

EPISODE 26

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:05.3] Benjamin Felix: This is the Rational Reminder Podcast, a weekly reality check on sensible investing and financial decision making for Canadians. We are hosted by me, Benjamin Felix, and Cameron Passmore. This episode was recorded a few weeks back, we saved it for the holidays so that we could still release an episode without Cameron and I having to come in to the office on December 24th or something.

But this is a special one. Well, they're all special. This was just kind of neat so Cameron was in LA for a conference and he made the connection with Dave Goetsch who is the Co-Executive Producer of the Big Bang Theory and a writer. Cameron made a connection with him at a conference that Goetsch was speaking at a while back, Goetsch, Dave, I don't know what to call him. Dave Goetsch. Dave, he subscribes to our investment philosophy and he's passionate enough about it that he speaks about it at conferences every now and then.

So anyway, Cameron met up with him in LA and they had a really neat conversation.

[0:01:04.5] Cameron Passmore: Yeah, it was fascinating. He invited me to his home and I just texted him out of the blue because at his presentation, he put his cellphone number up at the end of the presentation. "So we get this podcast going," I just texted him. He said, "Sure, when you're in town, stop by." So I did. Fascinating guy and the impact that this investment philosophy had on him is unreal. He is a self-described worrier, he worries about all kinds of things and then he finds himself in LA, which is this crazy city, this crazy industry of ups and downs and you're always worried about your next gig.

Once he had his eyes open up to this philosophy by his adviser there through a book that we'll mention in the podcast, it changed him forever. He now embraces uncertainty, he embraces risk, he is not worried about his portfolio at all and it's given him a great amount of peace in his life.

[0:01:54.4] BF: We'll get to the episode in a second but what was your biggest take away?

[0:01:57.6] CP: He's a changed guy. He is markedly changed. I didn't know him before but you hear him talk about how much he worried growing up and that worry is gone. He relies on his advisers so much, he believes every dollar he pays for advice is worth it so we can focus on what he specializes in, which is creating comedy. Then we talk a bit about the actual show as well for any Big Bang junkies out there. But he's a changed guy.

[0:02:23.1] BF: That's really neat. All right, well let's head over to the episode.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:02:30.8] CP: This is the Rational Reminder Podcast and I'd like to welcome Dave very much for joining us.

[0:02:36.3] DG: Thank you so much for having me.

[0:02:37.0] CP: This is a very exciting, very interesting to meet you on your home turf.

[0:02:41.1] DG: Yes, welcome. You're welcome to record any podcast here anytime you want.

[0:02:46.3] CP: I may take you up on that. I first heard you speak, it has to be two or three years ago at a conference that we were both at and you talked about the impact that your financial adviser had on you and it was a very moving presentation, and I could feel how it did impact you. Can you talk about that event?

[0:03:06.5] DG: Yeah, absolutely. I had a really terrible relationship with money growing up and my dad was a teacher and we always had enough money, it wasn't that there was a scarcity. But I think when you take a step back, it really was my deep discomfort with uncertainty and with the future and what is going to happen.

So from a young age when you know, you'd see 1987, I was in high school and the stock market crashed and then every time, it didn't seem to make any sense, you know? Things would go up and then they'd go down. So I don't think it's hyperbole to say that my financial adviser really changed my life. I was a long time to get there and I didn't even really realize – I didn't know about financial advisers or what they did and when I first started working on 3rd

Rock From the Sun in my 20's as a writer, that was right around the start of the crazy .com boom. I remember everyone in the writer's room buying JDS Uniphase because somebody said that was a great tip.

[0:04:21.5] CP: That's an Ottawa company, I drive by where their office used to be every day going to work.

[0:04:27.5] DG: That was a great stock for a while until it wasn't and if people say that you know, the stock market's too hot, when the taxi cab driver's giving you tips. When a sit com writers were giving you tips, that's the worse time, that's definitely the worst time in the world. I found myself – I describe myself really as the chief worrier in any writer's room.

[0:04:47.3] CP: I recall you talking about that.

[0:04:48.7] DG: Yeah, because I could read a newspaper and find something to get anxious about. Reading the business section and thinking, "Oh gosh. Interest rates are going to go and this is going to happen and all this is going to lead to that," and when I was in college, I took macroeconomics with William Nordhaus who just won Nobel prize. When I heard that he won a Nobel prize, I just thought to myself, "There are so many things I wish he had taught me in introduction to macroeconomics," right?

