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Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. Happy Thursday. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be here with you today. We have got a great show. Oh, this one's different than any other show we've ever done. Y'all are gonna love it.

Before we dive into today's conversation, I'd love to tell you about one of our amazing partners, [Cru](#). Y'all know this about me, but the Bible is part of my daily life. I overslept today. So I will tell you it was not part of today's daily life, but most days. Its words have changed me and I am really, really grateful. I know that's true for a lot of you as well.

So imagine for a second that you couldn't get a Bible, that you didn't have the resources to allow for that, or that you couldn't hop on Amazon and get one sent to your house by like tomorrow. Take it one step further and imagine that you weren't even allowed to have one.

Honestly, sometimes we forget that there are people, lots of people all around the world who simply can't get a Bible. That's why we're thrilled, I mean, thrilled to partner with Cru.

Cru is one of the largest evangelical organizations with over 25,000 missionaries and in almost every country. Cru is giving Bibles around the world to people in their own heart language and sharing the hope of Jesus.

But here's where they need your help. For only \$21 a month, you can provide three people with Bibles each and every month. When you sign up to provide three Bibles with a monthly gift of \$21, you'll also be providing meals to five hungry families through Cru's humanitarian aid ministry. And as a thank you, you'll get a free copy of my new book, *Chase the Fun*.

Simply text "fun" to 71326 to help today. Imagine just how much this gift could change someone's life. So text "fun" to 71326. That's "fun" to 71326 to help now or visit give.cru.org/thatsoundsfun. Message and data rates may apply.

Intro: Today on the show I get to talk with my friend Jon Acuff and his girls who were as you will hear, like original MiniBFFs L.E and McRae. Jon, you may remember from the other two times he's been on, Episode 52 and Episode 285. Make sure you go back and listen to those.

He's an amazing author, a podcaster, and a speaker, not to mention a great friend of ours. But what a treat to also be joined by the girls and co-authors of his new book *Your New Playlist: The Student's Guide to Tapping Into the Superpower of Mindset*.

L.E. is a freshman business major at Stanford University in Birmingham and McRae is a high school junior here in Franklin just outside of Nashville. Their book is a companion to Jon's book, *Soundtracks*, that's meant to help teens tackle overthinking by replacing self-defeating thoughts with a positive healthy mindset. Y'all, I'm so proud of them.

You are gonna love this conversation. I know this book is gonna matter to so many people. And I'm thrilled for you to get to know them. So here's my conversation with McRae, L.E., and Jon Acuff.

[00:03:08] <music>

Annie: Acuffs, plural, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

Jon: I feel that I was just gonna say like Acuffi. Like is that plural? Acuffs?

Annie: Acuffi.

Jon: Like octopi. We've never done plural.

Annie: You've never done plural?

Jon: Mm-hmm.

Annie: What's another word that ends in double F's that you would have to...?

Jon: Scuff.

L.E.: Handcuff.

Annie: Handcuff and handcuffs. Not handcuffi.

Jon: No, that wouldn't work.

Annie: So we get that.

Jon: Yeah. So Acuffs.

Annie: Gals, welcome to the pod. I'm so glad you're here.

McRae: Thanks for having us.

L.E.: Yeah, thank you.

Annie: Will y'all introduce yourselves, say your age, and your name so that people who aren't seeing us they can learn your voice?

McRae: My name is McRae Acuff and I'm 16.

L.E.: And then I'm L.E. Acuff and I am 19.

Annie: And you are leaving for college when we walk out of here practically.

L.E.: Yeah. So got a lot of packing to do.

Jon: Tomorrow morning.

Annie: Do you really yourself have so much packing to do?

L.E.: Mostly clothes, but yes.

Annie: Yes. So you leave tomorrow morning? Is everybody going?

McRae: I'm not going.

Annie: No. You're like, "Sorry."

McRae: I can't miss so much school.

L.E.: She's junior year, you know.

Annie: You gotta be there.

Jon: Junior year counts. Freshman year you can kind of skip over.

Annie: That's right. That's right.

Jon: A little bit of costume to have.

Annie: But junior year I guess it matters.

Jon: It's a little bit cozy.

Annie: What is a soundtrack you have written that you're taking with you to school? Like do you have any new ones going into college?

L.E.: Well, this isn't a new one but when we talk a lot about in the book is "be brave to be bad at something new." So I'm going in with the mindset that, you know, this is everybody's first year of college. Everyone's a freshman that I'll be surrounded with. So, you know, we're going to be bad at it. There's going to be times when it's hard, but you know, I'm going to be brave.

Annie: L.E., I think it's you who makes a list in the book. Hold on. Let me see. Oh, no, sorry. It's McRae. Makes a complete list of all the students, you know, who have life totally figured out and there are five blank lists. Will you talk about why that's... I mean, even as L.E.'s talking, why is it important that y'all know that you're not the only one who's not doing this perfectly?

McRae: I would say like it's easy as a student to feel like, "Oh, I'm the only one that doesn't know what I want to major in or where I want to go to college." So it's like good to realize everyone feels this way.

Annie: And it helps you thinking about going into school of like, we're all freshmen.

McRae: Exactly.

Annie: Literally no one-

Jon: She's never gone to college before. She shouldn't be amazing at it. This is the first-

McRae: There will be a learning curve.

Jon: There will be a learning curve. I've said that before. Like every parent that told me they're bad at homeschooling their kid during virtual school, Yeah, you should be terrible at that. You probably suck at hang gliding. You've never hang-glided ever. And the worst time to learn something new is during a global pandemic. But we expect excellence.

So yeah, that's one that we, whether it's credo and cross country for the first time, or L.E doing band on a serious level in high school, we always talk about like, Yeah, there's gonna be a learning curve. And that's appropriate.

Annie: Do you remember when you moved to school, in college?

Jon: Oh, yeah. Yeah. It's a sore subject that is I have.

Annie: Is it? Why?

Jon: Because my parents put me on a plane.

L.E.: From Boston.

Jon: From Boston.

Annie: Yeah, from Boston. They just said, "Get off-

Jon: Yeah.

Annie: My gosh.

Jon: If I bring it up to my mom, I hope she doesn't hear this, she still gets like, "I don't..." But they just had my sister who was like...

McRae: She was probably three.

Jon: She was three at the time. So they had a surprise toddler and so it was just wondering-

Annie: Are y'all the oldest?

Jon: Yeah.

Annie: So you just like hugged everybody and got on a plane.

Jon: And then there was a family they had met at orientation. I forget their names. It wasn't people we knew well. It was like Sam's parents who got divorced eventually. They picked me up at the Birmingham Airport with as much as I could carry, I guess.

Annie: Oh gosh.

Jon: Then I, you know, moved myself and cried to Counting Crows or something.

Annie: Listen, I remember two nights before. So this would have been your last night. I remember sitting on the side of my bed and crying so hard, I could barely breathe, thinking, "I don't know how to do this. I am not capable of doing this." And I had a soundtrack that said, "Neither are the other 10,000 college freshmen that are going to Georgia tomorrow, Annie."

Jon: They don't have it figured out.

Annie: Yes. You just think everybody else does. How has that soundtrack served you already?

L.E.: Well, you know, through high school, as I grew up, I really was like, "I'm going to try new things. I'm going to push myself out of my comfort zone." There's been a couple of times, whether it's been in band or in swim, where I've taken on a leadership position and really just had to make it up as I go because, you know, I'm new at this.

Last year I took on the role of section leader in the band, and I felt like I was making it up for like the first three months. So that has really taught me that no one really knows what they're doing.

Annie: But you didn't quit.

L.E.: Exactly.

Annie: You're like, "We're all making this up."

L.E.: Mm-hmm.

Jon: Well, one of the things that is interesting for us in the research of this book was how many students feel they're too late. Like it's already too late-

Annie: Oh, my gosh.

Jon: ...like 9-year-olds, 10-year-olds, 11-year-olds because of how culture is like if you're not on a travel soccer team in the womb, you feel too late because we start... So L.E when she was nine and went to the swim team felt like, "I'm too late because other kids started at five."

So you as a parent, you don't understand that... Like, I understand when I talk to a 45-year-old that they're like, "I feel like it's late in my career. It's too late for me to do anything." I get that. I still don't think it's too late. But the idea that a 12-year-old

in our culture can feel too late is crazy to me. But they feel that pressure. So that's something we talked about a lot too, is it's not too late. Like you're just getting started.

Annie: Were you writing this book a long time before you wrote this book?

