



Pill Pop

Transcript for episode 0 – Pilot

Silvi Vann-Wall: Pill Pop. A road trip for the chronically ill...

Izzie Austin: It's also a podcast!

Pill Pop is recorded on the lands of the Wurundjeri people, and we wish to acknowledge them as Traditional Owners. We would also like to pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

Silvi: We'd also like to give a content warning: this podcast contains detailed discussions of illness both physical and mental, and while we take a funny tone, this content may distress some listeners. In Australia, Lifeline is free to call on 13 11 14, and we'll have a list of local & international support services on our website, pillpop.org

Izzie: Right-o, off we pop...

Silvi: I see what you did there.

[SFX: Engine revving, spluttering, conking out]

Silvi: Damnit!

*[Engine SFX continue spluttering in background]
[Footsteps approaching]*

Izzie: Hey Silvi! Ready for our road trip?

Silvi: Hey Izzie ... just a sec ... I can't get this bloody thing to start.

Izzie: Really? Who would've thought a bent-up old ambulance you bought on Gumtree would have a busted engine.

Silvi: Yeah yeah, shut up ... Oh man! It just keeps making this weird noise – and I’m pretty sure there’s some weird gunk leaking out of the exhaust ...

Izzie: A bit like your colon?

Silvi: Yeah. *Hilarious.*

[SFX: After a big struggle, the engine starts!]

Both: Hooray!

Silvi: Get in!

[SFX: Izzie hopping in, doors slamming shut]

From inside the car ...

Silvi: Hold on a second – I can’t drive. I don’t have my license. Let’s swap.

Izzie: No problem. Hold my Twisties.

[SFX: Shuffling and swapping seats]

Silvi: Hang on. If you’re driving – how are you going to eat the Twisties?

Izzie: Just shake some into your palm and I’ll eat them from your hand like a horse.

Silvi: O-kay ...

[SFX shaking Twisties and Izzie munching]

Izzie: Oh, did you remember your colitis meds?

Silvi: Yep, got ‘em.

Silvi: Do you have your insulin?

Izzie: Yep.

Silvi: Okay. Awesome.

Izzie: Alright, so what’s our first stop?

Silvi: Well, the point isn't the stops, Izzie – it's the journey.

Izzie: Hmm. Okay. Cool. It's just that, if my blood sugar gets low we might need to take a Pill Pop Pit Stop.

Silvi: A what?

Izzie: A Pill Pop Pit Stop.

Silvi: ... what is that?

Izzie: It's what I'm calling this road trip – the Pill Pop Extravaganza; or Pill Pop for short. The podcast for chronically ill people, by chronically ill people. At each Pill Pop Pit Stop we'll talk to a different guest about what it's like living with chronic illness.

Silvi: That's cute.

Izzie: And permanent! I got it as a tattoo!

Silvi: That whole thing?

Izzie: Just the main bit!

[SFX: shirt sleeve being peeled back to reveal tattoo]

Silvi: Oh my god ... you know you'll have that forever, right?

Izzie: Yeah, well, it's the same with my chronic illness, so ...

Silvi: Good point.

[Awkward silence]

Silvi: Let's listen to the radio!

[SFX: Radio buzz and tuning in]

Wellness blogger: Well, Sally, I cured my chronic illness simply through not ever eating or breathing, it was that easy.

Silvi: Ugh.

[SFX Changing the dial]

Politician: ...that these people are a strain on the economy, plain and simple. There's just no place for dole bludgers who lie at home and pretend to be sick while good, hard working Australians—

Both: Uggggghhhhhh!

Izzie: Wow, that is one oddly specific radio.

Silvi: Yeah.

[SFX radio switching off]

Silvi: Well, we're at least two hours out from our first stop. My phone just lost reception, the Twisties are already gone, the radio is weirdly ableist ... I guess we'll just have to ... talk to each other?

Izzie: I guess so.

[SFX: ambulance sirens]

Both: Argh!

Izzie: Woah, sorry. I was leaning on this ...

[SFX siren momentarily wails and then stops]

Silvi: ... Jesus!

Izzie: Yeah, that thing is traumatic.

Silvi: I was having full 2009-hospital-flashbacks.

Izzie: Sorry, Silv. It will NOT happen again.

[SFX as they lean on it one more time]

Izzie: Shit. Fuck. Sorry.

