

Podcast 114 : King of Comedy

{INTRO:

V: All the lights they shine at me. It's just what I've always wanted}

{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 :)

Normally I'd open a podcast episode talking about things that had been going on in my life, but I'm recording this a full week in advance because at the time of release, I should, all being well, be in Suriname. A country that had always lurked precariously on my 'everywhere is interesting ... isn't it?' mindset, somewhere I was kind of curious about, but which was never high enough on my list because other places felt more pressing, and which were easier and cheaper to get to. But me and Laura had the time, and two other parts of the world we could have gone to, we minded against because two internal borders were closed and crossing them had been kind of the point. I mean, who doesn't want to go to Burundi? I am fully consciously aware that two of the countries on the trip I'm currently on, Guyana and Trinidad/Tobago, are within visual range of Venezuela, but I think at the moment the US President has found a different place to focus on so I think we should be fine. If this turns out to be my last episode, at least I went out on a bit of a high.

I also don't have a lot of housekeeping because this episode is directly about what I did last weekend. It was the culmination of the 8 week comedy course I've been on; on the Saturday we had our last lesson, where we all had a run-through of our material, and then on the Sunday was the event itself. As you'll hear, they were quite different experiences, and, spoiler alert, who would have thought that practice would have made perfect?!

Four of my friends turned up to watch us all humiliate ourselves. No, I lie for stereotypical comedic effect. There were twelve of us on the course and I think we all pretty much rocked it. The way it was organised was in three groups of four, each separated by an interval of 10-15 minutes. I was on position 5, so immediately after the first interval. I was pretty happy with this - I think I had wanted to be either side of an interval, but I can't put into words why. The indicative running order was drawn up by our tutor, and while we were absolutely free to change it, I don't think we did. The audience was made up of a mixture of paying public and friends of the performers - mostly the latter to be honest but it was quite hard to tell. The four who came for me were my friends V (of course), Peter (my Discord and Beer buddy from close by), Alistair (my old school friend who has appeared on my podcast before), and Mark (who as far as I know has not appeared on the pod but I've certainly mentioned him; he's the one I've been drinking with a lot in the past and who visited me in Glasgow just before I moved away). None of them had, to my knowledge, ever met each other before but it was lovely to see they all got along quite well.

I'd like to give a shout-out to another beery friend of mine, Claire (who blogs as Curious Claire, but also Beers & Boarding Passes) who would have come along too, but she forgot. Oh, she didn't forget my performance, for the record, she forgot something more important was happening on the same date - that it was her birthday. Her boyfriend was taking her for a posh trip to London and she didn't realise it was the same weekend. I might ignore my birthday but I generally don't forget it exists.

All of our performances were recorded professionally by the venue and sent to us, and we seem to be free to use them how we like. They are designed, in effect, to be kind of like 'showreels' - proof of our performance and ability that we can show to future potential gig venues and others in the industry. But I'll come onto that all later. First though, as V was up visiting, she did some content for her own YouTube channel, and one of the things she wanted to do for it was do a quick interview with me the day after, where I talked to her about the

course, the event, and my feelings. So where better to start than to reply the interview. If you go to her channel though you'll be able to see the funky striped long dungarees I was wearing at the time. These are new; my friend Sarah who persuaded me to do the course in the first place, saw one of her friends selling them online and instantly thought of me; serendipitously they were my size (an 18, for the record). A year or two ago I'd been with Laura in Afflecks in Manchester and seen the same design in the dungaree skirt version, and she said it would really suit me too, but sadly those were only a size 12. I haven;t been a size 12 since, well, since I was 12 I would think. Not that I wore dungaree dresses when I was 12. It was 1987 and I was absolutely not that trendy.

{section separation jingle}

V: Alright, there we go. Still trying to blow my camera over.

ME: Blowing something.

