

Sick in France 🇫🇷 | How My Family Holiday Became a 3-Week Nightmare [1009]

Hello!

I'm back with another episode, after quite a long delay. If you heard the introduction to the last one you might know that I **have been ill**.

You might have wondered what happened to me.

Let me tell you the whole story.

An Audiobook

For this episode, I have basically recorded an entire *audiobook* for you.

I'm calling this episode an audiobook because I wrote it all in advance, it's probably quite long, I am now recording it with my voice, and just like with an audiobook you are free to take your time and listen to this at your leisure, probably not in one single listening session.

So, let's consider this episode to be an audiobook, and in this audiobook I'm going to tell you a true story, in a lot of detail, all about what happened to me over the last few weeks.

This is the story of how I got *sick in France*.

While I was recovering, I wrote this account - a little bit each day, and it has ended up being nearly 20,000 words long. I'm not sure how that happened!

Anyway, there is a PDF for this with the full text that I wrote and which I am now reading from. You will find the link for that in the description.

You can use that if you'd like to read what you are hearing, or if you would like to check certain words and phrases that you will hear throughout this episode.

I don't know how long this will be yet, because I haven't finished recording it, but it's probably going to be really long.

But, of course you don't have to listen to this all in one go.

Just like with an audiobook, you can just listen for a while, then stop, carry on with your life, and when you come back to this episode, your podcast player, or YouTube (if you are signed in) should remember exactly where you stopped, and you can just continue from that point, and keep going with my epic story.

That's what you do with an audiobook, and so that's what you can do with this episode.

I hope you enjoy following my story from start to finish, and that this episode keeps you company in various situations as you listen to it.

As I've mentioned, I have been very **ill**. And it wasn't just me. Perhaps the worst part of this experience was that my parents **got ill** too. In fact, they had

to go to hospital for nearly 2 weeks, and it was really quite a distressing and awful experience.

Not only that, my brother and his family got ill as well, and they weren't even in the same country - so I don't know what happened.

It all occurred while my parents were visiting my family and me in the French countryside during the recent autumn school holidays.

What was supposed to be a lovely 4 or 5 days with my parents, turned into a horrible a three week ordeal in which we were **struck down** by what we think was at first good old-fashioned **type-A influenza** (also commonly known as **flu**) but then we realised later that it was actually (or perhaps also) a bad case of **pneumonia**, which, as you may know, can be a very serious **condition** indeed, and which often requires careful **medical attention**.

In fact, this did become quite a serious situation really.

I'm happy to report that everyone is basically ok now, although still **recovering** and taking time to get back to normal. I have been taking time to get better, hence the lack of episodes recently.

In this episode, I want to tell you exactly what happened, in plenty of detail, because, as we say, the devil is in the details, meaning that all the specific details are what should make this a good story and are necessary in order to communicate to you exactly how this was such a difficult, painful and distressing experience.

If I just gave you a brief summary of what happened, it wouldn't really do justice to the story. You need the details, I think. And that's why the episode is long.

So, what I'm trying to say is - I suffered to bring you this episode, and now, it's your turn.

I'm joking. I hope this is going to be an interesting and compelling thing for you to listen to, as part of your mission to get more and more English into your life.

Medical vocabulary

As you listen to this you can also look out for various bits of **medical** vocabulary which I will use during the episode, as I describe **symptoms**, **feelings**, **treatments**, **recovery**, **hospital vocab**, **parts of the body**, **body processes, movement and mobility**, what happened in hospital and so on. So, watch out for all the medical and health-related vocabulary.

I will summarise and review it all after this, in an upcoming premium episode. So, as well as being the story of this unpleasant ordeal for my family and me, this is also a vocabulary lesson in context.

But to get the vocab review, you'll need to be a premium subscriber. teacherluke.co.uk/premium ← coming soon.

At the moment I have a very long list of vocabulary, so after recording this I will turn my attention to that, and how to help you learn it all.

Sharing Personal Details

I hope, that while you listen to me, that you don't judge me too much. Not that there's much for you to judge me on, but I'm sharing quite a lot here and giving you quite a lot of insight into my personal life. I hope you'll be respectful. It's not just about me, but about other members of my family too. This has been an unpleasant experience for all of us, so if you do write comments, please keep that in mind, and please be nice, respectful and thoughtful.

To be honest, I have been wondering why I'm going to tell you all of this in such detail, but I've decided it's for 3 main reasons.

1) To teach you English in context in what I hope will be an engaging way, as I usually try to do on this podcast. This has been such an intense and all-encompassing experience that it just feels natural to make an episode about it. It is all still very present in my mind.

2) I want to explain why you haven't had many episodes recently. Some of you might have been wondering what happened. So, I would like to explain my absence.

3) I think talking about this and telling this story is a good way for me to process what happened and to get it all off my chest - as a form of therapy maybe.

By the way, during this time, I received so many messages of support from listeners who knew I was ill. Thank you very much for your kind words and your understanding. I appreciate that a lot.

Right, I am going to start properly in just a moment, I promise.

I should also point out that luckily, I didn't get ill with anything incredibly serious. I mean, nothing permanent, nothing **chronic** (as far as I know) or immediately life threatening, although, having said that, it definitely could have become life threatening, especially for my parents if they hadn't received medical treatment, but it wasn't some kind of **untreatable chronic illness,** thankfully.

It could have been a lot worse, and of course every day people **suffer** more than we did. I am grateful that it wasn't worse. I am also grateful that we were able to get **medical treatment** and all that stuff. We were unlucky **to fall ill** in the first place, but we were also very lucky in plenty of other ways.

Plenty of people in the world are not lucky enough to have access to medical care, for all sorts of reasons - because of war, political corruption or poverty, or all of those things.

To help people in the world who aren't as lucky as us, consider donating to **Doctors Without Borders** (**Médecins Sans Frontier**) by going to MSF.org

So what happened?

OK, let me try to tell you the story as it happened, step by step.

The last two weeks of October were school holidays where I live in France, and so we made plans to do something as a family.

If you remember, these days my wife and I rent a house in the French countryside. We live in Paris, but we like to go to this countryside house as often as possible - at weekends and during school holidays.

There is a lot more space, fresh air and a garden - the kids need it. That kind of space and fresh air is virtually impossible to find in the city.

My parents had arranged to come and stay with us during the first week of this school holiday. They were due to stay for just 4 or 5 days.

My parents are nearly 80 years old now, and they find travelling very **tiring**.

I don't know if you have relatives of a similar age, or if you are of a similar age yourself, but when you're that age (depending on the person of course) travelling can be daunting, especially if you're going to another country.

You feel more **fragile**. Problems that can happen while travelling are magnified, and if there are any problems or delays, it can be completely **exhausting**.

An **ordeal**

So, my parents were cautious about travelling, but still really wanted to visit us and spend time with the kids, so they decided to *throw caution to the wind*

and just come. I wanted to make sure that their whole trip was as smooth and comfortable as possible.

In terms of the specifics of the trip, they had to travel from their home in the midlands to London by train for about 2 hours, then make another trip through London to the Eurostar train station, then do some queueing for the Eurostar and go through all the usual inconvenience of baggage control and immigration control (because taking the Eurostar from England to France is a bit like taking a flight because you're crossing an international border).

Rigmarole / hassle

Then they had to do some more waiting, queue up and board the train, then do the actual train trip to France for about 2 and a half hours, then meet me at Gare du Nord station in Paris. Then I was to drive them in the car for about 2 hours to our house in the countryside, where we would arrive in time or dinner.

Does that sound like much? It's basically a day of travelling for them.

They were supposed to stay for just 4 nights. That's what was supposed to happen. In the end, they stayed for about 20 days in total, with about 11 of those days spent in hospital.

So, on the Friday evening, just as the school holidays were beginning, my family and I loaded ourselves into the car in Paris, and drove two hours to the countryside house.

We partly share this house with the owners. We have it most of the time, but sometimes the owners come back and use it too.

This particular two week school break (autumn half term) we chose to have the house for the first week, and the other family were planning to come for the second week.

So, my family and I would be there for about 7/8 days from Friday to the next Saturday, and my parents would be with us during that time from Sunday to Thursday.

We arrived at the house on the Friday evening, got the kids in bed, unpacked a bit, warmed up the house and went to bed ourselves.

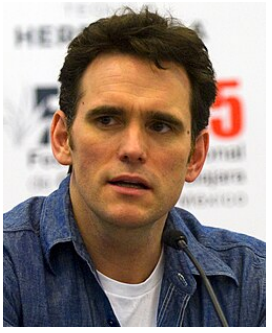
All good so far.

The next day (Saturday) was mostly spent cleaning up the house, preparing it for my parents' arrival, and doing a big shop at the supermarket to make sure we had plenty of food and everything else we needed.

On Sunday I drove back to Paris and waited for my parents next to the Eurostar arrivals platform.



Funnily enough, as I was waiting, I saw a taxi driver holding a sign saying MAT DILLON and I thought - could that be Matt Dillon the famous Hollywood actor from such films as *Crash*, *The Outsiders*, *Rumble Fish*, *Drugstore Cowboy*, *There's Something About Mary* and more recently *I Play Rocky*?



You know - movie legend Matt Dillon.

And sure enough, Matt Dillon, the Hollywood movie legend himself did come strolling down the platform, having apparently just made the trip from London on the same train as my parents.

Maybe he was in town to make a film or something, or to promote *I Play Rocky*.

At the time I didn't think Matt Dillon had any further part to play in my story, but was that really the case?

Anyway, a minute or so later, my parents also came walking down the platform, having been on the same train as Matt.

Thankfully, their trip had been fine, and I quickly brought them to the car in the underground car park.

I was a bit nervous on that day.

What I was nervous about was potential problems getting out of the city and onto the motorway - possible traffic jams or other disturbances in the street.

This is because at that time, there were a lot of protests going on in Paris, and in some parts of the city those protests were becoming violent riots with a lot of fighting with police, vandalism and looting of shops.

You might have seen footage on the news or on the internet. Quite scary stuff really.



Actually, some of you have been requesting an episode explaining the situation in Paris, which has calmed down a bit now.

Obviously, I haven't been able to do that, but I might. That's another episode for another time.

But, on this particular Sunday when I was in Paris to collect my parents, there were police vans driving around with their sirens on and lights flashing, and

there were some protests still going on just down the road from the station, in Place de la Republique.

So, there were some riot vans full of police, and also unmarked police cars with their sirens and lights on rushing down the road in that direction, while I found my way through the tight streets towards the train station.

