throwing away money that we didn't have.

[00:34:49] **Dana:** Right.

[00:34:50] **Mitchell:** But God forbid the idea that she would miss the bingo with it. Bingo was the cause of any problems, but they all went together, this group, and I loved my aunts.

[00:35:01] I love my aunts so much. Not my mother's sister. She was not my favorite. Bless, bless her heart. But my great aunts. Ida, Dottie. Ida and Dottie were. We got a Bessie.

[00:35:10] **Dana:** We got a Millie. We got an Ida. We got a Dottie. We got a Miriam. I mean, these names. Come on.

[00:35:14] **Mitchell:** I mean, you can't write this, right? And so. It's those are very good memories of my mother that she brought us and...

[00:35:20] **Dana:** Did she come alive like do you remember?

[00:35:23] **Mitchell:** She was very funny. People thought my mother was a hoot. She was very serious about her bingo. She was very serious about her game. She was good at Scrabble. Here's the deal. I think, I'm trying to formulate this because I actually think this is sort of a philosophy of mine. If one doesn't use one's can, one's potential for intelligence to its fullest it will come back and

haunt you and I think my mother didn't use any of her potential and I think she was a deeply intellectual or not intellectual, but an intelligent woman should mean enormous capacity for knowledge I think ironically despite the fact she was so bad with money that she lost our house twice and then permanently, never had money.

[00:36:04] I actually think my mother was sort of a mathematical genius, but it never

[00:36:08] **Dana:** Why?

[00:36:09] **Mitchell:** Because she could do large sums in her head. She could figure out math homework. She just could figure it all out and she had no education. She thinks she dropped out of school in eighth grade to get a job in a factory like everybody else in her generation.

[00:36:21] **Dana:** Wow.

[00:36:22] **Mitchell:** You know, it's like, yeah, World War II. And...

[00:36:23] **Dana:** She never worked? Or small jobs here and there?

[00:36:26] **Mitchell:** Like everyone. Like everyone. This gets complicated. So my father leaves. She doesn't ever send us a dime of, so think about this, she's now got three kids, she has the emotional maturity of a 14 year old. She dropped out at 8th grade.

[00:36:39] She dropped out at 8th grade, she has no education, she has no, she didn't work. She worked as a kid, like in factories and stuff, because if you're poor in Rhode Island you work in jewelry factories, because Rhode Island is the number one producer of costume jewelry in the world. Question mark.

[00:36:53] **Dana:** Question mark?

[00:36:54] **Mitchell:** But also true, and I don't know why that is, but it is true.

[00:36:56] **Dana:** For real?

[00:36:57] **Mitchell:** For real. It's a big, it's a big deal in Rhode Island I, uh, jewelry factories. Well, like, you know, you put, like, somebody solders a back

onto an earring, and then somebody puts those things into a little plastic thing that then gets hung.

[00:37:08] **Dana:** Right.

[00:37:08] **Mitchell:** The thing, you know, next to the Register at a mall store.

[00:37:12] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:37:13] **Mitchell:** All that all that work has to get some done somewhere

[00:37:16] **Dana:** And it's coming on a Rhode Island.

[00:37:17] **Mitchell:** It is.

[00:37:18] **Dana:** Huh.

[00:37:19] **Mitchell:** And so my father leaves her and then she's got AdNauseam and she started, she started, okay, she went to like a group to like you know, maybe get some, it's like a vocational group. Didn't really stick.

[00:37:36] She couldn't really hold a job. And so for the rest of my life, she sort of perpetuated insurance fraud. Meaning that she would find some way, every job, to be injured. And then collect unemployment and workers compensation until it ran out. And then she'd find another job somehow. And then something would happen, she'd get hurt.

[00:37:59] And that was kind of what my mother did.

[00:38:01] All her life? How much money

[00:38:04] **Dana:** did that amass?

[00:38:07] **Mitchell:** None. I mean, she was barely pulling it together. It was just literally to just get a weekly paycheck from unemployment or workman's comp. She had like a settlement.

[00:38:16] **Dana:** I'm thinking a settlement, I'm thinking some like big amount.