V: So last night I went to the Frog and Bucket comedy club to watch my friend Nel, wave at me Nel, and I told you all that there were 12 of them who had been on a 12 week comedy course and I lied to you because it was in fact an 8 week comedy course, wasn't it? Which I think it makes it so much more impressive actually because you were all brilliant and nobody was sort of too shy or too stumbly or forgot everything that they were going to say or any of the other sort of anxieties that you might have about doing a course like that. What was the best part of it for you?

ME: I've mean, doing it I guess. It's not something I've done before. I've been on stage, I've done spoken word stuff but it's different because I've been on stage with something in my hand like notes or something and I just refer to the notes and then speak about the topic that it refers to. This is quite different for two reasons. One is because I don't have the notes in front of me and the other one is because when I'm doing the spoken word stuff like reading my teenage diaries to a largely queer audience that is on my YouTube somewhere.

V: I'll link it in the description.

ME: The aim isn't to make people laugh. The aim is to make people engage, the aim is to make people interesting. Sometimes what I say makes them laugh, sometimes what I say makes them go awww. Whereas this is, you're on stage for five minutes and your whole point of doing it is you are going to try and make the audience laugh as much as possible. That's a very different aspect to it and I'm not used to that, and one of the issues that I had going into it in the first place was: I know I can stand on stage and talk to people but I don't know if I can make people laugh and I don't know if what I say is going to have that reaction with the audience and I don't know how I'll react if it doesn't.

V: Five minutes feels like a really really long time to me. Did it feel like a long time when you were on stage?

ME: I have ADHD and time blindness.

V: So was it, did it go in a bit of a flash or did you feel like you were up there for ages?

ME: One of the interesting things, and this may relate to a later question, I don't know because you haven't told me what questions you're going to ask.

V: I'm making up as I go along.

ME: One of the things that we discussed in the comedy course itself was, and I'll talk about the comedy course the way it structured later on if you ask me that question, you can edit that bit, is when we're doing the comedy course in those eight weeks and we're going on stage and we're doing our routines in front of the other 11 people and the tutor, it's a very different experience because you know you're being timed, you know you're being judged, you're not judged, but you know you're being sort of watched. You know that everyone is making notes about like what you're doing, how you're doing it, how you're performing on stage. It's a very different feeling. It's almost like a, I don't know, it's almost like doing a driving test. Whereas when you're on stage in front of an actual audience who's never met you before, doesn't know anything about you, doesn't know anything about your routine, you just go on stage and you just do your routine and then you leave. You don't

think about the timing, you don't think about how people are reacting in that sense, you're just sort of going with it, you're going with the flow. Now there is a, there is a time limit of five minutes but it doesn't matter if you go over it, but after four minutes, certainly at that comedy club, after four minutes there's a red light that comes on stage, sort of below the balcony so you can see the, oh red light on that means I've got a minute left.

V: Yeah that's really handy.

ME: If you notice it.

V: Yeah, yeah. So tell me about the actual course then, what does it involve? If I was thinking about signing up for it, what would it be like?

ME: Right, it's an 8 week course at a comedy club, a genuine comedy club. The tutor we had has been on the local comedy circuit for like 30 odd years. That particular club is one of the more notable ones in Manchester and a few famous comedians that you may have heard of have either started there or have certainly been there in their early days.

V: I mentioned a couple of them earlier in the video.

*ME: Yes, yeah and then they've got pictures of all the people that have sort of been on and done it and they have a couple of, just as a side, they have a couple of regular events, one was called *Beat the Frog* where you basically go on stage and do your routine and there's three people in the audience with cards and if two of them hold up a card you get dragged off the stage.*

V: You'd have to be a special kind of brave to do that I think or just not care if you get dragged off stage.

*ME: Apparently it's really good practice and it really focuses the mind and a few of those famous comedians have won the *Beat the Frog*.*

V: Yeah, yeah.

ME: So yes, but the course itself, eight weeks, the first couple of lessons were basically just us, well, a tutor going: how do you feel on stage, just go up on stage and say something, and then we had a session on mind mapping. So we basically wrote down a word that we could think of and thought of all the things that come off that word.