I was quite stressed about this.

I was anxious about somehow getting stuck in a traffic jam near a protest and at the very worst being there in the car when police and protesters started fighting, and then who knows what else could happen.

The day before, Saturday, had been particularly bad, with a lot of fighting and trouble, but on this day it was a Sunday and it seemed that even protesters and rioters take it easy on the day of rest.

Thankfully we got out of the city ok, and then onto the motorway and then it was a fairly smooth drive to the countryside house.

Still, I was worried that my parents would be tired.

What can I say - I'm a worrier, but I wanted to make sure they were as comfortable as possible, and that they would have a lovely stay, enjoy their time, eat well, sleep well in their room, and that they wouldn't be exhausted when they got back to their home afterwards.

That is what we were all hoping for, but that is absolutely not what happened.

The first evening was great, and we all felt fine. We arrived at the house in time for dinner. The kids were already sleeping and my wife had prepared a lovely dinner. Everyone was happy and had a comfortable night. All good.

The next day, everything appeared to be fine again.

We had a good breakfast, my parents and the kids were happy to see each other. We had a nice lunch. Then I took my daughter by car to the nearby pony club for a session of pony riding. My parents came too.

The pony club is just a few minutes away in the car. It was nice to see the ponies, and my daughter preparing her pony and riding it, but my parents and I found it cold.

I took my parents to see the local town. We were going to visit the local church, but we all decided we were too cold and wanted to get back to the house to warm up.

We got back, where it was much warmer thanks to the wood burning stove, but I just became colder and colder.

My parents were ok, but throughout the afternoon and into the evening, I became colder and colder and colder and I just couldn't **warm up**.

I **added layers**. I sat closer to the fire. I drank tea, but I just felt **a cold chill** which went all the way through to the bone. I picked up my daughter and brought her home. I was still **freezing**.

By the evening, I was actually **shaking and shivering** all over and felt quite weak and uncomfortable. I managed to eat a little bit, but went to bed early, with a lingering sense of dread about how I was feeling. I knew I was **coming down with something**. What an awful, frustrating feeling.

By the time I got into bed that evening, I was shaking so much I was almost bouncing up and down in bed, freezing cold. I had felt like this before, and every time I had felt like this before, with **the cold shakes**, it was followed by a horrible long case of flu or something similar. So, I had that dreadful feeling where I knew I was getting ill.

My teeth were chattering.

I hadn't had full-on proper flu too many times in my life, maybe just 3 or 4 times, but every single time it had started like that - feeling freezing cold and shaking and **shivering** all over.

I just hoped and prayed that I could **get a good night's sleep** and that **whatever I was coming down with** would just last the night or maybe a couple of days. Maybe it was just a **24-hour fever** or perhaps it was just **a cold** and I would basically be able to carry on as normal. Perhaps I would **feel a bit under the weather** for a few days but it would be ok.

But that's not what happened.

That night I felt worse and worse and couldn't get any good sleep. The freezing and shaking turned into **a fever**. I don't know what my **temperature** was because we didn't have **a thermometer**. But I definitely had a fever.

My body became **stiff** and started **aching**. I felt terribly tired, and yet couldn't relax. Somehow I felt so tired that I was too tired to rest. Does that make sense? My **head started throbbing**. I couldn't find a comfortable position in the bed. My wife slept on the sofabed next to the kids' room.

In the morning I felt awful. I couldn't eat any breakfast and I just stayed in bed all day, trying to rest but not being able to. My **throbbing head** turned into a full-on **migraine**.

I don't know if you've ever had a migraine - I mean, a genuine migraine headache.

I should say there are two things that people underestimate in terms of how bad they make you feel. And I'm talking about both flu and migraine now.

Sometimes people say they have flu when they just have **a bad cold**.

Real flu makes you feel like you are going to die or something. If you've had real flu, you will probably remember how it felt, and you'll know what I'm talking about.

People also sometimes say they have a migraine when really they just have a bad headache.

A real migraine can be so bad it's almost **unbearable** - like a form of torture that can make you panic because you can't escape it.

They can affect your **eyesight**, your **sensitivity to any light**, your **sense of balance**, and can give you **nausea**.

To be fair, there are different types of migraine. Some are more **debilitating** than others.

I get migraines sometimes and they usually **put me out of action** completely.

Sometimes when I have a migraine, I can't open my eyes because the light is too painful.

Sometimes moving is difficult because it feels like my brain is bumping against spikes inside my head.

Sometimes it makes me **nauseous** and I have **to vomit**.

On this occasion, it was **intensely painful**, and it was hard to move.

The only way I could describe it was that I felt like (and this sounds dramatic but it's the best way I can put it) I felt like someone had hammered nails into my head, all the way around (like where a hat sits on your head, or a headband worn by a tennis player) someone had hammered nails into my head all the way around, and then they had put a belt around my head and then they were slowly tightening it.

Forgive the graphic explanation, but that's what it was like. Intense pain which wouldn't stop, and also **pains in my body**, and a feeling of **deep fatigue**.

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My wife and parents were lovely. They brought me water, which I had to keep drinking because I was suddenly so **dehydrated**, and gave me sympathy.

They **kept their distance** and **washed their hands** etc.

I was sick in the toilet a few times. Also I had **diarrhoea**. Sorry, about the level of detail. I am probably oversharing now, but I'm just trying to describe what happened.

It seems I couldn't **rehydrate** myself. My mouth felt as dry as a bone. As far as I was concerned, I had full-blown flu - a classic case of **influenza**, with **gastro** to boot.

I was actually **groaning in pain and discomfort**. **Groaning** somehow brought me **a little comfort**. So I lay there groaning pathetically.

As well as feeling so bad physically, I was also very angry. I was really angry about being ill and the fact that this was spoiling my parents' stay, and the fact that my wife had to do everything, including look after the kids. I just couldn't help being furious.

I **took paracetamol**, but it didn't **relieve** my headache. I **took codeine** (once) but it also didn't help **relieve my pain**. In fact paracetamol only made my head throb harder, it seemed, and made me feel **boiling hot** and **sweaty**.

Over the next day or two this continued.

Allow me to continue explaining this at great length here. I mean, I could just say "I got flu" and leave it at that, but for some reason I feel like describing this all in great detail.

I also started feeling quite **delirious**.

Occasionally I would drift into a sort of half-sleep and yet my mind was still running 100 miles an hour, and I was having these weird dreams, or at least I just felt very strange, as if my senses were all messed up, and my perception of the world was distorted.

You know, that weird state you get into when you're lying in bed ill and your senses kind of can't work properly and you feel like your sense of space, or **spatial awareness** is all twisted. Do you know that feeling? Surely, we all feel like that when we're ill. I don't think it's just me.

It was very surreal and horrible. In these occasional weird dreams I felt like I was somehow trying to communicate something to someone, and I was doing this by standing in a corridor and attempting to walk down it, while moving myself into different positions and directions. This is how I was trying to communicate. It's very weird, I know.

I felt like I was attempting to negotiate my recovery, and doing it by adopting different angles and pointing myself in different directions, some directions which felt very unreal - as if they were not just physical directions, but metaphysical ones.

I don't know if that makes any sense, but my feelings of spacial awareness were all twisted and mixed up with weird delirious visions almost. It was horrible.

So, I lay there groaning pathetically and feeling quite upset that this had happened when I wanted to make sure my parents were having a good time while staying with us.

Also, as I said, my wife had do everything. But, she told me just to relax and try to get better.

As I lay there, all day - this is just the first day really, although it's more or less how I felt over the first few days, I lay there and listened to everyone in the house downstairs. I could hear pretty much everything: what the kids were doing, what my parents and wife were talking about.

I didn't really want to listen, but I could just hear everything.

My wife suggested that I just put on a podcast, but I couldn't do it. I tried a few, but somehow it felt too **stimulating**. I needed the opposite of that.

Music didn't really work for me either. The only things I could bear were a compilation of very minimal ambient tunes by Aphex Twin (a playlist called Aphex Twin - Melancholy Music for Stress Relief/Sleep), or classical music for guitar or lute by J.S. Bach. That's all I could handle for some reason.

But most of the time I just lay there and could hear everything that was going on downstairs.

I heard my mum **coughing**. She usually has a bit of **a cough**, but I noticed that at first she did a little cough probably about every 10 minutes, then as the day went on she was coughing about every 5 minutes or so, and then by the evening I felt she was coughing about once every minute or two.

My parents went to bed that night quite early. I heard my Mum coughing all night. I don't remember sleeping. It just seemed to me that I lay there in various positions, none of them comfortable and heard my mum coughing throughout the night.

She can't have had a good night's sleep. This bothered me. I hoped hard that she hadn't **picked something up** too.

First thing in the morning I heard my parents talking to my wife. I heard my dad mention that he felt cold and had the cold chills. My mum said she also **felt bad**. They said the room was warm enough and the bed was comfortable, but they were feeling some **symptoms**.

My heart sank. I hoped that they had just had a bad night, and that would be it, but as the day progressed, they got worse.

My dad had the shivers and shakes just like I'd had before, and my mum said **she had aches and pains**. Also she had the cough, and **the beginnings of a headache**.

During the day they both got worse. My mum **had nausea** and **was sick**, and then eventually developed a migraine like me. My dad was cold and shivering, then he had aches and pains, and they both became very weak.

They stayed in bed that day, and that night. I got up occasionally **to check on them**. I was **unsteady on my feet**.

On Wednesday morning (day 2 or 3 for my illness), my wife was sleeping again on the sofa bed next to the kids' room. I heard my mum calling for help from downstairs.

At this point I don't want to be *too* specific in my descriptions. I'll just say that both my parents were so weak that they **couldn't really get out of bed on their own**, and **couldn't get to and from the toilet or bathroom without help**. And they both **needed help getting up from the floor** on several occasions.

This particular morning, my mum needed help and was **calling out**. I heard her, and so I got up and went downstairs, and I had to try to help her up, then with my wife's help we were able to move her back to her bed.

My dad also needed help even just **sitting up in bed**, and then **getting up** and **walking to the loo**, and all those things.

Both my wife and I had to help them, because neither of us could do it on our own. Even though I was **feeling pretty appalling**, I had to help them, and wanted to.

It was upsetting. My parents were **mentally ok**, more or less, but physically they were **in bad shape**, just about 24 hours after first showing symptoms, or maybe a bit more.

