

Bonus Episode: Nobody Should Believe Me with Andrea Dunlop

[00:00:00]

Debbie Sorensen: If you enjoyed our most recent episode, episode 314 with Andrea Dunlop and Marc Feldman on Munchausen by proxy syndrome, you won't want to miss Andrea's podcast. Nobody should believe me.

In this special bonus episode, we're bringing our listeners. The very first episode of nobody should believe me. Andrea shares how she first became captivated by the story of hope you Barbara, who spent 10 years in prison for Munchausen by proxy.

And begins to unpack the many similarities between Hope's case in Andrea's own family story. Nobody Should Believe Me is a production of Larj Media. That's L. A. R. J. Media. Before we begin, a quick warning that in this show we discuss child abuse, and this content may be difficult for some listeners. If you or anyone you know is a victim or survivor of medical child abuse, please go to [Munchausensupport](#).

Andrea Dunlop: com to connect with professionals who can help.

People believe their eyes. [00:01:00] That's something that actually is so central to this whole issue and to people that experience this, is that We do believe the people that we love when they're telling us something. If you questioned everything that everyone told you, you couldn't make it through your day. My older sister has been investigated over suspicions of abuse brought by the doctors who were treating her children.

I'm Andrea Dunlop. This is Nobody Should Believe Me. I am a mom. Is that a Tickle Meal? I am a novelist. I am the author of three books, including most recently, We Came Here to Forget, which is inspired by my family's story. My sister has been investigated for Munchausen by Proxy child abuse on two occasions that I'm aware of.

Though I want to be clear that she has never been charged with a crime. I'll get into a little [00:02:00] bit more detail about my family's involvement in the first investigation in a future episode. The second investigation concerned her

younger child, whom neither I nor anyone in my extended family has ever met, because we've been estranged from her for over a decade.

The extent of my involvement in the second investigation was to share truthful background information with a detective who reached out to my family and several other relevant authorities. Everything that has happened with my sister has had a huge impact on my life and this podcast is really about me looking for answers.

The stories I'm going to be sharing about my sister in this podcast concern my lived experience with her and mostly happened prior to her having children. I'm not a medical professional. And any opinions that I share in this podcast are just that, my opinions informed by research and my own experience.

We're going to be getting into all of the nuances of this in future episodes, but I wanted to start you off with a working [00:03:00] definition of Munchausen by proxy because there is so much confusion around this term. We used the term Munchausen by proxy a lot in this podcast because it is the most well known of the terms used for this.

But Munchausen by Proxy actually encompasses two different things. One is the act of medical child abuse, which involves a parent or caregiver fabricating, exaggerating, or inducing illness in their child. The second is factitious disorder imposed on another, which is the DSM term for individuals who commit medical child abuse in order to obtain emotional gratification.

So even though this is a mental illness, it is rarely diagnosed and it's never diagnosed in the absence of a conviction for medical child abuse. Even in the most famous case of our era, the Dee Dee Blanchard case, she was never officially diagnosed with factitious disorder imposed on another or Munchausen by proxy.

She was also never charged with a crime. [00:04:00] When I started writing my third novel, *We Came Here to Forget*, I really quickly realized that it was going to be about sisters. And then I started getting into the topic of Mudgehausen by Proxy more directly and realized that it just felt very urgent for me to write about.

And I think that a huge part of that was because I was working through my own feelings about that while I was getting ready to become a mom. When I first came across Hope Ybarra's case, it was in Deanna Boyd's reporting for the Fort Worth Star Telegram. There were just these uncanny similarities about, really,

Hope's life and the story of her family that struck me right away as being so similar to my sister and my family's story.

When I was pregnant with my first child, the specter of these investigations into my sister just hung really heavily on me. [00:05:00] And in addition to that, you know, her absence from my life during this time was really palpable. She'd been out of my life for many years by the time my daughter was born. And after some of the things that she'd done, which I'll get to, I felt really strongly that she needed help.

