

**Oral History Interview of
Rachel Tilley**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
August 16, 2016
Lubbock, Texas**

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*General Southwest Collection Interviews***

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Preferred Citation for this Document:

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Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Audio

Digitization Details: N/A

Audio Metadata: 96 kHz/ 24 bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Related Interviews:

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: Andy Wilkinson

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: Cindy Stanukinos

Editor(s): Katelin Dixon

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Texas Tech music student, Rachel Tilley. Rachel talks about her tattoos, the meaning behind them, her views of what tattoos mean in society, and using tattoos to express meaning for difficult events in life.

Length of Interview: 00:48:33

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Interest in music	5	00:00:00
School, music education	9	00:05:09
First tattoo	11	00:07:33
Tattoo art styles	17	00:14:45
Overcoming difficult times	20	00:20:47
Sunflower tattoo	27	00:28:42
View of tattoos	33	00:36:23

Keywords

art, Lubbock, Texas, symbolism, Texas Tech University, tattoos

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

And I will say this is the sixteenth of August, 2016. Andy Wilkinson here with Rachel Tilley, and that's, and I spell, or you spell it R-a-c-h-e-l T-i-l-l-e-y.

Rachel Tilley (RT):

Yes.

AW:

Okay, good, so a hundred years from now, when we want to know which Rachel Tilley we're talking about, so what is your date of birth?

RT:

[Laugh] December 29 of 1995.

AW:

Wow, twenty-ninth, so let me just make sure I have this, all this stuff down—where were you born?

RT:

Lubbock, Texas.

AW:

Really?

RT:

Mm-hm

AW:

I think we may have talked about that before. And did you grow up here?

RT:

Kind of—we moved to Fort Worth in—at the end of fourth grade.

AW:

Okay.

RT:

Yeah. So childhood in Lubbock.

AW:

To fourth grade and—so where'd you go to elementary school?

RT:

At Preston Smith

AW:

Oh yeah, my—one of my kids went to Preston Smith

RT:

Oh yeah, I loved it.

AW:

Yeah, so did he. And then to Fort Worth, and did you graduate high school in Fort Worth?

RT:

No, we actually moved two years later to Colleyville, Texas

AW:

And did you—is that where you finished up?

RT:

I went to Grapevine High School

AW:

Grapevine—what year did you graduate?

RT:

2014.

AW:

And came straight to Tech?

RT:

Mm-hm.

AW:

What are you studying here?

RT:

Music Education with a Choral Focus.

AW:

Oh cool, so do I take that—take it that you were in choir in—

RT:

Actually my first real experience with choir was in, I think, fourth grade actually? Third or fourth, I went to the Oak National Conference and sang in the children's choir and—

AW:

So do you just say, "I'm going to go and see the children's choir" or how do you do that, do you try out?

RT:

No, it was an audition process, yeah, a big audition process.

AW:

So that was here in Lubbock?

RT:

Yeah, and Susan Brumfield, she teaches over there—

AW:

Yeah, oh I know Susan

RT:

She is teaching me the Kodaly method, which is what Oak kind of—

AW:

Okay, spell Kodaly

RT:

K-o-d-a-l-y

AW:

Oh right, I've—the name for the composer

RT:

Mm-hm Zoltan Kodaly, he worked with Bela Bartok.

AW:

Yeah, yeah—do you happen to know—I just went to a great presentation on Bela Bartok—Mei Ling Jin?

RT:

Mm-hm.

AW:

Yeah, she's a doctoral student and she just did this wonderful presentation on Bartok.

RT:

Really?

AW:

Yeah.

RT:

She's amazing, she's really talented.

AW:

Yeah, one of the things that impressed me about her presentation was that Bartok's compositional style, the theory behind it was so—I mean it is modern, but there was something that connected with like—I teach songwriting in the school of music and we, you know we've only got a semester, we can't teach scoring, we can't teach it, so I—and most of them don't, are not musically trained to start with, so we talk about charting, but when we talk about charting, we talk about charting the Nashville system, so that if you start out in C, this happens a lot in fiddle tunes for instance, on the B part they'll actually change keys to usually the four or the five. Well in regular score, you would change the key, but in Nashville Chart if you change—so you go to the four, so you go to a G, well let's see, we're in C, so we go to an F, or let's say you go to the five, that'll be easier for me to think about it, that will be easier for me to think about it.

RT:

Yeah me too.

AW:

And then—so now the three chord in G is back to a C, and the five chord is a D, so you would write D when you're writing in Nashville

RT:

You'd write D5?

AW:

No, you'd write—it would be a two chord, because you're in C, so you don't go back—I mean you stay in the tonal center

RT:

Okay.

AW:

And I was listening to her talk about Bartok—he did the same thing. I mean in his thinking about—

RT:

He's, he was really ahead of his time

AW:

I'll just—

RT:

He was just great.

