

Hello and 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. Today's episode is a conversation about pretty much whatever I want. That's right. It's a freewheeling improvisational conversational episode. But as always, you can find the transcript and PDF at EasyStoriesInEnglish.com, and you can find the link to that in the description.

So as I'm recording this, it is the 5th of August, which means I am just five days away from flying to China. But as you listen to this, I will already be in China. So nihao!

There's been so much going on in my life preparing to leave that I thought it would be nice to just have a little check-in to just kind of talk about my feelings and tell you all how things are going because as you know, I never talk about my feelings on Easy Stories in English.

If you're like, Ooh, the sound is really good today, well, it's because I'm staying at my friend's and she has a little closet, like a little, uh, broom cupboard I guess, which she doesn't really use. And it's perfect for recording a podcast in because it is a small, enclosed space.

Now, I think it will be good for sound quality. It certainly seems to have a lot of reverb, which generally is good, I guess? I'm not sure if it's ideal for a spoken word podcast, but I think it will probably be better than where I was recording before because that place had quite a metallic sound.

I don't know if this is stuff that any of you actually care about. I know as a podcaster myself, I try to make as good a space as possible to record in, and I've been very frustrated in the past when I haven't been able to record at the quality I would like. A lot of people think podcast recording quality is all about the microphone, but really 80% of it is, well, maybe not 80%, but a large part of it is the space you record in and how the sound moves around in that space. And unfortunately, if you're living in rented accommodation as I always have, you usually don't have much of a choice about that, and soundproofing a space, trying to change a space to be better acoustically, to have better sound, can be very expensive, difficult, and possibly even ineffective.

So it's really all about the space first. So I'm gonna take advantage of this little closet wardrobe space and hopefully it will lead to a pleasant listening experience for all of you.

If you usually watch on YouTube and you're like, Hey, there's no video this time! That's because I'm not recording a video this time, because currently I only have my laptop. I've sold my desktop computer, which I use to edit video, and my laptop's pretty old. It's over 10 years old now, and I can edit videos on it, but it's quite a slow process.

So I decided, you know what? I am busy enough with preparing to leave for China. Why don't I just make this a bit easier on myself? And once I'm settled in China, I'm going to buy a new computer and hopefully some new recording equipment so I can really level up the podcast.

And to be honest, although I love seeing comments from people on YouTube, I really like making a video version of the podcast, the vast majority of you listeners are listening through a podcast app and not watching the video, so it's a bit silly to prioritise the video.

Anyway, it's really been a week of lasts. So last Friday I had my last day at work, at the school I worked at in London. And that was nice and one of my colleagues very kindly gave me a cake and some bubbly.

So bubbly in this case means a bottle of champagne, but generally bubbly refers to any kind of sparkling wine. It's a very British way of saying, um, getting a bottle of something. Yeah? Like, oh, there's, there's some bubbly in the fridge. That kind of thing.

So I had some cake and some bubbly, and I took the bubbly to church on Sunday. That might seem strange. Why are you bringing alcohol to church?

Well, it was my last time at my church. I go to an Anglican church in South London that I feel very, very connected to, and we had a little goodbye and it was very moving. Um, they gave me a blessing in front of everyone and a round of applause as well, which was really sweet. And then we had bubbly and Colin the Caterpillar cake.

So Colin the Caterpillar cake is a very important British cultural tradition. A caterpillar is that insect that grows into a butterfly. You might know a children's book called *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, it's quite famous worldwide, about a caterpillar who eats lots and lots of food and then grows into a butterfly. And Colin the Caterpillar cake is a cake you can buy from Marks and Spencer's, a British supermarket chain, which is in the shape of a caterpillar called Colin, shockingly enough.

But for some reason, Colin the Caterpillar cakes have just become this thing that people get, maybe when they're growing up, at birthday parties or maybe at office parties. They really represent like celebration and a bit of fun and a bit of that very British kind of unseriousness. You know, we never take things too seriously. We always like to make a joke and what could be sillier than saying goodbye to someone by giving them a cake shaped like a caterpillar?

Now, despite this being quite a British cultural icon, I actually never had a Colin the Caterpillar cake growing up. In fact, I felt robbed of this experience because I didn't know it was such a normal experience until quite late on in life. So when I was asked what cake I would like for my farewell at church, I naturally said Colin the Caterpillar.

Well, actually I was hoping they might get me a really fancy cake from this cake shop around the corner. But you know, Colin the Caterpillar was also a good choice. I was also very happy and I ate the face, which is the best part of the cake 'cause it has lots of yummy chocolate. And I think it's tradition that the person being celebrated eats Colin's face. That's very weird now that I say that. I ate Colin's face.

