

[ROOSTER CROWS]

JOY: Good morning, Maeve-- well, almost morning. The sun should come up in just a bit.

MAEVE: Hi, Joy. Why are you crowing?

JOY: Are you ready to get started?

MAEVE: Yeah, I'm just not sure why we had to start quite so early. It's still dark outside.

JOY: Because it's our first episode of *Forever Ago* in a while. And I'm way too excited to wait any longer. [CROWING NOISES] We're back with more secret histories of everyday things.

MAEVE: Right, because this is *Forever Ago*, where we explore the before.

JOY: Did you just think of that? I love that. [CROWING NOISES]

MAEVE: You could stop that any time.

JOY: Sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so excited. And this morning, I thought we could celebrate with a sunrise ice cream social.

MAEVE: Ice cream this early?

JOY: Yeah, maybe a morning milkshake, or a sunrise sundae. And not just any ice cream. We're scooping up historical flavors of the past.

MAEVE: Whoa. But I mean, it seems like sunset could have been another option?

JOY: That would make way too much sense. So let's check that all of our supplies are ready.

MAEVE: Right, because if you stay ready--

JOY: You don't have to get ready. OK, I've got a super scoop.

MAEVE: Check-- what's the difference between a regular ice cream scoop and a super scoop?

JOY: I don't know. I think maybe the super scoop has an alter ego and fights crime at night?

MAEVE: Cool, and do you have your sundae spoon?

JOY: Check.

MAEVE: Plus a straw?

JOY: Checkity check. I think we should be all set. Now, let's warm up with a series of sprints and bad jokes.

[WHISTLE BLOWS]

MAEVE: Get on the treadmill.

JOY: Ready.

MAEVE: Set.

JOY: Go!

MAEVE: Joy, why do ice cream cones always carry umbrellas?

JOY: In case there are sprinkles?

MAEVE: Nice! Now bump up that bass. Why do we always invite ice cream to the party?

JOY: Because we like eating it?

MAEVE: No, because it's cool.

JOY: Of course.

MAEVE: Last one, what do we keep in mind as we start this season of *Forever Ago*?

JOY: Anything is popsicle.

MAEVE: Correct.

JOY: I am warmed up and ready to scoop. Let's explore the before.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

JOY: Hello, and welcome to *Forever Ago* from APM Studios. I'm Joy Dolo. And I'm here today with Maeve.

MAEVE: And we're not just here today.

JOY: That's right. We're kicking off the new season of *Forever Ago*.

MAEVE: Yay!

JOY: In every episode, we'll take something you think you know and uncover its true origin story.

MAEVE: Sometimes you might look at an actual object like a Rubik's cube.

JOY: But there are also lots of cool stories about stuff we do, like taking baths.

MAEVE: Because almost everything has a fascinating history if you dig into it.

JOY: Yay, it's so exciting to be back! And today we're looking into the past of ice cream flavors, with this celebratory sunrise sundae social. Before we scoop up the past, put it in a cone, and cover it with sprinkles, Maeve, do you like ice cream, or do you like popsicles better?

MAEVE: I like ice cream better than popsicles.

JOY: Oh really? Is it the cream factor, or the ice water?

MAEVE: Cream. I like milk.

JOY: What's your favorite ice cream flavor?

MAEVE: I like cookies and cream along with mint.

JOY: That's good. That's really good. I think ice cream-- that's one of my favorite ones, too.

MAEVE: What about you, do you like ice cream cones, or are you one of those people who mushes up their ice cream so it's more like ice cream soup?

JOY: You know, I'm a big cone girl. I've always been a cone girl, and not just, like, waffle cones. I like the cheap plasticky cones that you can eat.

MAEVE: What?

JOY: Yeah, the ones that are like \$1 because there's just something that's just so crunchy and raw about them. And I grew up with it. So these are my favorite ones.

MAEVE: But it tastes like plastic.

JOY: Well, the thing is, there's like no taste to it. So it doesn't take away from the ice cream, which is a super tip for you. And I don't really like making ice cream soup. I think that's weird. I think it's meant to be separated.

MAEVE: I've done it once.

JOY: Did you like it?

MAEVE: I don't know. I don't remember. It was so long ago. I was, like, 7.

