

S2E6 NICK JOSTEN

Fri, Dec 08, 2023 10:46AM 49:19

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mom, people, care, reno, feeling, dad, job, filming, years, miss usa pageant, podcast, happen, weird, started, hospital, apocalypse, set, notre dame, moved, week

SPEAKERS

Nick Josten, Elle Billing

N Nick Josten 00:00

Hi, my name is Elle Billing. I am a chronically ill queer femme, and I'm tired. I'm here this episode and every episode to dig at the roots of our collective fatigue, explore ways to direct our care and compassionate and sustainable ways and harness creative expression to heal ourselves and our world. And welcome to Hoarf Radical care in a late capitalist heckscape.

E Elle Billing 00:48

My guest for this episode is Nick Josten. Nick Josten is a writer, comedian, director, voice actor and actor-actor based in Reno, Nevada. Though he taught English and got his master's degree in Library Information Studies, he quickly realized he would much rather make his living as a professional clown. You can see him strangle a Russian mobster and teach a baby how to break down a brick of cocaine in the indie action comedy *Carp-e Diem*, the link to see that movie will be in the show notes. Welcome, Nick. Well, Hi, Nick. Welcome to Hoarf

N Nick Josten 01:22

Hi, I just took a big swig of water

E Elle Billing 01:24

I know, I know. It's like going to the dentist. It's like the worst possible time to say hello. At least my hands weren't in your mouth. That would have been weird. And also how would I do that? The logistics

N Nick Josten 01:36

over video?

E Elle Billing 01:37
How are you doing today? Pretty good.

N Nick Josten 01:39
Good. I'm a little tired. A little beat up. I spent the past week working with the Miss USA pageant here in Reno. And that that was an experience.


E Elle Billing 01:51
I was gonna say, I can imagine, but I can't. I can't imagine what that would even be like. Were you doing tech? Or?

N Nick Josten 02:00
Yeah, I was a PA. So I was just kind of a gopher just kind of did whatever they need me to do. I was with the film crew that was getting B roll for like the commercials and the bumpers and just kind of things that'll flashes across the screen really quick.

E Elle Billing 02:17
Okay,

N Nick Josten 02:17
I just gotta I follow the camera crew around carrying equipment and helping them set up for seven days. Yeah, just kind of went all over a hotel. They were doing the pageant at the Grand Sierra Resort here in Reno, kind of this gigantic Hotel Casino and I think I walked 20 miles a day, just going back and forth across this casino. We also we went up to Sand Harbor one day to take some some videos up there. Honestly, like I never really got a chance to talk to any of the contestants or anything. It was mostly just haul gear, set up, you know record some stuff really quick, tear down the gear, get back in the van and go to the next location

E Elle Billing 02:58
when I think about it, you know when when they televise those events you know, we see like the last night of the contest, and they do show a lot of B roll of the contestants waiting in the hallway for like their interview, or for other portions of the of the contest during the week.



N

Nick Josten 03:12

Yeah,

E

Elle Billing 03:13

and I guess I never really thought about who gets all that footage. That's you

N

Nick Josten 03:16

Yeah, there were a couple of camera crews, yeah, out there getting footage that they that they'll show for all of five seconds. No, the marquis we had to get video of that with the Miss USA pageant signage up there and you know, the outside, the exterior of the hotel with the big sign up there, and just like all these things that you'll see for all have one or two seconds that we spent a few hours trying to find all this stuff. Yeah, getting. We went-- we got, had to go back out and get the exterior shots again. Because we got them the first time in the middle of the day. And the sun was too harsh and the shadows were too harsh and all this and so we went out at golden hour and sunset and

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Elle Billing 03:59

okay, I saw that on your Instagram when you're like, freaking sunset.

N

Nick Josten 04:04

Yeah, this is something that I started doing a few years ago that I'm I'm a man who hates sunsets I get angry at ugly things that flash across the sky every night. Who do they think they are? These sunsets

E

Elle Billing 04:19

man shakes fist at cloud.

N

Nick Josten 04:21

Yeah, that's me every night. Silly sunsets. Usually I do PA gigs. Like maybe for like one or two days. This was my first one for an entire week. And it was, it was a lot. The crew was still really fun though. And I learned a lot. I kind of I liked doing these sorts of gigs because it, I get to see kind of a different setup, a different professional environment. I usually work with this really small, independent production company here in Reno and it's just kind of the same people. Over and over again, we have our core group that we go if and we have just kind of our own way of doing things. It's kind of interesting to see how this big multimillion dollar production does things and just kind of the madness that goes behind doing a live show.

E Elle Billing 05:14
Right?