[0:05:20.5] CP: Amazing.

[0:05:21.3] DG: He never told me that you should – he never mentioned stock picking being a bad idea. He never talked about how it's hard to beat an index fund and he never talked about being a long term investor, he never talked about all these super impactful ideas, which is what my adviser ended up talking to me about. What happened is, throughout my 20's, I would – I was a sitcom writer and so I remember sitting down with an accountant and he said, "Okay, so try to sketch out the next five years of your income. What can you anticipate?"

I said, "Well, I might create a hit show and make a hundred million dollars or I might never work again. So could we try to budget for somewhere in between that?" That level of uncertainty –

[0:06:19.4] CP: On average that's pretty good.

[0:06:20.3] DG: On average, on average. By the way, I did much worse than average. That uncertainty left me feeling pretty crippled and disempowered and I kept waiting for this awful – the crash to happen and then it did happen in '08 and '09.

[0:06:38.9] CP: Just as you are kind of getting ahead in the game.

[0:06:40.7] DG: Yeah, and would start working out – that was the beginning of the Big Bang Theory and my son was born, my first child was born in '09 and I just realized, I just can't live like this and so I read the New York Times article about Gordon Murray.

[0:06:54.3] CP: Phenomenal book.

[0:06:55.0] DG: Yeah, *The Investment Answer*.

[0:06:56.2] CP: Phenomenal story.

[0:06:58.0] DG: He was racing to rate this book as he was battling cancer and I read the book and it was amazing and –

[0:07:05.2] CP: How did you find that book?

[0:07:05.5] DG: It really clicked. So there's the New York Times article that profiled it and I bought it on Amazon book, that was before it even came out and I bought it in Amazon and then it came out just devoured it and then I looked to see who were advisers who worked with the guys that Gordon was talking about? Then there were two in Los Angeles and my agent is at CAA and one of the guys who run CAA is Bryan Lourd and so one of the people who recommended is Blaine Lourd and I was like, "I already give 10% to his brother. There's no way I'm giving 1% to the other brother."

So I went with the other guys and it's interesting because when I sat down with them, I thought that I understood everything. I'd read the book, I learned about the power of markets, I learned that you don't have to be a stock picker, you don't have to predict the future, you can have a plan that you feel good about and I thought that I knew everything that I needed to know but

what's interesting is that at the end of that meeting, "You know what? I'll give you a year and then we'll see how the results are." Which proved I didn't know anything. The book had gotten me into a financial adviser, which was great but there was so much more education that I really needed and have since greatly benefited from.

[0:08:27.9] CP: Did you change your mind on giving it a year?

[0:08:30.7] DG: I've been with him —

[0:08:32.1] CP: Did the adviser kind of correct that framework?

[0:08:34.8] DG: Yes. I think that there's this phrase that I use about being a transformed investor and what does it mean to be a transformed investor and I think a transformed investor is somebody who not just as has a plan for the future, it's not just thinking about, "Are my kids going to be able or may not have enough money for college? Am I going to have enough money for retirement?" It's about having the faith in your approach so that you don't have to worry day to day because there was that chief worrier and if you can stop worrying then you can spend more time with your kids and you can be a better parent and you can get closer to living the life that you want to live.

There's a guy who I worked with for a number of years who is such a funny writer and he's so smart and he went to MIT and he knows all this stuff. He knows that you can't beat the market, but he still thinks he can and he thinks diversification is 10 stocks and it's just so much easier if you think about buying the market and holding it and making some adjustments that you work with your adviser on, the idea of tilting a portfolio or weighting a little bit towards things that academic economists have proven that over the long term seem to have these returns. If you think about this holistically, it really has a profound impact on how you live your life.

[0:10:19.7] CP: Which part has the greatest impact? Is it the planning or relationship with the adviser who understands you and your family and your objectives? Or, is it more on the academic underpinnings of an empirically smart portfolio? Or is it the combination of all of that? Which caused the most worry coming into this?

