

Robbie Hoffman: Growing Up Poor Never Leaves You | The Interview

52 MIN • YOUTUBE • [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=GNPDXBPAXLE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNPDXBPAXLE)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNPDXbpaXLE>

SUMMARY

Robbie Hoffman, a comedian known for her roles in "Hacks" and "Rooster," shares her journey from growing up in a poor, ultra-Orthodox Jewish family to achieving fame and success in comedy. She discusses the complexities of her upbringing, the impact of class on her perspective, and how her experiences shape her comedic voice.

- Hoffman grew up in a large, poor family in Crown Heights, facing trauma and an abusive father, which influenced her humor and outlook on life.*
- She contrasts the generosity found in poorer households with the perceived coldness of wealthier families, emphasizing how socioeconomic status shapes behavior and relationships.*
- Comedy served as a coping mechanism for her difficult upbringing, allowing her to address taboo topics and find humor in hardship.*
- Hoffman discusses her transition from a religious upbringing to a more secular life, influenced by her mother's desire for a better future for her children.*
- She reflects on her identity as a comedian, noting that her humor is often provocative and challenges societal norms, particularly around class and privilege.*
- Her relationship with Gabby Wendy, whom she married, has been a source of stability and healing, allowing them both to navigate their past traumas together.*
- Hoffman emphasizes the importance of discussing class issues in America, arguing that it is a central theme in her work and comedy.*

I've never heard the word growing up. Comfortable. What? We're not comfortable. Nobody is comfortable. [music] This is the interview. I'm Lulu Garcia Navaro. Comedian Robbie Hoffman [music] seems to be everywhere these days. >> Robbie Hoffman. Robbie Hoffman. Everybody. >> She's been praised for her scene stealing role in Hacks. Last week I was a casidic labavich Jew living in Crown Heights, New York. Now I'm in LA. I'm gay and probably an atheist. Till last week I never even seen a movie.

>> Huh. And in [music] Steve Carell's HBO comedy Rooster, where she plays a blunt, protective roommate. >> Permission to be frank. Break up. Let's wrap this up. Go home. >> Hoffman grew up poor in a hidic community. The seventh of 10 children with a lot of trauma. He was physically abusive to my mother for years. I remember some bad fights he would speak to us after and say, you know, but I would never hit you. But it's like, but you hit ma.

It's like, you hit ma. There's so much I wanted to talk to her about money, fame, marriage, and what it all means in our celebrity and wealth obsessed culture. Here's my interview with the singular Robbie Hoffman. >> Okay.

And action. >> Robbie Hoffman. Yeah. Can you imagine? >> We're actually in your home. >> It's weird because you guys said and I I was saying this a bit. You said, "Oh, they have to do it at your house cuz we want the the person to be comfortable."

But what you do is you come to the house and you totally rip apart like this is not >> like do you know what I mean? It's like you want me to be comfortable, but the couch isn't where the couch like the whole house is moved. >> Yes. So it's kind of counterintuitive. We want we want the subject to be comfortable, but then you come in the house and you move everything that's right. And I did notice sometimes when you see an interview, you see them sitting in the middle of a room in their chair and I go, "That's their living room. How weird to walk in, but now I understand they move everything. I have these chairs. These are my chairs." But normally they're there. They're very nice chairs.

>> They're very nice chairs. >> The house is beautiful. >> They're beautiful. Do you feel comfortable? >> No. [laughter] >> Fair. [gasps] Um, >> but I'm not comfortable a lot, so don't worry. I'm comfortable being uncomfortable. >> Are you comfortable making people uncomfortable, too? >> Yeah. Oh, [snorts] yeah. >> Great. Then we're in for a fun conversation. >> We're in for it. >> All right. So, um, we're going to talk about more of this later, but as you have often talked about, you grew up really poor. And I wanted to start though with what is the weirdest thing now about finding yourself >> with money and fame?

>> You know, I don't know if weird is the word. I I think it's tremendous. It's amazing. It's everything I've ever wanted was to make a living doing what I love doing. Um, you know, life is weird everywhere. I my weird doesn't you know me seeing stuff you know it it doesn't change necessarily based on my socioeconomic status now I just see rich people in their weirdness I was poor I saw us I you know what I mean and I saw them now I see new weird things you know it's like you go to a different level of a of a video game there's other challenges and there's other weirdness how would you compare the rich weird to the poor weird.

>> The rich weird is way weirder and worse. Um because it there's like a a humanity that's that is missing. Uh my favorite is a people like me who who who grew up poor and then by the grace of God got some money and now we could be like, "Oh my god, how weird are these rich people who've been like this since birth or whatever, right?" You know, small things like when you go into a rich person's house and nobody's allowed to go in the fridge, right? The poor have much less, but it's like when you go to their house, it's like of take take. You want a Coke? You want a Sprite? Like we just everybody went in the fridge, but the rich, they have so they have the biggest fridge, but nobody can go in the fridge. Right? So, it's a small thing like that that paints a bigger picture, a bigger problem of generosity, right? Generosity seems like a small thing, but um I've only uh I've mostly seen generosity in poor um households. Uh, it's not to say it doesn't exist, but it is notable.

