

I Wish I Was An Only Child – Bobby Seagull & Davey Jose

[Guitar and flute music]

RACHEL MASON: Welcome to I Wish I Was An Only Child, with me, Rachel Mason –

CATHY MASON: And me, Cathy Mason.

RACHEL: Where we speak to other siblings about the dynamic of their relationship to see where we're going wrong.

CATHY: This week we spoke to artist and polymath Davey Jose –

RACHEL: And his younger brother, mathematician, teacher, and writer Bobby Seagull.

[Flute sounds]

CATHY: Who's the funniest?

DAVEY JOSE: Bobby, you're quite funny. I think you're funnier than me.

BOBBY SEAGULL: The thing is, Davey being modest, if I have humour it's only because I learned it from him. Because you know if you were a sibling and someone's two, three years older, you pick up and imitate the jokes they make. So it's about football, about sport, about food, about the way our mum makes our tea. All the sort of family in-jokes. I would nick his jokes and adapt it.

BOBBY: So – so yeah, Davey’s the creator. You know there’s a phrase, um, ‘good artists copy, great artists steal.’ So maybe for humour I’m the lesser version. Like I steal Davey’s jokes.

CATHY: Ah, interesting.

RACHEL: So – so Davey, what’s the age difference between you?

DAVEY: It’s – it’s four years. Four years between us.

RACHEL: Four years.

BOBBY: Oh, these – is it –

DAVEY: Three – three – three and a –

BOBBY: Three and –

DAVEY: I’ll round it. I’ll round it. I’ll make myself – I’m older.

RACHEL: Okay.

DAVEY: Four years. I’m going to be older.

CATHY: I was going to say, you don’t want to be older. Why do you want to be older?

RACHEL: No, you definitely don’t. So – okay. So there’s four – and you are – you’ve got – there are four brothers, right? In the family. So it’s – so Davey, you’re the oldest. Then Bobby, then two more.

DAVEY: Yes.

CATHY: Johnny. Is it Johnny and Tommy?

DAVEY: Johnny and Tom, that's right.

BOBBY: Yeah, John, yeah.

RACHEL: Okay. So – so tell us – tell us about growing up in that household. My goodness. How did it work?

CATHY: Four boys.

RACHEL: Davey, do you want to start?

DAVEY: Yeah, honestly I – I came to the family first and then Bob came a bit later on. And in fact the first memories of Bob I have is – because, uh, when I was a kid I got run over by a car age two. And I remember being in hospital in about – I think it was 84. It was almost 84. I remember, 'oh, you've got a new brother.' And I remember Bob coming in in a purple baby dress, like fat baby lying next to me. And I was like, 'this is so annoying. This kid's going to get all my toys.' And I remember actively – I remember I couldn't move because I was paralysed at the time. But I remember actively trying to push Bob off the bed.

RACHEL: Wow! So you –

DAVEY: Like I was three and a bit years old. I remember trying to push this kid, this fat little kid, off my bed. I remember that. I'm horrified now that I think back. Because I just wasn't strong enough, right?

RACHEL: But – but –

DAVEY: But I remember Bob lying there in bed in like, you know, in nappies or whatever it was.

BOBBY: I was a fat little kid. That was definitely true.

DAVEY: Yeah, Bob was a fat little baby. Uh, that's all I can think of.

RACHEL: But I think – that's not abnormal when the sibling comes along.

DAVEY: Yeah.

RACHEL: To think, you know, 'hold on a minute, I feel –'

BOBBY: Jealousy.

CATHY: Yeah.

RACHEL: 'I feel threatened here.'

DAVEY: And – and I vividly remember it because it was in hospital, right? Everything's very vivid. And I just remember Bob lying there in bed next to me. And like, 'this kid's just going to take all my toys.'

RACHEL: Oh my –

DAVEY: That's all I could think of.

RACHEL: Oh!

DAVEY: That's all I could think of. My first memory of Bob.

CATHY: Aw.

RACHEL: Would you –

BOBBY: Aw. I didn't actually know that, you know that?

DAVEY: Yeah.

BOBBY: That's the first time I've heard.

DAVEY: Yeah yeah yeah.

BOBBY: About that damn memory.

RACHEL: But Bobby, what's your first memory of Davey?

BOBBY: Ooh. This is a good question. I've never actually thought about it. What's my first? Okay, so my first memories are in nursery. So they probably would've been coming back. Ah, actually it would've been art related. Coming back home and showing Davey bits of – thing is that's quite late, isn't it?

RACHEL: Yeah.

BOBBY: To have an early – your first memory of someone at four. You should have something earlier.

RACHEL: Bobby, it's not – I mean I don't remember much until I was – I've got very few childhood memories.

BOBBY: Yeah.

RACHEL: So everyone's different. But it's art related?

BOBBY: Yeah. So I vaguely recall coming back from some sort of nursery type related place. Like definitely where there were other children. And coming back and showing Davey some – I drew a truck full of peas.

DAVEY: A truck full of peas?

BOBBY: It's a pea truck. Like my mum used to – we used to love fish and chips. We still do.

DAVEY: Yeah.

BOBBY: And I drew a truck that just – and it wasn't – it was quite literal. Because it was a truck and you could see all the peas stacked on top of each other.

RACHEL: Lovely.

BOBBY: And for some reason I wanted to show Davey.

DAVEY: Okay.

CATHY: Aw.

BOBBY: To get his approval. Like, 'Davey, do you approve?' I didn't use those words, obviously. But –

DAVEY: The thing is, I probably stuck it on the wall. Do you remember when we had this art club? I created this art club with Bobby and all my little cousins. And basically I would be the art teacher and I would say, 'today we are going to draw this.'

BOBBY: Oh my god, I remember those.

DAVEY: Because I was – yeah, because I was four years older, I felt like I was so much older than everybody else. And I'd be like – this art club. And I remember like if you didn't draw something to the standard I liked I would kick you out of the club.

BOBBY: I remember this! A tyrant.

CATHY: Ooh, that's terrible.

RACHEL: You were tough.

DAVEY: I said, 'out! This is not – this is not good enough!' And I'd bring you back the next day.'

BOBBY: Because we had cousins – because we grew up with our cousins as well.

DAVEY: Yeah yeah.

BOBBY: So we had Davey, myself, and then we had – we had the cousin I'm living with now.

DAVEY: Yes.

BOBBY: Who's about seven months younger than me. Then his sister, who's about a year younger. Then another cousin who's about a year –

DAVEY: Yes.

BOBBY: So we're all – all of us grew up together.

CATHY: Wow.

BOBBY: So like an extended family. Although not in the same house.

RACHEL: No, how close? But like round the corner?

BOBBY: Yeah, quite literally.

RACHEL: Yeah. Right.

DAVEY: I mean it's a bit like – a lot of like, um, Indian families. Like they all come together and live together. Like, you know, even, you know, they got on at the end of the day. It's kind of that Asian family set-up, you know? Your parents will look after their kids. Not only their kids but their siblings' kids and their siblings' siblings', you know, kids if that makes any sense.

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: And were the – were the cousins male? Or was there any females in your set-up?

BOBBY: There's only one female but she's – and in the London side. So we've got our dad's side of the family.

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: Dad is – Papa's one of ten, isn't he?

DAVEY: He's one of ten, yes.

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: Good, he's the eldest of ten. But his are scattered around the globe: Canada, US, Middle East, India. Whereas my mum's one of three. Better get these facts correct. It would be embarrassing if I –

DAVEY: Basic facts, Bob.

BOBBY: Mum is the second – I know. Yeah, they're listening going, 'what are these children saying?'

CATHY: 'Who are they talking to?'

BOBBY: Um, as soon as Davey says the word 'Mummy', she'll be there listening. She'll be like – her ears will perk up. We need a code name. We'll call her –

CATHY: Should we bring a tea in?

BOBBY: Yeah, tea. Alpha T is in the zone.

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: No, um, and then our mum is the second of three. But all our mum's family moved to London, East London, in the late 70s, early 80s. Um, so we grew up with all the siblings – all the cousins. So effectively even though they were cousins, they were pretty much, apart from like bedtime routines and waking up, they were pretty much like siblings to us.

DAVEY: Yeah, pretty much.

CATHY: Wow, that's – that must've been amazing.

DAVEY: Yeah, we were very close.

