

## Interview with Eugene Vent

Jade: I have some questions that Brian's investigative reporting class have come up with. One of the main questions is why we should believe that you're innocent? Twelve jury members convicted you after hearing all the evidence, so why should we believe you?

Eugene: Because I think the evidence all played out in the state's favor and the judge. I think the jury, they sat there and watched the whole thing, they found us guilty because the evidence was all stacked up against us. Like the state witnesses and the boot print, I think all of that was kind of messed up. They could have left some of that out because it was inadmissible, well it should have been inadmissible. I think all the evidence they had was not circumstantial, it was fabricated, like with Bradshaw and all the state testimony. We just got railroaded and I think it's clear that some injustice happened.

Jade: Do you believe that there was any discrimination towards Alaska natives involved with their decision?

Eugene: Somewhat, I mean, maybe because when the DA O'Brien said that all natives stick together, maybe they thought that all natives do stick together. Maybe a little bit.

Jade: Some questions about that night, did you ever ride in Marvin's car that night?

Eugene: No. The last time I rode in his car was like on Wednesday or something of that previous week. He gave me a ride from the courthouse to Fred Meyers. I had a minor consuming and me and my mom had to go to court that morning, and he gave me a ride to Fred Meyers. I got a little pager, an AT&T wireless. That's the last time I rode in his car.

Jade: Do you remember seeing Marvin, George, or Kevin that night?

Eugene: I seen Kevin, I was with Kevin. And I seen George at the Eagles Hall. I don't remember seeing Marvin though. I didn't see him cause we knew each other, but I remember seeing George and I was with Kevin most of the evening.

Jade: What was it like at the Eagles Hall, at the reception? What was going on, what do you remember?

Eugene: It was like a dance, you know, lots of people. Lots of people I knew, cause you know they were from the same town that my dad used to be from, Kyka. I knew a lot of people there. It was like a big dance, big gathering, like a reception. A bunch of people, you know, having fun.

Jade: Were you dealing any drugs at the time?

Eugene: No, I wasn't. I was just trying to go to school.

Jade: Yeah, you weren't selling any marijuana?



Eugene: No. I was using, but I wasn't selling it.

Jade: About the party at Kevin Bradley's house, some interviews were done with Joey Shank and some other people that the class talked to. That alibi they believe is not a solid one because everyone was kind of confused about the times, about what was going on at what time. It seemed that there would have been enough time, after you had gotten back from the party.... It was before the beating of John Hartman. So can you think of any other alibis, that you have, that were with you at that time when you got back from the party?

Eugene: When I came back from the party, like came back to Fairbanks?

Jade: Yeah.

Eugene: Uh, just Dana, did you get to interview Dana?

Jade: I'm not sure if they've interviewed Dana.

Eugene: Well when I got to the Eagles, it was me, Dana Eden, and uh, who else was it? I think that's it, they dropped us off. Oh Shara, Shara David, she was with us. And Allen Sisto, but I think he went home, or Shawna, there was a bunch of us. They dropped us off at the Eagles Hall, and then they went and dropped Kevin off at Conan's house, then I guess they went back to Kevin's, or Joey had to return the car cause it was Kevin Bradley's mom's. But yeah there was me, Dana, Shawna, Shara, Allen, at the Eagles Hall. Like before that, or after that?

Jade: After that.

Eugene: Then I was with, I got kind of drunk so I vaguely remember stuff. I remember seeing my Aunt Margaret, she told me, "Go home, go home." And I was like, "I'm trying," then I tried to get a ride from this girl named Agnes, Agnes David.

Jade: What's your Aunt Margaret's last name?

Eugene: Williams. Yeah, Margaret Williams Beatus. She goes by Margaret Williams or Margaret Beatus. I tried to get a ride home from Agnes, but she wasn't trying to give me a ride home. Then I ended up at that party at the Alaska Motor Inn, somehow. I was kinda drunk, I was really drunk.

Jade: Why was everybody looking for Conan that night? Was he dealing drugs at the time?

