

## Podcast 111 : What's The Worst That Can Happen?

{INTRO:

*KIRA: To be fair, since you've last been down here, they've opened like 67 more takeaways, about 455 Turkish barbers, and three more tattoo places. So I'm pretty sure the entire of Kirkby is a money laundering operation. There is nowhere in Kirkby that you can spend your money apart from Morrison's that isn't a money laundering business front. I'm pretty sure of it these days. It's why I don't tend to buy anything in Kirkby, that and the fact I have no need for a Turkish barber}*

{intro music - jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

*Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a podcast looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Enby with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the 'why's behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}*

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello :)

Ugh.

So this is going to be one of those podcasts that's basically me doing catch-up. I have so many plans for future episodes, several of which will involve me, shock, talking to other people in a guest-spot format, not as a contribution, you know, like many other podcasts work. I'm not intending for this to be a full-on interview-style podcast, but honestly, the dislike I have for the pre-admin organisation is possibly outweighed by the ease of recording and the lack of need to write the bloody thing,

However, doing podcast with other people relies on, well, Other People. I've not managed to tie any of them down (no!) to a recording session time yet, but working on that. Or as much as an introvert can. We'll get there!

In addition, the podcast I was going to do is taking longer to write than I expected, because I seem to be going into a lot of detail. No bad thing, it'll make for a better episode, but also, delays.

I must be a bit open and honest here though; for the last couple of months I've been a bit off-kilter. The original crash was caused because my bestie moved out, and while I like being on my own, I guess I've not been used to it so not having someone round to ground me hasn't been good for me. November was mostly okay, and I'll talk about that in a moment, there was a period over Christmas where I literally only spoke an average of about one sentence a day, mostly to people serving me in shops. You would have thought that recording a podcast would be a great antidote to that sense of vocal isolation. Apparently not.

But let's go back a little. November was quite a busy month for me. It started with a trip to London to go to the Traverse Creator Awards and the World Travel Market, passed through the annual dark beer festival at the Victoria in Halifax where me and Peter once again may have sampled beer that was far too strong for us, and then I had two successive weekends away with good friends.

I spoke about World Travel Market in my last episode, but suffice to say while it was interesting to walk around and see who'd turned up and how, it's not that productive. The questions I had about future trips were answered but not in any way that helped, and I'm still not quite in a position to leverage my skills to create something wonderful, so it was a lot of walking around for nothing much.

I was staying in a Travelodge hotel in Belvedere, which despite its sounding name is way out beyond Abbey Wood, Zone 5, so very much In The Burbs. The hotel itself is on a commercial park with a large Lidl, which came in very useful when I turned up at the hotel and I couldn't check in because the receptionist was in, like, Mordor or some shit. And no, there was no bell to attract attention. It almost got to the stage where I'd've had to call the Travelodge helpline. Almost. But not quite. After waiting for 15 minutes or so I went to Lidl to pick

up food (I was going to have to do that anyway) on my return I only had to wait another 3 or 4 before he turned up.

It was still cheaper than staying closer to central London, and/or in a more prestigious hotel. Even the Premier Inns were pushing £200/night, for reasons that still escape me as there is no justification for a Premier Inn to be £200/night. There's barely a justification for a Premier Inn to be £100/night to be honest. Yes, even in London, and, and, the last Premier Inn I stayed in in London was at Paddington Railway Station and was £70/night. At least on the Sunday night, the night of the Traverse Creator Awards. The reason I was in Belvedere in the first place was because that same hotel was £150 the next day and £200/night on the Tuesday. The Travelodge was £138 for two nights in total. Because it's in Belvedere. And a Travelodge.

The Creator Awards themselves were strangely almost an exact repeat of the previous year, in that it was in the same venue, I started off slow, spent some time leeched onto one of the few people in the travel blogger community I know and like, and then as the night progressed, I ended up talking to the same two people I spoke to the previous year (and I found out who they were this time) while Laura snogged the same bloke she did last time. We were even in the same hotel as last time. Well, I was. But that's none of my business.