V: Well I'll bet your mindmap was huge with your ADHD.

ME: I did do several of them.

V: Shit, bananas.

ME: Yeah, so we did those sort of mind maps. The idea behind the mind maps is to get ideas for material because a lot of things are funny but possibly not very, but only once.

V: Yeah.

ME: So the idea behind a mind map is that you can go connecting and connecting all of the sort of themes that you've got and all the ideas that you've got. So you can create a kind of routine that follows a couple of the paths.

V: I suppose that helps if you get a bit derailed by something like someone in your audience or something like that.

ME: Yes, well, coming on to the later lessons, a lot of what we did in that course was very much stage presence. So it was how do you perform on stage, how do you, I mean one of the lessons was how do you do with hecklers, for instance, and also things like movement on stage, making sure that you're aware of where the seats are, the stool is, rather, than where the microphone stand is. You can use the microphone stand and the stool

to affect in your routine if you want it or you can just move it out the way. Some of it was we are performing on stage and then the rest of the group are going, okay, you moved a bit too far that way, you're doing too much, it's distracting or you're just standing there, it's not very interesting and things like that.

V: Yeah.

ME: And also sort of toning the routine going, it's a bit long and it's a bit wordy, you cut this bit out.

V: Yeah. Or, you know, when you said this, I thought you were leading in a different direction.

ME: Yeah, yeah. And then all the things, I mean, a couple of the things that I used in my actual routine were things I'd never thought of until in the comedy course, someone said something and they went, oh yeah, that's a good thing to say.

V: Yeah, yeah. So I think that that is something that I think stand up comedy does a lot. And I don't know if you came in to discuss in it in your course, but the way you take something quite mundane, you tell the story in an engaging way and then you just flip a little bit of it to either make people uncomfortable or be relatable or something like that. I thought that you all did that sort of thing quite well. I also really liked how a lot of you did, I think the word is callbacks., in your show, so you reference something from earlier. And a lot of you referenced in each other's things as well, which I thought was really, really good. It made it really cohesive through the night.

ME: We were advised to do that because it just makes it more fun. But also one of the, in some parts of the comedy circuit, people don't do this and it's a really bad form. But if you're a comedian going to a comedy group like that, or not a comedy group, a comedy evening, it's polite to watch the entire thing regardless of when you're on. So some people, on that comedy group, some of them went to a open mic night in Manchester in the weeks and they said that a few comedians just turned up for their set and then bugged off.

V: Oh, that's true. That's like turning up to a school play, watching your kids sing and then go in. You're not supposed to do that. You've got a tap for all of them.

ME: Yeah, absolutely. But the other thing about, you know, sort of, it's not just polite to stay. You learn from other comedians. You learn from how they act. And if you, as I say, if you see something that someone does or hear something that someone says and then you refer back to it, is that just, it's two things. One, it gets the audience going, oh, hang on a minute, that's a clever thing that they've referred back. But also it means that you're essentially acknowledging that the other person is a comedian and is talented and has vibe.

V: I really, really liked that, that you all sort of referenced each other, not all of you, but a lot of you referenced each other. But your acts were all so different to each other, even though some of them were like content similar. But the way you used the stage was really different, the way some of you used props and some of you didn't, the way some of you used like tone of voice and like, it was a real good variety of performance. I would say if you're into comedy, it's well worth going along to watch a show like that. You might not get the most polished performance, but what you'll get is raw and authentic and fun and new. And I really, really enjoyed it. Thank you very much for inviting me.

ME: It's a pleasure. Yeah, we all have different styles. There was 12 of us there and we all are very different people because obviously we've got different backgrounds, different personalities, different interests. We all find humour in different things. A lot of comedy is based on your experiences and if you've got different experiences, something I find mundane, someone else is going to find completely hilarious.