Jon: Oh, yeah. We've talked about a lot of these concepts for a long time in our family. We joked the other day that Jenny needs to do soundtracks for moms. Like 40 soundtracks for mom because there's a lot of the soundtracks that are in the book that she'll tell, you know, every one of us.

So yeah, the book was like a finally we've got it as far as it wasn't something new. It felt like, "Oh, we've been doing this for years. I think there's other families, other parents, other teenagers that would be helped, let's put it together."

Annie: I mean, Soundtracks defined—you know this—defined our office's fall last year.

Jon: Yeah, yeah. That was awesome.

Annie: It really helped us. I will never forget, girls, the first time our team sat down and read *Soundtracks*, chapter one, multiple people cried. And I was like, "Oh, welcome to work. Okay, we are all crying." I mean, I didn't expect that.

L.E. and McRae, as y'all been writing this, because y'all wrote this book, and as y'all been writing it, have you thought about the person on the other side? Like, are you thinking about the girl who will sit and read this in a room and cry? Who are you thinking of when you're writing?

L.E.: I haven't been thinking of someone crying already. I hope it reaches an audience like teenagers who really need it. So I've been thinking about that while I've been writing it.

Annie: What's it like to walk through the halls of school and be like, "In a couple of weeks, they're all gonna realize I'm an author."

L.E.: It's kind of crazy. Well, the crazy part is, as I'm going to college, coming out as a freshman, McRae, still has to go through the college process. She's gonna have a book under her belt.

Jon: But I would say one of the things, Annie, like L.E. joked the other day, like Jaden and the oil change.

- L.E.:** Yes. My friend was hesitant about doing something and so I was like, "You know what? Just be brave to be bad at something new." And she was like, "Oh, stop it."
- Jon:** So it's fun that they get to encourage other people. The crazy thing about this book though, Annie, was, so 10 years ago I spoke at a bunch of high school camps. You're a speaker. It's kind of like a rite of passage. You talk to like thousands of high schoolers. I mean, it's such a fun audience, because they'll fall asleep in two seconds if you're not good. Like you got to earn every-
- Annie:** They are medicineball, not basketball.
- Jon:** Yeah, exactly. But I would ask the students to write down their thoughts. Like, "What are your internal thoughts?" And they put them on pieces of paper anonymously, and turn them in. I had thousands of them in a box on a shelf that I didn't know what to do with. And then 10 years later-
- Annie:** You've kept them this whole time?
- Jon:** Ten years later, I was like God said, "Hey, like, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap." And I got the box out and we looked at him. And we could see patterns. And we realized, "Oh, we have thousands of real soundtracks from thousands of real teenagers from around the country. And we could see, you know, "Oh, wow, here's a thread here. Here's like..."
- The crazy thing was the number one most common word on every one of them that appeared more than the other was the word "enough."
- Annie:** I knew it was gonna be enough.
- Jon:** Pretty enough, talented enough, smart enough, popular enough. But that had been sitting there in the office I've worked in for 10 years just waiting for the right moment.
- Annie:** "Enough is a myth" was my favorite chapter. I think you wrote it L.E, just to remind you. Will y'all back me up and tell me... I'm sorry if you've answered this one thousand times, but I haven't gotten to see y'all about this book. A, I loved it. So I want to tell you that. But tell me about the writing process. Was your dad like assigning you? You gotta-
- McRae:** We had assignment, yes.
- L.E.:** He gave us little assignments, yeah.

Annie: Like of how many words or of the topic?

L.E.: Like the topic.

Jon: The topic. I'd go, "Hey, Crae, you've got a really good handle on this kind of abbreviation that you use." Like she talks about JEEPS in the book. And I'll go, "I need you to explain that." Or "Hey, L.E., what do you think are the symbols real teenagers would use?" Because I have ideas but I haven't been a teen in like 32 years." And so that's-

Annie: Unfortunately Nike is still the one.

Jon: I know. I know. So that's so funny is like some of the things that are still in and way out. But yeah. So we would do that and then they would help me see nobody cares about that, that thing you think of. Because I would add something or tweak something and "No teenager would ever say that. That's not going to be helpful." So that was the other thing. It was a back-and-forth.

Annie: I mean, was it like when you got home from school, you're like, "Dad, now I have to do this too?"

McRae: I didn't more on like weekends. It wasn't that much. Some of it was over the summer too.

Jon: Some of it was over the summers. But what they've also learned is like the back half of sharing a book, that when there's like the writing it... So like the audiobook process was hilarious.

Annie: Oh, y'all did that? Wait a minute. It's y'all?

Jon: Yes.

McRae: Yeah. We read the entire audiobook.

Jon: I'm barely in the book. I'm the intro and the outro. Every chapter that was them they-

L.E.: It was our voices.

Annie: Oh, I cannot wait to hear that. So it is y'all reading?

Jon: There were some little words that we just couldn't say.

L.E.: Okay, I couldn't say ridiculously. McRae, Bocelli.

McRae: Oh.

L.E.: She said Neckflix instead of Netflix.

Jon: Then there was one that L.E. had to say-

L.E.: Stephen Scoggins is a successful podcaster.

Annie: That is very hard.

L.E.: Yeah.

McRae: Super simple symbols.

Jon: So they were like, "Some of these words that are impossible to say." Because you know how it is. Like you don't think about it, and then you got a record and you're like, "What did I say?"

Annie: "Why did I do that?"

L.E.: Like, "Why Stephen Scoggins?"

Jon: Well, there was a guy named Ted Bocelli and Crae had that section. And she was like, "Ted Brocelli." It's not "Bro." But when you make the mistake, you overthink the next time. And then we did a Q&A at the end.

That was kind of fun because we talked about some of our soundtracks and L.E is on time was one of them. And Crae said, "We were early to this audiobook recording. Like we had to wait in the parking lot to come in today." And that was a funny like-

Annie: I mean, the truth is y'all told me you'd be 10 minutes late and you were 10 minutes early.

Jon: Yeah. We got early on time.

Annie: You said you'd be late. I expected you on time. You were early, even though you said you'd be late.

Jon: Yeah, yeah.

Annie: How do you see L.E. is on time? I mean, do you see that playing out in your life? Are you glad for that one?

McRae: I get to school like 40 minutes early. I roll on the parking lot like 7:00. School starts at like 7:40.

Annie: Really?

McRae: Yeah.

Jon: Well, part of it is there's no more dangerous spot than a high school parking lot. It's like 300 kids that have had their license for an hour.

Annie: Yes, that's exactly right.

Jon: Friday afternoon on the way out for, especially if it's April.

L.E.: Terrifying. Stanford's filled off.

Jon: Oh, yeah. L.E has been hit twice.

L.E.: I just parked. I just parked.

Jon: She was parked.

Annie: So you're like, "McRae, you're getting there early and parking in the corner."

Jon: That's not a soundtrack. That's a life principle.

L.E.: Even sometimes, though, you get there early and you park, and it still happens.

Jon: You get hit.

Annie: What do you do for 40 minutes before school starts?

McRae: I go into school early. Like 7:20. So I'll stay in my car for like 20 minutes. Sometimes I drive on my neighbor so we just kind of chat.

Jon: Your outfit of the day. You used to do that.

L.E.: I used to send my friends in college what I was wearing that day. We can exchange and connect that way. And then I would do the Wordle.

Annie: Oh, yeah.

McRae: I would, you know, get ready for my day.

Annie: Are y'all still doing Wordle?

L.E.: I sometimes do it but not often.

McRae: I'm back on it because I had 140-day streak and then I forgot one day and I've fallen off.

Annie: Oh, you can't come back from that.

Jon: No.

Annie: Because there's no recovering?

Jon: I forgot how you forgot. It wasn't dramatic.

L.E.: You were like halfway through.

McRae: I didn't know what it was. So I was like, "I'll come back to it later." I completely forgot.

Jon: There was the narrator. There was no later.

Annie: There was no later. So when you opened it the next day, we you like-

McRae: It was like streak of one.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

McRae: I was like, "It's over."

Annie: One of our co-workers, Jonny, had something like that where it was like he was at 100% or something. And when that broke, when that egg broke, there was no coming back. No.

L.E.: And I was like, "I'm not going to do it for 141 more days."

Annie: I'll show you. Okay, so L.E, thinking about this book has been out for two days when people are hearing this, two days in their lives, and one of the things you write about... I think it's you. I promise I read it. I did not perfectly memorize who wrote what. But where you wrote about how a bunch of people reached out to your dad and said, "My new soundtrack doesn't work." Was that you?

