

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

Watch this. Here we go. Ready? Three, two, one, three, two, one. Here we go.

One, two, one, three, two, one, five, seven, eight.

Four, and we're going to the west coast into three.

And five, four, three.

You saw it here first, world premiere.

Five, four, three, two.

Listener, I have to apologize for my comments.

Hey, did we do all the three, two, ones?

Yeah. Welcome to smart list.

Oh my God, I'm so nervous.

Okay. Do we just go or do we practice once?

No, we're just going to do it. We're just going to do it.

Okay. Great. Ready?

Hey, smart list listeners.

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steal an unsuspecting kid's birthday wish.

I get it, Sean. I get what you're doing there.

Verizon is making it easy to get Apple's latest and greatest

with an amazing trade in offer,

even if your current iPhone has seen better days.

Me, my phone is pristine, but you know, some of us just

aren't as careful. No judgment here though.

Shout at you, Sean.

That's, I got it.

And you got another one coming up too.

Yeah.

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Offer ends November 15th, 2023,

and is only available in the United States.

So, Will, you're back on American soil.

Congratulations.

Thank you.

Yeah.

Did you kiss the tarmac when you got off your plane?

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

I did.

I always do that.

So you asked him, as soon as you get off the plane, you say, hey, can I just go down the little stairs here on the jetway?

I just need to kiss the tarmac.

Well, yeah, I mean, it's the only way to get off this plane is get off the stairs under the jetway.

Oh, my God.

You're trying to do a private joke.

You definitely went commercial at least, right?

I did.

From England?

Of course I did.

I had an incredible, as you guys saw, seeing that photo.

I had an incredible time at Liverpool.

Yeah, with the Jurgen.

Sean, Will's doing really well.

You know, he's flying private occasionally.

He's going, he's on the pitch in Liverpool.

He's got a real, a real porny looking mustache on his face today.

I got a fresh new haircut.

Wow.

He's real boyish.

Yeah, I went up to Liverpool.

I watched them play at Anfield, which is their ground.

It was like such a dream come true for me.

I know, hang on.

Sorry.

And I got to my friend, Tom, took me up there kindly.

Is that Werner?

Tom Werner.

That's nice.

Yeah.

Why don't you bring Tom on the show one of these days?

He's a nice fella.

I'd like to.

He's the best.

He's got a lot to say.

So anyway, so Tom is part of obviously the group that they, they own the Red Sox and they own Liverpool in the Pittsburgh penguins.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

Suffice it to say, Tom is an old friend.
Jason Unive played golf a number of times.
He's a great dude.
And he invited me up to the game.
I went up there.
It was incredible.
Billy Hogan.
Did they get a win?
They got a big win against West Ham.
Oh, they did.
That's fun.
That's really cool.
I was like, man, I want to know.
I said to Jurgen Klopp, I go, I want to know.
So I'm kind of good luck.
And I guess you have to have me back.
His, his, his assistant coach who's like number one right hand
guy, this guy, Pep Linders, who's a Dutch football coach.
He's a massive smartless fan.
So Pep, I know you're listening.
Yeah.
Huge fisted.
Scotty has a CPAP.
And Billy, Billy, Billy Hogan, who, who runs the team day to day.
He's also a massive, massive smartless fan, listens to every episode.
Really?
Yeah.
Every episode.
So it was kind of like, it felt very good.
They were all happy to.
Well, now, because, well, let me, because like, I know, I know what a,
what a, what a little, you know, boy you are in the best sense of the
world when it, when it comes to Liverpool or your, your, your one.
And if I've said to people in the, in the past, the only, the only
good thing about being semi-recognizable is that you can get a good
table at a restaurant that's hard to book.
Yeah.
But most importantly, when you meet your heroes, there's a, there's a,
there's a, there's a decent chance they might know who you are and you can
skip all the sort of fan, like, oh, I'm so sorry.
Do you mind if I ask you about it?
They want to talk to you too.
So, well, was that amazing for you?
What was amazing was, and I don't know if it's because Pep had told

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

Jurgen or Jurgen actually knew, but Jurgen Klopp, who I totally admire, he comes towards me smiling.

And I, of course, I do it to everybody.

I do it to my agent.

I go, hey, Jurgen will, will Arnett and he goes, I know who you are.

And he came and gave me a huge hug.

It was Chappy's with me.

Chappy's like, what is happening?

I know.

This is, this is so freaking crazy.

That's so cool.

Sean, we got a Chappy mention.

Yeah, we got a Chappy.

And we did, but we're, you know, smart less.

We are the official podcast of Liverpool football club.

That's so exciting.

I got a flat tire yesterday.

Should we get to the guest?

Yeah.

No, hang on.

Sean, here's the other thing I was going to say.

So I come back state side, as we say.

Good.

Sean's juggling his bosoms.

I come back and I start watching football and American football.

Yeah.

I see you two clowns every 10 minutes.

Sorry about that.

Yeah.

In your Verizon spot.

Yeah.

You guys, I love you guys both.

And you're in there and you're hilarious.

And you guys have obviously great Kim.

And the great Will Speck and Josh Gordon director.

Yeah.

Well, yeah.

And it made me so happy to see you guys.

The problem is that, you know, they came to us because the iPhone and Verizon is a fan of smart less.

So they thought to come to us.

The reason listener that will is not on that is because he's got a prior commitment with a, with a phone company.

Yes.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

I have, Jason, you're right.

I have a prior commitment with a phone company.

But what was fun was more money for me and Sean, basically coming home and coming back and seeing you guys on the air.

It was like, I'd been gone.

And then like, because it was Monday night football.

I was like, look at these guys.

Look at these clowns.

Sean, you were very good.

You were very good that whole day, Seany.

Well, likewise.

Now wait, was that the first time?

Sean, it's the first time you and I have acted together.

Right?

I think so.

Yeah.

I think it was.

Yeah.

I did the dock and everything, but that was just us playing.

I guess we were playing ourselves in this spot too.

But yeah, anyway.

But it was fun.

It was a real dream.

Good God.

You made me laugh hard.

Well, you both, first of all, you both look and Jason, I want to say that you didn't look great.