CATHY: Wasn't it?

DAVEY: Yeah, it was – it was fantastic.

BOBBY: Davey used to run an art club, didn't you? And kick out people when you wanted to.

CATHY: Davey, did you make any of them artists?

DAVEY: Oh, my cousin Colleen is now a graphic design teacher.

CATHY: Nice.

DAVEY: Right? Uh, she's – and Cedric is as well. They're both – they're both art teachers.

BOBBY: Oh my god, you're right.

DAVEY: They're both art teachers.

BOBBY: In each family.

DAVEY: Yes.

RACHEL: So you had an influence.

BOBBY: Yeah, I never thought about that.

DAVEY: Yes.

RACHEL: Yeah.

DAVEY: Yes, both art teachers.

RACHEL: So sleep wise, wasn't it two boys per room? Didn't you – what was it?

CATHY: Bunk beds.

RACHEL: Bunk beds.

CATHY: Two bunk beds.

BOBBY: We'd got bunk beds.

RACHEL: Yes.

DAVEY: So in the 80s it was only me and Bob. John was born in the 90s so initially we lived in a council estate in the 80s, right Bob? And then –

BOBBY: And the early 90s.

DAVEY: In the 90s. And it was a fairly spacious. From a kid's perspective it was huge. I think there were like three bedrooms. But we shared them, right? We were in the same bedroom I think.

BOBBY: Yes.

DAVEY: Like I think – I know a couple of years we shared a bunk bed.

CATHY: Wow.

RACHEL: Wow.

BOBBY: I obviously took the top one.

DAVEY: You took the top one. Exactly, yes.

RACHEL: Yeah.

[All laugh]

BOBBY: You would've been climbing up.

RACHEL: So with that age gap, obviously you didn't push him off the bed, Davey. Thankfully, yeah.

DAVEY: No, I didn't. Yeah, thank goodness.

RACHEL: But – but you are – how close were you as kids?

DAVEY: Oh, we were very close. Right, Bob?

BOBBY: Yeah. I think – I wonder whether because you were in a wheelchair. You know when normally siblings are much older you look – you sort of like see them as distant? 'Oh, there's a like elder brother or elder sister.' Whereas even though you're three – three years and two months – 3.166 years older than me –

[All laugh]

RACHEL: He's not letting it go.

DAVEY: No.

BOBBY: He's got to four. I want to close the gap, Davey wanted to extend the gap. Um, even though he was yeah, three school years above me, um, I saw him more as like a – not a big brother but like a medium brother. That's the word.

DAVEY: A medium brother!

BOBBY: Yeah. Yeah, medium. Like he was definitely an elder brother, but I felt like, 'ah, he's only like a year or two above me,' rather than three to four years above me.

DAVEY: But I think that was the thing. So in my head, I was so much older than Bob.

BOBBY: Hm.

DAVEY: And my earliest memories of Bob was that Bob was so much smarter than me. Like he knew how to spell, he knew how to do mathematics. I could draw. That's different. Because I'd learnt drawing while I was in my – in my hospital like recovering for many years. And the only thing during the 80s was drawing. That's how I'd picked up my drawings. So drawing was fine. But because I went to a special school, we didn't follow the national curriculum in the 80s, right? So I didn't know any mathematics, I didn't do any science.

I could – I could barely read, I could barely write. And Bob was – I felt almost inferior because Bob was so much better than this.

And I was older and I was like, 'oh my god, this is not right.' Like I remember thinking, 'this is just bad. How can my younger brother, baby brother, be infinitely better than me?' I remember being actively jealous.

CATHY: Oh wow. Okay.

DAVEY: Yeah, I remember this. And then –

CATHY: How did that play out? How – how did you – yeah.

DAVEY: So it actually spurred me – it – funnily enough it kind of motivated me. This kind of like – Bob was so much better than me, it was like, this cannot be right, right? So I was in my special school and – and this is – so this is the thing that, you know, the only thing I did was like I drew all day in school. Uh, and there was a – for some reason in the 80s all schools had amazing computers. Like I don't know what was going on in the 80s with school budgets. But we had like ten computers in one room, alright? And then so I would program all day. So then what happened is about – okay, when I'm about ten years old, eleven years old, my special school in East London got burned down in an arson attack.

BOBBY: I remember that.

CATHY: Wow.

BOBBY: It was also – you know sliding doors? If that hadn't happened, you'd have still gone to that special school.

CATHY: That's amazing.

BOBBY: Because back in the late 80s, early 90s, education wasn't enlightened regarding – with regards to young people that had, um, disabilities.

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: They just assumed if you're physically disabled, then you had mental like divisions as well.

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: So obviously you have to look after all members of society, but Davey, actually, mentally there was nothing wrong. But they treated him like, 'ah, Davey can't read. He can't write. He can't do numbers.'

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: So again when Davey says I was superior, it's literally because I went to a school where they just taught us like normal people. Like you know, the normal curriculum. Reception, year 1, year 2. Whereas Davey didn't have that curriculum. So Davey's would just be like literally sit there, 'guys, you can play all day.' And I was sort of like jealous of Davey's school because I would have to do homework and maths and set up projects and things. And Davey's like – Davey just goes and plays at school all day and he comes back and he's just, you know, been doing games and wheelchair races and sports and I'm having to go and study all the time.

[Flute sounds]

CATHY: So with the school being burned down, so then what happened?

DAVEY: So, okay. So this is the story: the school got burned down. Then for the next, uh, two years we went from temporary school to temporary school. Then we even went to – back in the 90s, this wouldn't be allowed now – but you went to be taught in teachers' houses.

CATHY: Really?

DAVEY: You could sit there in the living room with – yeah, you'd sit there having their sandwiches and stuff like that. And it was completely acceptable back in the day. Uh, and then what happened? We got a new building in Prince Regent Lane.

RACHEL: Yeah.

DAVEY: Right? In Prince Regent Lane. And then that was there for another two years and then what happened is there was insurance money from the school. And that money went to a school called Eastlea Community School to build a wheelchair lift. And because of that, I was one of three students who was going to transition to the mainstream school. So about 13 or 14 years old, I went to a mainstream school and then my first couple of tests and stuff to figure out what sets you were going to go into, in maths I remember I scored effectively 0%, which is 2%. 0%. And like, 'wow, I literally don't know anything.' And then from then on, because of what Bob – I considered Bob a genius at the time, and probably is still now, and, uh, I studied like crazy. And then in a

few years' time, from scoring 0 I ended up doing like mathematics at Trinity College Cambridge.

CATHY: Wow. That's extraordinary!

BOBBY: I do remember, Davey, the transition. Because, like, you talk about like sliding doors moments. Had your school not burned down –

DAVEY: Yes.

BOBBY: You probably would be somewhere else. Still very creative, but you probably wouldn't be able to read properly, write properly.

CATHY: Wow.

BOBBY: You wouldn't be the numbers genius that you are now. And it – I remember because before, until Davey – before he went to the special school, I used to think – I wouldn't say it to Davey. Maybe sometimes in fights I'd say, 'oh, I'm better than you.' I just knew I was better than Davey because Davey didn't have the education. But when Davey started going to mainstream school, very quickly I noticed – before he used to ask me – I remember when he first started the mainstream, you'd ask me for help on your work.

DAVEY: Yes.

BOBBY: And then quite quickly, literally within a few months, I would be coming to you for help. And I was like, 'wow, the tables have turned.'

DAVEY: Yeah yeah yeah.

BOBBY: Like I thought I was the genius in the house. And suddenly someone's, you know, been at school literally three months, and now he's picking up all the concepts.

DAVEY: Yeah yeah. But the thing's that I don't think you made – I don't think it was – the jealousy came from myself. It wasn't that Bob made me feel bad.

CATHY: Yeah.

DAVEY: Bob was always helpful. It wasn't – that just comes from me. From my, you know, because I wasn't taught. And then – and then so even – even like that transition from going 0, ending up in Cambridge, it kind of came from a role model. So I was in my bedroom one day and my dad had a bookshelf full of Readers Digests. One day I picked it up as a teenager and there was this article, 20-page article, about this guy called Professor Hawkins. And I'm like, 'who is this guy?' And I started reading this guy's biography and I was like, 'oh my word, this guy's a genius. This is amazing. How did he do this? Like he can barely use one hand. How on earth did he do this?' And then this became my hero. Uh, and then I said, 'I want to do what this kind of guy did. I want to go to Cambridge and do... dadada.' And then again, again purely by accident, in the mid-90s I found a book about the internet, right? And in the book, there was Professor Hawkins' email address. And I wrote to him. And he replied to me and we had a correspondence. I said, look – I told him my history up to then.