L.E.: I think so.

Jon: I think that was L.E.. About the need to repeat.

Annie: Yes. Yes. Will you talk about that for a minute? Because I thought that was one of the most interesting chapters to me, the idea of like all these grown-ups said, What do we do? And now somebody's got this book for 48 hours and-

L.E.: It doesn't work.

Annie: It doesn't work?

L.E.: So we talk about I think it's retire, replace, and repeat. So that's a big concept in the book. And you know, if you've been listening to the soundtracks for who knows, a year, five years, 10 years, even longer, two days or a week is not going to completely change your mindset. It takes time. So you really need to focus on like really repeating those soundtracks.

And there's going to be days where something washes up, like what we talked about in the book is your brain likes to remind you of like past grievances. So there's one story he tells about him ruining a surprise party. And he'll think about it like 20 years later, and he's like, "This isn't helpful." So those thoughts sometimes take a lot of work to really-

Jon: Yeah, repeating those new ones. I mean, they're sticky. And what we say though, like, for a teenager or student is a shorter process, potentially, then an adult because an adult has listened to him not a real leader for 30 years-

Annie: That's right.

Jon: ...because a teacher accidentally said, "Hey, we need a different group leader for this project. You're not a natural leader." And they've believed that for 30 years. So that might take a long time to unpack. The hope is that for a teenager, if they've got a broken soundtrack, they've listened to it, like L.E. said, for a year for two years or

three years and then some truth comes in and is able to kind of dissolve that and replace that with something true. But it is a repeat.

And that's part of taking the pressure off the teenager or the student. We're so quick to judge something that not working. And it must be us. Like, I didn't do it right. It didn't do it right." And going, "No, like, if you play soccer, you played soccer in high school, Annie, when you played as a senior you are better than the first day because you had..."

So it's the same with your mindset. We don't understand that about mindset, because nobody teaches us that. Like it's amazing that there's personal finances classes in high school because I didn't have that. I got a mountain bike with a loan.

After college, I was about to buy a mountain bike and they're like, "You want to buy it with a loan?" I was like, "What's that?" They're like, "It's like free money." I was like, "That's amazing."

Annie: "That sounds good."

Jon: Three years later I'm still milling checks to Birmingham, and Jenny's like, "We live in Boston. Where are these checks going?" And I was like, "To my bike loan. Dah."

Annie: Right. Right.

Jon: And so the idea that we can hopefully change the way students talk about mindset as a learnable practice cool thing, that's game changer.

Annie: What did you think when you started getting that feedback after *Soundtracks* was out? I mean, were you like, "You guys?"

Jon: Yeah. Well, I would just say I would try to share one of my own. I mean, if you asked me to define leadership in two words, it's go first. Go first. So anytime-

Annie: I saw you all the time saying, gift of going second.

Jon: Yeah. So if somebody says to me, "It's not working," I go, "Well, let me tell you about one that didn't work for me. And it still comes back and I still work on. Here's what it looks like."

So I think that was interesting. We all want fast results. And I want fast results. I don't think you should feel any shame about that. Like who wants long results?

Annie: Right. Right. It's like, "I hope it takes a lot of time."

Jon: "I hope it takes forever and I don't see it's like glacial. Like it's slow, slow, slow. Like the grand canyon over thousands of years."

Annie: That's right.

Jon: I don't want that. Like, let's go fast. So I think if we can forgive ourselves of wanting fast but then also put in the work bit by bit, it makes a big change.

[00:20:11] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about one of our amazing partners, [Prose](#). Okay, tell me this. Are you interested in having healthier hair? I know. Me too.

So as we wear our hair, you know, every day, we want it to look the best we can, right? Well, Prose is my go-to for personalized hair care. They take natural ingredients and combine them in innovative ways to bring us clean hair care with incredible results. Their formulas offer answers to your individual hair needs, not the same old solutions that target everyone's issues.

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Sponsor: And one more amazing partner tell you about, oh you guys, [Thrive Causemetics](#). Listen, we are talking about our hair and our face. So a couple of weeks ago I got in the habit of putting my makeup on with all of you on Insta Stories.

When you know I got a ton of questions about my favorite products. I love makeup and skincare and nail care products. When they're better for my skin and the community, let's go. That's even better.

Thrive Causemetics features high-performance beauty and skincare products made with clean skin-loving ingredients. No parabens, sulfates or phthalates. It's certified 100% vegan and cruelty-free.

"Cause" is in the name for a reason. Every purchase supports organizations that help communities thrive. When things that I'm going to be buying anyway like lipstick and eyeshadow and mascara also help do good in the world, I think that is extra fun.

Thrive has this liquid balm lip treatment that gives your lips a smooth, glossy look and even replenishes moisture with a protective veil of skin-nourishing vitamins and juicy hydration. And you guys know I've shown you Thrive's liquid lash extension mascara. I literally just bought another tube of it this weekend. It's like magic how long it makes my lashes look with no clumping or flaking.

And then when I go to remove it at the end of the day, warm water and a washcloth and it slides right off. I don't know how they've done it, you guys. I don't understand the science but I am in awe of how well it works while also being affordable and healthier for my lashes than all the damaging glues with false lashes. My absolute favorite mascara, you guys.

And now is a great time to try Thrive Causemetics for yourself. You can get 15% off your first order when you visit thrivecausemetics.com/tsf which is literally what I typed into the computer this weekend to get me more mascara. That's thrivecausemetics.com/tsf for 15% off your first order.

And now back to our conversation with Acuffs.

[00:24:27] <music>

Annie: This won't matter as much to you as it does to them, I think. But one of the things, one of the soundtracks from high school that I have just started reworking is watching midsize halls. Because when I was in high school, I didn't know anybody showing me how to wear clothes for my body.

And so it was very like, "Wait, when we were in high school, the clothes were only one size. All the models were one size. So now when you see these people doing midsize halls, I'm going, Oh, I'm rewriting a soundtrack right now that high school Annie, if someone would have told high school Annie this soundtrack of their really cool clothes no matter what size your body is, oh-

Jon: That's huge.

Annie: ...my 20s would have been... So now I'm like, "Look, look at the life that all these teenagers have."

Jon: So good.

Annie: It's amazing. I mean, it's amazing. McRae, do you imagine... Like, is this a book that your teenage friends are reading by themselves? Are they reading them in a small group? What do you picture?

McRae: I picture like, hopefully we want to... The way we want the book to go so that their parents buy it and then the parents read it first so it opens up like great conversations to have. To be honest, no one my age picks up a book. So we hope that they read it. Hopefully, we just hope they buy it.

Jon: That's the thing. Like if it gives the parents new tools, that's amazing. Like if it gives them the chance to recognize a broken soundtrack... Because even that language, you know, the girl that got out of the pool at the swim meet that said, "I'm the slowest swimmer on the team. I'll never get better." And Jenny and I looked at each other and we said, "Oh, there was a broken soundtrack. She can change that."

So if you as a parent have new ears, to hear the things your kids are saying, or to hear the ones you're bringing into the house yourself as a parent. An example I always do is, if you criticize your work and hate your job for 18 years, don't act surprised your kid graduates college and doesn't want to get a job. You demonized work for 18 years. And then you're like, "It's so weird my kid doesn't want to get a job." No, it's not. You talked to him a thousand broken soundtracks about work and that's what they're reacting to.

So I think it'll teach the parents to recognize soundtracks in their kids and change them. But also, I think there's gonna be a lot of parents that go, "Oh, this is a book, you know, written for teenagers secretly but it's also for me."

Annie: Yeah, yeah. Are soundtracks worse now for teenagers than they were when we were teenagers?

Jon: I think the challenge is... Because the girls like one of the questions they love answering is like, what's fun about being a teenager now? It's interesting to hear their perspective. But my-

Annie: That's the last question we always ask. So I'm very excited about that.

Jon: So my answer to that is I just think it's more challenging because of the amount of content they're dealing with, the amount of exposure to comparison they're dealing with. There's a lot of good parts to social media. But I'll give you one example.

So when they were in elementary school, L.E. and McRae couldn't bring birthday party invitations to the classroom and invite friends because people would be excluded. That was a rule of the school: invite friends outside of school.

So now at Snapchat you can see geotags of friends being places you're not. So we've had friends say, "My high school daughter saw four of her friends come to her driveway and then leave because the one girl that doesn't like her convinced them all to go somewhere else."