You look great.

You did not look puffy.

Really?

Yeah.

I think I may have been a little bit of help in post production.

I look like I could use my eyes.

Just a little bit, just a little under the eyes.

I think post production now they may have done it.

It's called tough production.

Yeah, tough production.

But I don't know.

Listen, you know, you got to be pretty on TV.

Yeah.

Guys.

Yeah.

Let's get to our guest.

Okay.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

This person's got stuff to do.

Today's guest is a Grammy winner.

What?

Just bring him on.

She has a degree from Stanford.

She's a gifted fisherman.

She's got part Dutch, Canadian, English, Irish, Russian.

She plays volleyball, basketball.

She also has multiple Emmys.

What?

She's a Rhodes Scholar and earned a doctor of philosophy and politics from Oxford.

What's that?

She's written four books, had a crossword puzzle in the New York Times, had her own radio show, a couple of podcasts, and her own TV show.

What's happening?

She's a hero to some and inconvenient to others.

Please welcome Robert and Elaine's daughter, David's sister, Susan's partner, and one of my personal heroes, America's own Rachel and Maddo.

Oh my God.

Yeah.

Now that's a bookie.

That's a bookie.

It's not like I'm going to cry.

I'm going to cry.

You cry on me.

This is crazy.

This is a top notch bookie, baby.

I know.

How did you get to me by saying you got to be pretty to be on TV?

Okay, let's go to the guest.

That was cruel.

This is very fair.

Rachel, I've been mistaken for you so many times.

We should check in in the morning about who's using the haircut today.

That should be noted until he talks.

Oh my God.

That reminds me.

I'll never forget Will.

Amy cracked me up one day.

She said, what didn't she call herself?

She made some cut.

She said, I am, I'm the female Chris Matthews.

Who said that?

Amy Poehler.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

Did she really?

She called herself that once.

I thought it was a funny thing.

That's kind of a good party game.

Which MSNBC host are you?

That is not bad.

I saw you, Rachel.

I saw you walking down the street in New York one time like a couple of years ago.

And have a creepier start to your story.

Keep going.

I was falling closely behind you in a van.

Hard to see you in the bushes.

I could smell you as you passed.

And I was like, wait, wait, screw it.

I was like, no, no, no, I can't.

I'm too nervous.

I was too nervous.

Was I doing something weird or was I just getting groceries or something?

No, you're just walking.

You're just walking.

Rachel, I am so, so excited that you are here.

I will, with all respect to all of the guests that have been nice enough to say yes to my invites, I will say you're one and one A with Radiohead for me.

Will, Shaw, can you attest to that?

Yes.

Jason talks about you all the time.

All I do is watch MSNBC.

It's true.

It's 12 hours a day.

It's true.

Do you think you are Joy Reid if you had to be one of us?

There isn't anyone I don't love on that.

Anyway.

I think if I am any other host, I'm, I think I'm Chris Hayes.

Chris Hayes hangs a son for me.

I could see that.

You guys seem, I've seen you guys, I've seen you guys sort of go back and forth a little bit over the years and you seem like you guys legitimately get along very well.

But you see eye to eye.

Yeah.

Very collegial workplace here.

People like each other.

But now we no longer have the handoff.

A, you're only one day a week and that one day a week, you're leading now is Jen Psaki,

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

another past guest of ours.

I loved her guest with you guys.

Oh, good.

That was a great conversation.

Now, do you think she's going to be as good as at the on time handoff as Chris was?

He was never late.

It's true.

He was so good about cutting off guests and getting to you on time.

So humbling because he made such an effort to always make sure at nine, zero, zero, zero, zero, I was ready to go.

Whereas I'm always traipsing like a minute and a half into Lawrence's show.

Oh, you do 10 minutes with Lawrence on his because he makes sure he's got to tell everybody who he's got while he's still got your audience, which I get.

I would do the same thing.

Wait.

I got a question, Rachel.

When you, it's kind of to that point when you're, what's fascinating to me about what you do is how you fill in the gaps and you constantly have something to talk about endlessly.

Like, like how much of that is like on a prompter or on a card or on a card?

Or you just like, are you done?

How much research before every single show?

Are you just filled with education in your brain where you could just keep talking about it?

Winging it like we do.

I don't have any other life.

For example, I don't, I don't have like things.

It's just this.

So I do anything where it's like me talking to the camera.

Yeah.

I have written it down.

If it's me asking, if it's me interacting with another human, I have not written it down.

So that's the way to know if it's in the teleprompter.

But like, for instance, your interview with Cassidy Hutchinson the other day was incredible.

You were certainly prepared for that.

You had, you had questions that were very specific that we all really wanted to hear the answers on and she was incredible and forthcoming.

Yeah.

I mean, book interviews are, are great, but it's, I mean, it's, it's got, I mean, I'm only interested in talking to people about a book if I'm interested in the book.

And so I've always read the book.

And so, but once you've read the book, you don't have to do that much other preparation as long as you grok it and you kind of understand what's going on.

Rachel, explain to the guys what a book is.

Yeah.

What does that mean?

Neither of them reads ever.

You read an entire book for one interview.

It's just stunning.

It's like, you know how stuff gets stapled together?

You move the staple to the long side of the paper.

You still don't have them.

And it's left to right, top to bottom, right?

Put it in TV terms.

Just put it in like a television program.

Imagine a television program, but all the dialogue was, what else would I do?

Crunched into cue cards you can hold.

You know what?

What I was saying is just the ability to like, when if something goes wrong or the satellite didn't connect, sorry, we can't get them.

And you just fill the space right away.

By the way, I will say, and Rachel, just so you don't have to be too embarrassed about why you are so smart, I will say that part of the thing is that because I imagine someone like Rachel is so well read that she's able to talk on many different subjects at all times because she has points of reference other than, you know, the golden bachelor, you guys. So, which is embarrassing for the two of you.

I can't wait to start watching that.

Neither can I, by the way.

Neither can I.

I've never watched any of the bachelors.

No, never.

What does it take to be golden?

How old is he?

Over 50.

He's 72.

You know, they had the golden bachelor once in Germany, but that was different.