[0:10:38.9] DG: I feel like there are these core ideas and the kind of investment approach that you take. There are these philosophical underpinnings, which are things that I desperately needed to hear. One of them is just this idea of uncertainty, right? So if you go and talk to a lot of advisers, they'll say, "Well, what's your risk tolerance? Are you 70/30, are you 80/20, are you 60/40?" What I found is, I don't know what I am. Like what does 80/20 mean? What does 70/30 mean? What do these things mean?

If you think more like, "How would you feel if you lost 50% of your portfolio?" Even that, it's like, terrible, you know? How would you feel if you gained 50%? Great. But take a step back from that and think about what is uncertainty? Think about how risk and reward are directly related. The reason that there's a positive return over the long haul in a stock market and not relative to a savings account is because of that risk and if it wasn't there then people will arbitrage and exploit it. You have to understand that there's a risk, but the risk is not whether or not Apple's going to go up and it's not predicting the future. That was the thing I really struggled with, I just didn't understand why you'd buy these stocks knowing what was going to go up and what was going to go down. But when you take that off the table and say, "I'm buying 4,000 stocks around the world and I'm betting that humans will be increasing efficiencies and build things and progress. If you're betting on –

[0:12:27.8] CP: Capitalism.

[0:12:28.7] DG: Capitalism and humanity and you're taking a long term approach and my uncertainty changes.

[0:12:36.3] CP: Tell me how you reacted going through this past month of October, which was a pretty rough month? Did it weigh on you, did you think about it, did you peak up the portfolio?

[0:12:48.1] DG: It's so funny because I think about this compared to 08/09. So '08 and '09 I was in cash, I had nothing. It was so stressful for me, this last month, I'm obviously, my retirement and everything is all in stocks and I didn't worry about it at all. It's a bummer when it goes down and that money was there and it's not there.

But, you know, I was thinking about it how people don't think in the same — I think people think differently about their portfolio because they can look at it and send number, compared to like

their house. You know, your house goes up and it goes down but it's still your house, you still live in it and it hasn't changed.

[0:13:23.9] CP: But you don't get a statement showing the value of your house.

[0:13:26.7] DG: Yeah, you can look at Zillow and people have been going crazy looking at Zillow and thinking what's changed and hasn't changed. But I think that we still own those stocks just because the value hasn't changed and gone down and, you know, I remember hearing somebody say he's been in the business for 30, 40 years or something saying, "I hope I live long enough that there is one of every 10 year corrections. Because that means I will have lived longer." That's just like a different outlook on life and it's been a much healthier way to live.

[0:14:03.6] CP: Tell me about your relationship with your adviser? How does it work? How often do you meet?

[0:14:08.9] DG: We are pretty email-y and he's available to me whenever but I find I like texting and emailing him and I found over time that I can be even more just honest with him and say, "Look, here's something I need help with and I'm trying to – I have to get this kind of insurance for something and, you know, I have a deadline and I can't handle it. So what's feasible?" and that kind of trust and rapport is really so invaluable and it's so different from – I remember having lunch years ago with this friend of mine from high school and she was working at some big bank and she was an analyst and she had her industry and this is even before I knew any of this stuff but it just didn't make any sense,. "Wait, you study airlines and you predict which airlines you're going to go up and down and how do you have all of the information?" "Well we have really smart people and we have really," – all the stuff and it just didn't add up to me.

[0:15:14.9] CP: It' doesn't

[0:15:15.2] DG: Because it doesn't.

[0:15:16.6] CP: You think about it, it doesn't, there's lots of smart people.

[0:15:20.0] DG: Yeah, there are tons of smart people and it's just – it's a bet in terms of trying to time the market. What's nice about my adviser is that there are none of those conversations.

Somebody described it as never having to apologize because is what has happened in those last month in October, was that something we didn't think would happen? No, is it something we're surprised by? No. Has it changed our approach? No. Does it stink? Yeah.

But do we need, if this money's for retirement? No. If you need that money then it's not supposed to be there then you're working with your adviser because you say hey, I might buy a house in the next five years and I need access to this money so it's probably not going to be money that you want to put in the market like that.

[0:16:11.1] CP: Fees are a big topic and we've talked about fees on this podcast a fair amount. How do you think about the fees that you pay your adviser?