So you get to watch live real updates about isolation. There's no world where 100 years from now we go, "Turns out that was good for kids. That actually help self-esteem." So that element of it, when I think about that, I think there's a lot more room for broken soundtracks with some of that stuff.

Annie: Will you talk for a second about at the end of the book, you write a whole section on if we'd had phones when we were your age, we'd be bad at them too?

Jon: Yeah. Well, there's this sense of... I don't know, maybe not ego, but self-righteousness of like, "These kids with their phones these days."

Annie: "Why can't they resist?"

Jon: "Why can't they resist?" You wouldn't have either.

Annie: Yeah, I don't.

Jon: Yeah, exactly. The idea that we would have been amazing, I'm like, "You know what? That's enough video games for today. I think it's time for me to study my history exam." No, we wouldn't have.

Annie: Right.

Jon: I had a hard time turning off like Nintendo and all I had was Mike Tyson's Punch Out and Excitebike. And there was like four colors. So I think the last section of the book is about things we never say to our kids, and just admitting-

Annie: Did you write that?

Jon: Yeah, that's the section I wrote. And just saying, like, Hey, we asked you to be braver than we're being. That's one that somebody challenged me on once about how we'll take kids to soccer fields when they're six and go, "Hey, run out in that field, you now play that sport." Like you never met that coach. You've never met those kids. But now you do that."

And then how often we as adults try to so manicure our lives so there's not discomfort. So we go, Well...Like the joke that girls have heard me do before is if Jenny says, "Hey, we're going to a dinner party," I'm like, "Well, how long are we going? Who's gonna be there? Will any of my friends be there? Do they have a dog, like a pet?" I'll ask like a thousand questions. That's just a dinner party. Oh, that's real... Why don't you put the box in the middle? That's real.

Annie: We're allowed to turn water here. We're allowed to drink water.

Jon: That was real loud.

Annie: But we're leaving it because that's why we're live.

- Jon:** That's so funny. I tried to have that section be like, "Hey, let's be honest about teenagers and the challenges and the opportunities."
- Annie:** Okay, I'm gonna ask both you girls this question. As an Annie in the world who does not have my own kids yet, I don't live with a teenager so I'm not learning things at the same pace your father and mother are. What do I not know?
- L.E.:** What sometimes adults asked me is really just about like the hidden rules of teenage social media. I always do a meme book at the end of the year and give it to my dad. But I feel like I could do like a 50-page dissertation about the secret rules about posting on social media.
- Annie:** Really?
- McRae:** Like don't double post one post a day.
- Annie:** On what? On anything?
- McRae:** On Instagram.
- L.E.:** On Instagram. There's all these like secret things that teenagers, especially teenage girls will specifically do.
- Annie:** Tell me more. Only one post today.
- L.E.:** Or like not posting on your story too often. There's all these like, like, if you comment on someone's Instagram, they expect to comment back. Or if sometimes people will comment on your post because they want you to comment back.
- McRae:** Comment on their post, yes.
- L.E.:** Yeah.
- Annie:** Comment for comment is what you're telling me is supposed to be happening?
- McRae:** Uh huh.
- Annie:** Wow. I did not know that.
- Jon:** Also like punctuation. Their text messages, whenever I... Sometimes I'll text for them to somebody, they'll be like, "Hey, how do I respond? This person wants me

to babysit. Their kids are monsters." And like they're not gonna babysit for the person. I'm like, "Let me write a response. No punctuation, no capitalization.

L.E.: The capitalization is turned off on most teen's phone.

McRae: It's like a thing.

Jon: Did you know that?

Annie: Why? Anything language?

Jon: It drives me bonkers.

L.E.: It makes it seem casual or something? I don't know. A lot of my friends have been turned on but-

Annie: So what happens when you need to yell? Do you use all caps or no?

L.E.: Sometimes you just put the capital on. If I'm like sending a text to a grandparent or-

Jon: To an old person who's bouncer, brittle.

Annie: Sometimes I'll turn the Caps on if I'm sending a text to my grandparents.

L.E.: I'll make it more formal. Sincerely L.E.

Annie: I sign every email "Sincerely..." You're just telling me what I know. You're not telling me anything new about myself. You're telling me lots of new things about the world. Okay, I did not know we're supposed to turn our caps off. We're only supposed to post once a day on Instagram.

Jon: They're not building brands. We have books to sell. Me and you Annie are out here trying to hustle. There's a guy in the corner of this room running a mixing board. We gotta pay for that-

Annie: Right. Right. We've got to capitalize every now and again, you guys. Wow. That blows my mind. Okay, I can't move on. I don't know. What else do I not know?

Jon: Or what do you guys call me out on? Like, there were a lot of jokes you're like, "Ah."

McRae: Dad jokes. Oh, like the one direction joke?

Jon: Yeah. Tell her that joke.

McRae: It was gonna be a header, a full header in the page. And he was like, "No offense to Harry Styles, but there is really more than One Direction."

Jon: Because I was talking about dials that go... I thought that was very clever. Don't look for it in the book.

Annie: No, no, no. That's one I felt like was dad jokey that I really liked.

L.E.: Did he mention the "girls, let me keep this in"?

Jon: I did that. I put a paragraph.

Annie: Yes. Also, you talk so much about your height that when our friends... Like our friends that get our AFD Week in Review email on Friday can ask questions to y'all. And one of them said, "Jon, how are you so tall like a basketball player?" And Lillian says, "I don't understand this question." I was like, "He jokes about this all the time?"

Jon: I did a video series once for a client, and when they did the focus group, the feedback was, "He was so cocky about his height" because they didn't know I was joking. They really thought during the entire series I was some jerk that was like, "Well, you know."

Annie: "I'm super tall." Okay, I have one more question as the three of us are unmarried around this half of the table.

Jon: I hope so. What if this is when we find out McRae... She's a child bride?

McRae: Ew.

Annie: Are you married to someone we don't know?

McRae: I'm not.

Jon: Tell Annie the truth. You can talk to another adult. This is a safe place.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. I'm often the safe adult. Third wheel of parenting.

Jon: Do people tell you tattoos? Like had a kid been like, "Don't tell my mom I got a motorcycle tattoo?"

Annie: Not yet. Not yet. Because all my friends' kids are just getting here.

Jon: It'd be so weird to change. He already had a tattoo.

Annie: Right. Right. But also probably. I think that's what she wants. That's what she wants.

Jon: Stick-and-poke. Oh, do you know Stick-and-poke?

Annie: No. I thought I did but it's not coming to my mind.

L.E.: It's like a DIY tattoo that teenagers do to themselves.

Annie: Oh, yeah. I don't know this.

Jon: Do they do it with a big pin? What do they do? It's like gel style, right?

L.E.: It's like it's real sketch.

Jon: And they don't look good.

McRae: No.

Annie: That is not what I thought you're talking about. I thought you were talking about that little on... one of the toy stories there's a spork? What's his name?

L.E.: Sporky.

Jon: Sporky.

Annie: That's who I thought you're talking about.

Jon: Oh, that's so cute. That's adorable.

Annie: I went from Jane Taylor to there? And you're saying people are giving themselves tattoos outside of jail.

McRae: I feel like it's a public school thing to be like, "Hey, come to the bathroom. Come to the bathroom, I'll give you a Stick-and-poke."

Jon: Their friends have... not close friends.

McRae: But I know people who have them.

Annie: Is it needles?

McRae: Yeah. They'll just take like some ink. I don't know. You know, I've never done one.

Annie: You don't plan to have a stick and poke, right?

McRae: But I know people who have... They look real sad.

Jon: Their trend, especially during COVID when they're home alone, it's virtual, they're bored and they're like, "I'll give myself a terrible tattoo." Stick and poke. Yeah, you need to whole episode on that.

Annie: Yeah. We aren't done with y'all being on the show. We're gonna have you about quarterly to tell me what I don't know. Tell me what I don't know about dating as a teenager.

L.E.: We don't really have very much experience in that kind of realm.

McRae: No one really dates anymore.

L.E.: Oh, there is this whole Snapchat... This is another social media thing. People do a stage now. It's called this talking stage, where like, you start snapping people. And then it'll be like you don't say anything. It's just pictures of yourself. And then sometimes you'll start sending words or questions.

Annie: Like across that gray line?

McRae: Yes. Kind of like work your way across. Sometimes you'll make it to text message. That's big.

L.E.: Big step. Big step.

Jon: That's intimate, right?

