

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

[music]

The last time I saw my grandmother on my dad's side, she was 94. I had gone to visit her at the senior center where she was living and I knew it might be one of the last times I got to see her.

So I had brought my tape recorder with me because there was this story I'd heard just a few years earlier. It turns out I had an uncle I never knew about who'd died by suicide when he was a teenager. As long time listeners might recall, that story was the basis for the season finale of the first season of *Family Ghosts*. But you don't hear my grandmother's voice in that episode because that day at the senior center, I was too scared to ask her about it. I spent a few hours with my grandma that day and at one point she even looked me right in the eye and said, "I've got a few stories I could tell you," but still something stopped me from asking about my uncle. Eventually an attendant knocked on her door and told me it was time for my grandma to get ready for her evening routine and that I had to leave. And the memory that has haunted me ever since that day is turning in the doorway and seeing her sitting in her chair, looking out the window, and realizing this was probably going to be my last image of her. Which it was.

[music]

Recently, my friend Mac stopped by the Blue Room where we record all the audio here at WALT. When he got here, he immediately commented on some of the inspirational totems that I like to keep around - a silver pinky ring with a bright blue stone, a placemat with a picture of Cape Cod on it, a framed copy of an original Pogo comic book, and then of course, the *pièce de résistance*, a magenta lava lamp, which I turned on just before Mac arrived.

MAC: It's been a while since my last lava lamping, but it like, gets going at some point, right?

SAM: Oh yeah.

MAC: Yeah.

SAM: It probably looks a little bleak right now.

MAC: But it'll, it'll warm up.

SAM: It, uh, it should warm up.

SAM: I've known Mac for about five years, ever since he visited my apartment to record an episode of a baseball podcast I used to do with another friend. It was about the Baltimore Orioles and politics, in that order, and we called it Baltimorons. I know, great title. Mac came on the show to tell us about the time he actually tried out to play for the Baltimore Orioles.

MAC: And every throw was about four feet too short and skipped past the first baseman. And uh, then we got to batting, they didn't even call my name and I s- I just slunked off with nothing more than a sunburn and bad memories. Who's like the worst fielding Orioles shortstop of all time? I was that guy.

SAM: But beyond this ongoing and ill-advised allegiance to one of the most difficult to love baseball teams on the planet, I recently discovered that Mac and I have something else in common. That day in the Blue Room a couple months ago, after we'd been talking for a while and the lava lamp got going, Mac started telling me about how he hasn't been to visit his mom in a long time. That he feels guilty about that. And that whenever he thinks about her, it makes him really sad.

MAC: Mostly when I think about her, I just picture her sitting alone in her room looking out the window.

SAM: Part of the reason Mac and I were talking that day is because a few years ago I read this article he wrote for Gawker - a long personal history about the mysterious circumstances surrounding the death of his brother and its lingering impact on Mac's relationships with his parents. And in spite of all the time Mac and I have spent together over the last few years, clowning around in bars and weirdly decorated podcast studios, I had no idea about this terrible chapter in his life. His brother Asher was shot and killed in a carjacking in 1992 and the perpetrator was never caught. That's the story that Mac tells in the Gawker piece. But that's not the story we're going to tell on the show this week. Because after I read Mac's essay and sat down with him to talk about it, I found out there's more to the story.

The reason that Mac hasn't seen his mom in a long time is that, when Mac was in high school, his mom did something that made Mac feel really betrayed, so betrayed in fact that he left her house in the middle of the night and never went back. Their relationship had always been complicated and once he was gone, it felt easier to stay gone. So that's what he did.

And then, decades went by. And now that Mac's mom is nearing the end of her life, Mac's getting ready to go visit her for the first time in a long time. And he's trying to decide if they're finally going to do something they've never done: to talk about what happened to Asher and whatever happened between the two of them.

MAC: That's a regret of mine. That, um, yeah, that I never sort of summoned what ever I needed to, to have that conversation about kind of everything.

Yeah. And just a lot about my mom's life that remains mysterious to me.