N Nick Josten 05:15
Because yeah, everything I do is mostly narrative. So like, we're able to plan stuff months in advance, we find our locations we set up and like, everything's all pre planned out, and everything's just kind of smooth sailing. And then with this, it was just kind of like, you know, just being thrown into a war zone. It's just like, things are popping off and changing constantly, you have no idea what's gonna happen in the next couple of hours. It's just not exactly what I want to do for the rest of my life. But it was kind of a good experience to have once.

E Elle Billing 05:45
Yeah, and then go, nope, I prefer this other thing that I've been doing. Yeah, that sounds exhausting. So how have you been able to like receive care or take care of yourself? Or even receive care from others, like during a long, exhausting week? Or do you have plans this weekend to unwind from that?

N Nick Josten 06:06
No, you really don't get a chance to unwind. I signed up to work at a haunted house this year. And tonight is the opening night. So I kind of got to run and do that at four o'clock. so I have that tonight. And tomorrow night. I'm also in pre production for a couple of different things with this Mad Wife is the production company that I work with here in Reno. We've been in pre production for our next feature film for a while now. And that starting in November. But we also got dropped in our lap, this web series by a Chinese company wants us to do like 80 one to two minute web series things. Kind of like a soap opera thing. It's kind of a weird concept. And I think it's mostly going to be on TikTok and YouTube shorts and all that they're making us film vertically. And it's, it feels so weird, like everything that we've been exposed to. You're not gonna be showing the video, so no one's gonna see what I was trying to visually explain it anyway. But yeah, usually we have a few months for pre production. And now we had, I think, like two and a half weeks to get all this stuff organized. And that starts on Sunday. So kind of while I was doing this PA gig, I was doing a lot of production stuff for this other web series. That was just kind of like if I had some downtime. I was on my phone trying to find caterers and locations and all this other stuff. So kind of double dipping in the job world. So yeah, I just, I don't really get a chance. October is just going to be absolutely Busy, busy, busy, busy. Which happens a lot is like,

E Elle Billing 06:17
Okay, Feast or famine

N Nick Josten 07:47

N NICK JOSTEN 07:47

Yeah, like my summer was was pretty lean. And I'm starting to get worried about finding work. So I found this online tutoring job, that's going to be like 15 hours a week. But now I'm getting so much work again, that I don't know if I'll have time to do the tutoring job. But I also don't want to just drop that because it can be it can take a long time to find a day job again.

E Elle Billing 07:47

Yep.

N Nick Josten 07:47

And you know, go through all the training and everything. So I don't know if I want to drop that right now or just like, be even busier for the next couple of months. Self Care! is kind of you have to focus on self care when you're on set, because a lot of times nobody else is

E Elle Billing 08:27

Yeah, I was gonna say no one else is gonna take care of you.

N Nick Josten 08:30

You need to really self advocate for yourself. And I try to tell younger actors to do that as well. Like, you have to keep yourself in mind because it's not always malicious or anything. There's not like some producer creeping in the background trying to like how am I going to screw with this person's day, it's just, they have so much on their plate and there's so much going on that they can't think of your needs specifically. So you kind of have to be able to stand up and say like, I need some time, or like I need a vegan meal, or I need whatever. Like this past week. Like one thing I my insoles on my shoes, like I somehow wore a hole in one specific spot. So I started developing a blister on my foot after the first day. I had to go out and buy some new sole inserts and everything. And I guess it was too late because it just that blister still there. It was just hanging on tight. And it just like having to do late night trips to CVS to find things to take care of it and mitigate the symptoms. Because that was pretty much my entire job is walking around.

E Elle Billing 09:32

Yeah, and foot health is a big deal.

N Nick Josten 09:36

Yeah, like if your feet are screwed, then you're screwed. Like it's it's hard getting around if your feet are hurting.

E Elle Billing 09:43

I don't have arches. I have flat feet. And so that has caused a considerable amount of pain for me over the years when I don't have proper shoes because it throws off the alignment of everything from my ankles all the way up to my hips and back.

N Nick Josten 09:57

Yeah,

E Elle Billing 09:57

and so custom orthotics are really expensive and so I've sort of gone the cheaper route and done Superfeet insoles, and-- but they wear out and then I don't always notice they're wearing out until I start to have a lot more pain in my legs.

N Nick Josten 10:12

Yeah.

E Elle Billing 10:13

And yeah so like the whole taking care of my feet is a big deal. And I

N Nick Josten 10:18

Lieutenant Dan was right. You're gonna take care of your feet.

E Elle Billing 10:22

True story.

N Nick Josten 10:25

But I forgot what I was gonna say.

E Elle Billing 10:27

I'm sorry.

N Nick Josten 10:28
Oh no, no, like, you know, like I My mind is elsewhere already. Yeah,

E Elle Billing 10:34
and I know on the weekends, you always you make soup right?

N Nick Josten 10:39
See what's today?!

