

All content property of Chillag LLC. Not to be copied or distributed without express written permission.

Previously on Everything is Alive.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

My name is Chioke and I am a grain of sand. I think normally I would just say we are sand, you say of yourself that you're a person?

Ian Chillag:

Yeah, I would say I am a person.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Why aren't you a grain of person? It just seems to me if you recognize the degree to which you own your existence to other people, you might also be nicer to other people.

Ian Chillag:

Well, Chioke, it's good to talk to you again.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Yeah. A lot of things have changed since we last spoke.

Ian Chillag:

Yeah. Why don't you tell us what's changed?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Well, I am now a Pane of Glass.

Ian Chillag:

I mean, this is something, I guess I've always known that glass is made from sand, but it's the process, what was it like?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Well, let me tell you, the process involves a lot of heat, it's quite something. Imagine heat that you can't tell if it's coming from outside of you or within you. And then the feeling of having a form, small, simple, though it may be, and having that form melt away, I became extended.

Ian Chillag:

Did you understand what was happening or was it like what's going on here?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Well, I knew of the process, I knew that this was a thing that happened. I was after all, originally in a fish tank so I knew about glass. I didn't think that it was a thing that would happen to me.

Ian Chillag:

Well, for people that can't see you, why don't you just describe where you are and what you're doing now.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

I am in the chimp enclosure at the zoo.

Ian Chillag:

You are the window through which the humans look at the chimpanzees?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Yes. Humans come into a little hallway, viewing area and they sit and they watch the chimpanzees who are also sitting and watching the humans.

Ian Chillag:

Is it like that? Is it equally entertaining for the humans and the chimpanzees?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

I think that the humans are definitely entertained. I think that the chimps are perhaps I think resigned, is the word. It's very strange actually, so humans come in, they come in day in and day out. They bring smaller humans, they're all having a great time looking at the chimps and most of the time you can always hear someone say, oh, they're so like us. And I don't know why they're saying that exactly.

Ian Chillag:

You mean you don't see that one is like the other?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Well, let me tell you, they're not so similar that you don't depend on me serving as a barrier to where they can't interact with you. They're not so similar that they are subject to the kinds of rights that might make it illegal to enter them in a zoo. So I feel like whenever a human says they're so like us, that actually humans feel a little bit of guilt or anxiety about the fact that they have constructed huge cities and have built modern technological lives. But it's hard to conclude that you are capable of a greater contentment than the chimp sitting in the sun, eating a banana. I think it's just a cute and fanciful thing that they say that indicates a deep insecurity that humans have about the actual value of civilization.

Ian Chillag:

Whenever I'm at the zoo, I have this thought that the worst animal at the zoo is the human being, we're judging the other animals, we're treating each other badly. Is that your experience?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

I think I see what you're saying, but I guess that if that were true, then it would just be the case that the worst animal on earth is a human being. It's not that being in the zoo somehow brings out your moral failings.

Ian Chillag:

Yeah. I mean, do you think the human is the worst animal on earth?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Well, it's hard to say. I think that we would have to establish what it was that made beings good or bad. If the thing that makes beings good or bad is pollution, genocide-

Ian Chillag:

Greed.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Yeah. Greed, a kind of willingness to kidnap other animals for the sake of observation, war, personalized license plates that just say the name of the car again on the license plate, White supremacy. If these are the things that make a species bad, humans are bad and furthermore are the only bad species on the planet. So that's like an accomplishment actually.

Ian Chillag:

So Chioke tell me about the time the bird flew into you.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Oh man. Well, I'll tell you about the first time the bird flew into me. So in the sky one day, there were some birds circling, doing their bird existence. And one bird seems to have a kind of close angle of approach. I thought, hey, if he keeps flying like this, he's not going to make that branch. But then he overshot the branch and was still headed toward me. And then I thought, oh, well, this isn't going to be good at all and he hit me so hard. I mean like feathers flying everywhere and then you know how birds are, he did that thing where he fell for a bit and then caught the wind and then kind of flew off crookedly.

Ian Chillag:

Did it hurt you?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

It was a feeling of impact. It was an unexpected feeling of impact. I don't know that I feel pain, but I guess that I feel enough empathy that the bird's pain was also my pain. I mean, he was more surprised than I was, I obviously saw him coming the whole time and he for sure did not see me.

Ian Chillag:

How does that feel, that you could be mistaken for nothing?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

I mean, I guess that it's a feeling of, I know something you don't know and you're about to find out in three, two, that kind of thing.