JOY: And we're-- that's just way in the past.

MAEVE: I had the grand idea of, what if I put milk in ice cream, that's already made of milk?

JOY: It can work! I think so. Put a little sugar on it. Well, my favorite ice cream flavor is vanilla.

MAEVE: Really?

JOY: Yeah.

MAEVE: I think of vanilla as, well, a little boring.

JOY: Oh, no. Vanilla is complex. And it has a pretty interesting story behind it.

MAEVE: Oh.

JOY: Yeah, we'll get to that. But vanilla isn't the first flavor on our sundae bar. Here, I made us a menu to follow as we set up.

MAEVE: Oh wow, I don't really recognize the first few flavors. Mace, orange blossom, and ambergris?

JOY: Yeah, honestly, I had to look up how to pronounce that last one, ambergris. But I guess in the United Kingdom, it's "ambergreese." And all of those flavors are from a way long time ago. And they're different from the ones we know now. So grab that super scoop. And let's get started.

MAEVE: Super sunrise sundae set-up mode, engaged.

JOY: So let's talk about where these first few flavors are from. That would be England, in the mid 1600's. Kitchens are pretty different at this time. There's no refrigerators, no gas or electric stoves. Most kitchens wouldn't even have running water.

MAEVE: Seems like a really tough time for food safety over there.

JOY: Yeah, and cleanliness in general. The bubonic plague is exploding in London around this time.

MAEVE: Oh, bummer.

JOY: Yeah, definitely. But still, ice cream exists for fancy people. People like kings and queens keep ice frozen in cellars. And they use some of that ice to freeze cream. We know because someone wrote down a recipe. And that someone was Lady Ann Fanshawe.

LADY ANN FANSHAWE: That's right! I call it icy cream.

MAEVE: Lady Ann, hello.

JOY: I was hoping you'd join us. Tell us about your recipe. It's where I got our first round of ice cream flavors.

LADY ANN FANSHAWE: Of course. My recipe is from around 1665. So far, it's the oldest one that historians know of, in English. And I had the good sense to give a few flavoring options. I was one of the first people to flavor ice cream in this way.

JOY: So smart! So here we have the first flavor, mace.

LADY ANN FANSHAWE: Right, you might boil your cream with a blade of mace, which is part of the nutmeg plant. It's a little spicy and a little earthy.

JOY: Oh, nutmeg I know. Sometimes I put that in apple pie or on french toast.

LADY ANN FANSHAWE: Excuse me. You're in England, not France.

JOY: Right, right, please continue.

LADY ANN FANSHAWE: Or you could flavor the cream with orange flower water.

MAEVE: Oh, an orange blossom ice cream-- sounds delicate and delightful.

LADY ANN FANSHAWE: And the last flavor I've suggested might just be the best one.

JOY: That's ambergris. So that flavor is also earthy, a little perfumery, and a bit sweet. It's kind of hard to describe.

MAEVE: I haven't heard of that.

LADY ANN FANSHAWE: Oh, it's just an exquisite flavor. It comes from this mysterious, waxy substance that washes up on the beaches. So it's from the ocean. And that's pretty much all I know about it.

AMBERGRIS: If I may speak for myself--

JOY: Are you ambergris?

AMBERGRIS: That's me. I'd love to tell you where I'm from.

MAEVE: Please.

AMBERGRIS: So yes, I am, as they say, of the sea. But I am from a very specific place in the sea. And that is--

JOY: Ooh, let me guess, Nova Scotia, Barbados, Antarctica.

AMBERGRIS: Even more exquisite. I'm from a sperm whale's intestines.

MAEVE: Oh boy.

AMBERGRIS: The sperm whale loves to eat squid. But squids have hard beak mouths. And the sperm whale, it cannot digest squid beaks. So those beaks get all bunched up in the whale's gut. And then something truly deluxe happens.

JOY: So this can only end one of two ways.

AMBERGRIS: See, that's what you think. But the beaks harden all together. And they mix with whale poo that's also traveling through. So it's kind of a medley of digested and undigested.

MAEVE: Wow, very deluxe.

AMBERGRIS: Yeah, people used to think whales threw up. But actually, it's probably more of a dookie situation than a pukie situation. But it's not exactly either one.