I do need to have a think about what I need to do to be nominated next time. I'm sure I have a couple of ideas that are 'winners' for next time, but I think I need to write them in a way that appeals to the award panel. That's on my list to talk about with V, but whether that will ever happen, that's another story. One of us has been diagnosed with ADHD. But only one. I'd say that was a subtweet but V never listens to my episodes.

I stayed in London until the Wednesday; the organisation I work for in my day job has an office there and I think now I've been to it more often than the office I used to be registered at, in South Wales. I did the same a couple of weeks later actually, either side of a short weekend trip to Freiburg in Germany, with Laura, obviously.

The trip was partly to visit a Christmas Market, but mainly because Laura, who for an ex-flatmate I met up with an awful lot in November, had a semester there in her college years and kind of fell in love with the place. And a Christmas market seemed like a reasonable place to go, given it required no days booked off from work, and it's much more aesthetic, and considerably cheaper, than Christmas markets in the UK. And when I say cheaper, a bratwurst, the standard Christmas Market sausage, costs about £11 in the London markets, and maybe less than half that in the Freiburg ones. The deposit on the gluhwein glasses was £2.50 so procrastination meant I was comfortable coming back with two of them, different designs, one nice but corporate, the other a bit more cheesy. I think we went on the Saturday it opened; weirdly it was closed on the Sunday, not because it was Germany and lots of things close on a Sunday, but specifically for some reason closed on \*that\* Sunday, but that was fine, it's a nice city to just wander and take pics of. Accidentally, I booked one night in a hotel that was a block away from where Laura's dorm was, so that was quite a nice touch. Video from that trip appeared last month on my YouTube Shorts channel.

Even back in London we met up before I left, again on the Wednesday, and we took trips to fabulous Asian restaurants and London Christmas markets. This time though I was overnighting in rooms above pubs – before the Freiburg trip I was in one near Euston station, while after it I was in Bermondsey in a really nice place run by what I assume are a gay male couple and which played French pop music 1950-1995 over the speakers. It is quite weird to be sitting drinking beer on your phone and suddenly be confronted with the sounds of late '70s French Disco.

Laura wasn't the only person I hung out and drank beer with over the last couple of months though. In mid-November I took a trip back to Nottinghamshire, to meet up with Tracey, one of the few people I know originally through real life rather than online. We had an afternoon and long evening in Nottingham, involving beer and chats. She's someone I keep wanting to get onto this pod, because she's done quite a lot of travelling herself over the years, but I've not managed to arrange it yet. Hopefully one day because I think she'll have a few interesting stories.

Nottingham has changed quite a bit since I last went there, which, I think the last time was pre-Pandemic because the times I've met up with Tracey and the Unicorn Squad since, it's been in Ashfield or Mansfield. When I was last there they were starting to demolish the old Broadmarsh shopping centre and bus station, which, let's be honest, had always been quite unaesthetic; it's now a series of landscaped green spaces and

footpaths, which definitely opens out the area, and it's a lovely space to wander in the cool night holding hands with someone who means a lot to you, though it's a little weird to have somewhere so central to be so empty. They haven't finished redeveloping it yet though so there's still a lot of construction barriers around; like everything else in this country, things take a long time to finish. Like Manchester Town Hall, which I see every time I go to my office, and like, I don't know, a jigsaw puzzle, every trip reveals more. Scheduled for opening in Spring 2027, which is, uhm, only about two years later than planned. Apparently due to the state of the construction industry and suppliers going bust, the sort of thing I should know if I paid more than a residual attention to the boring bits of my job.

