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CASE 3: Belt Buckle

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Starlee Kine: From Gimlet, I'm Starlee Kine and this is Mystery Show. (music - why is there you, why is there me, why does my Mother kiss my Father occasionally). Every week I solve a new mystery. Mysteries that can't be solved online. Mysteries you can't solve yourself. Up until now there hasn't been anyone to help with this. That person is now me. (music - 'cause mysteries, tomorrow I'll find out all I should know, those mysteries, I don't even know what I don't even know. Those mysteries, they're hiding around and around and round and round.)

Carson: Okay, so what two words do you know about my mystery?

Starlee: Belt Buckle

Carson: That is a good title for it.

Starlee Kine: That's Carson. He knew me even before I was solving mysteries. *That's* how far back we go. When you have a mystery, you carry it around with you always. Usually that happens in your head but in Carson's case, his mystery fits in the palm of his hand. It's an object that came into his life when he was nine years old, in Phoenix Arizona:

Carson: There was this kid in our neighborhood named Jimmy Turk, who was like maybe a year older than my brother, who is two years older than me and he was like a troublemaker. I wouldn't go so far as to call him a bad kid but you know he had a single mom so he could get away with more stuff than me and my brother 'cause she had to work and he just had a lot of unsupervised time.

Starlee: Likable, affable trouble-maker?

Carson: Yeah - good guy. He never really did anything that bad, you know? I remember he had found a stick of dynamite somewhere, and he had emptied out all the gunpowder.

Starlee: From the stick of dynamite?

Carson: Supposedly. The stick of dynamite was never seen, just the gunpowder was seen.

(music)

Carson: One day, I went over to Jimmy's house. and he showed me this belt buckle that he had found in the gutter. That was what he said. He went for a walk and he found it in the gutter. And, it is beautiful. On the front of it, there is a chef's hat, front and center, flanked by a corkscrew, a pan of eggs that are frying and a toaster. The pan of eggs - the eggs are painted very carefully with some kind of enamel - so they are yellow and white. This is the coolest part of it. Ready?

Starlee: Yeah

Carson: Click

Starlee: Gasp

Carson: That is the toaster.

Starlee: No

Carson: Yeah. There is a tiny tiny switch and if you flick the switch, the toast pops up.

Starlee: There is little tiny toast that comes out?

Carson: Yeah little tiny toast like as big as your pinky nail. They have like a crust and bread texture on the bread, and then you can push them right back down. It is the coolest belt buckle I have ever seen.

Starlee Kine: Think back to when you were a little kid, how badly you wanted to believe the world was full of hidden treasures. Now, imagine seeing that belt buckle.

(music)

Carson: I was hypnotized.

Starlee: Yeah, as you should have been.

Carson: (laughing) I just sat there in his bedroom playing with it for half an hour, just popping the toast and putting it back, to the point where his mom took him out into the hallway and was like, "you know Carson loves that thing so much. I think you should give it to him."

Starlee: What did he say?

Carson: He gave it to me. He was like, "yeah you're right." He was like, "hey man you can have that." He didn't really care about it.

Starlee: What?

Carson: Well you know, he had dynamite and girls and stuff.

Starlee: Why did he get girls and you didn't? Because you were too young?

Carson: Too young, too tiny, obsessed with miniature toasters. (laughing)

(music)

Starlee Kine: Every lost object comes with a mystery that seems hopelessly impossible to solve. The single glove found on the train. The wedding band found on the beach. But the belt buckle was different. It came with clues.

On either side of the buckle was a name.

Carson: The name on the front is Hans Jordi: H-A-N-S J-O-R-D-I. And, then the name on the back, it says: "In appreciation, Bob Six." B-O-B S-I-X

Starlee Kine: Hans Jordi. Bob Six. They were the kind of names that demanded to be etched into silver. Who *was* Hans Jordi? What did Bob Six appreciate him for?

Carson has a theory which he inherited from his Dad.

Carson: My Dad's theory, which is funny, just because he said it, it stuck with me. Bob six is a cowboy. He's organized these trail rides for older guys in their 40s and they would go on the trail and eat breakfast and get drunk. Hans was there as the cook. He was a blast and they all loved him. Bob Six was just wealthy enough that he had this belt buckle made for him.

(music)

Carson: I started to feel guilty because there is a name on it that I should get this belt buckle back to him or to his kids or to somebody, right ?