But this has become such a thing, this cake, that all the other supermarkets have ripped it off. They've copied it and done their own versions. So at Sainsbury's, you can get Wiggles the Worm, and um, there are all other kinds of caterpillar/worm cakes at all the supermarkets, but from what I understand, Colin the Caterpillar is the best quality caterpillar shaped cake in the UK. So I'm very glad I had the authentic experience, and I will say the Prosecco really helped it go down.

So, yeah, I had my last day at work, I had my last time at church, I'm seeing lots of people for the last time, particularly at my yoga studio. I've said goodbye to several people, although often it's that awkward thing of, oh, well, I might see you again, so I'll say goodbye now. And you know, I'm really coming to appreciate the beauty of the Irish goodbye.

If you don't know, the Irish goodbye is when you leave a party without saying goodbye to anyone. You just leave quietly and quickly, and I guess it's called the Irish goodbye because Irish people have a reputation for not saying goodbye and just leaving. I dunno if that's because Irish gatherings tend to be very big, very family focused, and I know from personal experience, if you have a big family saying goodbye can become a whole operation.

Certainly at my family gatherings you need to plan in at least 10 to 15 minutes before you actually need to leave to say goodbye to everyone because everyone wants to talk to you when you say goodbye and there's hugs and kisses, and it turns into quite an operation.

So, you know, there were various groups and spaces and people who I was planning on saying a formal goodbye to maybe seeing at yoga or sending them a text. And then I just realised I couldn't be bothered. Um, and that's not that I don't wanna say goodbye to these

people, but it's really hard when I'm in this headspace of, okay, I'm getting ready to leave. I'm trying to rest before I go. It's gonna be a big change. And then people are like, oh wow. Oh, you're gonna have an amazing time. Have a safe journey. Oh, it's been really nice to know you. Oh, well maybe I'll see you again.

And you're going through this same script of saying goodbye again and again with different people. And I don't know, it just feels a bit unnecessary, like I'm sure some of these people will send me a text message when they realise I've gone, and that's lovely and I'm happy with that, but I don't feel this need to make long drawn-out goodbyes with everyone.

Originally, I thought this last week was going to be very social. I thought I would have a last drinks event and say goodbye to everyone. But yeah, I've actually just been spending a lot of time by myself and that's been lovely. I've been resting a lot, which has been much needed.

And actually it's really kickstarted my creative process. Yesterday morning I just wrote three stories for the podcast back to back. Um, that was really cool. So it's clear that this is what my body needs, and I was telling myself, oh, I need to make sure I do lots of exercise this week because I'm going to be sitting on a plane for 12 hours on Sunday. And then my friend pointed out to me, travel is very tiring. Sitting on a plane for 12 hours, it's not like just relaxing at home, it's going to tire you out. And I was like, oh yeah, travel is exhausting. Like I had kind of forgotten about that part. So I should rest up in anticipation of the travel fatigue.

I will say I'm actually weirdly excited about the plane journey, about the flight. It will be the first time I've flown long-haul. Long-haul is when you fly like a really long distance. It'll be the first time I've flown long-haul since 2013, I think, when I flew to Japan. So that's going to be interesting. I'm flying from London to Shanghai, and then I'm getting the maglev train from Shanghai Pudong Airport to the city centre.

So Maglev is short for magnetic levitation, and it's this very complex high-tech form of train that literally levitates on magnets, it floats on magnets, and this train goes at 350 kilometers per hour. So it gets you from the airport to the city centre in 10 minutes. Needless to say, we don't have anything that cool in the UK, certainly nothing that fast, so I'm really looking forward to that.

Then I'll have a few hours in the city centre. I'll probably store my luggage and go and have breakfast somewhere because I will be landing in Shanghai at about eight in the morning.

And then in the afternoon I'll be going to the other airport, um, not to fly, but to get the train from Shanghai to Ningbo, where I will be picked up and beginning my new adventure in China.

So one thing that's always horrible about flying long-haul east is that you get jet lag, right? Jet lag is when your body can't adjust to the difference in time zones and you feel very tired. But there is a scientifically proven method to avoid jet lag, and it is fasting. Now, I've talked about intermittent fasting on the podcast before, but essentially this is a method that actually, I think it's the Foreign Services Institute in America invented, where basically you calculate when your first meal will be in the country you are going to, and then you fast for 16 hours leading up to that. So theoretically I will be fasting from 9:00 AM on the day I fly until I land and get breakfast.