It was a different show.

Here, get rid of the joke.

Here we go.

No, it is what you think it is.

I've been there.

Sure.

No, but Rachel, you have said, and when I say that, I'm talking about my research on Wikipedia, that you think you have an obligation to, since you have a light on the camera, that you need to have something to say when that light comes on.

And you're very responsible in making sure that you're prepared and you're brilliant at doing that. A block where you are giving us some story.

We have no idea what the hell you're talking about for a few minutes in the best way.

And then you land the plane and contextualize what this story of history was as it pertains

to something that's going on today.

Yeah.

And it's just, thank you for that.

You hold my hand every night or once a week now, damn it.

That's the way that I learn.

If something's going on that I think is interesting or important, I want to be able to say why it's interesting or why it's important.

Usually that involves some sort of origin story or some sort of historical analog or something like that.

And so that's usually where those stories come from.

But when it comes to just having something to say, I really firmly believe in reading widely, not only reading about the thing you're supposedly researching, but just reading a lot. Right.

Yeah.

I think, Rachel, tell me if this rings true for you at all.

If something like you, you went to Stanford, you're a Rhodes scholar, you're really well educated, you obviously can speak to a number of different sort of big issues.

There used to be a time when somebody like you came along and was so well informed and was so smart and able to really deal with a lot of complex issues at one time and blah, blah, blah.

They would maybe turn all their talents to the public sector.

They would try in a way to serve in government, et cetera, et cetera.

And now partially, and it's just really a result of where we are as a society, the highest calling almost is entertainment and celebrity.

But also, but within that, you get to kind of have your cake and eat it too because you get to go do that.

But in a way, you get to serve the public by, as Jason said, helping people understand what's going on.

So you kind of get to do both.

Do you see it in that way that you're, and again, I don't want you to say that you're doing some great thing for the greater good, but you kind of are.

Of course.

It's nice of you to think of it that way.

I definitely feel like my job is trying to understand things myself so that I can explain them for lots of people.

And so that is a very satisfying job, particularly at a time when things, I think the news feels overwhelming or devastating to lots of people.

To have it be your job, the thing you get paid to do to try to understand it and explain it in a way that makes sense, that's real.

It's a very therapeutic thing.

But in terms of what I'm trying to do in the world, I was an activist before I got involved in the media, and I definitely see a hard dividing line between those two things.

I spent a long time trying to get people to do things, trying to get policies to change, trying to advocate for specific people in trouble or whatever it was, and I stopped doing advocacy

and started explaining.

There's no money in it, and you can't get a table of restaurants, as Jason said.

But I get it.

But talk more about that, Rachel, because I would imagine it would be difficult to turn that switch off of advocacy with the end game being actual change and results, whereas now you're probably able to say much more with much more specificity, deeper reach, much more research, but you need to be a little more, I guess, indifferent to whether the results are going to come, because you're presenting information and potentially hoping that people react to it and change their patterns from it.

But there's no follow up to that, like there is in the other work you were doing.

Yeah, it's interesting.

I really feel like what I'm doing now has a bigger impact, but I have to have less ego about what it is, because I'm not trying to change one.

I used to work for the ACLU National Prison Project, and I was in ACT UP in the AIDS Activist sort of heyday, and we were always trying to get a thing done, and I feel like I know how to do that, and I was pretty good at it, but I was sort of average good at it.

There was a lot of other people doing it that were better than me.

But with what I'm doing now, I feel like hopefully by creating more understanding, by making what's important about the news and current events really plain to people, it makes it possible for people to make their own decisions about either just participating or doing activism.

Yeah, we'll be right back.

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So in my life, I'll start talking to Scotty about something,

and I'll start the conversation in the middle of a sentence

because in my brain, I've already said the other half, like the top half,

and he's like, wait, I don't even know what you're talking about, who are you talking about?

You need to catch me up.

So a lot of the times, I get ahead of myself instead of stopping, being present, and catching him up on things because my mind races so fast, right?

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

So do you ever feel like your brain is kind of getting in its own way?

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And now back to the show.

So, Rachel, your latest book, *Prequel*, is a bit of a cautionary tale yet.

Yes, that is applicable to what we're talking about right here,

that in fact America went through this at least once before right around World War II

is this story that you've uncovered, correct?

Yeah, I mean, it's basically, I think it's a positive story

because there was all these Americans who fought against it,

and there was this really big fight in the lead-up to World War II

in this country against the fascist movement in this country

that in a lot of cases was actually working with Nazi Germany

to try to set up a similar form of government here.

And we had paramilitary groups and we had a Nazi agent

working with lots of members of Congress on a big propaganda effort.

And it was seemingly a very big movement that had quite a bit of support

and there's lots of documentation to that, right?

Yeah, the most famous industrialist in the country, Henry Ford, was part of it,

the biggest national hero at the time, Charles Lindbergh, was a big part of it.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

I'm watching the documentary. I just watched it and started watching last night. It's called The United States and the Holocaust.

Oh yeah, Ken Burns, yeah.

Yes, it's fascinating.

And he has a lot on Charles Coughlin and Lindbergh, yes.

So Coughlin was the biggest media figure we've ever had in America and he was a self-described fascist and a rabid anti-Semite and he set up armed militia groups around the country among his followers.

Good guy.

Was there a remedy that came from this that we could perhaps learn from to offset what we're dealing with?

Dude, we tried. I mean, I don't know if you've seen, but there's been other people who have come in and take over the media and they're not necessarily American.

Oh yeah.

And it's like you were saying, we keep making the same fucking mistake.

What is the change? What is the change that needs to happen?

Yeah, how did they get through it then that maybe we could kind of draft off now?

Yeah.

That's why I wrote the book, is that I actually think there's a bunch of like lessons learned, things to, you know, post-it notes, things to remember for 80 years from now when this comes around again.

I mean, obviously the Nazis are, there's nobody like the Nazis.

That's not the analogy.

The analogy is a domestic.

That was their slogan.

Don't settle for second best.

We're the worst you've ever met.

But is there one thing that we should focus on to maybe inoculate ourselves from a possible future or are there many small things?

