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Nathan Windel ([00:03](#)):

Well, it was just when we had figured it out. I was actually about to reveal one of the secrets of the universe, but I forgot it now.

Donnie Lee ([00:11](#)):

[inaudible 00:00:11] sad.

Nathan Windel ([00:16](#)):

Yeah. You know, this is the holiday season.

Donnie Lee ([00:19](#)):

It is indeed.

Nathan Windel ([00:22](#)):

Totally depends on when you're listening to this, I guess, but for us, it's the holiday season, and it's a kind of a joyful time. It's a time in our society when we focus a lot on joy and happiness.

Donnie Lee ([00:36](#)):

Yeah. 'Tis the reason for the season.

Nathan Windel ([00:38](#)):

Yeah. That's good stuff. I remember when I was in school, sometimes the joy was in getting out of there for a couple weeks.

Donnie Lee ([00:48](#)):

Yeah, [inaudible 00:00:48] can come in different forms, [inaudible 00:00:50] it.

Nathan Windel ([00:52](#)):

Break. Right. It was going to be a break, and it was a big break.

Donnie Lee ([00:55](#)):

That was a happy time. Yeah, a couple weeks maybe. And if you tagged on a snow day or two, man, you could be looking at a potential two-and-a-half, three-week event, you know?

Nathan Windel ([01:04](#)):

The excitement of a new year of holidays, of gifts, just... That's what the season's all about. But you know, Donnie, I was happy to get on the break. But, I missed my classroom, too. As a teacher, I missed my students. The break was nice, but man, you see people every day, and you want to see them again. You want to see them and learn about them, and know what their experience had been since you saw them last. And that becomes part of what class is, and also as a student, I was sometimes eager to get back to school and sometimes not. And part of that depended on the classroom. Some of my classrooms were more joyful places to be all the time. And those were places I wanted to get back to.

Donnie Lee ([01:57](#)):

Well, yeah, and as a student, I was never a teacher in the classroom, but as a student, I can relate to that in the sense that I was pretty rural, remote, so I didn't necessarily see anybody but family through the time of Christmas and the holidays and all that, and get two weeks off. Well, you have this other family as a kid, who includes your teacher and all your friends and all your classmates and all that stuff back at school. So, you had all this information baggage, there wasn't any internet back then. Maybe we had a phone, or whatever, but you didn't call anybody up. That was pretty rare. So you had all this two, three weeks of knowledge or experiences that you had to unload on everybody when you got back. And I remember that, coming back on the 2nd of January, or whatever it might be, and walking into like the lunchroom or the classroom or something like that, and the place was exploding, just like the first day of school.

Nathan Windel ([03:13](#)):

Absolutely. So if you think back to a classroom, a teacher, that brought joy to the classroom and that brought joy to your life, who comes to mind?

Donnie Lee ([03:25](#)):

I'd probably have to say, and I've probably mentioned this person before on the podcast. Maybe I won't use names, but my high school math teacher was just like super at the time. She was young at the time. I'm nearly 50 now, so whenever I think of somebody in their 20s, I'm like, oh my god. We thought that she was clearly older than us, but now I'm like, oh my gosh, they were just kids. But she was always really super hyper, and hyped for everything, and up for it. One of my overall best teachers ever in school, in college, whatever. She was always, always up for it and made things fun. She would have to be my pick.

Nathan Windel ([04:27](#)):

Well, this is awesome. There are three things that I'm going to offer are ways that we can make the classroom more joyful. And these are not things I invented. These are things that I stole from other people and used them in my classroom, and I hope they brought a little bit of joy to that room.

Nathan Windel ([04:42](#)):

The first one is to play. And you mentioned that. You said kind of like your experience, you were into sports. Those are some of the playing aspects of school that really get us, they get us excited, and they should, because play is fun and it makes us happy, but it's not something that can just happen outside of the classroom in the hallways and on the playground, but it can happen in the classroom and we can be a part of the play. So playing. Playing games, and I'll tell you, I think times to make those games content oriented and all about, yeah, it's good stuff, but just play. Just play and have fun so that your students and you know that that is a big part of why you're there. It's for a good time. Now you're going to have some learning, but we're going to have fun.

Donnie Lee ([05:35](#)):

Yeah. I always love that kind of stuff where the learning was turned into a game. One of my favorite games, and this ties into the holidays, as we're talking about it. It relates to the holidays, with my family, is that we would get together and play games through the holiday. And I remember distinctly the year

that we got Trivial Pursuit. Everybody was learning something, and we all learned a lot of things about each other, because there would be these obscure questions that the least likely person that you would expect would answer them, would answer them. Be like, I didn't know you had that knowledge.