E Elle Billing 10:41
It's Friday you didn't miss a game.

N Nick Josten 10:46
Oh, yeah. Last weekend. I had to miss the Notre Dame. Yeah, for every Notre Dame game. I make curry udon

E Elle Billing 10:54
So not soup. Curry udon. It's different

N Nick Josten 10:56
Yeah. It's soup-like it's soup-esque. It's in the soup family.

E Elle Billing 11:00
It's in the bowl.

N Nick Josten 11:02
Yeah. But last week, yeah, I was I was on set with the Miss USA pageant. So I couldn't make it. And then Notre Dame lost. So it's a weighty burden to bear. But I'm willing, I think tomorrow I'll be home when Notre Dame playing. Right when I made when I got home. My dad said, you know, oh, you could have just made it the day before. That way they wouldn't have lost. You're right Dad, I, I let him down. But it was the day before I was still working on set. So like, I

probably wouldn't have had time anyway. But I was, we were sitting by the pool at the GSR waiting for the contestants to come down for the pool shoot. And they had, they had the Notre Dame game on. And like as soon as I sat down, they went to halftime. And then

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Elle Billing 11:49

of course,

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Nick Josten 11:51

then we're just one of those situations where we're just sitting around waiting for stuff to happen. And I got to see about five minutes, the third quarter. And then someone came around and turn all the TVs over to the Miss USA pageant logo. So that would be shown in the background when we're filming. I was like, the production manager was on my side though, she was also waiting for a college football game, she was kind of watching it on her phone and we got to commiserate about that. You just kind of finding moments like that on set. A lot of times it's just hurry up and wait. And you have to find moments to like kind of take care of yourself and take a moment to breathe. And for me it's really important to have those moments because I'm pretty introverted. Like I'm an introvert who really likes people and like, I like entertaining people. I like making people laugh and everything, but my social battery wears out pretty quickly. Like usually after an hour or so like I kind of need some time to myself, but you can't really do that on a 12 hour shoot day. Like you're just kind of constantly around people.

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Elle Billing 12:53

Yeah,

N

Nick Josten 12:54

I try to just find some time, usually during lunch to just kind of like, take some time away by myself. And it seemed a lot easier when I was the the co star in Carp-e Diem because, like, where we filmed we filmed it at the director's house and she had couches on her back porch. And I just absolutely love that like a back porch couch. And I-- I'd eat my lunch really quick. Then I go and take a nap on the back porch and like play with her dogs and she had goats and everything too, and so

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Elle Billing 13:25

amazing.

N

Nick Josten 13:27

Nick the goat like every now and then I heard you yelling at Nick to shut up. I thought she was talking about me. No, no, no, it's just the goat, just the goat. And he would sneeze a lot to

allergies. Oh, it was adorable. And Nick, the goat died, unfortunately. Yeah, she was super broken up about it the director, she had a lot of animals. Yeah, just like but when you're on the crew, it's a little harder to get away, kind of you need to stick with a crew and kind of be a little family and everything. But I did that during this last run. There are a few times where like, they'd asked me to go out with them to lunch or whatever. And I'd kind of be a little standoffish, and it's kind of like screwed with my networking a little bit. Like, you got to fit more people to hang out with and find more work from, because that's kind of how you find work in the entertainment industry is just by word of mouth. It's really hard getting your foot in the door. But once your foot's in the door, it's just going to show up in on time and be nice and do your, and work hard and more jobs come your way. That was kind of like, I wanted to go with them and like hang out more but I was just like, I need a few moments to myself. It was just like sitting on a couch. Nobody else around shutting my eyes for a little bit and just being all by myself.

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Elle Billing 14:52

That's tough balance.

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Nick Josten 14:53

I've gotten a lot better about just like, no, I just need a little bit a little time to myself. I just need a little space. And also I had to send out emails and call people for his other production gigs. So I need to I need a little time to do my other job while you guys are paying me to do this job.

E

Elle Billing 15:09

So you mentioned you know, getting home and your dad saying that, you know, Notre Dame lost because you didn't make your curry udon. you live with your, with your dad? Yes.

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Nick Josten 15:20

Yeah.

E

Elle Billing 15:20

Okay. So I know you moved in with your parents during the pandemic, and I talk a lot about living with my parents. So do you want to talk a little bit about all of that, like, why you moved in with your parents and what that process was? Yeah, for you.

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Nick Josten 15:35

Um, so I moved in with my parents during the pandemic, to help take care of my mom while she went through cancer treatment. She was diagnosed with is called Colegio carcinoma, which is very rare and aggressive cancer of the bile ducts in the liver. That kind of connects it to

is very rare and aggressive cancer of the bile ducts in the liver. That kind of connects it to another organ, I forget which one?