CATHY: Yeah.

DAVEY: I said, 'I'm thinking of applying to Cambridge but I don't know anyone who's been to Cambridge, I don't know about wheelchair access.' And he guided me through the process.

CATHY: Wow.

DAVEY: And that is the reason I ended up going to Trinity College. The college next to Professor Hawkins. And in my first year I got to physically meet him and thanked him for it.

[Flute sounds]

CATHY: Where do you two get your drive and – I mean what are your parents like? Your drive and energy is insane.

BOBBY: I think it's a combination of both our parents. Like our mum is very chatty, talkative. Very positive and smiley. So we sort of get that like – I guess that personality of like confidence. And being able to go into a random room of strangers and suddenly just start talking to people. But we've always been like that. And for Davey even – he'll get in his wheelchair and just like get into a group and start talking and be the, you know, like – not the – not the centre of attention, but we've both like always felt confident in holding our own in conversations. And from my dad it's more like the cerebral side.

Again, I think with our – when we were growing up in the late 80s, early 90s, there wasn't much money. Like we – we couldn't afford holidays or niceties or like – yeah, it was a very humble upbringing. But the one thing that our dad in particular emphasised is the value of educating yourself. Again, for Davey it wasn't through school. It was like, 'Davey, be creative, um, draw your art.' And in fact because my dad saw Davey coming back and

saying about programming, my dad like saved lots of money and bought one of the BBC micros so Davey could take it apart.

DAVEY: Yeah.

BOBBY: And I'd be his little assistant. Like Davey says, 'get me this. Get me the screwdriver.' Probably gone – so yeah, um, I think –

DAVEY: It was a crazy scientist's scientific lab for kids, right?

CATHY: Aw.

DAVEY: It's like a crazy science lab for kids, right? You were like my assistant.

BOBBY: I was your assistant, yeah yeah yeah. I think I learned a lot by being there. I was like – I was like the – this is a weird analogy. I was like the Debbie McGee to your Paul Daniels.

DAVEY: Basically.

CATHY: That's funny.

BOBBY: We're computing and everything.

DAVEY: Exactly.

BOBBY: He's like, 'Bobby, can you get me this?' I'm like, 'yeah yeah yeah. I'll be your assistant.' But I think it's a combination of the two. Like our mum's positive outlook on life, and then our dad's like cerebral, you can, you know, we might be poor, you might be growing up in a really challenging council estate. Like in fact on our council estate – it was a very difficult council estate in

terms of it was very poor, there was a lot of crime, um, there were gangs there. And I can – like even – I’m 37 and I’ve seen over the course of the last few decades, people that I knew on that council estate literally ending up on the front of their local newspaper for GBH or murder. And what makes us different – we aren’t anything different in terms – I don’t think, is that they’re not much different in terms of our raw smarts. It’s more just a set of experiences. Like having each other spur each other on, having a dad that said, you know, every Saturday Davey and I, we’d go to East Ham library.

RACHEL: Yeah.

BOBBY: Um, and sit there for hours. And, you know, literally just reading anything. It might be like – back then Roald Dahl was very popular. I might read books on like the Mayan civilisation, Davey might grab a book on, um, engineering. And we’d just chat for hours about books and reading. So I think it was, yeah. I think it was just, yeah, the combination of the two. Like the confidence of our mum. My mum – my mum sometimes back – did she? – in India back in – when she grew up, she didn’t do A-level equivalent, did she?

DAVEY: No, I don’t think our mum finished – it’s embarrassing we don’t know the full story of our parents’ education. No, but –

CATHY: She’s going to pop her head round the door in a minute and go, ‘hey, I’ll tell you.’

DAVEY: Yeah yeah. No, but she does. She does – she comes to tell us, ‘you know, I’m really highly qualified.’ And she goes, ‘you might not think I have the papers to prove it, but I’m actually very smart. Where do you think you get your smarts from?’

BOBBY: Because she is.

DAVEY: She tells us.

BOBBY: Yeah, she has got the razor-sharpness.

DAVEY: Yeah. And I think also when you come from a family that's immigrated, we were first generation, uh, born in the UK, there's a lot of setbacks and things when you're growing up with – with various, you know, problems of coming from another country and from migrating. And – but the thing – I think it's very important. We have setbacks, like the setback of our family would've been my car accident, right? Would've changed a lot of things for our parents. We can't even imagine what they would go through when your two year old is run over by a car and possibly dead, right? Um, I think having something called a – I'll bring a maths term in, Bob – you could have a Markovian memory. Markovian means –

BOBBY: Oh, like stochastic Markov chain.

DAVEY: Yeah, so Markov means –

BOBBY: You should really explain what it is to them. [laughs]

DAVEY: Yeah, sorry. So it's basically – it means that at point 'N', only 'N' matters. You shouldn't remember what happens to 'N'-1. So basically –

BOBBY: Oh, these are memory lists, aren't they? Memory list chains.

DAVEY: Yeah, so we've got a Markovian memory. And today's a new day. Whatever bad things happened in the past, let it go and move on.

CATHY: That's amazing.

RACHEL: I like that. I like that.

CATHY: And are your two younger brothers – so what's the age difference there? And are they as positive and as energetic? And I know they're as clever. But are they the same as you guys?

BOBBY: I almost think is there – are they like variations on us? SO us as elders, uh, we have like the Seagull-Jose family variations. Everyone becomes slightly different, like a version of each other. So Davey's the most mathematical. So Davey's – so the ages are Davey's 40, I'm 37 – it's weird. Our ages – we're actually now proper adults, but in my – in our minds' eye I'm still a child.

DAVEY: Yeah.

CATHY: Yeah, of course.

BOBBY: Because our mum – our parents are still like, 'aw, it's our little children.'

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: 'Mum, we're not little children. We're proper adults.' So Davey's 40, um, I'm 37, John is 31 and then Tom is 27, going to be 28.

DAVEY: I lose track by Tom's age. I lose track.

BOBBY: But they became less mathematical. Because I think in terms of the education, obviously the Davey thing – because Davey and I actually loved history. That’s – we loved maths and history at school. But in terms of subjects that we’d decided to put our efforts in, mathematics is one where there is the direct correlation between the effort you put in and the output. History you sometimes might read books and you’re still not quite sure. So World War 2, was it really because of Germany being upset about World War 1? Or was it because of the arms race? So like you can still – even like two years later you might still not be fully confident.

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: Whereas mathematics, directly the effort you put in should be – should relate to the rewards you saw. So as the siblings went down, our dad became more liberal in the way he approached education.

CATHY: Oh.

BOBBY: Because with us he said, ‘oh, it’s maths and science.’ Although weirdly enough, we were more creative than the younger ones. But the – with the younger ones, my dad was like, ‘oh, explore if you want to do languages. If you want to do politics. If you want to do economics. If you want to do philosophy.’ So they became less – so I was – Davey did maths and computer science, so I did maths and economics, the next one did pure economics, John, and the last one did politics, philosophy, and economics. So it started to become more waffley.

DAVEY: [laughs] Yeah.

BOBBY: Less precise.

DAVEY: I like that. 'More waffley.'

BOBBY: More waffley.

RACHEL: Yeah, how would they feel about you calling it 'more waffley'? But –

DAVEY: I think that may be our age. Like Tommy – I can imagine Tommy saying, 'Davey, that's not a very nice thing to say, Davey.'

BOBBY: They've become more – I think they've become more eloquent as well. Because Davey and I were much more thinking – not thinking like – you've got –

DAVEY: I don't know what the differences were. Maybe straightforward and just more blunt maybe?

BOBBY: Yeah, they're more – they're more savvy in terms of the way they construct arguments and –

DAVEY: Yeah.

