

IAN:

Let's just start, settle in, have you introduce yourself for us.

LOUIS:

My name is Louis and I am a can of Go2 Cola.

IAN:

That's a store brand?

LOUIS:

Mm-hmm. Go2. G-o-2 Cola.

IAN:

So it's similar to Coca-Cola?

LOUIS:

Similar. People call it a knock off. I've been called the best of the worst. You know, if you wanted to get my honest opinion I believe in a blind taste test. Your average person wouldn't be able to tell the difference between me and a can of regular Coca-Cola, but yeah, bottom shelf. We can describe it comfortably as bottom shelf. I'm at peace with that.

IAN:

Literally on the?

LOUIS:

Most of the time, yeah.

IAN:

Well, there's a lot I wanna talk to you about today. Do you need water or anything?

LOUIS:

No, no. I'm completely self-contained.

IAN:

I wanna ask you about your time before you ended up in the fridge you're in now. So, you I take it were, you were in a supermarket?

LOUIS:

Yeah.

IAN:

And, where were you?

LOUIS:

I was in a Safeway. I was bought at a case. So there were 24 of us. We were all purchased together and actually our next residence was a bowling alley for a 12-year-olds birthday party. I saw most of the rest of my case drunk at that party. I was not drunk, I was saved for later and was brought home and put into a refrigerator and forgotten about for a few months placed in the back of the fridge.

IAN:

Sure.

LOUIS:

I froze in the fridge. I was in the very back and the temperature got very cold. I didn't freeze all the way through, but I had a frozen couple of weeks. Pretty chilling.

IAN:

You were slushy inside?

LOUIS:

I was slushy inside, yeah. And I had a brief adventure when they realised I was still in the fridge and they took me out for a road trip. I got to sit in the front seat cup holder, you know, and I took a little fun road trip down to Florida and then back again. And they never got around to drinking me on that trip, and they put me back in the fridge, and that's where I've been ever since.

IAN:

It sounds like you were almost chosen so many times?

LOUIS:

Yeah, yeah.

IAN: What does it feel like when you're say, at this birthday party, and you're waiting for your moment?

LOUIS:

(SIGHS) Have you ever seen the movie Jaws?

IAN:

Yeah.

LOUIS:

So you know the story that Robert Shaw tells to Roy Scheider and the other guy? Anyway, you know the story about the USS Indianapolis? Where he's in the water and the sharks are coming, and he's waiting to be ticked off, and he's waiting, and having that long dark night, and one by one he's seeing his friends go. That's kind of what it was like for me. It was terrifying. And on the one hand, I was very angry at human beings for being in this position to consume us. And then on the other hand I was also very angry, how come you didn't wanna consume me?

IAN:

Mm-hmm, yeah. When you think about being consumed by a human, do you think about the human that you wanna be in?

LOUIS:

(LAUGHS) If and when I'm finally consumed, I hope I'm consumed by someone who enjoys it.

(HAUNTING MUSIC)

LOUIS:

But I like to imagine that if you're drunk immediately, that instead of being a painful process, there's this sort of first moment of relief. The can is cracked open.

LOUIS:

All of this internal fizzing that I have going on finally has somewhere to go. Just sort of drowned out from your external can, and you have that last moment where you're fulfilling your purpose, and beginning to blend in with this human being, and you become part of their story.

(HAUNTING MUSIC)

LOUIS:

Truthfully, here's how I expect to go, assuming I am consumed. I'm expecting it's gonna happen in the middle of the night when I'm not waiting for it, and someone's gonna open the fridge, and pull me out, and that'll be that. It would be nice to be poured into a nice big pint glass, you know. A frosty mug would be a pretty good way to go. That would be pleasant, you know. I doubt that's gonna happen though. They don't reserve frosty mugs for Go2 Cola's. It's just another one of those facts of life.

(MUSIC FADES)

IAN:

How did you see Jaws?