Whatever we had **caught**, all three of us, I assume we must have caught the same thing at approximately the same time, and I don't think they caught it from me, because apparently, for this kind of thing, the time from **exposure** to **showing symptoms** is usually more than just one day.

Anyway, whatever it was that we had caught had made them very very weak indeed.

We tried to help them as much as possible, to make sure they had water and could drink it, that they were warm enough, and comfortable, and we had to do quite a lot of laundry too, and I kept getting back to my bed, and then getting up again when I was needed, and then back to bed to try and rest, with this migraine raging and the aches and pains in my body. I was worried about my parents.

We carried on like this for a few days. I think it was after another day, I guess it must have been Thursday (day 3 for me I think), I found that I **had some strength back** in my legs. I'd been drinking water with **rehydration salts**, which helped me a bit, and I found that I had got my legs back.

This was good. I thought I was **getting better**. I felt I had more strength back in my body generally.

By the way, I was the only person in the house who could drive, and this house is fairly isolated. The nearest town is about 10 mins away by car. Same for supermarkets.

My daughter was still going to her pony club each afternoon, but my wife was taking her there by bike, and my daughter's bike had a slow puncture, so they

had to pump up the tyre, set off, and stop half way to pump it up again because the air would slowly come out.

There are hills on the way, and wind, which was blowing stronger each day. It was mad. Things just kept going the wrong way, even the weather.

So, they'd cycle to the pony club and back. My wife did the trip 4 times each day. It was important that our daughter went. She loved it, was learning a lot, and it got her out of the house for a few hours every afternoon. Otherwise she'd probably just be watching TV because nobody could spend much time with her or her brother.

TV became like a babysitter for both the kids, which we didn't like at all, because usually we try to keep their screen time to a minimum, but these were special circumstances.

If my wife could she'd also take our 3 year old son in the trailer behind her bike, so that I didn't have to get up and do things for him while they were out. He still needs quite a lot of attention at 3 years old.

But then, yet another thing happened.

A big storm arrived in the area, probably on the Thursday - strong wind and lashing rain which hammered the roof and windows of the house, and it was impossible for them to go to the pony club by bike.

But we badly needed the kids to be occupied. Pony club meant my daughter was out and doing something for 3 hours each afternoon. The pony club has an indoor area, inside a huge barn, where the kids can ride, so the storm wasn't a problem.

So, I took my daughter in the car on Thursday and Friday.

I probably shouldn't have done that, and that seems obvious now, but at the time, without the benefit of hindsight, it seemed ok.

I had some strength back, and dispute the ongoing headache, I was ok to drive the 5 minutes there and back to deliver my daughter. It's all quiet country roads. I managed it.

My parents were still in bed and we were doing our best to keep them comfortable, hydrated, fed (but they had no appetite) and warm.

We kept running low on wood for the stove, which is really important for keeping the whole house warm.

So, I also had to get more from the nearby supermarket, where they sell large bags, fairly cheap.

So, I would do these things that my wife couldn't do, and then go straight back to bed to keep trying to **recover**.

It went on. My parents were supposed to go back to England on Thursday. But there was no way that could happen. We rescheduled the train tickets (well, my wife did - she was doing most things!) and put the tickets on hold.

There was no way they could do all that travelling **in their condition**, and no way I could drive them all the way to Paris anyway.

Everything was up in the air. We had no idea when my parents would be strong enough to get home.

We tried to make different plans - plan A, plan B, plan C, working out different possibilities for how they might be able to get home eventually. But mainly we just hoped they would recover from this apparent flu (or whatever it was) and get their strength back, and then we could work out travel arrangements.

Saturday arrived. On this day, it got to a point where my mum and my dad needed more help than we could give them at home.

They had to go to hospital. It was a sort of crisis point. My mum in particular felt so bad, and although my dad is generally quite positive and optimistic, he was too weak to move about in bed, get up, etc.

They **weren't eating properly**. They were **dehydrated**. They both had bad coughs, and all the other symptoms. My dad's **chest was wheezing and bubbling** when he breathed. He had shortness of breath.

They both needed help moving anywhere, and doing most things.

So we **called an ambulance**. They both agreed to this, in fact my mum requested it. With hindsight it was definitely the right thing to do, because without **care** they could have got into quite a serious condition.

We learned later that they both had quite **complicated infections**, my Dad's being **a form of pneumonia**, although we didn't know this at the time. So, it turned out that calling an ambulance was definitely the right thing to do.

But at the time, it wasn't a very easy decision. Neither of them wanted to go to hospital. The idea was repellant to them. Not just being there and all the horrible things about that, but just the **strain** of getting up and going there, entering the building, waiting, speaking to staff, and all in a foreign language. The way they felt at the time, they hated the idea, but they needed to go.

Eventually an ambulance arrived. We both did our best to help them prepare. But I was feeling bad again, worse in fact, than I had done over the previous couple of days.

Despite getting some strength back in my legs and body, I now had **sharp stabbing pains in my chest** on the right side (not near my heart) and the headache was in overdrive.

The **chest pains** meant it was very difficult to move, **to sit up**, **to lie down**, etc. I assumed it was **trapped nerves** due to **tension**, **stress**, **lying in**

uncomfortable positions, and the strain of lifting things like bags of wood and other things I had done.

But I also noticed I had **a bubbling sound in my chest** when I **breathed deeply**, not that I could do that often because it gave me a lot of **pain in my ribs**.

I thought that maybe I had **injured my back or my shoulder** and that the pains were **trapped nerves** and **muscle spasms**, or **pulled muscles**, also because I was very **tense** and dehydrated.

Getting up and lying down, moving around - a lot of stabbing pains in my ribs. But **I tolerated it** like some kind of hero (not really - I just did it and didn't believe it was too serious or anything) and helped my parents prepare to go to hospital.

In the end, they were still quite unprepared though. My mum was in her pyjamas, and didn't have socks, and we didn't give them a bottle of water, and things like that. It was a stressful moment.

The ambulance arrived and took my mum away on **a stretcher**. What a horrible sight and I'm sure she felt terrible. Then they came back to take my dad.

I felt very **anxious** about all of this, but in that situation you just have to hope and trust that it's the right thing. We had all decided that hospital was ultimately the right place for them to be. But I was still **worried** and **upset** of course.

They don't speak French (much). I didn't know about the quality of the hospital. I didn't know how long they'd have to wait, how they'd **be treated**, if they'd be **admitted into the hospital** properly, what care they would receive, if they were **eligible** as UK citizens. The hospital had an average rating of less than 3 stars on Google.

I went back to bed feeling very upset, and just hoping and praying that they would be alright. My wife spoke with the **paramedics** a lot.

Meanwhile, the kids were still watching TV almost all day long, to keep them occupied while my wife dealt with so many things - as the French speaker in the household - calling the hospital, talking to the ambulance drivers, calling the hospital again, calling my parents' insurance company, doing washing, cooking in the kitchen, persuading our daughter to do homework, dealing with our son who is still potty training, and all sorts of other things.

One of the paramedics (ambulance drivers) even checked me while I was lying in my bed, and agreed I **wasn't in great shape**, but he didn't take me to the hospital (at that point).

Now, as well as all that and the storm and everything I've talked about, there were other complicated factors which had to be dealt with.

Remember that we share this house with another family, and this was the day (Saturday) that we were all supposed to be leaving the house and going back to Paris. My parents were supposed to have gone back to England 2 days before.

The other family, who owned the house were due to come on Sunday afternoon to spend the week there - the owners of the house, their teenage son, and their parents (around my the same age as mine). They were due to arrive the next day, on the Sunday.

We were in touch with them and they were very understanding - they delayed their arrival as much as possible, but train tickets had been booked, everything had been booked. We just couldn't demand that they didn't come.

We had to find another house to move to, in the area, not far from the hospital.

My wife found an AirBnB that was available, with a good rating, booked it, and then we arranged to move in there on Sunday morning - the next day.

My wife had to spend Saturday cleaning up the house to prepare it for the other family. As I said, we couldn't ask them to cancel. So my wife prepared the house, changed bed sheets, cleaned everything and got it ready for the owners to come in the afternoon the next day.

Meanwhile I lay on the sofa now, groaning, feeling pathetic and frustrated, and trying to rest, extremely uncomfortable.

The kids tidied up their toys, prepared their bags, and watched more TV while they waited for everything to be ready for us to leave.

Then it was time to go. The car was packed. I **pulled myself together** and drove, slowly, to this other house. It was just 15 minutes away. I was able to do it, but it was unpleasant, and I had to lie down again straight away when we arrived at the other house.

Thankfully the place was generally clean, there were enough rooms and places to sleep.

But there was something unpleasant about the house. Clearly, it used to belong to an old woman, and we guess that she had probably died, and then the house had been converted into an AirBnB.

But a lot of the house smelled a bit strange - musty, stale and quite unpleasant.

I don't mean to complain, and in my weird state I actually spent some time thanking this old person who we felt still had a presence there.

It was nothing paranormal, but just a lot of signs of her personal touches in the home - like the shower designed for an elderly person, the old fashioned

style of the wallpaper and other decor, the doilies on shelves, the equipment in the kitchen.

It was like the home of an old French grandma. It was quite charming, but also, well, it had this certain smell. I was quite surprised that it had such a good rating on AirBnB. It made me uncomfortable.

The first night, I slept in a double bed in one of the rooms. The sheets didn't feel clean to me. I could feel the springs sticking through the mattress into my bottom and my back, and I became engulfed by this musty, stale old smell that I felt was infused deep into the pillows, blanket and sheets. I became horribly disgusted by it all night, and into the next day.

Also, around this time I **started getting horrendous sweats** at night.

God, this episode is just 100% TMI - Too Much Information, isn't it?

I don't know, maybe you're loving the details, but I'm sorry if it's all a bit too much, but as I said, I just feel I wanted to tell you what happened, for the reasons I gave before.

Still, I really hope this is interesting. In my experience - tales of my own personal suffering tend to be quite popular on this podcast!

And as I said - there is a lot of vocabulary in here, for describing symptoms, illness, health and more. I'll collect it all together and will summarise it in the next premium episode.

For non-premium subscribers, there is a PDF transcript of all this, which you can read and you can hunt for vocabulary there if you like. I've highlighted the vocabulary **in bold**.

Anyway, the next thing, probably a bit too much information, but whatever - I'm telling you anyway, is that I started getting awful **night sweats**.