Starlee: But normally, when you find stuff - like there is stuff in thrift stores: a picture, someone's wedding album - and the urge is not really to return it. Why have you felt the urge to return it at all?

Carson: Because it wasn't found in a store. It was found in a gutter. It's like a lost thing, you know. I just thought that it's the right thing to do.

Starlee: how do you imagine he lost it?

Carson: That's your job to figure out.

Starlee: Oh I will figure it out. (laughing) When I find Hans and Bob Six. what do you want to tell them?

Carson: I want to say, "sorry I didn't get back to you sooner." But, I mean do you ever want to spend your leisure time ... I guess you do. (laughing)

Starlee Kine: I would find Hans Jordi and return his buckle to him, even though this case made my stomach hurt a little. The buckle was that rarest of things - an object as enchanting in actuality as it was as a story. What were the chances that the real life Hans Jordi and the real life Bob Six would be that too?

I wasn't in the preserving whimsy and wonder business, though. I was in the mystery solving business. I had my work cut out for me. There were so many gaps to fill in. For example, I already knew Hans Jordi's position on miniature toasters, but nothing at all about how he felt about regular sized ones.

(music)

Donna: Hello?

Starlee: Hello is this Donna?

Donna: Yes.

Starlee: Hi my name is Starlee, and I was calling to ask you a question about an art class that you teach.

Donna: Oh, okay.

Starlee: Do you remember a student named Hans Jordi?

Donna: Oh yeah, Hans Jordi. I remember Hans Jordi.

Starlee: You do?

Donna: Yes.

Starlee Kine: This is Donna Beers. I discovered a newspaper item written ten years ago, about a seaside painting class in San Diego that Donna had taught. The class had been free and had taken place on the beach. Donna gave lessons on how to paint the horizon. Included in the article is a group photo, showing the students who had taken the class that day, and in that photo's caption, third from the left, is the name Hans Jordi. So I called Donna up to see if her Hans Jordi was Carson's Hans Jordi.

Donna: You know I've had, I don't know, maybe a couple thousand people come to those classes, and I remember Hans more than I remember a lot of the other people.

Starlee: What do you remember about him?

Donna: He's German. He was an interesting student. I just liked him a lot. I was very happy to see him in my classes.

Starlee Kine: The photo accompanying the caption is grainy. The students are crouching on the sand, holding their canvasses. There's only one man in the photo, who I assume is Hans. He's wearing a hat and mirrored sunglasses.

I know a disguise when I see one and ask Donna for a better description of Hans:

Donna: I can see his face. I can see his body. I can see him drawing. I can see him sitting in my class. I can hear his voice. I can hear the sound of his voice. There is an actor that he seems like, this German actor that usually plays like a father kind of role or an in-charge kind of guy, and he has that kind of a look

Starlee: Hmm.

Donna: I could picture him with a monocle, but not a skinny faced guy with a monocle and a mean face with a monocle, like a rounder face, like a know-it-all kind of guy.

Starlee: So the monocle was more like professorial kind of monocle?

Donna: Yeah. He looked professorial. That's a very good term. He would be like Dr. Finklestein.

Donna: How about Armin Mueheller Stall?

Starlee: How did you just find that? What did you just type in to get that?

Donna: (laughing) Look in the article, just type www.imdb.com

Starlee: Okay. Let me look, hold on. That's the guy?

Donna: This is the guy.

Starlee: Where have you seen this guy before? I don't think this is the guy. I think now that you're seeing him you have decided that he is the guy. But I don't feel like this guy was in your head.

Donna: Click on the picture where he's sitting behind a desk.

Starlee: Sitting behind a desk, okay. I am looking... that's the vibe that Hans had?

Donna: Yes. He had that kind of demeanor. Okay, there is one with him with the wife and he cuddling the wife.

Starlee: Okay. let me look at the cuddling the wife picture. Yes. Right. This man is very classy looking.

Donna: Remember I told you? He was fatherly and professorial, and here are these pictures of this guy and he 's exactly those things.

Starlee: That's true. He is matching up to what you're saying.

Donna: Yeah that's the guy.

Starlee Kine: Thanks to Donna, I now had a description of Hans Jordi. Hans Jordi was Swiss German. Hans Jordi was memorable. Hans Jordi was great in the film *Avalon* and robbed of his Oscar in the film *Shine*.

