

EVERYTHING YOU THINK YOU KNOW ABOUT MIKE TYSON IS

Mike Tyson: The first stage of my life was just a whole bunch of selfishness. Just a whole bunch of gifts to myself and people who didn't necessarily deserve it. Now I'm 44, and I realize that my whole life is just a fucking waste. "Greatest man on the planet"? I wasn't half the man I thought I was. So if there's a big plan now, it's just to give—it's selflessness, caring for the people who deserve it. Because I think I'm a pig. I have this uncanny ability to look at myself in the mirror and say, "This is a pig. You are a fucking piece of shit."

Details: *Sounds painful.*

Mike Tyson: No, not at all. Objectively, I'm a pig. That's why it's very difficult for me when people are offering me all that adulation and love. I just feel dirty. These people want to hug me, they want to touch me, and I'm feeling like, "Get your fucking hands off me." I feel that energy of theirs, and it's just filth and murder. It's not that they're *bad* people necessarily; it's just that they did something bad, and you can feel it on them. I have to go and wash up before I touch my own kids. And after I lost my 4-year-old daughter? All these people reached out and I realized: I just want to be of service to people. I need to help. I need to have something, finally, that I can offer people in this world.

Details: *Do you think that might be helping those who have gone through a similar tragedy of losing a child?*

Mike Tyson: I have such mixed feelings about that. Sometimes it feels like I've lost faith, and I get that incredibly insignificant feeling of thinking that other people should be dead and she should be the one still here. And then I see that I just gotta boot up and suit up and come to work and make the situation better somehow. Try to be a man—not *the* man, just *a* fucking man—and show up. I knew I had to show up for my daughter. And it's so ironic: I arranged this lavish funeral, and the doctor bills were astronomical. It came to, what, \$200,000 all told? And I don't have a nickel to my name. It was all paid for by donations, and then I'm thinking, I'm not worthy of all that.

Details: *How's money now?*

Mike Tyson: I don't know. I guess it's all good. I live in a nice house, exclusive neighborhood, but it's all just insignificant stuff. My life is just different. I don't even recognize myself sometimes. I went back to Brownsville with my reality-TV-show crew, they're doing a segment about my childhood racing pigeons, and Brownsville's all upscale now. They got surveillance cameras, buildings that were abandoned cost, like, a million now, and I'm thinking, My life must've been a lie, 'cause there's nothing there that looks like my childhood. This white woman come up, and I'm thinking, Wow. When I was a kid, she would've been robbed and raped and left for dead. This is a real strange scenario, and I just wanted to cry. I'm like, "Who am I? Where's my heritage?"

Details: *How did it feel when you realized the life you'd built from the ground up from age 12 had come to an end? Was it a revelation? A relief?*

Mike Tyson: It's just a simple question of humility. If you're not humble, life will visit humbleness upon you. I'm a really damaged human being, and it's still such a struggle, but I'm going to fight to the end this time.

Details: *And that's when you realized you were a fighter?*

Mike Tyson: That's when I realized I was a ham. Everybody was, like, hollering, clapping. It felt good to win, to get more shots in, but it felt really good that everybody was clapping for me. And I lived with that applause all those years, and now I can't take it no more. All I usually feel is just that bad energy of theirs. I just know it's not good for me and that I don't want to live that way again. I want to transcend.

Details: *Transcend to what?*

Mike Tyson: I don't know. I only know I'm not supposed to be here. I'm supposed to be in prison for murder. I'm supposed to be dead by now, have AIDS or something.

Details: *Never thought you'd make it to 40?*

Mike Tyson: I never thought I'd make it to 25, man. People just gotta love each other, treat each other better. I don't know about the Zen stuff to transcend to. I still got that fire in my heart, and it just burns, man. I don't want to have any misconceptions here. I'm not a pacifist and never will be. I still get angry, and I still scream. I can talk about humility, but I'm not humble. I mean, if you say, "I'm humble," you've just contradicted yourself. But I'm trying to be, man, I'm trying so hard.