The reason for doing this is when you fast and then eat a meal, it kind of resets your body clock. So by having breakfast as my first meal, by breaking the fast in Shanghai at the kind of normal time for that part of the world, I should hopefully be telling my body, Hey, it's breakfast, it's morning.

And there are also some other parts like you're supposed to spend a lot of your first day outside, get lots of sunshine. You're also supposed to eat a specific diet leading up to the fasting where you eat loads of carbohydrates on one day and then loads of protein on the next. Uh, I'm not doing that. I can't be bothered. That sounds like a lot of work. Fasting is pretty easy, so I'll do the fasting. I won't eat any food on the aeroplane and I'll eat in Shanghai and we'll see if I get jet lag. I also have some melatonin pills, so that will help prevent me getting jet lag.

I don't remember getting really bad jet lag either time I went to Japan, I had some jet lag, but it wasn't a massive problem, but it's been a long time.

The other advantage of this method is it means you don't eat food on the aeroplane and, as we all know, aeroplane food isn't exactly great. It also avoids the problem of, and I'm really sorry that I'm gonna talk about this because it's a bit disgusting, but I'm a disgusting person and you choose to listen to me, so it's kind of your fault. Um, nobody wants to poo on an aeroplane. Doing a number two, doing your business on an aeroplane is not pleasant. So if I fast, I probably won't have to do that, and I'll have a more comfortable flight and I can just sleep and read books, and watch films.

I'm actually kind of looking forward to the flight because I haven't had a lot of uninterrupted me-time in the last few months and it's really sad that I'm looking forward to a 12 hour flight, but I'm hoping to get some good reading and Chinese study done, and I don't know, in the past I would've found that length of travel quite boring, but I think now I'll be okay with it. I think I'll make good use of that time.

I will say it's been a bit nerve-racking, it's made me a bit nervous in the past week, because there's been multiple natural disasters. Well, natural disaster is perhaps a strong word, but there was a typhoon in Ningbo in China, and there was this earthquake in Russia, which I'm sure you've heard about, and there was a tsunami in Hawaii and they thought that my region of China - oh, I'm already referring to it as my region of China! Look at me go. Uh, my region of China, Zhejiang, where Ningbo is located, did have a yellow flood warning. So they thought there might be bad flooding from the tsunami, but in the end it was fine and they removed the warning and I think the water rose by like 30 centimeters or something. So it wasn't a massive problem.

So I heard all this and I was understandably a bit nervous. There has been a lot of flooding in Beijing. But my friend said to me, well, they're just getting all the natural disasters out of the way before you go. So they've done the earthquake, they've done the typhoon. So when you go, it will be nice and calm, and I agree. I think that's exactly what's happening. Or maybe when I go, it will get even worse. We'll see.

I've also been studying a bit of Chinese. I've been using this really fantastic Chrome extension. So it's a program that you can install on your web browser, and it's called Language Reactor, and basically it lets you watch Netflix or YouTube with all of the subtitles on the right-hand side, and you can click the subtitles to jump to that part of the video, and you can highlight words to get an instant translation, and you can get a line-by-line translation of the story.

Because basically I'm at the level in Chinese where I want to be using resources that aren't for learners. So like I want to be watching TV shows and reading books, but it's still very difficult for me to understand anything. So by using Language Reactor, I can kind of just look up some of the words that I don't know and get a gist of what it means.

As you know, I really believe in studying using comprehensible input methods, and this is a great way of doing it because I can get just enough of the meaning from the dictionary words to understand what's going on in the story, but I don't have to look up every word.

This kind of study feels like really hard work at the beginning. Like I'll watch a 30 minute episode of this TV show and I genuinely feel exhausted afterwards, but I know it's just going to get easier with time and I can already feel my vocabulary expanding.

For example, I learned the word 'wenrou' the other day, which means soft, I think, like emotionally soft, or at least that's one of the ways it can be used, wenrou.

But yeah, using Language Reactor, I just feel so grateful at how much easier language study has become. You know when I compare studying a language now to when I was a teenager, it's so much easier. There are so many more resources. The quality of the resources is generally higher. A lot of the resources are free, and there are all of these tools and programs, a lot of which use AI, which really help facilitate the difficult parts of language learning.

Now, I will say it's also much harder now in the sense that there are all of these really tempting tools like Duolingo that give you the illusion of learning a language, when really they're just helping you play a game. So I think you can get really lost in all of these new apps and methods and programs, which don't actually help you learn the language. If anything, they get in the way of accessing the content directly. So I would say these tools need to be used really carefully.