**LADY ANN
FANSHAWE:** I may need to lie down.

MAEVE: That's what ambergris is?

JOY: Yep, and people were really into it. They still are, actually. Ambergris isn't as much of a dessert ingredient now. But it's in lots of perfumes. These days, there's synthetic ambergris, too. It comes from labs rather than sperm whales. And don't worry, I used the lab version to flavor our ice cream.

MAEVE: Nice, I "whale-y" appreciate that. So Lady Ann, when would you have served icy cream like this? Did you ever have it for breakfast?

**LADY ANN
FANSHAWE:** Absolutely not. In my time, icy cream was for the end of an elegant dinner, a show-stopping dessert, if I do say so myself-- not something to eat willy nilly.

MAEVE: Right, because sugar and ice were expensive. They weren't things everyone had at home at the time.

JOY: So serving ice cream was almost a way to say, check out how fancy I am.

**LADY ANN
FANSHAWE:** Oh, definitely.

JOY: Got it. Thanks, Lady Ann.

LADY ANN Toodles.

FANSHAWE:

[MUSIC PLAYING]

JOY: So there we have our first station of this sundae bar, mace, orange blossom, and ambergris-- artificially flavored, of course.

MAEVE: Quite a lineup.

JOY: I know. Ever since people have been making icy desserts, they've been tinkering with tastes. But ingredients have actually changed a lot over time. And as food and kitchens change, what we eat changes a lot too.

MAEVE: I get that ingredients have changed over time. But ambergris really makes me feel like, where was good old, plain vanilla when they needed it?

JOY: Right? Vanilla feels kind of like the automatic flavor for ice cream. But obviously, it wasn't always. In fact, at one point, vanilla only came from a few places on Earth. We'll get to that in just a minute, right after we play a round of First Things First.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

THEME SONG: (SINGING) First Things First.

JOY: It's the game where we try to put things in order from oldest to newest. Maeve, do you want to read today's three things?

MAEVE: Sure, so they're chocolate sprinkles, ice cream cakes, and popsicles.

JOY: OK, now we have to guess which one came first, which came second, and which came most recently in history? So what do you think?

MAEVE: I think popsicles came first, while then it was chocolate sprinkles, and last but not least, ice cream cakes.

JOY: That's so funny. I actually think the same thing. Why do you think popsicles came first?

MAEVE: I think it came first because if you freeze fruit, that's basically a popsicle. And chocolate sprinkles, it's chocolate, but sprinkles. And then ice cream cake seems like the most complex in history, so.

JOY: We'll be back with the answer in just a bit.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

OK, so obviously, we love sitting down to a nice big bowl of the past. But history is always happening. So here at *Forever Ago*, we're building a time capsule about the time we live in now.

MAEVE: A time capsule is a collection of things that shows people in the future what our lives are like today.

JOY: When future people look at our time capsule, they'll learn about our present, which will be their past.

MAEVE: And we want to know what you'd put in the time capsule. What things really capture the essence of today?

JOY: Record yourself telling us about the item you have in mind, and why you want to save it.

MAEVE: And send it to us, at foreverago.org/contact.

JOY: Maybe you have a favorite recipe, a super ice cream scoop that must live on for posterity, or even a favorite food that you'd want people in the future to know about. Maeve, what would you put in the time capsule this week?

MAEVE: Like any food?

JOY: Yeah.

MAEVE: Curry!

JOY: Curry, yes!

MAEVE: Like curried lamb with potatoes in it.

JOY: Yum.

MAEVE: And all the good stuff because it tastes amazing. And I live for it.

JOY: Oh, cool, yum! We'll hear what more listeners would put in the time capsule at the very end of the show after the credits. Send us your recording at foreverago.org/contact. We can't wait to hear what you come up with.

MAEVE: More *Forever Ago* in just a moment. Don't go anywhere.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

This is Forever Ago. I'm Maeve.

JOY: And I'm Joy. Let's reveal which of our First Things First is actually the oldest.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Maeve, you're going to love this.

MAEVE: Oh no.

JOY: So the first thing is ice cream cakes.

MAEVE: What?

JOY: Can you believe it?

MAEVE: Ice cream cakes was, like, the last thing I thought.