V: Yeh. Is it something you would do again? Or has it given you the desire to pursue comedy through other avenues? Because I don't know if you can do the same course again sort of thing, but is there like a stage two course that you can go on?

ME: I'm not aware of a stage two course. I know that a couple of people have done the course, not in my group, but there have been people that have done the course twice. I don't think I would do the course again because I don't think I'd need to, but things that came out of the course gives me vibe, like, you know, the existence of open mic nights, things like that. I see myself more as a spoken word person rather than an actual

stand-up comedian and one of the reasons why I did the course in the first place was more sort of self-confidence reasons to see how I feel being on stage, as I say, without the notes and in that more high-pressured environment, but using that should improve my spoken word stuff.

V: And do you feel like it gave you that confidence that you were looking for? Do you feel like, or was it more a case of, I was confident for that night or pretending to be confident for that night?

ME: No, I don't.

V: I suppose you'll have to wait and see.

ME: Yes. One thing I will say though, and this is blindingly obvious because it just is, and that is, so when we're doing the comedy course we perform every week or every other week honing our craft and the more you do it, the better you get, which is ridiculous to think about until you consider that the day before the actual performance we had a lesson, the final lesson, and I was, I didn't flunk it but I wasn't, there was still a lot that I needed to do, there was a lot of work that I needed to do and the reason was because I didn't practice very much.

V: They do say that a bad last rehearsal does mean a good show.

ME: Possibly. Possibly.

V: It was a good show.

ME: It was a good show. But yeah, so certainly after the last lesson, me and the friend that got me into it in the first place, we went, we de-camped to a cafe and just went through our routines, and went no, we're not having that, we're not having that, that's rubbish, get that out, and then we just spent like, we had three or four times where we just videoed ourselves and then sent it to each other and went, is it better now?

V: And that's really, really good, so you were able to sort of get a little community together where you could all help each other out, I like that.

ME: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely.

V: Right, now we were so excited about the show yesterday that we didn't actually really eat very much. Now I'm starving, so let's go into Manchester and find some food. Kit Kat for breakfast, tempting.

{section separation jingle}

As I said in the interview, there were twelve of us and we were all pretty different. I'm not going to go into full detail about the other acts and what they did - sadly many of them don't have much in the way of social media, and some that do only set up accounts after, and as a result of, the show - but to give you a flavour, we had a very calming and self-assured vet who talked about a threesome, a very angry-presenting failed musician who talked of his bitterness at having to fill celebrity hot tubs, a lady who felt let down at the promised lifestyle of Madame Adelaide from the Aristocats, someone who espoused the joy and delight of Periods, and someone with Tourettes who made it funny for the right reasons. And if you heard V say the random phrase "Shit, Bananas", that's not an observation of surprise fruit appearing in the hotel room we were chatting in, that was a reference to one of the other comedians, part of whose act was that he said, for years, he'd had a mondegreen, a misheard lyric, in a Gwen Stefani song, viz "my shit tastes like bananas", and that, by trial and error, mostly error, he realised that it did not.

The audience seemed to be really keen on all of us; obviously that was slightly affected by them largely being friends to at least one of the acts, so had an empathy with us all, but even though a few of them got verrrry tipsy throughout the show, there was pretty much no heckling and no bad vibes; I think they almost all stayed until the end and saw every one of us. It's not for me to say who was the best overall; I'm not Brian Clough so I'm absolutely not going to say I was in the top one; but in any case we all appealed to different people in different ways. That we had our recordings as early as Monday evening meant that I was able to send it on to friends who couldn't watch live for one reason or another; they've all been pretty positive so far. I'll be putting it

up on YouTube very soon – because I'm planning this in advance I don't know exactly when everything will be going Live across all my channels but it should be imminent, if indeed it's not there already.