As for my old hometown, I did pop back for the purpose of video and imminently there'll be a couple of Shorts on my YouTube channel showing you the delights of the town centre of Kirkby-in-Ashfield. Possibly they've even already gone live; I don't run my own YouTube channel. Everywhere is interesting but barrels are being scraped, not gonna lie, I wasn't a video person when I lived there, so I think this might be the first time I've ever recorded there. I'd say it's improved, but that's a bit like saying Sharknado 6 was better than Sharknado 5. Improvements funded with European Union money. Almost 80% of the population voted Brexit. Voted for a career politician in a racist party. I'd say there are other improvements that could be made but honestly, I don't want to be accused of a war crime. To give you some idea on what sort of a place this is, even the Wetherspoons closed. It was bought by someone else and you honestly can't tell the difference, a 'cheap knock-off own-brand Wetherspoons', if you will. It'd take a lot to get me to move back there; someone would have to mean a hell of a lot to me for that. That was a subtweet.

They've also done stuff in Sutton-in-Ashfield, including similar landscaping on the market square and removing what was Europe's largest sundial, which does mean one of my earliest blog posts needs a bit of a rewrite. Eh. Everywhere is interesting but honestly, it wasn't that impressive and it never actually worked anyway, insofar as a sundial can be said to 'not work'. In my trip down to Ashfield and Nottingham I stayed two nights in a hotel in the centre of Sutton. Every time I passed it on a bus when I lived there, I always wondered who on earth would want or need to overnight in Sutton-in-Ashfield, because it's absolutely not a tourist town. Evidently now I have my answer. I'm not telling you what the hotel was, but honestly, that's a bit like saying 'I went to Sydney and saw a bridge'.

There are absolutely places to visit in Nottinghamshire as a tourist. I'm not saying Ashfield isn't one of them, but you need to have some very specific interests.

Then, in mid-December, I took a long weekend to the Bailiwick of Jersey. It turned into a very long weekend, because of issues with my flight back, but that's a tale for a different podcast. In actual fact I probably \*will\* do a podcast specifically about Jersey because it is quite an Interesting Place, so I won't go into too much detail here. What I will say is that I went there to meet up with my friend and ex-landlady Debbie. She works in the Care Industry, and for a while recently had been working in Falkland Islands; sadly not during a period where I was able to go and visit her. Now she's in Guernsey for the foreseeable, which is a much more convenient place to get to. She messaged me a while ago saying she was going to hop over to Jersey for a quick trip and did I want to join her, and absolutely I did, because I'd never been there before and it's absolutely my sort of place.

You might wonder, if she lives in Guernsey, why didn't I visit her there? The answer is it's Winter and Guernsey basically closes between October and March; there's very little open outwith basic facilities for locals. Even the ferries to the neighbouring islands drop to once a day. Not everything in Jersey was open, for sure, and I'll need to go back, but only for one major tourist attraction and to take a photograph of one gravestone. That's also a story for another podcast, but not necessarily the Jersey one, since it specifically involves identity politics. Not a spoiler alert, but it seems the lady at the entry desk at one museum took one look at me and thought to herself 'ah, gender-non-conforming; well, do I have a story for them'. She was absolutely right, not gonna lie, but still, it's weird to feel 'seen'.

The other thing, hugely important thing, that's happened recently is I am now in possession of Class B drugs. Like, they're in my backpack as I type the script for this podcast, Which, given I'm in a craft beer bar in Manchester, is probably something I need to be more aware of than I am. Yes, my ADHD prescription came through, and it was remarkably quick. I mean it would have been far, far quicker if I'd responded to e-mails and filled in forms in better time, but then if I was able to respond to e-mails and fill in forms in better time, I wouldn't need the ADHD medication, but we are where we are. At the time of podding I haven't actually taken any yet, and you can probably tell that from the nature of this episode.

