

'What Would Sharon Raydor Do?' Podcast with Mary McDonnell – Episode 1

Chelsea: It started with 'What Would Laura Roslin Do?' And now we're asking "What Would Sharon Raydor Do?". Welcome to the all-new "What Would Sharon Raydor Do?" Podcast, where we're looking to get an in-depth view of Sharon Raydor from the woman who knows her best. I am here with Mary McDonnell who plays Sharon Raydor on TNT's *Major Crimes* and we are looking into her character and analyzing a little bit of this week's episode that you hopefully saw last night. And that episode is episode 1 of season 5 called "Present Tense" and... Hi Mary! How are you?

Mary McDonnell: I'm well Chelsea! Chelsea is a veteran member of Team BAM. So quite often when Team BAM is tweeting, now you'll have a voice associated with some of those tweets.

C: Awesome! Well let's go ahead and dive in! I feel like a lot of us have questions about Raydor's backstory and everything else, so we're just going to go ahead and get started! As we start season 5 of *Major Crimes* we've seen so much change between Sharon Raydor who took over *Major Crimes* in season 1, and the Sharon Raydor who runs the division now. How has Sharon changed from your perspective?

MM: Well, the Sharon that took over was a woman who had spent most of her career cultivating distance with her colleagues. Because her whole position in IA was to observe colleagues not to engage them. Her position was to evaluate whether they had been in a difficult situation and acted appropriately or not. So all of Sharon's energy was as a watcher and it was as someone who was passing judgement on the different degrees of misdemeanor or not.

The Sharon Raydor that then was invited in to run the *Major Crimes* division had to figure out how to transit from being that distant person, to someone that a very elite experienced squad of detectives could trust and be professionally intimate with. So Sharon Raydor herself had to crack a little of her very well developed professional energy open and take a little more.. Take more risks now and then with these people. Because it wasn't going to succeed, frankly, if she didn't slowly put that other Sharon, that other professional to the side.

But one of the reasons she was gifted in IA, one of the reasons she's good at what she's doing here is that she has IA... and this is almost, if not part of her moral code it's lined up next to it, is she has a very deep respect for the law and for justice. And she understands the law. In my backstory she was going to be a lawyer and life took her in a different direction. She has a greater understanding and a great respect for order. And that part of Sharon will never go away.

So it was kind of learning how Sharon would let certain things go, but she has a bottom line. And so what she has developed with that bottom line has come forward. And it has allowed the other detectives to both feel more comfortable with her and also understand that they were now going to be in a *Major Crimes* division that was not going to be bending rules at every turn. Which in fact pushes them to be a little bit different as well.

So I think the whole squad has changed a bit with this woman as the boss.

C: So we haven't seen much of Darth Raydor recently....

MM: Well no, we haven't. And for those of you out there who might be listening to this, you probably already know what Darth Raydor means when we say it but I'll refresh for you.

On my very first episode of *The Closer* so many years ago, I had to enter a crime scene at night. GW and Tony were there, Provenza and Flynn, and Sharon Raydor walked through the yellow tape and just blasted her way on to the set in a Greg LaVoi masterpiece, which is a dark blue trench coat, and came on and just started to push her way around the crime scene. And during one of the turn arounds, which means that they're changing the camera angle from one side of the set to the other, I do believe it was Michele Tyminski, who at the time

was my wonderful makeup artist, she was looking at me and she said “Oh my god, it’s perfect. It’s like Darth Raydor”, and that name just eventually made its way out into the culture.

So Darth Raydor means Sharon Raydor who doesn’t mess around. Who doesn’t really care how anybody feels about her. Who isn’t worried about taking care of the finer feelings of the squad or anyone else and who just wants to cut through all the BS and push her weight around. So she’s Darth Raydor.

We haven’t seen her much lately and I know that I have heard from the fans about that a lot. They miss her. They miss that part of Sharon sometimes that was IA. That was coming in to just be pushy and push the detectives to the brink to just make sure they weren’t withholding information about a crime or what have you.