BOBBY: There's our youngest brother, Tommy. It's our joke he's going to become prime minister. Maybe one day he will. But the way – I guess if you're younger, imagine – imagine growing up in a house where, okay, Davey and I were growing up and we had our academic like battles. Like first it was me being the genius, then suddenly Davey became the genius. I accept my place. And then imagine you're John coming and seeing these two elder brothers –

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: Who parents are praising, teachers are praising, everyone – again, one of the things I liked about our parents is even though parents – at parents' evening, teachers would say, 'oh, Davey and Bobby are now clearly geniuses.' My dad would say, 'ah, look at Davey's education. He's not a genius. Look at Bob, he's not a genius. It's because they worked hard to get there.' But when John sees that, John is like, 'oh mighty, how are these elder siblings so bright?' So it probably puts pressure on them.

And the youngest one, he's – John as well. John's four years older than him. So actually in a weird way, if you're the younger siblings in a family of high achievers, it puts a lot of pressure. Because like when Davey went to Cambridge, I was thinking – and I was like applying a year or two after him – I was thinking, 'I should get in.' But by the time it was Tom, all of us had gone to Oxbridge. If he doesn't get in it's almost like a failure.

CATHY: Yeah.

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: Was there a divide between you two and the younger two? Was it you two together and them together? And do you have any jealousy of their liberal – more liberal upbringing?

DAVEY: I think – I think yeah. It's a funny thing you should say that, that me and Bob are alike and Tom and John are alike. But the funny thing is, so I'm born – again this is numerical rather than, you know, any meaningful. I'm born December the, uh, 11th. And Tommy, the last one, is born December the 10th. Bobby's

born February the 13th and the third one is born February the 13th. So even though we're different, when we're growing up we had birthday buddies as well.

CATHY: Oh, right.

DAVEY: So I wouldn't be Bob's birthday buddy. I would be the youngest kid's birthday buddy.

CATHY: Yeah –

RACHEL: How did that work?

DAVEY: We had – we had allegiances. Do you remember this, Bob?

RACHEL: Right.

BOBBY: Uh, yes.

DAVEY: Yeah.

BOBBY: I see my parents have a special day.

DAVEY: Exactly. So like –

BOBBY: But um –

DAVEY: It's a weird thing –

BOBBY: There's definitely a birthday allegiance, yeah.

DAVEY: So I would feel allegiance with Tom for birthday allegiance. And then when the birthday was over, like, 'okay, now I'm on Bob's side.'

BOBBY: Yeah back then it was like ceasefire. Because it was like temporary truce around, uh, late November, early December.

DAVEY: Yeah, exactly.

BOBBY: Because he wanted to get good birthday gifts. And then by the time it was done, allegiances, um – [laughs]

CATHY: So did you have – as a foursome were you close? Did you fight? And did you – is there different things you'd go to each brother for? So if you were feeling down you'd go to that brother? Or did it work like that?

BOBBY: Ooh, it's a good question. I'd definitely say like our mum had to deal with lots of fights.

CATHY: Oh.

BOBBY: I think it was more competitive. Again, I think it's competitive. Board games were banned at some – various stages.

DAVEY: Yeah.

CATHY: Oh really?

BOBBY: Whether Scrabble, Monopoly, Ludo. All of us became – it's weird because as adults, we're so supportive of each other.

DAVEY: Yeah.

BOBBY: But like – because we’re our biggest cheerleaders. But as children I think it’s because it’s – I’m trying to think, how would you describe it? Like all of us wanted to – we just wanted to win. Whether supporting football, like Davey’s a Spurs fan, I was a West Ham fan. Because Davey went to Cambridge, I said, ‘I’m going to go to Oxford.’ So we literally just, yeah, it was competition. But in terms of the – the household, because our age gaps are so big it means that –

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: The relations are – when Davey’s 16, Tom is 3.

RACHEL: Yeah. Yeah.

BOBBY: So I can’t really go to Tom for advice about – you know? Davey – was getting bullied in school and Tom –

CATHY: You could. You could, it would be hilarious.

[All laugh]

BOBBY: Well no, it made the youngest one, um, really able to articulate himself. Because he’d have like – again I might have a fight with Davey about, I don’t know, literally about football. About Spurs and West Ham. Sadly West Ham weren’t successful in the 90s. Neither were Spurs. And I’d got – and John might be busy. So I got Tom, the three year old, and say, ‘Davey’s wrong, isn’t he? Look at the result.’ And Tom would be like, ‘uh, uh, why do you think so?’ So he would – and again, so maybe in some ways our arguments led to greater articulation skills for the younger siblings.

RACHEL: That's true. That's true.

CATHY: Yeah.

DAVEY: Yeah, but we – I think we'll take credit for that, right?

BOBBY: Yeah yeah.

RACHEL: But you two seem to have the same sense of humour. It's – you're the mathematicians, you're the logical thinkers, right? And you also share a similar sense of humour, would that be fair to say?

BOBBY: Is that – I think that's a lot to do with our – because we were brought up together –

RACHEL: Yeah.

BOBBY: Watching the same sort of like 80s cartoons.

DAVEY: Yeah.

RACHEL: Shared history.

BOBBY: On family WhatsApp I can send like cartoons of the original 'Transformers', 'Gummy Bears', uh, 'Funhouse'. And Davey and I would reminisce about it.

DAVEY: Old Disney stuff.

BOBBY: The younger siblings are like, 'god, what is this weird 80s stuff?'

RACHEL: Yeah. Yeah, that's true.

[Flute sounds]

RACHEL: How honest are you with each other?

DAVEY: Yeah, fairly. We're quite straightforward with each other. I think so. I don't know. What do you think, Bob?

BOBBY: I think it's – growing up we were very – I think this as well, we were quite blunt.

DAVEY: Yeah.

BOBBY: We were always very truthful in terms of – and again this could lead to fights.

DAVEY: Yeah.

BOBBY: Because we would say, 'oh, Davey, your artwork is terrible.'

DAVEY: Yeah yeah yeah.

BOBBY: Or, 'Davey, let's have a running race.' And Davey's like, 'oh, I can't really run. I would beat you though.' So because it meant that we would never – we would never, uh, sugar the truth.

DAVEY: Yeah yeah yeah.

BOBBY: Um, and it helps. Because it means you're not like – I

think our family – I think partly it's the combination of the Indian nuclear family where you're all together, so you can't – there's no secrets. Like, you know, if you've got your own bedroom you can close the door and, you know, you can go into your own world. Uh, but there were like – like the fact that there are no secrets – even in our diaries. We had personal diaries.

DAVEY: Oh yes. A Roald Dahl diary, remember? Quentin Blake sent us the diary.

BOBBY: Yes, well this is an amazing story.

DAVEY: In 19 –

RACHEL: What?

CATHY: Oh.

BOBBY: We were family friends with Quentin Blake.

DAVEY: Yes.

CATHY: Wow.

BOBBY: The illustrator of the –

CATHY: Roald Dahl.

DAVEY: So in these – yeah, in these drawing clubs we used to have, I used to run I guess, so one part of them was one between me and Bob. And the thing was one year we got all the Quentin Blake books we could get from the local library. And I forced – I

told Bobby, 'okay,' I said, 'Bob, we're going to draw every single drawing.'

CATHY: Aw.

DAVEY: And we brought our little books and we drew every single Quentin Blake drawing. Literally hundreds, maybe even thousands. And then we sent all of them to Quentin Blake.

CATHY: Aw.

DAVEY: And then months later we got this letter from Quentin Blake saying, 'ah, this is really amazing, you know? Bobby and, uh, Davey. And I've sent you some goody bags, things and hopefully they'll come. A couple of months later we wrote back to him and said, 'oh, you know, nothing's come.' And then he sent this huge A3 handwritten, hand-drawn, uh, illustrated card for us with a stork flying over the Atlantic. And books falling into the – into the ocean. And he says, 'Davey and Bobby.' And we've got that – we've got that somewhere, this signed, illustrated A3 page apology for the thing not coming.

CATHY: That's amazing.

DAVEY: And then – then he sent us two Roald Dahl diaries from 1992. Bob, do you want to tell the rest of the story about how –

BOBBY: Oh, so again we got signed, 'dear Bobby, dear Quentin – um, dear Dave, from your friend Quentin Blake.' Um, and then so it was the first time I had a proper diary. And I would write stuff, normally like, 'I scored two goals in school.' It was, again, this numerical analysis of my day. Um, and I'd give myself ratings for like, 'oh, I did 30 minutes of, uh, English today. I give myself 7/10.'