[music]

SAM: From Spoke Media and WALT, you're listening to *Family Ghosts*. I'm Sam Dingman and this is episode 25, The Ambassador. Our story continues after the break.

[AD BREAK 1]

SAM: Last summer, I went to visit Mac's apartment. He lives there with his wife Katherine, their two daughters, and a dog named Sully.

[Sully barks]

MAC: Whoa! Alert, alert. Sully, that's not good podcasting, bro.

SAM: When I got there, Mac had this big manila folder open on the dining room table with all kinds of old documents spilling out of it.

MAC: Um, this is my W9. And- Oh, this is wild, actually. This next thing is, um...

SAM: It's one of those folders a lot of people have that contains this random hodgepodge of family memorabilia. Eighth-grade report cards, childhood drawings that once hung from magnets on the fridge, a letter Mac sent his cousin about a baseball game that he went to. And there was also this letter that Mac's mom, Rose, wrote to her mom, Mac's grandma, in the mid nineties.

MAC: She talks in here, from what I can tell, I think like, you know, as part of her kind of spiritual practice, there was a lot of dream analysis, conversations with

psychics. Um, just sort of anything my mom could access that would try to make sense of a world which I think often did not make sense to her

SAM: Dreams were very important to Rose. In fact, she goes by Rose because she once had a dream that she should change her name from Joan to Rose. In this letter that we found in the folder, Rose is telling her mom about another dream she had and what she thinks it might mean. Mac told me that the mystical language his mom used in this letter was familiar to him. Rose used to talk to Mac like this when he was a kid.

MAC: If I would say like, “Oh, I, you know, feel really like, despondent about, you know, this relationship I'm in,” or whatever, and she'd be like, “Oh, well, part of the reason is you're a ray three and ray threes, you know, are very sensitive,” et cetera. So yeah, this language that's in there...

SAM: At least some of this, Mac says, came from Rose's study of Sufism, a mystical strain of Islam that Rose got interested in when she was a teenager.

MAC: I mean, my- to hear my grandma say it, um, my mom from a very, very early age had this, something in her that propelled her to like seek out higher truths or understanding or clarity, you know, from a very young age.

SAM: By the time Rose left for college, at Bard College in upstate New York, she'd been studying Sufism for a few years. And Mac doesn't know the details, but shortly after Rose got to Bard, she had some kind of breakdown.

MAC: And my grandparents both drove up from Baltimore to Bard and collected her and brought her home and, and she never went back to school there. I just think like, you know, as that suggests, she was very like, overwhelmed by the world. From early on.

SAM: As part of our collaboration on this story, I asked Mac to read me a few passages from that Gawker piece he wrote - you'll be hearing them throughout the episode. And in an early section, he tells the story of something terrible that happened to Rose a few years after she left Bard.

MAC: As a very young woman she fell in love with a dashing University of Chicago Philosophy and Mysticism student named Alan. He looked like a Jewish Al Pachino. Soon enough she was pregnant, and then she was driving herself and Alan and their friend Barbara from Chicago to San Francisco to visit Alan's mother. Mom drove through the night until her eyes closed like their future. The Volvo skidded off the road, down a steep hill and into a culvert. Barbara was in the front next to mom and survived with serious injuries. Alan, in the back, was crushed to death by the front seat. Mom broke her wrist and was badly cut up. This was just before dawn on December 20th, 1967, outside Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. Asher was born almost exactly five months later.

SAM: Asher is Mac's older brother. And a couple years after Asher was born, Rose met another student of Sufism named Henry. They got married and eventually became disciples of this spiritual teacher named Meher Baba. Mac's parents found a community in Baltimore where a lot of Baba's followers had settled. And a few years later, Mac was born. In the early years, Mac says, even though the block was lined with mystically inclined Bohemian parents, his mom was a little further out on the hippie spectrum than the other moms.