AW:

Very cool, so what do you intend to do with your music education?

RT:

I'm not sure yet

AW:

Good, it's too early to be.

RT:

Yeah, I have to keep reminding myself that. I've always wanted to be a high school choir director, but I really don't know because I've been working with the East Lubbock Promise neighborhood grant and working with first and second graders, and elementary school is looking like maybe a cool option because it trains, it embeds music in their minds before they can fight it, really, if they have a good teacher.

AW:

Yeah, and before they have an attitude. And plus everything important in life you learn before the second grade.

RT:
Yeah.

AW:
I think there's a lot to be said. I've got grandkids and their—and just watching them, which is, you have a different perspective as a grandparent. When they were—when your kids were that age, you were worried about them

RT:
Yeah [laugh] a little more responsible for them

AW:
Well cool, do you sing other than in choirs?

RT:
Yeah, I little bit. I've posted a few—not Facebook, YouTube videos.

AW:
Oh cool, how would I find them—just with your name?

RT:
Yeah, just on YouTube. I don't know, it's really more of a private thing for me because I don't like performing that much, so when I'm able to just record myself and then be very picky about which take I use.

AW:
So you like the recording studio?

RT:
I haven't used it; I just do it at home.

AW:
No, I mean recording music. I'm just the opposite, I don't mind performing but studio to me is work

RT:
It's intimidating and scary because it's all up to you, and you can't really—I don't know, it's weird. Both are stressful in very different ways.

AW:

Performing is not stressful to me

RT:

Oh, I hate it

AW:

I don't like performing if I'm not prepared but it's such a release to me to be able to do it, but I don't know

RT:

I just get way too anxious

AW:

Yeah, so we could talk about music all day long, but tell me about tattoos. How did—when did you get your first one?

RT:

My first one I got January of my eighteenth birthday, what year would that be? Would that be 2015?

AW:

Well, eighteenth would be—

RT:

That would be 2014 I guess

AW:

Thirteen, yeah

RT:

Fourteen.

AW:

Fourteen, yeah, you would have been eighteen in December, so January—

RT:

So January of 2014.

AW:

And why? What prompted you? Did you have a lot of friends with—

RT:

No, I went by myself actually.

AW:

Yeah, but I mean, did you have a lot of friends that had tattoos?

RT:

I had a few friends that had them, and a bunch that wanted them. I don't think I really had any friends that didn't want—didn't like tattoos

AW:

So there were not people saying, "Oh Rachel, what are you doing with your life?"

RT:

No, and I don't like to stay friends with people that kind of feel the need to impart their views on me so aggressively. So I got it in January, and it was one that I had thought about for a while, but I didn't think it was going to be my first one, and I went to this really crappy tattoo shop, thinking back now that I've been to good, really safe ones, I am horrified of myself, [laughs]

AW:

Well we have to learn somehow

RT:

Yeah

AW:

So how did you—what was the design and how did you arrive at it?

RT:

It is a plus and minus on my wrist

AW:

Oh, that's right under your bandage.

RT:

Mm-hm

AW:

Okay, that's a very simple tattoo

RT:

It is, and it confuses the hell out of people—I'm sorry, the heck—[laugh]

AW:

I like it. I like the simplicity of it

RT:

Thank you, me too, that's why I love it so much

AW:

And what are you—a mathematics major also?

RT:

No! I hate math. I respect it and I wish I could do it but I can't. It's actually kind of a Yin-Yang type of thing, just way more simplistic. It makes a little more sense to me personally. It's just the idea that there's good and bad in life, and you can't experience the good without the bad. You don't really know what you have unless you've experienced worse. So you learn to be a lot more thankful for when the good is happening

AW:

That's pretty deep philosophy for an eighteen year old.

RT:

Yeah, I thought so, I mean, I had to learn it.

AW:

Yeah, so it's a result of experiences?

RT:

Yeah, and this one does—it didn't really have a trigger for me. It was just at like nine o'clock, I was like "Okay, it's time. I just need to do it."

AW:

But you'd been thinking about it?

RT:

Yeah

AW:

Okay, so let me ask the next question. Why'd you been thinking about it? There's something had to come up before.

RT:

Well—okay that one is—I think the whole reason behind it was just ending high school. I think that summer after I realized a lot of things because my best friend all throughout high school died a week after graduation.

AW:

Oh man.

RT:

Yeah, and it was really sudden and just out of the blue kind of.

AW:

Yeah, not like car wreck, or—

RT:

It was medical; it was something with her heart

AW:

Oh gosh

RT:

Yeah, so she passed away a week after graduation, so that was just a really, really hard part of life for me, just dealing with that because it was—she was taken away right as everything was about to start.

AW:

Yeah, well and not only that, at eighteen we don't normally have much experience with that anyway.

RT:

Huh-uh.