E

Elle Billing 16:01

That's fine.

N

Nick Josten 16:03

Yeah, we-- she was scheduled for, she got diagnosed in July of 2020. I still kind of remember it. I was helping out with the film festival. And it was because of the COVID restrictions. We were doing it at a drive in theater here in town, and that was kind of waving cars in the sun was setting. I get a text from my mom, that she got the results back and that it was cancer and it looks serious. And that was like just after we finished wrapping that first summer filming for Carp-e Diem when we thought was going to be a web series. And then things happened quickly. And we got her in scheduled to see doctors. And she got this, like miracle surgeon out of San Francisco who was super interested in her case. It was kind of lucky that it was a very rare cancer because there were top surgeons and doctors who were interested in studying it. So she had this surgery in San Francisco where normally they have to flay you open like a frog in biology class to get it out. And he was able to do it laparoscopically. So and he said he got it all and it was like a miracle surgery and you're like, Oh, she she dodged another bullet. My mom has kind of had health issues throughout her life. She's died a couple of times. And I was kind of used to it in a way like I'm just like, just it's another surgery. Like the whole family went to San Francisco to be there with her and bring her back to Reno so she could recover. Even though they got it all out. They were still going to plan on doing some chemo and everything. They thought one of us, one of my brothers, I have an older brother and a younger brother thought it might be a good idea for one of us to move in with them. My older brother was recently divorced, but he kind of went off the deep end. He had a weird midlife crisis and kind of, we can't really trust him anymore. My little brother has his family and everything so-- and at that point, he wasn't living in Reno, he was still up in Washington. So it kind of seemed like the logical solution was for me to move in. So I could help mom recover and take her to appointments and everything. Like things looked really optimistic and at the beginning, like the miracle laparoscopic surgery and everything and started in with the with chemo and she was doing a relatively light dose of chemo and that was starting to really wear down on her. And like the symptoms were getting pretty bad. And then by the following summer. Yeah, that's when we kind of saw that she wasn't gonna get better. And it was it was during the second round of filming for Carp-e Diem. I still remember. We were doing a bunch of night shoots. So like my call time was like, I think like two or three in the afternoon. We, I didn't get wrapped until like one in the morning, I get home around 1:30 finally get into bed around 2:00 and started falling asleep. And then I think it was around four in the morning heard this loud crash as my mom had passed out trying to get herself to the bathroom. And she refused to go to the hospital because she had doctor's appointments later that day and she didn't want to-- you didn't want to miss the doctor's appointments. So she just like absolutely refused to go to the hospital and they got her back into bed and you know, got her all set up and my little brother came later that day to take her to a doctor's appointments because I had call time again. And my mom was a producer for children's theater for 20 years so like, you don't miss your call time, you don't you don't miss rehearsals. She was, she was adamant that I still go. So I went, went back to my call time, we had another late night, then I make it home again, one in the morning, then fall asleep. Finally around two, then my dad comes in to get me around 3:30 or

4:00 to take my mom to the hospital because she was, she finally tapped out. And when she taps out, like she used to be a nurse, and she, she knows a lot about her body and everything, take her to the hospital. And so I'm just kind of like, two days sleep deprived and sitting in the hospital with my mom and trying to get the tests run and everything. And a lot of times they-- lately with the ER, it's just like, it's gonna be eight hours before anybody's gonna be able to see you. Like they took her vitals and they took her to the back right away, like her blood pressure was like, I don't know, 80 over 20 or something, it was just like super, super low, just sitting in the hospital with her. And then I was sitting in there with her all morning. And I had another call time that I had to get to. And I was trying to get my older brother to come and he wound up being over an hour late getting there. And it was just like, when I was still sitting there we got some tests back. I think a CT scan that looks like the cancer had gotten bigger. Like it started regrowing. And, and they thought it was metastasizing, because there were a couple other spots that were showing up elsewhere in her body. But they of course, it's just the ER he's not an oncologist, he needs to he's good at saving people, but he's not an expert in anything. So he wants us to go see the actual oncologist. And that's where it left, where I left it and my older brother finally showed up so I could go make my call time. It was just it was thinking in that, oh my god, my mom's gonna die, like she's she's not getting better. And there was a wildfire that broke out. And it happened to be like down the street from where we were filming. So like traffic was all backed up the entire way there. And it just took me forever to get there. And like I finally got to where the filming location of this house and I just kind of like I parked my car and just like, the floodgates open, it's just like, bawled my eyes out, it was like the most I've cried ever in my life. It's just like, holy shit, my mom is going to die. And the sound guy came out to get something out of his car. And he saw me and then soon the two directors are coming back out. And you know, it's this is their first feature that they're filming. And it's the last day, the next day, the co star has to go fly back to LA. So like, this is our last shot to film anything. And they're co star is in his car, just having a break down. And they come out and just talk to me for a little bit and I explain everything that's going on. And they're like, fuck, that is a lot. And they just kind of-- oh, they offered to wrap it, that wrap me that day I can go back to the hospital, they'll figure something out. And I'm just like, No, no, it's like, what else am I going to do? Like, again, I'll just be sitting at the hospital, like I want to, I want to do something I want to be active. So yeah, they just give me like 15 minutes in my car to get myself together. That is as soon as I get into the set and the filming location, they have me improvise a scene with a wildfire. Because they thought they could cut it. So it looked like like at the end of the movie, my truck Bessie blows up. So like, maybe the Bessie blowin' up is what causes a wildfire, like, do a scene about that. So like, just like my world's crumbling around me. And I'm just like doing this little fun improv scene about my truck blowing up. And then immediately after that, I had to do a scene with with the directors baby about breaking down a brick of cocaine, and like teaching the baby how to how to pack, pack up these little packets of cocaine. And there's like five minutes of me just talking to a baby. And just like trying to keep it together but like I have to like be entertaining and fun. And it was just like it was such a weird moment for me. Like I had to still keep it all turned on. While, all this madness was happening in my personal life. And that was such a weird situation. And I felt weird being there. But I knew that my mom wanted me to be there. Like she was so focused on me still getting the job done and still, you know, being an actor, everything. And yeah, that was just kind of the moment that If I knew she was gonna die, and the next few months, it was just really hard.