Whenever I meet a rich person and they actually were helpful or great, I mention it. It's worth mentioning. Are there things that have stayed with you about having really struggled? Because my mom came as a political refugee from Cuba >> with basically a suitcase and no matter how comfortable she is. >> No, no, no. Yeah, >> she's a hoarder. She is a hoarder because she says it's because she lost everything so young. >> Um, she can't throw anything away. It's she's 87 now and that has stayed with her. Is there anything like that for you?

>> Everything. Everything stays with you. Um the way that I am is entirely informed by how I grew up. Um everything stays with me. I joke about it often times, but you know, that's why I like being with Gab. We both kind of grew up meager beginnings and we speak the same language. I equate it to literally dating outside of the faith. Um, I Gabby and I getting married, we dated inside our faith. No, she's not Jewish. Nothing to do with that, but she grew up meager. So did I. And that helps our day-to-day. We speak the same language. If we're grocery shopping, raspberries are \$7.99 for a little thing, and I'm not in the mood to spend that. I don't care if the money's in the account. I'm not in a place emotionally to drop \$7.99 USD on a little thing of raspberries. We move on. She's She agrees. We move on. This thing that you just said is so interesting to me that you're not emotionally in the place to spend \$7.99.

>> I think it's criminal. I'm moving on. >> But what does that mean for What does that mean for you? I I just I've never heard that. >> This is crazy. I mean, I had a great uncle and I don't know the the the the comparison, but you know, gas right now in LA is seven is \$7. >> Close to Yeah. >> Okay. Now, when I was a kid, I think in Montreal goes by um liter gallon.

>> Mhm. And I think like it used to be like. 7 cents or something. When it reached a dollar, he didn't leave the house. Like he was like like I'd be like, "Uncle Eddie, could you take me to my friend's house?" He's like, "Are you kidding? Gas is a dollar. I'm going to be downstairs." And he just didn't leave his room. I grew up like those like like the day in and the day out. Um I don't know. It just affects me. It's how I you know, even the way I purchase things. If I'm going to buy something, it's I got I I sold out a tour. I I sold a show. I'm writing a book.

Whatever it is, I take a little off the top. I make sure it's something I love I have forever and I buy it. And then the rest of it I try and be careful with. >> What's the last thing you bought that you loved? >> Uh probably my backpack. >> Cool. >> I bought a designer backpack for tour. Um, and uh, you know, as a dyke like me, I don't buy purses or anything like that, but a backpack is a kin. I've had it almost a year and and I I don't see it slowing down.

>> That's a good investment. >> Yeah. Really good. No. >> Really good. >> Yeah. >> All right. Um, you grew up the seventh of 10 kids um, in an ultraorthodox acidic family. >> You've described growing up in pretty brutal terms. >> Brutal. What are your earliest memories of your life in Crown Heights? >> Really bad. [snorts] [sighs and gasps] >> I don't speak too much to this, but I can a little bit. Um, Crown Heights is beautiful now. Um, but there were a lot of robberies when we were kids, and I do remember, um, the summers are very hot in New York for those, you know, as the New York Times. I never get See the New York Times mug. Are you getting that on camera? I never You ask me if I'm comfortable. The New York Times is in my house. No, I'm not comfortable. I'm always excited. The Times is the times.

So, no, I'm not comfortable, but I'm excited. I don't need to be so comfortable. Back to the question. We in the summer didn't have air conditioning, but my parents had in their bedroom one air conditioner in the window, and it was so hot. Must have been over 100°. Everybody was sleeping in their underwear. My parents had the 10 kids on the floor. Some in the bed and others of us like on couch pillows like you know quasi made mattresses and we would sleep on the floor in our underwear. I had you know memories. I was very afraid of my

father. My my my mother was uh my father was abusive um to my mother. Uh you know I try speaking about this now I try and give grace too. Not too much grace but not you know my parents were very young when they had us. You know my father was 35 with 10 kids. My mother was 30 with 10 kids. So they were under a lot of pressure and stress. I'm not excusing him but I don't know that he had the proper resources to deal with anything.

And I'm not sure how he was told to manage his family in in in the systems that he was a part of the religious systems. Um so that's that said he was very abusive and we kind of made of him. >> What does that mean if I if you don't mind my asking and you don't have to say >> he was physically abusive to my mother >> for years and so I kind of always avoided him. Now he would he was not physically abusive to us and in fact I remember some bad fights he would speak to us after and say you know but I would never hit you but it's like but you hit ma it's like you hit ma >> and my mother was the sweetest you know unbelievable wouldn't hurt a fly so it's like well you you know it's like I don't know we kind of like I just like I remember seeing my f like I remember once walking to the kitchen I was in five six I don't even know young I wanted an orange juice or snack and I saw him sitting there and I saw him and I go, "Oh, didn't see you there." And I, you know, and I would walk away like we didn't have that sort of a relationship.

I saw him and I'm like, "Oh, sorry. I didn't see you there. I'll come back." >> You know, so that was kind of a tiptoe time for sure. >> When did you realize you were funny? >> Probably later. >> Later. Uh but my whole family, everybody was funny. >> We just were all funny. My father was very funny and my mother is hysterical. So everybody was funny. It was always brutal and funny >> like this. [clears throat] [snorts] And yeah, we laughed at each other. We laughed at ourselves. We laughed at everyone and anything. There was nothing off limits. And if you saw something funny nowadays that like, oh, you shouldn't laugh at that. Like my brother would hit you. See, look at this. Look, you know, like we would always catch funny with each other. Like, oh, look, look what's going on there. Look what's going on there. So, we were pointing, we were looking, we were laughing.