It's that there can't just be one thing.

And so it's just, everything has to happen at once.

So there has to be, when it's crimes, when there's violence, there has to be prosecution.

Like the criminal justice system has a role.

And it's really important to protect them from being intimidated.

The risk of violence that I was talking about in the 1944 sedition trial, which I write about in the book,

the attorney general was actually pressured by a senator who was implicated in the plot, was pressured by that senator into firing the prosecutor in that case.

Like it worked.

Like that's terrible.

We have to make sure the justice department and the legal system is protected from intimidation. But then it's also, you know, activism, people infiltrating these groups,

good journalism about it.

You need like the military to court-martial people.

You need the bar associations and churches to police their ranks.

When the Catholic church is who shut down Fr. Coughlin and had they not, he'd still be preaching, you know, anti-Semitism all through World War II.

So you're saying that we could live in a world where a president could be, could escape punishment because potentially like the southern district of New York would refuse to, I mean, I'm just, look, I'm trying to, I'm dealing in hypotheticals here.

Well, well, maybe what might be even more apt,

another book that you wrote, Bagman, correct me if I'm wrong, is the Spear Agnew, that there was a deal offered him that may or may not potentially be a precedent for what could shape the possible conclusion of any sort of Trump sentencing?

Well, what happened with Agnew is that they hit him with a 40 count federal indictment, which sounded amazing at the time.

And now we're up in the 90-something count federal indictment.

And so he sounds like a piker.

But yeah, they were hitting him with that felony indictment and he so didn't want to go to jail that his very able lawyers negotiated a deal where he'd plead no-low, he'd plead effectively no contest to one felony and he would avoid jail time, but the penalty was that he had to resign from office.

And agree never to go into politics again, correct?

You know, I asked the prosecutors who were involved in that if that was a contingency, if they said you can never run again.

And they said, we never thought that we would ever have to put that in writing because who would ever think of voting for somebody who'd been charged with violence?

No, but wasn't this right at the moment where they were pretty sure Nixon was either going to resign

or be impeached and that Spear Agnew with all of these,

what was it, tax fraud or something like that,

the possibility was strong that he could end up in jail as a result of that prosecution, but then be appointed president because Nixon was on his way

and they didn't want a president to be incarcerated because it would just be a nightmare.

So they offered him this deal, am I getting any of that?

This whole idea that you can't bring a prosecution against a sitting president, that whole idea really was crystallized and formalized at the Justice Department around Nixon and Agnew because the Attorney General at the time, Elliott Richardson, is one of the people who was getting middle of the night drunken phone calls from Nixon, ranting and raving and seeming like a crazy person.

The Attorney General thought he was in such bad shape that he was going to die and that Agnew was going to be elevated and it was tax evasion,

but it was also bribery and extortion and all these other corruption crimes

and they thought, my God, we've got to figure out a way to get him out of there.

But there's also that thing, they probably never imagined it, Rachel,

because there was a thing back then that people had that was called shame.

They'd reach a certain point and now the people are so ashamed.
I just felt it was shame.
Yeah, where they'd be like, even a guy like, he's like,
I'm not going to go fucking do that. I can't do that.
That's indecent at the highest level.
I've done a bunch of other shit, but doing that now, it doesn't matter.
All of that is out the window because of, you know.
You can't assume that.
Such a dumb, dumb question to all of this is like, why do people go into politics?
I don't understand.
The second you get elected, you got a target on your back and everybody's,
and then they're involved in everything we're talking about where,
I'm going to get you, I'm going to sue you, I'm going to sue you.
And it seems like an endless game of that.
I mean, you can do good stuff in politics.
Government can do good things, but a lot of people go into politics
because they want power and they want ego.
It's certainly not for the money, right?
Doesn't an average senator make far, far less,
probably a tenth of what they could make in the private sector being a lawyer.
Most of these senators would be the top lawyer in their district.
So they're taking a big pay cut, so it must just be the power.
Although they all seem to do very well after they leave office.
Yeah, no kidding.
Yeah, you've never seen a poor ex-senator?
Yeah.
What did they call Menendez?
A gold bar Bobby or something like that?
I thought it was pretty funny.
Now, all right.
Well, Rachel, let's go back.
Let's go back to the volleyball and basketball days.
And getting sort of the...
Now, your father was Air Force, I believe, and your mom was in education.
Sort of, yeah.
Yeah?
Okay, so then...
She worked at the middle school.
Okay, but clearly there was that great sort of cocktail of those two things
at the dinner table for you to start getting interested in those worlds.
Yes, and did politics, was it an early passion or do you find it later?
No, not at all.
It's interesting.
We weren't like a kids' book kind of family.

We didn't have that.

That wasn't the vibe.

My mom grew up on a farm very poor in northeastern Canada.

My dad was the first person in his family to go to college.

Take it easy, Will.

Take it easy, Will.

We're in a pause.

Your mom's Canadian?

Here we go.

She's from Newfoundland.

She's from Newfoundland?

Oh, there he goes.

Oh, there by.

I'm Canadian from Toronto.

We're going to say hi to all her buddies out there in Newfoundland.

There by.

Hey, there.

Hey, Torbé.

Hey, Gander.

No way.

Yeah.

That's amazing.

Big family, lots of sisters who are nuns.

She didn't want to be a nun, didn't want to be a nurse afraid of the sight of blood,
and didn't want to be a teacher, didn't much like children.

So she left, came to the United States, ended up meeting my dad when he was in the Air Force.

But yeah, I sort of grew up reading the newspaper.

It sort of was like more interested in news.

But then by the time I was sort of figuring out who I was in my teenage years, it was
like the real height of the AIDS crisis.

And I was coming out as gay and I was growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area.

And so I kind of just like got really swept up in AIDS activism really early on.

But did you guys talk about current events and stuff at the dinner table?

Were you that kind of family?

Were you talked about what was going on?

No.

I wasn't really like that.

No.

I mean, it was great.

I mean, my parents are fantastic.

They're my favorite people in the world.

But it just wasn't that kind of a vibe.

Like I think they were as surprised as I was.