L.E.: Big step when you like get the number and you move from Snapchat because text is seen as more formal.

- Annie:** Wow. It's the same as the birthday party thing? I cannot fathom trying to be a teenager dating right now-
- Jon:** Oh, no.
- Annie:** ...with the access you have to the... I mean, I have to block him as soon as we break up, the day after we break up he's blocked. Not because I don't want him seeing my stuff. Because I can't stalk him. I can't imagine being 19.
- Jon:** It seems like you guys date less. Like homecoming. I mean, you'll go with people but it's group.
- L.E.:** Group more casual friend stuff. I mean, that Snapchat thing. It's not like someone's calling you on the phone be like, "Hey, would you like to go to the movies with me?"
- Annie:** No.
- L.E.:** It's like, "Hey, let's send pictures of our faces for six, eight weeks." And then one day-
- Jon:** And then one day it's over?
- McRae:** And then you just get left on open and it's over.
- Annie:** And that's it? It's over?
- McRae:** It's over.
- Annie:** When you're like, "Oh, man, he opened it but he didn't respond. We broke our streak again." And that's when you know it's done.
- Jon:** Dunzo. Dunzo.
- Annie:** And then you have to see him in like science the next day, but he's stopped...? That would be the thing.
- L.E.:** What people do is like there's a thing called "I don't have Snapchat. So I'm just going out with my friends. There's a thing called a snap score. It shows on your profile how many times you've sent pictures, like live updates. So people will be like, "I know he's on Snapchat because his snap score is going up but he's not snapping me back."

Jon: Oh, like the CIA?

L.E.: It's insane.

Jon: That's how we catch terrorists.

Annie: And lose our souls. That is it.

Jon: Thank goodness. Thank goodness.

Annie: Tell me some soundtracks around social media for you guys.

L.E.: McRae had some good ones.

McRae: Ah.

Jon: Well, I mean-

L.E.: Or like how you do social media.

Jon: Yeah, how do you do social media?

McRae: Sometimes I'll take like breaks from like Instagram and stuff if I'm spending too much time on it.

Annie: How do you define too much time?

McRae: Just like sometimes when I'm tired or if I'm bored, I'll just like go on Instagram and just kind of like just scroll aimlessly and when I could be like doing something else.

Jon: We talked about breaks during seasons like especially for teenagers. If you're the only one not going somewhere amazing on spring break, it doesn't hurt to mute a couple people. Not to miss the 30 a party you're apparently not at.

Annie: Right. Right.

Jon: You're the only one like, "I don't want to see that. So I'm gonna pause it for a second." But I would say, I mean, Crae Snapchat but not TikTok. L.E. has TikTok but not Snapchat. So we've kind of customized it. Social media isn't one size fits all.

Annie: That's good to say.

Jon: L.E. prepared... How did you get TikTok?

L.E.: I made a slideshow.

Jon: PowerPoint.

L.E.: PowerPoint.

Annie: About why you should be allowed to be on TikTok?

L.E.: Yeah. I did.

Jon: And that was your idea.

L.E.: That was my idea. I did that.

Annie: Why did it sell you? I mean, a terrible PowerPoint doesn't get what the kid wants. It has to be a good PowerPoint.

Jon: How many slides? Was it like 12?

L.E.: It was probably at least like five to ten slides.

Jon: But it was like, "Here's what I want to follow. Here's why." So, for us, it was saying, "Oh, it's a serious thing and you put serious thought into it." It's not a casual thing. Like, "I'm going to open myself to the entire world and all possible criticism." This is gonna blow your mind, Annie. Not everyone's posting good stuff on social media.

Annie: Say what?

Jon: I know. It's crazy. And so that for us as parents was like, "Oh, she gets that it's a serious thing." Same with Snapchat. Like we talked to Crae about that a long time. You only got that like a year ago?

McRae: Yeah, it's the main way all my friends communicate.

Jon: That's what was surprising for us is that there comes a line where... I was self-righteous as a parent. I was like, "They're gonna get it when they're 30 and they're at monastery, you know, whatever." And then they were missing connection.

So I was isolating them from their friends by coming up with rules, like, "You can't have it." Because they're not going to call on the phone. They're not even a text message. Like a lot of L.E.'s communication is via Instagram DMs.

Annie: That just blows my mind. I'm like, "You have a phone number."

Jon: Less people use it over and over. And then like this-

L.E.: I initiate a lot of text conversations because I don't have that Snapchat, Snapchat's really popular to text. But I enjoy texting with my friend.

Jon: But Crae, how many of your friends text you?

McRae: Like, maybe two.

Annie: What listener can't see is her face at "what are you asking?"

Jon: Like, how do you turn butter again? What's the movement to get the cream?

Annie: So like to have your friends and the rest are all like snapping?

McRae: Yeah.

Jon: Yeah. And then we'll text your friend that you're going to pick her up late. She's like, "I'll just Snapchat her." Because again we're like-

McRae: He's like, I talked to her about that on Snapchat."

Jon: I was like, "Sent her a pigeon." She's like, "No, no, I doubt-

Annie: It'll be straight ahead of you. So you said earlier that teenagers don't pick up their own books, right? So put together your Snapchat life with being an author. Because this is like something I read in the bio, and in your thank yous. And in the book, you're a very good writer, but also you want to write. So how do we write books for teenagers when teenagers are on Snapchat and don't read books?

McRae: I think just like encouraging them to read. We talked about in the book doing like a money incentive. I think I enjoy reading and I think others would, too. It's just you have to like put down your phone and pick up that book.

Jon: So that's a challenge. You're up against the phone. It's a phone. A phone is a really big obstacle. But yeah, for us, we paid them to read books. We came up with a list of 15 books and paid them one summer. Every parent gets paid at work. None of the parents listening are like, "I just do that for 40 hours for free. It's weird. I don't expect a check."

So there's times where you want to change or encourage behavior. It's 100% okay. And the goal is that they learn to love it and they just do it. But you can't be like, "Well, I know you have the x box and it's connected to every video game ever made, and every one of your friends, but here's a book." So it's okay to get creative as a parent to go, "How do I encourage them to do this? What does that look like?"

Annie: Forgive me for not knowing this. And Xbox is connected to every game that's ever existed?

Jon: Well, it's all digital now. So you can still buy really-

L.E.: You can digitally buy it.

Jon: Yeah, you can digitally buy them. So you can still get a physical disk or physical game, but there's libraries of games and subscript. Like the whole goal of everything is a subscription. So of course, they're like they don't want you to have to go to a store to get it. It's much easier if it's a subscription model.

Annie: Wow. I'm the grandmother you have to use caps for because I'm like, "You can just get them in your house?" I'm going to Blockbuster. I don't know what you're talking about.

Jon: Annie, Netflix is gonna blow your mind.

Annie: Yeah, that's it. I'm in real time realizing that x boxes are Netflix for video games, or whatever.

Jon: And every video game.

Annie: Or whatever. PlayStation, blah, blah.

[00:42:42] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this one more time to tell you about one of our sponsors, [Chime](#). Y'all know I finished out my TSF best summer ever checklist this past weekend in Iowa with my friend Russell Dickerson. Y'all it was just the best.

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And now back to finish up our conversation with Jon, L.E., and McRae.

[00:45:59] <music>

Annie: Okay, one of the things I didn't read in the book that I'm interested to hear y'all talk about just because you kind of hit it when you talked about being kind, where you said, "Is it true? Is it kind? Is it helpful?" I would like for y'all to talk for a second, girls, about like, Do you have any soundtracks around your faith or about what's with you and God?

L.E.: It's a great question.

Jon: Oh, I can tell you a mistake I made around L.E.'s faith?

L.E.: Oh, my gosh, I forgot about that.

Jon: Do you want to tell the story?

L.E.: Sure, I'd love to. So we're leaving church one day... It was Easter maybe-

Jon: No. It was-

L.E.: No. It was baptism Sunday.

Jon: Baptism Sunday.

Annie: Big Sunday either way.

L.E.: Yeah. And so we're in the car and dad turns around and he goes-

Jon: Hey, give them setup of why I asked that. Tyler got baptized.

L.E.: Oh, one of our friends got baptized. I've never been baptized. And he was like, "So L.E., do you feel like you have a personal relationship with Christ?" And everyone in the car just started laughing when he asked that.

Jon: And Jenny said, "What do you think she's been... No, you said, "What do you think she's been doing a small group for the last six years?"

L.E.: Yeah, I'm just going for fun, for the food.