But I still didn't know what accounted for all the chef stuff on the buckle? It couldn't just be random. I asked Donna if her Hans been a chef. She said she didn't know because she hated to cook, which I had to admit was airtight logic. I'd have to decipher this clue some other way. I bid my first witness goodbye.

Donna: Anytime you come to California, shoot me an email and I will meet you somewhere and I will actually show you how to do horizon because it is really hard to translate that over the phone without the visuals that go with it.

Starlee: I appreciate that. I want to know how to see the horizon.

Donna: We'll hook up. One thing that you can do is that if you have a pen just hold it right on your nose. Half of what you see is above the pen and half of what you see is below the pen. Then, pick up an object - like a glass or something - and then tilt your whole head down so that you see the pen from the bottom you know of the line and (music) then with the glass up so that you see it above the pen and then you will see what I am talking about.

Starlee: I feel like you are telling me a new way of seeing whether a glass is half full or half empty. (laughing) This is going to change everything for me.

(music)

Starlee Kine: My next lead I found on a food blog called *The Sated Epicure*. On April 14 2010, the Sated Epicure, had written about a meal he'd had, that awoke a long ago memory from his earliest days as a cook. The post said, quote, "In 1986 I was on my internship at a casino in Lake Tahoe and tasted my first classical beef daube prepared by Chef Hans Jordi. At 6'6", Chef Hans was so tall that he had to take his chef hat off to walk around the kitchen. His stride was wider than the wingspan of a small aircraft and he spoke as fast as he walked." end quote.

A chef so tall that he grazed the ceiling, with a stride wider than the wingspan of a small aircraft? That's the language used to describe a superhero, not a human man. Could it be possible that the real life Hans was even more fantastic than the one Carson had imagined as a kid?

Maybe I was in the preserving whimsy and wonder business.

I wrote Sated Epicure and told him we had to talk.

Sated: I was 19 when I first met Hans. In walks this guy, 50 years old, starched perfect chef whites, and he takes us running through the main kitchen with these 80 gallon steam kettles going with soups and stocks, all of these various sauces and chowders, things happening all at once, people dicing and chopping and noise and steam and heat. "This is the main kitchen." Boom. Then he swings back through the stairway, and he is taking two or three stairs at a time. He is flying. We're tripping down the stairs behind him, all seven of us, bumping into each other. I'm like, "oh my gosh," he's at least twice my age and I can't keep up with the guy.

Starlee Kine: Twice well, everything.

Sated: Twice as fast in the kitchen and twice as capable of putting out two thousand dinners at a pop. Twice as capable of standing on his feet til two in the morning on a

twenty hour shift. Twice as capable about being in the next morning at 4 like nothing ever happened, twice as capable of having a spotless white chef coat while I was covered from head to toe. I know that sounds a bit overboard but it is the truth.

Starlee Kine: My stomach was hurting again. Sated kept bringing up Hans' chef whites, how perfectly starched and spotless they always were. It was hard for me to imagine Carson's buckle fitting into that ensemble. I tell Sated about the buckle, and describe for him the pan of eggs, the corkscrew, the toast that pops up.

Starlee: When you hear that, does that sound like Hans?

Sated: It jogged a memory in my mind of us seeing him for the first time in civilian clothes. Back then when you got your pay check, they put three drink tokens in your paycheck. So we're sitting at the bar after we got our paychecks, consuming our three free drinks, when we see Hans. (music) It's like reverse Superman, you know, Clark Kent coming out from the booth after changing into his regular attire. We didn't recognize him at first. I remember saying to Burns, "hey Mike, that's Hans." "That is not Hans." "Mike, I swear to God, that's Hans. He's going to walk towards us." He is in this white sort of Stetson-y looking shirt. He's got cowboy boots and jeans. And he walks towards us, kind of nods and then keeps going and I said, "oh my god, he is a Swiss cowboy."

(music)

Starlee: Did you ever see him again in civilian clothes.

Sated: No.

Starlee: Never?

Sated: No, there is a reason I saw him then and it's 30 years later that I know why. If we didn't catch him coming out of that door that one time. I would have been no use to you. Isn't that funny?

Starlee Kine: Funny had nothing to do with it. Was Sated destined to be a clue that helped me solve my mystery? Is that really how fate works? Or was that simply how drink coupons work?

In Sated's life, this actually wasn't the only time fate had converged with Hans.