>> Was funny a way to deal with the hard things? >> I'm sure. I'm sure it's cultural. I'm sure. Um, >> and you need to have rough There's a roughness to comedy. It's It isn't polite all the time. It's not sensitive all the time. It's It's just funny. If you grow up that way, >> um politeness and decorum is kind of to the side because you can't you you can't invest in those things necessarily. I had a joke early on in my career, which my friend Jess gives me a hard time about. My sister worked at Starbucks and she and sometimes I would meet her after work and she would close up the shop. So sometimes at midnight whenever I don't know if it was 24 hours but it was like till midnight [snorts] and she would she lived in an apartment four subway stops away and she would walk home. She had two very long scary blocks dead of the winter snow dark that she would have to walk home. Not too far, but not a comfortable walk home.

But she would walk home in a very unflattering, and I don't know how to say this that wouldn't be disgusting, that wouldn't be rude, that wouldn't be offensive, but she would walk home in a way that mimics somebody with um physical disability. >> Okay? She would limp or do something really crazy for the entire two walks to make herself quote unquote less desirable for a sexual predator. And it's too bad that that's the way the world is,

but these are the safety concerns she did. And I used to say that as a joke and I used to do her walk. I don't do the walk anymore. But of course, comedy isn't always comfortable. It's her safe. It's like that was a defense.

That was a protective defense mechanism. Okay. If sexual predators mostly men, thank you. They're mostly into young able-bodied girls. She has to be not that. So, it's not always it's not always polite and it's not always comfortable. I think the idea of comfort generally, even when you ask me if I'm comfortable, is a rich thing. >> These are concepts. Even if you ask somebody how they grew up, they won't even tell you rich. They'll say, "We were comfortable."

I've never heard the word growing up. Comfortable. What? We're not comfortable. Nobody is comfortable. There's roaches in the [_] sink. I'm not comfortable. The snow is coming through the window. I got to put cellophane on it. Nobody is comfortable, right? And we're very comfortable being uncomfortable. But the rich are not and they dictate what is comfortable and what isn't. They are uncomfortable often. They don't talk about things. Things like money they don't talk about. They don't talk about politics. Money whether I wanted to talk about it or not. As a kid, we had one one phone in the in the main when you walk into the house, it was a table with a phone on it. That was the phone. And my mother was screaming about money on that phone from the morning till night.

She doesn't have it. What's going to be? What's the how much does the bus passes? We heard everything. It's not like if I didn't want to hear about it, it's it's like the rich have their own siloed rooms. It's not like I could go into the other room and not hear her. >> Mhm. I heard her. It's basically one room and the walls are thin as hell. Hold on. >> Adjust the mic. One second. Robbie, >> I hope you didn't lose all that. Nobody lost anything.

>> Did you lose that, Joe? Joe, did you lose all that? >> No, not at all. >> Joe Bill just won an Emmy. Are you kidding? Muzzle top, my man. >> I saw your Emmy over there. >> Yeah, I got an Emmy over. >> Exactly. That's why I mentioned Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. >> Okay. [snorts] >> No, totally. >> I hope you didn't lose that, Joe. >> No, we >> now that you got your Emmy, I hope you're not relaxing. You know what I mean? Cuz then you go, I already got it.

>> Yeah. >> So, what do we care if the sound works or not? I'm kidding. >> We're good. >> All right. I I want to stay with your upbringing because I do think it's a source of a lot of your comedy. >> Nothing uncomfortable. Are you going to kill me? >> No. I I think it's actually really um insightful. Go on. >> Okay. Thank you. Poor people know how to chill. Once we are Okay, the house is a [_] hole. It's a dump. But it's Friday night. People back from work, school's out, whatever it is. You get [snorts] into a poor person's house. You got the the chips on the table. Everybody's got a Coke or a Sprite, whatever they want.

Take take. You're sitting outside. You're shooting the [_] It's a lot more comfortable to hang in a poor house than when I go to the rich houses. Like I hate Somebody offered me, they said, "Oh, these people are going to Italy. You should come to the pool. Their house is going to be empty. They're going to Italy." It's like, I don't want to go to that pool. I don't want to be in somebody's house. They're not there. And then I got to like I don't know if this, you know, it's just it's it's just a little bit bizarre. I'll probably go to the pool, >> but it's not, you

know what I mean? It's not like the most >> I don't know if I believe you that you're not going to the pool.

>> I might go to the pool, but I'm just saying it's not like I'm like, ah, >> if one day is my pool, I'll be like a little bit more ah, but I don't know if I would do a pool anyway. It's a whole other conversation. I think it's a lot of maintenance probably. >> It is probably. Um, I want to ask you one more thing about this period. Eventually, you leave Crown Heights. You move down to Florida. You're there for a little bit and then your grandfather.

>> Wow. How did you hear the Florida piece? I always skipped the Florida piece. We were there for like a year, but Okay. You did your research. >> She's not [_] around. She knows her [_] We're at the New York Times, baby. Okay. Go ahead. So your grandfather then comes and rescues your mother from your abusive father and you all move to Canada. You leave your dad behind. >> Yes. >> Did you become more secular at that moment? Was that >> what was it like to sort of move from a religious community to a less religious environment?