Donnie Lee ([06:26](#)):

Of course, it's way before the internet, nobody could cheat with their phones. I'm not too sure how the social dynamic works with Trivial Pursuit anymore. It's too easy to cheat. But back then, I remember that. So it was like turning learning into something fun. And I remember bringing that back to school and being like, man, we need to have a Trivial Pursuit day. I don't even remember what classes, but it was probably every class I was hyped for it. I was up for that.

Nathan Windel ([06:57](#)):

So truly not scripted, but Donnie, the next thing I was going to say that we need to do to bring joy to the classroom is get to know each other, which is exactly what you're talking about, this opportunity to play, and then through that play, we have these opportunities to share and get to know each other. And when we know each other better, we have better experiences with other, we have more in common, we share more, and that brings happiness and joy to our lives. So doing things together, playing together, and learning about each other are really key to that experience. You know, I'll say I forgot to do these things all the time. We forget, and currently forget to do these things all the time. We lose sight of, we need to have some fun and play and get to know each other, and we lose sight of it because there's so much stuff we have to get done. We all feel that tension between what we need to accomplish and what we know works for making the experience worth it. We need to make it worth it.

Nathan Windel ([07:59](#)):

I got one more thing that I think is going to make a classroom joyful, not just around the holidays, but all the time.

Donnie Lee ([08:07](#)):

We've covered a lot of ground. So a third, that's icing on the cake.

Nathan Windel ([08:11](#)):

This one is something each person needs to do, but it's going to begin with the teacher in the room, and that is to practice extreme compassion.

Donnie Lee ([08:23](#)):

Mm. Empathy.

Nathan Windel ([08:27](#)):

Empathy, yeah. Extreme compassion for others, and make that a value in your classroom. That can look a lot of different ways. I don't know that I can describe even what extreme compassion looks like.

Donnie Lee ([08:44](#)):

I can remember learning lessons in it, though. I really can. Those are those lessons that you learn. A lot of times I learned those from my mother. She was a really always compassionate and empathetic person

in general, more than I probably even am giving her credit for. But she probably taught me more hard lessons in empathy by squaring me off whenever I would say something or do something that was just heinous, and be like you need to look at this from, what she would always say is, is walk a mile in their shoes, or put the shoe on the other foot. My modern terminology for that is flip the record and play the deep cuts. Get to know, like we said, get to know people. And I think that opens the door for that emotional gateway for you to get in and have empathy for people. At least that's my theory on it.

Nathan Windel ([09:52](#)):

Donnie, I think listening to the deep cuts, that's the best advice we could have here.

Donnie Lee ([10:01](#)):

Well, it's how I listen to music.

Nathan Windel ([10:03](#)):

Yeah. The music connection is fantastic.

Donnie Lee ([10:06](#)):

I kind of think that's how you need to listen to people, because the greatest hits is kind of what's on the surface. And everybody kind of plays their own greatest hits every single day. You can learn something about people from that, but I kind of think unless you start listening to the whole thing, you're not picking up all the nuance. You're not picking up everything that they're laying down until you spin the whole record and then flip it over and listen to that side, too.

Nathan Windel ([10:41](#)):

Yeah. That's awesome. Hey, I'd be remiss not to bring it back to science a little bit here. So why this works, why this is valuable, well, one, in any classroom, but why it's valuable in the science classroom is that when we play and work together, that connects to collaboration and investigation, in curiosity, getting out into the world, wondering what's working, getting excited about it, playing with things so that we can understand them better. Those are science skills that connect to these other things, and being compassionate sets us up to support each other in the work of learning.

Donnie Lee ([11:25](#)):

That, and I think it also opens your mind to other people's perspective more. So you're not going to be dismissive of people if they bring something to the table, if you're worried about how that's going to affect their emotional state. I'm not saying that you should 100% be sensitive to everyone's emotions as it relates to a science project. That sounds silly. What I just said sounds silly. But at the same time, being respectful of people's opinions and being empathetic to their approach I think is very wise.

Nathan Windel ([12:15](#)):

Yeah, Donnie, and we're going to talk about it in a future episode. The way that we think scientifically, well, that seems quite technical, and it seems that science is very... Science sometimes comes across as a bit of a sterile discipline like we've just [inaudible 00:12:33]. It's got to be very technical. The reality is, a lot of how we think scientifically about the world, it's deeply personal. It's deeply connected to who we

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are and our own culture. Is it not only not silly, you having that kind of empathy and compassion for one another and that respect and understanding, it's crucial because, again, what we're doing is so personal.