The drug in question is called Elvanse. I'd never actually heard of it until I had a final chat with someone last week where we went through the medication and the titration process, but in subsequent conversations it seems quite a common medication. It seems to work in a very similar way to Concerta, which I know better as Ritalin, except that, as I was told, Elvanse is easier to get hold of in the first place. Elvanse's chemical name is Lisdexamfetamine, which (exists in my word processor's spell checker) is spelt with an 'f' rather than a 'ph', even in the UK, for reasons the internet seems to suggest is because worried parents can mentally pigeonhole amphetamine with an 'f' as being a perfectly normal chemical that does perfectly normal and helpful things, and amphetamine with a 'ph' which, uh, isn't. I mean for sure some chemicals are very different to each other even with only a letter difference; ethanol and methanol, for instance, though very closely related, should absolutely not be confused. One of them will kill you. The other will also kill you, but over the course of hours rather than years. But this is not one of them; lisdexamfetamine, even with an 'f', is very much Something That Could Be Abused, and is why it's a Class B Drug in the UK, "possession" of which could lead to an unlimited fine and 5 years in jail. As an aside, given I'm still The Barefoot Backpacker, I haven't yet asked how I take it across international borders.

I mentioned Titration. This is the process of getting used to the drug, seeing how it affects me and working out the best strength for it. As it currently stands, I have 28 days' worth of pills, 14 at 30mg and 14 at 50mg. The idea is that I start on the 30, see how it feels, switch to the 50 after two weeks, see how I feel, and then in conjunction with my healthcare provider, see what strength works best, if indeed Elvanse itself is working for me at all. I'm to track my heart rate and blood pressure throughout this process, because one of the major side effects is ... ADHD medication in general is a stimulant and therefore pokes your body into action. So heart-rate and blood pressure both have a tendency to rise, which I'm not looking forward to because, for my age, I'm quite fit, and I quite like having a slow resting heart rate. I had a free can of Red Bull once when I worked for E.On and I could still feel my heart beat 3 hours later. It was most uncomfortable. I had to buy a blood pressure monitor from Boots so I could track it myself; fortunately it comes with detailed instructions, almost as if it's designed for dyspraxic ADHDers!

I'm scheduled to take one pill a day. It's designed to be slow-release and its effects last for up to 12 hours, so I'm supposed to take it with breakfast. Bold of them to think I have breakfast. They do say I should avoid caffeine, alcohol, and strenuous exercise after taking it; they suggest doing a daily run either before I take it, or in the evening when the effects have worn off. The alcohol restriction is kind of amusing, as I feel I was drinking beer at the time when the pill would be having its full effect, I'd probably have bigger problems than ADHD. I have to take it at breakfast time because it's so long-lasting, and being a stimulant means it'd affect my sleep. In the many questionnaires I had to do before diagnosis, one of them was asking about what three things were most important to me to resolve; in my case 'Executive Dysfunction' and 'Focus' were clicked without even blinking, but one of the other options was 'regulating sleep'. I suspect if I'd clicked that option I'd've been put on a different medication. [My choice of third option was 'mood regulation', for the record].

Some of my friends have notified me of side-effects. One of my besties was prescribed Elvanse but they didn't get along with it at all and they quickly came off it, but they seem to have had issues with many of the alternatives too, so I'm considering them an outlier in my stats. The child of one of my great podcasting friends also was assigned it and didn't do well with it, but he's a 15-year-old kid and I'm not. Most people seem to have been okay with it, but one person in my running bubble did say it made them sweat even more than usual, which isn't a pleasant thought. Another of my online friends has just started taking Concerta, and is having some really big teething troubles, so I suspect I won't take my first one until I know that I'm home and can cope with things if they go somewhat to pot.

The one thing that I will say though, and which I'll keep as my baseline, is that whatever happens, regardless of the side-effects, the benefits will make my life better than not doing anything at all. It's a weirdly low bar, and I'm dyspraxic enough to fall over the metaphor, but it's what I've got and I'm running with it.

What's the worst that can happen?

