



Album

45

Lost and Found

The Search for Leonard Meltsner

We had talked for years about doing a story arc in which Eugene searched for his missing father—and even planned to include it in the Novacom saga. It didn't work out there, but we did use some of the ideas we had plotted.

Our first plan was to adapt the *Adventures in Odyssey* video game (*Treasure of the Incas*) into a radio episode. The villain from the video game (Carlton Freedman) would be the man who held Eugene's parents as hostages. We soon decided, however, that it would be more interesting to create an entirely new villain for the radio show. Working out this villain's plan, his back story with Leonard and Thelma Meltsner, and Eugene's foster-parent situation gave us fodder for many future shows.

The first episode in the Leonard saga was "Prisoners of Fear." The germ of the idea for this show appeared as an article called "The Plane Truth" in *Clubhouse* magazine. (See next page.) We wanted to tell several stories about what happened to Eugene and Katrina while they were missing from *Odyssey*. We even had Katrina make reference to their time in Africa in "For Better or for Worse" (album 44). With "Prisoners of Fear," we decided to combine their African adventure with the beginning of the Leonard story (see album cover art).

The climax that we first wrote to "Prisoners of Fear" featured Eugene and villager Yosef figuring out how to stop a secret dam from releasing the flood, while Katrina tried to convince the corrupt village leader, Gobir, to reveal the truth. Another idea was to have Katrina practicing her shooting skills early in the show and then put those skills to use by shooting the machine gears to stop the release of water from the dam. In the end, we decided that the scene between Gobir and his son, Kwame, was emotionally dramatic enough without the unnecessary shooting.

Episode Information

572: **Odyssey Sings!**

Original Air Date: 7/09/05

Writers: Marshal Younger & John Fornof

Sound Designer: Jonathan Crowe

Theme: Fame

Summary: When *America Sings!* comes to Odyssey, many hopeful singers line up to audition.

573: **Back to Abnormal**

Original Air Date: 10/1/05

Writer: Kathy Buchanan

Sound Designer: Glenn Montjoy

Theme: Dealing with change

Summary: Finding a job becomes Eugene's goal after learning he's not needed at Campbell College. Wooton Bassett tries to help Grady McKay deal with changes at home when his mom starts a new job.

574, 575, 576: **Prisoners of Fear, I, II, and III**

Original Air Dates: 10/8/05, 10/15/05, & 10/22/05

Writer: Marshal Younger

Sound Designer: Gap Digital

Scripture: Psalm 130:7

Theme: Serving others

Summary: Eugene and Katrina Meltsner take a trip to visit a remote African tribe that believes its village is under a curse.

577: **The Business of Busyness**

Original Air Date: 10/29/05

Writers: John Fornof & Kathy Buchanan

Sound Designer: Glenn Montjoy

Scripture: Luke 10:38-42

Theme: Being too busy

Summary: The Washingtons can't find time for family devotions, and Eugene's new service organization has him running in circles!

578: **All-Star Witness**

Original Air Date: 11/05/05

Writer: Nathan Hoobler

Sound Designer: Bob Luttrell

Scripture: Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15

Themes: Communication, forgiveness

Summary: When Coach Tom Riley doesn't choose Ashley Jenkins for the local All-Star softball game, her father, former Mayor Jenkins, files a lawsuit.

579: **Always**

Original Air Date: 11/19/05

Writers: John Fornof & Marshal Younger

Sound Designer: Allen Hurley

Scripture: Song of Solomon 8:6

Theme: Love of a family

Summary: Aubrey Shepard prepares to leave home for college, but her little sister, Bethany, doesn't want her to go.

580: **Tales of a Small-Town Thug**

Original Air Date: 12/3/05

Writer: Marshal Younger

Sound Designer: Nathan Jones

Scripture: Proverbs 14:15

Theme: Responding to criticism

Summary: Everyone at Whit's End is in an uproar when a former Bones of Rath gang member writes a scathing book about Odyssey.

581: **A Christmas Conundrum**

Original Air Date: 12/10/05

Writer: Kathy Buchanan

Sound Designer: Glenn Montjoy

Theme: Giving

Summary: Eugene, Tom, Connie, and Whit get confused over who's giving which Christmas present to whom.

582: **Silent Night**

Original Air Date: 12/17/05

Writer: John Fornof

Sound Designer: Jonathan Crowe

Scripture: Philippians 2:4

Theme: Selflessness

Summary: At home alone on Christmas Eve, Whit remembers holidays past that were difficult—but still made for treasured family memories.

583: **The Champ of the Camp**

Original Air Date: 1/28/06

Writers: Kathy Buchanan & Nathan Hoobler

Sound Designer: Bob Luttrell

Theme: Winning isn't everything

Summary: Connie narrates the story of her last year at summer camp and how she got stuck in the midst of the annual prank war at Camp Jumonville.



Clubhouse magazine, May 2005, the article that started Eugene's search for his father.



Behind the Scenes: Odyssey Sings!