Because of that, she cut me and my entire family off. After the second time she was investigated, I set out to learn everything I could about Munchausen by proxy in an attempt to come to grips with what had happened in my family. As most people would, I went online and I found the website of Dr. Mark Feldman, who is a professor at the University of Alabama and one of the foremost experts in the world on Munchausen by proxy and other factitious disorders.

And I reached out to him.

Marc Feldman: The American Psychiatric Association, since 1980, has recognized factitious disorder as an ailment when the [00:06:00] person induces or feigns illness in themselves, and that's called either factitious disorder imposed on self, or more commonly, Munchausen syndrome. When the person is feigning, exaggerating, or inducing illness in another person, that's still a factitious disorder, but we refer to it often as Munchausen by proxy.

And then malingering is when a person does it not for emotional gratification, but more to acquire tangible goals like money, disability payments, or other rewards like evasion of criminal prosecution or evasion of military service. So there's subtle differences, but they're important because, in some sense, Munchausen by proxy is paramount because it's a form of child abuse.

The others are not.

Andrea Dunlop: Until you [00:07:00] understand the psychology behind it a little bit. In that, you know, folks that have Munchausen, that psychopathology, they get a dopamine rush from the attention that they get for having a medical issue. So it can be seen like an addiction. So when you understand it in those terms, it's a lot easier to understand the why.

It's a maladaptive coping mechanism that people use to get attention that they feel they need and can't get otherwise. Why a particular person develops it, that

is more of a mystery than what it actually is or like how it functions. So all I knew was that my big sister had lied to me about something really serious and that is a very hard thing to wrap your head around.

I've [00:08:00] spent the last decade of my life trying to make sense of my history with my sister. And it is complicated. And it's complicated to talk about. The truth is, there is so much about our shared history that I will never know. And I find myself still trying to make sense of memories that don't make any sense.

There are some incidents where I do know definitively that she lied and those are the memories that I can share with you. Many others, I can't. So I was reading everything I could get my hands on about Munchausen by proxy at the time. I was doing interviews on the topic. I was talking to a lot of experts and throughout all of that.

You know, I found that this story of Hope Ybarra and her [00:09:00] family just really stuck with me. I just had this very strong feeling that I could get to the bottom of something. That I needed answered for myself by talking to Hope and her family. I started trying to get in touch with Hope's family members. I knew she had three siblings.

I reached out to Robin Patcher and she just happened to be living at the time about an hour and a half away. So she was actually the first person that I sat down to talk to face to face.

Tina: You ready?

Andrea Dunlop: My producer Tina and I, who both live in Seattle, drove south to the Tacoma area where Robin was living at the time. You too, because I'm such a hunker.[00:10:00]

So what was Hope like growing up?

Robin: She was like the perfect sister, you know, she was the perfect student. She was the oldest and she had all the responsibility in the house and she never let that bother her. You know, like parents put a lot of weight on their kids, especially a mom of four dinners and getting us in the shower and the laundry and that was all Hope's kind of responsibility and she just carried it.

It wasn't like at the end of the day, she goes. I shouldn't have to do this, or why do I have to make dinner? She just did it.

Andrea Dunlop: As I was talking to Robin, that feeling that I'd started out with, of Hope's life and family being a parallel to my own, was just deepening in this really extraordinary way. I really wanted to talk to the rest of her family and just fill this picture out, and so I was able to get in touch with her father, Paul Pucher, and her younger brother, [00:11:00] Nick Pucher, who both live in Fort Worth, Texas.

Paul: My name is Paul Pucher. I'm the father of Hopi Bar. We didn't really notice anything, uh, any issues whatsoever, before anything started happening. And it was, everything was cool.

Andrea Dunlop: Hope's younger brother, Nick, really looked up to her during their childhood.

Nick: So Hope was the oldest of the four of us. We were really, really close, especially as I got into high school.

