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Eugene, Tattoo:

The earliest memory I have is just kind of hearing screaming, and I'm just like, is this because of me? I'm feeling pressure, and it's this constant kind of tapping pressure, which now, in my longer life, I realize were a bunch of needles that were connecting me to Danny. My name is Eugene. I'm a tattoo. I am shaped and look much like the Dreamworks character Shrek.

Ian:

Okay, so you're a tattoo of Shrek.

Eugene, Tattoo:

I am a tattoo of Shrek, yeah. And if you look right at the base of my smile, you can see, in a ribbon, that it says, show me the money and a couple of money signs.

Ian:

If I'm not mistaken, show me the money...

Eugene, Tattoo:

Yes.

Ian:

It's not a...

Eugene, Tattoo:

No, it's not a Shrek phrase, as I also found out. Never been around to watch the entire film. Usually, I'm covered up during film watching, which makes sense.

Ian:

And what can you tell me about the person on which you live?

Eugene, Tattoo:

Oh, Danny, Danny's great. I've been with him 16 years now, but I am predominantly on his left pectoral, over his heart. When we became partners, initially, when I was born, created, however you see life, we were excited. He was happy. I think he was surprised of how painful I was going to be. Also, I think he was convinced by the artist that I should be bigger, so you could see more of the detail. I think Danny, he overestimated the lovability of Shrek. But to his heart, I think it still means a lot.

Ian:

How does it feel knowing that, to come into the world, you have to cause a person pain?

Eugene, Tattoo:

I don't really think about it that much in that regard, because I'm just like, I mean, isn't that what you went through, Ian? I mean, that's what humans go through. You caused your mother pain when you came out, and I think it was pretty similar.

Ian:

I guess...

Eugene, Tattoo:

Yeah, we are...

Ian:

Yeah.

Eugene, Tattoo:

We're the same in that way, that neither of us could exist without pain.

Ian:

Pain.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Yeah, there's a lot of pain.

Ian:

It's interesting, when you meet somebody with a baby...

Eugene, Tattoo:

Yes.

Ian:

...you never say to them, did it hurt to get that? But you do say that to somebody with a tattoo.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Let's be honest. If you can remember what it was like when you were being born, if anything, you just remember people screaming, people in awe when you appeared, somebody with gloves on touching you...

Ian:

It really is similar.

Eugene, Tattoo:

A lot of goop.

Ian:

I think about a baby. My wife is pregnant right now.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Oh, congratulations.

Ian:

Thank you. The baby's kicking a lot.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Wow.

Ian:

And I think that there's something so interesting...

Eugene, Tattoo:

[inaudible 00:04:04] needles. It's like the needles, probably.

Ian:

Needles from the inside.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Yeah.

Ian:

And I think it's so interesting that she is aware of every single thing the baby does. You know?

Eugene, Tattoo:

Right.

Ian:

I just think about how you are constantly with this person.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Yeah. No, yeah. Me and Danny are fully connected. And yeah, the journey is together. And there is times where he'll forget about me, but I can't forget about him, just because I hear his heart beating. You know? In a not so great time, there was times where he is with his other partner. And he's been with this partner for, I would say, roughly, six-ish years.

Ian:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Eugene, Tattoo:

And I remember a moment where we were in the bathroom, and we were both looking into the mirror, and he clocked her makeup, and was just trying to see what it would look like if he covered me up with that.

Ian:

Wow.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Which was... I mean, it was really short. He... Because maybe he realized that it might be silly for him to do that all the time. But that was the first real moment that I was just like, wow, he might not want me around. But I think the saving grace is that his, Danny's partner, Grace, thinks that I'm cute.

Ian:

When you saw in the mirror...

Eugene, Tattoo:

Yeah.

Ian:

...Danny's chest covered up with makeup, what did it look like to you?

Eugene, Tattoo:

It's weird to feel like you're gone. And in a weird way, it also got me in the head space of, well, every time he wears a shirt, or puts a sweater on top of a shirt, or whatever, and we'd go outside, and it wouldn't feel that cold. I mean, maybe that's just him dressing appropriately for the weather, so that I wasn't cold. But it made me think, is this what he's doing every time he puts clothes on, is just trying to make me disappear for the day.

Ian:

I mean, I will say people do, just social norms...

Eugene, Tattoo:

Yeah.

Ian:

...do just kind of, you need to wear shirts.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Yeah, no, I understand that as a concept. But at the time when he was putting the makeup on me, I felt like that's what he was always trying to do. I feel the regret from Danny a little bit.

Ian:

Yeah.

Eugene, Tattoo:

A lot a bit.

Ian:

I have a friend who, he got a tattoo, and the tattoo artist, the tattoo kind of went wrong.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Wow. How does your friend feel about the tattoo?

Brent:

Hello?

Ian:

Hey Brent, it's Ian.

Brent:

Hey. How's it going, Ian?

Ian:

I'd say it's all right. It's a weird, it's a weird time, honestly.

Brent:

It is a weird time. It is a weird time.