Something that one of my friends (Laura, specifically) picked up on when she watched the recording was that I seemed to 'sway' a lot when standing. When I went on the stage, I took hold of the microphone and then realised the wire was wrapped around the mic stand, so I was stuck more in one place than usual. While good for my dyspraxia, it wasn't good for my ADHD because I have a tendency to wander around the stage when I get animated, it's my way of getting my energy out, so when I'm more-or-less stuck in position, my body evidently needs to get rid of its excess energy somehow. I was at least barefoot (or, at least, wearing my crocheted sandals with no sole) so that was one less uncomfortable vibe to have to deal with.

I was also conscious that I actually missed out, or forgot, some of my planned material. That it took me until the seventh performer to realise says a lot about the stuff I didn't say. Mainly it was a bit of a further rant about the Asexual Flag, alongside a couple more references to my friend Susan, who obviously does not exist and absolutely did not interview me the day after for her YouTube Channel. Heaven forbid. I don't know where that rumour came from.

Anyway Susan, oh sorry, no, not Susan, V, my friend V, who is not called Susan, V asked the question, and a couple of my other friends did as well, about what I do next. Having done it once, and getting a good reception, does this give me confidence to do this again, and try my hand on the Comedy Circuit? Bear in mind that in their early days, comedians of the likes of John Bishop, Sarah Millican, and Peter Katy have, if not started at the Frog & Bucket, certainly have used the club as a springboard in their early years – they, and many others you've heard of, have for instance taken part in (and won) the Beat The Frog competition they hold. Obviously they were much younger than I am (and that does play on my mind a bit, not gonna lie), but yes, obviously it's going to be inspirational, and certainly we none of us underperformed in that environment, so there's definitely something to build on.

The thing is though, as I've always said right from the start, I'm not a stand-up comedian. Or rather, I've never seen myself as a stand-up comedian. Even back in Primary School days, when I would regularly go up onto the stage in talent shows and tell jokes and be funny (even at one point being invited up to cover for a stage scenery change that took longer than anticipated), I don't know if I ever felt that was my calling. But it's an interesting thing to think about. And if I can get laughs merely by waving an asexual flag in an insipid and pathetic way, there must be *something* there to build on.

I mentioned in my interview with V that the showcase felt a bit like a driving test, What I meant by that was that eight weeks is not a long time to become comedians, and it very much felt like the course was designed primarily to help us get through the showcase at the end. It taught us how to be stand-up comedians, for sure, and it taught us how to hone our writing to make it compact and funny without waffle, it taught us how to hold an audience, it taught us how to think about topics to do a routine about, but ultimately what it mainly taught us is how to write and perform a specific 5-minute routine and get laughs from it. The mind-maps allow us to venture into other topics, and what we've learned from honing our first routine mean we can better handle tweaking others in the same way, but when it comes down to it, we only *know* how to do that one routine – we haven't practised anything else, save maybe in the early lessons where we did other subjects and discarded them as being 'fluff'. I know there's other topics I can create a routine about →dyspraxia is a great one, there's so much material there, but also ultramarathons, there's things around my travel experiences I could try to condense into something, and of course even the stuff I ended up talking about could be expanded – on YouTube a few years ago I already did a couple of shorts where I laid into many of the Queer Pride Flags. The question is, is this something I'd want to do? And I don't know. I definitely feel more at home doing spoken word and storytelling, and for sure this is going to help with that, but if nothing else, that's much harder to market and promote.

But I've waffled on for long enough, I know what you want, And so at this point it feels right to let you hear my performance. So here is the syndicated premiere of Nel Scroggie, The Barefoot Backpacker, performing stand-up comedy in front of a live studio audience. Content warnings: queerness, sex, kink, Tory politicians.

{section separation jingle}

DAVE: Nel the Barefoot Backpacker!

ME: So, you may wonder, what on earth has just walked on stage right now? The answer is, I mean, Dave doesn't know either. So, I have a friend, my friend Susan, who is in the audience somewhere, and Susan once described me to her friends as, I don't know what Nel is, but they're obviously gay. Sadly, I am about as interesting as Susan's name.