*{section separation jingle}*

*Me: Hello :) It's time for a mid-episode break. Half time. Seventh Innings Stretch. That sort of thing. Put the kettle on. Grab a snack. Get comfortable. I'm just here to remind you ways in which you can get in touch and*

help this podcast out. You probably know this already, but in case you don't:

*The best way of supporting this podcast is to join my Patreon; for as little as a pint of beer at Wetherspoons every month, you can get a shoutout on this podcast, get occasional exclusive content, and other benefits. This podcast is going places, and wouldn't you want to say you were there before it was cool! The Patreon link can be found at [patreon.com/traveltalesbeyondbrochurepod](https://patreon.com/traveltalesbeyondbrochurepod) and it's also in the shownotes.*

*The second best way is to appear on the pod yourself; if you sign up to my newsletter you'll be able to see what episodes are being planned, and see which you'd like to contribute a voice recording for. It's also a great way to keep in contact if and when the soch needs undergo a lingering heat death. Newsletters should come out in the first week of each month, and sign-ups can be found at [barefoot-backpacker.us14.list-manage.com/subscribe](http://barefoot-backpacker.us14.list-manage.com/subscribe).*

*Now, on with the show}*

*{section separation jingle}*

As I mentioned in a previous podcast episode, a travel blogger friend of mine, Sarah (The Urban Wanderer) has committed us both to doing an 8-week course that's an introduction to stand-up comedy.

Now, you might be thinking to yourself, you're not a comedian Nel, and you don't have the right mentality to go up on stage and feel pressurised to make people laugh quick-time. And you'd be right, of course you'd be right. But that's not why I'm doing it.

When I was at primary school, we had 'talent shows' in the run-up to each Christmas, and I was notable for being on stage in them a lot, mostly in comedic themes - either sketches or simply standing up on stage and telling jokes. In all fairness it's quite easy to make a bunch of 7-11-year-olds laugh, because they're at that age where they've never heard the Dad Jokes before. Remember, even the oldest, cringiest, groaner of a joke has to be heard for a first time.

Then, at 6<sup>th</sup> Form, a friend of mine had a video camera and a group of us used to write and film comedy sketches (he was a huge Monty Python fan, and it showed. My contributions were heavily influenced by, and by 'influenced' I mean 'if any of it ended up on YouTube there might be a case for a lawsuit' by the teenage comic Oink!, which was best described as a Young Person's Viz). There wasn't an audience for our recordings, and it's unclear just how much of that footage still exists (I have it on VHS but it's a tape where, as they used to say, "the tracking's gone" so I don't know how much of it is still viewable/ None of the others have posted any of it to YouTube as far as I can tell, so you're in luck!), but I'd say even the very act of doing it must have meant we were comfortable trying to make people laugh.

These days I just tell stories in the comfort of my own home, but apparently I still have the capacity to engage and amuse, so I guess I'm trying to recreate Primary School Me and see whether or not that will help my podcasting and storytelling. I don't think I'm quite the performer that Primary School Me was, but who knows. Given that this was also a time when my class rehearsed and performed a 'musical' that our teacher had found somewhere, in the depths of the local library I guess, that was a parody of fantasy adventure stories, the 'oh no the princess has been kidnapped by a dragon' type. I ended up being the character in the most scenes (the King; I absolutely would not have made a good Dashing Hero and this was long before my Damsel In Distress preferences), and it suited me fine. Partly because it was a musical and I didn't have to sing. Disappointingly a year later I was cast in a similar school play that I have almost no recollection of, other than I was, and I kid you not, a grumpy wizard the main characters passed by on their quest. I say disappointingly, not because this was a very early example of typecasting (what do you mean I'm the next Geoffrey Baildon), but because I did indeed have to sing this time. I very nearly bailed on the play, such was my distaste for such a concept. I may have done Karaoke in the decades since but only when everyone else is drunk and doesn't care. That said, at least an audience of 6-year-olds, even when told not to, will always sing along to a rhyme they know.

Now. In December 2019 I made a list of 'things I could do', which covered a multitude of ideas, both practical and aspirational. I've mentioned this list before - 'running an ultramarathon' was on it - but one of the other entries was, vaguely, 'stand-up comedy'. So the idea has been in my mind for quite some time, although I never thought it would be something I'd actually do, just something that would be in my mind as something that

might be fun and that I'd be open to trying in the unlikely event the opportunity ever came up. You know, in exactly the same way that bungee jumping was not on the list. I didn't even know you \*could\* do courses in comedy back then. I just assumed people tried it by accident and found they were good at it, in much the same way Michael Bublé discovered he could sing.

