

Shrinking It Down – Our Greatest Strengths, Part 2

INTRO MUSIC AND CREDITS

Shrinking It Down: Mental Health Made Simple

With your hosts Dr. Gene Beresin and Dr. Steve Schlozman

Filmed on location at: Massachusetts General Hospital, The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds

SHOW BEGINS

Steve: Welcome back to Shrinking It Down. I'm Steve Schlozman, and we're here with Dr. Braaten.

Ellen: Hello.

Steve: Hey! And we have a guest.

Ellen: Yes, we have a very special guest. We have my brother, Robert, who is here to talk about himself.

Robert: Well, thank you.

Steve: Thank *you*. Thanks for coming here. Let's start with... so you're gonna tell us about growing up with Dr. Braaten—with Ellen, I can't call her Dr. Braaten—as your older sister?

Robert & Ellen: Yeah.

Steve: What was that like?

Robert: Right. And she's also my Godmother.

Ellen: I am, that's right.

Steve: Really?

Ellen: Yeah, that's how much older I am than he is.

Steve: You're the God—Can you do spells?

Ellen: No.

Steve: Not that kind of Godmother. Okay.

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Ellen: Yeah.

Robert: And I was growing up with, one of those Downs people.

Ellen: Yeah, you have Down Syndrome.

Robert: And I do have a mother who's not here right now. I would say, Mom, I love you. But my brothers are here, Mark, Dave. I know I'm wonderful, but I know what I'm here for. To help these children from your [Ellen's] Department. And I want to let you know, don't worry about anything. I want you to understand what I'm saying.

Ellen: So, Robert, do you—when you're saying that, what you're talking about is having a disability. And when did you first realize you had Down Syndrome?

Robert: After I was born.

Ellen: So, it's always just been a part of who you are.

Steve: Ellen has told me that she felt protective—seriously protective of you—growing up. That she wanted people to treat you well, that she fought for it—she was a scrappy gal I guess, from what I heard. <to Ellen> And then you went home once and said to your mom, “Hey, they're being mean to my brother—to Robert.” And what did she say? What did she do?

Ellen: So, my mom said that you sort of had to learn to stand up for yourself.

Robert: Yes.

Ellen: And that there would always be people—there are mean people to everybody, really. And you were no different than anybody else. And that you were going to learn how to cope with people when they're kind of mean. But, I mean, people are mean to everybody. And...

Steve: Yeah. <to Robert> Do you remember that? Not that conversation, but your mom giving you that lesson?

Robert: Yes. My mom or my dad would say just step up and defend yourself. And I know that. But I want to tell a story, just a little bit.

Ellen & Steve: Sure.

Robert: I was in, like, middle school – urban. And some kid on the bike – I was walking to dad's school – cut me off and said, “I'm gonna beat you up.” I kept walking, he cut me off again: “I'm gonna beat you up.” And I said, “That does it. I didn't do anything.” I just ran all the way to dad's school, told my father what this kid did to me.

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Ellen: And what did he do?

Robert: He didn't do anything.

Ellen: So, Robert, you started school when you were really, really young. I remember that. I wasn't that old when you were doing that. But you started when you were, like, two-and-a-half years old—three years old. And then you went to school all the way through high school and learned to read—you read really well. You write very well. And do you remember anything being really important in school that really made a difference for you?

Robert: Well, let's see. Well I do have a couple of teachers who helped me out and got me out of trouble.

Ellen: Oh, okay. Did you get in trouble a lot?

Robert: Well, not me, but... Well I had—every class, I needed to be on time.

Ellen: Oh, okay. We're not very good at being on time either, so we can relate to this.

<all laugh>

Steve: But they helped you, those teachers.

Robert: Yes.

Steve: Also it sounds like they—this sounds corny—they believed in you. Yeah, like they knew that you could do the work.

Robert: Yeah.

Steve: So you had people at home believing you could do the work. You had people at the school believing you could do the work. And you *did* it.

Robert: Yeah.

Steve: And you like to read.

Robert: Yes.

Steve: What do you like to read?

Robert: Well, let's see. I do have a couple of—well I do have. Well my sister had—when we went to—when she was in ___ with us we went to... It's like a club house.

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Ellen: Mm hmm.

Robert: And we have a book called “The Story.”

Ellen: Oh, yeah, it’s like The Bible—the whole Bible—as told like a story.

Steve: Like the Old and New Testament—

Ellen: Yes, the Old and New Testament—

Steve: —but like a novel?

Ellen: —but written like a novel.

Steve: That’s easier than all the thous and thys...

Ellen: Yes. All the begotten. Yeah.

Steve: Right.

Ellen: So, you’re reading that? I think you also like a lot of times books about sports. You’re a huge sports fan.

Robert: Yup.

Steve: Oh, wait minute. What teams?

Robert: Well, I’ve always liked the Brewers, or the Bucks, or the Packers.

Steve: I’m sensing a theme here.

Robert: And, well... and this is partly in my head, I do like the Patriots—a little bit.

Ellen: A little bit, okay.

Steve: It’s okay. You know, you’re one of the few people not from Massachusetts who actually like the Patriots, so it’s okay.

Ellen: What’s your favorite sport?

Robert: Well, let’s see. We’re doing bocce ball.

Ellen: Oh, okay. So, you’re talking about your own—you’re talking about Special Olympics. Yeah, so what’s...