The *Odyssey* team was given the task of explaining the musical album *Eugene Sings!* in the context of *Adventures in Odyssey*. Why would Eugene be doing a musical album? To explain the team created a spoof of the popular *American Idol* (2002–present) television program. (For more information about *Eugene Sings!*, see the chapter titled “Music.”)



Tamika Washington belts out a tune in “Odyssey Sings!”

Cut Scenes

Our first draft of “Odyssey Sings!” featured Whit hosting the *America Sings!* show with Cryin’ Bryan Dern as one of the judges. After being insulted by Bryan, Connie retaliated by telling everyone that he used his grandmother’s money to support his gambling addiction. Connie eventually made it up to Bryan, giving us a lesson that “sometimes an apology isn’t enough.” However, this concept proved a little unwieldy and complicated as we spent too much time on plot twists and not enough on the original purpose of the show. In the end, we simplified the story and focused on the truly fun part of the show—the songs!

Sound Bites with Jonathan Crowe

To give “Odyssey Sings!” a different musical approach, I asked John Campbell to come up with the basic instrumentation for the show. Then I took his tracks and added a number of acoustic instruments, which were played



Connie with Cryin’ Bryan Dern and Shakespeare in “Odyssey Sings!”

by four talented musicians here at Focus. They played guitar, acoustic bass, dobro, spoons, and various other instruments such as the mouth harp and accordion.

I’m glad these guys are consummate professionals. They didn’t even get too upset with me when I had them come in several times to rerecord their parts. We wanted to be sure to get the best sound possible.

My Take: John Fornof

Marshal asked me to write the songs for “Odyssey Sings!”—which was a lot of fun. I had just bought a new Palm Pilot with a voice recorder in it, and whenever a song would pop into my head, I’d grab the thing and sing into it. Sometimes, I’d be walking down the street, singing “My Ode to Macaroni.” I’d get a few stares from passersby who had little appreciation for art.

I’m definitely not a singer, and so it was very nerve-racking to come in and play my recordings for the whole team. Marshal told me later that the show rested on those songs. If the songs didn’t work, the show would be cancelled. Yikes.

When my funny little ditties rang out in the room, I cringed. But the team was gracious and encouraging. They loved all the songs, and we used each one in the final program!

Have You Ever Been to Odyssey?

lyrics and music by Will Ryan

*Have you ever been to Odyssey?
A pretty nice place to be.
Have you ever been to Odyssey? Well,
you’ll have to come along with me.
Other places are okay and some are fine.
But as far as hometowns go . . .
well, Odyssey is mine.
Have you ever been to Odyssey? Winter,
spring, or summer, or fall?
Have you ever been to Odyssey?
You’ll really have to give a call.
If you think you’d like to meet
a brand-new friend
Simply go and grab a seat right
down at Whit’s End.*

*Oh, it’s the place to be.
I’m sure you will agree.
Have you ever been to Odyssey?
Where good old Mr. Whittaker’s
inventing something new.
While Connie and Eugene (ahem)
are working on it, too.
Bernard and Tom are in a dither,
Joanne and Jack in a canoe.
While Harlow’s in a quandary
hoping to find a clue.*

—Words and music by Will Ryan.
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My Take: Nathan Hoobler

“All Star Witness” began with the idea of Eugene being Bernard Walton’s lawyer for a frivolous lawsuit. Eventually, the idea evolved into a lawsuit against Tom Riley over his coaching techniques. Eugene assisted Tom in his defense. The lawsuit was based on several actual court cases. I noticed that Ashley’s last name was Jenkins and that we had a former mayor of Odyssey named Jenkins. I thought it would be fun to tie the two together. However, I now wish we hadn’t, since the connection doesn’t make sense, all things considered.

BTS: Always

Though many of our *Odyssey* kids simply fade away from the show without explanation or fanfare, we sometimes give them a send-off. “Always” was an example, as we allowed Aubrey Shepard to head off to college, but used the event to explore the emotions of the family she was leaving behind.



BTS: Silent Night

“Silent Night” included a number of appearances by characters who hadn’t been heard on the show in a long time. It was the first reappearance of Jana Whittaker-Dowd, Whit’s daughter, and the first reappearance of Jenny, Whit’s wife, since “The Mortal Coil” (album 16). Jerry Whittaker was last heard in “Memories of Jerry” (album 27), though played by a different actor. Maude Walton, heard in the background on Bernard’s phone call, last appeared in “Bad Luck” (album 8). This time, however, Maude wasn’t played by host Chris Anthony but by *Odyssey* coordinator Chris McDonald.

A Novel Idea by Connie Kendall

At a writer’s meeting in late 2004, we discussed Eugene’s return and how it would impact *Odyssey*. We wanted to do several character-based arcs—stories that would give our characters plenty of room to be themselves and

wouldn’t necessarily involve action-adventure and cliffhangers. The idea for Connie attempting to write a book came out of this meeting and became the center of a few future episodes. Connie’s struggles with her book also allowed us the chance to dramatize many of our own difficulties and frustrations as writers.