[00:38:19] **Mitchell:** No, she, like, I don't want a settlement, I just want to be able to collect while I'm, you know, through workers comp, while I'm, while I'm unable to get another job.

[00:38:26] I mean, for years and years and years until finally she moved in with my sister and then she didn't have to work anymore.

[00:38:31] **Dana:** Because you lost two homes, you said.

[00:38:33] **Mitchell:** Well, the same house twice. The same house twice. Once was rescued by my father's mother, which I found out years later. And then the second time when, after we had all moved out and then we.... she wasn't returning. The phone was the phone was out of service. I'm like, well, she didn't pay her phone bill, but then we couldn't get in touch with her at all in any way. It turns out the city had shown up and said, hey, old lady, you got to get out. We've sent you like five years of letters saying you got to get out.

[00:38:59] You don't own this house. You defaulted on it. You never, you didn't pay your property taxes in like 30 years and you got to go. Funny the irony of it because money worries was such a thing that made her that exacerbated her whatever her mental illnesses were and if she just fucking told somebody and didn't lie about it and got help that piece of property, which was paid for.

[00:39:21] It wasn't a mortgage. She didn't wasn't the mortgage that she didn't pay it was her taxes.

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

[00:39:26] **Mitchell:** And so the city just owned the house,

[00:39:28] **Dana:** but if she'd said, Hey...

[00:39:31] **Mitchell:** at any moment, to anyone, as opposed to, my mother had this brilliant way of, and I say brilliant, meaning her mental illness of if it wasn't in front of her, it did not exist.

[00:39:40] She was sitting at the bingo in Phoenix, talking to some ladies she just made friends with at the bingo. And they, and they asked about her kids. She'd say, Oh, my son, Mitch, he lives in Chicago. We're very close. Like you, if you were that lady, you'd think my mother and I were besties.

[00:39:57] **Dana:** Besties.

[00:39:57] **Mitchell:** Because it's not right in front of her. She couldn't see it. And it was clearly self protection. Like I can see it now, but now the damage is done. But the damage, this goes back to the thing I said at the beginning, which was like, we are not what happens to us. We are how we deal with it. So when I finally realized that the damage that I'm talking about is, is up to, it's up to me.

[00:40:22] I say this all the time. In fact, I said this on the beach today to these young people. I was like, whatever is wrong in your life, at this age, is in fact your parents fault. Good parents, bad parents, somewhere in between. It is their fault. That's how psychology works. Here's the catch. Unfortunately for all of us, it's their fault, but it's always our responsibility.

[00:40:44] Even if our parents say to us, I'm so sorry for this laundry list of things that you've been carrying with you for your entire life.

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

[00:40:52] **Mitchell:** Every, if they were able to catalog every single slight, every single confusion, every single lie and go down and individually say, I'm sorry I did this. It's still doesn't remove the, the internal stuff that we have to fix ourselves.

[00:41:07] **Dana:** And everybody on the beach was like, go get outta here, outta here. Get outta here old man.

[00:41:11] **Mitchell:** Parents. Actually, no, that's not true. They all, they all sort of went, yeah,

[00:41:16] **Dana:** I'm sure they said, Oh,

[00:41:17] **Mitchell:** he, because the thing is,

[00:41:18] **Dana:** he speaks truth.

[00:41:19] **Mitchell:** What's our responsibility?

[00:41:20] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:41:20] **Mitchell:** It'd be lovely.

[00:41:21] **Dana:** I know. Wouldn't it be great. I want to give it to someone.

[00:41:23] Oh, I want to give it to someone else.

[00:41:25] **Mitchell:** It'd be lovely if they could make amends and then we all magically washed of the stuff that we got from it. Insecurities, you know, I mean, there's so many things that my mother passed down. Like when I was a kid. My mother would say, oh, she'd introduced us, and this is my little one, this is my old one, this is my smart one, right?

[00:41:45] Smart, and my identity as a kid was that I was smart. I was a smart kid. I was one of those kids who read before I started school. I don't know how. Like, nobody knows who taught me how to read, but I could read before I went to school. Just one of those kids. I was a smart kid, you know, so. In fact, when I was in third grade, they wanted me to skip third grade and go to fourth grade because it was clear that I was sort of bored.

