

HOST:

Support for 'Everything is Alive' comes from Vistaprint. Vistaprint makes custom business cards with the colors, fonts, designs and images you choose. No longer do you have to write your name and phone number in Sharpee on the arm of the person you just met at a conference. With Vistaprint, you can create a truly professional, unique card in minutes. Also, Vistaprint uses only carefully selected inks and responsibly sourced paper stocks. Vistaprint wants you to do something great for your business right now, which is why our listeners will get 500 high quality custom business cards starting at 9.99. Use code 'Alive' at [vistaprint.com](http://vistaprint.com). That's code 'Alive' at [vistaprint.com](http://vistaprint.com). Alive' at [vistaprint.com](http://vistaprint.com).

(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

'Everything is Alive' is also supported by Progressive. Saving is the name of the game, and with Progressive's name your price tool, you're in the driver's seat when it comes to car insurance. Tell them how much you want to pay, and they'll find options within your budget. Choose your coverage and start an online quote today at [progressive.com](http://progressive.com).

(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

VOICE-OVER:

An advisory...this episode contains descriptions of pumpkin carving that sensitive listeners may find gruesome.

ANNIE:

My name is Annie and I'm a jack o' lantern. I came originally, from a pumpkin patch and now I'm on a stoep.

HOST:

Well, this feels like a strange place to start, but I'd like to just kind of ask you about your face.

ANNIE:

Yeah, kind of rugged, right?

HOST:

Well, could you for...you know, for our listeners that can't see you, could you just, I guess, describe your expression for us?

ANNIE:

Sure. So, my eyes are cock-eyed. They're triangle shaped...well, they're trying to be triangles. I guess one looks more like a square. It has four sides. My nose is an upside down triangle and the expression on my mouth is a...what I can describe as a moon turned upside down... no, like a fingernail turned upside down.

HOST:

OK.

ANNIE:

And I've got a little snaggle tooth, so I guess the expression is angry baby.

HOST:

OK.

ANNIE:

Yeah.

HOST:

And do you feel like that...does that represent you? Do you feel like an angry baby?

ANNIE:

Not at all. I feel like I'm a pretty happy pumpkin, and that face doesn't necessarily describe that.

HOST:

Yeah.

ANNIE:

So there's this disconnect with what I look like and kind of what I'm feeling on the inside, and that's a bummer because I'm happy but the face kind of says, "Whoa, don't talk to that one. Just keep your distance."

HOST:

Yeah. So, if you could choose...if you had been able to choose what face was carved instead, what would you have chosen?

ANNIE:

I would have loved to have some eyebrows. I don't have any right now, and if I had to choose my own eyebrows, I would like them to kind of have this furrowed, concerned V.

HOST:

You would want to look concerned?

ANNIE:

Yeah, because that's how I feel.

HOST:

Um, I want to ask you about being carved. The experience of being carved.

ANNIE:

Yeah.

HOST:

I guess, first of all, is that something you looked forward to?

ANNIE:

I looked forward to it in the sense that I knew it was going to happen, that it was my fate, so it was

one of those like, you know, I know this day is coming, so I looked forward to it in that sense, but I knew it was going to hurt like hell. And you know what? It did. It was excruciating. The pain was unbearable.

HOST:

Well, I don't wanna bring you back to the trauma.

ANNIE:

Uhm, but you're going to.

HOST:

Well, if you don't want to, you don't have to. But I would...if you wouldn't mind just sort of like telling us the story of being carved.

ANNIE:

(INHALES DEEPLY) So, you know, I was taken out of the patch.

(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

That's horrific in and of itself, you know. I'm ripped from my family, put on a truck with other pumpkins that I don't know.

HOST:

Uh hmm.

ANNIE:

You know, it's a very quiet experience. We all know what's gonna happen to us. We're gonna be sold at a grocery store. You know, sitting at that grocery store with these other pumpkins, watching people come by, choosing you, picking you, testing your firmness, turning you away because maybe you have a bump or two, you know. And then once, you know, you get into the house, it seems OK. You're starting to get to know your family a little bit more.

(SIGHS) And then now comes the knife. It's such a...it feels like such a betrayal in a way. For you...the carver, it's a joyful occasion, right? There's a lot of memories tied to carving a pumpkin and it's a family affair. For me it's like going under the knife in a hospital, where there's really no doctors. It's just some amateurs kinda working at your face.

(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

It starts with a sketch. That's usually with a Sharpee. And you know, it's tickly...the drawing, the Sharpee. They're drawing on my face. It feels nice, it's tickly. But once the slicing comes in, uhmmm, it's not quick and easy.

(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

In my experience, I actually had a mess-up, as they call it. So, the backside of me is the first trial of sketch, and I guess it didn't go as well as they wanted it to.