I am asexual, which, not to be confused with a...sexual, which is almost the opposite, makes finding it on Google search very difficult. Now, asexuality is where we have no attraction to anyone. Not even you. Essentially, think of it like, to me, everybody is as attractive as Luke Littler. Now, he's a really great bloke, don't get me wrong, he's absolutely fantastic, great at what he does, no one's going to swipe right at him on Tinder. And I kind of realised this about asexuality. When I was a teenager, when I was dating a girl, and she tied me to a bed, and she got over me and did a strip tease, apparently it's really bad form to yawn.

Asexuality is part of the queer community, and obviously we have a flag. And you might be surprised, you might expect that, you know, when we're not distracted by the pleasures of the flesh, that we would have time to create an absolutely fantastic, sparkly, dragon-filled flag. Sadly, this pride is supposed to be about joy. There is no joy in this flag, there is no colour in this flag. You take away the purple, and it looks like it's sort of a broken 1970s black and white television. It's the sort of flag that it looks like you're sort of at school, where you're late to do your homework, and it's 15 minutes before the start of the lesson. And you run into the art room going, I need to create a flag! But there's only two felt-tip pens. A purple one, and a black one. And the black one is running out.

Yeah, asexuality. I mean, I will say this about asexuality though, I mean, it doesn't mean that I, you know, haven't dated. I've been engaged three times. It's hope beyond expectation, that's what that is. But I do hang around on hook-up sites. Specifically gay male hook-up sites. And you might be wondering, well, Nel you're asexual. Why are you on a gay male hook-up site? The thing is, I've got to eat sometime, and it's cheaper than Deliveroo. But Nel, you don't belong on a gay male hook-up site. That's fair. The hook-up site I go on is called FabGuys. {one whoop from the audience} I am sincerely hoping that you are not next to your wife or significant other when you say that. The thing about FabGuys is, on the FabGuys profiles, there's a lot of words like discretion. And also comments like, wife doesn't know.

FabGuys profiles are, I suppose most dating site profiles are a bit like this, I imagine. I don't know. I'm asexual. I don't hang around on them. I am the sort of person that does watch porn and make notes about how realistic it is. But the average FabGuys profile is either a wall of text with sentences longer than your average 1980s TV kids presenter. Or they're the opposite. They're completely blank and have words like, will fill in later. Profile created five years ago. Or they're just rants about how boring and time-wastey the website is. Mate, I can't understand your profile. There are no full stops in it. And you look like Luke Littler. No wonder you're not getting any action.

Where Fab Guys does sort of speak out though is in the forums. So these are forums where people sort of post questions like, oh, I want to be humiliated. Can anyone help? Or more sort of questions like, would you rather bum Trump while nibbling his ear or suck Putin while telling him he's daddy's good boy? Good political things of the day. During the pandemic, there was one question that came up, which was, regardless of your politics, which Tory politician would you like to fuck? And there was complete consensus around it. There was a mass debate. I had to get that one in. It was complete consensus amongst the gays, the straights and everyone else. Matt Hancock, the then health secretary. Yes, the other consensus was, I would say he came out on top, but everyone thought he was actually a bottom. Which means that the whole thing was full of people making comments like, oh, Matt Hancock, I'd like to have him on all fours, collar and leash on, take him from behind. Oh, I'm coming, I'm coming, I'm coming ...

... to realise that if I wasn't already asexual, that image would absolutely drive me to asexuality. And if that, if that image has affected you, all I can say is, be more Susan. Thank you very much.

{section separation jingle}

While I'm here, and because otherwise the pod would run very short, relatively speaking at least, I thought I'd include the recording of when I read my Queer Diaries in Leeds about a month ago. This is much more what I'm comfortable with, being Spoken Word rather than specific comedy, and much more about storytelling. It's

also much more personal, meaningful in some way, rather than just observations of things I've experienced in life.

