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Josh, Chainsaw:

I am thrilled to be here. I don't get a lot of opportunities to do things like this. So my name's Josh. I am a chainsaw. I work in forestry, which not unexpected. My dad was a table saw, and my mom was a necklace. And so that's kind of how it came to pass.

Ian Chillag:

You are very powerful.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Thank you.

Ian Chillag:

You're also, I hope it's okay to say for me as a human, there's something scary about a chainsaw, the danger of it. And even sitting here with you, I realize I feel a little bit of anxiety, I guess, just being near your blades. Do you feel that when you're around humans, your impact on-

Josh, Chainsaw:

I do, yeah. Oh yeah, definitely. And I try to be very careful and mindful of it. I think there's a fear that stems from just the power and the capacity for destruction or raw metal kinetic energy that I'm capable of. But I also think it's a lot of media driven hype, right? There's no Texas buzzsaw massacre. There's no Texas handsaw massacre. It's chainsaws, I think are kind of mythologized. When I consider myself a horticultural implement more than a wrecker of damage.

Ian Chillag:

In getting ready for this interview, I read that the average chainsaw injury requires 110 stitches.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Wow. Yeah.

Ian Chillag:

Can you tell me, if it's not too hard for you, can you tell me about the time that you caused an injury to a human?

Josh, Chainsaw:

I figured this might come up. I haven't talked about it much because it was kind of a troubled day in my own past. But it was a hot day. I was in rural Oregon. We are almost done with a job. My operator that day was working on supervise, just that he could blaze through the last few tasks, maybe trying to work a little too hard to get through the day, go home, and see his family. I sympathize. It's a sweaty day and has his hand slipped, and my motor fell on his foot, broke his smallest toe. It was a hard day for me because to cause someone physical harm is just so antithetical to the way I try to work and who I think I am. I really had to do some soul searching. And fortunately he was just in a walking boot.

Ian Chillag:

Well, we talked about my fear of you. What's scary to you as a chainsaw?

Josh, Chainsaw:

Well, spiders, but that's everybody I think. But really, so I do ever since that injury, I think a lot about, I fear hurting someone else and hurting someone worse. And it's kind of ironic because long before we were mostly employed for forestry, chainsaws were actually developed as surgical tools.

Ian Chillag:

You're saying chainsaws were originally designed to cut open living people?

Josh, Chainsaw:

Yeah. Which sounds so grotesque to me now because that is, just the horror of it.

Ian Chillag:

It's funny because you're held by a person, but a lot of what they're thinking, like they're just thinking about not touching you in a way, at least touching you on your chain.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Yep.

Ian Chillag:

What's it feel like when you're, I guess, getting ready to be used, and you see your operator put on eye protection, and ear protection, and maybe those special pants.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Well, I think in a good relationship between a human and a chainsaw, those things aren't about fear, they're about respect and they're about safety. It's not an insult when someone puts on a condom, right? It's just a precaution that's taken, and that can be in a very loving relationship. And I think that's what I appreciated and respected. And I appreciate that they're treating me with respect.

Ian Chillag:

Is it, just speaking to the people, the person that uses you, do we call them a lumberjack? Is that still-

Josh, Chainsaw:

Lumberjack or lumberjill. That's a female lumberjack.

Ian Chillag:

Is a lumberjill?

Josh, Chainsaw:

A lumberjill. It's kind of fun.

Ian Chillag:

Yeah.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Yeah.

Ian Chillag:

I wonder if that works across the object world, like as a female Jack in the box.

Josh, Chainsaw:

A Jill in the box?

Ian Chillag:

Yeah.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Actually, it's a Diane in the box.

Audrey King:

Hello?

Ian Chillag:

Hi, is this Audrey?

Audrey King:

It is indeed. Is that Ian?

Ian Chillag:

It is. Hello.

Audrey King:

Hello to you. [inaudible 00:06:11].

Ian Chillag:

I'm well.

Audrey King:

How's across the sea?

Ian Chillag:

So Audrey, I wanted to talk to you because you, in World War II, you were part of the Women's Timber Corp.

Audrey King:

Yes.