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Elle Billing 25:11

Thank you for sharing that.

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Nick Josten 25:16

Yeah. Yeah, it was, I was really grateful that the director kind of sat down and he made sure that there was a cut ready to go that I could show my mom. So she got to see my my first film before she died. That was, that was really important. And taking care of my mom, those last few months was just, it was so hard, you know, knowing that, like, there's nothing I could do. Like, all I could do is make her comfortable. And, like, I want to do something to save her. But there's nothing you can do. And that type of care is, especially hard. That palliative at the end of life care, just making sure they're as comfortable as possible. And the end of their days are, how they want to spend. My mom really didn't want to be in hospice like, no at a at an actual facility. She wanted to die at home. Just making sure she got the death that she wanted. And yeah, like, I'm really glad that I was there to help. But it definitely took a lot out of me. And it seems like I'm about to do it again. Last week, I had to take my dad to the hospital. And it looks like he has pancreatic cancer.

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Elle Billing 27:08

I'm so sorry. You know, sorry.

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Nick Josten 27:15

No, no, it's just...

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Elle Billing 27:16

I moved. I moved in with my parents. After my mom spent two and a half days in the hospital. She had a UTI that became septic. So she has kidney disease, but also a form of dementia. And so she, now, two and a half, three years later doesn't remember that she was that sick.

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Nick Josten 27:35

Oh,

E

Elle Billing 27:36

so every once in a while she's like, Well, I wasn't that sick. And Dad and I are like, You were on IV antibiotics for two and a half days.

N

Nick Josten 27:45

Yeah,

E Elle Billing 27:46

it was really bad. And so I'm always super focused on keeping her safe and making sure she eats, stays hydrated, takes her meds doesn't cut or burn herself on her craft projects. But then like it was just my dad's birthday. And my mom asked him if he was going to grow his beard out again. And he's like, I don't know it's So white, it makes me look so old. And she's like, Oh, I think it's so handsome. And he asked me if I thought it made him look old. And I don't really, but I did tell him that, Last year when he picked me up at the airport, after I had visited my partner, I couldn't find him in like the sea of people. I was looking for a young guy. And then I saw him. It was old guy with a white beard and the grandpa cap. And that was like the first time it hit me that I'm not just really here for my mom. I'm here for both my parents.

N Nick Josten 28:00

Yeah. Yeah.

E Elle Billing 28:42

And like, my dad's old too. And that, but that was the first time like, my dad's mortality had sort of faced ,that I'd had to face that because I've been so focused on mom.

N Nick Josten 28:54

Yeah,

E Elle Billing 28:54

like, well, my parents are the same age.

N Nick Josten 28:56

Yeah.

E Elle Billing 28:58

And my dad said, so I looked like an old guy. I said, Well,

N Nick Josten 29:05

you're an older guy.



E

Elle Billing 29:06

Yeah. I mean, he does look handsome with the beard, but it is all white. Yeah. And I hadn't. I mean, after I was only gone for 10 days, but like I just I hadn't seen him for 10 days. And so I've it's not that I forgot what my dad looked like I just --it just hit me that Oh, most people his age are retired. And he's farming full time still. Right? No wonder he's so tired. Like, yeah. Oh, gosh. And I'm not saying that's the same thing that what you're going through with your dad. But it just facing our parents' mortality is...