Um, and that's really where my Relationship with hope had grown a lot. She was the first person in my family that had gone to college. Mom and dad were always really proud. She did really well. She was doing well in her life and it was kind of an inspiration for me. I could talk to her about what she had gone through, how she got to where she's at.

And lean on her for kind of a resource, because I wanted to go to school, I wanted to eventually be able to help take care of mom and dad and, and do all of that stuff.

Andrea Dunlop: Again, Robin, Hope's younger sister.

Robin: You know, she participated in all of our stuff. [00:12:00] My brother and my sports events, and she would take us, she would be our taxi, our chauffeur, and she still had such a exuberant social life.

You know, she had friends, and she was in clubs, and she was in marching band. In jazz band she played the, um, saxophone, and then she played the clarinet in marching band. You know, and she could play the piano and her and my mom shared that commonality. I could never learn, you know, she just was very outgoing.

Andrea Dunlop: I'm just sitting here smiling because I think talking about this part, it reminds me so much, you know, my sister was so fun. She had this incredibly light hearted personality. She was magnetic. She was smart. She

always had a ton of friends. She had this really close circle of friends from band. Um, she played the French horn.

I looked up to her in terms of, you know, just in the way that little sisters look up to big sisters. She just seemed to have things, you know, more figured out. She always had [00:13:00] boyfriends. She's incredibly warm, um, very smart, and so funny, so silly. People loved her. Pretty, green eyes, really all American girl next door.

Sounds like Hopeless, really similar. So striking to me.

Robin: That's scary.

Andrea Dunlop: Yeah, it's, it's almost like it's a, it's a little eerie. There was certainly a definitive moment where I lost my sister. You know, ten years ago, I remember really vividly having... What may turn out to be the final conversation that I have with her in my life.

But at the same time I also felt like I lost her little by little. In my memory, there's a person who is this funny, vibrant person with all of these interests. Someone who's a swimmer, loves horses, and who was the partner in crime to all my childhood adventures. [00:14:00] She was someone who was this loving, warm person and she just disappeared little by little over the years and her strange behaviors just escalated.

Here's Hope Ybarra's father, Paul Patcher, who told me about an incident that happened to Hope in high school.

Paul: So, you know, it really wasn't until about 16 when she fell out of bed on a, we've just told. Her floor and she fell on the towel floor and hurt her back, supposedly, like she couldn't walk and she was, uh, you know, she was in a wheelchair for a couple months and thinking back, this was probably the first sign of something's amok, but being young parents ourselves, we just kind of blew right through it and rolled her around in the wheelchair and she was in the band.

And, uh, so we, um, Went to Texas Stadium, the football team was playing in playoffs, and the band was out on the field, and we rolled her [00:15:00] out in her uniform out onto the field, and my boss got to roll her back, and we were doing wheelies and everything, and, uh, And it was a good six months, eight months of heavy caregiving, heavy, you know, heavy, heavy love and, uh, for all of us.

And finally she got better, but there was no rhyme or reason. Two or three doctors say there's nothing wrong with her, there's no reason she shouldn't be walking.

Andrea Dunlop: My sister had the same thing at the same age. Not from falling out of bed, but she had, when she was 16, she was really active, had always been healthy, she was a swimmer, and she had this mysterious back injury, and it wouldn't go away, and she was wearing this big plastic brace.

She convinced doctors to do surgery on her. I want to clarify here that, I didn't know then and I still don't know how many of my sister's [00:16:00] ailments that she had in high school and beyond were real and how many were fabricated. She had a series of surgeries on her back and knee that look different to me and my family now looking back knowing what we know.

There is one incident that stuck with me because we did have evidence. When she was in high school, she... Started losing her hair. Obviously that is like, the sort of nightmarish thing for a teenage girl. My mom took her to the dermatologist, uh, to have a look at it, and the dermatologist pulled my mother aside and said, She's not losing it, she's shaving it.