>> So it wasn't overnight. Yeah, exactly. Transition is the exact word. You said it good there. I was kosher till 19. >> Right. So I was still we were definitely kosher in the house like you know I got a muza here. I mean I'm not an animal so there's still things you know I don't need a d like like there's still remnants. I don't know that I totally transitioned out when we left. We weren't immediately not religious. We were still religious.

We moved to Montreal. In fact we moved to a Montreal neighborhood that was the same sect. You know, the the biggest difference was not having the father in the home, >> which meant my mother took on all of the male religious commandments. She did the the kdish, >> which is Friday night uh blessing over the wine. Um and Saturday, she did the habda, which is the the the service at the end of the Sabbath. Um she did all the male things. And that is that is the the the law is if the father is not in the home that the mother takes on um you know a lot of the responsibilities.

So was it something that you wanted to break from the the religious you know kind of um strictures or was it something that you were battling against or did you >> Well I did with my family this was just >> this is really you're asking about my mother's battle. Yeah, >> my mother is the one who took us out of that insular community. It's really her story, that part of it. I was born into it. So, I don't know that it was such a battle. I just This was life. This was the day in and the day out of life. For my mother, >> she was starting to open up and say, >> "Is this what I want for my life? Is this what I want for my kids' life?" My brothers, for instance, were not learning English. They were learning Yiddish and they were learning the Bible Torah and they were not and my mother is proficient in English. My mother is potentially the be the most well-read person I've ever met in my whole life.

So, she had a big dissonance between her kids not being able to read the classics later on. and like what am I doing to these boys that they're only learning Bible and they're not learning their own language. >> So there were things like that that my mother has shared later that led her to be like I don't want my kids living like this beyond her own abuse and what she was facing. She was thinking about what kind of people are we going to be?

>> Mhm. >> You end up going to a private Jewish school on scholarship. Um, you said in an interview that you

had to find your voice, that you had been sounding jappy and those were your words in order to fit in at high school. >> Okay. I wouldn't use such language. I would never use it. Shout out kidding. Yes. Yes. [laughter] Yes. Go ahead. [gasps] >> [_] shout out to the my Japanese fans. Nothing to do with you. Jewish American princess.

>> Yes. >> It's a derogatory term for Jewish girls, which I can use. Go ahead. Does anyone give you a hard time back in the interview? Oh, friend. Oh, really? Oh yeah. Name names. Not >> okay. After. Okay. Oh, I can't wait for the tea. >> Um I was curious about when you gave up that sort of pretense of trying to fit in with that crowd and that you had kind of adopted this persona. >> It was another transition, >> right?

>> It's also a teenage thing. It >> I think many teenagers want to fit in. I was already poor. I was the outsider. I was going to this nice school which still was a huge opportunity in the end was a net positive and really did teach me a lot. >> Okay, it was hard socio economically to not fit in and feel looked down upon but it also created a fire in me but um it was a transition. I remember I really tried I got so lucky. So I'm going to the school.

I'm pretty I had a great figure. So I tried to really there was two things. Not only was I hiding where I came from and and my uh the classism of it all, but I was also hiding the boyishness of it all. >> I wanted to be feminine and girly and don't I was always a loud kid. I was always annoying. I hated these things about me. I still hate being annoying and I'm working on it, but it is what it is. Um, but it wasn't for girls to be like if you were like if you were outspoken as a girl or you it was just like unladylike and and and still like not hot, not cool. So, I was kind of pushing that, too. And I kind of went the other way.

Also, one of my good friends sat me down probably in ninth grade and said like, I'm bringing down the group that like I can't wear a backpack anymore. >> [snorts] >> I got to I got to have a purse, a tote. We're putting all our [_] in a tote. We're not doing school bags anymore. >> And I was like, but these books are so heavy. I can't do a one shoulder. >> I need both shoulders. I almost need the clip here. You mean like these math books? Are you kidding me?

So, I remember she was like, "No, we got you got to get a purse." Like, >> you're bringing down the group. >> You're bringing down the group. And there was signs early on because the purse I got was from Levis's. It was a used Levis. It was a green cordurerized Levis's with a Levis's pocket. Um, and I would try and do things. I wanted to, you know, and um I I I I I tried like looking better or more feminine or whatever and leaning into my my uh my looks and you know, and also talking different, you know, cuz when I moved, I would say words like orange, but you say orange.

>> So, I remember doing that. Well, I'm going to say orange. Not going to say orange anymore. Orange is for losers, right? They know you're poor. If you say orange, they know you're poor. Orange is oat, >> right? So, stuff like that. And I did that for a while. And I was kind of always checking myself. And I think this is teenagehood in general, too. How I sat to be feminine. Like, right, I wouldn't sit like this cuz that's boyish. So I would try and sit like this. I would catch myself. I was always thinking how I look, how I sound, how I look, how I sound, how I look, how I sound.

>> And over time, as I came out, as I started standup, it was all about like leaning back in. It was all about like we're just going 100%. I'm still When you're on stage, it gives you an excuse to be a,000% you. Another big transition for you. You were actually outed when you were 17. In a way that sounds like something out of Mean Girls. >> Mhm. >> Bro, this was brutal. So, I had a girlfriend, Italian, and this girl wanted to be out of the closet with me, and I was like, "I'm not being [_] gay. Are you out of your mind?"

