

Welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from Okay to Good and from Good to Great. I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. In today's episode, I'm going to talk about six things I wish I'd done sooner, six things I wish I had done earlier in life, as well as just update you on what's been going on and talk about some books and films I've enjoyed recently. As always, you can find the transcript and PDF at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com](http://EasyStoriesInEnglish.com) and you can find the link to that in the description.

But before I talk about any of that, I just want to remind you that I have a sale going on for my online classes for all of June and July. There is 50% off my online classes. So if you book a class with me, and you can do classes with me from anywhere in the world thanks to the magic of the internet, if you book a class with me in June or July, you get 50% off, half off. So it's a really good deal. It's a really good opportunity to use this summer to learn English.

So to book a discounted class with me, go to [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Classes](http://EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Classes), and you can find that link in the description as well.

So six things I wish I'd done sooner. I was inspired to talk about this because the other day I went into a like hippie shop, a shop that sells hippie things. Yeah, like crystals, tarot decks. Hmm. Jewelry for, um, what's it called? Belly dancing. Yeah. That kind of dance that people do with their stomach and they wear all of those costumes with like jewelry and stuff. Uh, rings, all that kind of magic stuff.

And of course the kind of thing, well, one of the things that they sell in these hippie shops is incense. And I had wanted to get incense for a very long time, but I guess I never saw it in the shops I was going to. And I kept forgetting to look it out, to search it out, rather, to look for it in specific places. And I couldn't be bothered to order it online.

And it was one of those things where I was like, do I really need incense? Is incense gonna make my life that much better? Oh, by the way, if you're like, what's incense? Incense are these long, thin sticks made of wood. You burn them and then they slowly release a pleasant fragrance, a nice smell into the air.

So incense is traditionally used in Buddhist temples. They light sticks of incense at the temples. They're often used in India. I think in the west we usually associate incense with India, although I also associate it with Japanese Buddhist temples. So you can burn incense in your house just like you would burn a scented candle.

And I had wanted incense for a long time, but I wasn't really sure if it was worth it, I guess. Um. I have this problem where sometimes I want nice things, but because they're not things I usually buy, like maybe perfume, I find it hard to justify to myself that I should buy it. Yeah. And it's quite hard to justify a scented candle or incense sticks if you are thinking purely in practical terms because they're really not very practical things. They're just like aesthetic things.

But I bought the incense and I spent a long time smelling all of the different incense varieties in the shop. I brought, I bought a little, um, dish to put the incense in, um, because you know, it has to be held up and then it drops ash everywhere. It burns and drops ash. Although my dish, I'll show you, this is my, um, incense dish. Sorry. I'll show you if you're on YouTube. If you're on the podcast, I have a lovely, small, round blue soapstone dish in my hand, and you stick the incense in here. The problem is the dish is too small. It's smaller than my palm. Um, so when it drops ash, it gets ash on my table, so I need to put a plate under the dish, so, oops, I probably should have got a different dish anyway.

Um, this is the incense I got. Obviously you can't smell it, but it is copal incense. I dunno what that is, to be honest. But it smells really good and it comes from India and it's very, very

nice. And that was it. I came home, I burned my incense, and that was several days ago. And my room still smells gorgeous.

Like I love the smell of the incense and genuinely, every time I come into my room and smell it, it's like, oh, oh, amazing. It makes the room feel more like a home. It makes it feel more like a, I don't know, like a more fulfilled environment. It's not like, this is just a place where I live and like spend some time like a cramped small London flat. Like no, this is a home. This is a place I inhabit. This is my space. I think smell is very powerful for me, but I've never been one of those people who used perfume or scented candles or incense.

So basically I burned the incense and it's made me so much happier and genuinely made my room so much nicer and I realized, oh, this is one of those things I should have started doing years ago. Right? Something I wish I'd done sooner. So that was the inspiration for this list.

On that note, another thing from India, which I wish I had gotten into sooner, is yoga. Obviously all forms of exercise are really good, and I wish I'd started exercising regularly sooner. But yoga in particular really works for me because I'm quite like a bendy, flexible person. I love the feeling of having freedom in my body, freedom in my movements. So yoga is much more suited to that than say, working out at the gym. And it's a communal thing. It's something you do with other people, so that makes it nice as well.

But yeah, I've really never enjoyed exercise as much as when I started doing yoga. I only started doing yoga in January. But I've noticed a huge amount of progress in my yoga practice and I now do like six to nine yoga classes a week. I'm at my yoga studio five or six days a week, so I'm like really into the yoga. Like I love yoga right now. I wake up in the morning and I do a bit of yoga after getting out of bed, and I go to yoga classes in the evening and on Saturday I often do double yoga classes. I just, I love yoga and yeah, I wish I'd done it sooner because it's had huge benefits for me physically in terms of how healthy I feel, how strong I feel, honestly.

Also, how I look. I feel really confident with my body now, but also I think yoga, other types of exercise I've tried like body weight exercises, like working out, um, they often leave me in this state of like, exhaustion. Like if I try to do a difficult exercise and I can't do it, like I feel like my body is collapsing. And this kind of ties into this health problem that I've talked about before of catatonia, um, where my body shuts down and I can't move easily or talk easily. And yoga I've found, I don't know if it's the cause, but certainly since I started doing yoga, I've had way fewer problems with catatonia. Like it's not really an issue in the same way it was before. I feel much more relaxed and in control of my body.