Sated: I was in a situation then where we were running out of tuition money. I come from a working class family. Nobody ever went to college. Either I get scholarship money to continue or I need to withdraw from college. We had nothing left. We had nowhere to go.

Starlee Kine: In order to get the scholarship, Sated had to get an A from Hans. Sated didn't tell Hans about the scholarship or his financial problems all and he didn't hold out much hope of getting his A. Hans seemed to be so perfect at everything that he had very little tolerance for the limitations of mere mortals. Still, Sated had to try. He worked so hard. After two months, Sated returned home knowing he was a better chef but doubtful that he was still a college student. He met with his advisor who told him Hans had given him an A. Even his advisor was surprised. He told Sated, Hans never gave A's.

Sated: I was told in June that I had gotten the A and I had received full scholarship, including housing, for the following year. I went back so happy in September, and a new batch of teaching assistants started and my wife-to-be was in that group.

Starlee: So you might not have met her if you hadn't gone back to school?

Sated: Oh, I would never have met her. That's the whole point. It's one of those either-or events in life that we experience everyday. You either get it all, or you get nothing. This one I won. It happened. I got it at all. I didn't just meet my wife, she is my soulmate - really unusually great marriage. If I hadn't earned an A, that wouldn't have happened. Ever. There's no way. And Hans was that piece.

(music)

Starlee Kine: My conversation with Sated had filled out my profile of Hans quite nicely. Hans Jordi was a cowboy. Slash chef. Slash superhero. Slash manipulator of space and time.

(music)

And while we're on the subject of space and time, Sated hadn't seen or spoken with Hans since his internship ended. That was in 1986. I needed more recent intel, which came to be via a message board posting, called webfoodpros.com. The subject heading of the message was this: "Looking For Hans Jordi."

(music)

The message was from 1998 and had been posted by a man named Chef Karl, who wrote: "Swiss Chef Hans Jordi has been missing from my address book for years. I searched online and he doesn't exist there. Help! Please!"

I stared at the message suspiciously. *I* was looking for Hans Jordi. How many belt buckles had this guy lost?

(music)

Starlee: Hello?

Karl: Hello?

Starlee Kine: I found a Chef Karl who owned a restaurant in Houston and called him up.

Karl: We were all working at the Biltmore hotel. I started in '62 there, and he was the sous chef at that time and actually I was his helper the first time.

Starlee Kine: Chef Karl knew Hans when they were both starting off as chefs and cooking at one of the swankest joints in Phoenix, the Biltmore Hotel.

Starlee: And so you guys were like really close?

Karl: Pretty close, yeah. We were an all European troop that's why you know we stuck together. Say like on a Sunday night, when you finish work most the time around 9 o'clock, and the whole crew actually went up to a bowling alley and we were bowling till about three o'clock or four o'clock in the morning. And we all had to start work at eight o'clock in the morning.

Starlee: Was he a good bowler?

Karl: You have some good games and then you have some lousy games. Especially when you had too many beers.

Starlee Kine: Chef Karl's "Looking for Hans Jordi" posting had been a bust. It didn't help him find Hans. Mainly this had to do with Chef Karl never logging onto the site again. If he had, he would have seen this comment from a man named Chef Renee: "Hi Karl. I know Hans. Last time I saw him he was working for a Hotel in Scottsdale, Arizona. You should call Bob Bland." I read Chef Renee's message to Chef Karl over the phone. He knew Bob Bland too and agreed he was a good lead.

Karl: Robert Bland, in the '60s, he was the vegetable cook at the Biltmore and he is still somewhere in Phoenix. He maybe could help you.

Starlee Kine: Let's contemplate for a moment, the name Robert *Bland*? What kind of name was that for a chef? No wonder he had to use a pseudonym. I pulled out my notebook and wrote Bob Bland equals Bob Six. Period.

Starlee: Wait one more question did Bob Bland have a nickname?

Karl: We just called him Bobby.

Starlee Kine: I added a hook above the period so that it became question mark.

Karl: Anyway, Good luck with your hunting.

Starlee: Okay and maybe I might use some of this on the show.

Karl: Ok. Whatever.

Starlee Kine: Meanwhile my phone was blowing up with texts from my client, wanting an update.

Carson: I'm kind of too interested for small talk if you just want to jump in.

