

Make Your Own Luck

29.03.2019, Episode 14

A Thousand Words

Hi. Welcome to the podcast, "A Thousand Words", for March 29th, 2019.

There's a saying in English that sometimes you have to make your own luck.

When I was a boy, my father took me to horse races now and then [1] – the Los Alamitos race track, about an hour's drive away. At the time, my father had a special ring that he wore with a tiny horseshoe on it. Before every race, he looked at all the names of the horses that were racing and, one by one, he twisted the ring around his finger. The ring was lucky, he told me, and I learned to believe him. The ring, he said, vibrated slightly [2], gave what he called a little tingle, if the horse was going to win. If it didn't tingle, he didn't bet [3]. I don't know how the ring worked, how it was able to know which horse would win and then communicate that to my father. But I do remember that almost every time he bet on a horse that made his ring tingle, that horse won the race.

My story today is about timing, of being in the right or wrong place at the right or wrong moment.



I was living in San Francisco in my early 20s. There were still some hippies in the city then, but the grunge [4] of Kurt Cobain wasn't there yet. The city was between lifestyle fashions, and it was open for new influences.

I was at university then, and pretty much broke [5]. For the summer break, I decided to stay with my father in Southern California so I could earn some money between semesters. I found someone to rent my room for two months, and I flew down to Los Angeles. My plan was to work at my father's office during the day, and at night at the beach restaurant where I worked when I was living there. The restaurant was too far to walk to, and I was without a car. In Southern California, taking the bus is a joke, so to get to the restaurant I asked my sister to lend me her bike. Mine was in San Francisco.

My first night working, I brought the bike into the restaurant and leaned it against a wall in the kitchen, because I didn't feel comfortable locking it up outside. But the manager said it was in the way [6], so I started locking it up to a tall light post right in front of the restaurant. That way, I could keep an eye on it while I worked. Each early morning when I finished my shift, I rode back to my father's house, about half an hour away. He didn't have an extra key for the house, so he left the front door unlocked for me.

One night a few weeks later, just after midnight, I went to the front of the restaurant to check on [7] the bike... and my heart stopped. The bike was gone! I ran out to find a few pieces of broken chain [8] on the ground in the very spot my bike was – my sister's bike – where I locked it up only two hours earlier. How was it possible to steal a bike right in front of a restaurant, directly under a post shining light down on it? And how was it possible that no one saw it? I stormed back into the restaurant, angry at everyone for not seeing what happened. For the next half hour I did nothing but complain to anyone near me, so much that the manager pulled me aside [9] and told me to go home – I was no good to anyone. My mind wasn't on work and I was bothering [10] everyone.

In order to get home at that hour, I needed a taxi. I cursed my luck [11] again. Not only did I need to pay for an expensive taxi ride home, but I had to buy my sister a new bike now. I was definitely going in the wrong financial direction.

I rode in the back of the taxi in a sour mood, feeling extremely sorry for myself. When we arrived, I left without tipping and walked to the front door with the heavy weight of depression on me. It was almost 2 am. I opened the unlocked door, closed and locked it behind me, and then went to the kitchen. There were some cold leftovers [12] waiting for me on the stove [13]. I was so unhappy I didn't even bother to switch the lights on but ate and cursed my bad luck in the dark.

Just then, the sound of a car slowly moved into the neighborhood. I became aware of it only because it sounded like it stopped right in

front of our house. The engine switched off, and a moment later the car door opened. Footsteps slowly walked to the house, and a hand jiggled [14] the locked door handle. I stopped chewing. The footsteps moved away from the door and went along the side of the house. I stood frozen, listening rather than moving. I could hardly believe [15] that someone was trying to break into the house. My father's voice came barking [16] from the bedroom – "What the hell!"

Immediately the footsteps hurried away, the car door closed and the engine started. My father's bedroom door opened and he, half awake, stumbled out [17]. The car screeched away [18] into the night. My father unlocked and opened the front door and shouted profanity [19] into the darkness.

He returned, shaking his head, and locked the door. He joined me in the kitchen.

"Can you believe that?" he said, now fully awake. He opened the fridge and took the milk.

"I know. Crazy!" I said.

"What kind of person walks up to someone's house and just tries to go in?" he said.

"I don't even want to think about it," I said.

"At two in the morning! What did he want to come in here for?"

"I don't even want to think about it," I said again.

"I bet [20] he had a gun," he said. "When did you get home?" he asked.

"Maybe five minutes ago."

"So early? Don't you get home at 5 usually?"

"Yeah, but... my bike got stolen."

"No!"

"Right in front of the restaurant!"

"You're kidding? And no one saw it?"

"Yeah, that's what I thought! Can you believe it - no one saw it!"

"You locked it up?"

"Of course."

"Unbelievable!" he said. "It's your sister's bike, right?"

"It was."

"That's really tough luck [21]. I'm sorry."

We spent a few more minutes in the kitchen, and then he went back to bed.

I brushed my teeth and took my place on the sofa, where I covered myself with a thin blanket. Looking up at the dark ceiling, my mind started racing [22], vibrating, tingling.

Tough luck?

I smiled, and thought back at the series of events that brought me home early so I could lock the front door in time. How lucky I was that someone stole the bike that night, and that my manager sent me home early for being obnoxious [23], and taking a taxi that got me home so quickly. Staring [24] at the ceiling, I never felt so lucky.

Sometimes you have to make your own luck.

Thanks for listening.

If you liked this podcast, or others you've listened to on our website podclub.ch, tell a friend. You can also write us a message. As well, you can download our app if you'd like, and we have a vocabulary trainer to help you practice some of the new words you hear.

I'll be back on April 12th with a story about Hollywood.

Bye for now.

Glossar: A Thousand Words

[1] now and then: not often; irregularly

[2] **slightly**: only a little bit

[3] **to bet**: to risk money on the result of a race or game

[4] **grunge**: a fashion style of the early 1990s popularized by Kurt Cobain and Pearl Jam

[5] **broke**: without money

[6] **in the way**: an obstacle

[7] **to check on**: to make sure everything is ok

[8] **a chain**: a small round piece of metal that forms part of a long link, used for locking up bicycles

[9] **to pull someone aside**: to move to a more private place for private communication

[10] **to bother**: to disturb

[11] **to curse your luck**: to feel bad about or complain about your bad luck

[12] **leftovers**: unfinished food, often to be eaten at a later time

[13] **on the stove**: on the top of the oven, where the four burners are

[14] **to jiggle**: to move up and down or back and forth quickly

[15] **could hardly believe**: almost not believe

[16] **to bark**: to make a loud sound, like that of a dog

[17] **to stumble out**: to walk unsteadily; to move and almost fall over

[18] **to screech away**: the drive away quickly and noisily

[19] **profanity**: bad words

[20] **I bet**: to be so sure about something you would risk money

[21] **tough luck**: hard luck; bad luck

[22] **my mind started racing**: thinking very quickly and hard about something

[23] **obnoxious**: extremely unpleasant, vulgar, irritating

[24] **to stare at**: to look at for a long time, often without blinking