AW:

So having to gain one's experience with someone close and very unexpected—not like your grandma being close but is eighty years old, so very—

RT:

And she was just an amazing person. There was never anything but good words about her with anyone you talk to, even before her death. I mean she was just a caring, loving, just amazing person. So it was really hard, seeing someone who did not deserve it in any sense. It was really hard. So I think that's where I kind of hit a growth spurt, I guess, just mentally.

AW:

And so you had to think about this plus and minus.

RT:

Mm-hmm

AW:

In a sense.

RT:

Yeah, it took a lot of—kind of evening out on my end. Okay there's this terrible thing that's happened but look at all this great stuff that you can do for her and in her honor.

AW:

Well, and that she may have had an impact on the great stuff in your life too.

RT:

Oh, she absolutely did.

AW:

So you said you didn't think it would be your first one, I mean that design, and that's curious to me too, that you would be thinking already of your second design when you didn't have a tattoo yet

RT:

Because I expected my first tattoo—because I'd always wanted them—I just kind of expected to have something a little grander, a little more showy.

AW:

Why had you always wanted them?

RT:

I think they're awesome. I think they—

AW:

Okay, in what way, what way?

RT:

They show a side of people that a lot people can't communicate.

AW:

Because they're visual, because they're permanent, and they're on your body

RT:

Yeah, I mean you're showing yourself . [laugh]

AW:

Yeah, how much more intimate can you get?

RT:

I mean, there are people who get tattoos to get tattoos, and those people have an entire different respect for—because you've got to be brave to tattoo a slice of pizza on your body. I know people that have done that. For me, I just—

AW:

I could tell you worse. [laugh]

RT:

Me too. [laugh]

AW:

Yeah.

RT:

Yeah, me too, I know some terrible tattoos, but "Good for you!" [Laugh] No, I just love them because they really can represent the person without them having to speak about it sometimes. And they're just so personal in a lot of cases

AW:

So it's, when you say, it represent it and it's a person—it's not really the idea of the art form of the tattoos, it's the act of the tattoo.

RT:

The act of the tattoo, and for me sometimes it's the design. You can tell a little bit about—well just the style of tattoo. If it's a water color, if it's a traditional tattoo, if it's Japanese art, you can kind of tell who the person is, in a way. So that's always really interesting to see what kind of art someone has

AW:

How would you describe the art of the tattoos that you've gotten? What—is there a genre or a camp into which they would fall?

RT:

I don't know. I really don't know that much about tattoo styles other than just the basic kind of five groups. I think mine are just simplistic, definitely kind of nature related. I have a nature theme, except for this one. [laugh]

AW:

I noticed ones on your arm, the large ones; they don't look simplistic to me. They were line drawings, pretty much, but that's, you know, that's not necessarily simple

RT:

No, and I think that's fair. I mean they're intricate, I think. I think they're not incredibly intricate, but to a fair degree.

AW:

Yeah

RT:

I don't know how to describe them

AW:

Well no, I was just curious if you had thought it through and said, "I want an impressionist tattoo"

RT:

No I mean I try and get them to be coercive and kind of match, I mean not match, but—

AW:

So that they're all of a piece

RT:

Yeah, so if I decide to build, I've got—see I'm thinking simplistic because you can kind of pair anything with these, I feel like. I don't know

AW:

I mean, when I saw yours, I didn't think simplistic, was not what hit my—what hit my mind was "There's a story behind these." That's what hit my mind because there weren't obvious little Christian fish, they weren't the obvious—well girls don't get a Sailor Jerry, but you know what I'm talking about, it wasn't—

RT:

Not a tribal tattoo, not—yeah

AW:

Yeah, none of that. Well cool. So after you got that one, what—how did you feel, what was your reaction?

RT:

I was really excited. I wanted to show everyone except my parents and my family.

AW:

I was going to ask about that

RT:

I still wear long sleeves just because that's the society we're in, kind of and especially living Lubbock. I get tired of getting dirty looks.

AW:

Really?

RT:

Yeah

AW:

Because there are lots of tattooed people in Lubbock

RT:

There are! But there's a specific subset of people that don't—that just really look down on people with tattoos. And it gets frustrating.

AW:

Well, you mentioned something earlier too, you said it's intimate.

RT:

Yeah

AW:

And so, one doesn't necessarily always want people to know

RT:

Yeah, and I mean my family, they mean so well, but they always ask me what they mean, and it's like "Well if I wanted you to know, I would tell you." [laugh] And it's that way with anybody; I get people at the coffee shop I work at always asking "Oh, do you really like math?" Or they mistake this for a cross. That happens a lot. People always mistake it for a cross. But it's like—that's—I guess for some people it's not that intimate, but this is a really personal thing and the story behind almost all of them are really personal. So it always catches me off guard

AW:

Are there stories that you can share?

