

Gary Gulman
**THE GREAT
DEPRESH**

ABOUT



INTERVIEW

Gary Gulman on the Long Road to ‘The Great Depresh’ and His Tips for Struggling Writers

BY KATLA MCGLYNN

It’s not always easy to tell when a person who makes jokes for a living is clinically depressed.

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Before comedian Gary Gulman could get to *The Great Depresh*, his first HBO special and first new hour of comedy in four years, he had to come back from the abyss of mental illness that threatened his career. In January of 2017, when he taped a jovial five-minute set for late night,

you would never know that just four months later he would be hospitalized for severe depression.

“I went on the road the next day and, well, I was falling apart,” Gulman remembers. “It was all just different levels of falling apart at that point.”

The misconception that artists have to suffer for their art is a commonly held one, even among comedians. Some would see talking about their feelings to strangers onstage nightly as a form of therapy. For Gulman, who’s been taking antidepressants for close to thirty years (“on and... on,” as he jokes in the special) the adrenaline rush of performing did help him muddle through his sets—until it became abundantly clear that he had a more serious problem.

“It wasn’t just that my clothes were wrinkled or I hadn’t shaved. I was visibly shaking and I couldn’t remember things,” Gary recalls. “I had to acknowledge that I was sick, and I knew I had to try and write jokes and make light of it too.”

Since seeking more intensive treatment during the summer of 2017, Gulman realized how dramatically his health was impacting his writing (“Since the hospitalization and the recovery that took place that summer, I’ve written about two-and-a-half hours of material, including the 62 minutes that became *The Great Depresh*,” he says.) The idea to do a hybrid stand-up special and documentary, including revealing conversations with his therapist, wife and mother—came from his manager.

“Then I had a meeting with the director Mike Bonfiglio and he said, ‘Do you mind if I run this idea by my friend Judd?’ And I knew he meant [Executive Producer] Judd Apatow, because there are so few Judds you would run ideas by,” Gulman jokes.

Coinciding with this new special (and his “depresh” being in “remish” as he says), Gulman is paying it forward one tweet at a time with his [daily #GulmanTips](#)—a series of tips for struggling comedians and writers. Unsurprisingly, a lot of the tips focus on getting mentally healthy before putting pressure on yourself as an artist (Tip #140: “Writing while severely depressed/anxious is running in deep sand in ski boots. Writing healthy this past year feels like running on the moon,” e.g.) and many double as self-help tips that anyone can use. Since starting the thread on January 1, he’s up to over 260 tips and admits the most popular ones often have nothing to do with stand-up.

“I thought I was just going to share tips about the comedy writing process, but it became clear that the ones that resonated the most with people were about the fears, doubts and insecurities surrounding stand-up that apply to everyone. Like, ‘As long as you’re alive,’ you’re young enough.’ Everyone worries about how old they are, but if you’re alive, it’s not too late.”

Gulman is also somewhat of an inspirational quote connoisseur, many of which work their way into his tips. The insights come from the likes of Kurt Vonnegut (“We have to continually be jumping off cliffs and developing our wings on the way down,”) to Voltaire (“Perfect is the enemy of good,” to some of his own.

“A helpful ‘mantra’ I’ve found to overcome a lot of the anxiety involved with the unknowns of this business is ‘I’ll figure it out,,” Gary writes in tip #167. “Faith, even if it wavers constantly, that you will be able to make it through obstacles and setbacks is priceless.”

Watch a clip from *The Great Depresh* [here](#).

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