Silvi: Sooo, you never told me how you knew you were sick.

Izzie: Didn't I?

Silvi: Yeah – how did you get diagnosed?

Izzie: Well ... starting from when I was about six, I was getting way more sick, and angry, and I just wasn't eating enough ever. And my parents just didn't know what to do with me. I was taking bathroom breaks all the time, and I was so angry at just everything that was happening.

I think I scared my Year Two teacher when, for a full week, multiple times a day, I would ask if I could go out and get a drink of water, then I would immediately come right back in and ask her if I could go to the bathroom. And it just kept happening, until eventually my dad did the year 2000 version of Googling your symptoms, which is he found a *Readers' Digest* that was randomly left at his work, and in it there was an article about diabetes, and it said that one of the symptoms was thirst. So, we took that to a doctor, and we did a finger prick test that confirmed, yeah, my body doesn't process sugar properly. So, off I went to the hospital and several endocrinology visits later I was sent back home.

Silvi: That's pretty wild. Do you reckon if that *Reader's Digest* wasn't there, you would just still be angry and thirsty?

Izzie: Probably. It would've lasted for a bunch longer. I don't really remember much of how I felt on a day-to-day basis, but I do remember breaking down and crying quite a lot, like at the slightest provocation. We're not gonna go to KFC and get some chips? Full on mental breakdown. My friend borrowed a pencil and didn't give it back? Time to cry. Just ... so angry, and so sad, and frustrated, and didn't know what to do with all that so I did what a six-year-old did, which is: I yelled. And that didn't help. So I just kept yelling.

My parents and my teachers didn't really know what to do with that. Eventually they did figure out that they needed to focus more on the physical stuff because they just realised I was drinking a lot of water and never eating. Of course, I wasn't eating because I felt sick all the time, because that's how you feel when your blood sugar's high. You feel like whatever you're eating is just making you sick, so you stop. But I was drinking so much water just to like, flush all of the sugar out of me because that's what your body does. The pancreas shuts down, so your bladder takes over. So they figured, let's take this extremely dehydrated child to the doctor, and see why they're so thin.

When I went to the doctor, the only thing I really remember was that they had to do a finger prick test, and the only frame of reference I had for a finger prick was the movie *Sleeping Beauty*. So I wasn't gonna let that come anywhere near me. So a

test that in theory takes 30 seconds took about 20 minutes, of – you guessed it – me crying for reasons related to being a small child.

I also remember one very weird moment, because when I was a kid my parents promised that when I was nine I could get a kitten. But then, right when the doctor said I had to go to the hospital, my mum turned to me and said that if I do good in hospital then they'll get me a kitten. So, I was feeling two very different emotions at the same time. On the one hand, I was very scared of going to hospital, 'cause I had no idea what they were gonna do to me, but also: kitten!

So I went to the hospital, where I managed to ... I was lucky, I was in a room with just one other person, so I didn't have to be surrounded by just, all of the noise and just different things that happen in a hospital. 'Cause I wasn't good with crowds as a kid, so just being on my own was good. And eventually they sent me home, which in itself was really weird, because I, until then, thought that once you go to the hospital you get better and that's it. I didn't think of illness as something that would come home with you.

Silvi: What did the other kids think of that?

Izzie: I think – I don't know if I had the self-awareness to know what they were thinking of that. I know that when I got back from the hospital, and suddenly I was the kid who could leave the classroom at any time and start eating jellybeans whenever I apparently wanted, they got jealous of that. And when you're seven, it's impossible to explain to the other seven-year-olds, 'No, I'm doing this because it's life or death'.

Silvi: Yeah.

Izzie: I don't wanna leave the room and eat jellybeans, I have to.

Silvi: Yeah. Hospital kids are kinda superstars in primary school.

Izzie: A little bit! [crosstalk] You get this weird like 'Oh my god'...

Silvi: It's like, 'Oh man ... you got to take all that time off school! And sleep in a bed!' And just, you're like 'hmmm ... '.

Izzie: 'Wow, you went to a building! There's –'

Silvi: '–clowns there. Maybe?'

Izzie: Yeah. All you know about having your tonsils out is that you eat ice-cream afterwards.

Silvi: Exactly.

Izzie: And you're like, 'Oh cool! Ice cream!'