Jon: And it was me as a parent being like, "I gotta get my kid dunked fast. This is ridiculous she hasn't been baptized. It had nothing to do with their faith. This is was me as a parent, it was about like, "Oh, I gotta get her in real quick. How come other parents has their kid baptized?" And L.E. was like, "That wasn't a helpful question."

L.E.: You knew the answer.

Jon: I knew the answer. It was very insulting to her that I was like-

L.E.: That you even questioned.

Jon: I said it to her with the intimacy of somebody who knocked on your door and was like, "Here's \$100 bill that's actually a trap."

Annie: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: That was maybe two years ago.

L.E.: We were like still in the church parking lot.

Jon: I needed to wait a second.

Annie: That church parking lot is not big.

Jon: We could turn back around because you don't today. If you want to do this-

Annie: Water is still in there.

L.E.: 11 o'clock service. I'll take yah.

Jon: So that was a great learning moment for me as a parent because you don't know... sometimes you feel awkward in the conversation and you don't know what to ask or what to say. So that was super... Totally just blew it. Totally just blew it.

But it did start a good conversation about like, well, what does it look like for me to ask you questions like that? Or how do we as a family talk about stuff like that? But yeah, that was me just out of nowhere being like, "Can I check this box off my list?" It was the equivalent of a restaurant manager saying, "How was everything tonight?" without stopping, walking. You know they don't care. You know what you're supposed to say. And it was just a checkbox. And that was a good gotcha for me as a parent.

Annie: When you're going off to school... And you can be like, "Annie, get out of my business," and our friendship will survive this. We've been far long enough that you can tell me you don't want to answer a question.

Jon: They were OG MiniBFFs.

Annie: Yes.

McRae: We crafts at your house.

Annie: Yes, legit.

Jon: Like 12 years ago.

Annie: Literally, you did crafts at my house. We did like a weekend thing.

Jon: What did you call that house? We argued about it. The house had like a nickname.

Annie: It did.

Jon: Like gaslighter. Not gaslighter.

Annie: Broke Lamp Manor.

Jon: Broken Lamp Manor.

Annie: Yes. That was it, Broken Lamp Manor because the lamp in the front yard lay down every time it rains. It just lay right down. I'm just curious... That is really sweet that

y'all were original MiniBFFs. That's Sweet. That's why you have to use all caps when you talk to me or sometimes there's a Caps lock.

When I went to college, I think I felt afraid that my faith was going to like sift out of my fingers if I didn't like hurry, get into church. Hurry, hurry. Because I thought, "Oh, this is where you lose it, where one professor tells you a thing and you lose your faith."

Jon: Professor goes, "Tell me about dinosaurs. Were they on Noah's Ark?" And you're like, "I'm over Jesus."

Annie: Yeah, yeah. You have to take a world religions class and you're like, What? So tell me any thought... I'm just curious as your friend, but also thinking about soundtracks and thinking about what you're telling yourself going off to school about what faith is?

L.E.: Well, you know, I'm really looking forward to Stanford because I've gone to public school my entire life. So something that at orientation was really shocking to me as being in a room with all of my classmates and then like people talking to us just throwing in faith just casually.

Jon: Oh, wow.

L.E.: So that's something that I'm actually really looking forward to is having faith-oriented discussions in the classroom. Because as someone who's gone to public school, like that is way off the table. As I grow in my faith, I'm looking forward to getting plugged in on campus, like going to campus worship, and maybe doing a small group or something like that that they offer.

Annie: Sanford really cares about that.

Jon: That was really interesting to see L.E. come back at the end of orientation, because you're separated and then you kind of reconnect and have her say that.

L.E.: "This is crazy." I'm like, "It feels so weird."

Jon: Because it was so opposite of their-

Annie: What did they say to you at orientation? Why did they say to parents at orientation?

Jon: The best part is they do a worship night at the end, which is like you want to cry like you're crying. And our mutual friend, Amy Fenton was like, "You're not want

to go. You're gonna be grumpy and tired." Because they do a ton all day. She's like, "Don't miss it." And we went, and it was the best part.

So watching other students lead a worship service of parents who are sending their first kid to college, like, that's just like a motion city. So that was one of the things. And then what's fun is I'm speaking at the parent weekend at Sanford and L.E. is introducing me.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Jon: We'll get to do an onstage moment and talk about soundtracks. That's been really fun already. And Jenny, which is why Jenny needs soundtracks for mom's book, I'm just gonna speak that into the-

Annie: Mark Wright we're talking to you.

Jon: Yeah, let's go.

Annie: Baker we're talking to you?

Jon: She was like, "Jon, L.E.'s going to camp." And I was like, "What do you mean?" She goes, "Well, she's gonna be at camp for three or four weeks and then we go to parents weekend. And then she's got another camp where she's there for four weeks and we go to homecoming."

Annie: Oh, wow.

Jon: "And then another four week she's at Thanksgiving, four weeks after that she's at Christmas." So I think sometimes we put so much pressure on this as if this is it. And there is a lot of like ending beginning transition. But she reframed it for me in a way that was like, "Oh my gosh, she's going to the best camp that's ever been invented and I want her to feel excited."

I cried when her friend left and she was like, "Dad, that's a little awkward. That's my friend." I was like, "Goodbye, Caroline. You're gonna do great. I hope you get tread dwelt." That's how I-

L.E.: This is true. This is true.

Jon: Yes, you did.

Annie: Hi gal.

Jon: I just think about that for the mom who's listening and putting their kid on the kindergarten bus. Jenny is amazing at going, "It's what you want to happen. It's the goal." Cry when it doesn't happen. Cry when that kid doesn't get to go to kindergarten or doesn't get to go do the next thing.

And the other thing is like, cry inside because like cry inside the house versus to the kid. Because if there's one thing that a kid feels terrible about is their mom being in pain and crying. So this kid gets on his like, "I love the bus," and looks out and the mom is weeping, it's so easy for that little kid to go, "I must have done something wrong. Like mom's really upset. I hate to see mom upset." They don't go, "Well, those are sweet tears because they recognize I'm transitioning." So like, be sad all you want. Just be sad after they're on the bus and like, "This is amazing. So proud of you. You got this." Cry on the inside.

Annie: Is that different now that the girls are older? Can you be more emotional? Is there more cry on the outside versus the cry on the inside?

Jon: No, because I think for me, I'm more emotional than Jenny is. But Jenny has also been really good at like, "This is a slingshot moment. This is an amazing moment. So let's make it about that" versus, you know, I think... Again, I think we add a lot of melodrama to things.

Annie: There's a lot of movies about moving out and going to college.

Jon: But it's also like we put a lot of stigmas and self-fulfilling prophecy on this age. So we say, "Man, they hate you. The teenagers, man. The teenagers are so hard. They're so..." Parents will come up to you when you have an 11-year-old, 12 and go, "Oh, almost teenagers." Or daughters. Like we go, "Daughters? Good luck."

No, these two are hilarious and beautiful and funny and insightful. So I feel fortunate I get to be their dad. And their teenage years always have their ups and downs because welcome to humanity, but they're really fun age too.

Annie: Okay. McRae, your sister's moving out and you're an author all on the same year.

McRae: And only child.

Annie: Big year. That's what I was going to say, "Only child and an author."

McRae: And a bird owner.

- Jon:** L.E.'s love bird is staying with us. Never buy your kid a bird.
- Annie:** And you called it a Hate Bird which made me laugh so hard because it hates everyone but you.
- L.E.:** Yeah.
- Jon:** But she's leaving it.
- Annie:** And now you're leaving it. What are you going to do? Is it coming in your room?
- L.E.:** No. Uh-uh.
- Jon:** That's a spicy topic.
- L.E.:** It's a sensitive topic because Buddy needs a roommate. She'll be sad.
- McRae:** She's messy.
- L.E.:** McRae has rejected her. That's so tragic.
- Jon:** She weighs less than two ounces. Like just a tiny little bird.
- L.E.:** Think of like a dog.
- Jon:** If it was a two-ounce dog, oh my gosh, that'd be adorable.
- Annie:** Oh, she says thumbs out. Nope. It's not happening.
- Jon:** You want to edit this part out? What do you say? Give McRae some directions-
- L.E.:** She's saying that the bird is going to you. The bird is dad's responsibility now.
- Jon:** That's a parenting tip. Never buy a kid a tropical bird. They live 20 years. Buy them a hamster. Hamsters are disposable pets.
- Annie:** Really?
- Jon:** Wanna teach your kid how to deal with life and loss in the first Christmas? Easy. Super easy.
- Annie:** And instead you gotta love bird/hate bird.