HOST:

So you have another face on your other side?

ANNIE:

Yeah. So, right now I have a messed-up face on my backside.

HOST:

And your face is on your front side?

ANNIE:

Right.

HOST:

But that's...was originally...

ANNIE:

Was originally my backside. It's not my best side. I've got a lot of lumps on my backside.

HOST:

OK.

ANNIE:

Brown spots, too...age spots. And they tried again.

HOST:

Where did they start? What was the first...the first thing they carved?

ANNIE:

My right eye. That one's the square. So I think they were getting used to holding the knife and... you know, they let their six-year-old kid take a whirl at it. You know, which is like, oh you're gonna give a six-year-old a knife. That would be like me giving a seed a knife.

HOST:

Right.

ANNIE:

Here, practice this knife skill on this pumpkin. What does it matter if you mess it up? We'll just get another one. (LAUGHS SARCASTICALLY)

That's my face.

HOST:

You...you are such a symbol. Like a pumpkin...you immediately put a picture of a pumpkin on a thing and you understand, it's communicating like fall and Halloween and you know...

ANNIE:

Yeah.

HOST:  
..the season.

ANNIE:  
Yeah, that's true. I like that I do represent that and then, when you look at me, you know exactly where you kind of are in the world or what time it is in the world, right?

HOST:  
Yeah.

ANNIE:  
But that's only specific to this part of the worlds. It's different throughout the rest of the world. Like for instance, in the Ukraine, we represent heartbreak.

HOST:  
Pumpkins represent heartbreak?

ANNIE:  
That's right. It used to be that when somebody asked somebody to marry them, instead of saying "No," you just handed them a pumpkin.

HOST:  
You're saying that that person would pull out a pumpkin and hand it to the person and they would know what it meant?

ANNIE:  
Yeah. What an awful thing to be, right?

HOST:  
Yeah, yeah, you are "No."

ANNIE:  
I'm "No." I'm rejection.

HOST:  
You are "I don't love you."

ANNIE:  
Yeah.

HOST:  
Or maybe "Marriage is not right for me. I'm not in a good place right now."

ANNIE:  
Yeah. It got to the point where people would only propose at night to avoid being seen walking home carrying a pumpkin.

HOST:

So it was the original walk of shame. (PHONE RINGS)

ANNIE:

That's a good way of putting it.

HOST:

Hi, I'm calling for Tyrus.

TYRUS:

Yes, how can I help you?

HOST:

Well, I got your name from the Ukrainian Cultural Center. They said you may be able to talk to me about the pumpkins and proposals in Ukraine. You know about this?

TYRUS:

Nah, I've heard of it, I've read it in books and there's some movies that you can see actually, how it's done.

HOST:

Oh, really?

TYRUS:

Obviously, comedies but yeah. Well, tell me about one of them.

TYRUS:

(CLEARS THROAT)

Let me see...I can try to find it on YouTube for you. Hold on, 'cause it's a mouthful to tell you and we'll probably be struggling, both for me to translate and for you to understand what it means. So let me see if I could find it here quickly. OK, aahh, alright. It's V as in Victor, E as in Edward, C as in Charlie, H as in Henry, E as in Edward, R as in Richard, A as in apple. That is one word.

HOST:

OK.

TYRUS:

The second word is just N-A.

HOST:

So, Vechera Na?

TYRUS:

Yes, and then the third word is H as in Henry, U as in umbrella, T as in Tom, O as in Oscar, R as in Richard, E as is Edward.

HOST:

OK, so...

TYRUS:

And the fourth word is...no, that's a... I'll tell you when it stops. The fourth word is B as in boy, L as in Larry, I as in icicle, Z as in zebra.

HOST:

OK.

TYRUS:

And the last word is D as in dog, I as in icicle, K as in kite, A as in apple, N as in Nancy, K as in kite, I as in icicle. So if you are by the computer, you can try and see.

HOST:

OK. Oh, yeah. It came right up, I got it.

TYRUS:

OK.

(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

MAN:

Aaaahh.

HOST:

OK, so the scene I'm seeing here. It seems to be a man in a cave using telekinesis to dip his pierogi's in sour cream.

TYRUS:

So that's a...about the middle... you've got to watch the whole movie. About the middle of the movie, you have...there's a guy coming in, you know, a rich guy coming in to get married to a girl, proposed to a girl and then when they're done, she hands him a pumpkin.

HOST:

And do you know anybody that this ever happened to? From way back?

TYRUS:

No, I personally don't know. I'm too young for that. That's gotta be maybe like my grandparents, yes, but personally, not me. Once in a while, I think they're still... well, used in colloquial language. You know, saying that "Be careful 'cause you might get a pumpkin as a response." It's not that you're gonna get a pumpkin, but meaning that you might get rejected, you know.

