

SPR

S01E06

Written by

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and  
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NEWS ONE

34

INT. NEWS STUDIO

34

In the studio.

UNDERWRITER

This is SPR.

WENLING CHEN

JB toys has issued a recall on its Heroic Legion toy line after complaints from across the country. The manufacturer apologized, saying the anatomical correctness of the action figures was quote: "a mistake."

UNDERWRITER

That was Wenling Chen, reporting from SPR, Danbury.

DEIRDRE WILSON

From SPR news in Washington I'm Deirdre Wilson.

(then)

Last week the hero Quantum was revealed to be SPR reporter Stephen Singh following his death at the hands of Babylon.

(then)

With the revelation that one of our own reporters has occasionally covered his own exploits as a superhero, critics have raised questions about SPR's journalistic integrity. To address those fears we spoke to Anna Clark, Senior Vice President of News and Editorial Director of SPR.

ANNA CLARK

It is no secret that SPR has hired active and retired superheroes as journalists and editors. Their experiences and perspectives are valuable assets to our team. Who better to speak about the Superhuman experience than Superhumans themselves?

(then)

The issue here is disclosure.

(MORE)

ANNA CLARK (CONT'D)

Superhumans in this country have a legal right to anonymity. As an organization, we do not disclose the private, legal aliases of our reporters who do not wish to reveal themselves. We do this for the safety of our employees, and the safety their families. When our journalists have a conflict of interest, from either active or previous superhero activity, we on the editorial team step in to either reassign the journalist or correct the story.

(then)

We accept some unique professional obligations and limitations here at SPR. Stephen Singh was careful about the stories he reported, passing off any topic where his objectivity might be compromised by his alter ego to the editorial team without a fight to ensure the story was told correctly. Stephen held the ideals of truth and goodness in his heart as a reporter as much as a hero.

A beat. Heavy hearted.

ANNA CLARK (CONT'D)

He was the example of what we expect from our journalists and he will be missed. Our hearts go out to his wife Nicole and his Daughters Apoorva and Juhi.

UNDERWRITER

That was Anna Clark in Washington. It's 76 degrees here in Paradise City.

(then)

Coming up next is These American Supers...

**END NEWS ONE**

ACT ONE

35 INT. TAS STUDIO

35

In the studio.

ETHAN

From QSPZ Baltimore, it's These American Supers. I'm Ethan Schwartz.

(then)

We here at the program have been struggling to think of the best way to honor our friend Stephen Singh. Not because we cannot find the words, but because there is so much we want to say. So we thought the best way to start would be with the way a lot of us met him.

(then)

Way back, in the year 2001...

SFX: 90's Mattel Commercial Music. Whooshing.

QUANTUM

When you move faster than anything on earth, you need a deodorant that can keep up. That's why I reach for High-Speed Stick. The one roll on, I roll on, before I roll out.

SFX: Whoosh!

QUANTUM (CONT'D)

High speed stick. Smell me later.

SFX: Sonic boom.

ETHAN

It was his first endorsement deal.

(then)

Quantum had been a rising star in the hero community but it was this ad that made him a household name. Unfortunately it was partly because the commercial became one of the most parodied moments of the year.

JAY LENO

You seen this guy? Now when there's a bad smell in the room, you won't have to blame the dog anymore.

SFX: Late night walla. Audience laughter.

ETHAN

Late night hosts mocked it, it was a sound sting on many a rock station morning show. Keanu Reeves even played him on SNL.

KEANU REEVES

Smell me later!

SFX: Audience laughter.

ETHAN

Quantum couldn't go anywhere without having someone shout the catchphrase at him. It was, for a long time, what defined his career as a hero.

(then)

But what people don't know is that one commercial paid for his college.

(then)

This lead him to Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism, to meeting his wife Nicole, and then to SPR.

(then)

While Stephen was a full-time reporter and loving husband, his alter ego Quantum began to develop a new reputation: as one of the most effective, beloved heroes in the world. Since 2001 Quantum has saved over 43,000 individual lives and stopped over nine attempts at world domination.

(then)

Many will dedicate airtime to the hero this week, but today we honor the man behind the mask. Today's episode "Hold Fast" is dedicated to his memory.

(then)

First up, we go into our vault for Stephen's first story on our program. From 2013, we give you act one: "Man-baby."

(then)

Stephen Singh has the story...

PERSON 1

We only had three minutes to live...

PERSON 2

10 -- 9 -- 8 -- Just like that...

PERSON 3

You see these things happen on TV but...

PERSON 4

You never think it'll happen to you. But just then...

PERSON 5

At the last minute...

PERSON 6

My life was never the same...

STEPHEN SINGH

We've heard stories of heroic rescues. We even know some of the people who have been rescued by name. But after everyone has flown away, what happens to the lives that get saved?

PETE

Saved may not be a totally accurate way to put it.

STEPHEN SINGH

Pete Jackson may not be a name you know, but you might know his face.

PETE

There I was. The bomb was tied to the reactor and I was tied to the bomb. Me. I'm from Wisconsin, these things just aren't supposed to happen to you when you're from Wisconsin.