So I think for me personally, yoga is like the best form of exercise because it calms down my nervous system, but it also allows me to build strength in a really practical way. I do want to start going to the gym at some point. I'm trying to like bring in other forms of exercise, like I wanna go swim, swimming with my friend more. Especially now in the summer. There is some outdoor swimming pools in London that I want to go to more.

Actually, on my birthday I went swimming. Oh. But I'll tell you about that later. Um, so yeah, so doing yoga, wish I'd done that before.

On that note of kind of, well, I guess is yoga, religious? I don't know. But let's say religious practice. Um, group religion / chanting / singing / dancing. Basically doing something like that in a group. So going to church, singing with people, like singing in a choir or dancing. I don't do any dance classes at the moment, but I think it's a similar feeling. And you know, there's a lot of research that shows there are huge benefits to singing in a group with people and engaging in like a shared religious practice.

So I started going to church again January last year, so about a year and a half ago. And it's been really great for me and I'm in my choir and I love singing in the choir and... I dunno, I was in choirs in the past, like when I was in school, but it wasn't something I did super regularly and at the time I was very like nervous and I didn't really enjoy it, whereas now I absolutely love it.

Like actually at Easter in my church, we were singing some songs and someone took a video and everyone else is just singing normally. And I'm there like waving my arms, like moving with my whole body, 'cause I'm just like really feeling the music, right? And that's something that brings me so much joy, like singing and sharing that kind of practice with people brings me a huge amount of joy. And I really wish I'd joined a choir in the past.

But again, these are wonderful things I have now because now I'm about to move to China. I know like once I get to China, I'm like, okay, we will like find a yoga class, join a gym, maybe join a choir. That would also be good for my Chinese. Um, and then that way I can keep a lot of these really positive feelings and continue to grow.

I've also been reading some books about shamanism recently. I talked a bit about shamanism in a previous episode, but it's really interesting, uh, quite a few indigenous cultures, uh, within their shamanistic practices, they, they say that, you know, or maybe it was one culture in particular, I don't know. But basically there was this idea that, um, we must sing every day. Singing is really important for our health, and if we don't sing enough, we will die, essentially.

And I thought that was really interesting because within like modern Western society, we see singing as this like frivolous, unimportant skill that some people have. And people who are good at singing should sing and they should be professional singers. And then people who are not good at singing should like, you know, maybe just sing in the shower, but keep it to themselves. Whereas I think singing is something beautiful and really healthy and important for all of us to do. And I want to make sure I continue to bring singing into my life.

Another thing I wish I'd done earlier was quit social media. So I, I never really had a moment where I officially completely quit social media. And to be honest, I don't have a moment where I officially started using it because I kind of grew up with it. So the boundaries of what we consider like modern social media are a bit fuzzy. Like when I was using Facebook as a teenager, yes, it was social media, but it wasn't unhealthy in the way that it is now. Like there was no infinite scroll and you used it on your computer because we didn't have smartphones. So it was, it was different, right.

Um, so I quit Twitter in 2020 and that was a huge thing, 'cause I was like fully addicted to Twitter. I also was really, really into Tumblr around like 2014, 2015. And I quit that at some point.

Um, but it was only really maybe like a year ago that I stopped using Instagram. And I was never like super addicted to Instagram, but I was using it for work and I was just kind of using it periodically every now and then. And then at a certain point, I think it was when I started my last job, because I was like, before, I was always like, well, I have to use social media for my podcast. Like I have to promote my podcast. So I felt a pressure to be on there.

And then when I got the job I was like, well, financially I don't really have to use social media anymore. So I just stopped going on Instagram and I haven't posted anything on my personal Instagram for months. I don't remember the last thing I posted because it was at the point where I was maybe downloading the app on my phone like once every few months to post one thing and then deleting it.

And then at a certain point I was like, what's the point? I'll just delete Instagram. And I felt great for it. Um, obviously quitting social media is easier for some people to do than others. I'm aware that some people really do have jobs where they have to be on social media. Also, I do sometimes feel like I'm a bit out of the loop. Like people talk about, oh, did you see this thing? And I'm like, no, I didn't 'cause I'm not on social media. But at the same time, most of the things that are shared on social media are kind of really unimportant. Like, it's not like it's important news or anything, it's just silly, frivolous, kind of not very interesting stuff.

And the longer you spend off social media, the stupider it seems. Like when I'm on the train and someone's on their phone next to me on TikTok and I look over their shoulder and look at what they're watching, I'm like, this is crap. This is just pure undiluted sludge, just like gr, like, just nothing like mud. Like it there, there's nothing really beautiful about it.

And of course there are interesting, beautiful things on social media, but um, there's this phrase, uh, the medium is the message, right? So the medium is the format and the medium controls the message we receive from it. So if you have a medium such as television, it's always going to force television programs to be in a certain way. And therefore, even if you make the best television program, it's still a TV program, right?

And with social media, the medium is very much the message. Like no matter how good the content is, no matter how artistic or beautiful or kind it may be, it's still within this framework of social media. So it's still going to be controlled and restricted by these platforms.