Starlee: I mean, yeah this is the only thing I can talk about these days anyway. So what do you want to know?

Carson: Who is Hans Jordi?

Starlee: He's a chef, a great chef.

Carson: Awesome.

Starlee: With the soul of a cowboy.

Carson: That's what my dad thought!

Starlee: I know. Your dad was right. Oh, and I know who Bob Six is.

Carson: Oh. Who is Bob Six?

Starlee: He is a man named Bob Bland.

Carson: Oh wow, and what does he do?

Starlee: He is a chef.

Carson: Wow. So does Bob Bland go by Bob Six just because Bob Bland is the worst name for a chef?

Starlee: Maybe. I don't know why he goes by Bob Six yet.

Starlee Kine: But I knew how I'd find out. Karl had told me that Bob Bland still lived in Phoenix and sure enough I discovered there was even a competition called the Robert Bland Culinary Salon, put on by the Phoenix Culinary Association. On their website was a page that listed all its members who had made donations. Two long columns with hundreds of names. Toward the top of the first column, I spot Bob Bland. (music) Towards the middle, Hans Jordi.

The association had a board meeting coming up.

It could not be more clear what I had to do. It was time to return this buckle to where it came from. Looked like I was going to Phoenix.

But first, let's take a quick break.

ADS

And we're back. Did you miss me?

Here was the plan. I was to fly to Phoenix to return Hans' buckle to him. But before I could do that, I needed to get it from the person who kept it safe, for all these years, in a special place.

Starlee: What do you call it? The jar of-

Carson: Junk.

Starlee: I was trying to be polite.

Carson: I'm going to dump it (clang clang). The good stuff is at the bottom.

Starlee Kine: Much like theory about how Hans got the buckle, Carson's storage system for it came from his dad too.

Carson: My dad had these junk collections when he was a kid, that have now become my junk collections. That are just like every tiny object that we've accumulated through our youth.

In order words, it's a scrapbucket.

Carson: That's from Aladdin's Castle, that was our arcade growing up. That was from homecoming, 1996. This is off my first girlfriend's underpants. It's just a weird rose, but she gave it to me.. kind of gross... The belt buckle is definitely the crown jewel.

Starlee Kine: Obviously. It was in the *bottom* of the scrapbucket after all.

Starlee: How do you feel about letting it go?

Carson: I'm fine with that.

Starlee: Really?

Carson: Yeah, I mean I think the part of me that wouldn't be okay with that is the part of me that I want to kill. It wasn't made for me. It's Hans' belt buckle. I've just had it for twenty-some years.

Starlee: It's time.

Carson: Yeah I think it's time. I can't wait.

Starlee Kine: I slip the buckle into my backpack. On the flight to Phoenix, I keep the bag on my lap the whole time and even then, check constantly that the buckle's still in there. After all these years, it'd be so like me to lose it.

(music)

I'm at 40th street and Camelback Road. This is where the buckle was found by Jimmy Turk. The Phoenix Culinary Association meeting that I was hoping Bob Six would be at wasn't for another day. So, in the meantime, I decided to pursue another of the buckle's mysteries: How had Hans lost it? Maybe I'd get lucky and spot an obvious clue nearby. Like a belt buckle factory.

Jimmy: Hello?

Starlee: Hey.

Jimmy: What are you looking at?

Starlee: Well, I just walked around the corner and now I'm looking at Dental Specialty, now I'm looking at a cupcake place.

Jimmy: I'm getting out of the car right now.

Starlee Kine: I didn't know exactly *what* to expect grown up Jimmy Turk would be like, but at the very least, I thought he'd greet me with a lit stick of dynamite in his hand. Instead, he was trying to keep his voice at a whisper, so as to not wake his sleeping daughter.

(a baby's voice)

Jimmy: Emily that's not mommy, that's Starlee. ... say hi.

Starlee: Hi

Starlee Kine: In retrospect, he probably wasn't talking to me.

Jimmy: I wonder if I could pull up right there, just park...

Starlee Kine: In Carson's version, Jimmy had found the buckle in a gutter, which to me had made its own sort of sense. A gutter is where lost or unwanted things wash up. Instead we were standing on a sidewalk next to a busy, four way intersection, on the outskirts of a Phoenix subdivision. Who would've thought an object this unique could be found on a street this aggressively familiar.