Eugene: I don't think so, I don't think he was. He might have been, I didn't really kick it with him that much because he was going to Howard Luke with us, then he stopped going. I was looking for him because Dana was looking for him and they were going together at the same time, around that time, yeah.

Jade: Do you have any history, or did you know John Hartman?

Eugene: No, I didn't. I never knew him.

Jade: Had you heard about him?

Eugene: No, it was like two different, we didn't...

Jade: Different crowds?

Eugene: Yeah, different crowds, plus he was younger, yeah I'd never heard of him.

Jade: What about his brothers?

Eugene: No, I never knew them.

Jade: And Grimes?

Eugene: I knew his sister. Adrian, yeah, I went to school with her at Howard Luke. Yeah, I never knew Grimes though.

Jade: And what about Dale Depue?

Eugene: No. Never knew him either.

Jade: Okay, and Chris Stone?

Eugene: No. Yeah, all of them I didn't know about until after my detention here.

Jade: Now that you're in jail, maybe there's some things that you didn't want to talk about before, that maybe you'd like to talk about now, since you're here and since nothing could really hurt you at this point? Is there anything you want to bring up, or talk about?

Eugene: Yeah, Chris Stone. I'm convinced that he knows something, or seen something. And he ain't trying to come up off it, he ain't trying to say nothing because he figures you know, we're in jail, and he figures it won't do nothing to help us, but it will. But I think his conscious will get to him after, because I'm pretty sure he's seen something that night.

Jade: Yeah, that's what George was saying too.

Eugene: I'm kind of positive that he's seen something, but he ain't trying to say nothing.

Jade: Yeah, we're trying to get a hold of him so we can talk to him.

Eugene: Yeah, I feel kind of bad about that, but he was young, and you know he was probably scared. We were all young, but he was real young. But I'm sure he'll come out, the truth will come out.

Jade: Have you heard anything, while being in jail, through other inmates? Have you heard anything about other possible suspects, or what might have gone on that night?



Eugene: I heard something things like um, like there was some black guys, but it was just somebody in Fairbanks talking, like I knew someone that they knew, it was a female and she was saying that people were bragging about it, like on the south side. But, I haven't really heard nothing, that was in like '98, right after we came in. I never really heard nothing about it afterwards though.

Jade: How is Arizona incarceration different from in Alaska?

Eugene: It's more like a pre-trial setting. Like in Seward, in Alaska, we get to go outside all the time, we get movements, there's a big baseball field. We got to go back and forth from the gym, which was in a separate building. Here, it just like they got hallways. We've got to go from one hallway to another, and the outside, it's all like fenced in and it's kind of bunched up so everybody's bunched up together. But other than that, it's not too bad I guess. The time flies.

Jade: Time flies here, how? What do you do?

Eugene: I go to the law library, cause I've got like a post convictional defense right now. Yeah so I'm waiting on that right now. I just got a new attorney, Reger, and he's pretty interested in it. I'm waiting on a judge. But other than that, I just go play basketball, go work out, lift weights.

Jade: Are you working or anything?

Eugene: Yeah, I got like a graveyard shift, janitor. Yeah so I get to stay up all night and sleep all morning. Yeah, but then I go read, play video games, cause they let us get video games out here.

Jade: That's cool, that's what he [CO] was telling me. So you go to the law library and you've been studying up on some things?

Eugene: Yeah, a lot of things. There are a lot of things I know now, that I didn't know back then that could have been helpful.

Jade: How does it feel to be doing time for a crime that you didn't commit?

Eugene: It's messed up, you know, it hurts. Cause I know my family out there, they need me. My mom used to be doing real bad, now she's doing real good though. She's got the kids and when I came in they were just little babies and stuff, but now when I see them and I talk to them, they always ask me, "When are you coming home?" It's kind of hard you know, but it's really messed up. We're getting stronger, you know I'm really strong through all this. I'm keeping my composure pretty good through all of this, me and George. It's hard though.

Jade: Are you bitter, at all?