[0:16:18.2] DG: Yeah, it's an interesting question and I mean, I have found every year, my adviser has made some suggestion that has more than earned back his 1% fee and so when Big Bang was happening and it was doing really well and you know, I had some money and I was like, "Look, this is money I want to invest for the long term, these are good years and I want to think about retiring. This is money that I want to earmark for retirement, what can I do?" and he said, "Have you thought about having your own defined benefits plan?"

I was like, I have no idea what that means, :I don't know what that is." He explained it to me and I said, "Seriously, I can do that? That's amazing. Let's do it." That plan which I don't think that other writers have a defined benefits plan because they don't have advisers. Although, there's one –

[0:17:11.7] CP: You're a bit of an apostle though, aren't you?

[0:17:13.9] DG: Well, I'm definitely trying to get them all there and I would like them all to have this approach. For me, I want my friends to feel how I feel. It's funny because when you talk about advisers like it's not – I like my adviser, he's a really good guy but it's not like I'm trying to get more business for my adviser. I just want my friends to feel like me.

So I want an adviser to help them get what they need and it's just kind of like they don't know what they need.

[0:17:47.3] CP: They don't know what they don't know.

[0:17:48.8] DG: They don't know what they don't know and it's just there's so much stuff wrapped up in it. There's so much stuff wrapped up in it, it's so intense and then of course when a married couple, they each have their own baggage that they're coming at so how do you make these decisions, how do you talk about it, how do you meet somebody and then say, "Do I trust that person that scary?"

There are enough stories, nobody knows, I have a bunch of smart friends who are successful and make a lot of money and very few of them know what a fee-only fiduciary investment adviser is. That's like one of the first things you need to know. If you know that, you're better off than what stock is a good tip and what looks good.

[0:18:36.7] CP: It's safe to say the approach as you're following is not the norm in Hollywood?

[0:18:41.5] DG: there are people that are doing it. It's a great question because I don't know. Because people don't talk about this stuff.

[0:18:48.2] CP: They don't talk like they did back in the 90's.

[0:18:50.2] DG: There's less talk about what's a hot stock, that's certainly true. There is more of an appreciation for index funds, people get what that is and I think you can start in a place by saying, index funds are great, not going to knock them but what if you could do better than an index fund? What if an index fund – what if you – Gene Fama once called the next one stupid, not because they're a bad idea but because the exactly follow what that index is and they have to, whatever that's called.

[0:19:23.8] CP: Replicate.

[0:19:24.5] DG: They have to replicate it exactly on this day.

[0:19:27.2] CP: Tracking her.

[0:19:28.4] DG: Avoid tracing her and what if you didn't have to do that and what if you took a little bit of the investment research and built a portfolio that takes all the good things about index funds? But is a little on the margins, makes some differences and can you do better than that and does that add up and for me, that really has. It does add up and it makes sense to me.

[0:19:52.1] CP: Have you pretty much stuck with long only type investment funds, index funds? Do you have like private equity, hedge funds.

[0:19:59.0] DG: Yeah, no. I don't have anything of that stuff. I went to Yale and a bunch of these guys that I was never impressed with went into hedge funds and –

[0:20:06.8] CP: But Yale is the hot bed of successful investing and private equity and hedge funds, right?

[0:20:11.5] DG: It's true. Ben Swanson and all those guys. That's why Nordhaus maybe didn't teach me that stuff. I feel like there's no need, it might be great for somebody else but I don't want to have to worry about that and I also – I just don't want to be sold genius. I just know “this guys, you got to meet this guy. This guy or this woman has the perfect model and the best way to do it and you know, they figured out something no one else has figured out and so maybe that's great but if that person has only been doing it for two or three years and doesn't have, not necessarily like – not the past returns into future results but more like, what's your workflow, does it make sense, did you get lucky, you know?”

Those are outside my risk tolerance; they might be fine for other people but –

[0:21:06.8] CP: I'm guessing Hollywood must be just crawling with financial advisers and every bank must be here and –

[0:21:13.9] DG: Well, I remember a long time ago, I was like boy, I need to get some life insurance and I asked my friend and he was like, “Talk to my guy, he's great.” He had a box at the staples center and he took me to the Lakers game and that's kind of like the first red flag we were like, “How do you have enough money to – why are you spending all this money on a – if you're an advisor or you work in insurance, why are you spending those money on Lakers box

but you know, it was one of those investment vehicles for insurance that when you – I got very close to doing it, maybe some of them are good.

