

Sidedoor Season 5, Episode 5: Best of the Rest II

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: This is Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX. I'm Lizzie Peabody.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Have you ever had that dream, where you're out living your life and you look down and you realize, you're not wearing any clothes? And then you see that everyone is looking at you: your coworkers, some government people, maybe even some British royalty? You know, that dream? If you're lucky, it's just a dream, but I want to tell you about the time it happened for real, for one notable Smithsonian staff member.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: It all started earlier this season, when we reported an episode called, "The Milkmaid Spy." In that episode, we visited the Division of Birds at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, where museum specialist Christina Gebhard showed us a particular green woodpecker.

[MUSIC]

Christina Gebhard: I believe the one you're looking for is in my hand.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: This woodpecker was shot in 1944 by the eighth Secretary of the Smithsonian, S. Dillon Ripley, when he was working for the American spy network called the O.S.S. But on the woodpecker's tag, we read something curious.

[MUSIC]

Christina Gebhard: Shot at cocktail party... towel fell off? I have no idea what that means.

Lizzie Peabody: Curious indeed. To get to the bottom of it, we needed to talk to someone who knew Ripley.

[MUSIC]

Pam Henson: Well, he's a passionate bird collector.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: So, we called Pam Henson.

[MUSIC]

Pam Henson: And you have to understand passionate bird collectors will do anything to get a specimen.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Pam's job is to document the history of the Smithsonian. As part of her work at the Smithsonian Archives, she conducts oral history interviews, and back in 1981, that meant sitting down with then Secretary, S. Dillon Ripley.

[MUSIC]

Pam Henson: And I did some 40 interviews of him.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: 40?!

[MUSIC]

Pam Henson: 40.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Wow!

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: So, if anyone would know about the "towel" noted on the woodpecker's tag, it would be Pam. And she did.

[MUSIC]

Pam Henson: Yeah. He was getting ready to go to a cocktail party with some real muck-a-mucks.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: At the time of the story, in 1944, Ripley was posted to a tea plantation in Ceylon, which is modern day Sri Lanka. His O.S.S cover was that he was there as an ornithologist. And conveniently, he actually was an ornithologist. So, one afternoon, Ripley's preparing for a party. Here's how he remembered it in his oral history interview with Pam.

S. Dillon Ripley: There was a certain amount of social life. The British staff would have dinner parties.

Pam Henson: He's in his tent and he's shaving after taking a shower and he hears this distinctive woodpecker call.

[Woodpecker Call]

Pam Henson: This was a bird he'd been trying to get and he had not been able to get a specimen of it. And he is not about to miss this opportunity, despite the fact that the only thing he has on is a towel.

S. Dillon Ripley: And I darted out with nothing, but a towel around my middle, and the shotgun to shoot a specimen of green woodpecker, which I shot, and at that point the flexure of my stomach muscles meant that the towel fell off, and I found myself, after I picked up the specimen, which I did at first, staring up at the terrace above to realize that a number of the guests had already arrived and were peering down at this apparition.

Pam Henson: And there he is standing there, you know, in the, "all together" and you got to understand, he was six foot six. So, there was a lot of him there.

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

Pam Henson: Didn't bother him! He had his bird. He went back, got his clothes on and got his uniform on and headed to the cocktail party, but he kind of got a kick out of that story.

Lizzie Peabody: I think my, my favorite thing about this is you giggling in the background! You're, you're...

Pam Henson: Oh, dear! (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: The, "Nude Secretary Shoots Bird" story is just one of many Sidedoor side-stories we've come across while reporting episodes. These stories are fun, make us laugh, and sometimes they stick with us a long time, but don't quite constitute full episodes on their own. So, this time on Sidedoor, we've gathered some of our favorite short stories for you. It's an idea we call, "The Best of the Rest." And next up, a tiny animal with a big temper. That's after the break.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: From 1968 to 1975, the Smithsonian's Astrophysical Observatory had this thing called, "The Center for Short-Lived Phenomena."

[MUSIC: X-Files Theme Song]

Lizzie Peabody: Think of it like the Smithsonian's X-Files...

[MUSIC: X-Files Theme Song]

Lizzie Peabody: ...but without the paranormal stuff. It was pretty much exactly what it said it was: a place to document short-lived natural phenomena, like meteor impacts, volcanic eruptions, floods. Each phenomenon was typed onto a little notecard, and one of them caught my eye.