Ian:

I'm calling because I want to talk about your tattoo.

Brent:

Oh.

Ian:

I don't know. Can you just tell the story of the tattoo?

Brent:

Yeah. Well, I've always loved the Odyssey, and for some reason I got it in my mind that I might want to get Odysseus.

Ian:

Just the word Odysseus.

Brent:

Yeah, Odysseus. I mean, it was rich enough of a subject for me that I felt like I could just look down at his name, and go the places that I wanted to go. So, I found a very reputable tattoo artist and went to the

studio. We talked about it, and it seemed simple enough. He said, next week, we'll do the tattoo next week. So I went the next week. Oh, I should say, that before I left the prior week, he had written down Odysseus, and spelled it wrong. So, I reminded him, and I wrote it down and said, listen, this is actually how you spell Odysseus. He was like, oh God, I'm so sorry. Absolutely, not a problem. So I came back the next week, saw what he had, it was spelled correctly. And he started. And meanwhile, we started talking about, having a conversation about bad tattoos.

Brent:

It was a great conversation, because he said, tattoos, from his point of view, tattoos were something that showed a record of where you were at an exact instant in time. And if it was actually, there was no such thing as a bad tattoo. It's still part of the story of your life. So we finished it up. It didn't take very long. And when I got home, my wife immediately asked to see the tattoo, and I just, I showed her without thinking and she had a strange look on her face. She started really kind of acting nervous. And she said, Brent, I have to tell you something, and it might make you very upset. So I looked down and I saw that it was spelled O-D-D-Y-S-E-U-S.

Ian:

So it's, so it's wrong twice. It's not just the extra D, it's the subtracted S.

Brent:

S, yeah. Yes. Yeah.

Ian:

Oddyseus.

Brent:

Yeah, Oddyseus.

Ian:

Does any part of you think back to that conversation with the tattoo artist, and think that maybe he looked down after drawing the second D, and was like, Brent, what do you think about bad tattoos, because I think they're fine.

Brent:

Actually, the conversation that we had... I don't know, it stuck in my mind. I thought, well, this must mean something. It gives me a sense of perspective, and yet reminds me of why I was inspired to get that tattooed on my arm in the first place. I actually prefer that it's my own personal oddyseus.

Ian:

I just want to ask you a few quick questions about being on a body.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Oh yeah.

Ian:

Because I've never spoken to something that lives on a body before.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Oh, yeah. Oh right. It's neat, because I live out of body, but I am part of Danny's body, now. I'm part of the body now, and the skin is always changing, and I'm deep in it. I'm ink, but I'm also now part of the cellular structure of Danny, and it's wild.

Ian:

That's wild.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Yeah. The first time that I felt goosebumps, I saw them happen on his arms, and he looked at his arms, and they started raising his skin, and I was like, what's happening? And then it felt like I was more 3-D than I've ever been. It was just like, all of a sudden, I was bigger and buffer than I ever have been before. And I'm like, whoa, what's this? And each of those bumps was like another muscle that was on me. And I felt bigger.

Ian:

It's interesting, because, for a human, goosebumps are often part of fear. But for you, it's almost the opposite.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Oh yeah.

Ian:

You feel stronger.

Eugene, Tattoo:

I feel strong. Yeah. Because it's like, from what I've seen in some of the movies that he watches, it feels like the rush that some of these drivers have in the Fast and Furious franchise, I would assume, that it's similar to cocaine. It was like I was stronger and invincible for a short amount of time.

Ian:

Do you ever wish you were one of those tougher kind of tattoo?

Eugene, Tattoo:

I see these other tattoos, because for the first couple of years, Danny and I would go back to a tattoo parlor with other people, because they'd also want one and they knew that Danny had me. Going to these tattoo parlors, and going to these different ones, you would notice the ones that really meant something to people, or ones that they were just off on a whim. Nobody's like me. I've never met another tattoo that's exactly me.

Ian:

Yeah. I think that...

Eugene, Tattoo:

Yeah.

Ian:

The messages that you seem to communicate through your physical self...

Eugene, Tattoo:

Yeah.

Ian:

...aren't often...

Eugene, Tattoo:

No.

Ian:

...together.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Nobody, other than Danny, lives the life of both Shrek and Jerry Maguire. Nobody does, I don't think. Maybe there's somebody out there, and maybe we'll run into that person. I remember being around, at times, with Danny's friends, where there's one of Danny's friends where he was like, oh man, we're best friends. You should get the donkey on you.

Ian:

From Shrek.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Yeah. And you could tell that his friend didn't want to get the donkey on him. But he got it. He got the donkey. We haven't seen that guy since. But there's a donkey out there that's supposed to be my friend.

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Ian:

Eugene, you ever hear the phrase, "beauty is only skin deep"?



Eugene, Tattoo:

Is that from the, is that from the one, Fast and Furious? Is that from that?

Ian:

No, I think it's just, it's kind of around.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Oh, okay. I don't know the phrase. Is that, I can, I think that means that I am part of the beautiful part. Is that what you're trying to tell me?