And these platforms are hugely restrictive in terms of creative energy. Like when you have to force your work into the format of like an Instagram post or a TikTok it often destroys the value of the work. And I'm saying this for myself. I was trying to promote Easy Stories in English on social media and Easy Stories in English, like it's online content, it's a podcast, so it shouldn't be that difficult to translate. And yet I was really struggling, like I was clipping parts of the episodes and putting them as videos and like I got some engagement.

Actually, the short videos I did that got the most engagement was when I did conversational episodes. And I would take a clip, like out of context, like maybe I'm talking about normal people problems or like a famous person or whatever. And I would just have that as a short video on like YouTube shorts or TikTok or Instagram reels. And those did the best because people saw them out of context and they took my opinions and they were like, oh, you're really wrong, or, oh, you're really right. And suddenly something that within the context of a long podcast is just quite a normal opinion, becomes this like strong opinion that we are fighting over because that's the medium of short form video. You have to be inflammatory, you have to be really angry and direct, and people will agree or disagree very strongly with whatever your opinion is.

So, um, so yeah, I wish I'd quit social media earlier. At the same time, I do sometimes worry like, am I making myself obsolete as an artist? Like, am I risking my own artistic career because I'm avoiding social media, which is so important in our world now. I don't know. That's a difficult question to be honest.

If I'm being really, really real... Oh, I'm really careful about saying this because, um, I love doing Easy Stories in English. It's a huge blessing that I'm able to do the podcast and I have so many listeners and I've been able to do it for so long. But, um, it's really difficult making online content because right now I'm in my room with the smell of incense by myself, right? I'm recording this on a computer. I'm going to edit this on a computer. It's going to go up onto the internet, and then I will probably receive some comments on the internet.

So throughout that whole process, I am producing nothing physical. At the end of this episode, I will not have a physical object to touch to show that this is what I created. None of the feedback I receive will be physical. It will all be digital. Right? And that's strange. Like it's really weird as an artist to be creating something where you don't have a physical object and you don't receive physical feedback.

And I think of YouTubers and TikTokers and people who make online content creation their job. I think it's really risky for your mental health. Like it's very dangerous for your mental health because as an artist, like feedback is vital. It's so important. And sometimes having just a physical piece of artwork that you've created is a form of feedback, right? You are. You are literally, like, you've created something and you see it, and that gives you a sense of power and strength and progression.

But when you are only creating digital art, it can be easy to kind of lose touch with that. And then you start measuring things in social media metrics like, how many views did this get? How many comments did this get?

So I don't know. I, I've realized I need to prioritize embodied work more like, I need to try and do more performance. And I've been able to do quite a bit of performance since moving to London. Like I've done standup comedy and storytelling performance, but I need to make that more of a priority in my work. And that's difficult because the more I focus on that, potentially the less time I have for this, right? For the podcast. But I want to believe that there's a way to balance the two.

I think we have a really strange situation with art right now where someone can be like a musician, let's say, and performing concerts like every week, right? They can be doing weekly concerts. Um, the people who come to those concerts are maybe like they're big fans. Like they come to every concert. They kind of build this community. But then when you look at that person's social media, maybe they have like 200 followers, right? Like, I know people who are professional storytellers, like they perform, they, they are paid to go and perform at storytelling festivals and events, and they have fewer Instagram followers than me because their artwork is based in the real world and not online.

And actually marrying the two is really difficult. We've kind of been sold this idea that, oh yeah, just take what you do in real life and present it on social media and that will make you successful. And I don't think that's the case. I think they're really two separate worlds that, maybe if we think of a Venn diagram, they're these two separate worlds, these two circles that have a small overlap in the middle. But for the most part, they're very separate, right? And the interactions between them are kind of, they're often hard to track. Like it's very hard to force. Even if you have a huge audience and kind of influence in a real world space, you can't necessarily force that into social media. It's very difficult to predict the interactions.

So, what am I trying to say? Um, I guess I wish I had prioritized making art for community earlier, specifically because I think making artwork for real people within a real embodied space, um, even if it's maybe harder to monetize and make money from in the long term, I think it's much better for your growth as an artist and for your mental health.

Ooh, that was a bit of a long one.

Okay. The fifth thing. The fifth, this is a very hard word to say. The fifth. The fifth thing. I wish I had started. The fifth thing. I think. Girl, come on. It's my native language.

The fifth thing I wish I'd started doing earlier. Thank you. Dump people early.

So when you dump someone, you are dating someone, you're in a relationship with someone, and then you break up with them, you dump them. Dump can mean to like throw away basically. Right. It's not the nicest word. Usually if we talk about dumping someone, it means we're maybe not doing it in the nicest way, but yeah. And often, you know, you are

the one getting dumped, right? Like if you say, oh, I got dumped, it means someone broke up with you.

And um, look, I'm a very emotional, romantic person. You know this, I know this, I've talked about this before. I fall in love very easily. I have very strong emotions. I share my emotions readily. Um, actually yesterday I came into my old workplace and I talked to my colleague and I was talking about my feelings and she was like, you know, you really share your feelings very openly and easily, and that's nice, but you need, you need to be careful because people will take advantage of that.