I also didn't start doing anything in the news media until after I was almost done with my graduate

degree.

I just was on a totally different plane.

My first news job was I was, I did an, there was an open on air audition to be the news girl on the morning zoo radio show next to the town that I was growing up in.

No way.

Drive time.

No way.

Rachel Maddow on the morning zoo is the greatest.

I was, I was news, news girl was my title.

No way.

All right.

We're here with the weasel and the woody and here with Rachel.

Here's the news girl.

Wait, Sean, your dad was in the airport, right?

Yeah.

He took off real fast.

No, just because he took off.

Yeah.

That's why I thought that.

Right.

But Rachel, what drew you to like want to even do that?

What drew you to be like, Oh my God, I want to be, I want to try that zoo news girl news review.

It was a dare.

I was staying with friends.

New news.

I was, I was staying with friends and I was doing odd jobs and I was terrible at all of them.

I was doing deliveries, but I had a car with an electrical problem.

So every, unless I could leave my car running and it would not stall out, I could, I needed a jump every time.

I had to go to a park on a hill.

Pop the clutch.

It was really bad.

I had that problem too.

I was, I worked at, my friends had a coffee roasting company and I like installed some plumbing backwards in their plant and made a faucet blow up.

And that didn't work.

I just had a rot of really bad jobs.

And so my friends who I was staying with said, Oh, this morning show we listened to.

They're doing this audition.

And I auditioned live on the air and I got hired and that on the spot and started the next day.

And I just loved it from the reading associated press like rip and read top of the hour news

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

copy.

And you just couldn't get enough.

Yeah.

That's so cool.

Amazing.

But then though, I'm going to jump way forward then now, now flashing forward, you find yourself as a panelist on Tucker Carlson show on MSNBC and how I don't remember him on MSNBC.

I, you came on my radar when I was, because I was a big, big still am an Oberman fan.

You were, you were, you were on there often.

But what was it?

Was Tucker the same Tucker back then?

Or was he on the left?

No, he wasn't on the left.

MSNBC wasn't really, I mean, Keith is what, Keith is what made MSNBC liberal, right?

He showed, he did great.

He sort of came out as a liberal, did a great job.

His incredible broadcasting talent.

And he, with especially the special comments kind of created cut the path through the jungle in terms of making MSNBC have kind of a liberal identity.

Before that, it really didn't.

And so Tucker doing the late night show on MSNBC, it was like MSNBC was just politics.

It wasn't any one lane in politics.

I think it was, I think it might have been his immediate post bow tie job.

I don't, I don't think it was, I think he was post bow tie.

Post bow tie, yeah.

That's the delineation.

I think that he became the Tucker that we all ended up knowing when he realized how well it paid to be that guy.

And I know that's a cynical thing, but I truly believe that.

I don't know the guy at all, but I'm really good at judging people harshly.

It's kind of a talent.

You should hear me talk about Elon Musk.

But I will say, I will say, let me ask you, Rachel, when it comes to Tucker, do you miss him?

I'm real busy.

Yeah.

That's good.

He and Bill O'Reilly must be doing something.

But thank God that Keith came along and exposed us all to you and was such a big advocate for you.

So you ended up being on Keith's show quite a bit and then guest hosting for him quite a bit and enjoying it and him enjoying you and MSNBC enjoying you.

And then your show took off, yes?

Yeah.

So it was interesting.

One of the things that Keith did for me was he said, you should use my agent.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

And I never do that.

I stopped my agent from representing anybody who I compete against, but you should use my agent, which was a very generous thing.

Wow.

She's fantastic.

Her name is Jean Sage.

She was my agent forever and ever and ever.

And Jean convinced the president of MSNBC, Phil Griffin, to hire me.

And the fact that I had perceived to have done well on Keith's show, I think was absolutely the on-ramp there.

But then I started at nine o'clock right after the 2008 election, right at the 2008 election.

And then that's what I've been doing ever since.

Only recently did I scale back from five days to one day, but this is, we just turned 15.

Yeah.

That's awesome.

Congratulations.

What a great accomplishment.

Yeah.

But now you're leaving yourself open to pursue all the many other things that you're doing with the writing

and the podcasting and et cetera.

And also finding time to live a life and fish with Susan.

Yeah, trying.

Right?

And what are you guys, do you guys do something?

Susan is your wife.

Yeah.

Are you comfortable telling us that it just dumbs it all down?

I mean, are you waiting with bated breath for the Golden Bachelor or crap like that?

I say with all respect.

We are such old friends.

Or at least as much respect as you can muster for.

Exactly.

What do you guys do to dumb it down?

We are, are you familiar with the Great British Baking Show?

Yes, of course.

Yes.

I think it's the greatest television show ever made, but I also haven't watched much television.

So I don't know, but it's my perfect drug.

Does it get you then to the kitchen to try your talents at the same stuff?

Oh no, I can only make drinks.

Do you read a book while you're watching TV?

What's your favorite drink?

If someone's going to bring you a bottle of something as a gift, you're coming over to Rachel's house

for dinner.

What do they want to bring you?

Is it wine?

Yeah, I mean, I'm kind of an, I don't drink vodka, but other than that, I'm pretty good.

Oh really?

I'm pretty equal opportunity.

But you know, I also feel like I used to be-

What's the vodka story?

At what point was someone holding your hair after vodka?

No, I just don't like it.

It tastes like a cleaning product to me.

You know how like some people have that with cilantro?

And people always say like, oh vodka has no flavor.

I'm like, it does.

And it tastes like you should be, it's under the rim.

You know, it's funny.

I have this image of you and your partner, Susan, because my, our friend Eli is a friend of all of ours.

He used to always say, we'd watch you when we were in Atlanta, whatever needs to be.

I just want to go to Rachel's house and have coffee in the morning and have her just, just talk me through everything that's going on.

Just break it all down.

And just make me feel okay and break everything down because there's so much information.

I just want her, I just want to sit on her porch.

I go, yeah, Eli, I don't think that's going to happen, buddy, but-

Also, that's not what coffee with me is like.

It's the difference.

It's a pretty non-verbal experience until-

You don't speak to me until I'm into cup two.