When you Google this guy's name, a bunch of these people saying, "There are all these crazy hidden fees and he promises these things that over the long term you're not going to get and that stuff's terrifying, you know? Because you think that we'll – I don't want to get duped. I don't feel like I have the – on the one hand, I feel like I don't have the expertise to parse through all these stuff, but by having a fee only interest fiduciary, you know that that person has to be on your side legally. They just – they have to. They can't sell you something that's going to get them a kick back and a higher fee and if they're not going to benefit from more turn over then that sounds great to me.

[0:22:36.0] CP: Your perspectives are fascinating and the fact that you discovered this whole world and the impact it's had from that book, it's impressive. Because so few people would do that kind of homework and then seek out an adviser and I can feel how it's had an impact on you.

[0:22:50.8] DG: Yeah, it really has and I think that when an investor signs up with a financial adviser, you might think like, "Oh I am done now," right? And you know you can be if you want to be. You don't have to talk to that person, you put the money away to try to max out your 401(k)'s and do all of that stuff and you can do that but to me there is this interesting way to think about these ideas in finance and how they relate to your everyday life and this idea of risk and return being related and I think that I have spent so much my life trying to reduce uncertainty, or mitigate uncertainty. I remember walking to school in third or 4th grade to the bus stop and trying to think of all the bad things that could happen at school because if I could think of them, then they wouldn't happen. That was like the OCD version of me. But then I'd go to Hollywood, which is the most uncertain thing.

[0:24:00.9] CP: Most uncertain, it is wild.

[0:24:01.7] DG: You know, I mis-priced the risk of that. it was a total error on my part because there is one guy I knew who had been a teacher in my high school and he had quickly gotten a job on Cheers and have quickly become the executive producer of Cheers and I thought to myself, "Well if that guy can do it maybe I could do it."

[0:24:19.6] CP: That was your mental model for making that decision.

[0:24:22.1] DG: That was my model, it was totally wrong. It was really, really stupid. So I did mis-priced that risk and I got lucky. There is no other way to say that things could have turned up very differently. But what it meant is that when I did get here and I got lucky enough to get on 3rd Rock From the Sun and I worked there for five years and I didn't know how to prepare for life after that show. I didn't know that thing of when you go to the accountant and you say, "I might make nothing and I may make not make a lot," the accountant doesn't know how to help you. They're kind of at a loss.

Yeah that was really hard for me and my attitude now is trying to embrace uncertainty. That is my mantra. How do you realize that you can either be afraid of the future or you could be open to the possibility of it and that is hard to do and it's hard when things go down and it was hard for anybody in '08-'09. But you saw what happens if you stick by it and it's no guarantee. We don't know what is going to happen, but I have yet to hear a better plan. Nobody has a better other idea.

So I used to think that I needed to save as much money for my kids to try and insulate them and protect them. But I know think I need to make sure that my kids know these ideas and that they can use this to take care of themselves and plan ahead and the one thing I am looking for, which maybe you guys can create, is I want a target date fund for retirement for newborns. So imagine my friend just had a baby born in 2018. Target date fund for 2088 for when you're 70, right? Imagine if you put in a thousand bucks a year.

[0:26:23.7] CP: Just do the present value of what you need to do to get there.

[0:26:26.2] DG: That is amazing, right? And then think about that compounding that you start because everything about life is we got to save for college, we got to do that. That's fine. But what if you had a fund that was just for your kids retirement but it was for 70 years away and the thing that's fun for me about that is I show my son and I say, "Hey let us put a \$100 of that in your retirement, and you got \$20 bucks from your grandparents, what if we put that in your retirement?"

Now let's do the math, you guess, guess what that \$20 is going to be worth in 65 years if you have a rate of return, the market return is about 10%. So let's be conservative and say what's an 8% return on \$20 for 65 years? And what is hilarious is nobody can guess it. The amount is always way more than you think, yeah.

[0:27:17.3] CP: Can we talk about your career?

[0:27:19.1] DG: Yeah please.

[0:27:20.0] CP: I mean, it's so fascinating and our audience is so lucky to have this chance to listen to you. So, how did you get that — was your first break at 3rd Rock from the Sun?