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Nick Josten 29:53

yeah, just kind of hits you in the face one day.

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Elle Billing 29:56

Yeah, no one told us about this part of being adults. it sucks

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Nick Josten 30:01

Yeah, having to start taking care of your parents as well? Oh, yeah. After my mom died, my my dad asked me if I would stick around. And like he's the oldest of eight kids. And like, he's always just had people around him and like, I can't just abandon him and be like, oh, good luck. I helped with mom. See you later.

E

Elle Billing 30:22

Yeah.

N

Nick Josten 30:23

And yeah, I'm glad that I'm still around to be able to help take care of him as well. And it's just I thought he would have more time. This is, this is now just two years come November since Mom died. My dad after he retired, he's been so good about like, eating healthier, and like going out for walks and taking care of himself and everything. And then all sudden, it's just no, just dev devastation.

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Elle Billing 30:49

Yeah.

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Nick Josten 30:50

But it I'm, I am so glad that I'm able to be here to help out. Especially guys, like for most of my 20s, I was abroad. Like after Augie. I moved to Japan for five years. And I was up in Vancouver

for three years. And I just I missed a lot of what happened with my family. And now I'm actually here to be more a part of it. And like, my little brother and his wife and his their two kids are, we're also living in the same house. And the plan was that I was thinking about moving down to LA in August, because over the pandemic, I hooked up with his acting group out of LA that does his Meisner acting technique that I really liked. They're gonna start doing live classes again in August. So that was kind of my exit day. And then, you know, the WGA, and the SAG strikes and all that happen. So I thought it probably wasn't the best idea. And then the place that I was living with my dad, that condo owner died. So that family was selling that place. So we had to get out by the end of January. And my little brother and his family, were already planning on having dad come live with them. So they were already looking for a place that had a room for him. And they just happen to find a place that had an extra room for me. So I thought I'd live with them until I moved out here down to LA and then it just kind of happened that we're all living in this like little Josten compound. And it's been fun, like seeing my niece and nephew every day as well. And just kind of like in the, to be the fun uncle with them. The next few months are definitely going to be challenging, especially because I know what it's like now, to lose one parent and just getting ready for the next few months. And then pancreatic cancer is one of those things that it's also very aggressive, and acts quickly. And just kind of knowing that my dad's probably not going to be here next year. And I just like what I'm hoping for is that he gets a good last Christmas with the grandkids. And, like, can experience that. But yeah, taking taking care of a family member and just kind of watching them slowly slip away. It's just like, it's still devastating. Like, I didn't expect that, to like break down in tears again, that just kind of like when I woke up this morning, like, oh, that's I'm feeling fine and happy, like I'm a little tired, but otherwise, I'm feeling okay, then just like, there's leaps at you. It's kind of, yeah, it's also kind of like the, the Meisner technique is supposed to, like, make you more open to your emotions and like, get you out of your head. And so you can like more easily tap into all those emotions. So like after going through that it does kind of feel like oh, my emotions are just like, under the surface level. And it takes like, it's a hair trigger to like, get this stuff out there. And it's kind of, it's nice, it's nice being more in touch with your emotions and everything rather than just like having that, that shield of,

E Elle Billing 33:55

for me, it was quitting my job. And moving moving out here. Because all that stress from being so close to burnout all the time, and just waking up every day with a sense of dread.

N Nick Josten 34:10

Yeah,

E Elle Billing 34:11

getting out of that environment. After fully burning out and being very ill and getting here and starting to recover from burnout. Like I have space for my emotions, too. So like, there was one time I well, I was also going off my antidepressants at the time so we could switch them I hit a squirrel and burst out into tears. Because I was like, Oh, I didn't mean to do that. But two years ago in the fall when we were titrating down my meds, you know, I was I'd been here for several months and I was driving back from town and I looked over at the farmstead that used to be

my grandparents', and my cousin lives there now. And the leaves were so beautiful. Like I had to pull my car over so I could cry. Like it's just yeah, everything's a lot without whatever shield or whatever was that was holding it back. You know, mine was Stress and dread. Yeah, you know, all my, I've always had big feelings anyway, but they're much closer to the surface now too.

N

Nick Josten 35:08

Yeah, it's also nice not being afraid to experience them. It's kind of like, out of, like, so much of modern society has seemed like you need to keep everything tamped down and just, you know, be be pleasant. And yeah, don't make things awkward for other people or anything. And I don't know, I just always felt like I couldn't really express how I was feeling and just kind of having that openness anymore. It is much more freeing, and it feels like I'm experiencing more of the world rather than just kind of like, like, Am I making anybody else uncomfortable by being a little sad right now? Screw him, like, I'm gonna. I'm gonna be a little. However I'm feeling right now.