JOY: I know. All I think is, like, birthdays. I think I had an ice cream cake. So I was like, it must be current. But actually, food historians believe ice cream cakes were invented in the 17th century in England. Ice cream cake recipes dating back to the 18th century have also been found. And in 2004, ice cream company Carvel broke the world record for the largest ice cream cake, weighing over-- guess how much.

MAEVE: Oh, 800 pounds.

JOY: 12,000 pounds of ice cream cake. I can't even. That's almost as heavy as an elephant. There's an elephant-sized ice cream cake.

MAEVE: Well, may I have it, please? I really like ice cream.

JOY: Well, I'll help you with the ice cream cake. So number two was popsicles.

MAEVE: Oh.

JOY: So popsicles were actually invented by a kid. And it was a complete accident. In 1905, 11-year-old Frank Epperson mixed sugary soda powder and water and left it outside overnight. And it was so cold, the mixture froze.

MAEVE: And he was like, oh, I'm going to eat this.

JOY: I left it outside. I'm going to put this in my mouth. But the name popsicle came from him because he named it an Eppsicle, and started selling it around his neighborhood. So that's where the name came from. I never knew that. And last but definitely not least is chocolate sprinkles.

MAEVE: Wow.

JOY: The Just Born Candy Company is widely accepted as the creator of chocolate sprinkles, or jimmies, as they called them in 1923. And though another company may have come up with it first, a newspaper article from 1921 included an ad about a treat made with chocolate sprinkles before Just Born started. And Americans put sprinkles on cupcakes, ice cream, and cookies. But in the Netherlands and Australia, sprinkles are used on bread, called fairy bread.

MAEVE: Is it bread made of fairies, or bread made by fairies?

JOY: I think that it's fairy bread because it's got sprinkles on it.

MAEVE: Disappointing.

JOY: But you can make fairy bread at home. Just take a slice of wheat toast. And put some sprinkles on it.

MAEVE: Oh.

JOY: You know, you're not impressed.

MAEVE: I am not impressed. I'd rather have magical bread made by fairies that gives me either magical powers, or I'm transported to the fairy realm.

[WHIMSICAL MUSIC PLAYING]

JOY: All right, Maeve, let's get back to setting up the rest of our sunrise sundae bar.

MAEVE: This is going to be the best sunrise sundae social ever.

JOY: Yeah! You think there have been a lot of other events like this? I thought it was pretty unique.

MAEVE: I mean, no, I've never eaten ice cream at the crack of dawn.

JOY: Good. We're trying to keep things original.

MAEVE: For sure. So far, our ice cream flavors are definitely unexpected.

JOY: Right, we set up mace, orange blossom, and ambergris, that mix of old squid beak and whale poo.

MAEVE: These are actual flavors from a recipe that's older than the United States.

JOY: And ambergris sounds pretty out there. But over the next 100 years or so, people write a lot more ice cream recipes, including recipes for artichoke ice cream-- gross, and asparagus ice cream, double gross.

MAEVE: I see we left those off the sundae bar list.

JOY: Yeah, we did. Anyways, to set up the next part of our sundae bar, we have to talk about a major change that was happening. It actually starts before Lady Ann Fanshawe's time and continues on afterward. So now we're going past Lady Ann Fanshawe a bit, to about 250 years ago. There's still no refrigeration, no electricity, and no trains or cars. People light their homes with candles. And they don't bathe very much.

MAEVE: And at the time, fizzy water was a new invention.

JOY: But it wasn't just drinks that were changing, so was food. For centuries, people in Europe only ate grains, fruits, vegetables, and meat they could get from Europe, or from trading with Asia.

MAEVE: They had lots of ingredients we'd recognize now, like apples, carrots, onions, cabbage, bread, chicken, and beef.

JOY: Along with some ingredients we don't use as much today, like ambergris, mace, and orange flower water. All three of those flavors would come from Europe or Asia.

MAEVE: But if you're only eating foods from a few continents, you're missing out on some awesome flavors.

JOY: Right, some foods that are super common now, like potatoes and tomatoes, are plants that first grew only in Central and South America.

MAEVE: People in Europe didn't have access to those foods until ships started making long voyages across the ocean to bring them back.