Jimmy: I don't know where I was going or what I was doing but we were coming down and just happened to see it. Right over by the bushes, right over here, i remember just walking around and finding it right next to the wall over by the bushes.

Starlee: Closer to the wall then the sidewalk?

Jimmy: Yeah definitely.

Starlee Kine: Jimmy hasn't seen the buckle since that day in his room when he gave it to Carson.

Jimmy: Hans Jordi. Look at the toaster. It will be interesting to know if he remembers where he left it.

Starlee: He won't know exactly where he left it because if you know where you lost something, it's not lost.

Jimmy: Unless he did go back and I had already found it.

Starlee: Oh wow. What if? You could have just missed each other. `

Starlee Kine: If Jimmy had walked by at any other moment, instead of the buckle he would've just found some Swiss guy rooting around in the gravel.

Just like if Sated hadn't been in that bar that night, I wouldn't have known Hans was a cowboy.

Jimmy : Yeah, matter of fact, the house right here, I tried to show off and do a backflip and hit my chin and had some stitches when I was a kid. Then that telephone pole down there, I jogged into trying to teach my grandpa how to jog and I jogged right into a telephone pole, so I have two sets of stitches.

Starlee Kine: A couple questions here: how do you teach someone to jog? Why didn't Jimmy's grandpa already how to jog? And-

Jimmy: My grandpa my dad my uncle and I. We all have to sets of stitches up under our chin.

Starlee: What? It's a scar in the same place?

Jimmy: Yup.

Starlee: When your dad saw your chin, did he say "the family line continues."

Starlee Kine: What is it with this belt buckle and fate?

(music)

I head to my next appointment.

I've arranged to meet Chef Rene, the chef who answered Chef Karl's query on webfoodpros.com. We're meeting at an Italian restaurant that is known for having the best pizza in the country. Like, it's not just people in Phoenix who call it that.

Chef Rene is waiting for me outside. He recognizes me because of my microphone. I recognize him because of the twinkle in his eye of someone who is about to help me break this case wide open.

We order a pistachio pizza. I pull out the sheet of paper where I've printed out his webfoodpros.com comment which had brought me to Phoenix.

Rene: I wrote that?

Starlee Kine: Chef Rene doesn't remember writing the post *and* has no idea who Chef Karl is. Neither of which have deterred him from meeting with me. Apparently, helping people who are looking for Hans Jordi is just sort of his thing.

Rene: It was 1976, I think, when I met Hans.

Starlee: What's Hans like?

Rene: Typical Swiss.

Starlee Kine: Chef Rene is from Ecuador by way of Germany. He was part of a sort of mass migration of European chefs to the American southwest in the fifties and sixties.

Rene: You know when I came to this country in '69 and landed in Houston, Texas I thought somebody was picking me up on a horse. And when I looked out, it was all cars. And I was so disappointed. I expected to see cowboys, but it wasn't like that.

Starlee: Like you thought like down the runway, a horse would be coming?

Rene: Yes, maybe.

Starlee Kine: By now, I've grown accustomed to stories of Hans from the past. What I'm not used to is what chef Rene tells me next.

Rene: He's here. Maybe tomorrow we have a chef's meeting maybe I see him over there.

Starlee: Oh, I am going to that chef meeting.

Rene: Are you going to that?

Starlee: Yeah.

Rene: Oh maybe I see you over there.

Starlee: Do you think Hans will be there?

Rene: Maybe?

Starlee: Whoa... whoa...okay, okay, got a lot of planning to do.

Starlee Kine: Chef Rene says that at the meeting tomorrow, he'll pretend not to know me, so as to not tip Hans off. I tell him that I *want* Hans to know I'm looking for him, that's the whole point. Chef Rene gives me a look like, don't worry, he can keep a secret.

(music)

tape: I'm going to get to the managers' part. Stop me for any questions, feel free to add input.

Starlee Kine: Back in the day, the Culinary Association of Arizona's gatherings took place in the elegant hotels and resorts where the chefs worked. There were fancy spreads, multi-course dinners, ice sculptures. Now the meetings are held pretty much where ever the association can call in a favor.

tape: First of all, I want to thank - for his office today, for hosting us. If you know places that would host, country clubs, hotels, whatever...

Starlee Kine: About a dozen chefs are gathered in the conference rooms. I take a seat next to a man who looks to be in his late 60s, height: tall.

tape: If anyone has the name of a pastry chef, or would like to work for a big company, let me know.

