

Episode 19: Armchair Travel

Summary

Wendy's father was an armchair traveller who didn't have the opportunity to travel as much as he wanted to. In this episode Wendy talks about her Dad's love of travel and his one big trip to the Holy Land.

Transcript

Nick: We often talk about travel on the podcast and we're going to do that again today, but today we're going to talk a different kind of travel from the ... from what we usually talk about. And that's something which is called armchair travel. And the reason that we're doing that, umm, Wendy, is that your father, umm, during his lifetime, was what you would call an armchair traveller. And so, what does that mean?

Wendy: Yeah, well, an armchair traveller is someone who either doesn't want to or doesn't have the opportunity to actually travel themselves, to actually go to foreign countries or to other locations. Umm, but they enjoy reading about it or, you know, hearing stories about other people's travels, uhh, and so they sit in their armchair, umm, or they can sit on their sofa or ... but the idea is that they are comfortably staying in their home, uhh, but they still get the experience or at least part of the experience of travel by reading other people's, umm, travel stories or maybe watching a video or even listening to a podcast, but, uhh, traditionally I think we picture someone¹ reading a book when they're doing armchair travelling.

Nick: And so was that the case with your Dad, that he had these books?

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, we had these ... a couple of different series of photo books. They're what you might call coffee table books, you know, a big book with lots of full colour pictures, uhh, that's really nice to just flip through² and look at the pictures, even if you don't necessarily want to sit down and read it from cover to cover. Uhh, and so, there was one in particular, a Time/Life series from Time magazine and Life magazine, which I don't know if that exists anymore, but at the time they had come together to create this series of books about different locations all over the world. So, I remember there was one on the pyramids, there was one about Jerusalem,

¹ (to) picture someone: to imagine how someone looks

² (to) flip through: to turn the pages of a book without reading everything

umm, there was one about Rome, uhh, you know, just lots of different famous cities and iconic destinations. And so my Dad really loved to look through these and I did too, and I think that that is where my love for travel was born. And so when I was very little, I remember that I would sometimes³ say to my Dad, “Daddy, let’s go on a trip!” And that meant that he would take down one of these books and we would look through it together and he would tell me about these places.

Nick: And so much later on did he also get into watching travel documentaries and the Discovery Channel and things like that?

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, definitely. He loved the Discovery Channel, the History Channel, umm, yeah, he really loved watching those kinds of documentaries and shows about these kinds of places.

Nick: And I guess the area in the world that he was most interested in was around the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean, and I think probably because this is the area of the Bible, or this is where the Biblical events took place.

Wendy: Yeah, uhh, my Dad was a very devout⁴ Christian, a very religious man. My whole family, they’re all devout Christians. And in fact, my parents, uhh, did not just armchair travelling, but they actually did some real travelling, uhh, once, at least, in their lives. They didn’t do very much travel but, uhh, they did have this one trip, which they always referred to as their trip to the Holy Land, and by that they meant a trip to Israel, they went to Israel. This was before I was born, uhh, so it was a long time ago. But it was something that they continued - and my Dad, especially, continued - to talk about for the rest of his life. It was, yeah, I think it was probably the highlight of his life. Uhh, so, I mean, my Dad was an armchair traveller, uhh, not by choice. I think if he had the financial means or, you know, had ... and also the health situation. If his situation had been different, he would have loved to have done some real travelling, some actual travelling himself. Umm, my Mum, no, not so much. She’s not really interested in travelling. And some armchair travellers are not really interested in doing the actual travel. That just sounds really difficult to them, you know, it sounds like a lot of hassle⁵, and they’re much happier to sit at home in their armchair and read a book. Uhh, my Dad wasn’t like that. He actually would have loved to have done a lot more travel if he could have, uhh, but unfortunately he didn’t have the ability to, uhh, like I said, for financial reasons, health reasons and, umm, some other things. But, uhh, he did get to go to the Holy Land.

³ I would sometimes: the would here is not conditional but is used to describe a past habit, in a similar way as ‘I used to’. Notice that Wendy says it twice more in the next sentence.

⁴ devout: very religious

⁵ hassle: something that’s difficult or inconvenient and maybe not worth the effort

Nick: And so it's interesting to see the different, umm, different feelings of your Mum and your Dad towards travel. And so your Mum always likes to tell the story about how when she was in school, she missed out on⁶ doing geography because she switched schools and she didn't get the year of geography when she was 11 or 12 that you're supposed to have.