RT:

Yeah, there are stories I'm happy to share. It's just when someone asks so abruptly. It's like, "Whoa! I'm not prepared to delve into that just yet." [laugh]

AW:

Yeah, well I think, you know the conversation we had before we started the recorder is that there are—people think that if you get a tattoo you're kind of a freak or an exhibitionist, and so therefore—

RT:

Just want attention or angry

AW:

—and that you're willing to—so yeah, because they have a different cultural perception, they get the signals wrong

RT:

Yeah

AW:

Well so, how long was it before you got a second one?

RT:

Maybe two months? [Laughs]. The next one I got was one that was the first very, very personal one. I mean, this one, it was more of just a reminder.

AW:

Oh, which is why you have it on your wrist?

RT:

Yeah.

AW:

Very cool.

RT:

I mean, I don't always catch it. But I'll catch it sometimes when I really need it. And it's like "You're right, you're right self, just calm down. Its fine, everything is going to be fine." But I have a tree on my side, it's like a fir.

AW:

Like a pine tree fir, conifer

RT:

Yeah, I have that covering some scars.

AW:

Ah, and is that—you wanted it to cover scars?

RT:

Yeah, they're—well I guess I should back up. In middle school, I started self-harming, so I would cut my thighs, kind of just above where shorts would lay, and that was kind of my release for three or four years, and it was terrible. I mean, some of the scars now are still pink. And it's like, "Oh my gosh, how could I do that to myself?" But at the time, that's all I knew because I didn't know how to process anything. Life's hard, growing up, [laugh]

AW:

Especially if—it's hard enough growing up if everything is right and if there's anything wrong, it's very hard.

RT:

Especially when everything is right but it feels wrong. I mean, just growing up with depression is killer because you're angry at everything for some people, but really everything is right there for you, but you just can't see that. So I started cutting, and ended up stopping—oh I guess it was longer than that—ended up stopping kind of end of junior year

AW:

How did you stop? How did you—how did that come—because that's a difficult thing to—did you have help or did you do it on your own?

RT:

It was kind of both.

AW:

I mean ultimately you have to do it on your own.

RT:

Yeah, that was something that took a long time for me to realize that nobody else could stop me except for me. No, my parents took me to a very good doctor's office in Dallas, and I am so grateful for them, they're amazing. So we went there and got started on antidepressants and tried to get me on the right track to stop, but I just wouldn't. I mean, I had all the help and I had all the resources, but I just didn't want to. So I really don't know what it was junior year that stopped me, but it was kind of a long process of "Okay, let's see if I can make it a week, let's see if I can make it a month," and eventually I just stopped. So when I kind of realized that I stopped, it was weird. It was like I had depended on this for three or four years.

AW:

Well, you know, some people don't give near enough credit for how important habit is in our lives. And if we get any kind of behavior that's habitual, if we're lucky we get a good behavior that's habitual, but we don't always—and sometimes a habit is far harder to change than something that is more significant.

RT:

Yeah, no it's hard. Yeah.

AW:

So two months after this, so early in the spring of—that's the year, that's only been a couple of year now since you—

RT:

Since I quit, yet, which felt like a really long time to me just because of how old I was.

AW:

Well, yeah, it does make a big difference when you're eighteen. So you're decision to do the tree was directly related to that.

RT:

Yeah, directly.

AW:

Why did you pick a fir?

RT:

I think they're the prettiest and the easiest to—do good details with, good detail work and line work.

AW:

Is it colored? Is it green?

RT:

Nope, it's just black

AW:

So when you went to—did you go to the same tattoo artist?

RT:

No. No I scheduled an appointment with—

AW:

So why didn't you like the first one?

RT:

He didn't care that much, he just wanted to get it over with

AW:

Yeah, didn't take any interest. So how did you find the second one?

RT:

The second one, I had followed on Instagram for a while, and she is in Lubbock, all of my tattoos are from Lubbock.

AW:

Oh really?

RT:

So I had followed her on Instagram for a while, and then I went in and said, "Can you do this tattoo for me? It will be super easy," so she drew one up for a few weeks later and then we did it.

AW:

So did the idea of the being over the scars, did that—how did she react to that? I'm just curious.

RT:

I think she had done a lot of tattoos with deep meaning.

AW:

For the same—yeah

RT:

I mean maybe not the same, but a lot of people with kind of tattoos the same route of mine have had self-harm issues in the past.

AW:

Really?

RT:

Yeah.

AW:

Really? So a lot of people that you know that have had tattoos, this is—I hadn't even thought about that as being a connected.

RT:

I would say most of them, for sure, had self-harm issues of the sort in the past.

AW:

Wow, that's interesting to think about. Very cool. Because in some ways, the physical idea of poking hole in your skin and putting ink in it is kind of connected, you know? And would also

mean that you, in some way or another, too are probably more inured to the idea of the pain that goes along with it.

