

SAM: Hello, Ghost Family. Welcome to *Family Ghosts*.

[music in: FG Theme]

Friends, *Family Ghosts* was created based on this feeling I had - that there were stories in my own family that I couldn't make sense of - stories told and retold after dinner at holidays, after everyone had drunk a little red wine - stories about things like jewel thieves and long-lost uncles that I couldn't get out of my head after everyone left the table and went to bed. I would sit by myself ruminating on what I'd heard - wondering if these stories could possibly be true, and if they were, if the truth behind them might help me make sense of things about my life I couldn't fit together. And so the idea for this show, originally, was that in every episode of the show, we'd hear a story like that from someone's family, and then try to figure out the truth behind the legend.

But as we find ourselves here in the midst of the third season of *Family Ghosts*, I've been realizing that our can also be an opportunity to do something slightly different. Because sometimes people aren't haunted by stories, but instead by the absence of a story. They live in a reality that seems like it must have some sort of story behind it - but the only people who know the story are gone, or maybe the people who are still but around aren't willing to talk. More and more on the show, I find that we're making episodes about people trying to weave a story from whatever stray threads of their history they have access to.

I want to tell you a quick story about this ring I'm wearing. It's a silver signet ring with the letters WALT etched into the surface. WALT is the name of the radio station that produces *Family Ghosts* - and I should note that WALT is a radio station I made up. Sometimes people hear the name WALT in the show, and then they come up to me and say, "Hey, I saw *Family Ghosts* is on WALT now! Where are they based?" At which point I tap on my forehead and say, "Right here, baby."

Now if you've been listening to the show for a while and heard me ruminate on things like haunted forests and secret messages encoded in photographs, I'm

guessing it won't surprise you that I had this ring made at a flea market by a man with a Salvador Dali mustache. And I did that because rings are important to me.

One of the many things I learned making the first episode of *Family Ghosts*, which is about my mom's side of my family, is that for a while, rings were our family business. My great grandfather, Saul, moved to the US with fifteen dollars in his pocket, and he became a traveling salesman, selling antique rings. Many years later, his son, my grandpa Gilly, became an engineer in the Coast Guard during World War II, and after the war, Grampa Gilly wanted to continue his engineering career. But no one would hire him, because he was Jewish. So he picked up where Saul had left off in the antique jewelry business - he became a salesman in the Diamond District on 47th Street here in New York - which, is where he met and ended up briefly married to a woman who, speaking of rings, was part of an international jewel-smuggling ring. And this woman, who Ghost Family diehards will recall from our pilot episode, was named Sabine. And Sabine tried to establish trust with Grampa Gilly's kids - my mom and her siblings - by getting them presents. So at some point, she gave my aunt this big doll. And that gift actually led to my mom's first art project - which was that she chopped the head off the doll and hung it's headless body from the railing in their house. My mom went on to have a career making analogue art with what I perceive to be fairly intense death imagery - which I grew up seeing on the walls and bookshelves of our house, which is what led me to ask her about the legend of Sabine in the first place. So that's half the reason that it was important to me to have this ring with a hand-made design.

But then there's the inscription on the ring - WALT. The reason I picked WALT for the name of my imaginary radio station is to pay homage to a man named Walt Kelly, the creator of my favorite comic strip. It's called Pogo, and it ran from the late forties all the way through the seventies. But I discovered it when we used to go to visit my grandmother on my dad's side in upstate New York. My grandparents had almost all the Pogo books in their basement, and the strips have this incredibly kinetic, heartfelt mix of slapstick comedy, absurdist wordplay, turtles playing banjos, alligators smoking cigars - and, as I would only appreciate

many years later, fairly subversive Cold War political satire. I used to spend entire afternoons in my grandparents' basement reading and re-reading these books, with the dull hum of adult conversation upstairs in the background. And those are some of my happiest memories. To this day, Pogo is one of my absolute favorite things in the world.

So I had always thought it would be cool to have a radio station called WALT in honor of Walt Kelly. But the thing that really cinched it was this conversation I had with my dad's older brother. I was interviewing him about another brother of theirs, an uncle I never got to meet, because he died by suicide when he was very young - that was the story that became the basis for the finale of our first season. In the midst of this interview, I asked my uncle about Pogo, and whether he had read it growing up, and he told me that he had. And that in fact, reading Pogo and laughing about it with my grandparents was one of the ways they'd all been able to keep going in the wake of the suicide. It turns out that Walt Kelly was a ray of light in the midst of an incredibly dark time for my family - which I had no idea about when I started reading Pogo.