Ian Chillag:
The lumberjills.

Audrey King:
That's right.

Ian Chillag:
And they were formed in 1942. When did you join up?

Audrey King:
I can't remember the year now, but I was in domestic service during the war through the Battle of Britain and all the rest of it. And I thought I ought to be doing something a bit more useful, I'm waiting on people who could wait on themselves, if you like. And at this time I was 17 and 10 months.

Ian Chillag:
Wow.

Audrey King:
I had to get permission from my parents because I still wasn't 18.

Ian Chillag:
My understanding is that those of you in the Timber Corp, you were felling trees that were used in the war effort, like telegraph poles, the rails that they used on the beach at D-Day.

Audrey King:
That's right. And we did some beach trees, which went in the mosquito aircraft.

Ian Chillag:
Wait, what's that?

Audrey King:
Mosquito aircraft?

Ian Chillag:
Yeah.

Audrey King:
That was the all wood bomber that we had, two engine de Havilland Mosquito.

Ian Chillag:
Oh.

Audrey King:

And if you look up, yeah look up mosquito. No doubt you've got one of these magic boxes, you can press buttons and you'll see, there was a two seater wasn't armed at all because they wanted it for speed. So it had no guns or bombs or anything to start with.

Ian Chillag:

I'm looking at it right here. This plane was made out of wood that you helped chop down.

Audrey King:

Yeah.

Ian Chillag:

What was it like doing this work?

Audrey King:

I thoroughly enjoyed it. You shouldn't say you enjoyed a war. But the war started, it was horrible. But we were doing our best in a tight situation, because it was pretty tight a few times. Although we didn't get up fight end to end, or bomb people or anything. Either way the wood helped more so.

Ian Chillag:

Yeah. Audrey, can I ask, do you remember what you did when the war ended?

Audrey King:

Yes. I couldn't believe it, because I thought, "Oh man, what happened?" And we got a thank you letter [inaudible 00:08:53]. And 20... For most three and a half years, were I got 20 clothing coupons. And the first thing I did was bought myself a nice tweed overcoat. That was 18 coupons so it left two.

Ian Chillag:

So for three years of service you got a thank you note, and a tweed overcoat?

Audrey King:

Yes. Oh, yes.

Ian Chillag:

Well, Audrey, it's been such a pleasure to talk to you. Thank you so much.

Audrey King:

Right. Well, okay, Ian. Thanks very much for calling. And we might talk again one day, okay?

Ian Chillag:

Okay. I hope so.

Audrey King:

Do you mind me asking, what generation you're in?

Ian Chillag:

Well, I'm 41 years old. I was born in 1978.

Audrey King:

Right. Gracious. To be so young.

Ian Chillag:

Josh, I want to ask you a little bit about sound. You're very loud.

Josh, Chainsaw:

I am.

Ian Chillag:

Not as a speaker, but when you're working.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Yeah. Oh, yeah. Very loud.

Ian Chillag:

How does it feel being that loud?

Josh, Chainsaw:

It feels good.

Ian Chillag:

Yeah?

Josh, Chainsaw:

Yeah. And it's very liberating. It's liberating in part because it can't be another way. I spend so much of my day quiet and inert, and to when we're working have just this guttural mechanical bellow that I let out, it's very cathartic. It feels very powerful and it feels like a warning, "Hey, be careful." I think if I were quiet people wouldn't understand the power within me. And so it feels fitting.

Ian Chillag:

Are there other sounds you ever think about making? Would you like to make a different sound ever?

Josh, Chainsaw:

Sure. Oh, yeah. Who wouldn't? I think I would like to be able to have a roar of a lion. It feels very powerful and majestic, but in a different timbre. And there's a warmth, an organic warmth that I lack. And then, I guess, I would want to sound like Cher.

Ian Chillag:

You want to sound like Cher?

Josh, Chainsaw:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Ian Chillag:

So I pull your cord, start you up, and what comes out is, Believe.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Believe, If I Could Turn Back Time. Because when you hear Cher, you think that's Cher. I sound like most other chainsaws, but when you hear Cher, that's just Cher. And I think that's a really special quality to have. And it's something that I aspire to, but I think will never be possible for me.