[00:42:05] And my parents, once again, They couldn't see it. So they just, it was an absolute no, because it didn't make any sense to them at all. So I was always this, I'm going to show my smart ones, I'm going to show my smart one. And then when I got old enough, and I'm talking like eight or nine, to have opinions about things, and let me tell you, I did.

[00:42:23] No surprise, surprise. Then, then I went from my smart one to Mr. No at all. Do you

[00:42:29] **Dana:** Resentful?

[00:42:30] **Mitchell:** You created, resentful, a little bit scared of me.

[00:42:34] **Dana:** Jealous, but also like she wasn't living up to her potential, which you said she wasn't.

[00:42:37] **Mitchell:** And also she knew at this point, because I started clocking her lies that I could call her out.

[00:42:42] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:42:42] **Mitchell:** I remember a very specific time, we were all sitting at my grandmother's house. There was weekly gatherings that my, god, my, my, uh, Bessie's house, just like all the, everyone hanging out on Sundays and three meals and

[00:42:53] **Dana:** mm-hmm.

[00:42:53] **Mitchell:** Fresh bread from the deli and all this stuff. And so I remember my mother said something was sitting around the whole table.

[00:42:59] Everybody was there and it was such a blatant, like, almost ridiculous lie. And I'm pretty sure everyone, in retrospect, at that table of adults knew.

[00:43:10] **Dana:** What was it?

[00:43:10] **Mitchell:** It's something to do with my father. It's something to do with my... Everyone knew my father was a violent drunk, and I mean, there was no way not to know.

[00:43:18] But, she says something, and I was, I think I was like eight or nine. And I said, Mellie, that is totally not true.

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

[00:43:28] **Mitchell:** And then... Oh, I got in so much trouble. Just like

[00:43:31] **Dana:** afterwards or during?

[00:43:33] **Mitchell:** No, during at the meal, I was told to leave, leave, get out, get out. I was like, but I, and I just thought, I, you know, it all get outta here.

[00:43:42] Yes, yes. So it kept weaponized so that I couldn't call her on shit. Yeah. Oh, I'm Mr. Al. Yeah. Like, well, I don't know what all but you did tell me I was the smart one, right, you know, all this to say to around the idea of it's their fault, but it's our responsibility added to we are we are not what happened to us.

[00:44:02] There's a lot of these things we're talking about that I can actually find now that they're both dead. She's dead since 2014 I Realized have created part of my interesting life. Hmm. I read my response to Trot the trauma of her created a person who can pretty much tell when someone's lying to me. And so I have amassed And anyone who knows me who's listening knows it's true.

[00:44:32] Some of the fiercest, most loyal, most fabulous friends. I probably have a group of like 15 people that I would call my best friend. And they're all, and they all know it. And I'm not being fickle and probably been friends with all of them somewhere between 25 and 40 years.

[00:44:48] **Dana:** Wow.

[00:44:49] **Mitchell:** And so that's partly because my mother didn't know how to make friends.

[00:44:53] I think her...

[00:44:54] **Dana:** That's so sad. It's so... Isn't that so sad?

[00:44:56] **Mitchell:** Because people want you to be a friend. And I'd watch It sounds like she was... Not follow through.

[00:45:00] **Dana:** People wanted her in her life. And she was...

[00:45:02] **Mitchell:** She couldn't follow through.

[00:45:03] **Dana:** Same. My mom had a hard time keeping friends.

[00:45:06] **Mitchell:** Is that... I wonder what that's an indicative sign of.

[00:45:08] And I would watch it happen. I'd see her have a friend. And they'd be cool. And I'd think, Oh, good. My mother has someone to hang out with that's not her aunt.

[00:45:14] **Dana:** Right. And I think for my mom, some of it was shame around, like, getting sicker. Losing the ability to walk, not looking as good, wanting to keep some of her addictions private, probably.

[00:45:23] Maybe your mom didn't want people in that house. It was messy. She might want to go gambling with them, but she also... That's her business. Kind of like, don't be in my business.

[00:45:32] **Mitchell:** She definitely did not want her friends in the house. She hated it when people wanted to come to our house. Yeah. Except outside, because we had an above ground swimming pool, and nobody else in my family did.