I've mentioned on an earlier podcast, somewhere in the twenties, during the Pandemic, about my love for radio comedy and what I was listening to in my teenage years particularly. And I think some of my humour, and my style, derives in part \*because\* I've always leaned towards radio comedy rather than visual comedy, where the vocals are more important and drive the humour forward. And certainly much of my writing style, indeed why I started to write in the first place, was inspired by the slightly absurdist humour that only really works in an audio format, like *The Goon Show* or *The Burkiss Way*.

Obviously this doesn't quite lend itself to stand-up comedy specifically. And to be truthful, I'd say I saw myself more as a humourist, as someone who tells stories but in a funny way, or at least tells stories that people find amusing, either conceptually in themselves, or because of the way I tell them, rather than someone who actually tells jokes. Think of me as a kind of ersatz David Sedaris - I'm not sure whether you'd even call him a 'comedian' in the everyday sense of the word, just that what he does amuses you.

With regard to actual stand-up comedy though, certainly growing up I'd prefer to watch comedians on TV like Jasper Carrott and Billy Connolly - people who were storytellers first and jesters second (or even third in their cases, as they both developed originally as musicians). Clearly I'm not the target market for a folk guitar, although the idea did used to appeal to me, and it is one of the few career options open to someone in their advancing years. The same could also be true of the piano, an instrument I have even less aptitude for, which is a shame because I also really liked Victoria Wood's style and vibe. Again, storytelling rather than joketelling.

So I therefore don't know if I'm actually the target market for the course, but if nothing else it'll help me in other ways that are transferable, even if the act of making people laugh isn't my long-term goal. The course itself is quite vague and flexible, but there are several topics that will be included, including: microphone and stage technique, writing and structuring material, dealing with a range of audiences, and self-promotion and getting gigs.

I think what I most need, or want to get out of the course, is that kind of re-confidence and direction with my stage presence. I don't just mean 'what I do when I'm on stage with a microphone in my hand' although that's certainly a part of it.

At the time of podding, I've had two lessons and the feeling is the course is going to be quite interactive. That first lesson was a bit 'introductory', designed to get a feel for the idea and to open your mind. There's twelve of us on the course, and it's run by a local comedian who's been on the local circuit for maybe 20 years, so he knows his stuff. In our first lesson, he got us to do some mindmaps as a way to find ideas to do material about, and also gave us some open-ended questions, including 'what's the worst that can happen'. To which someone replied 'what if someone throws a glass at you', which, honestly, was not my first thought or concern - mine being 'what if you get halfway through and forget what you were going to say and freeze', which is apparently quite a common concern. The tutor did say one statement he hates is 'oh I could never do that'; apparently the fear of public speaking is stronger than, well, the fear of anything that can actually harm you. He said he had a fireman come up to him after one of his gigs and said 'oh I could never do your job'. A fireman. Someone who could literally die at work and no-one would be at all surprised. Like, they talk about comedians dying on stage, but apart from a couple of very specific examples, it's entirely figurative, and even the literal ones were long-standing and well-respected. And no, I didn't see Tommy Cooper die. We were watching a different channel, possibly football, possibly the cartoon version of *Lord of The Rings*.

But I digress. The second lesson was mainly us just getting on stage and talking for 3 to 4 minutes, not even necessarily trying to make comedy; rather it was just a way to get us used to the stage, to using a microphone, and so that the tutor could see how we spoke, how we moved, to get a sense of stage presence so he could see what he was working with. It is still relatively early in the course but already it's clear that all of us are quite different on stage, with not just different backgrounds but also different styles. One of the group is very definitely a lot more x-rated than the rest of us, another has Tourettes (the kind that gives you physical tics, not the kind that makes you swear randomly), and he seems to have already honed in on using that as the basis of his act.