RT:

Yeah, we were, I don't want to say used to it, but prepared for it

AW:

But you knew what to expect

RT:

I mean—I think tattoos hurt a little more [laughs], personally, but you also know that there is something greater in the end coming, and that it's going to be worth it and if you just sit still then they won't mess up, if you have somebody good at least. I don't know, I don't think I'd compare the pain, but I think there's definitely kind of a restorative effect, maybe?

AW:

Yeah, no, I've talked to one or two friends who—and it sounds kind of kinky actually—they looked forward to the painful part.

RT:

It's really strange, you do kind of look forward to the pain.

AW:

Not that they relished it, but it was like—the way I thought about it was the runner who runs until they're in pain and they say "Yes! That's—"

RT:

And then they did it.

AW:

Yeah, they did it, right.

RT:

They got it done.

AW:

It was not they like it so much as it was such a part of the process, they looked forward to that mark, no pun intended [laughs], but reaching that goal

RT:

Yeah, I've been trying to come up with an explanation for that forever and it's—

AW:

I don't know that you need to

RT:

I feel like until you get a few tattoos, that's a kind of feeling you don't really understand, I don't know, it's really strange, and I think it's different for a lot people that have tattoos.

AW:

So was it like, then as soon as you got that one, it was—

RT:

I was getting tattoos, yeah.

AW:

So how long, how long do you generally wait? I mean, or do you have enough of them that you know—

RT:

I've waited a little bit longer, kind of with each tattoo. After the tree—I think I got it in April—I got the one on my arm, the sunflower and the peony and the carnation.

AW:

You did them one at a time? Not all at once?

RT:

No, I got them all together. I got this full piece at once

AW:

Yeah, because that's a fairly, on your arm, that's fairly large.

RT:

It is large. Yeah, it took about two and a half hours.

AW:

Is the tree large?

RT:

No, it's probably only—[indicates length]

AW:

Oh, three or four inches, yeah.

RT:

Yeah, it's fairly small.

AW:

Because on a thigh you could do a pretty big tree, there's a lot of space.

RT:

I mean I kind of regret getting it smaller, I think it was because it was—tattoos were still a new thing to me and I was still kind of anxious about them. But now, looking back, I wish I would had gotten it bigger.

AW:

And a fir, you can't really enlarge it too much, you know it's kind of the size.

RT:

Nope, and especially since it's black. It would just be a spot of black, and I don't want that.

Yeah, so this one I got in April.

AW:

And is what—is there a story to that one?

RT:

Jordan, my friend that passed away. The sunflower was for her, and then really just everything else around it is just filler to make it pretty except the ladybug. The ladybug is kind of a memory of my childhood because I grew up collecting ladybugs, my mom threw me a ladybug themed birthday party, I mean, I loved them. I still love them

AW:

Oh cool, yeah, my daughter who is—let's see what year is this?—oh she just turned thirty-six, ladybugs were her thing too, and still are.

RT:

Yeah, they're awesome.

AW:

Can I see that one with the—?

RT:

Yeah.

AW:

Because I only saw it from a distance. Oh, I see the ladybug now

RT:

Yeah, yeah, I wanted it kind of far down

AW:

That's just one color but it's still—that's not simple at all

RT:

No, because you've got the shading and the all the leaves and detail on the leaves.

AW:

And it's nicely done and plus the—like a good tattoo artist, the skin becomes the second color.

RT:

Yeah, I've had a lot of people ask me if it's yellow [laughs], if it's colored in, but it's just the skintone.

AW:

So why are—did you get it on the inside of your arm instead of—

RT:

Because it's still a little easier to hide. [laugh]

AW:

So it's still the intimacy thing.

RT:

Yeah, because this one is incredibly personal to me just because it's for Jordan.

AW:

Yeah, because of your friend, yeah.

RT:

Yeah, and this one's a little harder to get in to, I mean not as hard as this one, for sure, the tree, but—because this one you just say, “Oh, my best friend died a week after graduation,” and they'll leave it at that, they don't want to ask anymore.

AW:

Yeah, right.

RT:

That's a little easier to just tell people if they really want to know, I don't know. [laughs]

AW:

Cool.

RT:

Yeah, and I think I just thought it would fit really well because this isn't an area—because one thing I am really conscious about when I get tattoos is what the skin is going to do as I age.

AW:

I know it, I was asked last week when I was doing the interview do I have any tattoos, and I said “No” because when I got of a mind a few years ago to get one, I realized, hey, I'm pretty old. And I don't have the same beautiful canvas that I had. I have a lot more of it! And the other thing is that the kind of—the thing I wanted to get tattooed first of all, the artist went “What?” And then secondly, I thought, What's it going to look like in ten years from now when I am a lot more old? So up to date I haven't come up with something that I'm, you know, because I am—

RT:

That seems worth it?

AW:

Well no, I'm just, I'm a lot further along, in age than you are, and so I'm a lot closer to the What's it going to look like all wrinkled up, you know, that kind of thing. So thinking about, that's interesting that as young as you are, you're already thinking about How's it going to be?