There's no way. I didn't look. I'm not doing that. I I'm compete. I'm I'm doing well in school, getting a great job, and that's going to be the end of that. I'm not going to be doing all this gay [_] in my head. And so she would say fine. And I just like wouldn't talk to her in public. You didn't want to come out at this point because you just didn't feel like it was anyone's business or you were >> and I don't even think I don't know how long this is going to go.

>> As soon as I found out I was gay, I was already living on my own. I was already having to make rent. I was in school full-time. I was working basically full full-time, too. I was living a really grown-up life and I just could not have another thing, >> you know, and I was a very good kid by this point. I was taking school very seriously. So, I didn't go out too much, but I went out. This is where it gets sloppy. So, we went to the student bar and I was with all my friends and she was with hers. So, then at some point, I think she texted me her in the bathroom. So, I went to meet her in the bathroom. So, we [snorts] went into the stall together. There's a line, you know, the bathroom. So, finally, we got a stall. We get in the stall together and we're making out in the stall. We're 17. Who cares? And uh the door sprung open and in and and so we were left like we pulled our embrace apart and a girl that I had gone to school with part of the Jewish community saw me this popular girl >> didn't see me kissing but something was what was going on and yeah by the next day it felt like everybody knew it felt like the scene from a walked to her.

Remember I was just walking through the cafeteria and everybody was like [sighs] >> like she's [_] gay. >> So really I really thought I'm like lucky to be here. I really thought I I it was the worst time in my life. I lost all my friends overnight at 17. >> Wow. >> Yeah. All but two. My friends told me they thought it was just weird. And uh I don't know, it was yeah, they just thought it was weird. And again, it wasn't a time where nobody was gay. It just we were in still a pretty conservative environment. And then I had uh a couple friends, my friend Malay, shout out to Malay, she messaged me, "Yo dog, like I don't care what's going on.

Here to talk if you want." And then my friend Ally, whose mother was always nice, she was like, "I don't give a [_] Whatever. I hear stuff's going on. I don't have You can talk to me. You don't have to talk to me." There was a couple people who were a bit of a lifeline. >> That's terrible. >> It was really bad. >> All right. You eventually go to McGill. You study accounting. >> Yep.

>> You started doing standup. >> Yeah. >> And you were getting your um first steady paychecks as an accountant after you graduated. But you continued doing standup going by Rifka, your given name, at work, and Robbie in the comedy clubs. Can you talk me through that? Was that like an alter ego? You saw them as two different people or >> No. No, it wasn't like a Beyonce Sasha Fierce. It was literally a practical decision. Um, my name was Rifka, but I didn't want the accounting firm to think that I did stand up or I wasn't living for the firm

because it was a very big culture at these professional jobs that like you live and die for this firm.

Like, so when I started standup, I didn't want really people knowing that I was leaving to do standup, like leaving at 7:00 p.m. to go do standup shows. So, I just didn't want my name on any flyers or anything. So, that's why I went with Robbie. >> Um, it was my uncle's name. It was an R initial. >> I watched a TEDex talk you gave in 2014. >> I hate that that's still up there. It's It makes me cringe beyond. But go ahead.

I don't know why I >> as someone who researched you, I found this to be very first of all, it was poignant. It was good. Good job, younger Rob. I don't know why I'm salty about [__] I shouldn't even be salty about. I look for problems. This is what I do. To complain is to enjoy for me. And and so I can't even look at something good and say, "You know what? That was a good thing. Fine.

>> So, one thing you said is comedy chooses you. Oh, yeah. >> And you also said the stage understands me and it's where I'd like to live. >> It's crazy cuz I'm like the most uncomfortable to bring it back to comfort. Like probably one-on-one, probably like little small talks or kind of little dinner parties or something like that where I can be a little bit socially. But on stage when everything goes black in the room and the lights are on me, I feel like I'm in a womb. I feel like like I'm free and I always worked small and then bigger bigger bigger and now I'm working in large. I feel like you know like there's some artists who paint still lives on on 8 by 10 canvases and small works and then there's like the Jackson Pollocks that need like a bucket of paint splashing from here to the other room onto a canvas the size of this rug.

>> And I feel like I'm like these stages are those I'm working ma in massive scale now much bigger scale. And I feel at [__] home really. >> I'm like these theaters are my [__] >> Why do you think that is? >> I don't know. It's amazing. I I don't know how to explain it better than that. But um I do think that comedy chooses you. >> I think you can choose it and the people who choose it, you know, some of them you can tell they chose it and it didn't choose them and you know, it's everybody's on their own journey. But I also, you know, it's very difficult cuz as soon as I started standup, I was like, I got to do this now. like this is really throwing a wrench into my plan. I was going to marry good, get a good job, and just live like like middle class, like whatever, like like you know, just just consistently live. [snorts] maybe have a condo, have a husband that now I'm gay, now the job's going, now I got to I have to really consider pursuing art, which seemed like the poorest thing you could do.

>> And I'm trying not to be poor anymore. And now I'm like, I could be really poor. Like, this is no joke, Rob. But I just I felt like it was a calling because Yeah. I I don't want to I wanted not to be but but it was like well I do have this shot and I do have it so I I can't believe it but I have to do this. You said earlier that growing up nothing was too taboo to joke about and you know in your comedy it is true nothing is off limits in your material.