Details: *And that struggle has been especially public. You once said it made you feel naked.*

Mike Tyson: No doubt whatsoever. My life is like a tornado, a fucking hurricane. It's like I'm a naked tornado that comes through a city and there's just so much wreckage. There's so much destruction, and when it's finally over, it's like the morning after and you're sober and...*what the fuck happened here?*

Details: *Have you ever considered medication?*

Mike Tyson: I've been that route. I think I was the most medicated boxer in the history of the sport. If I was going to medicate, I'd just smoke a joint. Nah, it's *trauma* I'm dealing with. And it's this fucking ego of mine.

Details: *Your opponents always seemed to weaken before the opening bell. Proud fighters in peak condition—Trevor Berbick, Michael Spinks, Donovan "Razor" Ruddock, Frank Bruno, even Larry Holmes—just seemed to get smaller the moment they made eye contact with you. It was like witchcraft.*

Mike Tyson: No doubt about it. Intimidation is crucial to the art of warfare, and it's totally legit. It's allowed to be used. It must be used.

Details: *But how did you do it? All these guys had spent lifetimes thriving on that same intimidation.*

Mike Tyson: I just had to believe it. And if I didn't, I just had to make myself believe it.

Details: *Believe what?*

Mike Tyson: That I had to kill this man. And you can't fake it, not even one tenth of one hundredth percent. You have to believe it so strongly that you can impose that belief, that will, on him. And that's another realm altogether.

Details: *Because every fighter has to have that same will, that same need, that same drive . . . to impose their will on another man.*

Mike Tyson: Every fighter in the history of fighting. But none like me. And, believe me, I'm not being immodest. None like me. I studied every fighter in history, at my manager's house up in Catskill, 'cause he had all the greatest fights on film, he had every last one of them, and I watched them all, every night. They were all so vicious, man. Jake LaMotta, Henry Armstrong, Carmen Basilio. Sugar Ray—God, he was vicious. But Jack Dempsey more than anyone. All these guys let you know they wanted to murder you, and they'd take shots from you, over and over and over, get beat senseless, just so they could get theirs in. Sugar Ray maybe most of all. But Jack Dempsey? He wanted to maim you. He didn't want you dead. He wanted you to suffer. He wanted to shatter your eye socket, destroy your cheeks, your chinbone. That's what I learned from Mr. Dempsey, and I believe I learned it well.

Details: *And what did you learn from Mr. Ali?*

Mike Tyson: Believe it or not, with all that poetry and the butterflies, what I learned from Ali was meanness. He was the meanest fighter of all time. He'd be in there with Foreman, hardest puncher of all time, he'd be in there with Frazier, another hardest puncher, and he'd be taking it, boom, getting pounded, and then he'd turn, when it was his time, and you'd look at that face, and he's screaming. [*Does an Ali impression*] "I'm not [*Throws a punch*] scared [*Throws a punch*] of you, you fucking faggot. [*Throws two punches*] You fucking punk. I'm fucking God, and worship me. I'm the greatest. [*Throws two punches*] You're a little fucking boy, cocksucker." Nobody at ringside reported it, but nobody shit-talked like Ali.

Details: *Can you take all the lessons you learned from boxing—tenacity, intimidation, high pain thresholds—and apply them to the next stage of your life?*

Mike Tyson: Definitely, but it takes rationality. And it takes balance. I can't live in the world like I lived in the ring, always at some extreme, always looking for that edge that'll tip the balance. If I were to say something to you now that would offend you, I could tell myself, I penetrated his defenses—I put a dent in him. So what? So I have another feather in my cap?

Details: *So if boxing is the art of taking rage and terror and disciplining them into assets, So what is discipline?*

Mike Tyson: Discipline is doing what you hate to do, but nonetheless doing it like you love it.

Details: *You learned discipline...*

Mike Tyson: From Cus D'Amato.