RT:

Well because people with tattoos get so much crap, for What's that going to look like when you're eighty? I don't know. I'm not there yet. It's like I can't figure out when that's going to be, what it's going to look like, but—

AW:

Well, none of these three that you've talked about are going to be substantially different.

RT:

Exactly, and I try to be really conscious of that all the time—every time I get a tattoo. “Okay, thigh skin probably won’t sag that much, inner bicep shouldn’t sag that much. I hope my wrist doesn’t sag, that would be weird.

AW:

That would be weird

RT:

Yeah, and then the back of the arm, that can, if I end gaining weight and being an old, fat lady, but I—

AW:

So you're next one after the arm was on the back of your—

RT:

Yeah, on the back of my arm above my elbow

AW:

And what is that one?

RT:

It is a crescent moon.

AW:

Oh, a crescent moon, I think I—maybe that's one of the first ones I got—Oh yeah, that's what—that's very nice

RT:

It's my first colored one. It's annoying because I can't ever get a good look at it. That is the most frustrating part of this one.

AW:

Yeah, in fact one of the people I interviewed said she was never going to get one on her back because what's the point? She couldn't enjoy it.

RT:

Exactly.

AW:

And I thought, Well I hadn't thought about that , but yeah, yeah.

RT:

Yeah, so that's my biggest qualm with this one, is that I can't see it.

AW:

Yeah.

RT:

And I can't see the detail.

AW:

Have a mirror—it's very nice. Why did you pick a crescent moon?

RT:

This is the one I haven't really figured out why I got it.

AW:

Well, I mean one thing I can say Rachel is that it look very cool. [laugh]

RT:

I think so too! [Laugh]

AW:

That's enough reason for me!

RT:

I mean if I think it's pretty, why not. I don't understand why people get so offended at other people's bodies [laugh] with tattoos. Why do you care that much?

AW:

Yeah.

RT:

So that's the most frustrating part about this one, is when I don't have an answer and people are like, Oh, that's stupid. It's like, Well it's stupid to you, but it's not stupid to me. I may not be able to tell you why, but—

AW:

Yeah, no, I was just curious as to if there was something that drove it—

RT:

Yes and no, I mean I had a really good friend in high school as well that this one is kind of related to and then kind of for Jordan as well because she would always—I mean this is so millennial talk—but we would always be the sun and crescent moon emoji, me and Jordan, so I was always the sun—

AW:

That's kind of—remember I'm from the sixties, you know? You're lucky that my generation invented sex, drugs, and rock and roll. The rest of you would have nothing without us. [laugh]

RT:

No, we wouldn't have anything; we wouldn't be having any fun.

AW:

No, but we, you know, having—we didn't have emojis but the idea of having, you know, your symbol is a crescent—

RT:

Kind of a sign with friends—

AW:

Oh yeah, we were—we're in there, so I get it.

RT:

Yes, yes, so that's kind of what that one is. It's kind of for two people, kind of not. It's, again, still trying to figure out what it means to me. But I know it has one.

AW:

Well, but now that's a very interesting thing, this—one person I talked to said that it was an exploration, that it wasn't like they sat down and said, "Okay, this is—here is the symbolism of this," and they had it put on. They talked about it more as an exploration, so that sounds like

that's what, you know, you don't necessarily have to know why you picked a crescent moon. One day, maybe you'll figure out, but so what? What if you don't?

RT:

It means something to me that I can't express and I think that's an even deeper connection with it than not—than knowing exactly what it's for because there's an internal drive to it, kind of on my subconscious level, and I think that's really beautiful, in a way.

AW:

Yeah, no, I think so, too. I mean, again what got me started on all this, my friend the musician, she never said, Well that one cause, an event in her life, caused the tattoo or vice versa but they kind of surfaced at the same time. Like they both were connected to something deeper. You know, and I thought that was very interesting. Well cool. And so, what others?

RT:

That's it.

AW:

That's it? That's plenty.

RT:

Yeah, that's plenty for me right now.

AW:

Okay, so what's the next one?

RT:

I don't know yet. I don't think there is a contender.

AW:

Yeah, so you're—it's not like you have a list like of Here are my favorite tattoos.

RT:

No, I mean eventually I'd like to get one for my parents. One that is kind of popular—not kind of—it's very popular right is getting signatures, getting like your parents signatures of like the end of a Happy Birthday card or something like that with the "I love you" and that's always been awesome to me. It's always seemed super cool but I don't know if I'd do it

AW:

Lloyd Maines who is the father of Natalie Maines, Lloyd and his wife Tina, when they started having grandchildren, went down and got their grandchildren's names tattooed on their back.

RT:

Oh, I love that.

AW:

And both of them said, You know, if we ever get divorced, we don't want to have each other's names—which of course they were making a joke, they've been married almost as long as I am. But I thought that was kind of a cool idea.