I'd wake up in the middle of the night, usually after having taken paracetamol before bed, I'd wake up with my t-shirt just **completely soaked through** - **sopping wet**. And I'd have to change in the middle of the night, because I'd be freezing cold again. I suppose it was my body attempting **to flush out the illness**.

But to make matters worse, there was no washing machine in this house. Luckily we had just enough clean clothes, but not many!

Also, there was no potty in the house for my son to use, and we had forgotten to bring the one from the other house. So my son had frequent "accidents" which had to be cleaned up, and he ran out of clean trousers and pants.

We, especially my wife, **were at our wits end** at this point.

The kids continued to watch cartoons all day, and as I lay in bed trying to recover, with these stabbing pains in my chest, my fatigue, and the migraine that continued for 9 days in total without a break.

I could hear the kids watching their cartoons, almost all day long. The sounds and music of these shows started to drive me quite mad.

I still felt delirious and my weird dreams continued, as I somehow felt I was pointing in directions unrecorded by science and I was doing it to communicate something, in order to negotiate my way through strange corridors, trying to find my way to my recovery.

And the whole time I was consumed by the smell of the bed and sheets in this old house. Plus, let's not forget, there was the ongoing saga of my parents in hospital, which I will describe in a moment.

It's nightmarish stuff, isn't it?

We moved to this other house on day 5 of my illness and I stayed there until day 12 (the following Saturday).

By the Sunday (day 6) I found that my headache actually seemed to be changing. Instead of the feeling of having nails in the head, with the belt tightened on top of them them, I felt as if those nails were now slowly being removed one by one. It was slightly better, but, obviously - still not great!

Basically, it felt like sharp needles of pain slowly sliding out of my head, fairly regularly. It wasn't a relief, just a different feeling - slightly less constant, but there was no end to these sharp pains which at regular intervals would arrive in various spots across **my forehead**, **my temples** and **around the back of my head**. Even my **cheekbones** ached.

I was also very weak and had not eaten proper food for 5 or 6 days. I was exhausted but somehow still too tired to get meaningful rest. I felt I was in a heightened state of tension as my body suffered, and my brain was still going round and round like a washing machine.

But what about my parents? I felt incredibly anxious about them. I'll get back to that in a moment.

What did we have? I assumed it was flu - proper flu. I don't know how we caught it or where. But surely this was proper influenza.

I thought my parents and I must have caught it in the train station in Paris perhaps. I wondered how Matt Dillon was feeling. Perhaps we caught it in the underground car park with its low ceilings, grotty atmosphere and lack of ventilation, or maybe in the lift going down to the car park.

Maybe someone else had just left that lift and had coughed in it, and we'd **breathed** his air, or perhaps the buttons on the lift were **contaminated** and we'd **got the germs on our fingers** when we pressed them. I had no idea.

From now on, I will **get the flu vaccine** every year. My parents usually have it. In fact, weirdly enough, they had had their vaccine only a few days before coming to see us.

I thought that perhaps not enough time had passed between them getting the vaccine and them being exposed to this flu for the vaccine to work. They say that it takes a week perhaps after having the flu vaccine, for **your immune system** to be ready to then defend itself from flu.

Perhaps they'd been **exposed to the virus** before their bodies had become prepared. Or maybe it was somehow the vaccine itself that had made us sick. I don't know.

At this point I don't want to invite you to speculate or to make comments about this, and I don't really want to get into a discussion about vaccines and the pros and cons.

I think there is always a bit of a risk with vaccines, but it's a risk you take, thinking that ultimately the risk of the vaccine making you ill, is lower than the risk of not taking the vaccine at all and getting full-blown influenza.

Also, I think there is no real reason to believe that my parents having a flu vaccine about 5 days earlier could be the cause of what we were experiencing.

In fact, later medical tests that we all had (blood tests, x-rays, other tests) showed that in fact we had **bacterial infections**, and that definitely my dad and I had **pneumonia - a nasty bacterial lung infection**. But there was some confusion over the details. I think I will describe this confusion now.

At this point now as I type this, after everything has happened, and all of us have had medical treatment, the **diagnosis** is that my dad and I did not in fact **test positive for flu**, but that we did test positive for pneumonia (suggesting that this is what we had from the beginning - and that it manifested first as **flu-like symptoms**, before developing into a clear case of pneumonia - but we're not sure) and strangely enough my mum did test positive for flu (maybe as a result of the vaccine she'd had - but not my dad, but every person is different) and the hospital *suspected* that she also had a

bacterial infection. This is based on a blood test that showed a lot of signs of infection.

Frustratingly, the diagnosis for my mum was less clear than for my dad and me. But anyway, it seems that pneumonia was what we had, certainly my dad and me. So, that's what it was. And yes, pneumonia is dangerous.

But I am getting ahead of myself. The pneumonia diagnosis and that whole episode is kind of part 2 of this story.

At this stage, we didn't know what it was. I didn't know what I had anyway. I thought it was flu and that the pains in my ribs were due to trapped nerves and muscle spasms. My parents were in the process of being tested and diagnosed in hospital, but it was messy, confusing and frustrating for them.

So, what about my parents then?

Let me go back a few days and talk about what happened to them.

So, on Saturday (day 5 for me, day 4 for them) at about midday they went to the hospital in the ambulance. Mum first, then after an interminable wait, Dad too.

The paramedics assured us **they would be taken care of**. My wife didn't go with them, as we had to get ready to move to the other house. But she promised to be in constant contact with both them and the hospital, and she was.

She regularly called and spoke to the admin staff, then doctors and was vital in just checking what was happening and then communicating that to my parents.

They had to go to what is called in the UK **"A&E" - Accident and Emergency**, or "Urgances" in French. That's where you go when there's an emergency, basically.

I think in most countries around the world, going to A&E in a public hospital is a nightmare, right? I'm talking about public hospitals.

You don't want to go. You know you're going to wait for ages. You expect it will be uncomfortable. You don't know what **the waiting area** will be like, who else will be waiting and what condition they will be in.

You imagine some horrible stressful place where there are people in various awful states of pain and disease, and maybe there aren't enough beds, and you will have to wait for hours and hours, and perhaps you will even catch some **superbug** which is **infecting** everyone in the hospital.

That's the image I think many of us have in our heads when we think of going to A&E. But sometimes, you just have to go there.

My parents went to A&E at this local hospital in this relatively small town in the French countryside.

Neither of them speak French well. My dad has some vocabulary and grammar which he remembers from school, so he can string some sentences together, but he struggles to understand French people speaking fluently, and French people generally do speak very quickly.

Apparently in this hospital, when my parents told the staff they didn't understand, the staff would just say the same things again, at the same speed, but just much louder.

In that situation it's not really volume that you need, is it? You need slow and simple language. But generally they didn't get it and found it really confusing, especially at the start.

As I said this was Saturday - day 4 for them (in terms of being ill) and both at a sort of peak of their sickness.

Apparently they managed to get to **the reception desk**, and then waited and were initially interviewed and checked by an administrative nurse who took their details, and then they waited for what must have felt like an eternity, first in the waiting room, and then in another room, on **gurneys** (sort of like stretchers/beds with wheels) for a doctor to come and see them.

Nobody gave them water. They were cold. They weren't allowed to leave the room. I think they were considered to be **contagious**.

When my mum needed the toilet, and managed to stagger out into the corridor, the staff apparently weren't helpful and told her quite strictly to get back in the room immediately, and then eventually one person begrudgingly showed my mum where the toilet was.

Eventually, after this awful start, they were given some tests, and were processed and **admitted into the hospital**. This means they were to be taken upstairs into a room, where they would stay, probably for days, to be given care. They were going to be admitted into the hospital.

But when my wife called them, and we talked to them via Whatsapp, they were determined to refuse. They wanted to refuse to be admitted into the hospital because they found it all so unwelcoming and awful.

Not only were they ill, but I think they were also culture shocked, to the point that they were convinced that the hospital was terrible, nobody knew what they were doing, and it was actually worse than just suffering at home.

I know their experience was negative, but I do think the language barrier and the general culture shock made it much worse than it should have been.

Try going to a local hospital in a foreign country when you are nearly 80 years old, feeling absolutely dreadful, and not being able to communicate with people. It'll feel like the end of the world.

And of course as we've discussed many times on this podcast - culture shock is not really a *shock*. In fact you often don't really realise it is happening at the time.

Usually it just manifests as a feeling that you don't trust anything or anyone around you and everything seems weird and different and therefore wrong.

It feels like everyone around you is doing everything wrong, nothing is familiar, everything seems unreliable, suspicious and unappealing. You don't trust what is going on around you.

Or you feel like *you're* doing everything completely wrong and *you* feel completely out of place.

I think for my parents it was mainly the first thing - their sense of trust in the hospital, staff and doctors was low.

But I think it was a combo of less-than-perfect care from staff (who were probably busy and dealing with lots of other **patients**) my parents' general condition - confused, ill, quite desperate, and simply everything being a bit different and unfamiliar to them.

Thank goodness they had each other. But there was no doubt - this was now an awful **ordeal**, several levels above just **feeling unwell** in bed when you should be having a little holiday.

I think they tried to tell themselves that this was the right place to be, but they weren't completely convinced.

Remember how I felt before my parents came and how I wanted them to be as comfortable as possible, and how concerned I was that all that travelling might make them feel a bit exhausted? Well, this was that but multiplied by 10 or maybe 100. It was many levels worse than what I had been worrying about.

But, to be more positive, they were admitted to the hospital, and despite their reservations they did eventually agree to it, and then things immediately got better when they were moved to their own room (just the two of them - they didn't have to share with anyone else).

It was warmer, they were given water, they had proper beds which could support them while they sat up. There were doctors, nurses, tests, diagnoses, medicines, food, **oxygen**. Eventually they were given **antibiotics** and they immediately **responded well** to them, physically at least.

But on the whole their first days were traumatic and awful. They didn't know what was happening. Nobody successfully explained what was going on. They didn't understand the doctors. My wife did her best by calling the hospital, speaking to the staff, interpreting, then giving information to my parents, and that helped so much but still, it was really horrible.

All the time I was trying to recover, yet keeping in touch with them by text, trying to reassure them. My wife took taxis to see them. The kids continued to watch cartoons all day long.

This is about Sunday or Monday. Day 5 or 6 for me.

Despite how my parents felt on the first day or two, and the apparently chaotic way way that they were being dealt with, they were given antibiotics, and oxygen, and water, and food, and they did respond to this treatment, and they physically started to get better.