Eugene: Yeah, a little bit. Mostly because I know Ring, you know he, I think he mostly used this to move up the ladder. But, I guess he was just doing his job. But, he didn't



have to do what he did, cause I think he took advantage of me. Like when he interviewed me and stuff, I think he took advantage of me.

Jade: Okay, I do have a few questions about that too, about your interview. If you were tortured into confessing, then why did you confess to something that you didn't do?

Eugene: I don't know, it was just a mental state, I guess, I can't really explain it. He broke me down, I just confessed I guess. It was like a mental state, I wasn't in my right mind then. I can't really explain it, I just kind of wanted the interview to get over, so I kind of told him what he wanted to hear. And he stopped. Once I told him what he wanted to hear, "okay I'll see you again," and he left. It was like, I was drunk you know, and I was tired, and he just took advantage of me and forced me into a corner. And you know, that's what happened.

Jade: Did you think about the consequences of that at the time?

Eugene: No, I was more wrapped up in the moment type of thing. He was laying out a bunch of stuff, and I didn't know how to handle it. You know I was weak minded, I wasn't thinking about anything besides getting him to stop interviewing me.

Jade: So why didn't you say that you were physically interrogated when you were at the trial?

Eugene: What do you mean?

Jade: In the trial, you didn't tell the jury, you didn't state that you were physically interrogated.

Eugene: I told them about the mental breakdown, cause he used some psychological stuff, I know he did. Cause I look back on it now, and I'm like, oh he used some tactics.

Jade: Like the foot in the blood?

Eugene: Yeah, all that, yeah. All the little fake evidence. I don't know, at the time I guess, I don't know, there's a lot of things I could have done different, I should have, but...

Jade: What was your life like before all this happened? What were you up to?

Eugene: I was going to high school, playing basketball.

Jade: It was your senior year?

Eugene: Yeah. Having fun, partying, but I spend time with my family a lot you know. The twins, cause you know I got a little twin brother and sister, I was always babysitting them.

Jade: How old were they at the time?



Eugene: They had just turned a year old at the time, in August '97. It was a lot of good times, it was fun.

Jade: Who were you hanging out with at the time, who were your close friends?

Eugene: At the time? Kevin Pease, Harley, Alan Sisto, Eddie Kutuck, Conan, we were pretty close. George, we didn't really kick it that much that year, but in like '95 we were pretty tight. Marvin used to come by and we'd play basketball, go watch the basketball team at the University, but mostly just Conan, Alan, Kevin, we were a little tight knit, Harley.

Jade: And who in your crowd of friends was dealing drugs at the time?

Eugene: I don't think anybody was really dealing drugs. We were all using, you know smoking pot, doing a little bit of coke I guess. But I don't think anybody was really selling, everyone was mostly using.

Jade: Who were you getting your drugs from?

Eugene: Um, it was, like different people. I used to just get the weed from different people, nobody really, but my mom used to have her friends come over. And I used to talk to them, get it from them. But, nobody really, it was mostly different people. I was mostly drinking alcohol though, I wasn't really buying all kinds of drugs, I was drinking alcohol.

Jade: Did you have any goals or dreams at that time, for your future after high school, or just graduating from high school?

Eugene: Well, I had my eyes set on going somewhere to play basketball. My mom always told me, "You can make it, you can make it to the next level." So I used to play basketball all the time. Maybe that, or going to work cause all my family on my dad's side, they own this little uh, kind of like a trading post down on the Yukon River. And my aunts, they all wanted me to go down there and work for them, go run the place, and I was thinking about that too. But mostly I was just thinking about graduating from high school. Trying to make it, you know cause my mom would have been happy.

Jade: And what's your life like now, here in prison?

Eugene: It's messed up. I mean, I'm kind of used to it now after doing all this time. But it goes by so fast, I mean the days just disappear into years, it's already almost 2004, then 2005 and it's messed up. But we make time go by as easy as we can, you know, don't get into trouble, try not to get into trouble. Try not to cause any more drama for us. It's kind of hard. I don't talk to a lot of people, like all of my family because I'm way down here.

Jade: Are you in contact with any of your family though?