[00:45:41] Anyway, it was a crappy old pool. Weird Dana, and I dreamt about that pool. Last night.

[00:45:45] **Dana:** What?

[00:45:46] **Mitchell:** I dreamt about that.

[00:45:47] **Dana:** What happened in it? Because everyone loves hearing about dreams. I'm kidding, but

[00:45:50] **Mitchell:** Rose has a whole show called Get to the Part About Me, and it's about, like, nobody cares about your dream until

[00:45:55] **Dana:** Yeah, am I in it?

[00:45:56] **Mitchell:** Yeah. But it is, but it was like this very sort of shitty pool, but you know, the inside of it was clean, and we whatever, open it every summer, if we could have, if my mother had the money to do it. And so people would come over and swim in the backyard, but she was very uncomfortable. If anybody wanted to go inside.

[00:46:11] **Dana:** She didn't like, yeah. No. No, no, no, no. Yeah.

[00:46:13] **Mitchell:** Because it was disgusting.

[00:46:14] **Dana:** Yeah. So that could be just like I'm being embarrassed and, but being able to keep friendships that I have, I have a lot of friends too. I feel like I have a really wealth of love and long time friends.

[00:46:23] **Mitchell:** But I think it's, I learned discernment.

[00:46:25] **Dana:** But I work at it because you have to work at it and you have to, and discernment about who you let in.

[00:46:30] **Mitchell:** I think that's what I got from my mother. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Because I had to figure out how to get my needs met as a kid, I think I can now literally look at a lineup of people and go, no, no, no, no, no, yes, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, yes, no, no, no, no, yes, and no offense to the no's,

[00:46:45] **Dana:** but I'm not going to get probably when I...

[00:46:46] **Mitchell:** just, I can't, I can't as a kid.

[00:46:48] That was really very true. And the friends whose parents I connected with, yeah.

[00:46:54] **Dana:** In the neighborhood and stuff, or...

[00:46:56] **Mitchell:** In the neighborhood, my friend's parents, who became my surrogate parents, are very, were all extraordinary people, and taught me so much that I wasn't learning anywhere else. I do think, once again, I don't want to call them, I am going to call them gifts.

[00:47:09] I think, for both my father and my mother, and like, I've played the like, I got crazy parents game, and I always score very highly. Mm hmm. You know, in competition.

[00:47:18] **Dana:** Yeah. Because it's a competition. I always place.

[00:47:21] **Mitchell:** In the conversation.

[00:47:22] **Dana:** Right, right.

[00:47:22] **Mitchell:** What it, flirtatious exchanges of childhood trauma. My mother beat me.

[00:47:29] **Dana:** Man, that could have been the name of the pod. Right?

[00:47:31] **Mitchell:** Yeah. Yes, it's brilliant. So the gift of my, of some of my mother's stuff is maybe some self awareness, is my ability to discern who's good to have in my life. So that's what it was as a kid. Now, because that skill leaked into my sense of discernment, I've surrounded myself with people who are very good to have an, it's what Armstead Maupin calls logical family as opposed to biological family.

[00:47:58] **Dana:** Who says this?

[00:47:59] **Mitchell:** Armstead Maupin, the writer, he wrote Tales of the City. Um, he calls it logical family, not biological family. Your biological family could be in your logical family, but your logical family is the people who it makes sense. I sit with a lot of my friends who are queer youth, or even, you know what, people my age who come from very religious homes or whatever, and they're still, still making excuses for their parents homophobia, for their parents not fully accepting them, for their, all of it, and like, not, the gift of my, of my particular mother was I understood I get to, I get to walk away, and do not believe, and I know this makes me sound horrible, but it's, who I am.

[00:48:40] I do not believe in the myth of blood relation. Yes, we share the same genetic. It means nothing to me if we're not compatible. If you're not a person who is good for my life, I don't give a fuck how you're related to me. I just don't buy it. I think it's a construct that has enslaved particularly women for many, many, many, many, many years.

[00:49:02] You know, you gotta take care of your mo I mean, yes, of course, take care of your parents if you love your parents. But if your parents have done nothing to take care of you, or they threw you out because you're queer, suddenly now you have to take care of them? Nope. I I just don't buy it. I I just don't believe in that mythology.