So we see her now and again. She’s a part of Sharon. In *Major Crimes*, as she is now, and the wonderful ways in which James Duff has opened this woman up to us, part of what has been put a little to the side is the aspect of her personality that we like to call Darth. I am hoping for more and I know that James Duff loves that name and loves that idea. So, the more we talk about that as part of her, I think, the more we’ll be able to identify where she can emerge because we trust her now, more. We had to make a transition with her. We had to bring her from, I know this is sort of an old discussion but people still like talking about it, we had to transition her from antagonist to protagonist. To a certain extent you can call it humanizing her. Although in my opinion she was already a fully developed human being. But in television speak, it has to do with softening a character, making a character a sympathetic hero as opposed to an antagonist who is coming in to give the hero an obstacle which is what Sharon Raydor was for Brenda Leigh Johnson.

So, the part of her that is Darth Raydor that is no longer being used as an antagonist for our heroes has to find very specific places. We have to find very specific places to enact her freely. We see her sometimes in some of the interviews. We’ve seen her once or twice out in the field. To me, every time I put on Greg’s trench coat Darth is there. So even if I have to play a very sensitive scene with Rusty, I’m not very sensitive that day. So it’s like the magic trench coat brings out Darth. We’ll look for places. We will.

C: I love that! I want to rewind a little bit to where you were talking about how Sharon originally was going to be a lawyer. What made her decide to join the police force.

MM: Well, I think she was interested in the justice system. She was interested in law. And somewhere in there the practice... Also, by the way, that’s probably where she met the infamous Jack Raydor. Or actually I think she met Jack in graduate school. I think they went to law school together. It became clear that they couldn’t get two people through law school. I feel that Sharon did not finish law school, but got a job in law enforcement after doing her training. And took a job in IA in order to have hours that would allow her to raise a family because it became clearer and clearer that she had married a gambler, alcoholic, at times deadbeat dad. So the choice to not become a detective had to do with the practicalities of becoming a single mother really. And had to do with having a desk job as opposed to risking her life every day in the field when there wasn’t necessarily another parent fully at home.

And it brings up the whole idea of how do you survive your life, as it becomes apparent to you that it’s not going in the direction of your dream. I think Sharon would have loved to have been a detective, but I think what was presented, and she did fall madly in love with Jack. He had a great mind, very funny, very charming, wonderful guy. But he had real problems. And those emerged particularly as they started having children early. And I think that adjusting to understanding that you have married an alcoholic, understanding that you have married someone who lost family money more than once, understanding that somewhere in you - you were not able to easily divorce - somewhere in Sharon’s Catholic upbringing, the idea of leaving Jack, divorcing Jack, making a clean break with Jack - was very difficult to come to terms with. She was also raising these two beautiful children and working full time and I think she segue into this job in IA because it allowed her stability. But she also could exercise in IA, her great mind for detail and her sort of ethical code. So it was a good job for her. Although I do not think it was her dream.

So, as life sometimes has it, some years later, some good karma rolls around and she gets invited over to really put her whole heart and soul into the most elite squad of detectives that the LAPD has. So it's really kind of an interesting way that life can sometimes stall us out from our dreams for decades, but if you keep leaning into what you think is right, sometimes your dream comes eventually in a different form. And I think that's kind of what happened to her honestly.

C: It's such like... there is so much meat to Sharon and we kind of know it on the outside, but we never get to see it. And so that just helps us understand that character so much more.

MM: Well she's a tricky gal to write because on the one hand there is all these layers to her and she is someone that has a lot of depth. But she also has the kind of personality, and the kind of training and the kind of upbringing, that she isn't easily intimate. You know, to the world.

What I love about James Duff is that he reveals her heart. It's always a surprise to her when she feels her heart. And he has been so specifically true to the idea that this is not a woman that you can just open up. She's not going to show it to you. Do you know what I mean?

Which I think, opens up what I think it means to be a woman in a classically male power structure. What is that like? What does that mean? Why, during the primary eight years ago, was there such a hullabaloo cause Hilary Clinton got emotional in New Hampshire? Because it was a beautiful moment. It was a beautiful moment and people went berserk. Because, you know, "how are you going to lead the country if you're going to get emotional?" "What? Hello!"