HOST:

Oh, it's like slang now?

TYRUS:

Basically.

HOST:

Well yeah, is there anything that I should ask you about this that I haven't yet?

TYRUS:

No, you're pretty inquisitive about a pumpkin.

(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

HOST:

Support for 'Everything is Alive' is brought to you by SimpliSafe. Home security done right. SimpliSafe is home security you'll actually love using. It's really thoughtfully designed, so you can blanket your home with protection and never notice. It's got all kinds of great little touches, like gentle reminders if you're leaving with a window open. Most importantly, SimpliSafe is really good at its job. CNET, the Wirecutter, PCMag all named it their top pick for home security. Over two million people use it every day. Learn more about how SimpliSafe can help you today. Go to [simplisafe.com/alive](https://simplisafe.com/alive). That's [simplisafe.com/alive](https://simplisafe.com/alive).

(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

We'd also like to thank Helix Sleep for their support of our show. You love sleep, you do it all the time. It's possible even, that you're asleep right now and this is all just a dream. It's weird, I guess, that there's a sponsor break in the middle of your dream, but that's just how it is. Helix Sleep matches your body type and sleep preferences to the perfect mattress. Just go to [helixsleep.com/alive](https://helixsleep.com/alive), take their two-minute sleep quiz, and they will match you to a mattress that will give you the best sleep of your life. They can even split your mattress down the middle, so you and your partner can each get the mattress that's right for you. Right now, Helix is offering up to \$125 off all mattress orders at [helixsleep.com/alive](https://helixsleep.com/alive). That's [helixsleep.com/alive](https://helixsleep.com/alive) for \$125 off your mattress order.

(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

VOICE-OVER:

Sensitive listeners may want to note that we're not done with the gory stuff yet.

HOST:

Does any of this stuff ever bother you?

VOICE-OVER:

Yes, of course.

(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

HOST:

So Annie, I guess even before you know, they start with the face, they...you know, they'd cut off... they have to cut off...cut open your top.

ANNIE:

Yeah, you get the...you get the... the head sliced into and they take off that top. And that's kind of my umbilical cord, you know. That's where I was connected to the ground, the earth. And then they

start digging in the inside with a spoon. Ummm, and those are my seeds, and for us lady pumpkins, that's a whole experience in of itself, is losing those seeds, you know.

(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

You know, you see baby pumpkins in the patch, other pumpkins who have kids, and you know, we're given so many of these seeds. It's like it's the expectation to have all these pumpkins.

HOST:

200 babies.

ANNIE:

Right. I'm watching them get placed on a tray and salted and put into the oven for a snack. Uh, horrifying...it's horrifying.

(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

I would have loved the chance to try, before I got plucked, but so be it. I was meant for Halloween.

HOST:

Yeah.

ANNIE:

Yeah, not motherhood.

(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

HOST:

So, I think, when we're picking out a pumpkin, I think some people like, you know, kind of taller, skinnier pumpkins, some people want you know, shorter, more squat pumpkin. Kind of Bert versus Ernie. Can you describe what you are?

ANNIE:

Yeah. I'm more of the shorter, f-fat pumpkins. I've got a lot of space horizontally, and you know, I think that can make...that could have made for like a cool like surfboard scene, or like you know, a big beach, maybe, but no, I'm just a big fat face. That's OK. And you know, I don't...in the pumpkin community, there is no, you know, hierarchy of body types, right? So there's no desired body type like those tall, skinny ones. I think you humans like the tall, skinny ones. You know, for us it's just you grew a different way.

HOST:

Yeah. ANNIE: Yeah. So, there comes a point, I guess, once all that's behind you, your face is carved in, when you're put back outside. Can you tell us what that was like when that happened?

ANNIE:

Yeah, that's kind of a nice moment, because you know this is your time to shine, right? You're gonna

be out there, you have a job to do, and it's to bring joy to all these trick-or-treaters, right? You're representing the spirit of Halloween. And then the rot starts to happen. Day one of carving, the rot starts to happen. And it's slow and you don't notice it at first, but a couple of days later, you start to see, you know, dark spots inside of you, and that's when I know my time is coming. You know, I have a clock that is ticking, the moment I'm taken from the patch. But the moment that I'm carved, the days become even more numbered. Yeah.

HOST:

Well Annie, so you...you became a jack o' lantern. Do you think about the other things that might have happened to you when you left the pumpkin patch?

ANNIE:

Oh yeah, yeah. And you definitely hear things, you know, in the patch. They can make you into a pie, right? Maybe they shoot you out of a cannon. Maybe they shred you up and throw you into a cake, and maybe they feed you to the lions.

HOST:

I'm sorry?

