



I Was Taking a Bath

01.02.2019, Episode 10

A Thousand Words

Hi. This is Richard. Welcome to the podcast, "A Thousand Words", for February 1st, 2019.

This might sound crazy, but the other day I was taking a bath – and I usually prefer taking showers, but sometimes a bath is just what you need.

Today I'll be talking about baths and neighbors, and how the two strangely came together the other day.

The other day I was taking a bath in the evening, watching my lava lamp near the window – I bought one two months ago. Red lava in purple water. I know it's not real lava, only wax. But they're still so relaxing.

The other day I was taking a bath, watching the red lava in the purple water break apart and fall back down in different shapes, all in slow motion. I lowered my ears under the water, and the bathroom sounds went mute [1]. In the water I heard the bathwater hit the sides of the tub [2]. I heard water from the tap [3] drip drip dripping next to my feet. And then, I heard something else.



"I wish I could play music like you," a voice said. "I wish I didn't give it up [4] so fast."

And then another voice:

"Why are you starting a new puzzle? You didn't finish the last one. You never finish puzzles. Not one! You just leave them there... on the table. I end up [5] finishing them, and then I have to put them away [6]."

I lifted my head, and the voices fell off of me back into the water. I heard only the silence of my own apartment. Strange - the voices were only in the water. Now, they weren't all in English, of course - I'm translating [7]. And they weren't just the voices of my neighbors directly under me, but they were many voices, and maybe even all of my neighbors.

I live on the top floor, and there are about twenty people in the building. It was strange, I thought, that so many of them were at home at the same time, and talking. Even stranger was that their voices were in my bathtub, swimming in the water. How did they get there? Somehow, they traveled through the building, maybe into the taps in the kitchens and bathrooms, up the pipes in the walls, and into my bathtub. What can I say? They were there.

I went under the water again.

The loudest voice I heard was a young boy singing. I didn't recognize [8] the melody or even the language. But he was singing. And I think he was alone, because he wasn't singing all that well and he didn't seem embarrassed [9] by it.

Another voice, a male voice, circled [10] my head, saying how Paul McCartney died in a car crash back in 1965. And another musician, a man whose ears are smaller than Paul's, replaced him after the accident. The whole Sgt. Pepper album was a tribute to his death.

Another voice, female, swam by and said she had a very good idea what was making the outside light go on in the middle of the night.

"Those squirrels [11]," she said; "they're getting into the garbage bins [12]."

"First of all," another voice said, "they're not squirrels, they're foxes. Squirrels can't open the bins. But foxes can."

"A fox has no better way of opening a bin than a squirrel," she told him.

I heard hiccups [13] next.

Someone then began running water for a long time... and I heard the sounds of someone cleaning dishes and humming [14].

When the running water stopped, another voice, very unhappy, said that a man in the building opposite them makes so much noise at night when he cooks. He cooks late, and he uses metal spoons. And he bangs the spoons whack whack whack. "He should use wooden spoons," she said. "Or not cook that late. Or just close the window when he cooks. That would cut out [15] so much noise, and so much smell. Oh, the smell! That was even worse than the noise. What awful smells! But you can't complain [16] about your neighbors' smells, can you?"

The boy began singing again, a still unknown melody, but the language was Spanish. He was singing it better now. The better he sang, the younger his voice sounded. His voice got louder and quieter and louder again, and I imagined he was moving into different rooms.

Another voice, male, said he would floss his teeth [17] if only it were easier.

"What's so difficult about flossing?" another voice asked - another man. "It takes only a minute."

"A minute! Then you're probably not doing it right," the first voice said. "Nothing you do for only a minute can do any real good."

Another voice, a woman, said she met the Dahli Lama once, after a talk he gave. He smelled like wood, and his hand when she shook it felt like tree bark [18].

Another voice mumbled [19]. I couldn't understand a word.

Another said that the last time he ate fruit was a week ago. It was at the photo exhibition they went to - the sweet pineapple balls the waiters were offering [20].

Another said that when he was young his parents never took him to a circus or a zoo. They didn't believe in watching clowns or caged animals [21]. So he took himself there, all by himself, when he was 20.

Another said he found an umbrella and brought it home, and a long talk followed about what to do when you find an umbrella or anything else away from home that's not yours.

More singing. Eminem this time.

Suddenly, I thought of Jimmy Stewart, with his broken leg sitting in a wheelchair watching his neighbors through a camera. I lifted my head out of the water and the voices dripped away from my ears. Was it neighborly [22] of me to listen to them like this? Were they speaking for private ears only? But, what exactly was I hearing? I heard theories and complaints and confessions, hiccups and humming and a voice singing other people's songs.

And anyway, I was just taking a bath. I just wanted to lie in the water and watch my lava lamp. The voices came to me. I didn't go looking for them. And what about all those small bits of information?! How secret were they? I don't even know if I could connect each voice to each neighbor. I mean, which one would floss if it were easier? Was it wrong that I knew one of them never set foot inside [23] a zoo or a circus as a kid? Maybe it was a good thing I was hearing all this. Maybe it added color to them [24] all, these people I live so near? Maybe it made me sympathize with them more.

I got out of the bath and dried myself with a towel.

I had a neighbor once... many years ago when I lived in San Francisco. But the more she got to know about me, the more she abused [25] it. She was a nut [26], an awful person to live next to. She lived directly under me. I'll tell you all about her... but in my next podcast. Because I've run out of time.

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 February 15th.

Bye for now.

Glossar: A Thousand Words

[1] **to go mute:** to go silent

[2] **the tub:** the place where a person lies or sits in the water when taking a bath

[3] **the tap:** where water comes out of the wall into the kitchen or bathroom

[4] **to give it up:** to stop doing it

[5] **to end up:** in the end being responsible for something

[6] **to put them away:** to return them to their normal place

[7] **translating:** from one language to another

[8] **didn't recognize:** did not hear or know the song before

[9] **embarrassed:** ashamed; feel bad about something you did

[10] **to circle:** to go around and around

[11] **squirrels:** small, mouse-like animals with long bushy tails that live in forest trees

[12] **garbage bins:** large containers where litter is stored outside

[13] **hiccups:** the sound a person makes when they quickly breathe in a short amount of air; an inward cough

[14] **humming:** singing with the mouth closed

[15] **to cut out:** to eliminate; to stop

[16] **to complain:** to criticize; to say negative things

[17] **to floss his teeth:** to use thin string to clean between the teeth

[18] **tree bark:** the skin around a tree

[19] **to mumble:** spoke without being clear or understandable

[20] **offering:** giving for free

[21] **caged animals:** animals living in places where they are not free

[22] **neighborly:** good behavior of people living in the same building

[23] **set foot inside:** visited

[24] **to add color to someone:** gave more details, made a fuller picture of someone

[25] **to abuse:** misused, was unfair

[26] **a nut:** a crazy person