So it was quite numerical. It was quite dry. But then occasionally after fights with Davey, I would say, 'I think Davey took my pencil case. I've got to get him back for that.' And I'd write these things. And eventually the diary became like a mini confidant. Like if I had a fight – it was normally – it wouldn't be for the positive stuff. It would be for the negative things. Like, 'oh, Davey got more chips than me. I'm not happy about that.'

And then one day Davey was – he brought in my diary. I came back from school and I opened my diary, and beneath one of my entries, 'I know.' And it was his handwriting. I was like, 'oh my god, he – ' I don't know. Again, this is the benefit – this is the benefit for Davey not going to a school. Because he – when I go to school, Davey would be at home or – I'd go off to school and I'd come back and when I saw it, I was like, 'yeah, I think maybe I won't –'

DAVEY: It's a blog. It's a blog back in the day, right? The analogue blog. It was – it was a forum. I was posting comments. I was ahead of the game, Bob.

BOBBY: I was like, 'yeah, I –'

DAVEY: Ahead of the game.

CATHY: That's amazing.

DAVEY: Social media. Forget diary, social media.

RACHEL: You'd have stolen mine and read it but not written in it.

CATHY: I'd have gone mental.

[Flute sounds]

CATHY: Which of you is the most rebellious? What – was one of you rebellious? I'm guessing Davey.

DAVEY: Uh, I was, uh, so Mum says that if I wasn't in a wheelchair I would have caused lots and lots of trouble.

CATHY: Oh really?

DAVEY: Yeah yeah yeah. She – there's this particular story, she said – so I got run over by a car when I was almost three. She goes, when I was two, my uncle just got married recently. And his wife had just come to the home. And apparently for some reason I didn't like her, for whatever reason it was. Two years old. So I went to her bedroom, broke all her lipstick and makeup, and put it in the drawer. And then went and hid underneath the – underneath the sofa. They're like, 'what is all this broken stuff doing here? Where's Davey, we can't find him!' And he was like – I was hiding in the sofa, apparently. So I was pulling – I was quite mischievous, I was told.

CATHY: Do you remember that, Bobby? Do you remember –

DAVEY: No, no.

BOBBY: It was before – before my time.

RACHEL: No, he wasn't there.

CATHY: Do you remember him being rebellious? Do you remember – is that how you would've said –

RACHEL: Mischievous.

CATHY: Mischievous.

BOBBY: I think this is – you can forgive – correct me if I'm incorrect, but maybe because you're in a wheelchair our parents could give you a bit more leeway?

DAVEY: Yeah.

BOBBY: They'd say, 'oh, be nice to Davey.' Like for example if I did something wrong, parents would go, 'Bobby, you shouldn't do that.' Whereas Davey, they'd be like, 'oh, let's not be as tough on Davey.'

DAVEY: Yes, I probably got away with a lot.

BOBBY: Maybe – yeah, he must've been –

CATHY: So Bobby, did that make you angry?

RACHEL: There was favouritism, then. A little bit.

BOBBY: Ooh, I'm trying to think. So the thing is, yes, there would be anger. But it would manifest not in like anger towards Davey. It manifested over things like, for example, sports.

DAVEY: Yes.

RACHEL: Right.

BOBBY: Like West Ham and Spurs. Like, 'oh, your club are horrendous! They lost 3 games in a row! Why do you support them? They're embarrassing!'

DAVEY: Yeah yeah.

BOBBY: Or Davey – yeah. Um, the thing is like art, I could never really challenge you. I could never say, 'your art's terrible.' Um, I guess maths and schoolwork? But again it wasn't really – I quite took pride in the fact that for a while Davey would ask me for help.

DAVEY: Yes.

BOBBY: Um –

RACHEL: Yeah.

DAVEY: I do remember that.

CATHY: Can I just – can I just ask the football thing? Because I don't understand why you support different teams. If you grew up in the same household, shouldn't you support the same team?

DAVEY: Again this comes from the rivalry, right, Bob?

CATHY: Yeah. How does it work?

DAVEY: I remember how I chose Tottenham HotSpur. Uh, it was probably late 80s/ early 90s. And we were obsessed with facts and top tens of everything, me and Bob. 'Guinness Book of Records', like facts, those things. You know, Olympic races and stuff. So I found a book called 'The Top Ten of Everything'. And we

looked at the football section of all the great English clubs in history, and like Liverpool was number one, I remember. And I'm like, 'well, I don't live anywhere near Liverpool.' And, uh, second was Tottenham Hot Spur. We had done the best European record, had won the most FA Cups.

BOBBY: They had, yeah.

DAVEY: And then also in my special school, there was a poster of Gary Lineker in my classroom. Because I think Gary Lineker's – one of Gary Lineker's children had leukaemia or something.

CATHY: Yes.

DAVEY: And he had signed, uh, a thing. And this is all retrospectively understanding, I didn't know this at the time. But then I supported Tottenham Hot Spur because I knew Gary Lineker played for Tottenham Hot Spur. And then –

CATHY: Right.

DAVEY: And then I – and then I got all the white, you know, all the white Tottenham kits, and supporting Gazzer and stuff like that. Like I'm, 'Bob, this is my club. Who – what – I'm this, I'm Tottenham. You choose your club.'

BOBBY: Yeah.

DAVEY: Uh, that's what I said, 'you choose your club.' And I was, yeah, 'I don't want him to choose Tottenham Hot Spur because they're my club'.

CATHY: Oh.

DAVEY: And then Bob was like – I don't know how you – I don't know how you chose West Ham, but –

BOBBY: Yeah, I guess we lived – we lived in East Ham, so it's quite a logical decision.

[All laugh]

DAVEY: And Bob, you're number six on the back. Bobby Moore.

BOBBY: Oh that's – that's – West Ham. So, um, I did a lot of, um, educational charity work with the Premier League and West Ham. So they gave me – the club gave me a shirt. Bobby – number six is Bobby Moore, England captain's and West Ham captain's retired number.

CATHY: Yeah.

RACHEL: Yeah.

BOBBY: So they gave me a number six shirt.

CATHY: Aw. We have, yeah, no, my kid is Spurs obsessed. And just the week before lockdown he was the mascot on the – you know when they walk out with the person.

BOBBY: Aw, that's amazing.

CATHY: So yeah. Literally. And it was all over the news because he was the last – they were the last people to do the mascotting.

RACHEL: Yeah.

BOBBY: Oh wow.

CATHY: So yes, I know a lot about Spurs.

DAVEY: COYS.

RACHEL: So I'd –

DAVEY: 'Come on you Spurs.'

CATHY: Yeah, exactly.

DAVEY: Yeah.

RACHEL: Do you have arguments now as adults?

DAVEY: No, we don't actually argue anymore.

BOBBY: We're quite boring.

CATHY: Really?

DAVEY: We're quite boring. No, we're quite – we're more in agreement than – no, we never – we hardly argue anymore. It's gone.

BOBBY: It's also – it's also the shame, isn't it? Like if you're whatever, five, six, ten, eleven –

DAVEY: Yeah.

BOBBY: Twelve.

DAVEY: Those were great days to argue.

BOBBY: It was like a fire.

DAVEY: Yeah.

BOBBY: Like a tempestuous like – it was like amazing, because we sparked off each other. And I think – is that because now we see the bigger picture? Like when you're young you just – you always think the world revolves around the house.

DAVEY: Yeah, you. You. Yeah yeah yeah.

BOBBY: You know, things much bigger, you know? This sounds cliché, but there's like famines and poverty and wars. All these things going on. So why would you fight with the person you're closest to?

DAVEY: Yeah.

BOBBY: It just makes no sense.

RACHEL: Yeah.

BOBBY: It's almost – yeah.

CATHY: But if you're feeling down, um, I'm guessing you never do feel down, but if you are feeling down, are – is each other the person you'd turn to? The first person you'd phone?

BOBBY: Yes, if –

DAVEY: These days, pretty much. Pretty much.

BOBBY: If it's –

DAVEY: Like I think I'll give Davey a Skype – sorry, I'm – normally like you've got a routine. Like Davey might WhatsApp me, and the nice thing about our relationship is that we'll always respond and pick up and say, 'sorry.' Like I'll pick up and say, 'oh, Davey, I'm really busy now. Can I call you later?' You know how sometimes people like are – ignore the message, uh. I don't want to say too much about our younger siblings, but they've got a different attitude towards looking at phones and like going, 'oh, it's fine. I'll just talk later.' Whereas with each other, we'll immediately pick up the phone and – or Davey will message and say, 'Bob, I'm really busy. I'm about to go, I'll call you later.'