Ian Chillag:

It's nice to picture. Imagine a forest and there's say five lumberjacks and lumberjills there. Each of them has a chainsaw, and they startup and they sound like chainsaws. And then you startup.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Yeah. And I sound like Cher. People will notice. People would stand up and take notice.

Ian Chillag:

I think so. Yeah.

Josh, Chainsaw:

That's it. I like it because it's just something different.

Ian Chillag:

I guess while we're on the subject, I'll ask you the question. Do you believe in life after love?

Josh, Chainsaw:

Oh, yeah. I think that's a chainsaws whole job.

Ian Chillag:

Life after love.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Yeah. Well, the growth of a tree there's love there, there's nourishment, and there's care and attention taken to growing something. And then once that's no more in its current form, there's no tree. I think I have to believe that there's life after that or else that would keep me up nights. So when I'm making a nice clean line through a piece of wood, I think maybe this will be someone's home or maybe a table, maybe several million toothpicks. It could be anything. And I think that potential is really what keeps me thriving and what gets me on in the morning. Yeah. I believe in life after love.

Ian Chillag:

Is there, for you, a kind of dream object you would love a tree to become?

Josh, Chainsaw:

Oh. I like to think that some of the trees I've cut down have become boats.

Ian Chillag:

Yeah?

Josh, Chainsaw:

I've never been on a boat, but it sounds so thrilling. Just the unsteadiness of the ocean I find very exhilarating, and that's what I find dangerous. Because, look, you drop me on the ground, I'm going to be fine at the end of the day. But if you drop me in the ocean, there I go, eroded by the salt, waterlogged. There's a danger to the sea that I respect and fear. And so I think a boat, because the wood, it bends so easily against my will, and against my strength, but then to watch it and master the waves, it really makes it feel like a partnership. I cut the tree down so that it might have a different strength and a different capacity than it does in nature.

Ian Chillag:

It's almost like a game of rock, paper, scissors, really. Chainsaw beats tree, tree beats ocean, ocean beats-

Josh, Chainsaw:

Chainsaw.

Ian Chillag:

Yeah. Well, you want to play a game of, I guess, chainsaw, tree, ocean?

Josh, Chainsaw:

Sure. Chainsaw. Okay.

Ian Chillag:

Yeah. I guess since you don't have hands, we'll just say it out loud.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Okay.

Ian Chillag:

Just I'll say one, two, three.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Okay.

Ian Chillag:

And then we'll say we are.

Josh, Chainsaw:

One, two, three.

Ian Chillag:

One, two, three. Ocean.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Chainsaw.

Ian Chillag:

Do you want to play again?

Josh, Chainsaw:

Sure. One, two, three.

Ian Chillag:

One, two, three. Ocean.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Chainsaw. Dammit. All right. One more.

Ian Chillag:

One-

Josh, Chainsaw:

One, two, three.

Ian Chillag:

Ocean.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Chainsaw. Okay.

Ian Chillag:

You know you can choose to be something other than chainsaw?

Josh, Chainsaw:

Can I though?

Ian Chillag:

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Josh, Chainsaw:

Oh, yeah.

Ian Chillag:

Are you full right now, by the way?

Josh, Chainsaw:

It's a little presumptuous, but I'd say three quarters.

Ian Chillag:

Okay. What's it feel like when you run out of gas?

Josh, Chainsaw:

I've never really put words to it. It feels like being between things. I drop into this place, everything's dark, and there's an emptiness.

Ian Chillag:

Literally an emptiness.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And I'm floating. And there's no... I'm not expending any effort, and nothing is expected of me. And there are lights in the distance. I'm gliding like a scalpel I imagine. I imagine it's what it feels like to be a scalpel. I'm light and I'm gliding. And it always smells like a horse was there recently but isn't anymore. And it's the kind of dark where you understand how people thought the stars could look like constellations, like every little brightness feels so bright and it feels like it must mean something. And quietly, and you can't tell exactly where from, there's always gently in the distance the song Sister Christian by Night Ranger, every time. Always Sister Christian, always in the distance, never louder, never quieter. And then I feel myself filling up. And then I'm full again. I'm sad to leave the emptiness, but it's nice to have balance, to have the full times and the empty times.