Ian:

I...

Eugene, Tattoo:

Beauty is only skin deep. So then I'm part of the beauty of Danny?

Ian:

Sure.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Oh, well that's very sweet of you. Yeah. I mean, I feel like that. I'm happy to hear that now. Yeah, sure. Beauty is a, I'm part of the beauty part, and everything deeper is gross. Wow. Ah, yeah. I'm beautiful. That's nice. Thank you.

Ian:

Earlier, we talked about you being with Danny constantly.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Oh yeah.

Ian:

Do you ever need space?

Eugene, Tattoo:

Oh yeah. I mean, there's a lot of talk about people regretting their tattoos. You know? But nobody ever talks about the tattoo regretting the person. You know? I mean, I love Danny, I do. And I don't regret being part of his life, or part of his body, but can I honestly say that every once in a while I wish I had my own time? Or see what else is out there? Maybe. Because I also can't look anywhere that Danny's not looking, if I am out. It's like, if I see something neat, like maybe a tree I've never seen before, or...

Eugene, Tattoo:

For instance, there was a time that we went to a baseball game together. I only heard the first couple of innings. And then I guess it was, it's Angels Stadium. So it's in Anaheim, California, and it's getting hot out there. So he takes his shirt off. So I'm watching. I'm able to watch that baseball game for about 10

minutes, and then he put his shirt back on, covered me up, just... A couple of his buddies were just like, I don't know if that's appropriate. But man, I would have loved to watch a whole game. I don't even know if the Angels... Did the Angels win that game?

Ian:

I don't know. When was this?

Eugene, Tattoo:

Oh. You know what? I mean, it was like seven years ago. So seven years ago they were playing... I know that the Angels were there, because everybody's rooting for the Angels, and it was Angels Stadium. The team they were playing against was also in uniforms.

Ian:

So did the Angels win...

Eugene, Tattoo:

The game.

Ian:

...seven years ago?

Eugene, Tattoo:

That game, yeah.

Ian:

Okay. It's not a lot to go on... Here, I can tell you... So that would have been...

Eugene, Tattoo:

Will it make it easier if I say between seven and eight years ago?

Ian:

That actually makes it harder.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Okay.

Ian:

Tell you what. So I'm just looking up here, just based on the record that season, odds are they did not win that game.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Oh, that's a bummer. Well, I guess it's good that I didn't see it then.

Ian:

So, something that happens sometimes is laser tattoo removal.

Eugene, Tattoo:

Yes. Yeah.

Ian:

Which I don't even know if it's okay to talk about.

Eugene, Tattoo:

I mean, it's not a choice that I would make, but if it does have to happen, I think I'll stay positive, because it's like... The way the process works for the laser, is this laser breaks me up, off the skin, and then I travel through Danny's body until I, you would basically poop it out. So I'd get pooped out.

Ian:

You're saying with laser tattoo removal, you...

Eugene, Tattoo:

Yeah. I'll be honest, the end result doesn't sound great.

Ian:

No.

Eugene, Tattoo:

But the journey sounds pretty nice. I would leave his chest, and probably move, seep through. And I mean, I'd be able to see the heart, and talk to the heart a little bit, or at least talk to it, rather than just hearing it all the time, and see what makes the blood flow in Danny, and move slowly down past the stomach, which it'd be neat to just kind of share quick stories with the stomach, move over to the liver, which can't be doing great. And then just kind of move to the spine, just kind of thank the spine for being the thing that held Danny up. He works hard, every day.

Eugene, Tattoo:

I wish there's a way that I could head up to the brain during that, and just kind of say, thank you, to him for even thinking of me. That would be kind of nice, but I know I'd probably just move South, shoot out, and be on my own to, I don't know what.

Ian:

Free in the world. What do you think you'd do?

Eugene, Tattoo:

If I... Oh man, if I wasn't, if I was a body and I... I might get a portrait of Danny on me, just his face, maybe on my arm. So I could just show him off all the time, like the forearm. So I could look down and whenever I'm doing something with my hands, I mean, just the idea of doing anything with my hands. I see Danny drinking coffee every morning. I want to drink a coffee. That seems fun. I don't even know how hot it would be or whatever. What's sipping like? You know?

Speaker 5:

This is, Everything is Alive. The show is produced by Jennifer Mills, and me, Ian Chillag, with Eva Wolchover. Special thanks to Emily Spiback. Our Editor is Hillary Frank. Eugene, the tattoo, was played by Eugene Cordero. We're grateful to the reporting of Jake Rawson, from whom we learned how laser tattoo removal works. Thanks to Brent Ballantine, for sharing his Odyssey with us. Thanks to Oddyseus for feeding the Cycloops. 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](http://everythingisalive.com). We'll see you soon. It's like what Shrek said. You know, Donkey, sometimes things are more than what they appear. He said it with a Scottish accent, and I just, I have a hard time rolling my R's.

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Speaker 5:

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