What I did realise though when I was doing it was that there's so much the diaries don't say, and that the time I read from my teenage penpal letters a year ago would make for a more interesting and rounded routine. That said, the two kind of exist in parallel; two different sources that, working together, could reveal a lot about why I've turned out the way I have. It's maybe something to work on, but it's not specifically stand-up comedy material. I need to sit down and, well, firstly decompress because I literally haven't had time since the comedy showcase, and then secondly work out what material belongs where, and how best I can leverage it.

As I said in a recent episode, Beth, who runs the Queer Diary concept, herself has a one-woman show where she does exactly that; she uses her diaries as a base to talk about life and experience in a comedic way. It's a very different vibe to ranting about the Ace flag or strange horny straight men on gay male hookup sites. There's no reason I can't do both, but it's a different concept and a different channel.

The sound quality is less good on this recording, but that's just because I was recording on my phone in a small venue with variant acoustics, but I hope you'll get the gist.

BETH: A long round of applause for Nel to get to the stage, let's go!

ME: Hello. Right, I am Nel. Alt-Text: A person is standing on a stage in front of a red curtain. They are wearing a black hat with daisies, a teal dress with daisies, black leggings, they are barefoot, and they are wearing a black choker with a ring on it, that may or may not be a ring gag. It is a ring gag.

Right, I am slightly older than you lot, a lot of you. These are genuine diaries from 1993. 1992 to 94. So, the reason why I did this was because I was curious to know whether the person that I have become was certainly not the person that I was at the time, but I wondered if there was any clues. For the record, I came out as non-binary and one of my friends said, "no shit, Sherlock". And a few years earlier, I'd come out as asexual and one of my other friends said, "That took you long enough". So, I was wondering on that basis that there was anything in the past.

What have we got here? January the 13th, 1993. The light is not brighter than here, but I shall see what I can do. January the 13th, 1993. I have written the phrase 'lovelorn and parthenophobic, hardly a typical 17-year-old'. So pretentious. I did 'A'-Level English and it shows. Literary criticism and poetry.

What else have we got here? I have got January the 19th, 1993. Where have I got here? January the 19th. I have got a phrase that says the period. Where is that? Where is that written? Where is that written? Where is that written in my diary? Right there.

BETH: The light really is awful.

ME: Oh, there we go. "The period, we had just failed to have an exam cos the teacher didn't turn up. The period 9:09 to 10:20 was spent in the library with Dan, Rick, Dan and Doug. They had read my story. They claim it's good. They especially like the pornographic ending. They also wonder how I know so much about kissing. All I said was that I had a dirty mind and imagination, and I picked up things like that in my life." At this point, I have never been kissed. Now, there is a trope. There is a trope on AO3. I'm sure you know AO3. I would normally say it has anyone ever heard of it. And the trope is that a lot of AO3 writers are actually Asexual and they're just sort of writing because that's the way they're getting it out. I do not write on AO3.

What else have we got here? Why did I take that out? Right, what have we got here? January the 24th. Oh yes, yes. "PS Dan claimed a couple of days ago that half the fun in girlfriends is losing them. Where's the fun in loneliness?" My comment there is all very odd. Are the straights okay? You have to remember this time I did not know I was asexual or ordinary because those phrases did not exist.

Second of February. What have we got for the second of February? The strangest. "The strangest to think about at all." I was talking about loneliness in life. "The strangest thing about at all. I can think about girls kissing, holding, touching. But I cannot ever picture myself with a girlfriend. I cannot imagine being in a kiss, only watching it from outside." Rather curious thing to write, I thought.

What have we got? Oh God, 18th of March. What have I written here? 18th of March. "I'd rather pad barefoot with a girl than go to bed with her." I don't know.

12th of May. 12th of May. "On my way home." What have I written here? "On my way home." Oh, this is a pretty (?) one. "On my way home. Three girls." I grew up in Liverpool. "On my way home three girls from Bebbington to Birkenhead. One sat there staring at me? I stared back and bushed. I looked away at them. They got off chanting to that girl that she was in love. I'll never see her again." There's a couple of things in the diary that point to that. Am I just ignorant of flirting even back then. Did I just not know what flirting was? Did I just not understand the concept? And therefore, you know, AroAce is very strong in here.