MAC: We, um, did not have a television, um, which, you know, as kids really rubbed my brother and me, um, terribly badly. So we'd often complained to my mom about that fact. And almost every time we did complain, she would either point to the large window in the front of the house or walk us over to the window and just say, "there's your television. Look out the window. It's organic TV."

SAM: Other than that, Mac says, life was pretty good for he and Asher. They ran around the neighborhood with the other kids. They played baseball and drew pictures with Rose at the kitchen table.

But then around the time Mack was nine or ten, he has this memory of an afternoon they spent with his dad Henry.

MAC: He once wanted to like take Asher and me on what he called a tour of Baltimore. So he had all these spots he wanted to show us and you know, we were both kind of like initially rolling our eyes like, you know, this is our town. Like what are you going to show us? But um... But it ended up being, actually being really cool.

SAM: The Baltimore tour started out great. Henry took Mac and Asher up to the top of this hill in a suburb a short drive from where they lived, and they walked through this vast green field with a beautiful view of the Baltimore Harbor, where they could see the city sprawling out all around it. Later in the afternoon though, Mac says the tour started to get a little weird.

MAC: At the end, he took us to his favorite downtown bar, I think was called Reggie's, very like, eighties kind of like swinger ish bar. And um...

SAM: Wait, do you mean swinger like Jon Favreau and Vince Vaughn, or do you mean swinger like, uh, key party?

MAC: Closer to key party.

SAM: Okay. Got it.

SAM: Mac told me that even though he was just a kid when this happened, it was clear to him that Reggie's was a place that his dad went to to hang out without Rose. A few years later, his parents got divorced.

And with Henry out of the picture, Mac says he started to notice how close his mom and his brother were. At one point, I came across a poem in Mac's manila folder, apparently improvised by Asher and transcribed by Rose.

SAM: This is kind of a wild poem. It goes:

A Charlie Chaplin of a boy

Playing the wheelbarrow bump on a xylophone hill.

A little pants leg kick, halt and rest,

With a shrug in his shoulder and he's off again.

With a shoe to the air and a trip of the barrow

And the wheels skidding, rolling

And a hand on the handles to a five legged stand.

With a lift, skip, tip, kick, stand

All down along the wide grassy tight rope lane

Wood chip path to the door of the circus master's daughter.

MAC: It's trippy.

SAM: It's like a Decemberists song.

MAC: It's trippy as hell. It is.

SAM: Mac and his mom were never close the way Rose and Asher were, and the divorce didn't make things any easier. Then, around the time Mac was 16, Asher left for college in California and things with Mac and Rose started to go downhill.

MAC: Yeah, at some point we all moved out of the house I grew up, uh, in, and my mom moved a couple times with a hand- uh, she was living kind of with a handful of friends slash roommates. I mean, I think she might have met them through her interest in Sufism, but they'd all also like, that had morphed into something else where they all had this relationship with a Santa Fe based psychic, um, who was kind of like their guru.

SAM: Mac says there were some positive things about the new living arrangement. His mom's roommates had kids of their own, they'd all play wiffle ball in the backyard sometimes, but those moments were fleeting.

MAC: It was a strange place to live as a teenager. I remember I had like, a basement room. I just didn't really want to like, go upstairs and mingle with mom and her friends. So I remember being down there a lot.

SAM: Part of Mac's resistance to hanging out upstairs had to do with Rose's dynamic with Sylvia, the psychic.

MAC: She would often say like, "I was talking to Sylvia and uh, we kind of agree you should do, do X, Y, or Z."

SAM: At least part of Asher's closeness with Rose seems like it had to do with a shared openness to the idea of some sort of sense of destiny. Asher used to write to Rose about it in his letters home from college.

MAC: She told me he wrote, you know, often, or at least more than once about, um, this feeling of like, that he was going to die young, you know, you could want, make the connection that part of why he felt that way was, yeah, given this immediate sort of legacy of his family. Yeah.

SAM: But as a teenager living in a house full of seekers, Mac had no patience for any of this stuff.

MAC: I'd never met, as far as I remember, I'd never met the psychic. And even if I had, she was a goddamn psychic, I'm not going to do what she says.