You said in a recent interview that anyone can do anything. I just want to explore a little bit about like how you think about >> your your comedy. >> Okay. Yeah. >> You know, do you mean you don't have to be part of a group to make fun of it? You know, >> I think anyone could do anything, but you're at your own risk. >> So, for instance, Chappelle can joke about trans people. He's not trans. It's not on the trans spectrum, but he can he can

do it. But people can clap back. M I don't think there's I think you can do whatever the hell you want, but also know that it could perceive be perceived by people however the hell they want.

How do you think about what you would or wouldn't do? Because you've joked about AIDS, pedophilia, late term abortions. Um [laughter] >> is there something that Yeah, I know that that's quite a list. >> You got to go listen to the jokes. You can't just >> No, exactly. I I want to I want to make that clear. Yeah. >> Got to go listen to the jokes. >> It's hard to talk about comedy actually out of context. I will.

>> Thank you. Please. >> I want I want to say, but is there something that you won't joke about or haven't found the right way to joke about? >> I'm sure I I don't know how to answer that. Um I I really joke about jokes come to you. It's it's it's divine. It's it's I don't choose idea. Where do idea it gets philosophical. Where does an idea come from? Yes, it, you know, you're informed by your life and all of the experiences and then one day you're walking, you're like, "Oh, that would be funny." Oo, can I do that?

Can I not? Well, I have to try. >> Is there like a Robbie Hoffman joke? Like, is there because you have a very distinctive style. All the great comics do, right? Like, I'm I'm just trying to get >> you be you'd be better able to describe what Robbie Hoffman comedy is like than me. It's very hard for me to objectively see myself. >> It's fair. >> You know, it's like whatever I talk about, it's cuz it came to me. It there wasn't it wasn't that deep. Um it can go deep as I explore the topic. Um and often times probably I've been told that it's like not what you expect.

>> How do you feel about being controversial? Because you said that people can be make jokes and people also have a right to clap back. I mean, you know, there is this continuum where the more famous you get, the more scrutiny you get, the more backlash you get. Um, I can see that throughine in your career already. I mean, you just had the Celiacs come after you. >> Yeah. The only two community the only two communities that have come after me hysterically enough have been the pitbull community after the uh special in which I said some of the I talked about some of the topics you listed so elegantly a couple a couple minutes ago. Um the pit bulls came out of all the things I said in that special raising the age of abortion till 10 years old.

The pitbull people came after me. Turns out they're as scary as the dog. I did not know this. Okay. My only thing really with the pitull was always like it's always the first time, right? The dog never attacked nobody before. [laughter] I come to find out a week later the dog ms the girl to [_] death. They don't know. They don't know what happened. The only other people to come after me is the celiac community. I mean, you can't make this stuff up, right? And celiac is a real disease that affects mostly white women who are privileged to have health care to get the diagnosis, right?

Um people of color uh tend to be less aware or not diagnosed with these things as much because they lack health care unfortunately in this country. So it was a funny, you know, I was asked a silly question about it. I was asked about gluten in a in a hard-hitting interview with Color Daddy and I responded jokingly as I always do, but uh nothing more serious than that. But of course, rich white women came after me as you know, they're at the helm of both the pitbull and the celiac community. So that made sense for me.

But of all the things that I've ever said, >> rich white women are at the head of the pitbull community. >> Yeah. They like to rescue dogs. which is great. I'm just joking, right? Uh just like I joked about those other things, you know, they're not upset. It's amazing that more people from other communities haven't. It's always like the people who are like I I don't know. I have a problem, too. It's like, yeah, we all have problems, [_] It's fine. You know, it's kind of like I shouldn't get in trouble. I will get in trouble for this, but it's kind of like how I feel about anti-semitism. Like anti-semitism is bad. I don't want anti-semitism. I get that.

But is it the worst thing? No. To me, right now it's not. especially living in a country where there's massive anti-Mexican sentiment and Mexican people are currently being rounded up or made to fear that they're going to be rounded up. So, sorry if I'm not screaming as much about anti-semitism as you want me to. Right now, I have bigger focuses on on some of my neighbors that are going through horrendous anti- um you know, anti-Mexican sentiment. So, yes, it's bad, but I'm not such a person that thinks, "Oh, I'm going to live a life free of any problems." You ask me about being offended with my comedy and all this stuff. Okay?

I don't think being offended is the worst thing. I think being poor is for me. >> Offended. Some people expect to go through a life of not being offended, I guess. Not me. I was born offended. My whole circumstance was [_] offensive. Again, like I said, if I hit your community, I'm also hitting my community. They're hitting me. You're hitting me. It's all fair game. It doesn't mean anything more than that, but that it's a more inclusive approach.

I'm including everybody. Nobody is above. I was asked a question. Would I go out of my way to talk about celiacs? Never in a million years. I don't even want to know about it. Okay, that said, did I happen to bring more awareness to Celiac than everybody than anybody else has? Look what that did in the end. how many people are more aware of it. So look at God. He sends us gifts in ways we don't understand. But yeah, everything is fair game. Um and I don't expect to live a life not being offended. And I don't think I think it's okay for something to bristle you and to make you think something or feel something or react somehow.

