

DENNIS:

My name is Dennis, I'm a pillow, obviously. Tell you about myself, I am fluffy, I guess. My case is up as you can see It's just a simple flower pattern faded, you know.

IAN:

And I guess that probably changes from time to time your case

DENNIS:

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I, every, say two weeks...

IAN:

Ok.

DENNIS:

..three weeks I'll change. Nice simple flat forest green or navy or the faded flower pattern. I don't have a ton of outfits.

IAN:

Well, tell me a little bit about the... I guess you live on a bed

DENNIS:

Mmhm, that's right.

IAN:

Are there other pillows there too?

DENNIS:

Yeah, there's three other pillows. IAN: OK. One is this very flat sort of over it pillow, you know,

IAN:

What was that?

DENNIS:

Over it, you know, just. IAN: Oh, over it. Just flattened and just over it. IAN: Yeah. One is a little loopy because he was put in the wash.

IAN:

OK.

DENNIS:

Kind of got scrambled and never was quite right again. And the third is memory foam.

IAN:

OK.

DENNIS:

Which, it's just, he's not completely flat but he's not ever gonna get full again either. There's something very fake about him. He wants to be all things to all people and you can't be anything if you're everything.

IAN:

Now, you are down.

DENNIS:

Yeah, I'm down. Goose down.

IAN:

Can I ask? I wonder do you think about the geese that you're made from.

DENNIS:

I'm grateful to them. I'm grateful to the geese or goose, i don't know. I hope that their feathers are taken and they're still left alive but I know, like now that I'm saying it out loud, that's definitely not what happens, they're definitely killed and they're (INAUDIBLE)

IAN:

They're not sheep, you don't shear a goose.

DENNIS:

But I'm grateful.

IAN:

It's interesting that like a feather can both, enable a bird to fly,

It's what makes it fly...

DENNIS:

Right?

IAN:

..it's also, this thing that makes you soft.

DENNIS:

Right.

IAN:

I don't know, it's just funny, those are two very different things that one thing does.

DENNIS:

Yeah. I guess I really thought about it. Feathers help birds fly, feathers are very light, feathers are soft. Angels have feathers. They live in clouds, clouds are like pillows. And maybe that's where the geese are now, up in heaven.

What would it be like to be a pillow made out of angel feathers? That probably be the best... Probably God's pillow is made out of angel feathers, you know, he's just like, Hey, Michael, come here, or, Gabriel, you know. Then I guess he'd have to kill them and take their feathers. Mmm, sorry. I don't know, my mind goes weird places sometimes. You know, I spend a lot of time with people dreaming, so, I guess my imagination just sort of has a dream logic to it sometimes.

IAN:  
Yeah.

DENNIS:

It just gets away from me. Now I don't even remember where I started.

TONY:  
Hello.

IAN:  
Hey Tony, its Ian Chillag. Can I ask you a few questions?

TONY:  
About what?

IAN:  
Well, about feathers.

TONY:  
Oh. OK, let's do it now.

IAN:  
Well, can we start, can you just introduce yourself for us?

TONY:  
OK. My name is Anthony Trento. I'm the president and CEO of American Plume And Fancy Feathers in Clarks Summit Pennsylvania.

IAN:  
Tony, do you work with goose feathers at all?

TONY:  
Goose feathers, no... Really there's not many goose feathers that are fancy feathers.

IAN:  
Well, what is just, what... I don't know about that distinction between a regular feather and a fancy feather, is that like an industry term?

TONY:  
Yeah, a fancy feather, there's two classifications for feathers. It's fancy feathers and bedding

feathers. Bedding is what you find in ski jackets and pillows, Things like that. IAN: OK. And fancy feathers are like ostrich plumes, peacock feathers, turkey feathers.

IAN:

OK.

TONY:

That's what Big Bird wears.

IAN:

So, you supply that turkey feathers that Big Bird, Big Bird is made with?

TONY:

Right, it's turkey feathers, yes. That's the biggest volume feather that we use, they made a lot of boas and things like you'd see in Las Vegas or something like that on a showgirl.

IAN:

So, potentially the same feathers that make up Big Bird come from the same turkey that makes a boa on a showgirl in Las Vegas.

TONY:

Right.

IAN:

Dennis, I want to ask you about the person who sleeps in your bed is it just one person?

DENNIS:

Yes, usually. What do, you know, about him? You know, like I guess if you, maybe like if you were gonna introduce me to him what would you tell me about? OK, Sure. I'd say, Ian, this is Dave. Dave is a pretty restful sleeper. Dave used to snore but he got his tonsils out. Now, he doesn't drool as much, he doesn't snore as much. This is how I would say, this is like if we were at a party and I was introducing you, I'd say, Hey, this is Dave he used to snore, he got his tonsils out, he's a very heavy sleeper, he used to snore. I guess I'm saying he used snore a lot but that's, it was irritating. But anyway. Yeah, he sometimes will toss and turn, he'll say insane things, sometimes he cries. That's what I'd say, if I was introducing him at a party. I guess that's probably too much to say, I don't know. Sometimes he cries, is that how you would introduce someone at a party?