Actually, maybe I should do an episode about this. The thing is, I'm still kind of getting to grips with a lot of these tools myself. It's quite difficult because often I know that I could improve my study methods, but I don't know exactly what tools I should use because there are so many options. Some of them are free, some of them are paid, but something like Language Reactor, I would happily pay for. In fact, I'm on a free trial of their pro version, and I probably will pay for it because it genuinely completely changes the process of studying.

I was watching some of this show before without this tool, and I could understand maybe like 20%, and I missed so many of the cultural cues and like the deeper meaning of the episode. And watching it with Language Reactor, being able to translate words on the fly, I understood so much more and I enjoyed it so much more, and it was a completely different study method.

Now, to be fair, that kind of immersion where you just watch and don't worry about looking things up, that's also a really important thing to do. But I think that's something I'll want to do later on in my study because right now I don't have the vocabulary to really get the most out of that.

Finally, there is something that I'm very sad about when it comes to leaving, and I don't want to go into too much detail about this because it's very personal, but I've been sort of seeing someone in the last month or so. It was very unexpected. I certainly wasn't planning on getting into a relationship or doing any serious dating before going to China for obvious reasons, but sometimes God decides for you. And in this case, he dropped a very lovely man into my lap. Uh, that makes it sound weird!

Yeah, I met someone and we've been seeing each other and it's been really lovely, but it's also heartbreaking because it's hard enough moving country and saying goodbye to friends. It's much harder having to say goodbye to someone who I've kind of fallen in love with, and earlier on I felt like, oh, okay, we're getting on very well, but you know, I'll say goodbye, I'll move to China and I'll probably get over this person. You know, we'll forget about each other. We'll move on with our lives.

And I do still think there's a possibility of that, you know? I'm sure I'll be very busy with my new life in China and I'll meet other people, but actually we've been getting closer and closer over the last few weeks and more and more it feels like, oh, this is a really special connection that I want to try and nourish and nurture and maintain, even while I'm away.

So that's gonna involve lots of writing letters, which, oh no! An excuse to write long romantic letters! What a shame. Secretly, I love this. Um, and of course, visiting each other, but it's not ideal. It's not an ideal situation.

But I always tell myself in situations like this, um, these things are sent to try us, right? God gives us these challenges because he knows that we can overcome them. I've been given this because God knows it's right for me even if it feels a little bit frustrating. And I've got much better at just going with the flow, seeing what happens. So for now, I just want to enjoy the love that is in front of me.

Because, to be honest, I am surrounded by love. I am bathed in love. It's become very clear to me in the last week seeing how people said goodbye to me at work, at church, staying with a close friend, I've just realized how lucky I am to have the people I have in my life and how much people care about me, and it moves me a lot because before I moved to London, I was living very rurally and I did have people who loved me. I did have close friends, but I didn't have that kind of local community. And I found it much harder to just enter a space and establish myself and connect with people.

And now I feel like, wow, I've really grown as a person and, without trying to sound arrogant, people really like having me around. You know? People really love me. I feel like I can really contribute to all the spaces I'm in, and that bodes really well for this new journey in China, right? That gives me a lot of hope that I'm really gonna settle in in my new school. I think I'm gonna get on with my co-workers. I think I'm gonna do really good work and I'm just gonna have a great time. I'm so excited to just meet lots of people, speak lots of Chinese, eat lots of food, travel, just experience life to the fullest.

I'm so glad I'm making this decision. I really... I just feel so ready for this. And hey, maybe I'll have a horrible time. Maybe I'll hate my new job. Maybe I won't make any friends. Maybe I'll be super lonely. Maybe the spicy food will make my stomach explode. Pow! And if that happens, I'll come home and I will have learned some very valuable lessons. You know, at the end of the day, whatever outcome I have, I'm going to learn more about myself and I'm going to grow as a person.

And I truly believe that's what life is about. It's about growing into.. I was gonna say, growing into the best versions of ourselves. That feels like a very kind of neoliberal version of it. I guess when I talk about growing into a better version of ourselves, I'm thinking of like that higher moral and philosophical purpose, right? Like I truly believe that we should strive, we should work hard to improve both morally and philosophically, but also emotionally and spiritually.

I think a lot of people in today's society lack any kind of ambition, and I'm not talking about just career ambition. I'm talking about, you know, ambition to be a better person, to do good in the world. That to me is vitally important.

Thank you for listening to today's episode, and if you are going through any similar journeys, transitions in your life, or if you're thinking about it, I would love to hear about it. Leave a comment on the transcript at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com) or leave a comment on Spotify. I would love to hear your thoughts.

Thank you so much for listening, and I will see you in China! Or rather you will hear me in China. Alright, bye!

Goodbye!