So there is that, there is also a different standard when you are competing for jobs in some of these more male semi-militaristic occupations that does force women to compartmentalize. And that's kind of a bit of what we see in Sharon.

C: So, talking about compartmentalization. Seeing what Sharon sees day in and day out without being just irrevocably affected by cases?

MM: Well, one of the things I've learned playing this part, and I learned a lot about it too during *Battlestar Galactica* when it sort of had to... had the good fortune to encounter military personnel that helped us with that and now encountering so many wonderful LAPD humans and humans in the LA Sheriff's department. And really any law enforcement personnel.

For 10 years now I've been playing these roles and you begin to understand the cost of the compartmentalization that is a requirement. You simply cannot let the tragedy of life that you witness every day or the confrontations that are violent that could take your life away, or your partner. You simply have to develop a way of distancing your emotions from those moments. So when Sharon is standing in the morgue week after week, quite often looking at a young woman or young man who has been brought down by someone and your mind, Mary's (sic Sharon's) mind, I start wondering about where is this human's spirit right now? What was the last thing they thought? Have we notified the parents? How are we going to... you know? That's where I go as we're starting to work on it. And if that's part of Sharon which I have, you just have to push it aside. Simply push it aside. The job is to facilitate justice. After a while you start to notice that you are a little bit immune. I've noticed that playing the scenes. You start to feel kind of numb to the event. "Oh it's another body", you know?

And you see it in Dr. Morales and you see one of the tools to survive all of this. And you see it certainly in so many characters in *Major Crimes* and so much in James Duff's tonality and sense of humor. And Sharon's sense of humor is a bit of a mystery. We don't always know where it is. But we do know she has one. We've seen enough of it. She has an internal sense of humor. She doesn't express it a lot. But she enjoys so much of what goes on around her. And she allows it to happen around her because that's healing for her too.

When Flynn and Provenza or Morales are just flying around with their comments here and there and everything, it's actually healing for her. Even though she may not have the freedom in her personality or does she feel that it would be appropriate for her position as boss to be able to participate that way.

And you know what? Actually, I think that women have for many years, in general I will say, not specifically because certainly we look at some of the great comediennes over the decades, that was not true of them. But women in general in the work place might not feel as free to crack jokes or use their sense of humor as a tool as men. And I hope, I hope that is changing in society today. I think it is because I meet young women such as the ones I'm sitting here in this room with and they're very funny and very free with it. And I, when I was your age, was not particularly when sitting in a room full of men or a professional room or as an actress, you know what I'm saying. Well, if the role is funny, fine but to be pretty and funny? There used to be a lot of rules.

Sharon Raydor clearly grew up in the same years that I did and has gone through the transition. Do you know what I mean? So now here we are with Hillary Clinton. And a very good week!

C: A very good week!

MM: And she's got a great sense of humor, but we don't always see it. But I think that our dear President Barack Obama has introduced us to the idea that presidents can be a lot of fun and they can be very funny.

C: Yes!

MM: So hopefully we will see more of Hillary's when she hopefully becomes president. More of the whole person. I think we're starting to see - as this primary has gone on - it has been nice to witness her becoming more and more 100% herself.

C: And less of just this politician that's just in front of everybody

MM: Yeah - and a woman that is being held to a much more critical standard at all times which is very true. And she's been going through that for decades. So it's kind of an interesting thing for me to observe during the primary, the difference between her and the highly respected Senator Sanders. I've been listening to Bernie Sanders for years on the Tom Hartman show, progressive talk radio. Such a great educator. I've learned so much about the government and how it works. Things that were going on in congress and he would come out of congress and he would fill us in and what have you. And he has been a beloved senator and he's a great statesman. Bernie Sanders, during his campaign, didn't have 30 years of fighting to just be there in front of him. And people hadn't spent billions of dollars in trying to attack him previously. And so it was kind of interesting to watch because you had this woman who has had more attempts at character assassination and has been in the public eye achieving great success and having some failures as all public figures do. For so long. And you have to know that somewhere there is protection and it's more careful. Because that's what we learn when people are after us. We learn how to protect. We learn how to defend. And we learn how to very calmly articulate but we don't quite have the freedom.