RT:

Yeah, that is really cool. I have one friend who has all of her nieces and nephews tattooed down her side. I love it; it's awesome

AW:

Yeah. So one other question that I think I haven't covered exactly is do you look at the tattoo yourself as a body modification or as the alternative would be that your body is just a place to put it? I mean, if you stop and think about some body modifications—

RT:

Yeah, I think of it more of a decoration, kind of. I can understand modification, but modification implies, to me, that something is being fixed. And I don't like that. Because there's nothing wrong—

AW:

To fix.

RT:

No. No, there's nothing to fix. It's just—

AW:

Yeah, yeah, no I think the same thing, but that's why I was curious as to whether—

RT:

Yeah, I don't know why modification has always bothered me so much, but I think it's just the kind of denotation that there's something wrong.

AW:

Well, I like to paint, and the things I like to paint are figures and landscapes and they're very much related, one to the other, and it always disturbed me when, you know, a group of us are hiring a model and some models say Oh I'd love to pose as soon as I loose fifteen pounds.

RT:

It's like why?

AW:

Yeah! Your reply is Why do you think I picked you? Because of who you are, not what you're going to be. [laugh]

RT:

Your body doesn't tell me who you are

AW:

Right. You're something else, and that's just part of it. It's like, would you go out and paint a landscape and say, Well, I'm going to paint that mountain, but I'm going to shave a little bit off the north face.

RT:

No, that's what it is. Yeah, you can't change it.

AW:

Exactly, so not modification, but decoration. Ornamentation.

RT:

Yeah, see and they don't even like that term. It's so hard to pinpoint what kind of tattoos like mine are, the ones with meanings, because the one's with—that people just go to get, kind of are more collectors. They just love tattoos, so they just get what looks cool to them.

AW:

Yeah, collectors, I like that

RT:

Yeah, so that seems to me like more decoration but—

AW:

Well and a signature would be, in some ways, more decoration too, you know, whereas yours, you've picked very specific things for very specific reasons at the time.

RT:

And that's one thing I like about tattoos is the meanings can change. I mean something else could happen and it's like, Oh, now I have a reason for this carnation. Cool, two in one.

AW:

I knew that I would need that one day.

RT:

I mean, nothing in your life is constant but tattoos are, which is kind of cool. Your tattoos and your body are constant, but they don't have to stay the same.

AW:

Well wait until you get older, let me warn you right now, it's not going to be quite so constant.
[laugh]

RT:

[laugh] Well yeah.

AW:

So have you thought about having any of these added to or altered?

RT:

I've thought about getting the one on my wrist kind of fixed, because it is a little crooked. There's—on the minus, there's a little blank, kind of blank spot because I mean this guy, he did it in a rush, he did not care, so—but people really close to me that I've talked to about it have said, "No, leave it the way it is" because it kind of adds to the meaning of the tattoo, just that the negative is imperfect

AW:

Yeah, and there's—and it's connected with the story

RT:

Yeah

AW:

Yeah, why you got it in the first place.

RT:

So, yeah.

AW:

What should I have asked you about that I haven't, or what topic should we cover that we haven't.

RT:

I don't know. I think that's really all of it about them honestly.

AW:

Well, it's not all of it, but maybe all we have at the moment

RT:

Yeah, no.

AW:

So if, like when you're working, slinging coffee and not on your hand, but—and you go “Oh! Here's something I didn't think about,” you let me know. I come in there about every day—well when I'm in town, and we'll add to the interview.

RT:

Okay. I mean, are you thinking like event wise, or—?

AW:

No, no, you'll think of Oh, here's another thing I wanted to talk about or that I thought about and this whole idea. No, I just mean anything. We can always add to—

RT:

Well, I mean, the plus and minus has kind of developed a second meaning—

AW:

Oh okay.

RT:

Dealing with depression, I had always kind of had friends that also had problems with depression just because like attracts like in that sense sometimes.

AW:

Well, and not only that, you—once you've had it, you see it in others and you recognize—

RT:

It's easy to spot, yeah. A lot of people can manifest depression in different ways. But usually you can tell once you've dealt with it. So with that, I have had lots of encounters with suicide.

AW:

Of your own?

RT:

What do you mean?

AW:

Of your own—

AW:

Of my own experience, yeah, so one of my good friends in high school committed suicide sophomore—no freshmen year. Was it freshmen or sophomore, I should know this. It was sophomore year. So he committed, just a few days after my dad's birthday, actually. It was terrifying; it was weird. So he committed a few days after my dad's birthday, and then I had, of course, my friends with self-harm issues. They had really difficult times. I had one friend, I was kind of talking to her, and then I realized something is wrong, like, she's going to do something crazy. So I drove over to her house, had me and I think two other friends ended up calling the police saying, "You have to go to her house. She's doing something terrible, we don't know what's happening," so that was a really close call for her.