SAM: One summer, the tension that had been simmering for months between Mac and Rose finally boiled over.

MAC: My mom and her psychic decided together that I should move from Baltimore to live with my dad in Oakland. Um, and I was very not into that. Um...

SAM: How old were you at that time?

MAC: I must have been about 16, because my response to that was to, um, I always think of this in the context of how the Baltimore Colts left Baltimore in the middle of the night. 'Cause my version of that was leaving my mom's in the middle of the night and having my friend Rachel drive me in her VW bug, um, across town to Mount Washington to live with my aunt. I remember, I think she, I

remember like Rachel pulling into the driveway of her house and her coming outside, you know, to, to meet me. Like she must've been watching out the kitchen window. Um. It's really sweet actually now that I think about it.

SAM: Yeah.

MAC: Um, yeah, I just remember her coming out and kinda, you know, putting her arms around me.

SAM: After that, things only got worse.

MAC: After I left and moved in with my aunt, Silvia told my mom like, you know, she needed to either bring me back to her house or, or handcuff me and, get me on a plane to Oakland.

SAM: Jesus.

MAC: Yeah.

SAM: Did you ever talk to your mom about this? Like about, did you guys ever have a conversation about like, what the fuck are you talking about? Or...

MAC: I mean, like, I said things like that. I definitely like, said, you know, that's bullshit. Fuck that. "Conversation" might be too grand, you know.

SAM: When Asher got word of what was happening, he flew home from California.

MAC: He came back to Baltimore largely to kind of make sure I was okay and take care of me, in a manner. And um, and he spent a year in Baltimore and got like, his own apartment out near school.

SAM: So he came back specifically to check in on you?

MAC: Yeah, I mean, I think he came back hoping to be a kind of family ambassador of a kind, you know.

SAM: Mhmm.

SAM: Asher's intervention couldn't fix the problem. In the end, he went back to California and eventually Mac moved out there too. Not to Oakland, like Sylvia wanted, but to LA where Asher later joined him. Mac started taking acting classes. Asher had written this screenplay with their cousin Aaron called Nuclear Wasted, a pulp dystopian sci fi comedy. They wanted Mack to star. They were going to be, in Asher's words...

MAC: The new Coen brothers or some shit.

SAM: But then, one night in 1992...

MAC: I remember a feeling, a wobble in my gut. Physical, a hollowing out. Not nausea, closer to the opposite, like I can't get enough air in.

SAM: In another section of that Gawker essay, Mac writes about his brother's murder. The night it happened, Asher was with Aaron and Mac was driving home from a date with his girlfriend at the time. Evangeline.

MAC: All I can say behind the wheel, "I feel weird." I fought it, denied it. Look at this rad girl! Look at the swollen moon through the sunroof. Moonroof! Shoving the Tom Waits cassette and forget the gut.

SAM: Mac and Evangeline made it back to the apartment, but Mac still felt strange. He decided to smoke some weed.

MAC: Maybe the pot could coat the peculiar wooziness still swirling my innards. Two negatives stacked atop one another to reach a positive charge. Maybe. But now the effect instead was cumulative and I was left with whittled wits. Unhappily stoned. We played a Sonic Youth CD and sat on the bed and then taka taka taka taka went the firecrackers. Strange for the neighborhood, I thought. Strange for anywhere. I ran shaky to the window and poked a finger into the Venetians, peeking, peeking, like a cheap detective in middle-class squalor. "What is it?" Evan's voice wobbled across the room. "I don't know. I don't see anything."

SAM: Asher never came home that night. And the next day, Mack woke up to an article in the paper about his brother's murder. It said that Asher and their cousin Aaron had been looking for a parking space when someone ran up to the car and fired a shot through the window. Asher was hit and when they tried to drive away, they crashed into a parked car. Aaron managed to hail a cab and get Asher to the ER, but it was too late. A police sketch of the gunman was eventually released and for a while it looked like the cops had enough forensic evidence from the crime scene to track down the shooter. But then months went by, and then years. At some point Mack realized they were never going to get a definitive answer about who killed Asher. Mac says he and his mom never really talked about Asher's murder.