E

Elle Billing 35:08

Yeah.

N

Nick Josten 35:09

Like, I'm not trying to, like impose my, my feelings on other people or like, you know, ruin their day or anything. Like, I'm just I'm just experiencing what I'm experiencing right now. And that's, that's fine.

E

Elle Billing 36:00

Yeah, you did mention when we were emailing that, after your mom passed, all those feelings that were are now you know, much closer to the surface, you process that through a couple writing projects. Did you want to touch on those quick?

N

Nick Josten 36:14

Yeah. So I wrote, one, it's pretty, it's based a lot on what actually happened while I was taking care of my mom, I kind of took away a lot of the characters, it was just my mom and me and her dog Blue. She actually has a diabetic service alert dog, a little dachshund, and his name's Blue. And kind of in the middle of taking care of my mom, he woke up one morning and he couldn't use his back legs. He became paralyzed. And we took him to the vet and the vet. It's just kind of like, yeah, this happens with dogs. And sometimes they just kind of lose the ability to walk. And he ran some tests. And he thought that is very unlikely that he would gain the ability to use his legs again, like he did like a little pressure test. And he didn't respond and all this stuff, he's like, I can give you some steroids and some meds and you can hope for the best. But probably, it's better to just put him down. My mom absolutely would not have that. Like, if

he's not going to learn how to walk, we're going to get him a wheelchair, and he's going to drag his little doggy legs around. And then we just took the medicine and took Blue home. And after a few days, he started getting up again. And he started like stiff legged walking around, and he got all better. And I kind of took that as a sign that the same thing was going to happen to mom like he's going through her struggles with chemotherapy, but she's going to come out the other side unscathed. And so that's what I kind of did with this short screenplay called Blue. And it's just kind of like the day to day life of helping to take care of somebody, they're going through cancer. It's kind of more about the caretaker than the actual cancer survivor. So I kind of wanted to write it as an homage to all the caretakers out there. And what it's like kind of the stress and the fatigue and the worry and everything like that that goes into caretaking. There's one scene in it. Like, in real life that happened to me where when Blue became paralyzed, like that's what broke me. Up until that point, I was keeping everything together. I was like, you know, just being happy go lucky nursemaid and everything. Like I was just making sure mom was feeling good. And then just when Blue became paralyzed, just like something snapped. And I was just like, in the shower, and I just started bawling my eyes out is like, what else can go wrong as I felt like job like just God's just taking more and more things away. Like, how did I piss them off? What did what did I do wrong? They had that moment kind of happens in the screenplay as well. And just about like, no. Like, one of the things that I did to take care of mom was she didn't really have much of an appetite. So she mentioned something that she wanted to eat, I would be like, Oh, I just take a little mac and cheese like then you're getting the world's best mac and cheese ever. And I'd make like this five cheese mac and cheese from scratch and everything. And every night, my mom, my dad and I would gather for dinner around her bed, and we'd watch baking competitions. And I think we watched every single baking competition out there like we she really liked the like the holiday themed ones. We started watching Guy's Grocery Games towards the end wasn't wasn't quite as if we were just running out a baking competition. So that's that's kind of that's in the screenplay, just like the son just doing his best to make a happy little life. And so it's just kind of like when he's in the room with his mom. He's just like happy and smiling and just joking around but when he's on his own, it's just you see the dread and the stress that he's he's going through. And it's also like really funny and heartfelt. But it's kind of in this weird space where it's around 20 pages. And it was kind of hard to sell. A short screenplay like that, like, a lot of festivals want shorts to be around five to 10 minutes for programming purposes. So it's just in this weird zone, it still won a finalist for the Cordillera screenplay competition. And I'm looking at getting it produced with my this production company that I'm working with, but it's still kind of like, I need to go back in and rewrite it and rework it a little bit. And just kind of I don't know, if I want to jump into that topic again, right now,

E

Elle Billing 40:42

it's understandable.

N

Nick Josten 40:44

Some people recommend trying to make it like a mini series or something that those are pretty popular right now. And just a 20 minute script would be about what a half hour episode would run, maybe, maybe try selling it that way. I've been working on a novel called Lawn Chairs for the Apocalypse. And it's about a down and out millennial who's shopping for an economical and eco friendly way to kill himself. And that's when the de facto leader of an apocalypse cult

intervenes and finds him in the supermarket bathroom, like making little suicide medics and convinces him to try to give life two more weeks. And they go on this epic road trip. And a lot of that deals with my depression that I've been going through since since high school. I just like I think that was kind of my big wall was that I didn't want to acknowledge my my depression, I didn't want anybody else to acknowledge it either. And I'm just kind of after I finally started seeing a therapist and dealing with it, and writing about it. It's become a lot easier to manage, because I'm not trying to pretend that it's not there. So the the main character, his name is Dick Akin. He is just this horribly depressed person, because he started off life wanting to be a teacher and marry his college sweetheart, and just like have this nice, happy life. But once he actually got out into the world, you realize that just all the rules changed for what life was like for his his dad and his grandpa that working hard doesn't get you a nice life anymore. And he just kept falling deeper and deeper into depression as he realized that the American Dream isn't attainable anymore. And he's just working these multiple crappy jobs. Like he's a customer service representative at the Chilean outdoor clothing collective, which was one of my beta readers. It took her halfway through the book to realize that that spelled COCC.