Eugene: Yeah, my mom. I talk to my grandma and my little brother and sisters, my other little sister Deedee. They get a hold of me through the mail and I talk to them on the



phone like once a week, twice a week. And they come down to see me, my mom came down to see me in February. They had a Black History banquet and they came down. We had a good time, we eat and got pictures, it was cool.

Jade: What do you miss most about being free?

Eugene: Oh man, I don't know, family, love, family when we're together and all the good times we had, all the holidays, Christmas time, Thanksgiving. Just all the family, you know, all the good times that we had. Feeling that love, you know what I mean? And here I still feel it, but you know, they're so far away. I get to talk to them on the phone, but a lot of people I was real close with, I don't hear from them or I don't talk to them.

Jade: So you miss friends too.

Eugene: Yeah.

Jade: Do you believe that you'll be in prison for your whole sentence?

Eugene: No, no I don't think so. I think that somehow or sometime down the road, hopefully soon, that this will all get taken care of. The truth's got to come out sometime. And it's right there man, I can see it, it's right there, but it's slow.

Jade: Brian told me to tell you that he is working as hard as he can to try to figure out what really happened and he's not going to give up on it, so he wanted me to tell you that too.

Eugene: Yeah, I know it's going to be a long process, I know that, but I just hope it ain't too long. Where we've got to do, you know 20's and 30's in here.

Jade: Is there anything else that you want to talk about?

Eugene: Umm, not really.

Jade: Have you been talking to Marvin much since he got here?

Eugene: Yeah, whenever I see him. He stays in most of the time. I go out everyday and sometimes he doesn't go out.

Jade: Go out and play basketball?

Eugene: Yeah, but I talk to him, yeah. It's good to see him. Yeah me and George are roommates, so I get to see him all the time.

Jade: Yeah, so you guys talk a lot I'm sure. Do you ever talk about what happened, about your situation, do you try to rehash and remember what happened that night?

Eugene: Yeah, I remember seeing him down at the Eagles Hall with his girlfriend, and they looked pretty drunk, and I was pretty drunk. Now I always ask him, "What happened, what were you doing?" and stuff like that. Cause when we first came in, you



know it was all like, "What'd you do, what'd you do," all four of us were like, "What'd you do?" Yeah, we talk about it. A lot of things at our trial, we talk about the trials and how they went kind of south, like how we got kind of railroaded. The judge in our case, its like he didn't even, when Bill Murphy was doing motions like to go farther into the interrogation on Bradley and Mueller and all them, the judge wasn't having it. It was kind of one sided. So we talk about all that, like the trials, and how bad they went. They went good too though, I mean at my trial you know, we had the momentum throughout most of the trial and then it just went south.

Jade: What would you change about the trials, like for your next coming trial, what would you like to do to improve it?

Eugene: Umm, have things more planned out. Going in we had things planned out, but a lot of stuff was happening, like with Joey Shank, you know, he was saying that he didn't want to testify and so they had to bring him into custody and bring him down. And that was kind of messed up. But to have everything ready, have everybody down there, not have people come in late, acting like they don't want to testify when they're a really big part of the case. I was kinda scared when they were saying all that, but he came. I was even thinking it might have helped to keep the trial in Fairbanks. Because down there man, it was like a whole courtroom and there was only like me and my mom, my aunt, and my little cousin, and everything else was empty you know. The jury was probably like, man they only have a few people down here.

Jade: Where in Fairbanks, all of your friends and family would have been there.

Eugene: Yeah, like supporting us and when the jury sees that, they would have been like, man they've got a lot of support. Down there, it was like empty.

Jade: Do you want to go on the stand and testify in your next trial?

Eugene: Yeah, I will. It was a lot at the time too, it was a lot of pressure. I didn't like it really, but I will. It was hard up there man getting grilled by O'Brien, cause he's tough, he's tough. And then everybody was looking at me and it was like...

Jade: Scary, I'm sure.

Eugene: Yeah, but yeah I'll go up there and testify though. It was hard man. It was a long trial, it was stressful. And then even when the jury was deliberating, that took like six days and that was tough too.