That was a very definitive, like, Oh, we know. I think my parents tried to get her to go speak to a therapist at the time and she just sort of blew him off. You know, she was always able to explain these things away. She always had an uncanny ability to just sort of like, move forward. [00:17:00] My parents have gone through all that same thing of like, In the light of what happened after, but, you know, so much of what doctors base everything off of is what the patient's reporting their pain to be, right?

Again, Robin.

Robin: So, seizures in high school and then the, you know, the paraplegia that came along with that and then her miraculous recovery came about her senior year. So, her goal was to be able to walk across the stage. So, she managed to be able to regain her ability to walk just in time to be able to walk across the stage and graduate.

And then she was walking again, and then she went to college.

Andrea Dunlop: Yeah, it was really similar with my sister, actually. It was... There are things that I think, for my parents, they can look back even further.

For me, definitely high school is where, yeah, she started having all these problems with her knee, with her back.

She had a couple of surgeries, and... Even then, it's just, you know, the doctors were basing what they were [00:18:00] doing off of what she was saying.

Robin: That summer, they packed her up and they brought her to school over in El Paso, Texas, and it was this very typical taking your child to the university. My mom and dad went and...

Helped her pack into her dorm, and she was doing great, you know, very typical things. She was participating in band, obviously. She also picked up jujitsu and was taking classes at night to be able to, you know, defend herself. And she was, all of a sudden, just thriving again in school. And then, uh, my mom...

Got a call that Hope had had a seizure at school. They had found her in her dorm, um, on the ground, and so my mom, of course, rushed down there and mortified that her daughter is so far away and needing her, and so she got her back on her feet, got her back into school, made sure everything was fine.

Andrea Dunlop: Then, when she was in college, she'd [00:19:00] met her husband to be, Fabian Ybarra, and they had actually had their first child while Hope was still in school.

Robin: She managed to have this baby, and she supposedly had complications, broke her tailbone. So my mom was there nursing her back to health, you know, with this new dad and this new mom. And the new dad didn't know how to take care of a child, and they shared funny stories. He peed on them, the first diaper change.

And still, at this point, she was a couple years into her schooling. She was going to become a veterinarian. She decided now, as a new mom, that she couldn't do that because she was... had to care of the family and so she changed her program and got her degree in chemistry. And so then they got married, a great, beautiful wedding, and had another child after that.

Very typical family. She was working, is a chemist. He was a school teacher. They were raising their now two children. They had a home. Just, [00:20:00] I could say the all American dream. Even at this point, everything we have been through, nothing

Andrea Dunlop: It really seemed like Hope had everything someone could want, including a happy marriage and beautiful family. When we spoke to Fabian Ybarra in Fort Worth, he had a somewhat different take on things.

Fabian: I don't think we were in love. I think we were just trying to make it work. After like the second year, my son, I think that's when it started.

Something clicked. I believe when my first daughter, my middle child, when she was born, that was, that's when you saw everything changed.

Robin: And they had a two story house and seven months along, Hope fell down the stairs and went into preterm labor. And so here this baby was born, um, [00:21:00] 28 weeks. She was a pound and a half or, you know, some ridiculously small weight and she spent months in the NICU.

And so here we are now a family dedicated to taking care of Hope and her family and her kids. And she's power throughing everything and still being a devout mom and wife and managing it all so well. That's whenever you could start to see that things were changing a little bit with Hope. I can't even say that she lost her light at that point, but that's whenever things, that's what sets the rest of things into motion.

Andrea Dunlop: After Hope had her second child with Fabian, she later told her family that she was pregnant with twins. This detail of the pregnancy with twin girls really stuck with me because we'd had an identical situation in my family, where my sister told us that she was pregnant with twins. So when I was in my 20s, [00:22:00] she was with a partner and she got pregnant, you know, they were engaged.

So it was a really It was like a really happy piece of news and she told us that she was having twins and they were, you know, twin girls and I was living in New York at the time. I was, saw her when I was home for Thanksgiving. And I was so excited. I knew their names. We bought gifts. Uh, my parents and I, we're all out of town.