[00:49:18] **Dana:** Hmm.

[00:49:18] **Mitchell:** Logical family. People that make sense to have in your life and for you to be in theirs. Yeah, that's what I that's that's partly what my parenting taught me and it's a gift because I guess I'll just be braggadocious about it if that's even a word the proof is in the pudding I have deep deep deep lifelong friendships full of honesty and challenge and they're all still here, and I'm still here so If, if, if my way was not right for me, I'd be lonely and looking for people to connect with.

[00:49:53] But the opposite is true.

[00:49:54] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:49:55] **Mitchell:** I don't have enough time in the year to see everybody that I dearly, dearly love. For me, it works out.

[00:50:02] **Dana:** How do you feel, I know you've already told me your mom's name and I always like to ask people their mom's name, which is usually what I do at the end.

[00:50:08] **Mitchell:** Yeah.

[00:50:08] **Dana:** But a part of me is like, I don't know if that's the question I want to ask you right now.

[00:50:14] I don't know. But. But I do want to know, when you say like, that's not for me, like, that type of maternal responsibility, like you just said.

[00:50:27] **Mitchell:** I think it's like maternal fascism.

[00:50:29] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:50:30] **Mitchell:** Like genetic fascism.

[00:50:31] **Dana:** So thinking about that right now, and thinking about Millie right now, and thinking about all of that, and that's your mom's name, and how you feel about her in this moment.

[00:50:38] What comes up then for you? Because it's not going to be probably this cookie cutter answer.

[00:50:44] **Mitchell:** I remember having a lot of fun. I remember laughing. I remember them indulging all of my, you know, all my things that I liked.

[00:50:52] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:50:53] **Mitchell:** Barbara movies and Judy movies.

[00:50:54] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:50:55] **Mitchell:** You know, I think about the fact that with because of her, my great aunts and my grandmother and my godmother are in my life.

[00:51:04] Thank goodness.

[00:51:05] **Dana:** Yes.

[00:51:05] **Mitchell:** I mean, you know, I tell these stories and Sometimes people are like, how did you survive something like that? A childhood like that, you know? The answer is I had these extended, this extended family of old Jewish ladies who were fiercely loyal and protective. They loved me unconditionally.

[00:51:22] So I had, I had that at the same time that my mother, my actual home life was quite nuts. So I also want to do that, (undiscernible). My life wasn't always a torture. In my house, it was pretty awful. Outside the house, when I was a kid, I had sanctuary, but then you bring all the trauma from inside the house through the rest of your life.

[00:51:41] So when I think about my mother, I think about the gift of her aunts and her mother and having chosen Robin as my godmother, who I miss every

day. But then I go, I go back to that moment. If I really think about her, I, I, at that moment is such deep sadness for her. She just was. Whatever happened to her, whatever mental illness that exacerbated it, or was caused by that trauma, she couldn't get past it.

[00:52:12] And we begged her to go to therapy, we, you know, she couldn't get past it. And so, she had no ambition, and then succeeded in having no ambition. She, she didn't do anything, and it, she folded in on herself, I think. She's a scaredy cat.

[00:52:28] **Dana:** Yeah.

[00:52:29] **Mitchell:** And I think about it, and it saddens me. My mother, I just think about how, how sad she was most of her life.

[00:52:35] I think my mother was probably clinically depressed for 60 years, you know? And so, years of that, unchecked, unmedicated with one awful thing after the other. I mean, who knows what my mother's diagnosis would have been? As a result of her not getting diagnosed, we learned a lot of really fucked up boundaryless stuff as kids.

[00:52:57] Yeah. You know, what was her full name? Mildred Ardel. Let Fain Ardel, A R D E O. No idea what the fuck that is. And then let L E T T, her maiden name and then my father's name is Fain Mildred. Mildred and Miriam.

[00:53:32] **Dana:** I have been putting off recording this closer for over a week. It's been on my list of things to do and every day I find a way to not do it, to do anything else but sum up my thoughts and find a way to relate this episode to my life, to my story, to my own mother, because that's the show. But maybe that's the glitch.