And I think she's right. And actually, before I moved to London, I was even more like emotionally open. Like my chest was just open for everyone to come and poke my heart. You know, like I was way too sensitive in many ways. And I've built up more of an armor now, and when I date people, I'm better at holding back emotionally. Like I don't let out all my emotions too quickly.

And the other skill I've developed kind of dating in London is, um, dumping people early, right? Because in the past I had a real tendency like to go on a few dates with someone and then be like, oh, hmm, I mean, there's good things and bad things, but like, let's keep going and see, see what it's like. Or I'd be in a relationship and there was something that made me uncomfortable, like something that fundamentally didn't work in the relationship, but I would just keep going with it, right? And then you end up having very unfulfilling relationships. And then it makes it harder to have good relationships in the future because you've convinced yourself that this is what I deserve, this is what I want, when actually you deserve better.

So, um, recently, I've had a few instances of like dating someone and after two or three dates I just realized, hmm, this person isn't quite making me feel how I want to feel, or this isn't quite what I want. And just being like, okay, I'm gonna end it here, right? And I'm not gonna see this person again.

And that's, um, that's been really difficult actually. Like, I feel a sense of guilt because um, I guess I find it very hard to reject people in that way, and especially if they're like emotionally vulnerable people or whatever. But, um, I've realized it's just much healthier for both of us. And, uh, I don't really have the time to be wasting on people who aren't bringing me joy, you know?

I, uh, I want to prioritize the most beautiful people in my life, and this applies to friendships as well. And I was actually really reflecting on this because I had my birthday picnic on Saturday, well, the Saturday before I record this episode, which was weeks ago. Anyway, um, but everyone there is super lovely. There were some old friends and there was some new friends and everyone I talked to who, you know, came and met other people, said they had a really good time and that everyone was really lovely.

And I really had this moment of realizing like, yeah, the friends I have in my life now are all lovely people. I don't have crappy friends in my life. And in the past I definitely had friends who I maybe tolerated certain things that I shouldn't have tolerated, or there were just incompatibilities that I was ignoring, whereas now I'm really only focusing on the beautiful people who bring me joy. So there we go.

And finally, and this is a very difficult word to say, the sixth thing that I wish I'd done earlier was, is learning to cook.

Uh, I've talked about cooking before in the podcast. I'm not a natural chef, let's put it that way. I didn't learn to cook properly until I was probably like 29, 30, which is quite shocking. Um, actually no, maybe 28. Anyway, a few years ago, basically when I was living with my partner in Devon, um, in the southwest of the UK, uh, because we lived in a really small town where there were no restaurants, so I had no option. I had to learn to cook.

And I'm definitely not like a, a super chef now, but I can throw food together without getting really stressed. And actually for my birthday, I really wanted to cook for people. So I made like a really big pasta salad, which ended up being more work than I expected because I doubled the recipe size. I doubled the portion size, so it made enough for like six people. And then it was like, it was a lot of food. Like I made pesto from scratch. I made lots of pasta. I cut up all these tomatoes and stuff. Um, but it was really nice.

So I, I, you know, now I can follow a recipe without getting really stressed. I can improvise cooking. Um, do I cook a lot? No, uh, mainly 'cause I'm very busy and I'm not at home that much. So I'm a bit lazy when it comes to cooking. And I really like eating out and in London there's a lot of options for eating out, right? But, um, I like that I have the ability to do it, and I wish I'd started doing it sooner because if I'd started cooking earlier in my twenties, I would probably be better at it now and more comfortable with it. And certainly it would've been much better for my health.

I think I was really unhealthy in my early twenties, and a lot of it was just because I didn't cook. I was buying like ready meals and crap all the time. So yeah, learning to cook I think is one of those really fundamental life skills that we should all have. When I meet people older than me who cannot cook, it's quite, um, I realize how, how limiting that is because it's like you have to eat... Well, you can fast, but usually most people have to eat at least once a day, right? And if you can't cook, you are relying on other people or like ready meals like every day for that, right? Like, that's not great, and it's certainly not good for your health.

Also, recently, I've just really like enjoyed cooking as a creative act. It feels very satisfying. Cooking for other people is like, oh, such a lovely feeling. So yeah. So I wish I'd learned to cook sooner.

To be fair, I wish my parents had properly taught me to cook, but it's like a cultural thing in the UK. Well, English people generally are pretty atrocious at cooking, and it's not something we tend to like pass down through the generations. So I think that's something I don't love about my own culture, but there we go.

Okay, so I've mentioned it like five times already, but my birthday party. So my birthday was officially on the 5th of May. Ooh, there's that word again. Fifth. You know what word is really hard to say is sixths. Sixths, which is like a sixth is like the fraction one over six. Right. And then if you have multiple sixths, like three sixths, which would be half, three sixths. Oh, it's horrible. Anyway, sixths.

Um, so I celebrated my birthday on Saturday the third because it was nicer weather. I invited a lot of people, like maybe like 60 people, but a lot of people were traveling because it was the bank holiday weekend. So the bank holiday are just a, a bank holiday is like a day we have as national holiday in the UK.