I think we were out of town together. We were in Las Vegas. And my sister called us. She, she was about six months pregnant at the time. So pretty far along. She called us. And she said that she was going into labor early and she was going to the hospital and my parents like scrambled to get a flight home.

She was calling and giving us updates and I was having these long conversations with her and she was saying, [00:23:00] they've got me in the

hospital, they've, I'm, you know, they're holding me upside down so that babies stay in, kind of like a little bit gallows humor about it. And, um, and then she lost the babies.

And I... was so sad. I was so sad for her. I was so excited to be an auntie and I really felt that grief of, like, losing those two little girls. And then things started to unravel really quickly. I think it was my dad who called me and said, you know, there's something about all of this that's not adding up and I spoke to the friend who my sister had told me took her to the hospital when she was losing the babies.

That friend told me she had the understanding that my sister's fiancé had been the one to take her to the hospital and that they'd been there together when she lost the babies. That was [00:24:00] impossible because... He was living in Tennessee at the time, and unbeknownst to me, at that moment, was no longer her fiancé.

When I got his version of events many years later, he told me that he'd had doubts throughout the pregnancy and eventually... surmised that she had probably never been pregnant at all, which is the conclusion that we'd all eventually come to. I did confront her on this once, during my final conversation with her that I had, which was during the first investigation into her.

And I asked her how she expected me to believe her when she'd lied about something as serious as an entire pregnancy. She didn't deny it. But said indignantly, I don't know why you're bringing that up now. This fact of the fake twin pregnancy is the most striking similarity between my sister and [00:25:00] Hope.

And I asked Robin about it. Do you remember finding out that the pregnancy hadn't been real?

Robin: So I remember her losing the twins and us coming and mourning with her. My sister's belly was very real. I saw the ultrasounds. I held them. My sister was pregnant in that moment.

Andrea Dunlop: So when my sister was pregnant, purportedly with twins, I put my hand on her belly and felt a baby kick.

And I now know that that wasn't real, but my experience was real, and I don't even know what to do with that.

Robin: The twins that she lost were Alexandria and Alexia, so my, my son's name is Alexander after the twins, that come to find out never, they never existed. It took us probably a couple months to realize that the babies weren't true.

We mourned these babies. The [00:26:00] final deciding factor is my mom found the urn. Um, and she opened up the urn and it was empty. That, to my mom, was enough closure to realize that my sister was not telling the truth about anything.

Andrea Dunlop: For me, the thing that I could never do, and that I do not foresee having an opportunity to do in my life, is to sit down with my sister and say, I can help you. But that's true, that I could help her. Like, one of the things I've really wrestled with in this podcast that I didn't really even realize I was holding onto, is this hope that I'll do this.

And that she'll hear it and say, I'm exhausted. I want to come home. Help me come home.[00:27:00]

In the next episode, we'll do a deep dive into Hope Ybarra's case and talk to her family about what it was like to try to unlock it. Unravel all of her lies. If you've been listening to this podcast and some of the details sound very familiar to you from your own life, or someone that you know, please visit us@munchhasensupport.com.

We have resources there from some of the top experts in the country, and we can connect you with professionals who can help. If you are curious about this show and the topic of Munchausen by proxy, follow me on Instagram at Andrea Dunlop. If you would like to support the show, you can do so [@patreon.com](https://www.patreon.com/andreadunlop).

Nobody should believe me. And if monetary support is not an option for you right now, you can also rate and review the podcast on Apple and share on your social media word of mouth is so important for podcasts and we really appreciate it. Nobody Should Believe Me is a production of Large Media. Our lead producer is Tina Noel.

The show was edited by Lisa Gray with help from Wendy Nardi. Jeff Gall is our sound engineer. Additional [00:28:00] scoring and music by Johnny Nicholson and Joel Schupach. Also special thanks to Maria Palaiologos, Joelle Noel, and Katie Klein for project coordination. Dunlop.