Lizzie Peabody: It's titled, "Brazilian Bee Infestation, April 7, 1975."

David Roubik: Yeah. Isn't that something? (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: This is Dave Roubik. He studies bees.

David Roubik: I've been employed for over 40 years as a Staff Research Entomologist at the Smithsonian's Tropical Research Institute, which is in the Republic of Panama.

Lizzie Peabody: And how many times have you been stung by bees?

David Roubik: Conservatively 2-3,000 times.

Lizzie Peabody: (Gasps).

David Roubik: But not over just a couple of weekends, you understand.

Lizzie Peabody: I called Dave because what I'd read on this note card sounded like bad news. I read it to him and here's what it said. It said, "a selection of apis queens were introduced into Rio Claro, Brazil."

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: It's long, so here's the gist. In 1956, researchers brought some African honeybees to Brazil for an experiment, but the African bees didn't stick around. They escaped into the wild.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: You've probably heard of these bees. They go by a couple of different names.

David Roubik: The Africanized Bee, African Honey Bee, Killer Bee.

Lizzie Peabody: Yes, Killer Bee. I put killer bees in the same category as quicksand: things you're afraid of as a kid and then you grow up, and you don't think about it anymore because you have bigger fears, like taxes. But this had me wondering, maybe bees should go back on that list of fears. And then it goes on to note that these bees are moving North toward the United States, and there doesn't seem to be any stopping them.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: I had one big question. The same one tabloids ask of every child actor. "Where Are They Now?" But let's start at the beginning.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: So, these African Bees were brought to Brazil. Why?

[MUSIC]

David Roubik: They wanted to try and build a better bee. Starting with the material they already had, the honeybees that they kept in hives in apiaries, which came from Europe.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: These European honey bees had been in Brazil since the mid-1800s, initially brought over with Jesuits, who wanted beeswax for their church candles.

[MUSIC]

David Roubik: A lot of people brought honey bees with them, when they brought their religion and their church to the new world. It was part of the same parcel.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: European honey bees produced some honey, but they never really flourished in the Brazilian tropics. So, by the 1950s, Brazilian beekeepers started looking to Africa because African honeybees seemed really good at producing honey in tropical climates.

David Roubik: What was number one on their priority list was to make a bee that had the wonderful honey hoarding, or at least storage capacity, but at the same time, they didn't want the bees to behave like they do in Africa with a particular thing called stinging behavior.

Lizzie Peabody: "Stinging behavior" is exactly what it sounds like, but worse. If you disturb African honeybees...

David Roubik: They're going to roar out of there like a freight train and just envelope you...

Lizzie Peabody: Oh!

David Roubik: ...in a cloud of bees where you can barely even hear yourself talk for the, the angry buzzing sound. And also, when they start stinging, the bee sting itself releases some odors and you can smell this acrid smell in the air.

Lizzie Peabody: (Gasps).

David Roubik: It's the bee alarm pheromone that attracts other honey bees and they will come and they'll look for wherever that sting making that odor is and they will sting there as well.

Lizzie Peabody: Oh my gosh!

David Roubik: So, I've had this happen just where the elastic at the edge of the glove presses up against the skin. One bee gets its stinger in there and suddenly you have 50 to 100 stings...

Lizzie Peabody: (Gasps).

David Roubik: ...completely surrounding your arm at the base of your glove and you think, you know, "There have to be better ways of making living than this, obviously." (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs). That's what I would be thinking!

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Researchers figured that by cross-breeding the African honey bee with the European honey bee, they could get the best of both worlds: a laid back, resilient tropical bee. And things were off to a good start. 26 colonies of African bees settled into their new Brazilian hives. Researchers blocked each hive entrance with a kind of mesh door called a, “queen excluder,” which let the workers squeeze through without letting the queen out.

[MUSIC]

David Roubik: The queen excluder was put right at the hive entrance to keep the Queen from leaving with her entire colony, which they knew they would do because that's the way they behaved in Africa.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: And it worked! Until one day, a well-meaning beekeeper noticed that these little doors were knocking pollen off the bees entering the hive. And he thought, “this can't be good.”

[MUSIC]

David Roubik: So, he took off the queen excluders and in a very short time, all 26 colonies had left.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: (Gasps). Oh, I would not want to be that guy!

David Roubik: Well, yeah, that was a pretty serious error. And those mere 26 colonies went out and randomly colonized the rest of the tropical America.