AW:

So you were able to intervene in time

RT:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah, good.

RT:

Yeah, thankfully. I mean, because I wasn't sure at first. And then another friend said, "No, this is happening," so I mean, I sped over there as fast as I could and tried to help. By the time I got there, they were already there, thankfully, the EMS. So they took her away as I was kind of walking in, and it was just a relief, but just this rock because it's like "Well what if I hadn't? What if we didn't know?" So that one—I mean suicide has kind played a part into this one, a little bit.

AW:

So the minus, obviously, would be the suicide, right?

RT:

Yeah, well—

AW:

Maybe, maybe not?

RT:

I think that it just really plays in to the whole yin yang kind of aspect of it, just because there will never be a reason good enough to do that. So dealing with my own depression, that has been just an amazing reminder to myself, just it will never be worth it. There will never be one thing that wrong in my life that should cause me to want to go that far because there's always going to be an upside. There's always something to be thankful for.

AW:

Which is the plus.

RT:

Yeah, so that has definitely played an aspect into them for sure.

AW:

And what about your tree? Has it changed some?

RT:

No, that is just really just more growth. I mean the tree, obviously, growth, a new life.

AW:

Well, and it's an evergreen too, it's not a deciduous, it's not going to—

RT:

It's tall and strong and—

AW:

And you're tall and strong

RT:

Yeah, maybe not strong—not physically.

AW:

Yeah, well, you give the appearance of being strong

RT:

Well that's good. [laugh]

AW:

And I don't mean, like Mr. Clean strong. I mean like just a strong person.

RT:

Well that's good, I appreciate that. Thank you, because I don't feel strong all the time. I think I'm a pretty strong person when I get kind of into it, but yeah, the tree is more about growth and just going up.

AW:

But it's not changed any, like the minus and the plus sign?

RT:

No, I think because it's on the scars, it has just an immediate association for me, and especially with where it is, physically it has an immediate—yeah.

AW:

Now let me ask this, does it cover up or incorporate?

RT:

Incorporates.

AW:

Cool.

RT:

Yeah, because the trunk of the tree fades down into the skin. So it goes kind of from black to gray to just skin tone, so it's kind of growth from the scar. The scars, I've realized, kind of look like a mountain top if you look at it kind of abstractly

AW:

So it's not just put over the top of the scars?

RT:

No, the trunk kind of is on the scars.

AW:

Oh, even cooler. Yeah, we really need to get a picture of that, because that's very cool because when you first said it, I thought, Well—

RT:

Like the trunks would cover it?

AW:

Yeah, like the limbs would just cover up, now this—very cool

RT:

Yeah, that was one thing I was very—I was like, “Yoshi, this needs to be right here, I need the trunk from the scars.”

AW:

Growing from—oh yeah, now that's a very—that put's a whole new cast on it.

RT:

Doesn't it?

AW:

Yeah, yeah, so and the sunflower and the moon are still kind of what they are.

RT:

Yeah, I think the moon is going to change meaning, I mean just because I am not entirely conscious of why I wanted it, and why I got it, except for that tiny little—

AW:

And it comes around every month. The moon is new every month.

RT:

Yeah, so maybe all of them are a sign for regrowth or just something like that.

AW:

Well your Celtic background

RT:

Scot Irish, yeah

AW:

Yeah, just like me, the triple goddess, the white goddess was a very important part of that and the moon was—that's her symbol.

RT:

Maybe I need to go visit Scotland and Ireland.

AW:

You should, you would love it.

RT:

I'm sure I would

AW:

But you could read Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* and it's a dense and sometimes maddening book, but the notion of the triple goddess and how the world went to hell in a hand basket when the Greeks replaced the feminine godhead with their panoply of male gods, that's kind of—it's one of the basics of the book. But one of the other basic is that words, and especially even letters and words, and all symbols, have a life of their own, and so that in Graves' idea—and this is what I think a lot of as a poet myself—is that even when you utter a letter that's in a word, it's a little invocation, it's a little prayer that invokes the meaning and the history of that letter.

RT:

Absolutely, yeah.

AW:

You know, and so that's very cool. So when you use a symbol, if it's a symbol of yours, not that you borrow—like you put a native American symbol because you're not—that not who you are, but if you put something that's part of you, then that's an invocation. When you have that moon there, it's literally invoking.

RT:

Maybe it was just the Scot-Irish gods speaking down on me.

AW:

That's it. Yeah well, you know Graves would say that those things have their own power and you use them and there they are.

RT:

They kind of lead you in a way.

AW:

Cool. Well, all right, I am—because we could also talk about this all day. I'm going to say thank you, and then we'll take it up.

RT:

Okay

AW:

And then I'll tell you a story about a song of yours, so thanks again Rachel

RT:

Thank you.

AW:

So I had a—whoops, I'm still talking here—

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