You know what, Rachel, you know what I find interesting?

What I really enjoy is watching you when you do, when you're on TV and you're talking about a subject, your cadence is second to none.

Because it's often quite broken up and you take pauses that I, what I've sort of gleaned from your pauses is that you're, you're, you're thinking, which is extraordinary.

You're letting the teleprompter catch up, though.

Well, yeah.

It's suggesting that there's no prompter for whatever subject that is that you're, you know, kind of musing on and, and that we live in a world where people are so quick to have an answer.

It's not just about being right.

It's about how quick you can be right.

And, and it's so odd and I think it's so powerful to take a moment when you're talking about something to really, you know, think about it before you-

It's kind of the thing when people say, when we had Biden on last year on our podcast, the Biden, President Biden.

And people say, well, you know, what was he like?

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

And I said, you know what, he's a really thoughtful guy.

And yes, he's, he's a little bit, he's older than we are.

However, I do like the idea of somebody who's in that position taking a minute to think about it when presented with a problem.

And that is something that is really undervalued.

And I think I see you do it in real time and I find it very interesting.

It's very powerful, right?

Yeah, very well said.

Well, it's, I mean, I think it's important not to blag through stuff that you don't know.

If you don't know, it's okay.

Like it better don't make it up.

It's okay.

We can find somebody else who does have the answer if you don't.

Yeah.

But it's, even if you're being asked your opinion on something, I think there isn't value to just like singing it out in the right tempo.

You have to, there's has to be a reason that you're there.

It has to be a reason that you're worthy of being asked and worthy of the attention.

It's why I don't put on, I never, on my shows, I never put on people to fight.

Yeah.

And if somebody lies on the show, I don't invite them back.

That I feel like I'm offering my audience a chance to hear from somebody because I think they have something valuable to say.

All right, I'll do it.

Enhance our understanding.

Oh my God.

See, yes.

Boy, you really misplayed that, John.

Shoes.

Shoes.

We'll be right back.

Remember, you can choose one title a month to keep from their entire catalog of thousands of titles.

I can tell you, I've been looking at all these incredible titles.

I mean, listen, if they're all as good as the covers look.

And now I'm trying not to judge a book by the cover, but I've got, I'm thinking about just planning vacations just to listen to books.

So I'm going to get back to you when I settle on the vacation spot and book.

Maybe we can all meet there.

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Hello, listener, Jason here.

November is Diabetes Awareness Month.

Did you know that?

A time to bring attention to diabetes.

So let's talk about it.

I know it's not fun or sexy, but hang on.

Let me just let me finish.

Managing diabetes requires a lot of effort.

And unfortunately, a lot of people living with it don't feel understood because not many people know what it really takes to manage the condition.

Well, that's where Medtronic diabetes comes in.

Medtronic makes devices to manage diabetes and they're very passionate about supporting the community,

which is why they launched their blue balloon challenge to raise awareness.

The balloon represents the mental load and constant decision making that people living with diabetes are faced with.

It's a constant balancing act trying to keep blood sugars in range while living their life.

Medtronic diabetes wants you to join the challenge and help them spread awareness and support for the diabetes community.

So grab a blue balloon and try to keep it in the air while doing everyday things in your life.

Tag at Medtronic Diabetes on social media and use the hashtag blue balloon challenge.

We can all come together to help make the invisible visible.

Visit [medtronicdiabetes.com slash smartlist](https://medtronicdiabetes.com/smartlist) to learn more.

That's [medtronicdiabetes.com slash smartlist](https://medtronicdiabetes.com/smartlist).

Hey, smartlist listener. This episode is supported by Kraft Heinz.

If your home tailgate gathering has started to feel a little rerun,

then guess what? These delicious brands can be used to make new recipes to serve as part of your football food traditions.

For me, I'm actually, you know, newly kind of into football.

I've kind of always been into football, but now I'm really into it and I actually have friends over and we watch the games.

I know me. I know. It's true though. Go Chiefs. Go 49ers.

So you know what I'm talking about? I know who's at the top.

But my favorite ones are Kraft singles and Kraft mac and cheese.

First of all, been eating Kraft mac and cheese since I was a kid.

It's one of those things that when you make it, everybody feels like, you know, oh, I'm home again, right?

So on game day, I make like three or four boxes of Kraft mac and cheese because I can eat one on my own,

but it's enough to go around.

And then Kraft singles constantly make grilled cheese.

I make the best grilled cheese sandwiches using Kraft singles.

Truly, it's the best. Come over. I'll make one for you.

It's your turn to show off your tasty game day food traditions.

Go to game-day-food-traditions.com to share a photo of your game day food tradition to enter to win \$10,000.

That's game day food traditions.com.

All right. Back to the show.

Wait, Rachel, do you think because and then we want to get back more to you, but do you think now is the time more than ever in a long, long time for an independent to win next year?

Because it doesn't seem like what I'm feeling is people aren't excited about either side.

I'm excited about one side, but a lot of the people seem like they're not excited about either side.

And I thought, well, gosh, what a perfect storm for somebody to break through right in the middle and run as an independent.

We really have a de facto two-party democracy, though.

And so trying to bring about an independent candidacy at a practical level, all you're doing is deciding which of the two parties you want to have that proportion of the vote shaved off of.

So if you bring on an independent who's going to appeal to Democratic candidates, you're just making it more likely that President Biden will lose.

And if you bring on an independent candidate who's more attractive to Republicans, you're making it more likely that probably Trump will lose.

So it ends up in real politic just being that.

And we can reimagine the American political system using instant runoff voting and other things that are now being tried in some states so that there isn't that spoiler effect.

But right now, while it exists, the only purpose of an independent candidate is to take votes away from the major party candidate who they are most like.

Will there ever be a world in this country where they will blow up the electoral college, that system? Will that ever happen?

Maybe. I mean, there's all sorts of counter-majoritarian things like things in our system that where the majority votes for a thing, but they still don't get it, that are starting to be really, I think, over exploited by people who want different types of minority rule.

So that's gerrymandering, that's the electoral college, that's other forms of abuse of the legislative system.