Lizzie Peabody: Turns out, African honeybees were really good at surviving on their own in South America. The same behavior that made them tough for beekeepers to manage, made them exceptional at defending their nests from big predators.

David Roubik: They've stung to death things as big as oxen.

Lizzie Peabody: ...and small predators, like army ants.

David Roubik: If something is overrunning their nest, they can organize and get out of there really fast. European bees don't do that very much.

Lizzie Peabody: Huh!

David Roubik: The European bee would tend to just sit there and get overrun or starve, at least that was the experience in the tropice.

Lizzie Peabody: African and European honeybees did interbreed, but not in the controlled environment researchers had planned. The few European queens in the wild were more likely to mate with an African bee, than with another European bee. The result is that more and more honeybee colonies became, “Africanized.” And these Africanized bees expanded their range quickly.

David Roubik: They crossed the Panama Canal about 1982, got to the southern US in the '90s, very early '90s. And they had been in the southern U.S. ever since then.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: So, back to my original question. Where are they now? Dave says that by now, it's safe to assume any honeybee you encounter in the southernmost U.S. will be descended from the African bees brought to Brazil in 1956.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: So, if you were going to go back and put a note card into the files of the Center for Short Lived Phenomena about the current state of African bees in the Americas, what would it say?

[MUSIC]

David Roubik: Well, it would say, in the American tropics, we have a honeybee that's now here forever from Africa. And it's not a short-lived phenomenon.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: This next story has sort of an Alice-in-Wonderland feel. You know, out for a stroll...

Kim Sajat: ...And then I turn the corner and there is this enormous, ginormous clock!

Lizzie Peabody: Huh!

Kim Sajat: And I'm like, what is this thing?

Lizzie Peabody: Kim Sajat is the Director of the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery, but on a visit to the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, she stumbled on a clock that left her intrigued.

Kim Sajat: I think it would be absolutely true to say that I have become absolutely obsessed with the Great Historical and Astronomical Clock of America.

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: The Great Historical Clock of America is 13 feet tall and 8 feet wide. That's as tall as two Michael Jordans and wider than a king-sized bed!

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: It has columns, a capitol dome topped with a bald eagle, a mini Statue of Liberty, a waterfall, and dozens of little figures, arranged in diorama-like scenes from American history, each painstakingly painted in exquisite detail and mechanized to move to music.

[MUSIC]

Kim Sajet: Think about the old-fashioned cuckoo clock, you know, the German cuckoo clocks where the little bird comes out?

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Yeah.

[MUSIC]

Kim Sajet: Well, with this this clock, every 15 minutes, a little door opens and it's President George Washington.

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

Kim Sajet: And he comes out and first is a parade of revolutionary war troops that he's inspecting, and then, on this revolving little plateau, come a parade of presidents.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: The clock was built around 1893, but like today's smartwatches, telling time was actually the least important thing it did. Clock Curator, Carlene Stephens, says the clock was meant to entertain and educate as part of a traveling show, think vaudeville, or the circus.

Carlene Stephens: In those days, the entertainment would come to your town. You would pay money. You would attend. This clock falls into the category of mechanical wonders that were very popular in the second half of the 19th century. And so, people were entertained by the moving figures and many people tried to figure out what made it go, which was also kind of awesome in the original sense of the word.

Lizzie Peabody: The clock traveled to Australia, Hawaii and up the U.S. pacific coast, where Carlene says it told the story of America to Americans.

Carlene Stephens: The clock represents a certain story of American history. Not everybody's story, but a certain story with the greatest hits. So, Paul Revere's ride and Pocahontas and these stories were what drew everyone together as a nation.

Lizzie Peabody: So, it's sort of a self-portrait of America at a certain era.

Carlene Stephens: Yes. And so, the idea that there's a common history is very powerful in that period of American history. There's so many immigrants coming to the country. The idea that there's something bringing us together in this history is very compelling.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: I guess it's not so surprising that the Director of the National Portrait Gallery would be so taken with this clock. It's America's own mechanical selfie.

[MUSIC]

Kim Sajet: Super cool.

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

[MUSIC]

Kim Sajet: It's like portraiture meets history, meets early Hollywood.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs). I love that!