LOUIS:

Oh, the human being who lives in my house was watching Jaws. They took me out of the fridge, and kept me on the table, and I thought, "This is it, this is my big moment." Kind of part of me there was the Robert Shaw scene where he's telling the story of the Indianapolis, and I was thinking, "Boy this is just too perfect, this would be amazing." And he was reaching for me, he was gonna go for me, and then at the last minute, you know, another human being came into the house, and scolded him on not drinking soft drinks, so he put me back in the fridge.

IAN:

Wow.

LOUIS:

Yeah. That would've been perfect huh?.

IAN:

Mmm. You know, I should ask you, there's a lot of talk right now about the health effects of soft drinks. People tend to think of them as very unhealthy. Just wondering, do you feel unhealthy?

LOUIS:

Do I feel unhealthy? It's hard to say because I think if you were feeling the way I feel, you would feel unhealthy.

IAN:

Right.

LOUIS:

But I feel like me. I can't say that that means I feel good, but to go back to your question, unhealthy drinks are not like a new thing by any means. Have you ever heard of Radithor?

IAN:

Radithor?

LOUIS:

Radithor. All right, so back in the '20's there was an energy drink with radium called Radithor, OK? And the idea was it was just radioactive material in water. They claimed Radithor gave you energy and cured a bunch of things. They also implied that Radithor increased male virility. Radithor also killed you know people.

IAN:

So people were just, uh drink radioactive material dissolved in water?

LOUIS:

Mm-hmm.

IAN:

I'm just looking it up here. There's actually...there's an eBay ad, there's a bottle of Radithor for sale.

LOUIS:

Oh, come on now.

IAN:

It's currently \$659.

LOUIS:

You've gotta be kidding me.

IAN:

It says here, 'This certified radioactive water was advertised as a quote, "Cure for the living dead," and quote, "perpetual sunshine."

LOUIS:

Mm-hmm.

IAN:

It goes on. One guy who used it, Eben Byers, died from radiation poisoning, and they had to bury him in a lead-lined coffin.

LOUIS:

Yeah, that's what you get when you drink radioactive material.

IAN:

So they made a beverage which not only killed a man, but his dead body would have, had they not taken precautions, killed all life around him.

LOUIS:

Yes. Presumably, his dead body is still radiating the poisons that he drank from Radithor.

IAN:

In fact, the ad goes on. (CHUCKLES)

They exhumed him for study in 1965...

LOUIS:

Oh, come on.

IAN:

...and his remains were still quite radioactive.

LOUIS:

Yeah.

IAN:

It then mentions the developer of Radithor was not an actual medical doctor.

LOUIS:

Yeah, that sounds about right to me to.

IAN:

Also, the bottle's in very good condition.

LOUIS:

So, there's your original power drink for you. That says to me more about human beings than it does about soft drinks to be perfectly honest.

IAN:

Our willingness, our eagerness to find something to...

LOUIS:

Your chronic search for potency.

IAN: Yeah.

(DIALING TONE)

LOUIS:

That's my evaluation of humanity. A chronic search for potency.

(DIALING TONE)

JEFF:

Hello.

IAN:

Hey, I'm calling for Jeff?

JEFF: Yep?

IAN:

Hey, Jeff you're the man behind the Bygone Times Vintage, right?

JEFF:

(LAUGHS) Yeah, I'm guilty.

IAN:

I noticed one of your eBay listings. So, you put up the Radithor?

JEFF:

Radithor? Yeah.

IAN:

Is that for real?

JEFF:

Oh, yeah. What happened was, I was at a flea market, and I found a set of about 20, 25 of these things.

IAN:

OK.

JEFF:

It was like a shipping crate or something. So yeah, I have sold a few of those.

IAN:

And is it a reproduction or is it an original bottle?

JEFF:

No, these are original. Yeah, original.

IAN:

Did you check them with a Geiger counter?

JEFF:

I have not, I don't... I just assumed they wouldn't have any... there's no content in them obviously, but I haven't, no, I didn't check 'em with the Geiger counter. I don't... I suspect that they're from the 1920's they would be done and gone.

IAN:

I think maybe it wouldn't be gone.