So many people were away. So in the end it was about 15, 20 people throughout the day. Um, so I did a picnic in Hampstead Heath, which is a big park in North London. And then I went swimming, uh, because there are some lovely outdoor ponds and pools in Hampstead Heath. I went swimming with two people from the party and then I went clubbing in the night.

Um, so the picnic was absolutely gorgeous. I was really intrigued to see what it would be like because I had people from very different parts of my life there. I had people from my church, I had people from my yoga studio. I had very old friends, and, um, yeah, just, oh, I even had some of my ex-students there, uh, from the school I worked at.

So it was a really interesting environment, but everyone got on really, really well. The food was great. As I said, I cooked this pasta salad, which people ate all of it, so I guess that means I did a good job because I made a lot of food. We had two birthday cakes, which was

like, ugh, amazing. So yeah, the, I, I'm not giving up sugar anymore. I'm having less sugar than before, but I couldn't say no to a birthday cake or even two birthday cakes.

And, um, we were really lucky with the weather because it had been really hot and sunny all week, and it was supposed to get colder that day. But actually when the sun was out, it was really warm, so a lot of us were like wearing just swimming trunks or shorts and sunbathing, so that was lovely. Um, I did smoke a bit of cigarettes. I'm very annoyed. I have two friends who are supposed to be quitting smoking, but they were smoking at my party, so I was like, fine, well if you can smoke, i'm gonna smoke as well.

Um, and I also drank, and it's weird. I go through phases of like drinking and not drinking, and I'm currently in a drinking phase, but because I don't normally drink very much, I don't have to drink a lot to get drunk. So I really only had a few glasses of wine. Uh, but it was great. It was like I brought some Prosecco, someone else brought some Prosecco, some people brought some glasses, sorry, some bottles of wine. So we had like, just enough alcohol. Some people had cider, but it wasn't like getting crazy drunk or anything.

My friend, uh, Roger from my yoga class is like the queen of picnics and he brought like, like a, an ice bag to cool the drinks in and all of this like beautiful Italian food and one of the cakes. My ex-students brought the other cake. So we did like two cake cuttings. I even gave a speech at some point and uh, it got, it got a bit emotional.

Uh, this was my 32nd birthday, so I'm 32 now. Um, so it's not like a super important birthday, but it felt like a very big birthday to me because... Well, I'm going to China in a few months, right? In August, I'm moving to China and this is a decision I've wanted to, it's a thing I've wanted to do for a long time, but I didn't feel ready until this year, and it's really because of all the friends I have that I felt ready to make this decision. And I basically said that in the speech. You know, I have people from all these beautiful communities like yoga or my church. I have old friends and new friends, and all of them have really made me the person I am today. Like they've given me the confidence and helped me understand who I am and given me that really strong, safe base to fly off from.

So I now feel ready to leave the nest to fly away into adventure and do something different. So, yeah, it was quite emotional. And then at a certain point, me and two friends went swimming in the mixed ponds, uh, in the park. But by the time we got back, oh, well, I should say the water was very cold. It was maybe 14 or 15 degrees, but it was bracing. It felt good. And I love swimming, especially like wild swimming. Um, and it's like a pond with ducks and stuff in it, so it's quite nice. Um, just don't drink the water. I didn't myself.

Um, but when I came out I was really cold and the weather had turned and when we got back to the picnic, it was like really windy and cloudy and freezing cold. So we quickly packed everything up and then I headed home to get ready to go clubbing. Hmm.

So the club I went to is called Trough, T-R-O-U-G-H. Uh, so a trough is like a long metal thing that you put food in to feed barn animals, right? Like you feed pigs out of a trough, you pour food into this long trough, and then the pigs eat the food. So that kind of gives you an idea what the vibe of the club was like.

So it's like a techno club, a gay techno club. Um, everyone there is like half naked, let's say. Most people had their shirts off. A lot of people were wearing harnesses, which I can't really explain what a harness is. Uh, it's kind of like a strap around your chest. If you are familiar with gay culture, you'll probably know what it is. Um, I'll put a picture in or you can Google it.

Uh, so people wearing harnesses and like shorts or jock straps, like leather and rubber. So it was a bit, you know, something a bit different. And there were lots of dark rooms as well, which are, um, oh, so I have to be careful of how much I say on the main podcast.



They're rooms with, uh, which are pretty dark, there's not a lot of lighting and there's lots of interesting things that happen in them. Um, and if you are interested in that, I, I recommend you do your own research.

Um, but I was, I was uncertain if I would enjoy it because I've never really liked techno music before, but I, I just wanted to try it and I, I loved it. I, I really enjoyed it. I was very surprised. Maybe it's also 'cause I haven't been clubbing in so long, I was just like desperate for some clubbing. So I was there with two friends who weren't able to come to the picnic and they said that they go clubbing maybe like once every three or four years. So for them it was like a, okay, we're doing this again.

Um, but I got really into the music because the nice thing about techno, because it's like a steady beat, you can really like lose yourself in it. Um, and they had two dance floors. One was a bit slower, one was a bit faster, and like harder techno. And I really liked the harder stuff actually 'cause I could like really get my body into it. And then I found it, uh, yeah, it gave me like a certain energy and like excitement that was, um, useful for doing other things at the club. So, uh, I had a great time.