Starlee Kine: Accent: German.

This had to be Hans. I'd finally found him.

I look over at the man and smile shyly.

TAPE: What I'd like to do is recognize a member's birthday, send them a birthday card.

Starlee Kine: Now wait a minute. This was a whole different guy.

Tape: So they have it in their hand. Not have to go on the screen and then it is gone.

Starlee Kine: I was suddenly knee deep in elegant European chefs. Hans Jordi could have been half the men there.

My hand shoots up.

Tape: Do you have a question?

Starlee: I do. I have a question about a particular chef in Arizona, he might be a member I think. Hans Jordi. Do you guys know him?

Tape: Oh yeah, we know Hans. He is one of the old guards.

Starlee Kine: Oh yeah, sure sure, Hans Jordi, no one easier to find.

Hans wasn't at the meeting after all. But a lot of these guys had seen him not too long ago, on his birthday.

tape: He had a big party

What was his birthday? The 70th.. 80th! 80th birthday we were there.

His wife yeah invited people. He didn't know about it.

Quite a few people there.

Old Swiss guy you know they know how to party.

Starlee: How long have you known him?

Tape: 30 years, 40 years, who knows. I mean every year, inventory Hans Jordi. Okay.

Starlee Kine: It's time to eat. We shuffle to another room. I hear my name called out. It's Chef Rene. He's saved a seat for me. So much for our plan, that was really his plan, to pretend like we didn't know each other.

Chef Rene starts pointing to different chefs, telling me who each one is. I'm not interested in hearing about anyone under the age of sixty.

Rene: He's a German. Peter, is next to him, you know. The gentleman on the end is Bob Bland.

Starlee: Oh really. Oh I wanna talk to him. See if he ever had a nickname.

(music)

Starlee Kine: If I had a mustache, this is when I would twirl it.

The meeting ends and the group of older Chefs head to the back to load up on free condiments. I make my move.

Starlee: are you Bob Bland?

Bob: Yes.

Starlee: My name is Starlee. Do you know someone named Hans Jordi?

Bob: Yes ... Oh him and I, we worked together at the Biltmore. He was my roommate because we lived in dorms back in '60, well '59 I came to town. '59, '60, '61 I have known him since then.

Starlee: What is Hans like?

Bob: Oh, typical Swiss.

Starlee: That's what Renee says! Was it hard being a chef with your last name? Bland?

Bob: (laughing) Tell me about it.

Starlee: Do you have any nicknames?

Bob: Not really.

Starlee: Were you ever called Bob Six?

Bob: Bob who?

Starlee: Six?

Bob: No, I'm sorry.

Starlee Kine: All along I'd been sure that Bob Bland was Bob Six.

As I was getting closer to one side of the buckle, it seemed I was getting farther from the other.

(music)

Starlee: Hi

Starlee Kine: Chef Rene has arranged to have me and Hans meet up at his house. He has even found an old belt buckle of his own to wear for the occasion. It has a horse head on it made out of pieces of turquoise.

Rene: I called him up and he recognized my voice right away. I said, there is somebody from New York that wants to interview you and say I can not tell you what it is all about but...

Gloria: He did not ask anything.

Starlee Kine: That's Chef Rene's wife, Gloria.

Gloria: If it was me, I would say "who? why? how?"

Starlee Kine: Oh those were good questions. I'd need to remember those on the next case.

Starlee: He's probably coming any second. Right?

Starlee Kine: Chef Rene can't sit still. He keeps looking out the window to see if he can spot Hans' car.

Rene: I don't think he drives a sports car.

Starlee Kine: Hans is supposed to be there at 5:30. At 5:31, Rene takes out his cell phone and calls him.

Rene: Are you on your way here? Ok bye bye. [hangs up, to Starlee:] I'm excited. This was something that wasn't in our program today.

Starlee Kine: and at 5:32...

Gloria: He's here.

Starlee: He's here

Starlee Kine: Hans Jordi walks through the door.

Hans: Hi how are you. Hi Gloria.

Starlee: I'm Starlee.

Hans: Starlee?

Starlee: This is all going to be cleared up very soon.

Starlee Kine: Hans is exactly as everyone has described. He's tall and lean. If I had to sum him up: typical Swiss.

We go out back to Chef Rene's garden. There's a table and chairs. Hans sits down and everyone turns to him expectantly. I pull out the case with the buckle inside.