[0:27:30.3] DG: It was my biggest break at the time but I –

[0:27:35.3] CP: But you took a plane here? You just show up? Like how does it work?

[0:27:38.9] DG: I drove out to Los Angeles in my grandmother's 1980 Subaru in the winter of 1994 and I arrived in Los Angeles about three days before the giant Northridge earthquake, talk about uncertainty, and I have never experienced an earthquake and luckily I was in Long Beach so it was pretty far from it. But I still heard it and felt it and my friend who I was staying with was writing for the LA Times and she ran out of the bedroom because I was sleeping in the futon in the living room and said, "I got to go to work," and she left.

And then she called me two hours later and she said, "I'm in a helicopter flying over the San Fernando Valley as the sun is rising and I am watching the fires," and I thought to myself, "Where have I moved to? This is so far from any reference that I have ever experienced in Connecticut," and so I just ended up calling everybody, every friend of a friend and seeing if there was some way to get a job and what happened in my case is my ex-girlfriend's ex-boyfriend's brother was in an acapella singing group with a guy who's brother was writing at MTV.

So it was that random and that far removed and he was nice enough to set me up with a meeting at MTV and the first job I got hired on was called Sand Blast, which was like the American Gladiators of MTV and I was a game developer, which means you have to come up

with crazy games every week and I was hired one week at a time and then I worked some more at MTV and then I had met my writing partner and he and I got a job on a sitcom for the USA Network and then the show runners were fired and the new guys who came in liked us and then they gave our script to CAA and then we were lucky enough to get a meeting at the 3rd Rock from the Sun for staffing season, which is when in May they announced the new shows that are going to be in the network in the Fall and so within a couple of weeks, they have to hire all of the staffs for those shows. It is called staffing season, it's when most of the jobs happen.

So I got a call from my agent and he said, "Have you ever seen the show, 3rd Rock from the Sun? It has been on since January," and I said, "I am watching it right now with my grandmother in Connecticut," and he said, "Well, can you be in Los Angeles at 1 o'clock tomorrow afternoon to have a meeting with Bonnie and Terry the creators because they going to make a decision at the end of the day and they liked your script?"

[0:30:04.6] CP: This is to be a writer?

[0:30:05.5] DG: Yeah to be a staff writer. This would be our first network big break and so I said yes and I somehow got — my dad drove me to JFK and I got on the cheapest flight that I could get to and my writing partner to picked me up and we drove from the airport straight to the meeting and we had this amazing meeting and Bonnie and Terry Turner had — are a married couple who'd work on Saturday Night Live for years and have written Wayne's World and The Brady Bunch movie and they are just so amazingly talented and after creating 3rd Rock from the Sun, they created The 70's Show and they're just really wonderful, wonderful people.

So my writing partner and I had this great meeting with them and the way you get hired is by writing a — back then it was by writing a spec script. So you would write a sample of some other show and I think we'd written a Friends episode and what we've realized later was that the tone of that Friends episode was a probably a little goofier than normal. But it was exactly the tone of the 3rd Rock from the Sun, even though we had never seen 3rd Rock from the Sun. So it was just so lucky that —

[0:31:11.6] CP: Did the Friends episode get produced?

[0:31:13.1] DG: No the Friends episode never got produced, but it totally served its role in getting us hired on that show and so then we were staff writers in that first year and then we rose up through the ranks and then with Christine Zander, we were the show runners in the last year, which was a terrific experience and the whole — those five years were just really, couldn't ask for a better introduction to the sitcom life. The actors were unbelievable and the writers are great.

[0:31:41.1] CP: It must be so fulfilling to know all those families at home watching this show are laughing.

[0:31:45.9] DG: Yeah, it's a crazy idea. I remember thinking, "What would it be like to write a joke that a million people might laugh at?" and I was in China earlier this year and speaking to somebody and I knew that I worked on The Big Bang Theory and then they quoted this joke and laughed about this joke and it's just when you have these moments you realize like, "Wow, you can work on something that impacts a lot of people."

It goes back to that guy who had gotten his job on Cheers when he described what it was to be a sitcom writer. He said, "They sit in a room full of people who are funnier than all of your friends, they bring you lunch, you put on a play every week and you grandparents get to watch it on television," and that just sounded great.