[MUSIC]

Kim Sajet: Actually, in one way, this is a great representation of the Smithsonian. You have the art on one side. You have a history. You have culture, but you also have this underlying idea of innovation and science and technology.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: And just like in the past, the Great Historical Clock can come to you, or at least you can see it from your home. We'll include a link in the show notes.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Next up, Sidedoor investigates a listener's tattoo.

Paul Lukas: And I went to a local tattoo shop and the guy said, "Yeah, never had that request before." (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

Paul Lukas: Which, you know, wasn't really surprising, I guess.

Lizzie Peabody: That's coming up, after the break.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Welcome back to Sidedoor's, "Best of the Rest." This next story started with an email from a journalist with an unusual tattoo. Um, so, we video called him.

Lizzie Peabody: Will you describe your tattoo to me?

Paul Lukas: (Laughs). Sure. On my right arm, I have a tattoo of my very favorite object. Can you see it?

Lizzie Peabody: I think I can see half of it. Now, I can see it. Yes! (Laughs).

Paul Lukas: And it's the Brannock Device.

Lizzie Peabody: Paul Lukas is well known in the world of sports for his writing on uniform design. But he says he's always had an eye for the overlooked, and he's written about the Brannock Device for years. "What the heck is a Brannock Device," you say?

Paul Lukas: Everyone knows what a Brannock Device is. Most people just don't know what it's called.

Lizzie Peabody: You've definitely used one, but it's still a weird object to be passionate about.

Paul Lukas: Most people think of it as that gizmo they use to measure your shoe size.

Lizzie Peabody: It's that metal foot-measurer from the shoe store! The one you step into, with slidey bars on the sides. It makes me think of buying new shoes at the start of every school year, the smell of new rubber and leather, the salesman hitching up his stool that looked like a mini-slide. Alison Oswald, Archivist at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, has a similar memory.

Alison Oswald: I remember as a child, having my feet measured using one of them, but I didn't know the story behind it. So.

Lizzie Peabody: That's the story of Charles Brannock.

[MUSIC]

Alison Oswald: So, Charles Brannock was born in Syracuse, New York in 1903 to Agnes and Otis Brannock. He grew up working in his dad's shoe store.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: So, yeah. He grew up among shoes. I guess shoes were his thing.

Alison Oswald: Definitely, yeah, definitely.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: At college, Brannock would wake up in the middle of the night to scribble sketches of his invention: pencil drawings, now at the Archives Center at the National Museum of American History. At the age of 22, he patented his device.

[MUSIC]

Paul Lukas: The Brannock Device was really a category killer. There was no competition afterward.

Lizzie Peabody: Before the Brannock Device, most shoe stores used the Ritz Stick.

[MUSIC]

Paul Lukas: This thing that was sort of like a yardstick, you know, like...

Alison Oswald: Kind of like, almost like a ruler. Yeah.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: But it only measured foot length. And for a brief time, there was something called the, "fluoroscope."

[MUSIC]

Paul Lukas: You could put your foot in this little chamber, and they would basically create an X-ray to show you how your foot fit inside a pair of shoes.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: High tech, right?! But it had a pretty significant drawback.

[MUSIC]

Alison Oswald: The fluoroscope actually was, I think it was, banned from use at some point in the '50s.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: In 1957, Pennsylvania was the first state to ban the fluoroscope.

[MUSIC]

Paul Lukas: They realized that they were exposing people to a lot of radiation. (Laughs).

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Wow!

Paul Lukas: And, you know, without any kind of lead covering or anything like that.

Lizzie Peabody: Uh, huh.

[MUSIC]

Paul Lukas: But when Charlie Brannock came out with this, it was perfect. It was the first device that took both length and width and instep size and it solved the problems.

Lizzie Peabody: The foot problems of the U.S. Military.

Paul Lukas: You know, they say an army travels on its stomach, but of course, an army really travels on its feet.

Lizzie Peabody: In the early 1930s, a Navy Captain reported that many sailors were experiencing foot problems.

Alison Oswald: As the story goes, you know, the ship comes into port, and they get off the ship. A supply officer goes into a local shoe store and encounters a Brannock Device there.

Lizzie Peabody: He orders a Brannock Device for the ship, and after all the sailors re-measured their feet for shoes, the Naval Captain wrote, "The foot troubles among members of the crew were entirely eliminated."