CATHY: Yeah.

DAVEY: And so it's like really – yeah. It's – yeah, it's a very wholesome ritual. Which it – when you saw the diary – if anyone was a fly on the wall in the diary incident of 92/93, there were no real thoughts –

BOBBY: Yeah.

CATHY: Yeah, amazing.

RACHEL: But that has to happen. You have to go through those stages, you know? That's just absolutely normal. Um, can I ask about any childhood pets? Did you have any interesting –

BOBBY: Oh yes.

DAVEY: Bobby, do you want to tell the story of the – of the goldfish? The infamous goldfish.

BOBBY: Okay. So our parents – in India, dogs are quite popular. Um, and our parents were thinking, ‘oh, okay, we’ve not had any pets yet. We want to get pets at some stage but we need to work our way up, you know?’ You don’t get a dog first, you know? You might start off with like earthworms and then goldfish and then guinea pigs and then cats and a dog. Because you’ve got to test, you know, the family. Can they handle a pet? Because obviously you’re bringing another member of the family in.

So again the early 90s. 92/93. My dad said, ‘let’s get a – let’s get a goldfish. Let’s get a – let’s get a fish tank.’ It was the pride and joy of the house. He was literally like, if guests come round, you know, in Indian culture – well we are British, but like in our parents’ Indian culture you would come, people would visit, you know, lots of tea and biscuits and Indian – amazing snacks that are probably not good for you, but loads of those. And then the fish tank would be there. Pride and joy. And then we had one goldfish. We had one fish called Speedy Gonzales. After, I assume, after the, um, cartoons, yeah.

CATHY: Cartoon character. Yeah.

BOBBY: The cartoons. And, um, we love eating fish fingers too in our family. We love fish fingers.

RACHEL: Yeah.

BOBBY: Um, so often the way it works our, Dad would work and Mum would be at home with us potting around, tidying, cleaning, telling us off. And then there’s one day – again I assume about

1993 – 92/93. Where my mum was again, probably doing the laundry in one of the other rooms. Probably in the big bedroom. And then Davey and I – so Davey would've been in the front room, I would've been potting around and John, who would've been two approaching three, he loved fish fingers. We heard some splashing and we're like, 'whatever. Splashing, doesn't matter.' And we heard – we heard little footsteps. We heard a board being take out. We heard some – we heard some water tap. And then the microwave coming on.

CATHY: Oh no.

BOBBY: And then we were just like, 'this is really bizarre.' And then we heard our mum shrieking, 'ah! What's going on?' And then Davey couldn't run physically –

DAVEY: Yeah.

BOBBY: Because of his, you know, wheelchair.

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: I went and saw. And there's nothing in the fish tank and John was there with a bowl. And our mum just like looking – I don't know, beyond despair. The goldfish had been microwaved in an attempted fish fingers.

CATHY: No.

BOBBY: And then my dad is like, 'this is – we've got – these children – we cannot trust them with, you know – ' fish at least, okay, you know, they're – I don't know what their memories are like.

CATHY: Oh my god.

DAVEY: Rest in peace.

BOBBY: They may – but if, you know, that was the end of our experimentation with pets. Finished.

CATHY: That's horrible.

DAVEY: Rest in peace Speedy Gonzales.

CATHY: That's outrageous. Did he eat Speedy Gonzales? He didn't eat it, did he?

RACHEL: So that – he didn't get the chance.

BOBBY: We saw that there was bread. He literally got bread. He was going to try to put it inside.

CATHY: Oh my god. That's terrible.

BOBBY: He was two to three. And I don't know why – the thing is I heard the splashes, I heard the – I heard a little boy walking two, three, going to the microwave, putting it in. And I should've probably thought, 'why is he going to the microwave? He's not allowed to use the microwave.'

DAVEY: Oh, and do you remember how he caught it? He caught it with a tennis racket.

BOBBY: Oh he fished it out. Oh my god, yeah.

DAVEY: Yeah, as a sieve.

BOBBY: Because I was having tennis lessons back then.

DAVEY: Yeah, yes, yes. With your, um, what was the brand called? It begins with a 'D'.

RACHEL: Dunlop? Oh –

BOBBY: Donnay. Donnay. It was the one Agassi had.

DAVEY: Yes. Yes. Agassi. Andre Agassi, yes.

CATHY: Oh my god.

RACHEL: So that –

BOBBY: It must've been after 92 because –

DAVEY: Yes.

BOBBY: Yeah.

RACHEL: So then no pets then after that. That was it.

DAVEY: No. That was the end of that.

RACHEL: Aw.

CATHY: My – I'll just say my very bleak, which will probably have to get edited out – my very bleak pet story was when I was very small. I fished a used condom out of a – out of a river and thought it was a fish because it had a head and a thing.

BOBBY: Oh no.

CATHY: And kept it in a jar for quite a long time.

BOBBY: Oh no.

CATHY: My mum couldn't tell me to – there you go, that's my – that's my story.

RACHEL: See I don't remember that, but that's – that's incredible.

CATHY: That's the pet I had. I named it.

DAVEY: Uh, funnily enough, the jars – the jar bit reminded me of the first time in my special school, okay, um, it had snowed and it was like 84? 87 maybe? 86? There's a big snow in the UK. And I remember like trying to get the snow – it's a random story – uh, and I thought, 'this is amazing. This thing is like – should be – should be tinned and canned.' And I put it in a jar. And then literally it was a Snowman story. I went to sleep in the thing and I woke up and it was gone. It was literally from the cartoon. Random story, random story.

CATHY: Aw, that's really sad. That's heartbreaking.

RACHEL: But you're heartbroken, right?

DAVEY: Yes.

RACHEL: Or were you – were you – yeah. Okay.

DAVEY: I was just like, 'this beautiful' –

BOBBY: He discovered the process of melting.

CATHY: Oh, that's really sad.

DAVEY: Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

RACHEL: So – so who – we don't need to know who's the most – the bad influence. We know that's you, Davey.

CATHY: We know.

RACHEL: The mischievous, bad influence.

DAVEY: Yeah, yeah.

BOBBY: Bit of a mastermind. He's a mastermind.

DAVEY: Mastermind, exactly.

RACHEL: Yeah, exactly. So who's – who's the most likely to cry?

DAVEY: Neither one of us, right? I don't think we've – I don't –

BOBBY: As children it would be – it's more sports related. It might be sports related. Like again, like –

DAVEY: Oh, yeah. Okay, yeah. Depression for – when Tottenham or West Ham lose. That – that's depressing. It brings you down.

CATHY: It's so weird that you've got – I don't get it. I have to deal with that in this house.

RACHEL: I don't get it.

BOBBY: Our parents are quite strong – our mum particularly is a strong Catholic. And I think if you combine like Indian Catholicism with football fervour, it's like a really potent mix.

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: Where you like – those football players are your idols and you worship them. And when your – when your gods struggle, then you feel their pain. It gives it – as an adult I'm now glad I can detach sort of myself from West Ham's successes and failures.

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: But it's not perfect. Like football growing up had a huge hold on our moods.

DAVEY: Yeah, definitely.

BOBBY: If on a Monday morning at school, you know, Spurs had lost, I'd be like gleeful. And like glorious.

DAVEY: Yes.

BOBBY: Like coming to school like a king. And my teacher said, 'Bobby, you had a great day today in school.' I'd be like – I wouldn't reveal the reason, so it's strange how football –

DAVEY: Yeah.

BOBBY: Manifests in our –

CATHY: It's an outlet.

RACHEL: Very powerful.

CATHY: It's an outlet for your aggressions and stuff.

DAVEY: It's bizarre you say this because I was looking into the history of Steve McQueen. Steve McQueen's a British director and artist. He was – he was actually a Turner Prize winner for his films he did. Then he won an Oscar for 'Twelve Years A Slave'. And he's also knighted last year as well, right? So it's kind of the art film – but what I realised is, a connection to him as well, I liked him as a – as a creator, but I liked him even more when I realised he's a Tottenham Hot Spurs supporter. But – but then I was deflated again –

CATHY: So weird!