[0:32:35.6] CP: So from there you transition to Big Bang and everyone knows it's a monster hit.

[0:32:40.1] DG: So I had when 3rd Rock from the Sun ended, I wrote a bunch of pilots and tried to make my own hit show and failed and really missed being on staff and so when the Big Bang pilot, I read about it and I saw the pilot and I remember telling my agent, "You've got to get me a meeting."

[0:32:58.5] CP: You knew it. You had a hunch it was going to be hot.

[0:33:01.5] DG: I felt like when I met with Bill Prady, I met with Bill first and then will Bill and Chuck and I remember telling Bill, "This is the show I have been trying to write for years," because this reminded me of my friends and there was something so special about the world

that Chuck and Bill had created and that these actors just totally owned those characters. I was so excited to just to be in that world.

[0:33:28.0] CP: It's just solid funny. It's just funny, it's so funny all the time.

[0:33:33.0] DG: We have heard from lots of people, just some of the sweetest things about how they'd watch an episode again and again or they'll watch it with families and yeah, it's incredibly rewarding and so I started working in season one and so on the second episode and it's been an incredible learning experience and to see the way we write is we sit around the table all the writers and we write the story together.

So you get to watch people with jokes and you get to see the connections made and then the most rewarding thing is that one person says one thing and then that pingpongs off somebody else and somebody else and somebody else and then suddenly you've got this hilarious joke that couldn't have existed in that form unless all of those people had been in that room together.

[0:34:23.1] CP: So you write the entire episode all together in one room and it's one a week?

[0:34:28.4] DG: So our schedule is that we, the writers get together in the middle of June and we spend eight weeks before the actors show up and we try to write as many episodes as we can. We can do about five or six and the process of writing an episode is to just make a list of as many different ideas for stories as possible and find one, for all the different titles that you see on the screen the writers are pretty much divided between all the writers who pitch who makes suggestions and then the person who's the show runner.

So our show runner right now is Steve Holland and so we are always pitching to him and then he'll run it by Chuck and Chuck Lorre and then also Steve Molaro is doing Young Sheldon and he used to be the show runner and so they have this great rapport where Steve will have an idea really likes kind of run it by Molaro and then talk to Chuck and then come back to us and then once there's an idea that they all like, then we start to execute it.

So we say, "Okay what are the scenes that will be in that story, and then who are the other characters that are not being used in that story and what are some stories that work with that?" And maybe we'll have two stories or something. So we'll have three stories and then how we

weave that together and then we just write scene by scene by scene. So we'll start with that first cold open and then work all the way through and the freedom that goes with that is that we have the chance to follow the story.

Because sometimes on a regular show, you have an outline and it gets approved by the studio and the network and send a writer off for a week to go do it and when that writer or writing team maybe encounters a story problem or comes up with an idea that's maybe better you can call the show runner and say, "Hey what about this or what about that?" But the reality is you're probably going to execute a pretty close version of what that outline is because so many people approved it.

With Big Bang Theory, you have the chance to set off on this one path that everyone's agreed on but if there seems like there is a more fertile area that way to the left or the right that we can do that and I remember early on I think it was season one or season two we'd written an episode and Chuck was sitting down. Chuck was doing Two and a Half Men and other stuff. So he would be coming in and out and he sat down to go through the script with us and it was probably the second scene that he wanted to change something and one of us said, "Well, if you change that plot point that is going to change the end of the script and he said, "You don't know what the end of the script is," and we all looked around, "Yeah we do, we wrote it. It is in front of you," and his point was that just because it's there doesn't mean it has to stay there and so he is so focused on that first scene working on that second scene working at being incremental and I think the effect of it is what you are describing where there are these hard jokes and people can drop in on a Big Bang episode and watch a scene and enjoy it and they don't necessarily need to know what was before or what was after. But they know these characters and they know what is going on that has been a great lesson.

[0:37:43.0] CP: I could talk Big Bang for hours, it is absolutely fascinating. A couple of other questions that I wanted to ask you though, you've had the massive success with your career and with this show, how do you define success in your own life?