E

Elle Billing 42:49

I was just running it in my head. Yeah.

N

Nick Josten 42:53

She wanted her notes that she left like, Oh, my God, I just got this joke. Like, yeah, there's, there's a lot of those in the book that just kind of takes a little while to see. And he's and he's still he's not making enough money working full time for this billion dollar company. He's having to do side gigs. And, and it's just, it's a running joke throughout the entire book that everybody has multiple jobs. Like they're just even the rich people they have. There's like, furniture stores slash Cafe, and a jewelry store slash tackle store. So he's just, he's depressed. He's, he's not just depressed, he's despairing because he's lost all hope that there's ever going to be a good life for him. So why is he's just sitting here struggling every single day just to make some other people a little bit more money. And it just seems like there's so many people in the world right now that are like that. They're just, they're waking up and realizing like, what is the point behind all this, like the environment is crumbling around us, is there's no hope for a future for anybody. So why keep trying? And just the whole book is about trying to find a reason to live. And kind of overcoming depression or dealing with it, at least, like acknowledging it and facing it head on rather than just getting drunk, which, yeah, that was also the thing like, I'm 300 and some days sober. Now, I kind of have a little app that keeps track but I kind of I keep forgetting to check it. And, like he does, that's what I did with a lot of my problems is I just, if I started feeling shitty, I started drinking, because momentarily, that's all that mattered. Like, I just, I felt good in that moment being drunk that then just problems would keep piling up later, but then there's always more booze. And there's the character having to overcome and face why he's been drinking the way he has and he has to kind of readjust his attitude and the way he's looking at the world and focus more on other people. That's kind of like the big goal at the end is that-- I do a play on the "Hell is other people" just know hell isn't other people, you know, opportunity and recovery is other people, like you need other people to survive. And the whole point of this Apocalypse cult is they're not gonna see the scare quotes that I did.

E Elle Billing 45:20

I heard that I heard the quotes, quote fingers, though I do them a lot. And I always say I'm doing quote fingers, right. Apocalypse cult? Yeah.

N Nick Josten 45:29

Yeah, the apocalypse goal is just about building community and community aid. They had these gatherings every night where people are able to get up and kind of tell something that's, you know, a joyous thing to happen to them or something that they're struggling with. And then the people around there offer support. Like, they'll pick up a collection, if you need a little help with rent, or, like some lady talked about how, you know, she's lonely because your daughter moved away to college. So people offer up, you know, volunteer opportunities here. They will take you out for coffee sometime that those just the community coming together to support each other. And that's what I think we need more of in today's world. communities seem to have disbanded. And we don't -- we've become even more selfish.

E Elle Billing 46:14

we're super isolated. Yeah.

N Nick Josten 46:17

Yeah, that yeah, that's, that's a good word for it. Like, we all become so isolated, and so insular and focused on our own microcosm of world that we don't think about how we affect everybody else, and how everybody else affects us. And we need to kind of start looking more at the larger world around us. And that's how I think we'll get out of this hellscape that we're in. We need other people to pull us out of hell.

E Elle Billing 46:42

Yes. Oh, I love that. Well, I would love to read that. That sounds amazing.

N Nick Josten 46:49

Hopefully, someday, it actually comes out.

E Elle Billing 46:51

Well, yeah.

N Nick Josten 46:52

I've sent it out to a few agents, and I've gotten some bites and they've asked for full manuscripts as soon as it takes so long for anything to happen, does it? Yeah, we'll get back to you in four to six weeks. Like why not now? Like, just

E Elle Billing 47:09

trust me, you'll read it in one sitting. It's wonderful.

N Nick Josten 47:12

I'll sit in the corner with a coffee and you just you read it. And when you're done. We'll discuss.

E Elle Billing 47:18

Well, I think that sentiment, it takes other people to pull us out of hell. That's a great note to end on. Thank you for being here.

N Nick Josten 47:26

Yeah. Thanks for inviting me. It was an emotional journey.

E Elle Billing 47:29

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N Nick Josten 49:08

like every now and then I heard her yelling at Nick to shut up. I thought she was talking about me. No, no, no, it's just the goat, just the goat