(then)

The bomb was going to turn the city to dust when it went off. I could be an inch away or 40 miles, it's a neutron bomb, it wouldn't matter. But they strapped me right to it. I guess to keep Ms. Thunder from cratering the whole building.

(then)

(MORE)

PETE (CONT'D)

But then I'm thinking, if I'm Ms. Thunder and it's one random Wisconsinite versus a whole city, she just does the math and flattens me and the bomb and the whole building. That's what I'm thinking with two minutes left.

(then)

You see her before you hear her, that's her whole thing. So when she flies into the room, I think this is it. The shockwave is going to drop on me like a hammer.

(then)

But then this sound comes into the room and rips the ceiling right off. Clean to the sky. And the next thing I know she's holding me in one arm and she has the bomb in the other and we're flying up into the night sky and she tosses it like a football into the stratosphere.

(then)

We land in the city just as it blows, she's holding me cradled in her arms and I don't even realize what's happening. I'm dead. I'm still just this dead person in my mind, and suddenly I'm here back in the city in my own neighborhood and I just bury my face in her chest and start to cry...

(then)

That's when the photo was taken.

STEPHEN SINGH

Newspapers called it a heroic act, but to the internet...

PETE

The meme's called: "The Manbaby."

STEPHEN SINGH

You've probably passed some version of this on social media. Most of the captions are mild: "When your husband has a cold, when the Patriots lose, when the store's out of beer"

Music.

PETE

My friends showed me some and ha, ha, ha. I can take a joke. I was still giddy from being alive so I didn't care.

STEPHEN SINGH

But then things took a turn. Memes evolve and the Manbaby...

PETE

Became the poster child for male privilege.

STEPHEN SINGH

"Female heroes demand equal pay. Men:"

Music.

PETE

And it's me. My face. And then it wasn't so funny anymore. All these hateful, regressive thoughts. Things I don't believe in, but there's my face. Ms. Thunder saved my life and the internet took it away.

(then)

I didn't get fired. But at work you... You notice. Even if no one mentions it, it's there. I mean the people who know me, they know me. So they're just happy I'm back. But then.

(then)

I mean, most people who matter, they don't know what a meme is. But going down the streets, people will call out. I'll be with a client and people will bother us in public. It's usually not that negative. Most people just want photos. They want the cry face. But sometimes it it's horrible. Like some people think I'm making these memes. Like I have these...

(then)

Opinions. So they'll tell me off. People spill drinks on me and call me "pig." There was a bit where people would whip silver dollars at me, the Susan B. Anthony's. Just -- Hit me with a coin.

(MORE)



PETE (CONT'D)

That lasted months. And you try not to let it phase you. But sometimes I wonder if I should've just been a crater after all.

STEPHEN SINGH

Pete tries to live a quiet life. The meme has lost popularity over the last year, but the fear of discovery lingers.

(then)

He is not the only one who struggles with the fallout of rescue. Over 40% of all super villain survivors report depression and suicide rates at three times the national average.

(then)

Support groups such as the Jenelle P. Grey Society for The Rescued deal with people like Pete every day, helping them transition back to civilian life. Through it all, Pete tells me:

PETE

I try to remember that I'm lucky. I was rescued. And mostly, I try not to cry about it.

Music.

ETHAN

In the time since this story aired, Pete was encouraged to seek help from the Grey Society.

(then)

He is back at work and the proud father of three daughters. We tried reaching him for comment but he declined to speak on radio. Instead he emailed us this statement:

(then)

Quantum will be the name that people remember, but my life was saved by Stephen Singh. That man was my true hero.

(then)

We'll be back with more These American Supers, after the news break...

**END ACT ONE**

NEWS TWO

36 INT. AD BREAK

36

In the studio.

ADS

Support for SPR comes from...

(brief pause)

Spandexo brand spandex. With our patented moisture wicking technology, our suits keep you dry while you keep the city safe. Spandexo brand spandex, now available at Target.

(adding)

Spandexo brand spandex is not bulletproof, fireproof, kosher, or vegan. If you have an allergic reaction to Spandexo, go to the emergency room as this could be the sign of a serious allergy to Spandexo's propriety spandex blend. By listening to this ad you have waived your right to sue Spandexo and all their affiliates.

(and adding)

Spandexo. A family company.

37 INT. NEWS STUDIO

37

In the studio.

DEIRDRE WILSON

Live from SPR news in Washington, I'm Deirdre Wilson.

(then)

The White House has announced further budget cuts for the Unified Space Defense Program, a top priority for the President in his first term.

(then)

The deputy press secretary has issued a statement noting that given the economic downturn, such initiatives are luxuries we can no longer afford.

(MORE)

DEIRDRE WILSON (CONT'D)  
Combined with longer than expected  
development times and ever  
increasing budgetary demands, quote  
"we must prioritize issues in our  
own backyard before we try reaching  
for the stars."

UNDERWRITER  
That was Deirdre Wilson reporting  
from Washington. It's 74 degrees  
here in Paradise City.

(then)  
And now back to These American  
Supers...

**END NEWS TWO**

ACT TWO

38 INT. TAS STUDIO

38

In the studio.

