

“It’s a funny story,” my boss tells me, recalling the bump in his nose. I managed to corner him in his office one day after work, cleverly not clocking out of work so I got paid for the interview. Eugene O’Toole doesn’t sign my paychecks, but he does tell me what to do.

In a strange way, I look up Geno, as he prefers to be called. Not in a literal way, because he’s only five two, but he’s a good man. After a year and a half of working together I’ve suffered through countless stories about “the track,” where he used to work. Everyone else has learned to zone out when he starts with, “when I worked at the track,” but I keep listening in case it’s one I haven’t heard.

When we sat down I asked once again about his nose. It’s a story I’ve heard before, several times, actually, but it’s a good one. It’s not really all that funny, but he tells it in such a way to make you laugh.

“It was summer,” he said, “and my brother and I were wrestling. We wrestled a lot, but usually it didn’t get out of hand. One time, it did.” Brothers and wrestling, I mused to myself, why do they do that?

“It began as it normally did”, he began, “a small argument that escalated into a wrestling match. I had him pinned down, trying to make him say uncle. He said no, flipped me over, forcing me to call him uncle.”

Geno tells me they were in their late teens, and I wonder why boys at that age insist on wrestling. “It’s about power,” he tells me, “seeing who is stronger, the older brother or the younger brother.”

“I was the younger brother,” he explains. “And because I was the younger brother, I was supposed to be the weaker one. I was forced to prove myself.”

He explains to me that his father wasn't the best and was rarely, if ever, around.

“I hate the old man,” he said, his expression becoming somber. “He turned his back on me a long time ago.”

The interview dipped, so I redirected back to the fight. “I was on the bottom, but I wasn't about to back down, so I flipped back around. And when I did, his elbow came up real hard, right here,” he said, motioning to his nose.

His nose has a bump about midway down, from where it was reconstructed. “it was a long process,” he tells me, a smile growing on his face. “They put you under, so you don't choke on your own blood.”

“They told me beforehand that they were taking out my nasal bone and realigning it.” He was smiling widely now, as the apex on the story approached. “I have to tell you, that freaked me out. I have this image of the doctor taking out my nose, and putting it on the table. Then he takes off his shoe,” he said, removing his shoe, and pounds on his imaginary nose,” and hammering it and hammering it until its back together.”

He put his shoe back on and sat down. “It's really nice isn't it?” he asked, gesturing to his now bumpy nose. “That'll teach you not to wrestle with people bigger than you.”

I haven't known Geno that long, but I've learned a lot from him. He may complain about his job more than most, but he's good man, a devoted husband and a loving father. And sometimes, he has something meaningful to say.

As I left, he said to me, “There was this time at the track...”