Alison Oswald: And this, I think, really sets in motion what would become a significant relationship for Brannock because he ends up doing units for not only the Army and the Navy, but the Marines, the Marine Corps, Women's Reserve, the Merchant Marines, the Coast Guard and the WACS. You know, he really was doing his part for the war effort. I mean, he wasn't going overseas to serve, but he was working on the homefront, and making a difference. And I think that really mattered to him.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Charles Brannock only ever invented one thing, but that's all he needed to do to change the world of shoes.

[MUSIC]

Alison Oswald: You know, Brannock is really just a classic American inventor. He is what we call an independent inventor. So, he's working outside of government, corporate or academia to create his ideas and bring them to market and, you know, he did this, he did this on his own.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: So, okay. I have to get back to this tattoo because, you know, people get tattoos of things that are really personally significant to them.

Paul Lukas: Hmm, mmm.

Lizzie Peabody: So, what makes the Brannock Device so special to you?

[MUSIC]

Paul Lukas: I've spent close to 30 years writing about the inconspicuous. And the Brannock Device, to me, is the perfect symbol of that. It's the ultimate inconspicuous object. It's this thing that's right there, but nobody really thinks about, except I think about it! (Laughs). And so, at some point, I had my own Brannock Device. I had like Brannock Device coasters, and other little trinkets, and I thought, "Eh, I think it's time to get the tattoo."

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

[MUSIC]

Paul Lukas: To get the Brannock Device tattoo. (Laughs). And uh, so, I did!

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: It was just one day you thought, "Okay. It's time to escalate."

Paul Lukas: I had... (Laughs). I'm not sure I consider it, "escalate!" Maybe elevate. (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs). Elevate, okay.

Paul Lukas: (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs). Oh my gosh!

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: We've arrived at our last story. And I do want to note that this story contains some adult themes that may not be appropriate for all listeners. So, if you're listening with kids, you might want to come back later. I'll give you a second to hit pause. Please enjoy this Sidedoor Hold Music.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Ready? Okay! Here we go. If you listened to our, "Field Trip!" episode last season, you might remember Frank Feltens. We met him at the Freer Gallery of Asian Art, where he talked with us about the Japanese artist, Hokusai.

Frank Feltens: I think Hokusai is probably, nowadays, best known for his famous print, "The Great Wave Off the Coast of Kanagawa." In terms of Japanese cultural identity, he's really the most important artist by far.

Lizzie Peabody: Hokusai produced tons of work over the course of his life, including one print that really shocked me. After the, "Field Trip" episode, I kept wondering about it. So, I called Frank. Turns out, he was not surprised to hear from me.

Frank Feltens: I was, I was waiting for this to come to be honest. (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

Frank Feltens: Sex sells.

Lizzie Peabody: The print I wanted to talk about is called, "The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife." And it belongs to a category of art called, "shunga." Literally translated, "shunga" means, "spring pictures." It's a euphemism for depictions of sexual encounters of all kinds: men and women, men and men, women and women.

Frank Feltens: And, "The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife" is perhaps one of the most famous images of shunga because it doesn't depict a man and a woman, but a woman and an octopus, or actually, a big octopus and a smaller one having sex.

Lizzie Peabody: One lady. Two cephalopods. The print shows the woman reclining naked, surrounded by a lot of tentacles. She's an oyster diver, part of a long Japanese tradition of women who dove for pearls.

Frank Feltens: And they were often eroticized because they dive largely naked, and to imagine these women diving into this unknown world that is the bottom of the sea. So, that sparked the imagination of a lot of people, including Hokusai.

Lizzie Peabody: The print actually appears in the show, "Mad Men." In the last season, Roger Sterling gives it to Peggy Olson.

[MUSIC]

[Scene from Mad Men]

Peggy Olson: Oh my God! What is this?

Roger Sterling: It's an Octopus pleasuring a lady. You can have it. You can put it in your office.

Peggy Olson: No! They won't take me seriously.

Roger Sterling: It's pretty serious. It's 150 years old.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Shunga exploded in Edo Japan, the 250-year-era of peace and prosperity, dating from the early 1600s to the mid 1800s.

[MUSIC]

Frank Feltens: The Edo period was unprecedented in its embrace of sexuality in Japan. I mean, in the periods before that you do find allusions to the sexual encounters, but it's never depicted in the way that it is in shunga. So, that has led scholars to assume various theories about the nature of shunga that they weren't just meant to be erotic, but that they also were meant to be instructional.

Lizzie Peabody: Huh!

Frank Feltens: To make life in the bedroom a little more enticing and interesting.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Oh, like a communal, something to be shared between couples.