And so it will be wonderful to see, as she moves forward, more owning of the freedom as someone who has survived all of this and is so brilliantly still moving forward rather than someone who has had to protect too often.

C: I think the real question in this is... Is Sharon a Hillary fan?

MM: Oh 100%! She voted. She mailed her vote in.

C: She got her "I voted" sticker?

MM: Well no because Hillary's campaign had to vote early so she did. And also, you don't know what's going to happen on a given day in the world of crime. You can't say "Oh no, I'm not going to the crime scene, I have to vote". So I would assume most law enforcement mailed in.

C: Sharon is always very organized so she would definitely do that.

I kind of want to rewind a little bit and talk about the compartmentalization in respect to this last episode. Which, if you are just now tuning in, it is episode 1 of season 5 and it is called "Present Tense" so this might be spoiler-y guys. If you haven't watched it bear with us.

We say Sharon's lines blur a little bit when she was questioning Amanda Pond's parents. What was Sharon's thought process through that? What was she thinking during that conversation? We saw those walls kind of break down.

MM: That was a moment where Sharon's emotional perception switched places with her logical investigative self. First of all, she has very strong feelings not only because of Rusty but I think prior to that, about the foster system. Anyone who works in law enforcement learns a tremendous amount about foster children. Particularly in massive urban centers like Los Angeles there are so many children fostered and so many children on the streets. So foster children are some of the most vulnerable citizens we have in this country and times. And when this family was explaining the moment when they gave a foster child back to the system and couldn't keep them. The idea of what it must have felt like to that child, Sharon immediately projected on Rusty. She immediately started to feel the vulnerability of that situation both as a parent and as a foster child. And she remembered also how skittish and damaged and hurt Rusty was at the beginning because of bad parenting and having been tossed aside by his own mother.

So it brought up a lot of empathy. Sharon is a lot more empathic than we know and so she has to ride that empathic quality very hard. And in that particular situation it was too loaded with too many relevant emotional difficulties. So it kind of got to her, and she had a moment. It was difficult to keep in professional.

C:

C: I think that's kind of a side we don't really get to see of her a lot. So it was just a really interesting scene to watch from both sides. It was heartbreaking for me to just watch it!

MM: I think it is interesting to see when Sharon occasionally can't quite hold it together. I always find those moments unpredictable and unusual. Though I'm sure *James set it up that way* but I'm always surprised by it.

I mean, she can be such a hard ass and she can be facing them as disgusting criminal bad guys, let's get rid of them, whatever. Doesn't cost her anything. But every once in a while something happens. And it might even be her empathy for the person who's just made the most grievous mistake possible, which is they've just killed another human being. But their reason as it comes out is so human. You know what I'm saying? And that's when she surprises me and I go "Oh no, now what do I do? How do I get through the rest of this scene?"

C: I want to go back and touch on Rusty. He's in a new relationship...

MM: Yeah

C: And part of those come with having fights, so obviously if you haven't watched the episode, again SPOILERS! But he and Gus had a fight and when he called Sharon, her suggestion was to slip a note under his door. Is that something that Sharon has done in the past? Or something someone has done for her?

MM: Well, I just think it kind of harkens back that she grew up in a time when you wrote letters and you did things that were actually tangible but not intrusive. So now we can break through to anyone at any time. You

know, we can text them or we can find them on our GPS or we can keep track of them. There really isn't any delicacy to any of this anymore. There are wonderful things about that. And as a mother I love the fact that I could text my son when he was in high school and he'd actually text me back! He wouldn't call me, but he would text me. So, it just kind of came out of her as an idea. You know, just slip a note. That way you don't have to feel that you're being inappropriate by texting an apology and you don't have to force him to face you face to face. It just goes back to how she grew up. I mean I remember growing up. I remember being in college and being in England for a semester and I had a boyfriend who was in American and we actually had an argument through letters! And had to apologize through letters! You know, we couldn't afford to call. And I didn't even have a phone in my apartment in Manchester, England. We had a cold water flat. There were no phones and we used to go out into the hallway and put money in the bathroom meter to get in line for some hot water. We didn't have a refrigerator, we had butter and eggs and cheese on the window sill.