MAC: Some people might guess that it would sort of like bond us back again, but it didn't. I felt really, really bad for her, but it didn't make me wanna reinvest in the relationship, I guess, or, or see her more. Um, I just, yeah, I mean I just at that point didn't feel like, I felt like she, a lot of what she was interested in, I did not understand and I felt like she couldn't possibly understand what I was interested in.

[music]

I just felt like I couldn't really trust her and I felt like she was like choosing these friends and this community over me, essentially. I feel like I kinda just like gave up on the relationship or like pulled, pulled way back and just felt like, you know, I couldn't really count on her, so I would just have to figure out how to make my way without her.

SAM: Elsewhere in the Gawker essay, Mac writes about what little he knows about Rose's life in the aftermath of Asher's death.

MAC: For many of the ensuing years, mom has drifted from home to home, coast to coast. Some years she's lived alone. Other times she's found a community of friends to take her in. I don't know how many thousands of dollars she spent on quasi spiritual classes. Never recouped loans to fellow seekers. Long distance calls to perceived mystics. I don't think I want to know.

SAM: As from Mac's life, he moved back East and started a family of his own. But in the essay he also writes about this sense that Asher isn't really gone.

MAC: Once on a cross town bus, I was absolutely convinced he was riding behind me. The same dark hair parted to fall over his right eye. Had he faked it all in order to... What? Move to New York? It couldn't be. Was it?

SAM: *Family Ghosts* will continue in a moment.

[AD BREAK 2]

SAM: When I first read max Gawker essay, I was particularly moved by the sections where he writes about the years following Asher's death. Right after it happened, Mac and his cousin Aaron, the one who was in the car with Asher the night of the murder, moved to San Francisco.

MAC: We started a band called Coal, changed the name to Postman. We performed at bars, clubs with no windows. Aaron played guitar and wrote songs. I sang. Not really. I drank beer and Jim Bean and jumped around and shouted until my voice was a croak.

[music]

MAC: A few shows, Aaron and I drank so much we could barely stand. I didn't think about writing lyrics for or about my brother, but every show was a eulogy. Awake.

SAM: The postman shows helped him at first, but eventually Mac realized he had to try to find a way forward. He moved in with another cousin in Santa Cruz and started taking college courses. But the clouds followed him down the coast.

MAC: At night I drink too much and walk out the front door of our small white clapboard house. Before I reach the nearby health food store, I cross the street and head for the stucco walls of the liquor store on the other side of Laurel Street. If it was late enough, about one or so in the morning, the streets would be empty and I'd be alone with the walls. I'd walk steady, determined, eyes on the pavement, around and around the square building, dragging my right hand across the stucco until my skin cracked open. I'd go for as long as I could take it and then try for one more loop. The open cuts sliced wider on the raised fake stone.

SAM: Thankfully, Santa Cruz is also where Mac met his now wife, Catherine. They got married and moved back East to Brooklyn and had two daughters. Postman broke up, but Mac finished school, got a job as an editor, and little by little the clouds started to dissipate. But by the time Mac started working on that Gawker piece a few years ago, he and Rose, his mom, were in touch only

sporadically. Mac writes about literally trying to find her in order to talk to her for the article, how she's drifted from spiritual community to spiritual community, giving unknown thousands of dollars to various self-proclaimed mystics and people Mac suspects are charlatans and con artists. When he finally tracked Rose down, he discovered that she'd enrolled as a student at a place describing itself as a Mystery School.

MAC: It's website describes its purpose. "In all cultures throughout the ages, Mystery Schools appear at times of extraordinary cultural, societal, and technological change to help ordinary men and women bridge the resulting chasm between the inner sacred and outer mundane life experience." To me, it's all a mystery.