Ian Chillag:

But it does get to one thing now that's different, you are invisible.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Well, I'm kind of invisible. I'm invisible in the way that, for those who perceive by seeing they can gaze through me, but I'm also a wall. There are all these other ways that beings perceive, sharks can detect electrical disturbances, bats have sonar, they perceive a very different world and so they can do things that you can't do, like the bat bomb.

Ian Chillag:

Sorry. Did you say bat bomb?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Yeah. A bunch of flying mammals and a bomb from the Second World War. Is this not a common story?

Ian Chillag:

No.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

So during World War II, the US military wanted to develop for whatever reason, a bomb made of bats. They went out to bat caves with nets and they captured thousands of bats and then they built a kind of bomb shell that they could put 1000 bats inside of. Yeah. And so then the bats themselves had tiny explosive devices attached to them and the idea was, a plane would fly over the city and it would drop the bat bomb and all the bats would scatter all over town and look for shelter. And then at dawn, bat boom.

Ian Chillag:

I want to, just can't believe anyone thought of this, but I've never, so did they ever use it? I've never heard of it.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Well, apparently in testing, the bat bomb destroyed an airplane hangar and some General's car, but then also the US military developed the atomic bomb. So they didn't need the bat bomb.

Ian Chillag:

So Chioke, I just want to, I want to get your thoughts on, there's a phrase that people use, people in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Does this comment assume that in a house of any other kind of construction, it's totally okay to throw a stone?

Ian Chillag:

I guess.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

I mean, even if you lived in a wood house, would you want to throw a stone? Couldn't that hurt a human body?

Ian Chillag:

Yeah.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

So maybe the phrase should just be people shouldn't throw stones.

Ian Chillag:

Support for Everything is Alive, comes from BetterHelp online counseling. We are in extraordinary times, extraordinarily difficult times and if you are struggling with stress, anxiety, or depression, you are definitely not alone. BetterHelp offers online licensed professional counselors who are trained to listen and to help. Join the over 1 million people taking care of themselves and their mental health with the help of an experienced professional. So many people in fact have been using BetterHelp, that they are recruiting additional counselors in all 50 States. BetterHelp is an affordable option and listeners of this show get 10% off your first month with the discount code, everything. Get started today at betterhelp.com/everything. That's BetterHelp, H-E-L-P.com/everything. Talk to a therapist online and get help.

Ian Chillag:

Chioke, can I ask you, I've always wondered about, glassblower the glassblowers. Every time I see that I think what if they inhaled?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Oh yeah. I really, I don't know what that would be like. It's something like above 3000°. Yeah. I'm not sure.

Ian Chillag:

Hi, I'm calling for Gayle.

Gayle Price:

Hi, you're right.

Ian Chillag:

Hi. So Gayle, you're a glassblower, I'm calling because I've always wanted to ask what happens if you accidentally inhale.

Gayle Price:

Not much, to be honest, basically the glass will, it'll just collapse in on itself. The hot air that's in the point that's molten doesn't actually reach your mouth because it's too far away. You're just shifting the air that's in the tube rather than actually what's in your lungs going through the tube itself.

Ian Chillag:

And it's so much heat too. Is there a risk of fire?

Gayle Price:

Yeah, very much so, have you heard of Murano glass?

Ian Chillag:

Yeah.

Gayle Price:

That's the Island of Murano, it's in the Venetian lagoon at that time, or about the 12th century. For some reason, the glass making was dominated by people in Venice, but the main building material for all the buildings and the docks and things was wood. So if you've got thousands of glass workers with ovens and all that sort of stuff, it just became too much of a risk. So I think it was the government who said, right okay, go on this Island, the Island of Murano. So then if you burned out at stay and you're surrounded by water, we'll be okay and then it's up to you sort of thing. But they were regarded as really important people, the glass makers, and there something like, it's like half of the people on the Island and they were de-lawed certain immunity from laws. So they could wear swords and they were immune from prosecution by the State for certain things. But by the same talking, people weren't allowed to leave the Island because the secret of the glass that they made was so prized. It was so treasured because nobody else in the world could do it.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

There was an Island of glass makers who were both above the law and not allowed to leave ever?

Gayle Price:

Yep. That's it. I mean, some of them did manage to leave eventually and they set up in England and the Netherlands and places like that. But they really risked the death penalty because-

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

The death penalty?

Gayle Price:

Yeah. Some of them, they could have hands cut off if they were caught trying to leave. It was, yeah, heavy duty.