Jon: She has 16 years left, dude. 16 years.

L.E.: I will graduate college. I'm planning on doing one year master's and that bird is coming to Birmingham.

Jon: The bird will still be around.

L.E.: I can have kids with this bird.

Annie: Literally. That's what I was gonna say too. What are you studying that you already know a four years and a master's?

L.E.: I'm planning to do accounting.

Annie: Okay.

Jon: So she's gonna get her CPA. They have a five-year master program.

L.E.: Five-year program.

Annie: Right.

L.E.: And Buddy gets to come for that fifth year.

Jon: Fifth year, "Here's your bird."

Annie: That means if I'm doing the math real quick, fast math, two of these years you and Jenny have that bird by yourself.

L.E.: Oh, you're right. I didn't think about that.

Jon: Oh, yeah.

Annie: So technically the card you have to play is McRae got two years and oh, you're now empty nesters.

Jon: We're now empty nesters.

Annie: What a good joke.

Jon: That was dad joke. That was amazing. Put me on Dadville. Get me back on me Dadville. Get me back on this cross-promotion I just did there. Get me back on Danville.

Annie: Okay, the one question that came in that I couldn't resist, Jon, is people want to know about their names. They're such unique names. Will you share about that?

Jon: Sure. So L.E. is Laura Elizabeth. So my mother-in-law's name... Did I say that wrong?

L.E.: Laura.

McRae: Laura.

Jon: I grew up in Massachusetts. We say Laura.

L.E.: Laura.

Jon: What do you say?

Annie: I say Laura.

Jon: Laura. Laura. That's a southern thing. How do you say that white vegetable that's not broccoli but it's-

Annie: Cauliflower.

L.E.: He says cauliflower.

Jon: Cauliflower. But I said her name wrong in the audiobook.

L.E.: I was like, "Dad, you said Laura."

Jon: And they want me to say Laura. Anyway, Laura is my mother-in-law. Elizabeth is my mom. So she's L.E, which is funny because kids, especially in elementary school would over-enunciate because it's just L.E. And they go, "Hello L.E." So formal.

And then McRae is named after her great-grandmother? No great-great grandmother.

McRae: It's my great grandfather's grandmother.

Jon: So great-great-great grandmother.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Jon: She was born I think on the same day.

McRae: Yeah.

Jon: Yeah, born in the same day. She's McRae Graham, so that's... But we were at Starbucks one day—This is like three years ago—and they asked the name, I say, "Jon." And she's next to me, she goes, "My name is Grace." I turned and I was like, "What are you doing right now?" She goes, "Dad, it's a nightmare with like McRae."

McRae: It's like McGray. They go with W. Or just Gray.

Jon: So she goes by Grace at Starbucks. Why did you pick that?

L.E.: Sometimes she'll take Ellie actually.

Annie: Really?

L.E.: So I'll be like, "Okay, my name is L.E., so then I have to do Laura because she's went first and stole my name.

Jon: Oh, that's sweet.

Annie: When you say it, did they do E-L-L-I-E?

L.E.: Yeah.

Annie: Yeah.

L.E.: So most of the time for class, I have to explain it every year. Over Zoom school it's worse thing ever. Sometimes I'm like, "It's L.E. I can't even say it's L-E.

Annie: Are you going to keep writing books?

L.E.: We'll see. We're probably gonna do another team book. But I'm about to leave my teammates.

Annie: Right. Right. You have nothing to offer anymore-

L.E.: I know.

Annie: ...once you change that team.

Jon: Once you're 20.

L.E.: I know. McRae-

Jon: Yeah, we're talking about doing another one because the next book that I wrote is about potential. So we're like, "How can we encourage teenagers about living into their potential, especially at that age?"

Annie: I mean, do you really see writing as part of your future?

L.E.: I'm not really sure yet. I don't know.

Jon: You know what I see as part of her future. Intern at Annie Downs Books.

Annie: Oh, you're coming over? You want to? Hey, listen, you don't even have to apply. You can just call and say, "Hey, I'm coming tomorrow."

Jon: That would be so fun. This place is so fun.

Annie: Oh, we would love it. Yes, we would love for you to be here.

McRae: I'm not taking that left turn though.

Jon: I know. Yeah, yeah, parking lot. We've already discussed that as a family. Girls are already said, "Maybe mom should drive home," which is insulting.

Annie: I almost always loop that way because I go out that way because turning left on here is pretty laugh.

Jon: They did say that in the park lot: "Maybe mom should drive home."

McRae: That is true.

Jon: Super insulting.

Annie: Is there anything we didn't say that y'all want to make sure we say?

McRae: Order our book. It's already out. It's already out.

Annie: But they can still order it. Go pick it up.

Jon: Go pick it up.

McRae: Listen to the audiobook. We slaved over that.

Jon: That one is hard, dude. And Crae would be like, "This is such a long chapter." And my part was easy. I just had to read the beginning and the end.

McRae: And you turned on your speaker voice.

Jon: Oh, yeah. They say when I get into speaker voice like, "Oh, okay." And we've done some podcasts and now they know some of the jokes. So I can see-

L.E.: I can finish your stories.

Jon: When I'm saying them, I'll watch them like the over the corner mouth. These teenagers. It's rough. But it's fun because teenagers will tell you the truth whether or not you want it. So L.E. one time said to me, "Dad, you're OCD or no CD." Like I'm either all in or all out. I have no middle. And I was like, "Oh, that's funny." OCD or no CD?

Annie: That's really good. That's really good. And true. It's true. Me too. Okay, the last question I always ask. We're gonna go left to right as I'm sitting. So McRae will be first. Because the show was called that sounds fun, because your future place of internment/employment is called That Sounds Fun Network over there, That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you. What do you do for fun?

McRae: I really enjoyed painting and running and baking.

Annie: What are you baking right now?

McRae: I always love cookies and cake.

Annie: Really?

McRae: Famous cookie cake.

Annie: Wait, you make a famous cookie cake? Why? What makes it famous? What's so great about it?

McRae: All my friends love it. I make it for everyone's birthday.

Annie: Is it chocolate chip? What is it?

McRae: Chocolate chip. It's from the bag actually. The chocolate chip bag recipe.

Annie: Really?

McRae: And it's like a cookie bar. Yeah.

Annie: Oh, wow. And the people love it. You're known for it.

McRae: Crowd pleaser.

Jon: Crowd pleaser. So funny.

Annie: Jon Acuff, tell me what sounds fun to you.

McRae: Legos.

Jon: Yeah. Okay, yeah. That's a specific one. We don't pluralize it if you're really into Lego.

Annie: Right.

L.E.: If you said Lego, you're a real nerd.

Jon: Jenny.... she's like, "Don't you dare say Lego say Legos."

Annie: So everybody knows.

Jon: So I went and spoke in Missouri last week and it was amazing. I came home and on the front porch was this huge Ferrari Lego set. I don't know who gave it to me. Like a client.

Annie: Oh my gosh, it's like a gift but they didn't put words.

Jon: It's my dream job. Because I talk-

L.E.: He's gotten to "This is the peak."

Jon: This is the peak for me. I know some people want an actual Ferrari but I was like, "This is 4,000 pieces."

Annie: That's right.

Jon: Super cool. So yeah, I'm excited about that and excited about college. I'm excited about going down to do that. And then about seeing what happens with the book. It's been fun for the girls to experience that world, to see like the parts that are challenging and the parts that are fun.

L.E. and I at the airport, we went, we paid for parking, we paid for a very average expensive lunch and then our flight got canceled. And she got to experience that we just found the hardest way to have lunch in Nashville. And then we're driving home tomorrow morning. We get to get up at 4 a.m. to catch another flight. And I was like, "This is the thing. This is the thing."

Annie: This is it. This is it.

Jon: This is the thing.

Annie: We did the same thing two weeks ago. We went and had a very expensive happy hour. And then we came home because the flight canceled. And I was supposed to be on the Today Show. So you also have to do this like, "Oh, this isn't getting rescheduled. This opportunity passed. And we had appetizers-

Jon: At the airport.

Annie: At the airport.

Jon: And no one ever goes, "You know I have a good apps at the airport." You ever go to the airport... I know Nashville has some restaurant, but if you go to parking spot.

Annie: Get at the security.

Jon: Yeah, yeah.