SAM: It was hard for Mac to watch Rose slip into the thrall of yet another spiritual guru who seemed to be exploiting his mother's trust, but it also wasn't surprising. Still, when she agreed to meet with Mac over lunch for the Gawker interview, he realized just how distant their lives had become.

MAC: She suddenly seemed to be aging very quickly. A half ghost nibbling egg salad. She didn't appear capable of relating to the kids. At one point, with the girls and Catherine off browsing books, mom and I talked about possible holiday presents for her grandchildren. "Do they like warm blankets?" Mom asked, as if she'd just fallen to earth. An hour and a half later, mom's friend picked her up. It was like visiting a prisoner in the jail of a Muren mini mall.

SAM: A few years ago, the Mystery School situation went from dubious to dangerous. Rose had ended up moving into the home of the founder of the school and according to Mac, that arrangement got toxic in a hurry. Rose couldn't afford to pay rent and she had developed Alzheimer's. Her mental state was deteriorating

rapidly. At some point, the school's founder sent Mac an email threatening to take Rose to the emergency room and just leave her there. Fortunately, some of Rose's friends swooped in and found her a room at a nearby assisted living facility. And while Mac is of course grateful to them, he's also haunted by the fact that he didn't go out to California and fix the situation himself. He can't help feeling like Asher would have handled things differently.

MAC: He had a real, like, uh, internal kind of like code of loyalty about the family. And um, in a way I didn't and, and, you know, could definitely summon strong feelings about the family in a way I don't.

SAM: In the wake of the mystery school mess, Mac agonized over what he should do.

MAC: Yeah, it's a, it's a weird thing because, you know, Catherine and- my wife and I talked a lot about should we have mom move in here? You know. And I just, I could not see that. I just could not see how that would work at all. It seemed like a terrible, terrible idea. So, then what are, the options are sort of very narrow from there. You know, my mom's old and frail seeming and has no money, so there's not a lot of great options at that point.

SAM: A younger version of Mac might've left it there, but lately Mac's been feeling like he has to try to do something for Rose. For her sake, and for Asher's.

[music]

SAM: That day Mac wrote about in his Gawker essay, when he thought he saw Asher on the bus, he actually ended up following the person he thought was Asher off the bus and down the street for several blocks.

MAC: He walked East and I followed, I began to think that, incredibly, it was my brother. Science was against it but still, the same pigeon toed strut. I followed him from half a block distance. Finally, Maybe Asher bounced up a short flight of brownstone stairs and entered a Midtown building. I froze. My chase was over. But was it even a chase at all? Can it be a chase if you don't know what you're after?

SAM: Later in the piece, Mac starts to realize what he's chasing.

MAC: Every few weeks it hits me hard. I wish Ashley were there for mom in ways I cannot be.

SAM: I asked Mac what he meant by that.

MAC: You know, I think if my brother was alive, he'd be with her and take her for walks.

SAM: A few weeks later as we finished going through those documents at Mac's dining room table, he told me that his family was getting ready to leave for their summer vacation.

SAM: So we're talking, um, I guess the day that you're headed out to California, right?

MAC: Mhmm.

SAM: Um, have you decided yet whether you're going to go see her?

MAC: Yeah, I'm definitely gonna see her.

SAM: Our story continues after the break.

[AD BREAK 3]

SAM: One of the things that was hardest for Mac about that conversation he had with his mom when he was working on the Gawker piece about Asher was the realization that Rose was starting to slip away.

MAC: It just seemed to happen so fast, even though, you know, there was, uh, decades between when my brother died and when my dad died and, and, and my mom's condition deteriorated. Like that was, all happened over many, many years. But it just oddly feels very sudden,

SAM: It made Mac realize that eventually no one, especially not Asher was going to be there to make things easier.

MAC: At some point. I remember thinking that I would just, there wasn't anyone to call.

SAM: And so, as he set off for California with his family this past summer, Mac realized there wasn't much time left with Rose, and no way to make up for all the time they'd lost. On top of that, with Rose's Alzheimer's in a pretty advanced state, the prospects for any sort of meaningful conversation weren't good.