Jade: How did they feel, when they made the verdict?

Eugene: Man, it mostly just stung me. I couldn't really believe it, and then I was trying to believe it and it was hard, it stung. Didn't really shock me all at once, until I got back to Cook Inlet, it hurt. Then I had to go down there and Kevin and Marvin were waiting for theirs, so I go into the little waiting room and they were like, "What happened, what happened?" And I got to tell them, and they were just like, "Oh man."

Jade: Put them in a bad mood too, I'm sure.



Eugene: Yeah, it was tough. Especially just waiting for the whole time, cause I'd go back to Cook Inlet, then back to the courthouse and wait all day. Then nothing, so go back and forth, a lot of time to think and it was too much time. And, I don't know, let's see what else I'd change about the trials. There's a lot of stuff that could have happened, that didn't, that could have helped us.

Jade: Like what?

Eugene: Like um, Richard Leo, the expert in confessions and why some people might confess to something they didn't do. They didn't let him speak, and then um, letting Bill go into, like Bradshaw and them, why they testified. To bring it out so it would benefit them. Yeah, that kind of hurt. And then at the end, O'Brien was like kicking a dummy, did you hear about that? He was kicking a dummy at the end of the trial in front of the jury. Yeah, he was like kicking a dummy and talking about us, it was messed up. And the jury was like, "Ohhhh." What else? Oh yeah, one of the jury members started crying and Bill tried to get a, what do you call it, a mistrial, and the judge denied it and he let the juror keep going. It was a female juror, she started crying when they were showing pictures and stuff. Yeah, that right there pretty much. It'd be kind of tough to change it though I guess. But, if I got another chance then I'd look into all that.

Jade: Try to improve on it.

Eugene: Yeah, it's a long process right now. It's tough, but I always tell myself, you know, we'll get another chance.

Jade: Yeah, that's good.

Eugene: We don't try to be negative, and think that we're going to be in here for a long time. It looks that way, but I don't think it will happen that way though. Yeah, George, I always try to tell George, cause he's always like, "Man, I got too much time."

Jade: Yeah, talking with him, you seem a lot more optimistic than he does.

Eugene: Yeah, we just took so many blows in the last six years you know, one day we'll have a good argument, and then it'll get shot down. It's been that way the whole time. And then when we got our indictments dismissed, I thought we were going home. I told my mom, "I'm coming home," I gave all my stuff away, all my little prison stuff like my radio and all my sweats and my shoes, I gave them all away to another inmate right, I was like, "I'm going home." And then they didn't lower the bail so we had to stay in jail for a whole year, until the appeal court came back into the state's favor and got our charges back. That was tough.

Jade: It's been up and down?

Eugene: It's been up and down. You know, we have a good argument and then we get shot down, so it kind of hurts. It kind of bruises our little confidence we have, but we're still confident that we'll get out. I know Marvin is, Marvin is really. When I talk to him he's like, "Yeah, we'll get out, keep waiting, patience." So I try to.



Jade: He seems to have a lot of faith.

Eugene: Yeah, Marvin's a good guy. He didn't want to come down here either. I saw him, I was like, cause I heard he was coming down. In Seward, you know he had a TV and Playstation.

Jade: Yeah, I know his family visited him a lot there too.

Eugene: Yeah, and then I wrote him letters when he was in Seward and he was like, "I'm not coming down, I'm not coming down." And I was like, "Come down, it's alright down here." And he finally made it and I guess Kevin's supposed to be coming down too. But I know he doesn't want to either. Alaska systems are way better. Alaska prisons, Seward, Spring Creek, way better than this place. But, this place ain't so bad though. A lot of, a lot of what do call it, not really a lot of tension, but it's a lot different, like the mentality from Alaska prisons than down here. Like people, getting along with each other, it's just a lot different. But yeah, it's not too bad here.

Jade: Are you mostly with Alaskans?