Silvi: That's how they sell it. Propaganda. [Laughter]

Izzie: The hospitals are in league with Big Dairy.

Silvi: Absolutely! Yes.

Izzie: It goes all the way to the top, people. Wake up!

Silvi: Ooh, you better believe it. All the way to the choc top! [Laughter]

[Music sting: main theme]

Izzie: I hope my phone holds out, if my battery dies all we've got is this map book from 2009.

Silvi: Wow. You know I was diagnosed in 2009.

Izzie: So the map won't have Silvi's Gross Colon Street on it?

Silvi: Yeah nah, but it might have Izzie-running-their-mouth street.

Izzie: Yeah, that was a great burn. So, what is the colitis diagnosis like?

Silvi: It's not that interesting.

Izzie: Up to you.

Silvi: Fine. When I was in Year 12, it was getting close to my exams, and I started vomiting, and then I was still vomiting, and then there was diarrhoea, and then basically everything I was eating was either coming up or going out. But yeah, after about 24 hours of that we thought, 'Okay, time to go to the hospital,' and I just freaked out 'cause I'd never been to the hospital before. Like, I was 18, never set foot inside a hospital unless I was visiting someone else, and eventually I had to be hooked up to an IV drip for saline, 'cause I was so dehydrated 'cause I couldn't eat anything and even water just wouldn't ... stay, [chuckles] it was coming out, as I said. One way or the other [laughs]

Izzie: Yuck.

Silvi: Yeah! Yeah, pretty unpleasant. And needless to say I didn't wanna tell any of my friends about that, because like how do you say to a bunch of snooty 18-year-olds, like, 'Hey, I'm just shitting a whole lot so I'm in hospital'. [laughter]

Izzie: You didn't have like a fun, sexy illness.

Silvi: No! Definitely not. Oh god, I would kill for one of those [laughter]. So of course, I'd had some dodgy chicken from a food court and I had food poisoning. And they said it was a strain called campylobacter, which I'd never heard of before, but I thought, 'Okay, that sounds, you know ... legitimate and I believe you and yep, I'll-I'll go home'. Basically they told me to go home because they needed more beds. So they gave me a, you know, a set of Panadol and they're like, 'Off you pop'. Great, you know. And I was just sitting at home with a bucket and that was just, you know, my activity for the next 24 hours. Just me and the bucket, just, you know, having words.

Izzie: Best of friends.

Silvi: And I went back to the hospital, this is round two, and we're sitting in the emergency ward – me and my bucket and my mum – and eventually I get let in again and they're like, 'You're back!' and I'm like, 'Yeah', and they're like 'Okay, well, we'll just give you some more antibiotics and hope that solves it'. And I was there for three days, I think, and I'd made some improvements.

I definitely wasn't dehydrated anymore because of the saline, so they were like 'Okay, well, it looks like you're recovering by yourself now, so we'll take you off, send you home again'. And then I was at home that night, and I was in bed just thinking, 'Wow, I feel really dizzy. And really sick.' So I got up to go to the toilet, to vomit, again, and after that ... I don't remember anything until I was on the floor and my mum was cradling me in her arms and she was just shouting my name, and I thought, 'Wow, that ... that's weird, I thought I was in bed, what's happening? Like, is the house on fire? Why is she trying to get me out of bed?' And then I – and then I put my hand down and I realised, well I'm on the floor, that's hardwood floor, that's the dresser next to me, apparently I had knocked my head on the dresser on the way back from the bathroom, 'cause I was still so dehydrated that my body was like, 'Okay, that's it. Like we ... we gotta recharge'. You know, like an iPhone just conking out, just like, 'You're done'.

And now it's sort of like, this is a cool story, but at the time it wasn't, like it was really terrifying. I ... I hated the thought of ambulances and hospitals, and just

anything happening to me that meant I wouldn't be sure about my wellness for the rest of my life.

So yeah, the ambulance came, the paramedics were super nice which I'm always grateful for, they were just gorgeous people, and they loaded me up, took me back to the hospital for the THIRD time. And, yeah, I was there for maybe a week that time. It was at that point that they brought in a gastroenterology team, because they thought, 'Okay, something's clearly wrong, she's not getting better from this food poisoning that was supposed to go away like two weeks ago, let's bring in the diagnostics team', you know, like Dr. House and his cronies. Yeah and they came in and they basically felt my tummy and they're like 'Okay, it's really bloated, it's really firm, I think your colon has inflamed'. And they sent me to have a CAT scan and after that they were able to confirm that it was inflamed to the point where it was pushing my other organs out of place because they'd let it go for so long. And that's why no food was staying down, because the colon was just red and raging and angry and, just, it wouldn't let anything come near it.