>> Well, you're articulating a Robbie Hoffman joke. I mean in in a real way you're articulating something >> that you >> like to make people I don't like. I just do. I guess my existence it's not like I like I didn't set out to do anything. I'm acting in the moment reacting to stuff that you know it's not that serious. I'm not a journalist. I'm not from the New York Times. I'm a comedian. You know what I mean? So I might not know everything and I'm wrong a lot and that's fine too. I'm not expecting to be right all the time. not expecting to live an offensive free life. I just don't have expectations like this.

>> So, I guess just to bring it back. >> So, I'm not trying to do anything but just be me. >> Mhm. >> And when I get an idea, bring it to you. >> All right. Um, we only have a few minutes left. >> Love you. I'm have a good time, actually. >> Good. Me, too. >> Um, you're in the TV show Hacks, which just ended. >> What's the experience meant for you? >> Oh, amazing. It changed my life.

>> I mean, it changed my life. I'm Emmy nominated actor now. >> Congratulations. >> Um, thank you. Six lines, an Emmy by the grace of God. Um, and yeah, it's just it's been an amazing experience. I don't know. It's just it's everything you would want. A part written for you and gets you an Emmy nom. It's amazing. >> I have no

complaints there. >> I was really entertained by a recent article. >> Oh, good. um where I saw the headline, how hacks botched its Yiddish line. It was in response to a cutaway gag from one of the last episodes of Hacks, the scenes, just a few seconds and you say line in Yiddish. And the author wrote that the line was grammatically incorrect and then said very archly quote as any fluent Yiddish speaker will confirm.

[music] >> I asked my mother how to say what was it free? I was using the word fry and my mother said machinum. So I add the first part of the line which maybe was grammatically incorrect. Who cares? A comedia. It's not a very used word in Yiddish to say a comedy show. It's kind of an Englishism in Yiddish. So it's like this is what annoys me about Jews. It's like they want me to speak about anti-semitism. We get Yedish onto the show and then this Jewish publication has an issue with the Yiddish. So yeah, I may have gotten the grammar wrong on there, but my mother got the word right and it's like which any Yiddish speaker would know. My mother is fluent in Yiddish. She I asked her one word on the phone. She doesn't need to be indicted for this. Feels like it hurt you.

>> No. Bothered me. Annoyed. You see, it goes to your thing of like uh with more fame, you know, you have like the scrutiny and you know, my little sister gets excited about all these things cuz she's like, "We're going up up up up up." You know, when you have the hater, she's like, "You have to start having." So, she gets excited with all these list because it means they care, >> right? Like, if they if I'm being scrutinized, well, I'm not a nobody to be scrutinized anymore. They wouldn't scrutinize me if I was a nobody, but I'm somebody now. Everything I say is did she did she come on we have other fish to fry.

>> All right we are going to talk again but Thursday >> for now. [music] >> Yeah. >> Thank you so much. >> Thank you so much. Thank you guys. >> On the interview we talked to our [music] guest twice. So a few days later I spoke with Robbie Hoffman again and asked her about the pressure of becoming more famous, her high-profile relationship with her wife Gabby Wendy and more. Hi. Nice to see you again. >> Nice to see you again. [laughter] >> You're stretching cuz you're on the you're on the East Coast now.

>> Yes, I worked last night. >> Um, what does that mean? Were you doing standup? >> Yeah. >> Oh, fun. How was it? >> Really good, actually. It's been good. It was It was a late night, but it was a good night. Oh, this is pulling, but I'm good. I'm good. I'm good. >> Okay. Um, you know, one of the reasons I wanted to talk to you is not only because I've [clears throat] admired your work, but I'm also really interested in transition periods in people's lives. And we spoke about sort of many of yours in our first conversation and about how this moment you've become a lot more famous and there's a real big period of transition for you now.

>> Yeah, that's true. And I, you know, and I just sort of wondered because of that, you know, we did talk about in our first conversation some of the criticism that you might have received. And I wonder if it just feels hard to deal with. I would say, you know, I'm so used to so many changes. My career has again been very slow and steady. I think that by the time you're ready for a promotion, it might be too late. So, I think I I'm ready. But it is interesting. You know, the whole point is I'm new to this. I think people are curious about that. Um I'm new to this and you know, I don't want anyone or I don't need anyone coming for me. But I think what the the big thing for me as I navigate this next level is like what why am I successful?

Why are my shows successful? Why does everybody come together? And I think it's because I don't need to be a part of like this big machine of of of, you know, this big machine of like dividing us by having us squabble about this and that, the red and the blue of it all. You know what I mean? I'm like, it's enough partaking in petty squabbles when we have bigger [_] going on. >> You know what I mean? And if you want the us versus them, at my core, it's always been about the rich versus the poor.

>> And that's what we, you know, I think we need to to focus on. I always bring it back to that. You know, I think struggle brings us together. And I've just been screaming about this since growing up the way I grew up. And whenever somebody tries to like grab me into their thing, it's no problem. I'm happy to be a part of a billion communities, but I don't need to get lost in the tit for tat.

Part of your fame is also compounded by your relationship with Gabby Wendy, who you married last year. >> She's unbelievable. Thank God for her. >> Yeah, she was on the Bachelor and Bachelorette. Um, and she was also a Breakout on the Traders, which I love. The Bambies. Um, >> oh yeah, yeah, yeah. >> Okay, I've got a question first. Did you think she was traitor material or did you always see her as a faithful? >> I thought she was a faithful. She doesn't need all the stress of lying.