Wendy: Right, yeah, so it was when she was in the sixth grade, so that's yeah, in the United States education system that's age 11 or 12 or so. And, yeah, she switched to a different school and so, the school wasn't very good, and I don't know exactly how it worked, but she should have studied geography that semester and instead they taught them, like, how to set a table, like really, like, practical ... you know, it was homemaking⁷ kind of stuff. Umm, and, so ... and she now has a terrible sense of geography. She really ... every time I, you know, tell her where we're going on a trip, she'll say, "Oh, where's that?" And so I have to, you know, describe, and then she doesn't really know where the other places are either that I'm trying to describe, you know, saying, "Well, it's near this country, it's in the eastern part of this region," and most of that doesn't mean anything to her either. Umm, but she always blames it on the fact that she missed geography when was in the sixth grade, umm, when really, of course, she's had plenty of opportunities to learn about geography since then. She's just not really interested in it.

Nick: Right, and even that trip to the Holy Land didn't seem to have, umm, awakened any kind of adventurous travel spirit in her like it did for your Dad.

Wendy: No.

Nick: Because like you said, your Dad would always talk about it, uhh, even, yeah, 30 years later, he would always have a story ready related to that trip and your Mum would say, "Oh how do you remember that? You know, I don't remember anything about that trip." But he always seemed to, like you said, because it was so important to him, I guess he guarded the memories, umm, you know, for the rest of his life.

Wendy: Yeah, he really did.

Nick: And then I guess, I presume it was something that brought him joy then later in his life when you started to travel and then, you know, that's another thing that an armchair traveller can do is that they can live vicariously through⁸ somebody else,

⁶ missed out on (phrasal verb: to miss out on): didn't have an opportunity or experience that other people had

⁷ homemaking: management of a household

⁸ live vicariously through (somebody): hear about someone else's life and enjoy their experiences as though they were yours

in this case for him it was you who are (is) his daughter. And so he was able to feel like he was experiencing these places, uhh, through you a little bit.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, so, uhh, I would send emails, you know, telling about the places that we had been to. And you were always and still are the photographer in our family, so he would love looking through your photographs and, yeah, he would love to ask me questions about the places that we had been.

Nick: And so again I think you'd be talking on the phone with them and you'd have both your Mum and your Dad on the line⁹ and then you'd just have these different reactions that your Mum wouldn't know what you were talking about and then your Dad would have to explain where a place was and things like that.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, umm, I'm being a bit hard on my Mum. I mean my Mum and I, you know, we connect in other ways and we have lots of great conversations about other things, but yeah, when it comes to travel, you know, she'll ask about it because she wants to be interested in my life and in what I'm doing but she just has no frame of reference¹⁰ to really understand it.

Nick: Right, but for your Dad that was, uhh, yeah, that was something that gave him a lot of joy. Firstly to take this one trip that he took, then to have all these books and watch all these shows about travel and history and things like that, and then finally to, uhh, see you do all this travel as well.

Wendy: Yeah, so I'm a bit sad for him that he wasn't able to do more travel himself. I think maybe he always thought that he would, or hoped that he would, when he retired. And then in the end his health deteriorated pretty quickly and he wasn't able to do that. But I'm glad that he was at least able to do it vicariously through me.

⁹ on the line: on the other end of the phone

¹⁰ frame of reference: basic structural understanding

Comprehension Questions

1. How did Wendy's Dad engage in armchair travel?
2. Where did Wendy's parents go on their one foreign trip? What did they call it?
3. Why does Wendy's Mum say she doesn't have a great understanding of geography?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. Doctors and dentists usually have magazines that you can _____ while you're waiting for your appointment.
2. Getting visas for certain countries, such as Russia, is often a big _____. You have to fill out many forms and provide a lot of information.
3. After the boy broke his arm he _____ all the sporting activities that his friends were doing.
4. Ian's _____. Do you want to speak to him before I hang up?
5. Their health is getting worse so they mostly stay at home. But they _____ their children, who have a lot of crazy adventures.
6. My parents are religious but I'm not very _____ myself.
7. When I was young _____ go to the beach after school.
8. If you think of French stereotypes, you _____ in a striped shirt, wearing a beret and carrying a baguette.
9. If you're not from the Indian sub-continent, you might not have any _____ for understanding rituals in a Hindu temple.
10. In previous generations, young women were often taught _____ at school. Now it's no longer seen as appropriate.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Are you an armchair traveller or do you know anyone who is?
2. How do you prefer to learn about travel and foreign countries - through books, television, podcasts, or something else?
3. Do you ever live vicariously through someone else? If so, who and why?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. He had photo books that he would read and show to Wendy when she was little.
2. They went to Israel, which they called the Holy Land.
3. She says it's because she missed out on geography in the sixth grade.

Exercises

1. flip through
2. hassle
3. missed out on
4. on the line
5. live vicariously through
6. devout
7. I would sometimes
8. picture someone
9. frame of reference
10. homemaking