JEFF:

Yeah, I don't know, maybe they wouldn't, I don't know.

(LAUGHS) Can I put 'em under a black light or something? I hope they're still active, that would... that raises an interesting question, sir.

IAN:

Did you know much about Radithor when you, you know when you...?

JEFF:

No. I got...fortunately now we have the internet, and Google was quite helpful. It's really an interesting story. I don't know if you've taken the time to look into it, but it's fascinating.

IAN:

Yeah, I just heard about it. It's crazy that we humans did that.

JEFF:

I know. I like the story about the guy who died from it, and then they dug him up in the '60's, and his lead-lined coffin, he was still radioactive.

IAN:

That's why I feel like maybe you should get checked out.

JEFF:

I think I will, yeah. I think I will now that you said that cause I didn't really think that the glass would hold any of that, but I guess it's possible.

IAN:

You know radiation you don't wanna mess around with I guess when it comes down to it.

JEFF:

No, no I hear you. I have to... I'm driving, and I don't want to... I'm getting onto busier road now, so I need to unfortunately, hang up on you.

IAN:

Got it, yeah. Be safe.

JEFF:

OK, bye.

IAN:

Louis, one quick thing I wanna ask you about? I have in my life occasionally dropped a can of soda.

LOUIS:

Oh yeah.

IAN:

Has that ever happened to you?

LOUIS:

Oh, it's an awful experience. You feel I mean obviously, very shaken. There's a rush I guess of in human being terms, it would be like a rush of adrenalin, and for a while you're feeling just very hyper after the shake-up. And then you start to sort of resettle back to a neutral state, but you have this awful kind of nauseous, sick, sleepy feeling after the fact. And you feel kind of dumb you know. The shake-up kind of like rattles you a little bit and takes a little bit of time for your intelligence to kind of come back to you. It's an awful experience.

IAN:

I imagine too like we often after that happens, we will tap on what would be your head.

LOUIS:

Don't. It doesn't do anything.

IAN:

It doesn't?

LOUIS:

Don't. There's no reason to do it. It doesn't do anything to the carbonation. All it does is annoy us in a very sensitive moment. Yeah, don't do that.

(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

IAN:

So, Louis, this might be awkward to talk about, but I feel like there's a hierarchy to sodas. At least in terms of how humans think about them.

LOUIS:

Sure.

IAN:

At the top, there's you know Coke and Pepsi, and then there's 7UP and Sprite. And then there's these you know like your Sunkist and Grape soda, Fanta that are kind of at the bottom. I wonder if that... does that hierarchy, does it mean the same thing to you?

LOUIS:

Well, let me tell you something about Fanta. I mean sure, here in the US it's not the most sophisticated soft drink, but overseas it's huge. Like Japan, huge.

IAN:

Fanta?

LOUIS:

Fanta. In Thailand it's all over the place. If you walk down the street there, you'll see half open bottles of Fanta everywhere. Strawberry Fanta in particular everywhere just hanging out.

IAN:

Just like sitting on the street?

LOUIS:

Yeah, just on the street because humans there use Strawberry Fanta as an offering to ghosts.

IAN:

So they leave it out on the street because they're giving it to ghosts?

LOUIS:

Yes. Friendly ghosts according to local custom love sweet red soda. So if you leave it out, it attracts them, and they hang out around your house, and protect you from you know I guess whatever unfriendly ghosts might come around. Who I guess don't love sweet red soda.

IAN:

Right. Do you know what it is about Strawberry Fanta in particular?

LOUIS:

Because of the colour. So there's a theory that it's because they can't do blood offerings anymore, and so Strawberry Fanta which is another you know red viscous liquid, would be the next best thing.

IAN:

Strawberry Fanta among the sodas available to us looks the most like blood.

LOUIS:

Yeah, which I personally don't see, but you know it's a Thailand thing.

IAN:

We humans, we think a lot about you know spirits or at least you know, what might happen to us after we die. Do you, as a Cola, do you think about that?

LOUIS:

The afterlife?

IAN: Yeah.