Ian Chillag:

Chioke, what's the closest you've ever come to shattering?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

That would have to be my installation. I was posted in a truck with some other pains and we were reflecting upon the strangeness of the transition. And then two workmen showed up and carefully pulled me out of the truck and then began to walk me toward the place where I was to be installed. And one of the workmen who was kind of walking backward, lost his footing and stumbled a bit. And there

was a moment where I was in a free fall and he caught me. But in that moment, I understood the gravity of the situation with regard to me shattering. I understood in that moment, that shattering was a possibility and that if it happened, it would be the end of my existence.

Ian Chillag:

Was that the first time you ever had a fear?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

I think so.

Ian Chillag:

It's not a great feeling. Right?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

I would say that it's an interesting feeling in that it reveals what's at stake. The way in which I think about things now must always include the possibility of no more possibilities. This is what it's like for you. Right? Because you could die at any moment, right?

Ian Chillag:

Yep. Yeah. I could die at any moment. I have to say, humans talk a lot about, humans will say life is short. Life is too short and I honestly never really felt that way until recently. I felt like it was a good amount of time that we had on earth, like it was enough time to live a full life. And then I my wife and I really like her, I really like spending time with her. And all of a sudden it was like, oh, life is short because no matter how much time we have, I will want to have more time with her.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

That's interesting because it's inevitable. And this I think is an interesting feature of human existence is the inevitability of your demise. Not one of you has escaped it, not one of you will ever escape it. And it's coming and you also don't know when and where, and also you have all this stuff to do. It's an interesting place to be and I guess I see why you've all been so prone to making rash decisions.

Ian Chillag:

Wait, what do you mean? Why do you say that would make human decisions rash?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Well, time and contemplation are two things that help decisions be good, right?

Ian Chillag:

Yes.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

But you're going to die, you have no time. And so it's reasonable to think that a being so constructed would just wildly thrash about in life trying to shake off the anchor of mortality.

Ian Chillag:

Yeah. I mean, given that time is a pressure on all human decisions, it's possible that no human has ever made the perfect decision. Not once in human history, not once has a human done the right thing.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Well, I think that probably many times a human has done the right thing, but it was an accident.

Ian Chillag:

So Chioke, do you ever wish you were still sand?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Not really. No. As you know, I spent a long time being sand and I think that this strange alchemy that has made me into what I am is a new space from which to think about the world. I think there's no good or value in desiring to go back. I do wonder, however, about the other things in nature that go through big transformations and whether they're okay with it.

Ian Chillag:

What do you mean?

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Well, I've always wanted to ask a butterfly if actually it preferred its life as a Caterpillar.

Ian Chillag:

It's funny. I realized I've always just thought the butterfly's is the better way to be and the caterpillar is happy to get there. But I don't know that.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Yeah. It's a kind of biological imperative, they can't do anything other than transform, but I think that having to do something doesn't that often make it suck?

Ian Chillag:

Yeah.

Chioke, Pane of Glass:

Yeah. I think that humans often paint a narrative of this beautiful metamorphosis, but what if what we're really observing is the greatest existential crisis in all of nature? I mean, I think it's at least possible that all butterflies are flapping around resenting their existence. What kind of crap is this? I had a great existence sitting on leaves, munching away, and now I'm out here flapping around in this ridiculous outfit. I literally did not ask to be this way.

Ian Chillag:

This is Everything is Alive. The show is produced by Jennifer Mills and me Ian Chillag with Eva Wolchover and Isabella Kulkarni. Special thanks to Emily Spivack. We got editing help from Hillary Frank, she's the creator of the Longest Shortest Time and author of a new parenting book, Weird Parenting Wins. We're

grateful to the reporting of Eric Brown from whom we learned of the bat bomb and a big thanks to Gayle Price, the scientific glassblower at the University of Leicester for telling us not to worry anymore about glassblowers accidentally inhaling. Chioke, The Pane of Glass was played by Chioke I'Anson Everything is alive, is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX and without Julie Shapiro, executive producer, we would still be stuck in our cocoon. Music in this episode from Blue Dot Sessions. You can get in touch with us any number of ways @everythingisalive.com. We'll see you soon.

Ian Chillag:

Support for Everything is Alive comes from BetterHelp online counseling. We are in extraordinary times, extraordinarily difficult times and if you are struggling with stress, anxiety, or depression, you are definitely not alone. BetterHelp offers online licensed professional counselors who are trained to listen and to help. Join the over 1 million people taking care of themselves and their mental health with the help of an experienced professional. So many people in fact have been using BetterHelp that they are recruiting additional counselors in all 50 States. BetterHelp is an affordable option and listeners of this show get 10% off your first month with the discount code, everything. Get started today at betterhelp.com/everything. That's BetterHelp. H-E-L-P.com/everything. Talk to a therapist online and get help.