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Steve: That was your sport at the Special Olympics?

Robert: Well, that one. And then I did... Well, what they do in Fall is bowling.

Steve: Mm hm.

Robert: And they have other the other one is swimming. But usually I do swimming but I'm taking the year off of that because the practice is so long.

Ellen: Oh, okay.

Robert: And I said, hmm, I don't want to do it.

Ellen: Okay. Robert did a lot of swimming, though, for a while. And then also basketball you do for Special Olympics.

Robert: I was gonna bring that up, too.

Ellen: Oh sorry.

<both laugh>

Steve: Did you steal his thunder?

<all laugh>

Steve: Tell me about your basketball—don't listen to her.

Robert: Well, she did steal my thunder. But I do some basketball, too. But we had a couple games in there, and there was a shot clock somewhere. And someone said, "Shoot. Shoot. Shoot." I didn't look at the shot clock or nothing—I mean the game clock. And I just dribbled it in, and then after I got the ball on the back board, the ball went in, the buzzer sounded.

Ellen: That's exciting.

Steve: You hit the buzzer winning shot?

Robert: Yes.

Steve: Oh my God. That's like a dream. When people say, "Shoot, shoot, shoot," to me I just wet my pants and have to leave the court.

<all laugh>

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Steve: No, that's really cool—that's like a dream. I used to practice that in my driveway. I'd go, "Three, two, one. He hits the shot! The crowd goes crazy!" But you actually *did* it.

Robert: Yes. And no one stood up and said, "Congratulations."

Ellen: No one?

Robert: Well, I wouldn't say no one. But, if someone would say that.

Steve: I'd say it. Congratulations.

Robert: Thank you.

Steve: You got a buzzer winning shot in the Olympics. I'll take that. So, you've had, and are continuing to have—like, you've done a lot of really cool—I was gonna say you've had a full life but obviously it's still going on. But you've done a ton of different things. Are you working?

Robert: I'm working both... I'm working at the Fitness for Success. I'm doing the locker rooms, and I clean up everything at the lounge, the entrance, the exercise equipment.

Steve: It's like a sports club? An athletic club?

Robert: Yes.

Steve: So, that's your main job back in Edgerton—are you still in Edgerton?

Robert: No, Waunakee.

Steve: Where's that?

Ellen: It's even closer to Madison.

Steve: Got it.

Ellen: Waunakee. So, this Fitness for Success—is that it, Robert?

Robert: Yeah.

Ellen: Yeah. It's gym, and Robert does just what he said he does. Yeah, that's one of his jobs.

Robert: And then I have one called the Community Support Network, and they call that CSN. And they do, like, we go through magazines and cross of the stuff you don't need to see—put labels on and stuff. And if I'm not bored – if I'm bored "this" is what happens: I eat.

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<Ellen laughs>

Steve: So “this” meaning, like, your belly?

Robert: Yeah.

Steve: It doesn’t look that big. You’re not eating that much. What do you like to eat? I’m just curious.

Robert: Well, sometimes I like to eat pizza. Like I had two slices for dinner, and then packaged up the rest.

Ellen: So, Robert lives all on his own.

Steve: That’s what I was gonna ask.

Ellen: Yeah.

Steve: So, you get paid by these places, you go get your groceries.

Robert: Well, sometimes I will go with my...

Ellen: You can say. He’s here.

Robert: Well, I will reveal the names who are here.

<Ellen laughs>

Robert: I have my brother Mark. He always helps me with my groceries and my bills and my rent. And I have another brother named Dave. He’s always—get me in trouble sometimes with his wife.

Steve: This sounds like what a good big brother is supposed—is he a big brother or little brother?

Robert: I’m his little brother.

Steve: Yeah, so big brothers are supposed to get you in trouble.

Robert: Yeah.

Steve: That’s their job. It’s actually part of the description—you sign a contract when you’re born.

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Robert: Well... <laughs> But I do have loving brothers always get me... Well, one of them gets me in trouble or out of trouble. Our Pastor, Joel,

Ellen: Yeah.

Robert: Had a sermon about... Example: if that coffee. If you have coffee in that cup and you spill that—if you spilled that it's like a mess. And you break the cup. You don't trust somebody. But if you get the cup together you can be trustful and tell them the truth.

Steve: So, what you're telling me—tell me if I get this right. In growing up you've got this community, you've got your family, and occasionally somebody in the family—it could be you, it could be somebody else—they break the cup.

Robert: Yeah.

Steve: But if people help to put it back together, actually it's even stronger. There's more trust.

Robert: Yeah.

Steve: That's pretty cool, actually. I mean, we're doing this segment today—you know, Ellen's a child psychologist, I'm a child psychiatrist. We think a lot about helping kids as they're growing up with all sorts of challenges. We wanted you on because you've grown up with these challenges and you've done amazing well. What you just said about putting the cup together? I wish I could get that across to the families and the kids I see. It's really special. So, thank you. Thank you for joining us.

Ellen: Thank you, Robert.

Steve: It was really nice to meet you, and to have a chance to chat with you.

Robert: Okay.

Steve: I'm Steve Schlozman. Please send us your thoughts, and tune in next time.

Ellen: Thanks.

Steve: Thank you.

OUTRO MUSIC AND CREDITS

Shrinking It Down

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