So they had to put me on steroids straight away and that's an injection into the hand, where the vein is, and it was – it's a really strong dose of steroids and if you've never had steroids before, like, you know, the rumours are true, it does make you rage [chuckles] you're like super roidy [laughs]. Um and then, yeah, I was just like angry for the next month and hungry all the time, but that was great because I hadn't been able to eat anything and all of a sudden I was eating everything. And eventually I could go home because it was helping the inflamed bowel, but um, that's when they said this is not food poisoning, it's ulcerative colitis, and this is an inflammatory bowel disease that is with you for the rest of your life. And that wasn't pleasant to hear at 18 as well, I'm like, 'I was just about to do my exams and get into uni, so yeah, maybe we could just redo this whole thing?'

Izzie: Not the 'rest of your life' you wanna be thinking about at that point.

Silvi: Exactly! Exactly, yeah, even to the point where they're like 'Well, now you have to have yearly colonoscopies'. So I have to get a camera up my butt to just check what's happening, you know, is it getting better? Is it getting worse? Is it the same? Uh, and that's something that they have to give you a disclaimer on because potentially your bowel could perforate and you could die. So yeah, I'm 18, I'm going like, 'Cool, death, shit, vomit ... hmm, yep'.

So it was probably the worst summer of my life, and I laugh now, but yeah, it wasn't ... it wasn't pleasant at all. But similar to you being a bit of a mystery to your friends when you came back to school, yeah, people loved visiting me in hospital and they were like 'Wow, so you don't have to do your exams?' And I'm like, 'Yeah, but, wouldn't recommend this option,' you know? [laughter, cross-talk] 'If you're looking

for a way to get out of your exams, yeah, maybe bypass this option.' [laughter] It's not ... it's not worth it.

Izzie: There's less pooppy ways.

Silvi: Definitely less pooppy ways! From what I hear. [laughter]

[Fade to music sting – main theme]

Izzie: Can you imagine what a colonoscopy would've been like before they invented the camera tube thing? They would've had to just ... like, get up in there.

Silvi: Mmm...

[SFX: Dream harps, chill music]

Izzie: What's uh, what's going on in that there bowel of yours?

[SFX: bubbling, popping, voices are echoing]

Silvi: Yeah. Okay. Well, don't mind the mess, you know I haven't cleaned up in a while.

Izzie: It's a sudden visit, I understand. I know how it is.

Silvi: You understand. Would you like some tea? I don't have any but do you want some?

Izzie: I would like some, but yeah. I understand. It's uh ... poorly stocked.

Silvi: So yeah, don't mind the bumps. There's a lot of those. Just my ulcers, you know. We have a couple of things happening here. You'll notice there's a lot of movement. It's not very stable in here, I'm sorry.

Izzie: It's uh, it's quite ... it's ... it's rickety, it's like a bouncy castle.

Silvi: I would say, you know, grab a seat, sit on an ulcer, but ... might burst. Could be a problem.

Izzie: Don't want that.

Silvi: Nope, you don't. You could be digested.

Izzie: Ah, yeah.

Silvi: It'll be very slow.

Izzie: Real gradual.

Silvi: Yeah. Actually one of the problems that I have is that I digest too fast.

Izzie: Oh.

Silvi: Yep.

Izzie: Yay.

Silvi: I will just eat something and then it will be like, 'Alright, time to get out of here'. So uh, we probably don't want to hang around for long.

[Music: shrinking sounds, ambient chill tones]

Silvi: OK. So we're travelling into your pancreas right now. What's going on in there?

Izzie: Well, what I see is not a lot. There's an old man playing a harmonica. There's uh ...

Silvi: I ... I see him.

Izzie: Yeah. It's otherwise it's pretty much a ghost town in here.

[SFX: slow, repetitive sound of wood creaking, sound continues throughout]

Izzie: There's like a swinging creaky shop sign that says you know buy our ... our, uh, islet cells. That's what they sold but now they're out of business.