BTS: Tales of a Small-Town Thug

Mandy Straussberg acted very un-Mandy-like in “Tales of a Small-Town Thug.” We later find out the reason in “Now More Than Ever” (album 46).

Cut Scenes

A short subplot about Tom’s five-legged dog, Cheddar, was cut from “A Christmas Conundrum.” Don’t ask.

Sound Bites with Jonathan Crowe

I worked for a long time on “Silent Night” to find the right sound to get into Whit’s flashbacks. I tried a variety of *whooshes* and *drones*. In the end, I asked fellow sound designer Nate Jones to play various synthesized sounds on his electric guitar. Then I affected and filtered them as needed.

The episode featured several lengthy scenes where Whit was by himself at home. We wanted to fill these with some vocal effects from Paul Herlinger to indicate what he was doing in each scene. It took a long time to record because we had to think about the exact vocal sounds that would indicate when he was opening the microwave, stoking the fire, or whatever. For days after that, Paul would tell us that he was practicing his vocal Foley.

Actor Dave Madden (voice of Bernard) had moved to Florida by the time this episode

was produced. We recorded his voice over the phone. So when he says, "I'm in Florida, Whit," he really is.

My Take: John Forno

The idea for "Silent Night" came from an *Odyssey* fan. He suggested a show where Whit felt lonely on Christmas. I thought it made perfect sense, since Whit would give and give to everyone else but never take time for himself. As with most shows, I learned a lot by writing "Silent Night." A lot of Whit's thoughts and feelings were taken from my own life reflecting on my boys having grown up.

BTS: The Champ of the Camp

In a flashback in "The Champ of the Camp," teenage Connie mentions that her rival, Goggles, is a geek, and most girls probably tell him to get lost and then throw mud on him. In the episode "The Trouble with Girls" (*The Lost Episodes*) Eugene tells young Jimmy Barclay he received this very same type of treatment.

Sound Bites

In "The Champ of the Camp," camp counselor Mr. Sherman was played by Alfonso Freeman, son of actor Morgan Freeman.

"Eugene Sings!" Art Contest Gallery

In conjunction with the episode "Odyssey Sings!" and the *Eugene Sings!* album release, the official Web site sponsored an art contest. Here are four of the winners.



Danielle O., age 14



Emily J., age 11, Gabriola, British Columbia



Charity M., age 18, Laurel, Maryland



Katherine N., age 14, Apex, North Carolina

Sound Bites

The scripted ending for “The Champ of the Camp” featured Eugene teasing Connie for having a crush on him at camp. In the studio, Will Ryan (Eugene) suggested a different ending in which Eugene runs off to call Whit to tell him the story. The chemistry between actors Katie Leigh and Will Ryan was so good in this alternate take that we used it in the final show.

My Take: Nathan Hoobler

Writer Kathy Buchanan came up with the idea of Eugene and Connie meeting up at camp years ago. Many of the incidents in

“The Champ of the Camp” came from our own experiences at camp, though one of our struggles was coming up with fun and original pranks that kids wouldn’t try to emulate themselves.

The name of the camp—Jumonville—is taken from the camp I visited during my summers growing up in western Pennsylvania. Interestingly enough, Paul McCusker also grew up in that part of the country and “Connie Goes to Camp” was inspired in part by his visit to the real-life Jumonville.

Get ready for another surprise. Guess what the name of the town down the hill from the real-life Camp Jumonville is? Connellsville.



A Hand Up: The Creation of Eugene's Organization

After Eugene returned to Odyssey with Katrina, we wanted to find something new for him to do. Our first thought was to have him become a teacher at Odyssey Middle School. But we agreed that setting a lot of episodes in a classroom with Eugene wouldn't be enticing for many of our listeners. So we decided that, in light of his inadvertent participation in the Novacom debacle, Eugene would feel motivated to give back to the community—and the idea for his charitable organization was born.

Originally named “General Inquiries,” the organization was later called “Stone Soup,” named after an old story about a vagabond who unites a town by encouraging the town folk to share. We wrote an entire episode where Eugene subtly re-enacted the ancient fable while building a playground.

The name “Stone Soup” didn't ring true for Eugene, so we went with “Little Things,” to emphasize that Eugene would be doing smaller tasks that would help others reach their ministry potential. After even more discussion, we settled on “PLEASE,” which stood for Philanthropic Loving Enterprises of Altruistic Services for Everyone—which seemed like a *very* Eugene-like name. Or so we *thought* until we realized that having Eugene trying to be handyman (painting houses, walking dogs, etc.) didn't make sense for his character. It was funny for a single episode, but not more than that. Finally, the organization became *Manus Sursum*,

from the Latin phrase meaning “Hand Up.” Since most of our listeners weren't fluent in Latin, the organization became simply “hand up.” Eugene was inspired to create the organization when he gave Grady and Sam McKay a “hand up” by fixing some appliances around their home.



Actor Mary Mouser, voice of Samantha McKay, with sound designer Nathan Jones