IAN:

I think. Yeah, I don't think you would. You would not maybe lead, that's probably something you learn later.

DENNIS:

Yeah I guess I just, my relationships are all extremely intimate.

IAN:

Yeah.

DENNIS:

So, I guess my boundaries are different than, say you or someone else.

IAN:

I don't, I mean, honestly, when people introduce other people at parties usually the things that you learn don't matter, there would be something maybe nice about having a pillows intimacy with other people.

DENNIS:

Yeah, why not?

IAN:

Yeah. Just get right in there, learning the important stuff, you know, so, I guess when I would introduce him I'd say, Terrence, this is Jack, Jack sleeps naked, you know. Terrence, this is Ian, he dreams about flying and when he wakes up and he's not flying, he's sad for a minute but then he gets up.

IAN:

Yeah, yeah. I'd love to fly inside a plane. A pressurized cabin. You know, look at a tiny window. See the clouds and see that city below, wow, what a dream.

IAN:

I like thinking about that too. I like thinking about you in a window seat, buckled up.

DENNIS:

Yeah. Oh, yeah, that'd be so, funny, cause I wouldn't need to be buckled up, I can flop around and I'll be fine.

IAN:

Mmhm.

DENNIS:

In-flight magazine barf bag, pressing a little call button, all that stuff, Oh, man, a lot of fun. A lot of fun. I'm sorry I got way far away from your original question.

IAN:

How would you, if you were introducing yourself at a party what would you say?

DENNIS:

Oh. OK, so, I'd say, hi, my name's Dennis I'm a pillow. I dream of being comfortable forever. And I'm probably a third dust mites, bacteria, dead skin cells, dust mite feces,

IAN:

A third?

DENNIS:

Yeah, probably a good third of my insides are just stuff that was not there it's not feathers anymore. Yeah, I think that's what I would say at a party.

IAN:

You know, it's interesting, I think like you're made from all this other stuff and like everything that you've absorbed, in a way it's not unlike people, like people are, you know, a product of all of their experiences.

DENNIS:

Yeah, I mean, it's the same exact thing. Yeah. We are what we've seen. Nobody is just their raw material I'm not just feathers in cloth, you know. We're made by our experiences. The people we've met, all that sweat, the feces, thousands of dust mites have laid into us, you know, we are all those things. You don't have to be foam to have memories.

IAN:

So, the bed, it's such an intimate space, like you only really, you know, sleep with someone, share a bed with somebody if like you really love them and trust them.

DENNIS:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, it's always been that way. There was a time, centuries ago, when kings of different countries would share a night in the same bed to show that their countries had, you know, unity, got along. King Richard the Lionheart of Britain spent a night in bed with, I think it was King Philip II of France, just to show that their countries were getting along, you know, and it wasn't, it wasn't a sexual thing, you know.

IAN:

They just they slept in a bed together?

DENNIS:

Yeah, literally, they were in bed together. And who knows, maybe they did get up to shenanigans.

IAN:

I wonder if they spooned

DENNIS:

I like to think that they were in full regalia. Huge heavy crowns and their sceptre's under a big furry blanket like a bear pelt or something. Just knocked out, totally undignified. Just two kings just laid out drooling on each other, crowns askew, you know.

IAN:

If you had been in that bed with the Kings...

DENNIS:

Mmm.

IAN:

What would you have wanted to say to them?

DENNIS:

I would have said, remember this, remember this feeling. I think if every leader of every nation spent a night with the leader of every other nation and just had that vulnerability and you got to observe their nightly routine, you know, just like, Oh, you use unflavored Listerine, I use unflavored Listerine too, maybe we should have peace. I think the world would be a better place. So, I would just say, remember this, who we are when we are falling asleep is... That's who you really are.

IAN:

It's nice to imagine one giant bed With all the world leaders...

DENNIS:

Man. Together and among spoon.

DENNIS:

Can you imagine all the different kinds of pillows? Silk, buckwheat, memory foam, hay. Wow.

IAN:

Have you ever experienced when a person can't sleep, insomnia?

DENNIS:

Sure, sure yeah.

IAN:

I wonder how that feels? Because...

DENNIS:

It makes me feel like I'm doing something wrong, to be honest, it makes me feel a little impotent in a way, where I'm usually like I got this, I'm taking care of this and suddenly it's like, Oh, is it me? Am I doing something wrong? You know what I mean? And if you ever feel that way just...

IAN:

Yeah, you know, often, yeah.

DENNIS:

Like someone else is having a bad time or a bad day and you think, Oh, is it me? And you know intellectually it's probably not you, it's probably they're just having a bad day maybe got too much coffee, or they're stressed out about their job or something, it's not you. But it's hard not to take it personally.

IAN:

My mom always says, There's always a third variable, like when, you know, when someone is mean to you or their reaction seems sort of outsized to a moment and you know, you blame yourself. She says there's always a third variable, meaning there's one more thing you don't know about that's happening. So, you know, you don't need to blame yourself.