JOY: Historians call this time the Columbian Exchange because Christopher Columbus and his big voyage to North America in 1492 kind of kicked this off. But like lots of things in history, the Columbian Exchange wasn't just one moment. It was a shift that happened over many years, as people sailed back and forth across the Atlantic.

MAEVE: And the Columbian Exchange spread two flavors that all self-respecting sundae bars include, chocolate and vanilla.

SPECKY: That's right! I better be on this sundae bar. It took me a long time to make it as an ice cream flavor.

JOY: Who's that?

MAEVE: It sounds like it's coming from the vanilla ice cream?

SPECKY: I'm Specky. You know those little black specks in really good vanilla ice cream? Well, I'm one of those specks.

JOY: Whoa, nice to meet you, Specky.

SPECKY: You, too!

MAEVE: What do you mean it took you a long time to make it as an ice cream flavor? You're like, the biggest ice cream flavor ever.

SPECKY: Let's keep it that way. But I didn't start out super big. And to be honest, it was a little tricky for me to spread around the world. Here, meet Rosa Abreu. She wrote a book all about vanilla's history. She's going to help me fill in these facts.

MAEVE: Hi, Rosa.

ROSA ABREU: Hello.

SPECKY: So first, a little more about me. Vanilla has grown wild in Central and South America for millions of years. It grows as a vine. And the vine grows small, white flowers. Those flowers grow vanilla beans. Each bean is about the size of a green bean. Here's Rosa.

ROSA ABREU: So it is green. And then it starts turning color. And once it turns color to black, this is where it has these tiny, tiny little seeds that are inside.

SPECKY: And that's where the vanilla flavors come from. Also, me-- I'm one of those little tiny seeds. And even before I was global, I was special. Different people gathered vanilla beans in the wild, the Toltec people, the Maya, to name a few. They used vanilla in medicines and food. And the vanilla vine was so special, people shared legends about it.

JOY: So the people who knew you, knew you were great.

SPECKY: Exactly. And then, in what's now Mexico, the Totonac people started growing vanilla themselves. Then the Aztec people got vanilla from the Totonac people, and used vanilla to boost chocolate's flavor. So for a long time, Mexico was one of the only places where people could grow and harvest vanilla. The vine just hadn't traveled anywhere else.

MAEVE: Until people from Europe sailed to Mexico.

SPECKY: Right, and after that, European people brought vanilla beans around the world.

EUROPEAN TRADER: Yoo hoo, I'm a European trader. And I love sailing with vanilla beans to sell. People love them.

SPECKY: So then, in Europe and around the world, people were using vanilla in foods and desserts. But it was pretty special and rare.

JOY: Couldn't traders also take the vines and then grow more vanilla beans in other places?

EUROPEAN TRADER: See, that's the thing, I tried-- and even in other tropical places. But take it from vanilla expert, Rosa Abreu. It didn't go well.

ROSA ABREU: They sold some flowers, maybe some beans here and there, but not the production that they wanted.

SPECKY: Mostly the flowers fell off the vines without growing the best bit, the beans. Wah, wah. For almost 100 more years, vanilla kept growing in Mexico and Central and South America, but not anywhere else.

MAEVE: But vanilla is so popular now. Someone must have figured out how to get the beans to grow.

SPECKY: Exactly. He was named Edmond Albius. He was an enslaved boy who lived in Réunion. That's an island a bit east of Madagascar. His enslaver was a botanist.

JOY: Oh, so he probably learned all about plants.

SPECKY: Bingo. He knew that vanilla plants only grow beans if they get pollinated. Pollination happens when this tiny stuff called pollen travels from one little bit of the flower to another bit of the flower. Bees do this. And in Mexico and Central and South America, there are special, small bees that can fly into these tiny vanilla flowers.

ROSA ABREU: As they go in to get food, the pollen falls on their body. And when they come out, they actually pollinate the plant.

SPECKY: So those special bees were the trick. But far away from Mexico, on islands off the coast of Africa, like Réunion and Madagascar, those tiny bees don't exist. So vanilla could grow, but never be pollinated, which meant no beans and no flavor.

MAEVE: Boo!

SPECKY: But when Edmund Albius was 12, he figured out how to pollinate vanilla plants by hand.

JOY: So cool! What'd he do?