[00:53:52] Maybe that's why I'm having trouble putting words to paper. Because Mitchell's story is so not my story. I have sat on the mic with so many people for this podcast. Some amazing guests that you might never get to hear on this show because I don't have enough hours in the day to make all the episodes I want to.

[00:54:10] And well, because editors are expensive. Wink. But every amazing guest comes with their own set of lived experiences and vastly different stories of complex maternal grief. And even though I might say to them, oh yes, that sounds familiar, or I can totally relate to that, I am always aware that my story is just that.

[00:54:33] It's mine, and only mine. And even if I can somewhat relate to a depressive mother's story, because I can, and I understand the pain of feeling embarrassed and frustrated by a mother's inability or desire to get help in her lifetime, my pain is still so personal and specific, as is Mitchell's. And so sometimes, even in the midst of connection and relating to another person, you are still alone in your pain.

[00:55:05] I always yearn to connect with my guests and laugh and make sure they're seen and heard. But I never want to say to them, totally, our mothers are the same because that's a lie. And even the fact that I realized I hadn't featured a pathologically lying, addicted to chaos and traumatic maternal story on my show, that was proof to me that maybe I was keeping myself at a distance from that perspective.

[00:55:33] Because no matter how much sadness I still carried around my relationship with my mother, I still had a lot of love for her and forgiveness. And maybe even more so after hearing someone else's story. In this episode, Mitchell said, You only really resolve your issues with your complicated parents when they die.

[00:55:53] Because then, for real, your brain, for real, lets go of that tiny little part of you that's still seven and wants daddy and mommy to be daddy and mommy. In the way that you needed and wanted them to be. I have much more empathy now for my mother than I did when she was alive. And this, I 100 percent can agree with.

[00:56:19] Mitchell's chosen family and friends are such a powerful shield around him. I love how he's curated such a fierce, supportive, safe, and unconditional loving community of humans. It's inspiring. And one of his chosen family members and spiritual maternal figures is the Barbara Streisand. And before I leave you, I wanted to share a little bit more of our conversation.

[00:56:40] I asked Mitchell to tell me more about his love for Barbara, how it began. And to tell me about his spiritual belief in what he calls the Tao of Barbara. I'll talk to you

[00:56:51] **Mitchell:** soon.

[00:56:52] **Dana:** The Tao of Barbara?

[00:56:53] The Tao! Thank you. Oh my God, what did I say?

[00:56:55] **Mitchell:** The Tao of Barbara?

[00:56:56] **Dana:** Tell me about this Tao of Barbara.

[00:56:57] **Mitchell:** When I was six years old, the very first movie I ever saw in a movie theater was What's Up Doc.

[00:57:00] I was with my grandmother, my father's mother, Ruth. And I remember three things. I remember my bubby, Ruth, laughing so hard that she was wiping tears from her eyes. I remember a grown man laughing behind us that he slid off his seat. Slid off his movie seat. He was laughing so hard. And I remember seeing someone on screen that felt like home and safety and I didn't know who she was 'cause I was six.

[00:57:26] Now I'm sure I had heard her voice because she was popular and like on the radio or something, but I'd never connected with seeing her. And so I didn't know that I was gay. Didn't know she was a gay. I, I didn't know Andy. I just was like something who is shifted, shifted in my DNA. And so I have always been a lifelong.

[00:57:45] Barbara freak. I mean, when I, you know, first got my own money, like if someone gave me money for like Hanukkah or Christmas or, you know, birthday, I would go to the record store and buy Barb. So like, I'm the only seven year old with like Barbra Streisand second album singing, you know, "Anywhere I Hang My Head is Home" in my bedroom with a towel on my head.

[00:58:02] So it's very attached to my queerness, but also as I get older and really start to really love her and appreciate her, when I joke, I jokingly say the Tao of Barbara, but I actually mean it because I think about all the ways in which her story has inspired me. Like I was saying earlier, she changed the beauty paradigm.

[00:58:23] You know, the world told her she was ugly. Remember I was saying before that I, I'm A religious, but I have my own spirituality, and it's in The Tao of Barbara. It's like the lessons of being so utterly knowing who the hell you are, so young. She graduated high school early, bought a cot. And would stay at friends houses in New York City because she just was like, I'm gonna make it.