ETHAN

Welcome back to These American Supers, I'm Ethan Schwartz.

(then)

We've arrived at Act 2 of our program. "Hold Fast," dedicated to the memory of our friend Stephen Singh.

(then)

Since the Heroic Legion began funding its full time hero initiative, most professional Superheroes have abandoned the practice of having a mild mannered alter ego.

(then)

But, in the decades before heroes came out of the phone-booth, there was a time when it was quite shocking for a hero to be unmasked. There was even an unspoken code between heroes and the media then to keep these identities secret, no matter how good a by line it would have been.

(then)

When these heroes died, many wanted their identities to remain secret, in case of reprisal from villains or criminals.

(then)

So papers came up with simple way to honor the fallen and mark them as caped crusaders.

SFX: Newspaper shuffling. Ethan clears his throat.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Dr. Juan Carlos the II, 65, died Tuesday, February 8, 1966, in New York, NY. Dr. Carlos was born on March 13, 1901, in San Diego, CA to Juan Carlos and Carly Laura. As an adult he moved east and went to NYU for philosophy and graduated 1925 with his bachelors degree.

(MORE)

ETHAN (CONT'D)

He taught Philosophy at Brooklyn Public High School for 30 years.

(then)

Juan is survived by his wife, Katie and, their children, Hank, and Sandra... *He was an avid squash player.*

SFX: Paper down. Possible music cue.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

For those not in the know, squash is a racket ball sport, played between two to four people in a four walled court.

(then)

It is popular in urban areas of the United States, Egypt and England.

(then)

And, in the Golden Age of Super-heroism, "playing squash" was a euphemism that capes used as cover for going out on patrol.

(then)

This is from a 1996 interview with retired hero Rick Mason, better known as the Masked Lantern.

39

INT. HOUSE

39

SFX: Degraded audio. VHS hum.

RICK MASON

The excuses had to be just right. An activity that explained the bruises and odd hours, and it had to be something that people wouldn't want to join in on.

(then)

We had all sorts of lies back then, boxing lessons, water polo, night fishing, but you know, you get tired of trying to come up with a new cover story every night.

(then)

So we convened a meeting at Legion Tower to come up with the perfect activity we could all use to explain why we were gone. The room erupted, people hollering over each other, and I can't remember who said it, but someone shouted; "Squash!" And the room when quiet:

(MORE)

RICK MASON (CONT'D)

(then)

It was perfect. It's got that little ball that can bean you, squash courts have crazy hours and best of all, none of us knew anyone who played it.

40

INT. TAS STUDIO

40

In the studio.

ETHAN

From that moment on, the excuse de jour became: "Honey, I'm off to play squash." And in hindsight I think it's a great cover. I played squash in college and would often come home drenched in sweat, covered in bruises.

(then)

So when these heroes died, be it on the job or from natural causes, papers would mark their obituaries with the phrase.

(then)

A lot of these heroes were never honored formally after the registration act, so many of them have been lost to time. But the phrase remains as a simple testament to their service.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Today's show was produced by Ellen Spiegel, a special thanks to Pete Jackson for allowing us to re-run his story. We'll be back with more of These American Supers.

(then)

This episode is dedicated to Stephen Singh. He was an avid squash player.

Music.

**END ACT TWO**

NEWS THREE

41 INT. NEWS STUDIO

41

In the studio.

DEIRDRE WILSON

Live from SPR news in Washington  
I'm Deirdre Wilson.

(then)

Three more candidate cities have withdrawn from consideration for the Heroic Legion's Tower Two Project. Houston, San Diego and Chicago join twelve other cities that have withdrawn from consideration since last week's attack on the New Orleans Jazz festival. The Heroic Legion insists that Tower Two will deter crime and supervillian activity in any potential site, but many remain unconvinced.

SFX: Street walla.

PERSON 1

Babylon cut through those heroes man, they can barely protect they selves, and they want to give us a bunch of trainees?

PERSON 2

If Cosmos was still a part of the team maybe, but without him, it's just a big bullseye for the bad guys.

PERSON 3

I want my tax dollars going to roads. Not to spandex.

Back in the studio.

DEIRDRE WILSON

Trust in the Legion has fallen in cities across the country with many Mayors increasingly turning to traditional policing over Legion heroes.

(MORE)

DEIRDRE WILSON (CONT'D)

Citing extreme expense, lack of oversight, and high amounts of collateral damage, the Heroic Legion insists that police forces will only make cities less safe...

UNDERWRITER

That was Deirdre Wilson reporting from Washington.

(then)

Today's show was written and produced by John Dorsey and Maximilian Clark. Additional producing by Brendan Sokler and Carla Lerner, This episode's cast include (see website). With special thanks to Brenna Killeen.

(then)

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(then)

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(then)

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Outro:

UNDERWRITER (CONT'D)

...Coming up in the next hour, new research suggests the country of Switzerland may be a holographic projection. What's underneath the illusion? An investigative report.

SFX: Music and fade out.

UNDERWRITER (CONT'D)

This is SPR.

**END NEWS THREE**

END EPISODE SIX