DAVEY: When he said in an article that he stopped supporting Tottenham a couple of years ago because it brought him down too much.

CATHY: Wow.

RACHEL: Oh.

DAVEY: He said the defeats were taking so much out of him, he'd stop – stopped going to matches.

CATHY: And you could never envisage that happening to you ever?

DAVEY: No, it's like – I think a couple of weeks ago when we were going through this bad patch, I actually turned it off in the 80th minute. I was just, 'this is too much.'

CATHY: Really?

DAVEY: Yeah, I had to – I – first time in my what, 30-odd years of supporting Tottenham, I turned it off. I said, 'I can't stand this,' and I turned it off.

CATHY: Did you watch last night's game? Because I did.

DAVEY: Oh, yeah. I watched that. That was amazing. Screaming at the TV.

CATHY: It was amazing.

BOBBY: You're temporarily occupying the space West Ham – West Ham after tonight's game will –

DAVEY: Oh yeah, exactly.

BOBBY: Go back to the bottom. Don't worry. Don't worry.

RACHEL: I love how you can't let it go. You're back in. Back in.

CATHY: Can't let it go. Literally.

RACHEL: Nope. Yep.

CATHY: I'm with Davey on this, sorry.

[Flute sounds]

RACHEL: What was the last present you bought each other?

DAVEY: Um –

BOBBY: It's a good question.

DAVEY: Oh, I bought you something. I bought you 'Innovators.'
Walter Isaacson's 'Innovators.'

BOBBY: Oh, yes.

DAVEY: For your birthday a few weeks ago.

BOBBY: Yes.

DAVEY: So it's all about, um, the top innovators around the world. Walter Isaacson is an author. He wrote – actually the book I read was because of Bob. So, um, Bob hosted '500 Years of Leonardo da Vinci' two years ago in the British Library. And Bob held a panel, uh, of polymaths. And professor Burke from Cambridge? And another woman polymath. And me. And for that particular event, because it was about Leonardo da Vinci, they called it 'The Art and Science of the Polymath, the Generalist v. the Specialist.' I read the entire Walter Isaacson Leonardo da Vinci biography. And because I read that, um, I gave Bob 'The Innovators', uh, what is it called, Bob? 'The Innovators.'

BOBBY: 'Innovators', yeah. 'The Innovators' I think.

DAVEY: Yeah, because Bob, do you remember my – you know the, um, Cathy, you said you saw my Royal Academy thing on – on television?

CATHY: Amazing. Yep, yep.

DAVEY: So I actually exhibited my 'The Cure' series based upon my spinal cord injury in the British Library in the same roof where Leonardo da Vinci's drawings were housed. And the ironic thing was, I didn't even know that was going to happen, but my – 'The Cure', the series, the anatomical drawings and paintings, were actually inspired by our love of Leonardo da Vinci when we were growing up.

CATHY: Hm. Oh, wow.

DAVEY: So it kind of came full circle. So then I gave Bob the book, the – 'The Innovators.' That was my last –

BOBBY: The book, yeah. 'The Modern Day Innovators', yeah.

DAVEY: Yeah. So my gifts seem to be practical to Bob.

RACHEL: Yeah.

DAVEY: Because I think, 'okay, Bob should learn about the innovators.' It's not – not like –

BOBBY: It's a great book. I'm really enjoying it.

DAVEY: Yeah.

BOBBY: Because I think we get gifts that are related to things that are happening. So again, back in 2019, 20 – Davey's art was – played a big part in our family's lives. So there were a lot of discussions we'd have about polymathy, the nature of it. Again, I

hosted a Radio 4 programme on the nature of polymathy. Because people often come to us and say, um, myself and Davey, who don't know us, they'll say, 'oh, so are you – would you consider yourself a polymath?' Someone that's able to – the thing is, the true definition of a polymath is someone that's able to make a contribution to two separate domains.

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: And they've got to be completely separate. But in the modern definition, people just tend to say polymaths are people that have an appreciation of more than one field. So like most of my friends will think I'm a polymath because I've got a broad range of knowledge, but in terms of true contribution it's only towards maths education.

Whereas Davey's more polymathic than me because you are trying to make a contribution towards art, but also you do a lot of work about programming, artificial intelligence, your robotics stuff that you used to do. So like my gifts would have been related to that. Like I would've bought you – I'm trying to remember – we buy lots of books for each other.

DAVEY: Yeah, books. Yes.

BOBBY: Loads of books.

RACHEL: That's not a surprise.

BOBBY: The last one would've been – I'm trying to remember the last book I bought you.

DAVEY: What did you get?

BOBBY: Oh, 'Hello World' by Dr. Hannah Fry.

DAVEY: Yes. Yeah, Hannah Fry's book. Yes.

BOBBY: That's a book on algorithms changing our world, because I know that Davey –

DAVEY: Yes.

BOBBY: We – we – the thing is often we'll buy books and discuss it, we'll forensically analyse it, um, it's almost like the gifts like have this virtuosity. Because if I get – if Davey gets me something, Davey knows that I will end up reading it and discussing it back with him.

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: And if I gave him something, we'll come back.

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: Yeah, that's brilliant.

DAVEY: Like in fact –

BOBBY: So we just keep on – yeah.

DAVEY: In fact –

RACHEL: So you get what you would like. You buy each other what you'd really like because you know you'll end up discussing it together. Yeah.

DAVEY: Yeah yeah yeah. In fact, Cathy and Rachel, like after this we're going to have a pub quiz on – on the book actually, Bob. So you'd better – you'd better hurry up.

CATHY: Can I ask because I'm sort of fascinated by the relationship between maths and music. And, uh, do you share the same taste in music and are either of you musical?

BOBBY: So are we musical? We tried. Okay.

CATHY: Okay.

BOBBY: So to be honest, first with Davey in the early 90s, our dad bought a couple of home keyboards. And they were things like – the lights would flash up where you were meant to play the notes. So we learnt to play the keyboard by little flashing lights. But with no proper finger – you don't normally imagine like a –

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: Later on in life in secondary school, I had proper lessons. But we sort of had – and because Davey, you could only use one hand.

DAVEY: That – that is one of the reasons, yes.

BOBBY: So Davey, he would have this unusual way of playing the keyboard. And then I would sort of learn from Davey. And because – because I followed Davey, I would try and play like in a weird way like Davey played. That's not – and when I first had lessons –

DAVEY: He had my bad habits.

BOBBY: I know. My – my piano teacher's like, 'who on earth taught you to play the piano?' Like, 'you've got some good – you've got some good music but your technique is horrendous.' So we – we played some instruments. Because we had like – a lot of things in life we – we – like I think probably because our dad, he'd let us dabble in so many things. In art, in music. Do you know we were master stamp collectors, coin collectors, um –

CATHY: Wow.

BOBBY: Um, Davey is like – Davey actually practiced magic.

DAVEY: Yeah.

BOBBY: Do you know the – what was it? Marvin's Magic Club?

DAVEY: Yeah, yeah. Marvin's Magic Club.

CATHY: Back to the Debbie McGee. Back to Debbie McGee.

RACHEL: Back to –

BOBBY: He was great at slight of hand. As your assistant we'd do optical illusions, we'd do like sawing in half. All these sorts of things.

CATHY: Woah.

BOBBY: But music is one thing where we developed an appreciation but not a significant competence in playing. Like I'm okay.

CATHY: Interesting.

DAVEY: Do you think, Bob, that's because when I tried music, the piano in particular, I couldn't do it as well as I wanted to because of the one hand? And because I didn't follow it, maybe Bobby didn't follow it either.

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: Yeah, interesting.

DAVEY: We talk about Bob following what I did. Like the maths, the science –

RACHEL: Yeah.

DAVEY: The drawing. Because I felt like I couldn't pursue this to the – well, to the point I wanted to do, that – and Bob didn't pursue it either. I don't know, maybe that's – that's a psychological –

BOBBY: Yeah, no, that's a good point. I never thought about it. There might be like an underlying reason.

DAVEY: Yeah. Because I didn't pursue it because technically I can't do it.

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: That's –

DAVEY: Bob thought, 'well, I won't do it either.' I don't know. A psychological reason?

CATHY: But do you like the same kind of music? Do you like the same?