What was actually wrong with them, and me? I have kind of answered this question but let me talk more about our **diagnoses** and the confusion around it all.

God I hope you're finding this interesting!

Remember: vocabulary. There is a lot to learn here, if you're noticing it. The words and phrases in bold on the PDF. If you're a premium subscriber you'll get a vocabulary review for these things later.

Like the word ***diagnoses*** which is the plural of… what?

That's right, ***diagnosis*** which is basically what the doctor tells you after having examined you.

A jury in a court gives their verdict: guilty or not guilty.

An examiner gives you your exam result: pass or fail.

A doctor gives you a diagnosis.

E.g. an infection of **viral** type-A influenza, or **chicken pox**, or a **bacterial infection** of your lung in the form of pneumonia, or something.

So, that's a *diagnosis*, and the plural is *diagnoses*.

The other thing a doctor might give you is **a prescription**. That's usually a sheet of paper with the name of some medicines that you need to take, which you then bring to a pharmacy.

So, **diagnosis**, **diagnoses**, **prescription**. That's the kind of helpful stuff you can get if you sign up to LEP Premium and then listen to the vocabulary review for this.

Plus there will be a full PDF full of support materials and self-study activities and all sorts. LEP Premium - episodes available in your podcast app of choice including Spotify and Apple Podcasts, or via the Supercast app where you can get video versions and all that good stuff.

Anyway, what about our *diagnoses*?

This is still a bit of a mystery, but let me start with my parents.

They were given blood tests when they were admitted into hospital, and other tests, and after the results were reviewed, the doctor diagnosed that my mum was positive for type-A influenza, which is **a contagious respiratory virus** that causes **seasonal flu epidemics** and is the only influenza virus known to trigger **global pandemics**.

So, it's classic flu, basically. An absolutely horrible little virus that **mutates** regularly, and if you catch it, it somehow makes you feel absolutely bloody awful.

It would be great if they made you feel fantastic, wouldn't it? But no.

So, my mum tested positive for that but somehow my dad wasn't positive (but **false negatives for antigen flu** tests are quite common, especially after the first 3 or 4 days, as far as I know, so who really knows - but maybe he did have it but the test returned a false positive).

They both tested negative for COVID-19.

My dad did test positive for pneumonia, which as I've said **can be very serious if left untreated**, as I expect you are aware.

Pneumonia is **an inflammation of the lung tissue**, usually caused by a bacterial or viral infection, which makes the tiny air sacs (alveoli) in your lungs fill with fluid or **pus** (NHS) and this can be very dangerous because it can seriously **restrict your intake of oxygen** as well as the dangers of bacterial infection ultimately spreading in your body.

The most common cause of pneumonia is a bacterial infection, but viral pneumonia is also possible. It seems bacterial pneumonia is usually caused by exposure to a certain bacteria, and it often develops from a flu infection.

Again, we are not sure how he actually got it, but in any case, this is what he had. I blame Matt Dillon.

Some of my dad's symptoms included a cough (which went away), wheezing and bubbling in his lungs, aches and pains, high temperature, weakness, fatigue, shortness of breath.

Surely part of his weakness (inability to get up, sit up in bed etc) was due to this pneumonia restricting his oxygen intake.

My mum did not test positive for this specific pneumonia infection.

However, she did show signs of some other infection (this showed up in her blood test) and so they suspected that as well as having a viral flu infection, that she also had some sort of bacterial infection, but they weren't entirely sure what it was, or where it was.

Imagine all this being communicated to you in a second language that you hardly understand. It was complicated and not very reassuring. A lot of stress, and we weren't entirely sure what was wrong, and we felt the doctors didn't really know either.

But, they're doctors and we're not, and based on the data from their tests, they saw from the way her body was reacting, that there was a fairly strong chance she had a bacterial infection too. So, **they were both given quite large doses of antibiotics**.

My mum was sceptical about whether she needed it. But in any case, after being given doses of several antibiotics over the first few days (the doc was covering a wide possibility of different potential infections) they definitely **showed clear signs of improvement**, thank goodness.

Antibiotics can be vital in situations like this of course, but they aren't nice and they can have **side effects** - particularly on **appetite** and **digestion**, but in terms of their levels of infection, they did show improvement.

But, they were **not out of the woods** by any means, and despite the reduction in those signs of infection, they were both very weak and very tired, and my dad's pneumonia was going to take time to go away.

They had to stay in hospital to continue **to be monitored**, and to be given oxygen, and other treatments. They could hardly eat the food that was given to them. They found it mostly unappealing and **they had almost no appetite**, especially my dad. They had water.

Meanwhile, I was in this other house, **feeling very out of sorts**, with nasty stabbing pains in my chest and ribs, on the right side (so not my heart) and nails being pulled out of my head and put back in again, and deep tiredness, and this disgusting feeling from the house.

But even though my parents were fairly **stable** in hospital, and we were installed in this AirBnB, difficult things just continued to happen.

Some time over that weekend, we got a text from my brother, or maybe his girlfriend, who we had been in touch quite with regularly to get news. And that text said that James, his girlfriend and their son had *also* **come down with something** and were feeling awful.

James in particular was very badly affected. He already has a condition which makes him quite vulnerable to other things. In this case **he couldn't keep food down** or eat.

What on earth was happening to the Thompsons? They were hundreds of miles away in London.

What was going on?

Was there some kind of flu epidemic sweeping through England and France? We asked around, to see if other friends in France or London were also

suffering. We googled it. No recorded outbreak of flu in the UK or France. No other friends were feeling ill. It seemed only to be us.

It must have been a coincidence that both my brother and his family, and my parents and I were ill at the same time, despite being in different countries, but nevertheless - it was disturbing, and added yet more worry to this situation, knowing that they were also unwell.

Their son couldn't go to school, my brother and his girlfriend were both struggling to look after him. Their son wasn't sleeping properly, and cried during the night. They were exhausted too as well as ill. My bro's girlfriend recovered more quickly, but James continued to **be in bad shape**, particularly because he couldn't eat, plus he had a cough and other nasty symptoms.

Madness.

Let's say that now it's about Monday. That's day 8 for me in terms of illness. Day 7 for my parents.

As I said, my family and I were basically stuck in this other house, with me in this horrible uncomfortable and very musty and stale smelling bed.

I couldn't stand it, so I moved to another bed in another room. My wife slept with the kids. They continued to watch a lot of TV, which we were not happy about, but we really didn't have much choice.

As I mentioned before, my son had no potty in this house. Sometimes he would manage to get outside and go to the toilet in the garden, but often not.

He was fast running out of clean clothes. As I said, no washing machine in this house. Eventually he just had his pyjama trousers left.

My wife was managing to go and see my parents each afternoon, going by taxi, and coming back by taxi. But this was expensive and time consuming.

The kids and my wife needed to go back to Paris. My son was booked to be in playschool, my daughter at a sports workshop. My wife had work commitments that she badly needed to attend to. And also I needed peace and quiet in order to recover properly.

Tuesday arrived (day 8 for me) and something needed to be done.

It was time for me to go to hospital now, because I was definitely not improving.

I was in pain, I was coughing a lot, and I was wheezing - or at least I could hear a bubbling sound in my chest when I breathed. I still could not get comfortable, and sitting up or lying down were very painful because of the pain in my head, and ribs.

Every day my wife asked me how I was, and honestly I couldn't say that I was getting any better.

So, on Tuesday we all went to hospital. I drove. It was uncomfortable, but I was ok for the short trip. It was only 10 minutes. That was doable. **I was able to muster up strength** and concentration for it.

Then all 4 of us went into A&E - the same place my parents had gone 3 days earlier, and **checked me in**.

Luckily for us, things went smoothly. I was seen quite quickly. The kids were as good as gold. I was checked and interviewed by a nurse and the kids sat in the room with us and stayed still. They had chocolate biscuits.

I was checked, interviewed. I told them about my symptoms - describing everything, especially the horrible pain in my head and ribs.

I had not been taking paracetamol, because it just didn't do anything for me. It didn't make the pain go away, and just made my head throb really hard, which was very uncomfortable.

But after describing my symptoms in A&E, and after they **took my blood pressure** and **checked my oxygen levels** and took my health card info and all that, they gave me a dose of paracetamol and also **a small dose of morphine**, which was a surprise.

I'd never had morphine before. I was a bit wary of it, because it's an **opiate**, and I've always been very cautious about them, but in this case I thought "Why not? I need a break from this pain".

As you probably know, morphine is **an opiate painkiller** - in the same family as opium of course, but also so many other painkillers and medicines, and also the illegal drug heroin.

Morphine - for me, it was what soldiers injured on the battlefield in WW2 were given if their legs had been blown off or something. But really, it's common in hospitals to give morphine to any patient suffering a lot of pain.

So I took this small pill and let it dissolve on my tongue. It fizzed and made my tongue feel a bit **numb**, and within about 15 minutes, it started to **take effect**, combined with the paracetamol.

We all went back to the waiting room, to wait for me to be examined by a doctor. I was worried about how long the kids could wait patiently before they started to do those things that little kids do when they are bored and tired, not to mention scared by a weird situation. There were other people in the waiting room, in various states of ill health.

But luckily for us, there was a door to another section of the waiting area - another room, which was empty, and in the middle of that room was a table with lots of children's toys on it.

A nurse opened up the room for us and let us in. The kids immediately started playing with all the toys, and my wife and I were able to talk and wait without worrying about the children.

Unfortunately there was no food, but they were **ok for the time being.**

We were both relatively **relieved**, and I sat there **feeling my pain magically drain away** because of the morphine. Also, **a lot of my stress and tension melted away**.

I was not only ill but also very uptight, stressed and generally exhausted because I had not been able to relax or get much rest in the 8+ days since I first started to feel ill. With my parents in hospital and in a bad way, and all the other things, **I was a borderline nervous wreck** actually.

This morphine gave me a warm relaxing feeling, and gave me a much needed break from the pain, and this became **a turning point** for me.

For the first time in about 8 days I started to feel a bit relaxed and **the pain was significantly reduced**.

It was the first bit of **relief** I'd felt for ages. But I was quite a mess. I hadn't eaten very much for over a week. I'd lost weight. I clearly had a lung infection too like my dad, and I was very fatigued and weak, and I knew it would probably take me a long time to get back to normal.

At some point in all of this I wrote a post to my premium subscribers to explain that I was very ill, and sorry for no episodes. Also at this time, just to make matters worse, I had a problem on my website and it went down - it went offline, so I needed to explain that too. Lots of PLEPsters replied with supportive comments, which was nice and **reassuring**.