I guess I'm *dating* myself which probably isn't a good idea. The truth is we already know how old I am anyway BUT I think things used to happen in a much more delicate manner and it gave people more space and time to process feelings. So that's kind of what she was suggesting.

C: I like it. I think it's definitely a Sharon thing to do. Just.. "hey, this is easier, don't deal with it. Here it is"

And I kind of want to jump on that. Sharon already has two grown kids. She's helped them navigate relationships and this must be old hat for Sharon. Is there anything different this time around with Rusty?

MM: I think that it's one thing to... Well first of all, might I say that this is Sharon's third child and so her own children, she learned on. And she's a little more savvy. You get better at it, you do. Every child you have benefits from the mistakes you made from the child ahead of them. And that just is the truth. And so she's learned a lot. And because both of her grown children are just so verbal and so honest and what have you, so Sharon has raised young adults who have taught her a lot about herself as well. So Rusty came along at a very good time to reap some benefits from Sharon's wisdom.

But I also think that Rusty and Sharon have this Odd-couple-kinda-karmic-I-don't-know-what-it-is". It's sort of like... These two actually get along really well, and what are the odds and why? And we were shooting a scene yesterday and I can't tell you what it is because then it would be a spoiler! But I realized halfway through the scene that Rusty and Sharon were on this wavelength quietly, sub-textually, about relationships. It was, can I say this? We were having a conversation, Rusty and Gus and Sharon and Andy. I'm sure I can say that. Something to look forward to. They're in this little scene together somewhere in this season. And I realized halfway through the first rehearsal...Oh wait. Rusty and I are totally on the same wavelength here about some dynamics and I got a charge out of it and I spoke to Graham about it. And he goes "yeah, it's like they really do kind of think alike!" And I thought, you know what, that's true. There is something compatible about the way... and they kind of share at this point in their lives, some relationship fear. Because Sharon has relationship fear at this point.

I mean, honestly the last thing that she was looking for was to fall in love after the whole Jack thing got settled. She was running things quite well, she had that whole condo to herself. Her kids had grown up. They were fine. She had a great job that she was loving and really getting involved with and... A man around the house? I'm sorry, but you go through a really long marriage that's difficult, you're not looking. You know? So this has been a surprise. *Surprise!* So I think there's a little shyness about it. Shyness is just an easy way to say it. But I do believe that she's discovering that she and Rusty are both a little push-pull. And isn't that a hoot. That they actually sort of recognize that they're like buddies.

C: So it's not just mother/son. They're friends.

MM: No it isn't. As he matures more and spends less time in the house under her - you have to let go anyway. He's in college. You have to let young men go. You cannot micromanage them from afar as much as you want

to. It's destructive. And he doesn't have, you know, he only has the squad. While we're a really great parental unit. Literally, it's a squad of parents. But the more she lets go of Rusty the more she sees him as a friend. That's kind of what I'm noticing.

C: Mary, do you want to sign us out?

MM: Yeah, I'd like to, I just want to take a minute to talk to the fans out there. This idea evolved in discussion with Team BAM about how to respond in a way, to the invitation that you all have offered me. Whether it's doing Q&A's at conventions or when I decide to finally randomly go on Twitter and engage in all your marvelous questions and comments. And I wanted to thank you all for kind of inviting me out into the world more than I have been prior to this point in my life. And this podcast is a way for me to finally really articulate some of the things I think and Sharon thinks and some of you have pointed out and wondered about. It gives us a chance to talk to each other. So thank you for doing that. We are very excited about this podcast and very excited to hear what your questions might be.

C: You have been listening to the 'What Would Sharon Raydor Do?' Podcast, featuring the woman that knows her best, Mary McDonnell. Get your questions ready. We'll be answering some of them next week. You can tweet us at #WWSRD or you can comment on the Facebook post or Blog post directly under this particular podcast.

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