The ways Congress are changing. Republicans, broadly speaking, are using them in ways that are against voting at a very level.

You know, like a Democrat gets elected governor of North Carolina, and so the Republicans in the North Carolina legislature take away all the powers that the governor has.

Eventually, that kind of stuff reaches its limit. If we're going to be a democracy and not a country where you rule by force,

then people are going to have to stand up for democracy, and that might mean the counter-majoritarian stuff like the electoral college is going to get some pressure.

And we're now seeing how vitally important it is to maintain control of the Supreme Court and what happens when you don't.

Yeah, and, you know, using underhanded and duplicitous and hypocritical tactics to get your majority on the Supreme Court, pays off for the life of the justices.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

Well, that's a bad precedent to set, because you've now set the bar that any means necessary for getting a justice onto the court is effectively justified by what the Republicans did.

Right, and we're not talking about necessarily, by the way, it should be noted to our listeners who are put off by us talking in this way, we're not saying that having a conservative judge is bad. I'm really not suggesting it. If it's done within the framework of what is fair, then that's fine.

What we're talking about is rigging the system to, you know, affect the outcome. And when you do that, that is not fair.

That is not a democracy working in its best, functioning at its best.

And you should also be opposed to that, because we're to work against you. You'd feel very undermined and you'd feel very cheated and you'd feel like this system. But unfortunately, it seems like we're having to start to sort of workshop and brainstorm what else we can do now that fair is becoming less and less common in the political space.

And do we take the bait and start playing by their rules and thus sacrificing our own values and ethics?

Or do we continue on the high road and get comfortable with the losses?

I'm not sure what the future is going to hold for that.

I feel like the lesson of history here is to have one lodestar, which is protect democracy. And that means make sure that everybody knows and everybody believes and we reify every way we can that the way we solve problems in this country is through democratic process.

And anything that is about to, you know, what Will is saying about the, you know, the fair process of which justices end up on the Supreme Court, if you vote for a conservative president, part of what you are voting for is if there is a vacancy on the Supreme Court while that president is office, that president will appoint a conservative to the court or conversely with a liberal.

If you are voting for a liberal president, it is with the understanding that if there's a vacancy, there'll be a liberal appointee.

When that system gets broken, you are separating outcomes from the vote and you are making people feel like the vote doesn't matter.

And in fact, you are making it so their vote doesn't matter, which means our democracy is getting weaker.

Whoever wins or loses any particular fight, the connection between people's desire and the outcomes they get from their government should always be the lodestar because that's the thing that's under assault from people who want authoritarianism and rule by force instead of rule by vote.

That's right. And so to that, can you, I hate for you to make a prediction, but what do you think is the life, going to be the lifespan of Travis Kelsey and Taylor Swift?

Is there any way that this makes it to the playoffs?

Right.

I mean, it's a hard life.

It's a very large man. He's a very large target. There's a lot of ways to make him.

You're good to avoid an answer on that one.

Now, Rachel, I'm sure that there's a team of incredibly gifted people that you get to work with every

day or maybe not every day now for your show.

But yeah, what is your favorite part?

I want to ask you to take us through your entire day because I'm sure it's a lot.

But is there a favorite part of the day that is potentially completely imploded when there's some breaking news and you got to toss it all out?

What's your favorite part of that collaboration?

Part of the reason that I left doing five days a week and went to one day a week is that I felt like my thoughts were getting shorter,

that I was starting to think in short thoughts without, I wanted to think book-length thoughts instead of tweet-length thoughts.

And so now that I have this new schedule, I'm spending a lot of time and I'm working on a lot of projects that involve me reading a lot of books.

So I'm often kind of, I look like I'm going to get smothered by a collapsing pile of books about Nazis at any time of the day.

But to have to like dig myself out of my home library where I'm dug into something going on in the 1920s in Mexico and then have to jump into like,

wait, the bankruptcy court judge said, what about Trump Soho?

It can be a little weird.

Yeah, so you must have an incredible team of researchers that can keep you up to date and or answer questions when you have them about what are the legal ramifications of X, Y or Z.

I mean, it's probably never ending.

Well, MSNBC made a good decision.

I mean, in the Trump era, everybody in the news had to become like a jailhouse lawyer, like we all had to learn.

Leaving the same way that we all became medical experts through the pandemic.

Yes, exactly. We all developed or that's expertise.

But MSNBC did a really good thing and they hired a bunch of lawyers both as on air correspondence, but also as off air consultants to help us process and understand and be correct about analyzing.

You know, it used to be just Supreme Court decisions you'd have to deal with or an occasional like true crime thing that captured people's attention.

Now it's the president potentially going to jail in four different jurisdictions.

You need to know a lot more with a lot more specificity.

You might enjoy this. This is a little bit of a tangent. We can always cut it.

About six months ago, I was in Atlanta with Eli and we got into an argument at breakfast over there at the OK Cafe, which is a terrific time.

Yeah, and our buddy Bob, and we were sitting there and I said, I made the point that

Was Chappy not there?

No, Chappy was not there. He was at Landfield with Jurgen Klopp.

And I brought up the point that ignorance of the law is never a defense, as you might know. Rachel, you know that probably.

And it's just not.

Eli and I went back and forth. So I ended up calling Jeff, who I work with, who's also an attorney.

He agreed with me. Eli said, well, I don't think he really knows.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

And like Eli, Eli's from Halifax.

So then we call my dad, who's retired for many years.

And my dad said, well, actually, well, yeah, yeah, right.

It's not ever a defense and et cetera.

Eli didn't believe me.

So we were a little bit of time.

Eli went to the bathroom. Bob goes on, what's that?

Cameo.

Sure.

Oh, God.

And he finds out that for \$100, we can get Alan Dershowitz to do a cameo.

So we put in the message.

He said, hey, everybody just graduating from law school is kind of an inside joke.

Tell everybody Eli about whether or not ignorance of the law is a defense.

And Alan Dershowitz does this fucking cameo within 20 minutes that we said to Eli.

In the job.

He did it from his home within 20.

We're still in the argument.

And he gets an email from Alan Dershowitz saying that it's never, how fucking great is that?