DAVEY: Yeah, well grew up with Disney stuff, didn't we? Disney and –

BOBBY: Oh my god, Disney. Our dad, yeah, literally Disney. Like in fact all of the first pieces we learnt on the keyboard were all the Disney pieces.

DAVEY: Yeah, exactly.

BOBBY: [sings] 'Bippity Boppity Boo.' Like literally all of the Disney things. Um, so that was our initial music. Oh my god, our dad, uh, so we had nursery rhymes. But for some reason our dad – instead of nursery rhymes didn't he play ABBA?

DAVEY: Yes.

CATHY: Love ABBA

RACHEL: Yeah.

BOBBY: So we – so we loved ABBA when we were growing up.

RACHEL: Great.

BOBBY: Um, Bros, Salt-N-Pepa, like we had – do you remember we had the sticker book, Davey? The – the music sticker book?

DAVEY: Yes, Smash Hits.

BOBBY: We loved collecting football stickers, but the Smash Hits – yeah.

DAVEY: Smash Hits.

BOBBY: And then you were like, ‘ah, I’ve got a Bros’. And we competed with each other, who could fill the sticker book quicker. Um, but as adults, so I think Davey’s music is probably not too dissimilar to mine. Because again we have conversations. Davey – for example, Davey and I listen – let’s not forget, let’s do a little test. Davey, what’s our favourite joint band? Let’s see if you get it. If you say a different band, then my argument’s flawed.

DAVEY: Uh, joint band?

BOBBY: Our favourite. Joint. So if we had to say we’re going to put one band forward to play, which band – modern day, they’re still alive. They’re still playing. So if you get this wrong then my – my thesis is about to fall flat.

DAVEY: Band?

RACHEL: Come on, Davey.

BOBBY: Okay, I won’t – so imagine we had to represent one band in the intersection of our Venn diagram. That we both play or listen to. And watch.

DAVEY: Oh, Muse. Muse.

BOBBY: Yes.

DAVEY: Sorry, yeah. I'm sorry. I don't know why I had a brain freeze.

CATHY: Oh.

DAVEY: We've seen them like three or four times together.

BOBBY: Yeah, and –

DAVEY: They're amazing live.

BOBBY: I think I've seen them more than three times certainly. Oh yeah yeah yeah.

DAVEY: They're like the Queen of our era, basically. Like you know, the – the – it's like Freddy Mercury and co. It's like – it's what it is, right? It's –

BOBBY: But with Muse, the interesting thing is, again, I can – I got into them first. Because I got a scholarship to Eton for my A-levels. And at Eton a few of my friends were playing Muse. And I was like, 'what is this?' And then I told Davey about Muse and he got into Muse. And again, it became like a shared area of listening.

DAVEY: Yeah yeah.

BOBBY: But the thing is that nowadays my taste – I don't know if my taste is more eclectic than yours? Like I tend to listen to like – I think my taste often depends on if I've watched something, I absorb it. I think maybe this is probably similar with you, Davey. When we find out about something in the world, we tend to like voraciously absorb everything about the era, that period.

CATHY: Yeah.

BOBBY: So at the start of lockdown, I watched 'The Last Dance.' Uh, the documentary on Netflix about Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls team in the 1990s. And the soundtrack to that is all 80s/90s American hip-hop. And I had this phase of two months, and now I'm like, 'that could be a Mastermind topic. American 80s/90s hip-hop.' And I didn't really know much about it before. Or like again, our dad bought a CD of Verdi operas, just from a charity shop. And I really got into Verdi. And then all the classical music. So I spent like a couple of years absorbing Verdi, Mozart. So it all depends on like little influences. Little like turns.

RACHEL: Yeah.

BOBBY: So for Muse it was one of my friends gave me a CD at Eton, and now both of us, we listen to Muse.

RACHEL: Yeah.

DAVEY: Oh I remember the story growing up. So because we both liked classical music, but I was not very good at recalling them. And Bob had an – Bob had an amazing memory. That is for sure.

RACHEL: Right.

DAVEY: So when I could – when I wanted to listen to classical music, because this was before Google and stuff, right? You know, Spotify. So I'd think of classical music that I wanted to play, and I'd say – I would hum it to Bob and I'd say, 'Bob, what is this called?' And we'd go to the library and take the CD out. That's what I used to do. So Bob had like a –

CATHY: He's like Shazam.

DAVEY: Yeah, Bob was my Shazam.

RACHEL: Yeah, Shazam.

BOBBY: Oh my god.

DAVEY: Bob was my Shazam. Even when I was at Cambridge, I called Bob, I said, 'this song. Classical music. What is it? Who is it by?' Bob would say, 'dadadadadada. Third movement. Fourth movement.' And I would go and download it.

CATHY: Oh wow.

DAVEY: Bob was my Shazam. I didn't realise.

RACHEL: Aw.

BOBBY: Yeah.

DAVEY: Bob was like my Wikipedia.

RACHEL: That's amazing.

DAVEY: And I'm not surprised, right? Yeah. This is the pre-University Challenge days, right?

RACHEL: Yeah.

DAVEY: But yeah, you were literally like my Wikipedia, basically.

CATHY: Wow.

RACHEL: Amazing. Right, we can't take up any more of your time so we've got one more question. Please, um, is there anything you would like to say to each other that you've never said before? Davey, would you like to take that?

DAVEY: Um, um, I guess I'm very proud of you, Bob. Um, you know? It wasn't very easy growing up, I guess, you know? Lots and lots of complicated issues. Uh, but I think you've overcome them and now what you're doing with, you know, uh, your teaching and your communicating of maths, you're trying to inspire a new generation. I'm really proud of that.

CATHY: Aw.

BOBBY: Aw, cheers.

RACHEL: Bobby?

BOBBY: Um, I think – it's funny, I did a class – no, before lockdown we had to do a – an assembly. I did an assembly on role models. And rather than – and I, you know, I could've picked like the Barack Obama, Malala. And I picked Davey.

DAVEY: Aw.

CATHY: Wow.

BOBBY: Uh, and I said, 'Davey is my only inspiration.' Because, you know, again – obviously I had obstacles as well, but when we talk about obstacles, yours are real physical, proper obstacles. Not having an education, not – being physically confined to a

wheelchair, even now you only have use of one arm. But you – I think sometimes when I'm having a tough time, I think, 'if Davey can overcome that and still somehow be positive, uh, bright and keep on forging his way again,' you know, like I'm a combination of very proud of you, the way that you've – your art, you're showcasing it to people around Britain, around the world.

Um, I think, yeah, you're my inspiration. And like mostly my dad as well, and mum. But you're like my real day-to-day inspiration. The way you just get on with things. Almost like that Markovian, uh, memory list chain. Obviously things have happened, but you just go the next day and say, 'let's do – let's go again.'

DAVEY: Let's – let's roll the dice again.

BOBBY: Like Spurs do. Like when they lose they've got to go again as well.

RACHEL: Aw, lovely!

CATHY: That's so nice.

RACHEL: What's it called again? The Markovian? How do you say it?

CATHY: Markovian.

DAVEY: Markov.

BOBBY: Markov.

DAVEY: M-a-r-k-o-v. Markov chains.

RACHEL: Right. Okay.

CATHY: Okay.

BOBBY: So these are like memory list chains, but it doesn't remember the thing that happened previously.

RACHEL: Yeah.

BOBBY: Because obviously as humans go, we are – our – our Bobby Seagull on a particular day is a combination of all the previous Bobbys. But in Markov chains, it's independent things.

RACHEL: Yeah.

BOBBY: Almost like trying to adapt the real –

RACHEL: Yeah.

DAVEY: Today's a new day, basically, right? That's – that's what it's trying to say.

CATHY: Aw, what a great way to end.

RACHEL: I'll be reminding that to you a lot.

CATHY: Yes yes yes.

[Guitar and flute music]

This has been a Little Wander production. Local artwork from Cathy Mason. Voice from Melanie Walters. Music from Rhodri Viney. With special thanks to Beth Forrest, Steve Pickup, Sam

Roberts, Henry Widdicombe, and Jo Williams. Other podcasts from Little Wander include Here to Judge and Welcome to Spooktown. Subscribe now on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts.

[Cathy laughs]

RACHEL: That's fine. That's totally fine.

CATHY: You're supposed to be – you guys are supposed to be technical geniuses.

RACHEL: Yeah, but –

CATHY: Come on!