It was really interesting. So I was like on the dance floor and there were all of these like shirtless masculine guys, like dancing really stiffly. But then there was this one like non-binary person who was like long black hair, beautiful dress, like really feminine, dancing in a much more interesting way. And at first I was like, this person must, um, they must have come with friends or something.

And then I realized, I was like, no, I think she's on her own. I was kind of like dancing near her at one point. And then we made eye contact and then we were kind of like playing around, kind of like doing silly dance moves and like making fun of the other people dancing around us. And then we got really into it and we started talking and you know, there may have been some kissing as well. Um, who am I to say?

Um, but yeah, it was, it was a really interesting experience 'cause I didn't expect to meet someone kind of giving that femme non-binary energy in such like a masculine space. So it felt quite like subversive and like queer. Um, and we left together and then I found out, I was like, she was saying some words that like, oh, one of the words she said was cringe, which is very like youth slang. And I was like, hmm, how old are you? And she said she was 21. And I was like, oh my God, I didn't just get off with a 21-year-old.

Um, so when you go clubbing, you get, if you get off with someone, it means like you meet someone and maybe you start kissing, making out, maybe go home together. So I got off with a 21-year-old, which makes me feel very creepy. Like normally I'm the one getting with older men and that's fine 'cause I'm the young one, but I'm not used to the other way around. It feels very strange. Um, especially 21, that's a very tender, vulnerable age. Um, but yeah, so I got off with this 21-year-old and that, that was odd. Um, but there we go.

It was a night of many experiences and I got home at about 5:00 AM and honestly, I can't believe my stamina because on Saturday I did two yoga classes in the morning, I did the picnic, I did the swimming, I went clubbing and then I got back at 5:00 AM on Sunday and I hadn't even drunk that much. I did have a few Red Bulls though, and they definitely helped.

Um, and then I had a, you know, not an awful hangover, like emotionally, I was just kind of on like a come down, like I was on such an emotional high on Saturday and then Sunday and Monday were a bit like, ugh. Yeah. Like not, not so happy. Um, but it has reminded me that I love clubbing and I need to go to more clubs like Trough.

So I am, I have made a list of nights that are coming up and I've filled my calendar. So that's a fun new hobby for me to get into before I leave for China. But also, you know what,

I'm looking forward to clubbing in China. I think it's gonna be a very different vibe and maybe the music will be quite different, but I'm sure it'll be a lot of fun.

And honestly, I'm, I'm like, I should try going to music festivals 'cause I've never been to a music festival and I really didn't think it was my thing, but now I'm like discovering this whole new side of myself.

So I think for me, honestly, it's the, um, I liked the fact that at this club in particular, you couldn't, you didn't just have to dance. There were like other activities to partake in. That makes it more interesting.

There's a rave. So a rave is like these massive parties where people, it's like electronic music, I guess normally, and people dance for like hours and hours and it's very like, whoa. And uh, there's a queer rave in London called Riposte which they call like a queer art rave, so it's like a rave but they also have like art exhibitions and performances and I think some dark rooms. And I really want to go to that before I leave for China. So I need, but, but it's the kind of thing where you have to dress up, like everyone dresses up and wears these amazing costumes and stuff, so I definitely want to do that. So, yeah. So, uh, Ariel Goodbody lets loose! Oh.

Okay, so let me talk about some books I've read recently and then I'm gonna talk about one film that I've watched recently.

So, as you may know, I'm doing a Japanese exam in July. So I've been reading some books in Japanese to work on my Japanese and the one I most recently finished is *Butter* by Asako Yuzuki.

So *Butter* was actually published in 2017 in Japan, but it was translated into English last year in 2024, and it won Waterstones Book of the Year. So Waterstones is the biggest chain of bookshops in the UK, and *Butter* was like a, a big success in the UK.

So it's, it's a really interesting concept. It's basically, well, I thought it was going to be like a Japanese version of *Silence of the Lambs*. So *Silence of the Lambs* is that film with Hannibal Lecter, where they're trying to solve a murder mystery, and they have to talk to this old murderer to like understand how this other murderer is working.

Um, I thought it was gonna be like a Japanese version of that, because basically it's about this, uh, news reporter who goes to interview this woman who is in prison because she, and she's called, um, Manako Kajii. But, uh, Kajii has basically been seducing men. Like she's been making men fall in love with her by cooking them amazing food with loads of like butter and cream and like really rich stuff. And then the men all die under mysterious circumstances. Like one of them falls in front of a train, one of them has a heart attack and so on. And basically, um, the reporter is interviewing her and trying to get in her head. So she starts eating all the food that Kajii talks about, like making all this butter and like fancy food. And then she kind of starts to understand her psychology through that. So it's like trying to understand the psychology of this killer.

But actually a lot more of the story is to do with whether or not she killed these people. Like did she actually kill these people or did she, um, accidentally cause their death by like being a big part of their life romantically and then suddenly leaving? So it's interesting 'cause it's kind of, it's got loads of like gorgeous descriptions of food and cooking, um, but then it's also to do really with the status of women in modern Japanese society. It's a very feminist novel. Like it's really about like, what does it mean to be a woman in Japanese society? Like what are the pressures and expectations and how can women like truly be free, um, from the expectations to be like the perfect housewife and to cook and to look after men.