ANNIE:

Maybe they feed you to the lions.

HOST:

Do you mean that metaphorically?

ANNIE:

No. You know, big cats. Apparently, lions and tigers love pumpkins. So, you know, all the pumpkins that don't get picked out, get sent to zoos and stuff, and the lions just tear us apart. You know, I don't even know if they eat us. They just attack us with their big teeth and paws.

HOST:

So, any pumpkin that doesn't get picked up from the grocery store is potentially headed to be torn apart by a lion?

ANNIE:

In a zoo, that's right, yeah.

HOST:

That seems to me like the worst fate.

ANNIE:

It's bad, it's really bad, but again, in my case, I was carted off in a truck into a house, where a family let a six-year-old take a steel blade to my face, and they placed a flame inside my hollow body that burns day and night.

HOST:

The lion, that seems quicker, at least.

ANNIE:

Yeah, yeah.

HOST:

It really does seem like Halloween is scariest for you and not for us, not for humans. They're really...the most terrifying fates are headed your way and not ours.

ANNIE:

Yeah, it does seem that way, doesn't it? I suppose you wanted a holiday where you felt scared, but you projected that on to an innocent pumpkin, because you truly didn't want to be scared, right? Not real fright. Like a good spook is OK. Like a "Boo!" Ooh, you scared me. But true horror...death and dying and decay, you don't want to get into that, right?

HOST:

I guess not. Like I think, if you told me ahead of time, that was gonna happen for me on Halloween was that someone was gonna carve a face into me and then leave me out on a porch with a burning flame inside of me.

ANNIE:

Yeah, happy Halloween, right?

HOST:

It would be a holiday I would want to avoid.

ANNIE:

Yeah.

HOST:

Just plain, I just wish, yeah, I wish you could have our experience. Which is pretty much just putting on costumes and getting candy, which, when it comes down to it, is not scary.

ANNIE:

Yeah, I would love to be able to put on costumes and get candy, but this is the life of a jack o' lantern. I'm not supposed to eat candy. I'm not supposed to put on costumes. I'm supposed to bring joy by way of fright for a night.

HOST:

Uh hmm. Would you like to trick-or-treat?

ANNIE:

I would love that.

HOST:

I mean, what would you want your costume to be? If you could dress up as anything in the world, what would you want it to be?

ANNIE:

Batman. The Dark Knight. I would love to put on some bat ears and a cape.

HOST:

Well, maybe what we can do is just, anybody listening to this, can kind of imagine sitting at home, it's Halloween night.

(DOORBELL RINGS)

Doorbell rings, you go to your door, you open the door, you look down, and you see Annie the pumpkin in a Batman costume, and yeah, you say whatever you want.

ANNIE:

Uh, hi. Please don't shut the door on me. I know this probably looks crazy. I don't want anything from you. I'm just an honest jack o' lantern looking for some candy. Trick or treat?

(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

HOST:

This is 'Everything is Alive'. Our show is produced by Jennifer Mills and me, Ian Chillag. Thanks also to (INAUDIBLE), Emily Spivack and Mr. Bill Kurtis.

VOICE-OVER:

Sensitive listeners can breathe a sigh of relief. The worst is over now.

HOST:

We're grateful to the reporting of David Greene and a big thanks to Tyrus Yecko, for talking to us about pumpkins in Ukraine. Annie, the jack o' lantern was played by Annie Donley. Music in this episode was from Blue Dot Sessions. 'Everything is Alive' is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, and without Julie Shapiro, executive producer, we would be barely more than a tiny squash. You can get in touch with us any number of ways at [everythingisalive.com](http://everythingisalive.com). We'll see you soon.

(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

(SILENCE)

IAN CHILLAG:

I want to tell you about something our Radiotopia friends, 'The Truth', are up to. If you're not familiar, 'The Truth' is a podcast that does these beautifully produced short stories in audio, and right now, they're in the middle of a four-part series. It's a thriller that takes place against the backdrop of the Me Too movement. It's called the Off-season. Here's a clip.

BRUCE:

Hi, you're on the air.

WOMAN:

Hi, how hard was it?

BRUCE:

Yes, thank you, that's a good question. Rita, has reaching this level of success been difficult?

RITA:

Of course. I mean, in this field the career is always...

WOMAN:

No, no, I'm sorry. That question's not for you. This question is for Bruce.

BRUCE:

That for me?

WOMAN:

How hard was your (BLEEP)  
when you tried to (BLEEP)  
your former co-host in your dressing room?

IAN CHILLAG:

I've been listening, I cannot wait until the next episode. You can subscribe to 'The Truth' wherever you get your podcasts or go to [thetruthpodcast.com](http://thetruthpodcast.com).

(RADIOTOPIA STATION ID)