MAC: Yeah, I mean, uh, unless there's been a like scientific miracle, um, between now and then, um, when I see her this coming weekend, um, yeah, there won't be, I mean, I'll be lucky to like get "hello."

SAM: In spite of everything, Mac and his daughter Una got on a plane and went to visit Rose.

SAM: Hey, can you hear me okay?

MAC: Yeah. Can you hear me okay?

SAM: Yeah, yeah. You're uh, you're fading in and out a little bit, but, um, I think I got you.

SAM: Mac called me a few minutes after he and Una left the hospital where Rose is living now. He said that he'd been hoping to bring his mom some flowers, but they couldn't find a florist. So he brought her a little almond cake from a coffee shop. When they arrived, they made their way to Rose's room. It was a small, cold, clinical environment, Mac says. A dresser and a lamp. Not much else. Rosa's bed faces a wall.

MAC: So when she was in bed looking out, she would see this wall. And really the only things on that wall were photos of me and Catherine and the girls. And, um, for some reason we both just like lost it.

SAM: Mac and Una got Rose into a wheelchair and they took her out into the garden behind the hospital. They all sat quietly for a bit.

MAC: It was nice out there. I mean it was cool, but not freezing. San Francisco summer morning, and the garden was green and it was nice. It was simple but nice.

SAM: After a while, Mac unwrapped the almond tart they'd brought from the coffee shop and offered a piece to Rose.

MAC: She kept kind of like pointing at it like she wanted more and so I would just break off very, very small pieces of that.

SAM: As Mac told me about his visit with his mom, I kept thinking about that thing he said. How if Asher were alive, he would have been the one to visit Rose and spend time with her.

MAC: He'd be trying to make her life better in some small way. I guess.

SAM: It's too late for them to talk about Asher or whatever it was that happened that summer with Sylvia, the psychic. As Mac expected, Rose hadn't even been able to say hello when they arrived, or much of anything really. But that afternoon in the garden, she did manage to find a few words he wasn't expecting.

MAC: We'd say, "you doing good?" and she might say something that sounds like, "yeah, good."

SAM: And so they sat together for a while, sharing the almond tart, piece by piece.

MAC: I mean, there's definitely some lucidity there, where when she wanted more of that it was clear she wanted more.

SAM: *Family Ghosts* is hosted and produced by me, Sam Dingman. With Vera Carothers, Soraya Shockley, Sally Helm, Odelia Ruben, Jenna Hannam and

Janielle Kastner. Our story editor is Mikaela Blei. Our production assistant is Julia Press. This episode was mixed by Evan Arnett. Our theme music is by Luis Guera. 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 where Mac reads the entirety of the Gawker piece about his brother that you heard some excerpts from in this story. It's a beautiful piece of writing. It was actually nominated for a national magazine award. If you'd like to hear that along with the special extras that accompany all of our episodes, please consider becoming a member of the Kindred Spirits. It's just \$5 a month and you can join 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*...

Jim O'Grady takes a fateful trip to Fort Davis, Texas.

JIM: If you happen to grow up in a small town with only one stoplight, that is 100% more stoplights in Fort Davis, Texas. Um, if this place ever had a heyday, it is over.

SAM: Jim spends a complicated vacation with his mother-in-law, Ruby Bell.

JIM: A woman who viewed everyday life through a veil of Gothic Horror.

SAM: Ruby Bell believes in the spirit world.

JIM: It's like a country club she belongs to and visits regularly.

SAM: But Jim doesn't.

JIM: And then I say to Ruby Bell, "you know what I can't believe? How some people squander their curiosity on BS like signs of the paranormal."

SAM: On our next episode, Jim and Ruby Bell take a fateful trip into the desert.

JIM: We hit something in the road. Ruby stomps the brakes, spins the wheel, turns around, drives back, stops, and there in the headlights is a vulture.

SAM: That's next week when season three of *Family Ghosts* continues.

You're listening to WALT. Homemade radio.