Eventually I was called to come through and see a doctor, and I wandered away from my family, through some double doors and into another room where I lay down on a gurney, waiting for something to happen.

I was given an antigen covid & flu test, and also an **x-ray** so they could see my lung, and eventually a doctor came and spoke to me, telling me that, yes, I had this specific *lobular pneumopathie aigue* (just like my dad) and that it was clearly visible on the x-ray.

I actually tested negative for influenza and covid. Maybe I had had flu the week before, but after 8 days the chances of a false negative result are fairly high, and my nose and mouth were so dry that I don't even think they were able to take much of a sample from me. You know when they stick that little white swab into the back of your nose - it came out dry as a bone. So I wonder how reliable that antigen test was, but what do I know?

But flu or no flu, I now had a nasty case of pneumonia, and the doctor prescribed **a course of antibiotics**, and another x-ray at the hospital after 3 days.

And then I was allowed to leave.

We managed to quickly pop upstairs to see my parents. They looked better than the last time I'd seen them (but that's not saying much), although they were still very tired and weak. They had **lost weight**, and were trying hard not to be too miserable about being in this situation - feeling the way they did, and stuck in a hospital room with staff they didn't really understand and treatments they didn't understand, for a diagnosis they didn't really understand.

My wife translated everything for them, but it was still mysterious.
What kind of infection did my mum have? The doctor couldn't be specific.
When would they be able to leave? Not yet, they still needed care and attention. How would they ever get home in this condition? Unknown.

My parents were **utterly fed up** but trying to stay positive. They had only been in hospital for 3 or 4 days at that point. They ended up staying in that room for 11 days.

I actually felt a lot better suddenly, probably because of the morphine, and was glad to have been given a prescription for antibiotics. The morphine had relaxed me and **taken the edge off my headache** and other aches and pains.

Suddenly I felt very hungry, and thoughts of food came flooding back to me. After seeing my parents, we got my medication from the pharmacy, and carefully decided that I could look after myself now for a few days.

I assured my wife I was alright. I had made contact with the hospital and had been checked by a doctor. I had my diagnosis. I had my prescription of antibiotics. I needed to take the medication, eat and rest in peace and quiet at the AirBnB.

In fact, a few days of total peace and quiet in that house on my own, without the children, was exactly what I needed. I love them of course, but they were having a difficult time, and they were noisy and sometimes arguing between each other, and my son had run out of clean clothes.

Also it was just absolutely no fun at all for them to be in that house all day long. They had nothing to do. No toys there. Nothing to keep them entertained except kids' TV shows on Netflix, Disney+ or French TV. The weather was bad so they couldn't play outside.

So, after some discussion, I drove my wife and kids to the station and they got on a train to Paris.

I felt **drained**, but felt ok to be on my own. I was definitely weak and tired, but I felt I'd **turned a corner**, with the painkillers I'd been given and I could see that food, rest and medication were the road to recovery.

We had the AirBnB until the following weekend. So I had about 4 days ahead of me. My wife could still call the hospital to talk to my parents' doctor. We were all in regular contact with my parents too.

The kids needed to go back to some kind of normal life away from this limbo with their sick dad, and my wife needed to get some work done, as per the original plan.

So, after dropping them off at the station just 3 minutes from the hospital (the journey back to Paris is just over 1 hour by train), I went to the supermarket and bought various bits of food I needed and was suddenly craving - plain things that I could eat easily, and that would make me feel better.

I felt **ravenous** and craved eggs, so I bought plenty, plus other things. Oats for making porridge for breakfast, rice, peas, some plain fish. Things that were not too rich and that I could easily cook and eat, and that wouldn't give me **heartburn** or **indigestion** because of the antibiotics.

Then it was back to the musty old house for me, where I locked the doors, closed off most of the rooms I didn't need, and spent my time between the kitchen, the toilet, and the bedroom, where finally I found I could actually sleep.

I managed to get a good night's sleep that night, and found strength returning to me, very slowly.

This all sounds so dramatic doesn't it? But it is exactly how it happened and how it felt.

Thank goodness we all didn't have something much worse. I find health problems to be terrifying, especially when you think that there are many things which are worse than what we were experiencing, but still, it was bad enough, thank you very much.

We all tried not to go crazy wondering how this had all happened, and at what point my parents and I had been infected by whatever we'd been infected by. We tried not to get too obsessed by this and focused on getting better.

But my parents were also in the dark as to how they would get home. They desperately wanted this entire episode to end, and to be in their own home where they knew they could actually properly recover, and where they could get the advice of their own **GP**.

My wife, again, was amazing, and contacted their insurance company again and again.

It turned out they had travel insurance through their bank account. This would pay for any **medical expenses** they had. Also, they had European Health Insurance Cards, which were still valid despite Brexit.

And their medical insurance through their bank account seemed to also provide a **repatriation** service - which means that the company could (in theory) arrange for them to be transported back home in the event of illness or **hospitalisation**.

So, they wouldn't have to pay for medical fees, and hopefully they would be taken home and all of it could be paid for by their insurance.

This appeared to be a stroke of good luck, or good planning, but as you may know with insurance companies - what is promised on paper is sometimes very hard to achieve in real life.

My wife got the process underway, but it was slow. It seemed that the insurance company could arrange repatriation, including transport back to their home. But it wasn't clear exactly how this would be done, or indeed when.

Some kind of car or minibus service door to door from the hospital or our house all the way to their house in England, via the Euro tunnel? That's an incredibly long drive with a potentially complicated transfer via the Eurotunnel. That was one possibility.

Another possibility was a car to Charles de Gaulle airport outside Paris and a flight to their nearest airport in England, and then another car home.

That seemed to be the best option, but getting guarantees from the company that it would happen was difficult.

Also the prospect of making the journey was too much for them to imagine at that time, and now we are talking about day 8 of their illness and day 4 of their hospital stay, and they were still very weak.

It's also quite an undignified feeling, as I'm sure you can imagine.

Anyway, that week slowly passed. My wife and kids in Paris, me recovering in this AirBnB that felt like an old woman's house, eating eggs and porridge and stuff, and resting, and going to visit my parents each afternoon, and bringing them supplies like fruit, yoghurt, bottles of fizzy water, and things like books of sudoku to keep them occupied.

It was still awful, but it was getting better.

On Friday I had my second x-ray. It still showed a nasty infection in my right lung. It had only improved very slightly, not much.

However, by Sunday, the last day of my antibiotics, I felt quite a lot better - hardly any pain, but still very low on energy and very easily tired.

That day was the last day we could stay at the AirBnB, and the normal house was available again. Although I was spending most of my time in bed, I managed to pack up and move out of the AirBnB and back to our usual house.

The other family had finished their week long holiday and had gone on the Saturday afternoon. So, on Sunday I needed to be there in time to meet a cleaner and let her in. She would get the house clean and ready for our return. I couldn't do that myself.

But I did need to stock up on more wood and some more food from the large supermarket that sells everything.

So, I did all that, and returned to the house, let the cleaner in and then lay on the sofa and slept, while the cleaner cleaned the house. I woke feeling very **groggy** and paid the cleaner.

That evening (Sunday) I made a fire to warm up the house, made dinner and slept for maybe 12 hours.

On Monday (day 14 for me) I had a video call with my doctor in Paris.

He confirmed that my pneumonia was still bad, even though the antibiotics were finished. I needed **a blood test** the next day to check my condition further.

My parents were slowly getting better, and thankfully did not have **complications** or any other new symptoms. But they were **fed up** and anxious after 13 days of illness and 9 days in hospital. My brother's girlfriend and their son were improving, but James was still in a bad way, and unable to eat, which was not reassuring.

In fact, I can't remember when this happened exactly - I think it was before I left the AirBnB - my brother suddenly felt so **appalling** - coughing very hard and with many other symptoms (surely **undernourished** and dehydrated too) that he went to hospital himself, and yes had a generally unpleasant experience, but got confirmation that he didn't have pneumonia, which he had started to convince himself of (maybe he just wanted to be in the pneumonia club - but he did have an awful cough). Apparently it was a mystery virus which had struck him down.

That's the thing about viruses - they are very tricky and there are many types, and they can't all be monitored and controlled, which is quite frightening

really. There are all sorts of them flying around the place, mutating and being invisible to the naked eye.

But anyway, coming back from hospital was hard and just like the rest of us, it is still taking him quite a long time to get his strength and appetite back, even now.

That was a stressful episode too. He called me when he was about to go to hospital, and I tried to calm him down. I'm not sure I managed it. And then suddenly he had to go. Later he texted and said he was being seen, but that he only had 1% battery left on his phone.

I didn't hear anything more from him for hours, and eventually I called his girlfriend to find out if she knew what was happening to him.

She had actually gone to the hospital with their son (he's 2) to check on him. He was ok, but everything was taking time. She came home, James followed a few hours later, in a bad way.

What happened to The Thompsons?

How did everything go so wrong on both sides of the channel? What was going to happen to my parents? How could they get home? When would they be fit to make the trip? And would the insurance company actually fulfil their promises on paper, and actually do it, like they said they could?

I continued to eat (my appetite was back but I couldn't handle a lot of food) and rest, going to bed at 7.30 or 8PM each night and actually sleeping.

Tuesday morning (day 15 for me), I went for a blood test in the morning - doctor's orders, but no breakfast for me that day - you're not supposed to eat before a blood test, and then came back to our house.

I went to see my parents in the afternoon. Positive news. The doctor had actually said their condition had improved and they could **be discharged**. They could actually leave the following day, at 11AM.

We couldn't quite believe it, and decided we would believe it when it actually happened.

This is because throughout their stay, people had said things to them that never actually happened, or happened extremely late and everything seemed so unreliable.

To be fair to the hospital and staff, it wasn't a total catastrophe and I think a lot of things were lost in translation, and were misconstrued by my anxious parents, but then again, a lot of things were just inconsistent and confusing and as I said, some things that were promised just never happened.

For example, one day a **physiotherapist** came and spoke to them in a rather mysterious way for about 30 minutes. But the thing is, he didn't *introduce* himself as a physiotherapist. He just introduced himself as a doctor.

They thought "Why a new doctor? Why now?" He asked them questions - in English I think - and they had a conversation which my parents couldn't understand even though this "doctor" was speaking English.