[0:37:57.6] DG: That is a great question. I have come to appreciate the power of coming together to create stuff. The life of a novelist is a nightmare for me. This idea that you have to sit in a room by yourself with your ideas and just type of these 400 page manuscript, I could never

do it. It's terrible. After all these years of sitting in a writer's room, I love and crave that collaboration and it's been rewarding to do that in teaching and in other projects.

So I feel like success for me is being able to collaborate with a person or a group and try to come up with something that none of us would be able to create by ourselves and that's a successful collaboration for me and then the — personally for me success is trying to be a role model for my kids and I think that has evolved where it's not about what I can't teach my kids to be better people. I think I just have to work on myself in trying to be the best version of myself and there is lots of work. There is always a lot of work to do there.

[0:39:11.8] CP: How do you define happiness?

[0:39:13.6] DG: Happiness is for me, I think happiness is a process and I think I crave that collaboration because in that collaboration is the happiness. If it's in a relationship or friendship or a conversation and happiness for me is the unexpected spark and maybe the joy that you don't see. I guess it is like just to bring it back to this investment thing, I think it's that uncertainty. It is the risk and the reward that comes by taking that risk.

[0:39:51.8] CP: I have a question for you that I was asked to ask you, and I have no idea where this goes but I was asked about your reaction to getting check one of 104 from your first deal on Big Bang Theory.

[0:40:05.0] DG: Oh yes, so that is —

[0:40:07.3] CP: Apparently it's a great story.

[0:40:08.7] DG: So when we finish the 3rd Rock from the Sun, my writing partner and I got an overall deal and it was for two years and so this is amazing, right? We didn't have to work on a show, we just had to work on our pilots and our projects and this was the dream everyone talked about and they —

[0:40:25.9] CP: Uncertainties going down.

[0:40:27.4] DG: Uncertainty is totally going down and so I got my first check and I looked at it and I was so excited and it was a great sum of money and it just seemed amazing and it was going to come every week and then I looked and it said, “check one of a 1 of 104,” and my heart sank because I realized this is going to end and there are only a 103 left of this and it was the stupidest thing in the world. I could have said, “Look, just enjoy. You got two years, you don’t know what’s going to happen.”

There could have been a different framework to that time, which would have changed my life and improved my quality of life and probably given me more time to work on a pilot that might have been more successful. But the anxiety grew and grew as it became check two of a 104, check 37 of a 104, check 89 of a 104 and it got so that I stopped cashing them and I was just holding onto them because I didn’t have a plan. I didn’t have a financial adviser. I didn’t have somebody who said, “Okay we don’t know who is happening but let’s put this money in one bucket and let us put this money in another bucket and let’s do this and let’s realize that if this thing happens and what are your expenses and what do you do,” and I just didn’t have any of that.

So all I could do is kind of white knuckle it and hold onto it because I was so fearful that that money would go away, and I remember going to couples therapy with this one therapist once and describing this to her and she said, “Oh you’re just like my son. If you think like that you are going to lose all your money,” I just was like, “You’re a terrible couple’s therapist. You need to — I never want to talk with you again because you just made me even more anxious,” and that was terrifying. So the irony is that I was right and that all the money did go away and that there was this period between getting jobs where I spent all that money and part of that was not having a plan.

So you could say that looking back at it, the fear was justified but the fear was also because I didn’t have a plan and I think the thing that if I could go back and talk to my earlier self I would say, “Don’t feel badly that you don’t have a plan. Someone has to tell you what that plan is. You don’t have to come up with that yourself. Just because you’ve been good at one thing doesn’t mean you’re going to be good at this other thing and there are people to help and there are people who won’t help. There are people who might not have your best interest in mind, but you can find the ones that do and they can help.”

[0:43:21.0] CP: I think that is a great note to end on. Dave, this has been an unbelievable conversation. Thank you, you have been very gracious to welcome me into your home and to share these thoughts with our audience.

[0:43:31.3] DG: Thank you and also to anyone who's ever been a fan of the Big Bang Theory, on behalf of all the writers, thank you so much. It's been such an incredible pleasure to be a part of something that people have enjoyed and I just want everyone to know that everyone involved with that show is just enormously grateful.

[0:43:47.9] CP: Well, I can tell you my kids and I love the show. So, thanks.

[0:43:51.1] DG: Thank you.

[END]

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