The problem is we can't really lie. That's probably why we get in trouble sometimes. We say this, we say that. Some people ask me like, "Oh, you would be on the show." I'd be out first. Like, I would literally be out first. First of all, I'd be like, "I'm a traitor. You got to get rid of me." Like, I would be too nervous. Like, I would need to go home. I don't have the temperament for, you know, I'm simultaneously, again, the most nervous and confident person. I don't know how that happened either, but I'm always this dichomous not I'm always non-binary. Not just in the gender sense. I'm Canadian. I'm American. I'm nervous. I'm confident.

The whole thing is a disaster. So, I don't think I have the temperament for that show. That said, she is a fighter. She did amazing. And I said when she would call, I got one one call a week with her and I was just safe. Just take the money and come home. [_] them. Just This is a game and that's that. >> I don't know if you can swear. [snorts] >> Yeah. >> Really? Oh, I'm I'm stuck again, Seth.

My hair is stuck. >> Seth will come and save you. >> He keep I have a man in my hotel room. It's been a minute, I got to say, since I've had a man in my hotel room. >> I lost my [clears throat] virginity actually with a man in a New York City hotel room. >> I think the bobby pin's doing the job. So, I'm just going to remove this clip alto together. >> Okay, fantastic. You got it.

Okay. Sorry about that. >> Thank you for sharing that. >> Yeah. Um >> fine. Three thrusts maybe. [sighs and gasps] [laughter] >> Okay. Um so back to Gabby, your wife. Um I've seen you talk about her with so much love um and so much respect. It's it's actually incredibly beautiful. >> Thank you. Have you had to figure out what a good relationship looks like because of the chaos of your upbringing, the chaos of her upbringing? Yeah, of course. I mean, I'm, you know, we met in our 30s because of the ways we grew up.

Like, I grew up, yes, single mom household, poor, but I did have a, in a way, a pretty stable I know I moved from

New York to Montreal and there was that stint to Miami, which you caught Lulu doesn't miss anything. But um my mother was home >> 24/7. Every day this woman was cooking and cleaning, cooking and cleaning, cooking and cleaning. I knew every day where my mother was to this day. If I got to go find my mother, I know exactly where she is. Gab didn't have that.

Gab didn't have that. Gab had, you know, maybe, you know, a parent who was not there. oftentimes didn't know where the parent was, you know, then went to live with her dad. But I'm just saying she didn't have that consistency. So Gab used to think that bringing up something with me would be that I would leave if she had if she thought I was annoying, which we've established I've long been annoying and I apologize. [snorts] So she used to like if if something hurt her feelings or if I don't know, she didn't like the way that I did something. if I left the cabinet open some. It could be tiny. She just wouldn't say because she wouldn't want me to go away. But I was like, I'm not. Babe, I'll close the cabinets. It's just insane. We can't live like this.

Try me. Try me. So, she had to get comfortable trusting that. And I had to get comfortable that she was tepid about everything. So, um, it just worked. It's kind of like it's not our job to heal each other. Um but you know through the relationship we are healing each other. It's not the job but it's the cherry and it's just really nice to like design kind of the life you want to live. It's like I've said with Gab when I was a kid and I hated my brothers. I would just come home and complain about my brothers all the time and my mother would say, "You don't choose your family. They're your brothers."

And then I realized there's a loophole. If I marry Gabby, I choose my family. That's the one time you choose your family. >> Choose wisely. >> Last question. Um, the theme >> Oh, that's it. Last question. >> Yeah. Yeah. Hey, we're just so um >> the thing that you've made clear I think throughout our entire conversation is that class is at the center of how you want to communicate um your comedy, your work. And you know, it made me really reflect about in many ways how America always wants to present itself as so aspirational and to hide the ugliness, the trauma, the poverty that underlies it all. And I think what makes you so provocative is that you are really trying to put that front and center in a way that I don't think many people are.

Um, have you felt that dissonance? Have you um do you feel >> Yes, I do feel it that especially doing more oats or elites publications. That's why I'm nervous like with the times or things like this. You know, I'm always You asked me if I was comfortable in my own house last time. No, I'm not comfortable. So, I just think that like I'm cognizant to just always be me, stand what I stand for no matter what.

And we can start really changing the focus to not be distracted and to focus on us, not you versus me or this or that. It's just classism affects everybody. the conversation. Basically, to answer your question simply, it shouldn't be a new conversation. It's it's a big conversation and it's the conversation. >> I don't know if that's even more succinct. >> That's very succinct. >> What do you think, Seth? He nodded. Do you think that's succinct?

>> Py? What's pathy and succinct? >> Py is short. Succinct is also short. >> I'm glad the producer I'm glad >> Seth shout out to Seth who's literally sitting on the floor in my hotel room. I wish. Can we pull the camera here? >> All right. Um, Robbie Hoffman, thank you so much. I've really appreciated your time. That's it. >> Okay. Oh

my god, we're finally done. Okay. Thank you, Lulu. Thank you to everyone. Uh, Joe, Emmy winning Joe.

Thank you. >> Thank you. [music] I appreciate you. >> I appreciate you. Thanks, guys. >> I'm Lulu Garcia Navaro. and I'm [music] David Maresy >> and we're the hosts of the interview, an audio and video [music] podcast from the New York Times. >> Every week we interview fascinating and influential people from all walks of life. >> Subscribe to our YouTube channel so you'll never miss an episode.