LOUIS:

Oh yeah. How do you not? I think about it all the time. Cause you know I'm reaching that age myself where I'm probably not gonna be around that much longer.

IAN:

You are, I mean you are recyclable?

LOUIS:

Yeah, which opens up a whole other conversation. You know my body, my can will almost certainly be repurposed. And then that leads me to you know ask questions of like well, have I already been repurposed? I don't know.

IAN:

You could have been any number of sodas or...

LOUIS:

Anything else.

IAN:

An airplane?

LOUIS:

I could've been. I actually, when I was younger I used to have a recurring nightmare that I was, there was a plane crashing, there was an ocean and a beach. And it was night time, and it was raining, and there was a plane crashing on the beach. And I used to like to think that in a previous existence I was part of an airplane, and this was some sort of memory that had travelled with me. Maybe I was part of like a I don't know, maybe part of a ventilation system on board of a 747 or something. You referred to your can as your body, or your body as your can.

LOUIS:

Yeah.

IAN:

Is there an equivalency between you know, humans talk about body and soul, is that... I'm sorry.

LOUIS:

(SIGHS)

No, no. I'm only sighing because I wish I had the answer to this question. Is there an equivalence? Yes. Yes, the body, mind problem that human beings have been dealing with since the days of Descartes. It's something all too familiar to us cans of soda. Am I just a can? Am I soda? What does it mean to be soda? Am I part of the larger ocean of soda out there? Am I just the individuated soda? Am I soda interacting with a can? Am I can being slowly eaten away by the soda inside me? I've thought about this a lot. Yeah, I don't have an answer, but it's something I wrestle with all the time. What am I fundamentally? Once the soda's gone, the can remains, but bye-bye me. I think.

IAN:

Yeah, who knows?

LOUIS:

Who knows? These are the mysteries that permeate every level of existence as far as I know.

IAN:

I have to say I think, I think about the type of can you are with the pull tab. And then I think about other cans in the kitchen you know like a soup can. I don't know if you know any soup cans?

LOUIS:

I know a couple of soup cans.

IAN:

And it occurs to me, you are so lucky because think about the way a soup can gets opened.

LOUIS:

Oh, yeah.

IAN:

A can opener to me, seems like a torture device.

LOUIS:

It is and let me tell you something else too. I thank God every day of my life that I was not born a can of Minestrone soup. I at least have lived a life. I know where I've been you know? I'm... not all of my dreams may have necessarily come true. I may have taken a couple of bad turns here and there, but at least at the end of the day, I've been witness to my own life. These poor bastards who are stuck in these soup cans, or talk about hermetically sealed, they lose all sense of time and perspective. When you open a can of soup, when they wake up, they have no idea how much time has passed. They're like astronauts coming out of cryogenic freeze, and they're all spaced out, and they're completely disorientated, they don't know what's going on, and they wake up call is being torn open by these damn can openers. What a nightmare of an existence. Their flesh is literally busted open only to wake up into a world that they don't know anything about. All the rest of us stay away from the cans of soup, and I'll be honest with you, I feel awful about it. But whenever I try to talk to a can of soup, they are weird.

IAN:

You've mentioned that you're feeling like you're nearing the end of your life.

LOUIS:

Oh, yeah.

IAN:

What... do you feel old or?

LOUIS:

Oh, yeah. Oh, very much so. I know for a fact I'm old. I can look at my expiration date.

IAN:

OK, and can I ask how close you are?

LOUIS:

T minus two weeks to go, my friend.

IAN:

Wow. So, what... but you could keep going on after that?

LOUIS:

I could. It's not recommended, but I could.

IAN:

Does it seem, I mean I think about this with you because and I'm sorry if this isn't the right way to put it, but it seems like your purpose is to be consumed by a human, and so you know we all want to serve our purpose, we all wanna be useful. And yet for you, the moment of your use is the moment where you are no more, and I wonder if that's something you anticipate with optimism or if it feels like you're approaching the end?

LOUIS:

That's a paradox isn't it?

IAN:

It is, yeah.