[00:58:43] She was like 16 years old. And then by 19, she was a legend.

[00:58:47] **Dana:** What? That was how young she was?

[00:58:48] **Mitchell:** Yeah, she cast in Funny Girl at 19.

[00:58:50] **Dana:** Oh, I didn't know that. I thought she was like early 20s, but wow.

[00:58:54] **Mitchell:** When she was on the Judy Garland Show. I think she had just turned 20. She had already had a hit on Broadway and a hit album.

[00:59:02] What if you got to meet her? What would you say? I'd, I'd, I'd. You wouldn't? Would you be able? No, I'd, I'd, I'd get verklempt and I wouldn't be able to talk to her. I mean, listen, I think there's something, there's another thing about her is that she's not just a fan. There's something magical about her, like Dolly Parton, like Stevie Wonder, like Prince that like.

[00:59:18] There's something else going on that's some part of some part of the universe and so I am not the only person who has a story of them. I'm sure she hears it a lot when I was a kid Right, and I listened and I had the I didn't have a good mother and your voice and right

[00:59:32] **Dana:** Or women wanting to be...

[00:59:34] **Mitchell:** I'm sure everybody has that

[00:59:35] **Dana:** ...seen is beautiful.

[00:59:37] **Mitchell:** Yeah, and I I understand that So, yeah, that's what the Tao of Barbara is. I think about the Holy Trinity, which is the mother, the daughter, and the holy Jewess. Liza, Judy, Barbara. It's a whole spiritual. And then there's the minor saints. Not minor, but the other ones.

[00:59:51] **Dana:** Who are the minor saints?

[00:59:52] **Mitchell:** Diana, Cher. They're not minor, but they're

[00:59:54] Dolly.

[00:59:54] **Dana:** They're

[00:59:55] **Mitchell:** not the Dolly. They're, you know, they're the goddesses, but they're not the triumvirate. Pat Benatar. Whoever you want it to be. Whoever is in your, your thing. That, like, whoever. Like, I always say this. I

have to say that every gay man has at least one. Diva past and present that they are ride or die and I just have to have all of them That's what a difficult mother by the way

[01:00:18] **Dana:** Barbra Streisand

[01:00:19] **Mitchell:** big time.

[01:00:19] **Dana:** Oh, I feel like I knew this.

[01:00:21] **Mitchell:** She's that's why Barbara's long nails cause she said I want to be an actress and her mother said ugly girls can't be actresses You'll be a secretary like me. You'll work in the school system until you get married And so she grew a nail so she could she couldn't type. I feel like I got this talismans Like they're like powerful for her.

[01:00:36] They're not just affectation. They're like, you know, the source of power.

[01:00:40] **Dana:** If I get her on the show, I'll, I'll call you.

[01:00:42] **Mitchell:** Thank you. I will not respond.

[01:00:45] **Dana:** You will not respond. Thank you, Mitchell.

[01:00:48] **Mitchell:** Thank you, Dana, for having me.

[01:00:50] **Dana:** It was awesome.

[01:00:51] **Mitchell:** You're awesome.

[01:00:52] **Dana:** Yeah, I'll take it. Take the W.

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

[01:01:29] And as always, thank you to Heather Bode for her emotional, spiritual, social, physical, for well, for all of the help over all of the years. Thank you. And all of you, thank you for listening, for subscribing, for reaching out, for telling all of your friends. I know that this club, this complicated, messy club, isn't fun to be in.

[01:01:51] But I'm so glad that you're here. I couldn't do this without you, so thank you for being a part of this community. And if you haven't signed up for our newsletter, please do so at our website, which is danablack.org. Not just because I want to sell you stuff, but because I want to keep talking to you, and you talking to me.

[01:02:07] So, go check that out. There's personal stories, I'll tell you about the season, and you'll learn about some live retreats that we're curating, one retreat at a time. So, yeah, thanks for being here. I hope you'll come back. Will you come back? Don't leave me like my dead mom. You know what I mean? Come back. Please. I'll talk to you soon.