Annie: I'm sorry, L.E. I'm sorry.

Jon: But she was a champ. She was a champion next morning. You have to tell last story - the question the student asked me in Chicago.

L.E.: So we did Global Leadership Summit in Chicago.

Annie: Oh, both of you? That's what you ended up going to was Global Leadership Summit?

L.E.: Yes.

Annie: That's amazing.

L.E.: We did the team event. And so we do our Q&A and they open up the floor for questions from the crowd, and there's a 14 year old in the back who raises his hand and he said, "I don't have a question. I have a statement." And we thought he was gonna say something really inspirational about maybe a soundtrack he had heard or something his parents said to him. And he says, "You're creasing your J's."

Jon: You know what that means?

Annie: Yes. Yes. Were they bent or something?

L.E.: He was bending his toes on the stool.

Jon: On the stool.

L.E.: But he didn't know what that meant. So I had to quickly translate.

Annie: Will you translate for everybody listening?

L.E.: It means you're creasing your Jordans. Which, as a sneaker community, that's like cardinal sin to crease the top of your shoes.

Jon: Yeah. So when you bend your toe, you're adding creases to them. And his leader after the event came up and said, as soon as you get on stage, all my kids are like, "Those are great shoes. But as soon as you started creasing them, they couldn't hear a word you said."

L.E.: He showed his hand.

Jon: And that was hilarious to me-

Annie: Unbelievable.

Jon: ...like you don't think about the thing, but like, there's some kid that's like can't hear what you're saying. You're ruining those shoes. That is amateur hour, you old man. That was the very first statement. The crowd lost it and I was like, "I'm gonna tell this story for a thousand years."

Jon: Like, you know how it is. There's story Manor where it just lands in your lap. I'm like, "I know this is funny, but like it's gonna get real funny." Like the girl you tried to help... Was it at Dairy Queen?

Annie: Yes. Yeah.

Jon: And saying like, "Nah." Because you built it up like, "I wish that happened over a salad." You laid it perfectly but you knew in that moment you're like, "I'm going to share this because everyone in the crowd thinks "And Annie washed her feet in the parking lot."

Annie: Right. Right.

Jon: So baptized her that day.

Annie: That's right.

Jon: So if there's any listeners, help me work that out. I mean, we steal time. L.E, come on. We got a river near our house. Oh, it'd be so romantic.

Annie: Did y'all invent sprinkle?

Jon: No. Isn't that mainly Catholic?

Annie: Methodist. I grew up Methodist and we did that. I don't know if it's gonna make your dad feel better or worse. I didn't get baptized. I grew up in the faith and didn't get baptized. till I was 28. I just got-

L.E.: That's nine years away.

Jon: Did your dad baptize you?

Annie: No.

Jon: Oh, even double bummer. Not that I would. I mean, maybe I would. Like CrossPoint will show the talking where they do filming close and you're like [whispering]. And you're like, "That guy is bringing it."

Annie: I got baptized in Loch Ness.

Jon: Really?

Annie: So not dad but a monster.

Jon: Really?

Annie: Yeah.

Jon: Did you know your whole life you're gonna or just like...

Annie: No. When the opportunity came up and it was right before I was moving here. I was moving here like three weeks later, and I thought this is when I want to old life has gotten new life has come in.

Jon: Wow. A lot of people don't know Gandalf is who baptized you.

Annie: Yes. What they don't know-

Jon: It was in Scotland.

Annie: It was. In the Loch Ness Monster. Nessie just watched. She was lovely.

Jon: That's got to be in a book, right?

Annie: No.

Jon: You never put that story in a book?

Annie: No. I'm gonna sound like a liar. I've shown the picture before at Crosspoint. I don't remember. Anyway. Okay, fine. Last question, L.E.. Because the show is called, That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you.

L.E.: I'm really excited to go to college with a few of my close friends who I've never gotten to go to school with before.

Annie: Yeah. Oh, really? They're like at other schools?

L.E.: Yes.

Annie: High schools?

L.E.: Mm-hmm.

Annie: That is so cool.

L.E.: So they were in my small group. I'm rooming with one of them and then other one is Sophomore.

Annie: Oh my gosh. So people from church-

Jon: Six-year small group. Six years.

Annie: ...and y'all get you live together?

L.E.: Mm-hmm.

Annie: Dude, I did the exact same thing and it was awesome. And we're still such good friends. And it was so nice because you had like an anchor. But we also had early said, "Freedom to make new friends. Go make new friends but come home to me."

Jon: That's great. That's great.

L.E.: And like, We'll go make new friends but these are the people that are going to be in my wedding.

Annie: That's right. That's right. That's exactly right. They will be. I bet they will be. But you will have others. There's going to be someone at Christmas you're like, "Annie, I didn't know I was gonna meet Katie. She's gonna be in the wedding too.

McRae: Also crafts for you. You love crafts?

L.E.: Oh, yes. That's definitely something fun.

Annie: Yes. And you're doing paint by numbers now that you created? Will you just please tell everyone and then... I know I'm giving you a lot. Please tell everyone how you created your own paint by numbers. Like how big are they?

L.E.: They are 16 by 20.

Annie: Oh, gosh.

- L.E.:** So we bought vintage postcards that were pretty easy to replicate. We made transparency on an old school projector.
- Annie:** Did you have one at your house?
- L.E.:** My grandma did. So I traced them there and then numbered them and then painted them. And so now we're gonna have-
- Jon:** But you figured out the colors using Instagram.
- L.E.:** Using Instagram, which blew your mind.
- Jon:** They showed me last night and I promise you they showed me for 15 minutes straight and I still didn't understand.
- Annie:** How did you find the name of the color? Or did you just find the-
- L.E.:** I just made it up. I was like, "This green will be one. I'll mix it myself."
- Jon:** To get to the one-
- Annie:** "I'll mix it myself." That's the thing. Jon Acuff-
- Jon:** This is just a bonus tip. For her high school graduation party they did this thing. And it was like-
- L.E.:** It was a downtown Franklin themed paint by number and my guest painted it.
- Jon:** So when you got there there were like 50 jars labeled 1, 2, 3, 4. And she had drawn it up there and so people got the paint it.
- Annie:** Everyone did it.
- Jon:** Yeah, everybody painted it.
- L.E.:** And be like " I painted that part."
- Jon:** It was a perfect party thing.
- Annie:** That's really sweet.
- L.E.:** And then it gives people something to do. It was awesome.

Annie: That's a very good idea. I hope you absolutely love Sanford. And it is okay if you don't some days. That is part of the gig. So, girls, thanks for doing this.

Jon: I like Crae got her water back.

Annie: She did. At some point she reached to the middle of the table.

Jon: We'll see. We always-

McRae: I'm not going to drink it till this is done.

Jon: We always joke like she's our water person. So like there's a lot of times-

McRae: I'm a camel.

Jon: L.E never drinks. Crae has like a Camel back. She's guzzling water constantly.

Annie: You just need it. I respect it.

Jon: Cross-country.

Annie: Jon, thanks for coming back and bringing the girls.

Jon: Thanks for having us.

Annie: This new book, I'm excited for our friends to get it. *Your New Playlist* is good, you guys. Well done friends. Well done.

Jon: Thanks.

McRae: Thank you.

L.E.: Thank you.

[01:09:47] <music>

Outro: Oh, guys, are y'all as impressed with them as I am? I know. Aren't they the best? Listen, they have always been this great. They have actually literally always been this great. So makes Don't you grab a copy of *Your New Playlist* and follow Jon on social, tell him thanks so much for being on the show, thank the girls.

I mean, listen, every teenager you know needs this book. Every one of them. Buy them for classrooms, buy them for youth groups, buy them for Girl Scout troops, buy them for the swim team or the soccer team. Everybody needs this, y'all. It is so good. Again, the book is titled *Your New Playlist*.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that is how you can find me.

And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you. I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me as my parents are coming to town today to celebrate my dad's birthday this weekend. So Happy Birthday Mr. F. Downs. I'm so glad you were born. Without you there would be no me. But you're also the very best dad. So I'm very, very grateful. So happy birthday, dad.

Y'all have a great weekend. We'll be celebrating here in Nashville. And we will see you back here on Monday with my new friend, one of my favorite, absolute favorite new artists, Katie Nicole. We sat by each other at the K-LOVES, instant friends, needed to have her on the show. So I cannot wait for y'all to hear our conversation with Katie Nicole. We'll see you on Monday. Have a great weekend.