The course is eight weeks, so the last lesson is the last Saturday in February. And if that was the end of it, then that would be fine, I'd have 8 weeks' learning how to make people laugh, and that would be fine. Except that it's not the end. No. See, the day after the last lesson, so Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> March, all twelve of us will be using what we've learned, and performing a five-minute routine. On stage. At the comedy club itself. In front of a live, paying, audience. We're going to be proper stand-up comedians. We could be heroes. Just for one day. I don't know how I feel about this, but I think I'm thinking that's a Future Nel problem. I'm trying to get as many of my friends to turn up as possible. Emotional Support Audience.

Obviously the course will train us for it, and obviously the event is advertised as being, literally, 'people who have done the course', and it's a much cheaper Sunday afternoon performance than most of the events they host, and given there'll be a lot of friends of the performers there, it should be quite a forgiving audience, but even so, it's going to be quite challenging, mentally. But as I intimate, maybe that's one reason why I'm doing it.

As to what I'd do as a routine, well I mean the mindmaps came out with many different ideas. There's a megaton of humorous content that can be pulled out of being a Gen-X purple-haired barefoot dyspraxic asexual trans-adjacent enby with ADHD who works in data analysis, runs ultramarathons, and travels to places in the world no-one else knows much about, and the mindmapping pulled out ideas from 'what happens if you take too many energy gels during an ultra' to 'the various things that can happen when crossing international borders'. But honestly, I think I've already got something in mind that I'm confident with. I need a topic I can do, off the cuff, for several minutes, that I know intimately and because I know it intimately, I can be myself performing it without worrying about freezing or forgetting. Obviously I don't know exactly how it'll run, what to bring in, what to leave out, but I've always felt something around Pride Flags, about asexuality, will be the best for me. As an AroAce Enby, it would be so easy to fall into the stereotype of concentrating on Queer comedy, because there's so many other arrows to my bow. It's just that ... there's genuinely more scope for comedy in it. Many of the ideas that came out the mindmapping are good for a joke or two, but I'd have to work really hard to do a routine about, well, even running in general, without it getting a bit too mundane, and many of my other special interests are either a bit too niche (tickling?), or just too ... political is the wrong word so I'll say 'depressing'. There's plenty of people who can make TERFs, or the rise of Reform UK, or Trumpism, funny. I am not one of those people. I'm not a satirist.

Also, as you know, I have form with regard to Queer humour. Although the idea for stand-up comedy had been in my mind for several years, it can't be denied my two ventures last year onto a stage downstairs in a bookshop reading my teenage diaries and my teenage penpal letters to a largely Queer audience have been an influence on my decision here. On both occasions people have said that I looked comfortable, confident, and natural on stage, and that what I was saying not only resonated with them, but also the manner in which I talked was engaging and appealing. My only observation is, re-watching the video I did of my reading my teenage diaries, I walk around a lot on stage. I don't keep still. I don't necessarily think this is a bad thing, but I'd be interested to know from the course hosts whether they think this is overly-distracting. I think it's a side-aspect of ADHD; if I keep moving, I can both focus better about what to say and not feel awkward and self-conscious because I'm doing something that distracts me from thinking about the fact I'm on stage in front of an audience, and therefore I'm less aware, less 'scared', of being the focus of attention. I just don't know if it's distracting.

Obviously what helped was that I knew my material well, and also of course the aim of the event isn't to make people laugh, not directly anyway, it's not an open-mic comedy evening, so in a sense there's less pressure to be funny - indeed by its very nature, opening yourself out about your learnings of who and what you are could in fact be the opposite of 'funny'; rather, therapeutic, educational, and cathartic. Obviously people deal with trauma by lashings of dark humour, but in my case I wouldn't say my teenage years were traumatic because of my latent asexuality and enbiness. I mean, they were traumatic for other reasons, not gonna lie, but not those!