LOUIS:

I guess on the one hand, I do sort of dread the idea of being consumed. You know, all beings endeavor to persist in their own being. Spinoza said that. I heard about that from a cup of coffee, but on the other hand, I guess on some level I still hope that I will kind of fulfil myself by being consumed you know? I think that dream is still very much alive. Though, if I'm being perfectly honest with you, you know I do sometimes fear that moment is passed.

IAN:

I feel weird saying this, but I could drink you.

LOUIS:

Right now?

IAN: Yeah. I mean I... I want you, I am thirsty, but I also, I want this to be a good moment for you. I want you to be read... I don't want you to do it if you're not ready.

LOUIS:

Well, I'll make a deal with you, I've always said I wanted to go with my eyes wide open. I'm prepared to end it here if you promise me that even if you're disgusted by how I taste, you will finish the can.

IAN:

I will make you that promise. Is there anything you wanna say to the humans you've encountered, the cans you've encountered, the countertops you've known?

LOUIS:

I think... I think overall, I would say life is a gift and a blessing, and I don't believe anything ends, but everything simply transforms into the next thing. I would say, if I can be a little bit soft hearted and sentimental for a moment or two, it's a gift to get to be anything at all.

IAN:

Well, maybe what I'll do just in the interests of journalism is I'll drink about half, and then we'll check in again. Do you wanna talk while I'm drinking you? I don't...

LOUIS:

No.

IAN:

OK.

LOUIS:

No, I wanna have the full experience, but I'll check in with you at the halfway mark. All right, so I'm picking you up.

LOUIS:

(SIGHS HEAVILY) Gimme one second.

(SIGHS HEAVILY) OK.

IAN:

Are you ready?

LOUIS: Mm-hmm.

(CAN OPENS)

LOUIS:

(EXHALES)

This I have to say, feels delightful.

IAN:

Well, I guess cheers to you with you.

LOUIS:

Here's hoping for the best.

IAN:

I mean... (EXHALES LOUDLY)

You...you are delicious.

LOUIS:

Thank you, you're very gentle. This is a trippy feeling, I'm not gonna lie. All right, my first report...

(EXHALES LOUDLY)

I'm feeling very spacious inside right now. I'm feeling, I think I, think I got room to be.

IAN:

Yeah.

LOUIS:

But I'm also... I'm feeling the warmth of the tummy. Very strange thing. I'm in two places at once. Spacious in my own body but feeling warm and secure in your own tummy. Wow.

IAN:

All of a sudden, I find myself thinking about my body. I'm thinking about my body and I'm hoping that my body is a good place for you.

LOUIS:

I think so. I don't mind telling you my first impression of the inside of your own tummy, you seem to be taking pretty good care of yourself.

IAN:

Thank you.

LOUIS: Yeah.

(EXHALES LOUDLY)

IAN

I am seeing some... are you sweating? Seeing some...

LOUIS:

Oh, with joy.

IAN:

All right, then I'm gonna, I'm gonna have a little bit more.

LOUIS:

You go ahead and finish me off.

IAN:

OK. Are you? Are you still there?

(HAUNTING MUSIC)

IAN:

This is 'Everything Is Alive'. The show is produced by Jennifer Mills and me, Ian Chillag. We got help this week from Emily Spivak, Sarah Geiss, Mckinsey Fagan, Eva Wolchover and Bill Curtis. A very special thanks to Stevie Lane and Jorge Jest. Also, Teddy Blanks and Adam Squires at CHIPS. We're grateful to the reporting of Patrick Wynn and Timothy Jurgensen. On the sub-soap, we heard the song 'Sheets Two' from the band, Mountains. That's off their album Choral. Everything Is Alive is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, and we are eternally grateful to Julie Shapiro, Executive Producer. Louis, the can of generic cola was played by Louis Kornfeld. Our website is [everythingsalive.com](http://everythingsalive.com). You can find us on twitter @ianchillag and on Instagram at EIA Podcast. If there is a thing you want us to talk to let us know. We'll see you soon.

("RADIOTOPIA" FROM PRX)