Ian Chillag:

I think if I were to have guessed before meeting you, you're the first chainsaw I've ever met.

Josh, Chainsaw:

I get that a lot.

Ian Chillag:

I think I'm surprised. You seem more gentle than I would have expected. From afar I would have imagined chainsaws to be a very bro-ey kind of macho culture.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Oh, yeah. I think there's a lot of... Well, especially in forestry, we're kind of socialized to have a very traditionally masculine attitude, just that like, "Oh, I chop down this much wood." Which, it's toxic. And it's not across the board certainly. But there is kind of from the older generation of chainsaws it's... I think I fit in more with humans in a lot of ways than with other chainsaws.

Ian Chillag:

Yeah. You're kind of in between. Because chainsaws aren't exactly your community, but people, they're afraid of you.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Yeah. I don't think I have many friends. When a chainsaw shows up at a party, something has gone awry. I think people are a little wary around me and they don't know how to deal with me outside of work. People like to have me around, they need to have me around. We work together during the day. And then at the end of the day they go home to their human families, and I hang out in the shed. That makes sense. But nobody wants to high five a chainsaw, tell them good job. No one ever gives a chainsaw a hug.

Ian Chillag:

It's a little weird maybe, but do you want to... I'd give you a hug.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Aren't you afraid?

Ian Chillag:

Well, I think I would ask that you not turn on.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Yeah, obviously.

Ian Chillag:

I am afraid.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Okay, okay.

Ian Chillag:

It is scary.

Josh, Chainsaw:

I'm afraid.

Ian Chillag:
What are you afraid of?

Josh, Chainsaw:
Well, the same thing you are, but from the opposite side.

Ian Chillag:
I'm afraid of being murdered and you're afraid of murdering.

Josh, Chainsaw:
Yeah. It is, when you say it, a different kind of fear.

Ian Chillag:
Well, all right, here it goes. My arms around you.

Josh, Chainsaw:
Huh. That's a hug.

Ian Chillag:
Tell me, this is your first hug?

Josh, Chainsaw:
First hug.

Ian Chillag:
I don't remember my first hug.

Josh, Chainsaw:
Oh, it's very weird. It's warm, but only in certain places. And I'm noticing that. But I wouldn't want it to be warm everywhere.

Ian Chillag:
I will say you're sharper than the people I've hugged.

Josh, Chainsaw:
Thank you.

Ian Chillag:
Can I ask you, for me, it's gotten to the point as it does with humans that the hug has gone on too long.

Josh, Chainsaw:
Oh, yeah, I'm feeling that, definitely.

Ian Chillag:

All right. I'm going to-

Josh, Chainsaw:

Sure. This on you?

Ian Chillag:

Yeah.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Do you hug everyone you interview?

Ian Chillag:

You're the first.

Josh, Chainsaw:

Aww.

Ian Chillag:

This is Everything is Alive. The show is produced by Jennifer Mills with me, Ian Chillag, and Eva Wolchover. Josh, the chainsaw, was played by Josh Gondelman. Josh is a comedian and writer, whose new essay collection, *Nice Try: Stories of Best Intentions and Mixed Results* is available everywhere now. Special thanks to Emily Spivak. Our editor is Hillary Frank, her book is called *Weird Parenting Wins*. A big thanks to Audrey King for talking to us about her time as a lumberjill in World War II. Also thank you to Joanna Foat, who's author of the book, *The Lumberjills: Britain's Forgotten Army* for her help as well. Music help this week from Kathleen Smith. Also a special thanks to Rob Byers for his help. Episode art, our new episode art is by Chip's New York. Everything is Alive is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, Julie Shapiro, executive producer. You can get in touch with us any number of ways at EverythingIsAlive.com. Find us on Twitter at Ian Chillag. Let me know if you would like to play a game of chainsaw, tree, ocean. We'll see you soon. (singing).

Ian Chillag:

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Speaker 5:

Radio-

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