So in that sense, it's a really, really interesting book and it's very different from, you know, if you read like a Western feminist novel because the issues are slightly different. So

there's parts of it that I think probably resonates much more with Japanese readers than English readers. But I really loved it.

It kind of surprised me because the first, third or half, like followed one structure where I kind of thought it was this *Silence of the Lambs* kind of thing, and then it took a turn and became a lot more personal. My favorite parts of the book, well, my favorite part of the book was absolutely the relationship between the reporter and this mysterious killer woman, Kajii. Um, because it gets very psychosexual. Like there's this weird thing of like, oh, she's obsessed with me. No, I'm obsessed with her. And then all of this like sexual stuff, like with the food and she's putting on weight, but she feels really happy in her body and she's having all this butter. Um. So that stuff is really interesting. I love any kind of psychosexual drama. I just, I just love that stuff.

Um, it's a long book though. It's almost 500 pages, so it took me months to finish in Japanese. Uh, but it was really, really useful for my Japanese and it's a really interesting book. I definitely recommend reading it. It's been translated now into many different languages.

I didn't think it quite met my expectations, like the version of the book I expected, I think I maybe would've enjoyed more, but it was really, really interesting and it felt like very topical. Um, like I said, if you don't know much about Japanese society, well it might be more interesting for you in a way. Uh, for me it was interesting 'cause it's kind of like covering these issues of feminism that I'm used to only seeing from a Western perspective.

So yeah, *Butter* by Asako Yuzuki. Good book.

I also just read *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino. Italo Calvino is an Italian writer, and he's one of my favorite authors ever, actually.

So he wrote, uh, *If On A Winter's Night a Traveler*, which is a very famous book because it's written in the second person, so you are the protagonist of that story. *Invisible Cities* is a similarly ambitious work. He does very weird experimental work.

So the concept of *Invisible Cities* is, it's a conversation between Kublai Khan and Marco Polo and Marco Polo has been sent to travel to all the cities in Kublai Khan's empire, so he can come back and give a description of them. But the descriptions he gives of these cities are all really strange and fantastical. He's basically describing places that don't exist and rather than talking about the city in like a, you know, a, a practical, materialistic way. He's talking about them very magically and philosophically like, oh, this is a city where everyone you see has the face of a dead person you once knew, for example.

So it's really beautiful and poetic and it's really like a meditation on like what are cities like, what is the role of the city in the human consciousness and in our society and history, and what does it mean to exist within a city and to move through cities and just existence in general.

There's a strong theme of like refracted reflection and mirroring throughout, and like false reflections that I find very interesting. So between the descriptions of the cities, there are conversations between Kublai Khan and Marco Polo, and they're these beautiful kind of like philosophical discussions where they get to the point where they're, they're so like mentally connected that they don't even have to talk. They just imagine the arguments they're having with each other. Um.

And as always, with Italo Calvino's writing the prose is just beautiful. He does have very long, challenging sentences at times, but he also just has these beautiful turns of phrases and everything has such a rich physical quality to it. Like the way he describes these places, like I get really strong visual images. So it's a really, it's a really inspiring book and it's the

kind of book that I think you could come back to many times. Uh, it's very short. It's maybe like 150 pages.

And, yeah, I, I honestly, 'cause all of the other books on this list today are, I read in the original language. This one I read in translation from Italian. If I were, if I were to look, well, at some point I probably will learn Italian. But my main motivation for learning Italian is honestly to read Italo Calvino in the original language because I just, I love his writing so much.

So *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino: read it.

Finally. It's actually been a while since I read this, but I did read it recently. *A Long Petal of the Sea* by Isabel Allende.

Isabel Allende is one of my other favorite authors. She's from Chile. She wrote, uh, *The House of Spirits*, *Eva Luna* and many other famous books. She's a very prolific writer, actually. She publishes books a lot and she writes really long epic books. This one wasn't so long, but it's certainly an epic story.

It's kind of based in reality, right? It's about a family who grows up in Catalonia, and then the Spanish Civil War happens and they're forced to escape into France, and then they go on this ship called the *Winnipeg*, which was described in a poem by Pablo Neruda as a long petal of the sea. They go on this ship called the *Winnipeg* to Chile, and they're allowed to emigrate to Chile and start a new life in Chile.

But then in Chile there's the, um, the coup, the coup d'état. So a coup d'état is when the government is suddenly taken over illegally, usually by military force. And there was this big military coup d'état where Pinochet, uh, took control of the government and sent many people to concentration camps, essentially. And there's this big stadium in, um, I think it's Santiago, the capital, where they sent all of these people for days and they were like starving. And they had to, you know, do everything just in this open hot stadium. It was a concentration camp.

So it's a really difficult story in some ways because the main character gets put in a concentration camp, like two or three times in different parts of the world, in different countries. So it's like really rough. Um, but it's also a, just a beautiful story like, really like you get this whole person's life and such a rich and varied life and it's, it does something that I find very difficult to do in my own writing, but that Isabel Allende does beautifully, where at times it really zooms in and you have these like long, slow moments and then other times it zooms out and you get maybe like 10 or 20 years in quick succession. But you really get this beautiful portrait of a very complicated and difficult life and like a really specific combination of circumstances in history.