Frank Feltens: Exactly.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Ah.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Most shunga was made with woodblock printing. Frank says, in Edo Japan, you could buy a book of shunga prints for the price of a lunch. Or, if you were wealthy, you could invest in a commissioned piece, the kind you'd pass down in your family for generations.

[MUSIC]

Frank Feltens: So, major artists, they also created a lavish deluxe versions, painted scrolls and images that, that show the same subjects: erotic encounters.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: So, Hokusai was not anomalous, as a famous, like, well-regarded painter who also painted erotica?

[MUSIC]

Frank Feltens: Not at all. No. He was one among many, many.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: If you're feeling a little taken aback by the openness with which erotica was sold and enjoyed in 18th Century Japan, you're definitely not alone.

Frank Feltens: So, there is a 1719 account of a Korean emissary coming to Japan and, he comments in his report that he was flabbergasted at how Japanese are using these images; that they were openly carrying them around. And he comments on the fact that the Japanese, God forbid, have sex with a light on!

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

Frank Feltens: ...and not in the utter darkness!

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs). Yeah! What strikes me about the fact that this was a Korean emissary.... So, it's not just a question of East versus West. It's really Japan stood apart as its own country in this regard.

[MUSIC]

Frank Feltens: Exactly, very, very much so. And I think to some degree, it seems that the Japanese were aware of this friction between how the outside world looked at sex vis-a-vis how the Japanese actually embraced that part of human nature as something wonderful and something essential.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: In 1868, Japan entered its period of, "modernization" and attitudes toward shunga changed. Japan was looking to the West and adopting Victorian-era values prevalent in the United States and Western Europe. Shunga disappeared from public view. And it's only recently, like in the past decade, that museums have begun re-exploring shunga in exhibitions.

[MUSIC]

Frank Feltens: Japanese shunga stand out in their diversity, in their explicitness and in the incredible numbers that were produced. I don't think there's anything like that in the world to be honest.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Well, that was fun! What a weird assortment of stories. Who knew you could get nude hunting, antique clockwork, feet, bugs, and ye-olde erotica in the same episode? It was like a bit of Sidedoor Spring Cleaning. It's nice to sweep out some of the stories we've been hanging on to. Thanks for joining us on this caper through our second ever, Best-of-the-Rest!

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: You've been listening to Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: For photos of Paul's tattoo, Ripley's woodpecker, the Great Historic Clock of America, and links to the Freer-Sackler's online shunga collection, subscribe to our newsletter at si.edu/sidedoor. And definitely follow us on Twitter and Instagram @Sidedoorpod!

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: We have some exciting news to share! Our episode, "The Worst Video Game Ever" has been nominated for a Webby Award! Webbys are like the Oscars of digital media, so this is a big deal. So, if we've made you laugh, or if you've learned something new, or satisfyingly odd, you can let us know by voting for us! Please vote at: [and here's the web address, so this part is important: vote.webbyawards.com](http://vote.webbyawards.com). That's webby with two B's. So, it's v-o-t-e-dot-w-e-b-b-y-a-w-a-r-d-s.com and search for, "Sidedoor!"

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Our podcast team is Justin O'Neill, Nathalie Boyd, Ann Conanan, Caitlin Shaffer, Jess Sadeq, Lara Koch, and Sharon Bryant. Special thanks to Cara Giamo. Episode artwork is by Greg Fisk. Extra support comes from John, Jason and Genevieve at PRX. Our show is mixed by Tarek Fouda. Our theme song and other episode music are by Breakmaster Cylinder.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: If you want to sponsor our show, please email sponsorship@prx.org.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: I'm your host, Lizzie Peabody. Thanks for listening.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Did you get the invitation?

Voice: Audio Call.

Carlene Stephens: Yes! Look at that! (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs). Whew!

Carlene Stephens: Whew!

Lizzie Peabody: Oh wow! Okay. You're calling me. (Laughs).

Carlene Stephens: (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: Oh my gosh. I'm so confused. (Laughs).

Carlene Stephens: (Laughs). I'm getting bubbling noises. (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: Okay. I'm going to pick up.

Carlene Stephens: Do you hear the bubbling noises? Oh wait.

Lizzie Peabody: Hang on. I'm closing out Zoom. You stay on the line. Can you hear me?

Carlene Stephens: Yes!

Lizzie Peabody: Okay! Wow! What a relief.