Silvi: Wow.

Izzie: There's some tumbleweeds rolling through. It's one of those old timey signs out the front. It's like 'Izzie's Pancreas: population -' and there's just like you know they've been crossing out the numbers it's getting smaller and smaller. They stopped after a while. It just says like [whispers] *four*...

Silvi: I feel like this is a bit of a *West World* situation.

Izzie: Mmm ... getting a bit *West World*, getting a bit ... Anthony Hopkins ...

Silvi: Is he there?

Izzie: He's overseeing [crosstalk] ...

Silvi: Is he the guy with the harmonica? [laughter]

Izzie: He's overseeing the guy with the harmonica. Make sure he doesn't you know glitch out and kill anyone.

Silvi: Huh. Wow.

Izzie: [whispers] I don't actually know what happens in *West World*. Is that what happens?

Silvi: Kind of. Yeah.

Izzie: Pretty much ... Anthony Hopkins just like looks at a bunch of guys like, 'Hey don't you be killing anyone'.

Silvi: Yeah.

Izzie: And then they kill a bunch of people.

Silvi: Yeah there's just robots going crazy everywhere. Yeah.

Izzie: If I had a horse I'd call him 'Anthony Clopkins'.

Silvi: Wow. [laughter]

[SFX: creaking, crickets, snoring]

Silvi: (half asleep) Hmm ... Anthony Clopkins ...

Izzie: Silvi ... Silvi!

Silvi: (wakes up from slumber, panicked) Huh what? What? What?

Izzie: I'm driving, you have to keep me entertained!

Silvi: Sorry. I must have dozed off. Hey ... did you ever have a horse called Anthony Clopkins?

Izzie: What? Of course not. You know the best horse name is 'Janelle Ponae'.

Silvi: Oh yeah. That's what I thought.

[SFX: driving sounds]

Silvi: How many more stops are we making?

Izzie: Including bathroom breaks?

Silvi: Yeah.

Izzie: Potentially thousands.

Silvi: Okay, not including?

Izzie: I dunno – ten?

Silvi: Cool. Hey, we should christen this ambulance. What's a good ambulance name?

Izzie: Ambu-Lance Armstrong?

Silvi: Terrible. I love it. Did you know in Germany they call ambulances Krankenwagens?

Izzie: Oh yeah. I'm gonna get crunk in this wagon!

Silvi: Please do not.

[Music fades in: main theme]

Izzie: Next time!

Cristina: When I first kind of figured it out, I was 19, and then I didn't end up getting surgery until I was 23. So, like that's a good long time. And knowing the potential effects that endometriosis could have, even though it's something that so many people deal with and it's not necessarily life threatening ... you would think that because of all the pain that we go through, doctors might have been more insistent of, 'No, you should get this sorted'.

Silvi: We interview our first guest, Cristina Spizzica, about getting diagnosed with endometriosis.

Izzie: Pill Pop is hosted and produced by me, Izzie Austin.

Silvi: And me, Silvi Vann-Wall.

Izzie: You can find us on Twitter @PillPopCast.

Silvi: Editing by Silvi Vann-Wall.

Izzie: With production support and mentorship by Bec Fary.

Silvi: This podcast is recorded at Studio 757 at the University of Melbourne.

Izzie: Music and sound effects are sourced from Audio Network, Soundsnap and Incompetech.

Silvi: And our series wouldn't exist without the Signal Boost programme at the Wheeler Centre.

Izzie: Pill Pop is a podcast about chronic illness. We're not doctors, and no part of our series is intended to be taken as medical advice. If you think something might be up, try to find a doctor you trust. It's a hard journey ... but you're not alone. If anything we talked about today brought up distressing feelings for you, remember that Lifeline is free to call from anywhere in Australia on 13 11 14. And we've got a list of support services on our website, pillpop.org.

Outtake

Silvi: Pill Pop ...

Izzie: Pill Pop!

Silvi: Pill POP!

Izzie: PILL POP!

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Visit wheelercentre.com/pillpop to listen to this episode – or for more information, including support services. Pill Pop is produced, hosted and edited by Silvi Vann-Wall (she/her) and Izzie Austin (they/them) in partnership with the Wheeler Centre's [Signal Boost](#) programme.