DENNIS:

Yeah. I've been punched repeatedly and I knew that I wasn't about me but it's not a nice feeling, you know.

IAN:

Can you tell me that story?

DENNIS:

Yeah my person came home and was slamming all the doors and throwing his bag down and yelling just pieces of sentences, not even sentences but just like, Who does he think he is? And, "You can't talk to me like that." And slamming doors and then just came in and just started punching me and I was shocked, you know, didn't hurt, it was just... It was just shocking.

IAN:

Yeah.

DENNIS:

To see someone like that shook me up. Do you know what I mean? And then later when he was sleeping on me I thought, Man, I can't, I can't just pretend like nothing happened. You know what I mean? I guess my point is, I didn't take it personally but I kind of did take it personally. So, it took me a few nights to where we were back on the same page, you know,

IAN:

Yeah.

DENNIS:

But, you know, there's always a third variable, like you said.

IAN:

There's the story I read, I don't know if it's true, it seems like there's some debate about it. But there's this Greek poet, I don't know if I'm saying this right, Philitas of Cos, He's a Greek poet.

DENNIS: Uh huh. There's a story that he, people say that maybe he died because he got, he became so obsessed with the liars paradox, that he couldn't sleep thinking about it and that insomnia killed him. Do you know what the liars paradox...?

DENNIS:

No. What's the liars paradox?

IAN:

So, the liars paradox is, if I say the sentence, I am lying...

DENNIS:

Aha.

IAN:

Am I lying or telling the truth?

DENNIS:

Oh. And he couldn't sleep because of that?

IAN:

He couldn't, it took over his mind.

DENNIS:

Wow. And he died because he couldn't sleep? Well, that would happen if you don't get enough sleep, You'll die.

IAN:

Yeah I bet there was other stuff going on there.

IAN:

With Philitas?

DENNIS:

Yeah.

DENNIS:

It's really a tragedy, it really is because if he was able to get some sleep maybe his dreams would've worked it out for him. I think dreams are really important in that way, they help you make sense of the world. So, I think he probably would have gone to sleep dreamt about the liars paradox, woken up and said, It doesn't matter. You know, and then just gotten a jug of water, you know, those really tastefully decorated jugs that the ancient Greeks had. That's what I'm picturing.

IAN:

That ultimately is a really that's maybe the answer to all of the classic unanswerable questions which came first the chicken or the egg.

DENNIS:

Yeah get a good night's sleep, wake up. Oh, it doesn't matter.

IAN:

Yeah.

DENNIS:

I'm gonna go tell my wife I love her.

IAN:

What's the sound of one hand clapping?

DENNIS:

And then you go to sleep and you wake up and you think, Oh, it doesn't matter, I'm gonna go patch up the canoe.

IAN:

I think that there could be somebody listening right now who can't sleep. You're sort of an expert in helping people sleep.

DENNIS:

Absolutely.

IAN:

They can't, you know, rest their head on you right now.

DENNIS:

Right?

IAN:

But...

IAN:

Is there anything you would want to say to them?

DENNIS:

I'd say, First of all, stop thinking so much, and relax, have a thought that is unconnected to any other thought, a vision maybe. And just let it go where it wants to go without thinking about what it means, you know, like you're... You're riding a horse. And then the horse grows wings. And then the horse flies up into the clouds. And the clouds are made of light. And then there's a Twizzlers waterfall, I don't know why, you don't know why, but let's go to the Twizzlers waterfall. Now the horse is eating Twizzlers. And you're combing the horse's mane and you don't know why, you don't know where this is going and maybe the horse decides to lay down and maybe you lay down with the horse.

And now it starts raining. And now you're in the Grand Canyon somehow, how'd you get there doesn't matter. You pull your cowboy hat down over your head over your eyes which you've been wearing but you didn't realize it. And now, you're looking up at the aurora borealis which you can somehow see through the brim of your cowboy hat I don't know, doesn't matter why. And now the horse starts eating the aurora borealis. You don't know why, just go with it. Now you put your cowboy hat on the horse's head and now the horse is the cowboy. Now, the horse starts riding you. Good night.

IAN:

This is Everything Is Alive. The show is produced by Jennifer Mills and me, Ian Chillag. We got help from Emily Spivak. Also special thanks to Mark Kushner and Chris Barley. We're grateful to the reporting of Caitlyn Dixon, John Gillingham and Antheneus of Naucratis. We heard music in this episode from Blue Dot sessions. Dennis The Pillow was played by Dennis Pacheco. Everything Is Alive is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX and could not do it without Julie Shapiro, executive producer. If you're still awake and trying to sleep at this point, we highly recommend the podcast Sleep With Me which tells you stories to help you fall asleep and which is good even if you don't fall asleep. So, no pressure. You can find Sleep With Me in the podcast app of your choosing or just ask

your smart speaker to play the Sleep With Me podcast. You can get in touch with us any number of ways at [everythingisalive.com](http://everythingisalive.com) We'll see you soon.

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