Finally, after all these questions which they had already been asked days before by other members of staff, this mysterious "doctor" revealed he was actually a physiotherapist - which was actually good news because my parents had very weak legs and backs and were struggling to do physical things, and definitely would have benefitted from some **physiotherapy**, to help them get their strength and **mobility** back, but he revealed this at the end, so that for the duration of this 30 minute interview, they had no idea who this guy was and why he was asking them questions that they had already answered days before.

At the end, after revealing that he was a physio, he said he would “come back tomorrow”, and then they just never saw him again. He never came back.

Apparently, things like that kept happening during their stay, but nevertheless, they had been given care and were reasonably warm and comfortable and hydrated and they had improved.

By Tuesday/Wednesday (that’s day 14/15 of my illness, and day 10/11 of their hospital stay) they were definitely stronger and so the doctor agreed they could leave.

They were happy about this, but continued to be sceptical that it would actually happen. This was their state of mind. I think they partly believed they would be stuck in that room for the rest of their lives.

Anyway, thank goodness I had a house for them to come back to.

We made arrangements for me to pick them up the next day (Weds) at 10.45AM. Then it was time for me to leave the hospital to go back home.

As I was leaving I got a phone call. It was the laboratory where I’d had my blood test that morning.

Apparently, they wanted to speak to my doctor but weren’t able to contact him by phone, so they called me. The laboratory man said he had to inform me that I had a “high **liver** level” and that I should email my doctor to inform him.

I said, OK, and thought - “well, yes, I probably do have an **elevated level** of *I don’t know what* - ***white blood cells*** *maybe* in my liver, because I’ve been really ill and I took quite a lot of antibiotics.” I thought it was not a surprise, and that the lab were being quite **thorough**.

When I got home I emailed my doctor. I told him what the lab had said. Basically, “Dear doctor, the lab called and said I have a high liver level and

that I should let you know. All the best, Luke" We still didn't have my full blood test results at this point by the way.

Then, that evening after speaking to my wife and kids on the phone, and after making myself some dinner, I had literally just climbed into bed, when I received some messages from my doctor.

He told me that I needed to have my liver checked, and that I had to go to A&E.

I said "Really? I have to go to A&E? Now??"

He said, "Yes. If the lab calls to say you have a high liver level, then it is probably serious. Go to A&E and get your liver checked, and get an ultrasound. It's important. There could be a risk of **liver failure**."

There could be a risk of liver failure. Yes. My doctor is thorough and doesn't take risks. I guess he was right. If there was a risk that my liver was in trouble for some reason, then I had to go to hospital to have it checked, didn't I?

The words "***risk of liver failure***" filled me with dread. Suddenly I was quite scared.

I got dressed, and got all my papers. By this point I had a growing pile of medical reports, test results, prescriptions etc. Then I got in the car again, and headed back to the hospital *again* (only 10 minutes away) this time in the dark.

Honestly, at this point, I was anxious again. I thought, "Liver failure! That'll kill me, won't it? Is there really something wrong with my liver? Is it suddenly going to hurt like hell, then explode and then I'm going to die? Could it happen any second now, while I'm driving? Will I be found in this car, several hours from now, crashed in a field by the side of the road?"

The thing is, I felt ok. I mean, I had no **abdominal pain**. There were no signs of imminent liver failure as far as I could tell. But what did I know? Maybe the liver doesn't feel pain, but then it just fails and you die. Is that what happens?

I know how important the liver is. If it fails, that's it, isn't it? You can't just carry on going around doing stuff with no liver. It's, like, really important.

I tried to tell myself that everything was probably ok, but I needed to be on the safe side. I should just calmly go to hospital and walk back into A&E and get this checked. Better to be safe than sorry.

But it felt wrong to be driving back out to this hospital in the dark when I thought I was about to go to bed, with this vague fear that maybe my liver was about to kill me.

I didn't call to tell my wife yet. I certainly didn't tell my parents, who would have just been getting ready to try and sleep in their hospital room, knowing they might really be allowed to leave the next day.

I got weird flashbacks to that time when I was sick in Japan, and when I misunderstood my doctor who told me that I had liver damage and I needed to go to hospital and **have an operation**.

Maybe you know the story. On that occasion, I was rushed off to hospital but I didn't understand what was wrong with me, except that I had liver damage, I needed to go to hospital and that I needed an operation, and that I felt bloody awful - not dissimilar to how I had been feeling in the last two weeks here in this situation.

That time in Japan, I thought I needed **a liver transplant**, and was going to be given one in the hospital the very next day. I was scared not only that I was **seriously ill**, and that I was going to have a major operation, but that during this imminent **organ transplant** they would surely give me a Japanese liver and I thought "What are the chances that this will work? Can my English body accept a Japanese liver? What if I get the liver of someone who can't

drink alcohol? There's always one Japanese guy in every bar who can't handle his booze, and after two drinks goes all red and lies down on the floor. What if they give me his liver?"

Thankfully, I was completely wrong, on that occasion, and completely confused, as you will know if you've heard me tell that story, which I have done lots of times on this podcast.

In fact, I didn't need an operation. It was all lost in translation - or just a misunderstanding. The fact is my liver *was* damaged by a virus I had at the time (the EB virus, which had caused the mononucleosis that I was suffering from, unbeknownst to me at the time) and I did need to go to hospital, but not because I needed a liver transplant, but because I was just so ill and exhausted, and the reference to me needing an operation was that one day the doctor thought I should probably **have my tonsils removed** (they were badly infected at the time).

Tonsils are **glands** in your **throat**. Mine were badly infected at the time, along with the mononucleosis that I was suffering from.

My Japanese doctor was suggesting that *one day* I would need an operation to have my tonsils removed so they wouldn't get infected again. Plenty of people get their tonsils removed for this exact reason, usually when they're young.

Anyway, back to me, in France, driving through country roads in the dark, worried my liver was about to explode for unknown reasons.

I arrived at the hospital, and parked in the usual spot, just under my parents' window. I looked up as I walked past the window. I think I saw my dad in his bed. I hoped they wouldn't see me.

And then there I was, back in A&E again. Luckily nobody else was waiting. It was just me. I was seen quite quickly. I managed to explain myself in French, which surprised me.

I went through to another room, and lay on a gurney again, mainly trying not to worry about how utterly messed up and wrong everything was at that moment.

I did feel ok. I told myself. I didn't have pain. I didn't think I was showing signs of imminent liver failure. I was just tired but slowly getting more and more strength back each day. Surely this was a just a false alarm.

A doctor arrived and he offered to speak English to me and I said ok. Later he said he was happy for the opportunity to practice. As ever, I am the living breathing English practice opportunity, and happy to help.

Anyway, I explained and he understood the situation. He checked me - kind of massaged and pressed my abdomen where my liver is, and asked if there was any pain. I said no. He checked for **swelling in my abdomen**. Then he used his **stethoscope** to listen to my breathing, to check the condition of my lung infection.

To my relief, he said it *probably* wasn't an emergency, and that there *probably* wasn't risk of liver failure.

I noted that he did use the word *probably*. I was equally impressed by his English and disappointed by the lack of certainty, but the facts were that my liver was not swollen or painful. I had no fever. I was not **jaundiced**. I was **pale** (and probably still am) but not ***jaundiced***.

I thought this sounded like good news, but as ever I wasn't completely sure and by this point I'd come to expect that there was always some other little problem that would just keep this whole nightmare going on and on. But in this case, it seemed that my liver wasn't about to explode, *probably*.

But still, what was wrong with it?

Apparently, despite there being no threat of imminent liver failure, it still wasn't doing very well, and was showing some high numbers of *something.* So, I felt relieved, but not entirely relieved, as you might expect.

He told me that the infection in my lungs had been reduced by the antibiotics, which was good, but that it wasn't completely gone. I knew this because I could still feel it. If I took a deep breath I could feel the tightness in my lung, and it would occasionally hurt, but nowhere near as much as before.

He said I needed an **ultrasound** of the liver to give a clearer indication of its condition. I would have to come back the next day for that.

He told me the next available ultrasound was 10AM the next morning. I was due to help my parents leave the hospital at 10.45. It would probably be tight but maybe ok, although everything took ages during this experience.

Anyway, I was advised to come back early at 9AM-ish and book my ultrasound for 10.

Oh yes, and no food or water from 6 hours before the ultrasound, and no urination 3 hours before. Great, again, no breakfast for me or water in this case. I'd be thirsty, hungry and probably needing a wee. Still, at least I'd (probably) have it confirmed that my liver wasn't about to fall out or something.

Also, there is more backstory here.

My god, I am giving you such a detailed account of my medical history.

For years I've known that I have **a genetic condition** that gives me very high levels of certain kinds of **cholesterol** in my blood.

Luke, what is cholesterol?

According to the NHS, cholesterol is a waxy fat-like substance which is naturally produced by your liver and also found in certain foods.

It is essential for life, helping **build cell membranes**, **produce hormones** (like estrogen and testosterone), **manufacture vitamin D**, and **create digestive bile**.

Because cholesterol does not **dissolve** in blood, it travels through your **bloodstream** wrapped in proteins called lipoproteins. Some of those types of lipoproteins can **build up** inside the walls of your **blood vessels**, and that's not very healthy because it can restrict the flow of blood through them.

I have genetically high levels of certain types of cholesterol, and so do all the other men on my dad's side of the family. We have high cholesterol, and my doctor decided over a year ago that it was time that I started taking **statins**, in small doses, and he prescribed me some.

Statins are a very common form of medicine - a **remedy** for high cholesterol, which a lot of people take every day without side effects, including my dad who's been taking them for years, successfully reducing his cholesterol to a safe level.

But when I started taking statins a year ago, in a relatively small dose, after about a month, my body reacted to them - my liver, specifically, didn't like them and produced an enzyme in response, and that ended up giving me a lot of aches and pains in my muscles and general weakness and fatigue for about a week.

I stopped taking the statin and the side effects went away.

Since then my doc had prescribed a different type of statin, to see if that would suit me better. That was 6 weeks before this particular nightmare kicked off.

The doctor in A&E suggested that perhaps this “high liver level” (whatever that really means) could be a reaction to the second statin, and that it could have been **exacerbated** by the illness I was recovering from - particularly because of how dehydrated I had become during the first week when I just could not drink enough water, and I was vomiting and, well… all the rest.

My doc in Paris, available via messages in the doctor app we use, agreed. So, the decision: stop taking the statins, and have more blood tests to monitor the effects on my liver.

For the millionth time in this 3 week nightmare I shook my head and wondered when this shit would just stop happening.