It is interesting to note, by the way, that not only when I've spoken about this with a few friends who've known me for years, and who watched my video from Queer Diary, their response has been 'oh yeh, you'd be good at that, you're quite natural at it, you seem comfortable on stage' but also, a couple of people in the group who I'm doing the course with have said the same, that I seem to have a natural stage presence. I'm also conscious that, and this is also true with my podcast, sometimes people find me amusing based not on \*what\* I say, but \*how\* I say it. Maybe that's me being influenced by all that radio comedy, but certainly I'm prone to mannerisms and vibes which have people giggling even if I were saying something utterly mundane. There are

people who have read the phone book and made it interesting (Steve Martin for comedy, Richard Burton for art); I'm clearly not on that level, but it's a nice thing to have an apparent aptitude for.

So, in and of itself, being on stage, reading, talking, about myself, isn't completely alien to me. However, I do think this *\*is\** probably going to be quite hard for me, mentally, for other and more holistic reasons. Like, at least with the diary readings I was in an audience of queer peers who were expecting something like that - on a random stage in front of a disparate audience who have paid to listen to someone specifically make them laugh, that's a lot of pressure and internal angst. Especially for someone like me whose humour and style largely derives from self-experiences rather than, in general terms, 'jokes'. I love puns, and use them a lot in passing, but it's not my style to do an entire act based on them. I am not Tim Vine. My humour is self-referential, self-deprecating, or at least as much as my therapist lets me. And I've not put myself this vulnerable in public for several decades. And, while 9-year-old boys can handle themselves better in that sense than 50-year-old ... whatever-the-blazes-I-am-now-s, there's not a lot of observational humour that a 9-year-old can do. It will be interesting for sure, but I'm more than fully aware I'm quite an easy target for heckles, which not only isn't great when I'm baring my soul but also I'm conscious that one of the reasons I'm reluctant to use foreign languages as I can't make my brain think quickly enough to come out with the right words. It's also why I've never done improv, although the idea has always greatly appealed. And so it would be with heckles; I fear I'd wilt rather than react, and that wouldn't look too good for stage presence and control. At least with a podcast you can heckle me all you like, and I will never know!

It is also true that my style, and much of my content to be honest, would land 372% better with Queer and Alternative audiences than with normative ones, and that's something I need to keep in my mind going forward.

What I will say though is in August, a friend is having a celebration of being married ten years; I went to her wedding and her afterparty was in a field with a marquee tent serving craft beer, and this party is in the same place so I'm expecting the same kind of joyous occasion. I hinted to her that I was doing this comedy course and she damn near bit my toes off to invite me to perform. I would say she hasn't heard me yet but this is the lady who, when I came out as non-binary, said 'no shit sherlock', so I think there's a fair chance she knows and trusts me well enough to be confident I can Do Things.

I mean, what's the worst that can happen?

*{end pod jingle}*

Well that's about all for this episode. Join me next time for another episode Beyond The Brochure. Until then, note that I'd rather overdose on Elvans and go on stage ranting about Pride Flags, than I would drink Dr Pepper. "What's The Worst That Can Happen" don't tempt me. And if you're feeling off colour, keep on getting better.

*{Outro voiceover:}*

*Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, tell your friends that I rocked your socks. If you wear socks when listening to my pod; that's your call not mine. And don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice.*

*You can tweet me @rtwbarefoot, and I'm the same name on YouTube, BlueSky, and Pinterest, or you can find me as Barefoot Backpacker on Instagram, Discord, and Facebook. Don't forget to sign up for my newsletter, and if you really like what I do, you can slip me the cost of a beer through my Patreon, in return for access to rare extra content.*

*Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure was written, presented, edited, and produced by The Barefoot Backpacker. The theme music is "Walking Barefoot On Grass (Bonus)" by Kai Engel, which is available via the Free Music Archive, and used under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.*

*Show-notes are available on my website: barefoot-backpacker.com.*

*Until next time, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}*