Fourth of June. Oh, A-level English. "Realised to my disgust that Othello is one - far too depressing." As an aside, imagine giving a bunch of emo 16 to 17 year olds the Tragedy paper. Like, two of the books we had to read, the character killed themselves at the end of it. This is not giving to a bunch of 17 year olds, they're just going, oh, everything's going, oh, I listen to the Smiths. I listen to The Cure. "One, far too depressive. Two, far too laden with sex." Didn't understand it then, don't understand it now.

So, 12th of June, 1993. "I realised I have a very dirty mind. Glanced at my romantic novel. Open brackets, untitled closed brackets. Open brackets and also unfinished closed brackets." I have ADHD. "The two things that I saw were socks and lovebite." Now, I don't think that either of those two words are the products of a very dirty mind. Don't know about you.

12th of July. 12th of July. Oh, God. So, the 12th of July, 1993. I was a month away from my 18th Thursday. And this is not the sort of thing that you would expect somewhat a month away from their 18th Thursday to write in a diary. "Can't imagine me having sex. This is not a pessimism. It's just a wonder of physical thoughts. I can't physically or mentally imagine it. It'll happen."

AUDIENCE APPLAUSE

I've got two or three from the next year, which is why I was at university briefly. Because I have ADHD. "13th of November, 1993. Still haven't got a girlfriend. Don't care. A week last Tuesday, eating a doughnut in the diner at 4.50pm, a Swiss doughnut." I don't know why I needed to say this. "I saw two people nearby talking, obviously, in love. And I thought to myself, why am I doing this?" And the next thing I've written is, "since then, I've joined the Blind Date Society." I don't know.

28th of November. Just a little one. 28th of November, I've got a friend at the time called Rachel. And I was wondering about ways to get involved. And she said, flirt. And I replied, but I can't flirt. Her response was, everyone can flirt. So back in 1993, I wrote that I'd never been able to understand flirting. And I've never felt comfortable that I didn't understand it. This is fundamental to a romantic life. Did I just not ever get this? AroAce. It's AroAce Awareness week next week.

Right, the last two entries I've got. 31st of December, 1993. "Mummy phoned." People who are 18 still call their mother Mummy. "Mummy phoned. She's going to organise, quote, a new image when, quote, performing. In her words." There is so much about this. "In her words, it is to, quote, get me a girlfriend. "My mother spent the best part of 40 years desperately trying to get me with someone. Desperately waiting for me to get with someone. And every time I mentioned a female name, her response was, 'ooh, do I need a hat?' I think she's finally got the message. She is still Facebook friends with one of my ex-fiancées with a kid. So I think she's just living her life through a proxy.

And my final one that I've made a note of, 16th of February, 1994. And it's a good one to end on. I was with a few friends at university. And we were just talking about love and sex. And so what could I say? Damien and Ian desperately want me to get off with a woman called Claire. And I've written. "They were surprised when I told them I never wanted sex." And I think that is a very self-explanatory point to leave on. Because it just proves, I was always AroAce. I just refused to believe it for 30 years. Thank you.

BETH: *Make a big cheer for AroAce Awareness Week, please.*

Yeh, it's not as good, is it? Maybe I should stick to comedy?!

{end pod jingle}

Well, that's about it for this episode. Join me again soon for another episode *Beyond The Brochure*. Until then, I'll leave you with the words of the 80s pop band Fatal Charm. "All I did was just for you, And all I want is nothing new, You make me happy just to see, A new life opening up for me, And all I want is need to love, And all I need is everyone". Is it just what I've always wanted? Who knows. And if you are feeling off colour, in the case of my friend Dayna who has a blocked intestine and a couple of weeks ago had a tube up her nose doing things that you really don't want so close to your face, 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.*

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

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