Eugene: Yeah, they got the Hawaiians over on the other side. We don't go to be with them, unless we're in the kitchen. Cause they work together in the kitchen. But when we're in the yard they got fences. Like they got one yard, a big yard with a basketball court and a fence around it, they got the Hawaiians in there. And they've got the Alaskans over here. Then they've got INS, marshals, like immigration, they've got them down there too. But yeah, we're mostly around Alaskans. It's not really easy time, but the time flies by so fast that it's just like, one day is gone, then the next day. That makes it easier I guess. But, it's still hard when you think about it. Whenever I talk to my mom, you know, she's always like, "Hang in there." And I tell her it's hard and she understands. Then when I talk to the little ones, they're like, when I saw them when they came down here, they were like, "Can you come home with us?" And I was like, "No." They said, "When are you coming home?" And I'm like, "I'll be home, don't worry." They're always asking and I can't really tell them everything cause they don't really understand. My sister does, Dea, she's 13, she's always like, "I can't wait till you come home, why won't they let you come home, it's messed up you're in there."

Jade: So what's the first thing you would do once you got home?

Eugene: I don't know, I'd just see my family, my Grandma cause you know she wants to see me, she's getting old. I'd go spend time with her. And a lot of my family that I didn't really know, on my dad's side, I didn't really know all of them until my dad passed away, so we got kind of close, then I came in you know. I'd go spend time with them. Yeah, spend time with family mostly. I'd probably just go for a long ride in the car or something and just drive, listen to some music or something and drive and drive probably. Clear my mind and try to forget about all this stuff.

Jade: Do you get to listen to any music here?



Eugene: Yeah, we get to have CD players and I listen to a lot of stuff, you know. A lot of like classic rock and some hip-hop, R&B, you know slow stuff. Then we get to watch TV.

Jade: Do you have a Playstation?

Eugene: Not yet, we're working on getting one. I'm not sure if I really want to get one because if I get one, I might go back to court. Cause this court thing, we're waiting on a judge right now to answer it, like a 35-1, post [?] relief, it's for ineffective assistance. Cause I just found out, Reger told me that when I was doing my appeal courts, one of my appeal lawyers like lost his mind, you know. He had a breakdown, I didn't know that, but he neglected a lot of his clients, so it's a pardon, so. Cause Bill Murphy, the appeal points, he had like 30 something appeal points, real good ones. And then when they did it, Maureen and McClain, they didn't do a good job, they only put two or three in there and my appeal got shot down real quick in the appeal courts, so hopefully that'll work out, ineffective assistance. But yeah, hopefully that'll work out. So hopefully I'll go back up there, but if not, we're working on getting a TV too. Cause it's kind of expensive and we've got to, you know buy the food, and we only get paid so much a month from working, like 60 cents an hour. Yeah, I only get like 4 hours a day so I get like \$3 a day. So we've got to save money.

Jade: It's slow going.

Eugene: Yeah, and I don't like asking my family for money no more cause I know they're doing their own things you know, they need their own stuff. My mom, I used to ask her for money all the time, but she's got the little ones, they're getting older. She has bills, so I don't like asking her for money. So I just got to save my money, you know. I've got friends that I know that have Playstations, we got like a Madden football game, we've got a season going right now, there's about six of us.

Jade: So you can go to like a common area where other people have them?

Eugene: Yeah, have like a mod right, there's 20 cells- 10 on the bottom and 10 on top, upstairs and downstairs, and then they got two people in every cell and we can go over there and kick it, play games, watch TV, so yeah. But sometimes they guards are like, you can't be in here, only the people that live in the room can be there, but we play video games and stuff. It's fun. A lot of competition. That makes the time a lot easier too, keep my mind off everything, you know try to.

Jade: Is there anything else about the night in October that you remember, that you didn't remember before? Anything, like now that you've had this time to kinda try to remember things?

Eugene: Not really. There was a point like after the Eagles Hall where I kind of went into a little blackout. Then I came out of it at the Alaska Motor Inn, you know probably like five minutes, ten minutes, but that was like at 3:00, that was after the dance closed. Then I came to at the party and I was there with Brian Joseph and all them and Harley. Then that's when Mike Buccus said that I pulled a gun on him, which was totally untrue. But yeah, then nothing else really.