But Ghost Family, I would like to think that the first time I opened a Pogo book and felt this immediate connection to it, I somehow sensed that history. And to the extent that WALT *is* a radio station - which, again, it technically isn't - that wave of recognition is what I'd like to think we're tuning into. Whenever I sit down in the booth to record something for *Family Ghosts*, I shut my eyes and touch the surface of my ring - and I imagine a radio dial locking onto a broadcast that was previously a cascade of static, but suddenly a new station is coming through loud and clear. All at once, the threads have come together, and I can hear something I never knew was there.

Today on the show, we're going to do something a little bit different. Instead of one story, we're going to bring you three - each of them about that moment when the static abruptly dissolves. From Spoke Media and WALT, you're listening to *Family Ghosts*. I'm Sam Dingman, and this is episode 23: Your Ghost. Coming up after the break...

SANDI: He knows that I have nothing but patricide in my heart.

We'll be right back.

[AD BREAK 1]

Welcome back, Ghost Family. Our first story this week is by Sandi Marx - she told it recently at *Family Ghosts Live*.

[SANDI'S STORY]

That was Sandi Marx. Coming up after the break, we'll meet Richard, who goes hunting for answers it might be too late to find.

RICHARD: We get in the car, we go to the cemetery, we search around. Within a short amount of time, I find the family plot. And there's the burial stone.

Family Ghosts will continue in a moment.

[AD BREAK 2]

Welcome back to episode 23 of *Family Ghosts* - this week, we're bringing you three different stories about people receiving transmissions from the past. Next up, Richard Cardillo, who told this story at *Family Ghosts Live* last summer.

[RICHARD'S STORY]

That was Richard Cardillo. Coming up, one final story...

NIMISHA: So let me tell you what's happening. I'm laying on my son's bed - he's sleeping in the next room with my husband. I'm sleeping on my son's bed because I need the space, because I'm extremely pregnant with our second child...

After the break, Nimisha Ladva confronts some complicated history on her quest for an answer to a deceptively simple question...

NIMISHA: So I'm laying on that bed trying to figure out, "How did this happen?!"

Family Ghosts will continue in a moment.

[AD BREAK 3]

For our final story this week, we bring you this story from Nimisha Ladva, who told it to close out the season three launch party for our show a couple months ago.

[NIMISHA'S STORY]

[MUSIC IN: "Your Ghost"]

Family Ghosts is hosted and produced by me, Sam Dingman, with Vera Carothers, Soraya Shockley, Sally Helm, Odelia Rubin, Jenna Hannum, and Janielle Kastner. Our story editor is Micaela Blei, who also coaches all the performers for our *Family Ghosts Live* shows - we couldn't do anything we do without her. Our storytellers this week were Sandi Marx, Richard Cardillo, and Nimisha Ladva - learn more about all of them at the links in the show notes for this episode. Our production assistant is Julia Press. This episode was mixed by Evan Arnett. Our theme music is by Luis Guera, and the music you're hearing in the background right now is *Your Ghost*, by the Maggie Carson Band. Executive producers for Season Three are myself, along with Keith Reynolds and Alia Tavakolian at Spoke Media. Special thanks as always to the Kindred Spirits - our supporters on Patreon who help make our work possible. In addition to ad-free episodes and exclusive bonus content, Kindred Spirits have already heard this episode - they get to listen to everything we make before anyone else. And this week, they're getting a special bonus episode, featuring two more songs by the Maggie Carson Band, performed live at the Caveat Theater as part of our Season Three launch party. If you have the means, please consider becoming a member of the Kindred Spirits for just five

dollars a month at patreon.com/familyghosts. We are proud creative partners of Spoke Media - find more great podcasts at spokemedia.io. Season Three continues next week - we'll talk to you then, and thank you for listening to *Family Ghosts*, where every house is haunted.

Next time on *Family Ghosts*...

Natalie: I think the theme of my life is that I wasn't necessarily the boy that I was supposed to be, which is, you know, caused a lot of trouble in my life.

Natalie grew up feeling like she didn't fit in. And when her father died, those feelings got even more intense

Natalie: And I went down the hall, and I opened my door. And I could feel something was wrong before I could pinpoint it. And then my eyes found it. There was a large black hunting knife stabbed in the middle of my bed mattress.

Natalie and her family confront a ghost with a sinister plan - but is it her father, or someone else? That's next week, when Season Three of *Family Ghosts* continues.