So what did Alan say in the cameo?

He said, you know, I was just getting a massage.

I just never took the clothes off.

These are quotes.

Well, what a cameo.

But he agreed.

He said it's never, you know, ignorance of the law is never a defense.

Whether or not you're wearing your underpants.

Whether or not you're wearing your underpants.

How fucking great is that?

We should use cameo more for inside settling inside jokes and arguments.

How good is that?

I got one once from the guy from Insane Clown Posse.

Did you really?

That was really good.

It was thanking me for having done a thing for a pal.

But it was just this magnificent font of like every iteration of the F word.

I had ever heard used every possible way.

It was like, it was.

And you did not have a beef with any of the juggalos, right?

That's what their followers are called.

I'm pro juggalo.

Is that true?

Yeah, it's true.

Oh, yeah.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

Do you know what it means to be anti-juggalo?

Don't say that.

Really, don't say it.

Rachel, when you're home and in your pile of books, reading and stuff, is it something you and Susan chat about?

Like, do you guys like, Susan's like, hey honey, what book did you read today?

Or is it something you completely do by yourself?

And she does this all by yourself.

And then you meet for dinner at the end and you talk about the day, but you don't talk about your books.

Pretty much the latter.

Yeah.

I mean, what I do, which is a horrible thing, is that we'll be out like in the woods on a dog walk or something.

And I'll go, hey, do you want a Nazi story?

There's always, no, this one's burning a hole in my pocket.

Wait, can I tell you please?

Like, she'll occasionally indulge me, but I cannot overstate the importance of having a partner who does not value your work.

I think it's really important.

Jason knows.

She likes me, but she doesn't care.

Jason's well aware of it.

Jason's well aware.

Yeah, exactly.

My daughters, they don't give it up either.

They're like, they could not be less interested.

It's very good for you.

It's very good for you.

The other day, the other day I was with Jason and is one of his daughters, who I absolutely love.

And I said, Jason was like, wait, what did you say?

I'm like, Jason, I texted that to you like a week ago.

And he goes, and I never responded.

And I go, no.

And his daughter turns to me and she goes, that's okay.

He never responds to my texts either.

Not true.

He's the worst.

He's the worst.

No, I just, I don't.

You're the fucking worst.

The ones that are important get the risk.

Tea times.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

Tea times.
Tea times.
Rachel, if you ever wanted to get a response out of Jason,
you just go, how's next Thursday at 10 look for you to tee off?
And then he'll answer you.
And then you've got him.
And then you say the real thing.
I'm trying to stay occupied during a strike.
You know, I'm trying to keep the brain fresh.
Sunday dinner when I was out of town.
Is that, it still happened?
Dinner happened when I was out of town?
Oh, sure.
Your life does keep going.
Fuck man.
It's shocking.
Rachel, we love you.
We can't thank you enough.
Love you, Rachel.
Such an honor to meet you.
I can't believe I've ever met you.
You guys are so busy.
No, you're so cool.
You're the best.
Thank you for having me.
You guys are really awesome.
And I'm very, it makes me, I have to say just briefly,
little earnestness.
There's a lot of crappy podcasts that have a lot of
listens in the world.
And it makes me happy and heartened that you guys are
so successful with this because you guys are nice
and interesting and kind.
And that is not usually what sells in this world.
And you guys are doing,
your success in this world makes me happy.
Thank you.
Thank you.
Thank you.
Thank you for what you're doing.
We feel the same about you.
You've done so much for so many people.
And I think you're doing,
I think you're doing a great service to the world.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

So thank you.

Thanks guys.

Yeah.

Rest up.

You've got a busy year ahead of you.

Thank you for spending a little time with us.

Yeah.

Of course.

We're going to stop you in New York and then we're going to have a proper meal.

Just to have the van pull over and then just get out.

It doesn't sound less creepy.

Little ether cloth,

you just put it right off my nose and throw me in the van.

That's how everybody else does it.

That's hysterical.

Enjoy the rest of your day.

Thank you, Rachel.

Thank you so much.

Thank you.

Bye.

Bye-bye.

Wow, JB.

Well, that was,

I don't think my,

that's the first time my pit started sweating before we started the podcast.

Yeah.

I was like nervous too.

But you didn't even know who it was.

No, when she came on, I was nervous.

Oh yeah.

I was like,

That was all star shit.

That is so fucking smart.

It's so scared to ask anything that you're going to, because I'm going to sound like a dumb shit.

Well, but I mean, that's,

I think you don't need Rachel Maddow for that.

Well, we have the title of the podcast to cover all that.

You know, we're not claiming to be investigative journalists.

Nobody's having us on MSNBC.

Okay.

That's true.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

But I was,
I'm so glad the way that that went because I was,
I was, I knew that obviously it's,
it's kind of baked in that it's going to be political.
And we try not to be overly political on this show.
But so it was nice to have a conversation with somebody who
is so political to have it not be,
you know, kind of burn it all down.
Well, and also not just political,
but also really fucking smart.
Yeah, really smart.
And also like, as I said in the thing,
it's like, it's not left versus right and right versus left.
It's, it's really more about everybody's.
Yeah, it's just about like, let's, let's cracking it open.
People like her crack it open and shed light on it and go,
this is actually not the way this is.
This is not actually quite fair.
Let's look at it and be honest about it.
That's it.
That's it.
Yeah.
That's it.
Yeah.
And she does make the medicine go down real easy too.
I just love the way she shapes stories and points of view.
And she just, she helps my brain get a little bit calmer.
Based on the way that she's able to articulate some of the stuff
that's going on and maybe some of the things we might need to
watch out for.
How much, you watch her every night or when she's on?
When she's on.
Yeah.
But I'm watching Nicole Wallace and Chris Hayes.
And I know how much, how much more do you think that you could
get from it?
If you had less gummy.
I just, I'm trying to do a new gummy to news.
I'm trying to embrace that.
There's a combo there that's trying to get right.
What's the right mix?
Well, because I'm not able to really comprehend a lot of what
I'm listening to or looking at.
So there needs to be a tonnage of information coming in.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Rachel Maddow"

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Last.

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