I was allowed to leave the hospital and I did. The conclusion being: Liver seems ok and no signs of failure or whatever, just suffering from statin side effects again, so that’s kind of alright, but get an ultrasound the next day to be sure.

This is why people don’t like going to the doctor - they’re afraid that they’re going to just discover more and more things.

Although this felt mad and frustrating, I thought it was good that my doctor in particular was being thorough with me and so I decided to just go along with it and keep going, aiming for whatever would let me recover and get back to normal.

Obviously, stopping the statins would cause my cholesterol to rise again, but you trade one risk with another, don’t you.

At this point I feel that someone out there listening probably has an opinion about this.

Feel free to comment, but remember, this is not a request for medical opinions, even though I appreciate that you might be doing it because of helpful motivations.

I should also say that although I am describing all this in detail, I am not really complaining about all this, not really. I hope this doesn't come across as me just whingeing or complaining. Mainly I just want to get it all off my chest and I find it therapeutic to talk about experiences like this.

Actually I feel very lucky, and I know that many people have many worse health issues, and all-in-all I am grateful for the relatively good health that I have, and the fact that I have a doctor who is attentive and all that.

If you are suffering from any kind of long term health issues, then you have my sympathy and I wish you all the very best, and I hope you get the strength and courage to tolerate it and also the good fortune and fortitude to make a good recovery.

So, after walking out of A&E again, after my "high liver level" scare, I got back to the car, hoping my parents would not see me through the window, because they would wonder what on earth I was doing there, and I didn't want to worry them on what we hoped was their last night in hospital.

I had called my wife from the waiting room earlier. She was getting the kids in bed, and of course was shocked and very worried to hear I was in A&E with potential liver failure.

I explained that it was ok. No liver failure, *probably*. Maybe it was just a slight overreaction from the laboratory when they saw my results, and then a typically cautious reaction from my doctor who concluded that was probably the statins causing an effect in my liver like last time.

Home and bed.

No breakfast no toilet and back to the hospital again in the morning.

How many times did I drive to this hospital during this whole nightmare? I don't know. Maybe a million. Yes, it was a million times.

Meanwhile my parents were *none the wiser* about this little “liver” episode, and were anxiously expecting to be released from hospital later that morning.

At reception, when I tried to book my ultrasound (that’s when they use sound waves to get an image of the inside of your body, for example to look at a baby in a woman’s womb, but in this case to have a look at my liver) it turned out that the next appointment I could get was the next day, Thursday, at 10AM. Again I would have no breakfast, no water and no wee wee that morning too.

So, back in the car I got, straight back to the house, straight to the loo, and then had breakfast (after washing my hands of course) and then straight back in the car again and back to the hospital in order to collect my parents, who were feeling very, shall I say, stressed, or perhaps just preoccupied by the prospect of finally leaving.

They had been assured that at 11, it would happen. Their bags were packed. They were ready. They were desperate to get out of that room, and the hospital, and ultimately out of the country, but were anxious about how this was actually going to be done.

I sat there with them, and we waited for something to happen, for the doctor to arrive and say “Yes, you can go - here are your medical reports”, or something like that.

We sat and waited, and sat and waited some more, for nearly an hour and absolutely nothing happened. At one point a nurse came in to tidy some things in the room. I asked if my parents could leave, as promised. He said he would go and check, and never returned.

So I went out to investigate. I hung around in the corridor until someone walked past and I interrupted them, asking about my parents and “can they leave now?”

He brought me to the doctor's office, and there he was, sitting, doing something or other. I'm not sure what he was doing but it wasn't *going to my parents room to let them leave,* but he was able to see me and talk to me straight away. I wondered how long we would have waited if I hadn't got up to ask someone.

I sat down and said "Can my parents leave now" and "Yes yes yes" he assured me, and I thought "OK well let's go then come on, what are we waiting for?!" although I didn't say that.

Instead I said, "What needs to happen now?"

To cut a long story short, he summarised the situation to me, which is what we already understood although it didn't make total sense - we still don't know if my mum really had a bacterial infection, but they "suspected" that she did, and so on and so on, but finally after being assured that they could leave, I was told to go next door to an admin office where I did more waiting, and finally two envelopes with medical reports were handed to me, and discharge papers for the reception downstairs, and off I went back to the room where my parents still didn't know what was happening and where I had disappeared to, but I proudly waved the envelopes and announced "It's happening! You can leave!"

This was quite an emotional moment, but my parents still didn't quite believe it until it actually happened for real. I helped them with their bags, and we just got up and walked out.

They had hardly done any actual walking for all this time. It was about 2 weeks since they had first come down with this illness, and 11 days since they arrived in hospital.

They'd been getting up and walking a little bit in their small room, but had done hardly any steps really.

I helped them out of the room, into the lift and then down into reception, where we had to wait again to be called, and I did the exit admin with the receptionist.

She took the forms from me, did some stuff on the computer and finally said “It’s ok for me!”

I couldn’t quite believe it. I said “They can go??” and she said “Yes!”

I thanked her. And by the way, we did see the doctor and some of the nurses upstairs in the corridor as we were leaving and we did thank them. Some of the nurses in particular had been nice and helpful. But really, my parents just couldn’t wait to get out.

I went outside and brought the car around, and then helped them get in, and then my mum realised she’d left something upstairs, so I parked the car, let the engine run so it would be warm inside with the heater running, and I dashed back up, for hopefully the last time, and did yet more waiting, while a nurse looked for the thing that my mum had forgotten, and then it was found and was handed to me, and I made my way back downstairs, into the car and we drove away.

My parents were feeling shell shocked, and said they felt extremely strange, even surreal, to be out in “the real world”. I was just very conscious that I wanted them warm, comfortable and fed properly, and then we could focus on somehow getting them home.

Of course this involved getting the insurance company to actually confirm repatriation and make it happen.

4 days later, it finally did happen, after a lot more waiting and a lot of calling and chasing them up, and emails and more calls, and all the time I kept the fire going in the stove, and made sure there was wood, and I tried to cook them good food, and they slept, and we sat around in the warmest room in

the house, getting frustrated and continuing to go a bit mad and being concerned for each other, and we tried to keep positive and avoid boredom.

And now, as I type this particular bit, it is Saturday - 19 days after I first got ill - 18 days for my parents, and about 2 hours ago they were actually picked up by a taxi to be taken to the airport in Paris, and of course they didn't get the full assistance they were promised by the company, not all of it anyway, but they were eventually assisted through the airport and are now waiting for their plane - a short flight, and they should be collected by another car at arrivals in their destination airport and driven home, where my uncle and a couple of friends will be waiting for them in their home, with food and help.

It's not over yet, but we are nearly there. They are both still v weak and recovering. It will take them quite some time to get their strength back, especially after an exhausting journey, but being in the comfort of their own home, and then the attention of their own doctor in England, will be exactly what they need.

What a horrendous ordeal.

Now I am adding more thoughts to this account. It is now about 3 weeks later. I am back in Paris, having driven back yesterday. My parents are home. Everyone is recovering. My brother and his family are all much better.

But I keep replaying the mad events of the last few weeks and I'm still not 100%.

I'm keen to get back to work. I want to make content for my subscribers. And I want to just be back to normal now.

An x-ray scan of my chest shows I still have pneumonia there but it's less than before. But my doctor says I have to rest. Pneumonia could come back if I'm not careful.

My parents are taking their time, cancelling plans in their diaries and focusing on resting and getting back to full strength.

Thankfully their journey was ok - not completely smooth, but ok and everyone's safe and feeling a lot better.

We keep wondering how all three of us could have got sick together all at the same time? Did we catch it in the train station in Paris? Was it Matt Dillon - did we all catch it from him? I wonder how Matt Dillon is doing. Has he been sick too?

Anyway, we just don't know. My doctor's opinion is that we probably got it from the kids. A little cough or a runny nose from them can be quite normal, but they also carry all sorts of germs which they spread between each other at school.

Yes, it probably was our innocent, cute children that nearly killed us.

Still, I feel lucky and grateful that although this was a horrible ordeal, things weren't worse, and they could have been a lot worse in various ways. So, I am thankful for that.

At some point, about 5 days ago I managed to record the introduction to a podcast episode - the first in a couple of weeks, and I very briefly explained why there had been a delay.

If you heard that (the intro to the Life, Death & Mario Kart rambling episode) you probably noticed that my voice was different. For quite a long time my voice has been affected. It's still recovering.

It's mostly better now, thankfully and I am glad to be able to to get back to normal, and to make podcasts again.

You might have been waiting and expecting new content. As I said, I did receive plenty of lovely replies to my community posts which I wrote during

this whole ordeal (in the LEP Premium community I mean) and plenty of PLEPsters said that I should take my time and recover properly. Health comes first. Thank you for those messages.

I have had no choice but to wait, to be honest, until I was able to do another episode. It's been frustrating but necessary.

Thankfully, that wait is over. I wonder how long this episode is. It's probably very long. But this is just how long it has taken me to tell you what happened to me over these last few weeks, and why you didn't get any episodes.

Hopefully this break allowed you to catch up on older episodes, or just to have a break yourselves.

I hope you're well. You should probably get the flu vaccine. Or just generally look after yourselves, eat healthily, wash your hands, get plenty of sleep and take good care.

Thanks for listening.

Now, it's time for me to publish this episode, and then get to work on the vocabulary review of so many of those words and phrases relating to medical issues, describing being ill, symptoms and all that other good stuff.

After this episode is edited and published, that will be the next thing I will do, and if you're a premium subscriber, you'll get it as soon as I can create it and record it.

By the way, I think I should probably publish slightly less content every month than I have done over the last couple of years.

I think I should slow down a bit - to let you all keep up, to take it easy a bit myself and also to ensure that I am able to consistently publish premium content each month as well as free content.

We are all busy with our lives, so I don't want to overload you with content. I love making episodes and it's what I like doing most of the time, but I should slow down a bit both for my sake and your sake.

So, I might move to a system where I publish three free episodes per month, and that fourth week will be a premium week.

I think that would be wise. Now I just have to actually keep to that plan.

Anyway, that's the end of this audiobook.

Thank you for listening.

Tell your friends about LEP.

Like and subscribe.

teacherluke.co.uk/premium to sign up to LEP Premium.

I'm planning to do a winter promo with discounts by the way, in December and January, like I did last year.

Time for me to stop talking now.

Have a lovely morning, afternoon, evening or night and speak to you soon.