Details: *Is there someone like Cus in your life now?*

Mike Tyson: I'm not a guru follower. I have to be my own Cus. I have to be the man who takes the boy under his wing, protects him, knows him better than himself. I'm still that little boy; I just have to learn how to protect him a little better.

Details: *You have to learn to love him?*

Mike Tyson: He has to learn to love himself.

Details: *Why do you think you lost your first bout, to James "Buster" Douglas in 1990?*

Mike Tyson: I just stopped caring. I just stopped feeling Cus inside me. All those headlines. I didn't care about boxing. And when Douglas got up after I knocked him down and came back at me—I didn't have it in me. I didn't have it in me when I knocked him down, either. It's just...more power to him, he got up. Nobody else had.

Details: *And what about the infamous Holyfield fight?*

Mike Tyson: Man, I didn't care about boxing anymore. I was wrong to do that—all wrong—all crazy to do that. But that wasn't about boxing. I just wanted to fucking maim him. I had no business being in that ring. A year out of prison, 16 months out of prison, already with two belts to defend? I had no business with those belts. I was already done. They put you, a writer, in prison, for three years, hands tied behind your back. Then they put you up against some hack, and you outwrite him, and they give you two awards. And then I put you up against a Nobel Prize winner? Absurd.

Details: *So what were you thinking when you bit him?*

Mike Tyson: I wasn't thinking. I wasn't training for that fight. I was on fucking drugs, thinking I was a god. I should've been home with my family, man. My kids.

Details: *You once said, "I don't aim for a guy's head. I aim to put it through his head." Bruce Lee also taught his students: Aim at a target just behind their head.*

Mike Tyson: Yeah, and I would never disrespect Bruce, but it wasn't his fighting that really got to me. There was too much showmanship there, even in his real fights. It's his philosophy—the best ever, off the hook: "You must be like water. The most insignificant substance but the strongest and most destructive force on the planet." You have to be both weak and strong. Strong alone is not enough. You cannot reign if you have not served. If you have not served a king, how can you ever know what it's like to demand that kind of obeying? That's water-deep. That's the ocean. Everything he did was extreme. He wasn't no nice guy, and people don't like extremists. But he was a perfectionist.

Details: *And so are you.*

Mike Tyson: I'm addicted to perfection. Problem with my life is I was always also addicted to chaos. Perfect chaos.

Details: *What's the story behind your Mao tattoo?*

Mike Tyson: I read his book when I was in prison, man. Down in the hole. They thought they were punishing me in that little room—no toilet, no bed. I got myself put down there so I could read Chairman Mao and not have to deal with all that prison bullshit. The thing that stuck from his *Quotations* book: "No investigation, no right to speak." If you aren't going to look deep, just shut up.

Details: *And the one of Che Guevara?*

Mike Tyson: You know, physically, he was just a pussy. He walked into this room, people would think he's a wimp. He can't kick no one's ass. But his intensity, his tenacity. Wow, it's like: What kind of guy is this? He was a doctor, man. He was a wimp. And then he's a killer? A revolutionary. He got turned out! But they got him. They got him good. And when that guy came to shoot him? The guy respected him, and he hesitated. Che said, "You gonna shoot me? C'mon, shoot me, you fucking pussy."

Details: *How long were you out of prison before you actually felt free?*

Mike Tyson: Never. Not till now, really. This is the freest I ever felt in my life. And I'm still not free. But it's an awesome feeling. I got no money. I'm not a glamour guy anymore. I got friends who've got money, so it looks like I've got money, but I don't. All the money I had, forget it. I never had anything, never had a stitch on me that felt like freedom. But to have somebody by your side, win, lose, or draw. My wife's lived with me in places I wouldn't take a shit in. I wouldn't be a prostitute in some of the places my wife and I have slept.

Details: *It goes back to the extremes, doesn't it? You wake up every day either God or a guttersnipe.*

Mike Tyson: *[Bursts out laughing]* That's me. God or guttersnipe.

Details: *Is that how you'll go to the grave?*

Mike Tyson: Sure hope not. I want to go to my grave with respect.