SPECKY: He basically used a little bamboo stick to act like a bee and move the plant's pollen.

ROSA ABREU: And this is now how vanilla became commercial.

SPECKY: Commercial meaning, I hit the big time. Now vanilla plants could be grown and sold all over the world, instead of just harvested from the one area where they grew in the wild. That's how I spread across the globe.

JOY: Wow, what a big change.

SPECKY: I know! Edmond Albius was eventually freed from his enslaver. But the way his story turned out is really disappointing. He made this huge discovery. And it helped farmers and traders make a bunch of money. But he never saw any of it. Because of people's racism, they couldn't believe he'd really done this work. And no one back then gave him any credit.

MAEVE: Ugh, he really should have gotten more credit, especially because what he did really stands up. Most farmers today who grow vanilla still pollinate their plants the way Edmond Albius did.

JOY: Totally, so hats off to you, Edmond Albius. Your work let my favorite ice cream flavor really take off.

SPECKY: Your favorite? I knew we'd get along, Joy. Anyways, not long after that, chemists also worked out how to make artificial vanillin, which is a chemical that tastes like vanilla. But if you ask me, it's not as good as the real thing.

JOY: Sure, the real deal rules.

SPECKY: Thank you. But between growing vanilla around the world and making vanilla flavoring in labs, the taste of vanilla really took off. And I mean, how could it not have? I was meant for the center stage.

ROSA ABREU: Now that you know the story of vanilla, would you like a scoop?

JOY: Of course! Perfect timing, Rosa. Do you two hear that? It's the sound of dawn breaking. Time to get this sunrise sundae soiree started!

MAEVE: I'm starting with this orange blossom. Can you pass me the sprinkles?

LADY ANN FANSHAWE: Oh, I hope I'm in time. But I have no idea what a sundae is.

JOY: Lady Ann Fanshawe, yes, hello. So glad you could come back.

MAEVE: Yeah, I guess sundaes came a bit after your time. It's ice cream with extra things on top.

LADY ANN FANSHAWE: Oh, any excuse for a bit of icy cream. Please pass the ambergris.

JOY: Oh, Lady Ann, you have to try vanilla. It's my fave.

MAEVE: Don't forget to dress these sundaes, everybody.

[WHIP CREAM CAN SPRAYING]

[SPRINKLES SPRINKLING]

JOY: So the whole point of this sundae bar, besides being a total yum celebration, is that the way we eat has always depended on what ingredients we can get our hands on. And we think of lots of flavors as super normal now. But it took time and effort for all those foods to spread around the world.

MAEVE: Also, a few hundred years ago, there were some really wild ice cream flavors.

JOY: Yeah, that too. But you know? I actually really like this mace one. Spicy ice cream-- spice cream!

MAEVE: Let's keep workshopping that.

JOY: Spicy ice cream-- creamy spice, creamy ice spice, spicy ice.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

This episode was produced by Menaka Wilhelm, Sanden Totten, and Molly Bloom, with additional production support from Anna Goldfield, Felicia Toddy, Grace Todder, and Tara Anderson. Theme music and sound design by Marc Sanchez, voice acting by Marielle Segarra, Nick Wilson, Beth Pearlman, and Rosie duPont. We have engineering help from Johnny Vince Evans and Michael Osborne.

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And now, [IMITATING FANFARE], it's time to add things to our time capsule.

MAEVE: Here's what we're putting in this week.

[FUTURISTIC SOUNDS]

MORTY: I would put a car in my time capsule because we have to drive cars today. And I think in the future, we should put cars to make them drive themselves.

OWEN: Hi, my name is Owen. And I live in Washington, DC. And what I will put in a time capsule is masks because, well, the pandemic is long. And I think people should remember it in ways besides photos.

ELLIE: Hello, my name is Ellie. I live in Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada. In a time capsule, I would put a mask, sanitizer, and some plastic gloves to show people what COVID was like. I think it would also be nice to put a scrapbook in, and write in it, and put photos in.

JOY: Thanks to Morty, Owen, and Ellie, for those time capsule ideas.

MAEVE: Send us your time capsule idea at foreverago.org/contact. We'll feature new entries in every episode.

JOY: And of course, as always, we'll go way back. Thanks for listening.

[MUSIC PLAYING]