So honestly, I learned so much about the Spanish Civil War and the history of Chile from this book. It's like really vital actually, I think, if you wanna understand either of those topics. This is a really fantastic book to read.

I read it in Spanish. Um, her writing is beautiful. Uh, it's, you know, I think she focuses more on story than prose. It's like less poetic than, uh, Italo Calvino, for example. But I do think her writing is really joyful. Like you always get this sense of just a love of life and humanity and a great compassion through, through her writing. And I think especially this is a work that's much less fantastical than her other stories. So it's wonderful that she was able to bring in this love and beauty into like a really difficult topic.

So yeah, strongly recommend *A Long Petal of the Sea* by Isabel Allende.

And finally, I recently saw the film, *The Tribulations of Balthazar Kober*.

This is a Polish-French film. It's a really interesting film. So I saw it at Kinoteka, which was this Polish film festival in London. It was the only film I saw from it, but my friend invited

me. So as a Polish-French production, some of the actors are Polish and some of them are French, and the Polish actors spoke in Polish and the French actors spoke in French. And then there's a Polish version of the film where the French lines are dubbed into Polish and a French version of the film where the Polish lines are dubbed into French.

So it creates this really interesting situation where, I guess there's no like definitive version of the film because both versions have some of the lines being dubbed, like spoken over. But the version we saw was in Polish. And to be honest, I think it's probably more the official version because most of the actors are speaking Polish in the film.

So it's very hard to describe the story because it's very hard to follow the story. It's set in the 16th century in Germany, and this uh, boy, Balthazar Kober is a bit simple. He has a stutter. A stutter is when you talk like this. Yeah, that's a stutter. He has a stutter and he's quite simple. And it's basically about his adventures through medieval Europe.

So a lot of his family members die of illnesses, so he's left to kind of wander on his own. And then he meets this strange group of like performers and acrobats and circus people, and they invite him into their world, but then they disappear. So he's looking for them. In particular, he's looking for this man called Papagallo who like leads this group of performers. And while looking for them, he ends up joining this group of Protestants.

So this is all set in medieval Europe, right? Where the Protestants were trying to like print the Bible in translation, but then the, the Church's Inquisition was coming after them to try and stop them. So he's like working with the printers and then on the run from the Inquisition.

So it's very hard to follow the plot and really the main theme of the story is like, what is real and what is a dream? And particularly Balthazar finds it very hard to distinguish between dreams and reality. There are many scenes where dead people from his past come and talk to him and give him advice.

Um, but it is a gorgeous film. Like it's so beautiful. Every scene is meticulously presented. All of the sets are phenomenal and truly like every detail is just gorgeous. So it kind of, um, follows this tradition of picaresque novels. So it is based on a real French novel. And picaresque novels were these novels that were popular in the Middle Ages where the idea is, it's like usually a simple working class protagonist going on many adventures and surviving through his wits, through his intelligence. Um. Well, I guess I said he's usually simple, but wits is that kind of street smarts, right? Rather than traditional bookish intelligence.

But it's more picaresque in the sense that it's a collection of really beautiful and intriguing scenes that maybe don't add up to a super cohesive story, but they leave you with this very strong impression. And it's an amazing film to see. It's like wandering through a dream. And there are so many memorable scenes. Like there's this scene where he goes to see a cardinal or something and he's, or maybe it's the Pope and he's trying to like, get a blessing from him, but like the cardinal is in like a, a brothel, like a whore house essentially. And he's getting his feet washed by one of the people at the brothel. Like while Balthazar is talking to him. It's very strange. Um.

But yeah, it was a really, really beautiful film and really intriguing. So I'm really glad I saw it because it gave me a lot of inspiration and I, I'm curious to see more films by the same director. Also, it's one of those films that when me and my friend looked it up afterwards, there's very little information about it online, and this version we saw was a restored version. So it might be that actually for a long time it was actually quite hard to even see the film. So that's the kind of thing where I'm like, really glad I saw it during this film festival, because maybe otherwise I would have never seen it.

So if you're looking for something beautiful and intriguing, I definitely recommend The Tribulations of Balthazar Kober.

Okay then! I've been prattling on, I've been talking for possibly over an hour now, certainly around an hour. So I think it's time I maybe shut up and left you all to your lives, but it's been lovely talking to you today. I had a pleasure. Hopefully you enjoyed this episode, um, and hopefully you've learned some new vocabulary from it. Certainly this is one of the most wide-ranging episodes I've ever done.

And I'd love to hear what are things you wish you'd started doing earlier? Like my things. Just leave a comment and let me know. I'm very curious to know.

We don't want to live with regrets, right? We don't want to think, oh, I should have done this, I should have done that. But sometimes we can have like a, a light regret, like, oh, it would've been good if I had done that sooner. So no serious regrets. Let's keep it light and fun and free, but do tell me what you wish you'd done sooner and book a class with me.

Remember, you can get 50% off in June and July. You can book one class, you can book 10 classes. It doesn't really matter. All that matters is you get them cheaper and you get to learn English with me personally, and I can tailor our classes to really help you with whatever you need.

So again, to book classes with me, go to [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Classes](https://EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Classes) or click the link in the description.

Have a lovely day, and I'll see you soon. Bye.