Starlee: I have something that I think belongs to you. You're Hans Jordi, right?

Hans: That's right. I'm Hans Jordi. What would you like to know?

Starlee: I want to know so much. But let me give you this back first.

Hans: Do I know what's in it?

Starlee: I don't know.

Hans: I don't know. Oh! Yeah. Oh my god. Wow. How did you find that?

Starlee: So this was yours?

Hans: Yes. Yes, even my name is on it.

Starlee: That's how I found you. Do you remember when you lost this?

Hans: We had a break-in at the house.

Starlee: This was stolen from you?

Hans: Yes. You know, I even went to some pawn shops to look for it, but I knew I probably could not find it again. Bob Six, he gave me that as a present. He had it specially made. He was the chairman of Continental Airlines.

Starlee Kine: Turns out, Bob ran Continental Airlines for fifty years. He was married to Ethel Merman and then later to Audrey Meadows, who played Alice on the Honeymooners. From the day he and Audrey were married, they never took a flight without one another.

Bob Six's ancestors were from Holland, where they were pawnbrokers. In the sixteenth century, a struggling artist pawned some of his work and never came back to reclaim it. And that's how the Sixes wound up with the largest collection of original Rembrandts in Europe.

Bob Six was pals with John Wayne and kept a collection of six shooters. To unwind, he would practice his fast draw. He loved gimmicks and stunts. In the seventies, he hired magicians and Playboy bunnies and baseball players to entertain the passengers on flights to short to show movies. He once received, as a gift, a little jaguar cub, from a Continental pilot. Bob Six named the cub Whiskey and brought him to work with him.

(music)

Every summer Continental went on a staff retreat at a ranch in Wyoming. Hans Jordi was the chef.

Hans: All those airline executives, you know there were 150 of them, I cooked for them. Long hours, long days. They had actually six meals a day: breakfast, lunch, dinner, midday snack, afternoon snack, midnight snacks. It was a lot of sleepless nights. I did that every year for 10 years, 10 summers. So out of appreciation, he made that for me when we had the farewell dinner. He was at the head table with a bunch of bigwigs. He was a big shot compared to me. And then he called me out, and wow. I always wondered where it would be. Who took it? And was it ever going to be found? I can't believe it. Thank you.

(music)

Starlee: Do you have any messages for my friend who had it this whole time?

Hans: Yeah. I want to thank him for being honest about it, and giving it back. I wish him well.

Starlee: He always felt bad that he had it, but he didn't know how to find it. The only thing he could guess, he thought you were a chef and he thought you were a cowboy.

Hans: That's probably true.

Starlee: You're a chef and a cowboy?

Hans: I was then. The ranch I worked on, we had 150 guests and they had 20,000 head of cattle. We were riding horses almost every day and chasing cattle around.

(music)

Starlee Kine: It's getting dark out. We go inside and have dinner. Hans and Rene reminisce about the old days. Hans keeps taking out the buckle and staring at it, shaking his head. Then he and his wife Peggy head home. I help Rene and Gloria clear the table.

Starlee: Are you going to be sad that the mystery is over now?

Rene: Yeah.

Starlee: But we all agree, case closed. Right?

Gloria: Case closed.

Rene: Case closed.

Gloria: Happy ending.

Rene: I knew it was going to be his.

(laughter).

Rene: I get that feeling because it said his name.

(music - You go far. You go far. Now come the day you walk through that day. Finally see what you've always been sure. Hope that you find what you're looking for. I hope that you find what you're looking for. Open your eyes).

Mystery Show is produced by myself, Alex Blumberg, Melinda Shopsin and Eric Mennel. Producing help from Chris Neary and Wendy Dorr. Eli Horowitz is contributing editor. Thanks to John Delore and Matt Lieber. White Dove made the original score for this episode. Closing song is by Emmy the Great. Opening song by Sparks. Arthur Jones, I'll never get tired of your logo. Thank you to Larry Lewis, and to our littlest helpers Zazie, Calvin, Samira, Winona and Leo. If you haven't heard the great shows Startup or Reply All, we have less in common than I thought. Find them on iTunes or at gimletmedia.com.

And congratulations Mr. Woobers, whoever you really are, you were the first to get the Honeymooners clue from last week's show. Or at least the first to tell me about it. Now for next week's clue: Think It Over.