

Stories from the brainreels transcript

May 2, 2014

[music]

CHERYL: Welcome to Blog Talk Radio's "Stories from the brainreels." I'm your host, Cheryl Green, from StoryMinders coming to you live from Portland, Oregon, as I do every first Friday and some third Fridays at 1:00 pm Pacific Time to share stories, news, art, comedy, and discussion on brain injury and disability culture.

Introduction

Welcome to today's show. I'm excited to have another UK artist with brain injury on, David Parkin. I'll be playing a pre-recorded interview in just a bit. The segment has one piece of his original music called "Tonight, the Stars." Before we get to the interview, it's time, as always, for some disability arts news. I've got the local stuff, and in honor of my UK guest, I have some UK disability arts news as well. As usual for me, I'm reporting on something that already happened because I still can't read calendars very well!

In April, the 3DOM Project's musicians with physical disabilities teamed up with Krip-Hop Nation's Lady MJ Warrior for a concert at the Birmingham Conservatoire. (UK folks, please forgive my Americanization of all these words. You wouldn't want me to try out an accent!)

Go to www.soundbeamdream.co.uk to learn about their arts and technology work. From their site: "Soundbeam uses movement sensors to activate musical sounds, like a very clever Theramin. Soundbeam can be programmed so the musician can compose, play and control a combination of midi instruments and samples and combines brilliantly with acoustic instruments as well."

There's a fabulous video of Christopher Lees, one of the disabled musicians, talking about the project and why he's involved. If you know me well, you know I have basically banished the word "inspiring" from my vocabulary, especially when talking about disabled people. But I have to say, this 3DOM Project inspired me to think about broadening how we do disability arts over here. Christopher talks about the sense of freedom when playing music with them and the joy of socializing and convening in an accessible environment. He talks about how the music sessions are a rare treat where disabled people have other things about them that matter besides their impairment. Neat! Too often people's lives are restricted--by lack of access, by attitude barriers, and more--to being solely about their disability. Kudos to 3DOM Project for creating a space where artists with disabilities are artists!

Lady MJ Warrior was on this streaming talk show last year, and so I'm excited to come full UK circle this Spring.

In local Pacific Northwest (US) arts news, the Disability Art and Culture Project's bi-annual Disability Pride Art and Culture Festival 6 is starting in two weeks, May 16th - 24th! Gorgeous events like a poetry reading, revolutionary arts panel, multi-media installation, writing and performance intensives, and evening performances are all on the agenda. Several events are free, and all are in physically accessible spaces (meaning, wheelchair accessible, low scent/scent-free, accessible and gender-neutral bathrooms, and when I'm around, no applause!). Visit www.dacphome.org/events/disability-pride-festival/ for all the details. For any of you who saw my weeks and weeks of begging on Facebook for disability-related light bulb jokes and for pictures of pain, this is what it was for. They're for an installation that will be presented during the Revolutionary Arts Panel on May 17th at the Center for Intercultural Organizing. Feel free to contact me at info@storyminders.com or DACP at disabilityartculture@gmail.com with any questions about the festival.

Onward with the interview.

Interview with David Parkin

DAVE: Right! There we go.

CHERYL: Ready?

DAVE: We're recording. Yes.

CHERYL: Hey, Dave. I really wanna thank you for coming on this show today to talk with me.

DAVE: I'm happy to be here!

CHERYL: Excellent. And I also wanna explain why your voice sounds a lot better than mine today. Which is that I could not get my recording program to work. And so you are actually the guest on my show, and you're recording the show for me through Skype. So thank you for stepping up and saving the day.

DAVE: Yeah. It was half an hour of watching you stare at your computer and swear as well. So, happy to do my bit!

CHERYL: Excellent.

DAVE: Hello. I'm David Parkin. I'm sort of generally an arty-farty weirdo. I've done a show centered around the piano, a "Clinical Depression Concept Album" show about a period of depression I had. Which I actually talk about that in what I'm actually on here to talk about, which is I've just sort of finished a book--it needs some polishing--about in 2010, there was a huge incident. And I broke many bones and received a very serious brain injury. In the book, I chart kind of two horrible years of my life dealing with depression but also dealing with a brain injury and how really the over-riding thing of the book is brain injury kind of turned my life around and was really nice. [laughs] Ok, so that's me. I'm David Parkin. Hello.

CHERYL: Hello! What a wonderful introduction. You covered everything. So we could basically just end the interview now.

DAVE: Ok. Thank Gawd!

CHERYL: [laughs] So you said that actually having a very serious brain injury changed your life, and your life is quite nice. Just want to clarify. Was it hard to have a brain injury? Was it painful and difficult to recover from it? Or is it just nice all the time?

DAVE: Well, I mean the thing I talk about in the book which is so interesting, especially where I was before, but when I came round, I was a giggling wreck. I was suffering from euphoria quite severely. And that's where the first bit of the book about me being in hospital with all these broken bones and a tube coming out my penis. It's that I actually kind of hope sort of reads a bit like a comedy. Because it's how it was. And the period of time the book deals with--the bit that's talking about the brain injury--that for a period of time, I was still too--it kind of tailed off but--still suffering from the euphoria. I love that phrase: suffering from euphoria. Yeah, it did. It changed my life and mainly for the better. I mean, Ok, my memory's not up to much now. But yeah, it was a big, big turning point.

CHERYL: It's really nice to hear because I do hear people who are way outside the brain injury world talk about us as if our lives are only suffering and only painful and terrible and tragic. And it is painful and terrible and tragic in some circumstances, in a lot of them. But it's really nice the way you write in your book.

DAVE: There's a big twist in the book, which I'm trying not to give away. But there's two things, I think. There's a: the euphoria and the various other things that come along with brain injury. So there's a: there's that. But there's also the circumstances. And so I was euphoric. And the circumstances around my brain injury were very, shall I say, there was a strange poetic justice to them. So especially at that time, I was like, "I should be dead! But I'm not! And isn't life brilliant!" And then so that's the circumstances. But also, it was egged on by the euphoria.

CHERYL: Right.

DAVE: And I talk about the beauty. Learning how to swim again is one of the most beautiful things that's happened to me in my life. Cuz I was all like new age hippie-ish and "Yeah, man! Look at that tree!" Cuz you're very in the moment as well, early on. You're very in the moment. Cuz I didn't really have a sense of future or really a sense of past. Couldn't remember it. So I was like, "Yeah! Look at that tree! And isn't swimming great!" I dread to say this, but it was one of the nicest times of my life or most amazing time of my life.

CHERYL: Wow. I've read the whole manuscript. That does come across. But you do a really nice job of balancing it, because it doesn't look easy at all. Even though you're celebrating learning how to swim again and celebrating the fact that the trees are so beautiful, it still looks really hard and painful at times.

DAVE: Ok, well good. I don't wanna come across like this happy Jesus figure. I'm glad it looks like it hurt! Good.

CHERYL: Yes, it does. But I also appreciate the humor. I mean, it is my sense of humor too. I think we have a very similar sense of humor in that a lotta the ways we express our sense of humor, we're not going to do on this recording today because I can't air it on my radio show. [laughs]

DAVE: There is a lot of swearing in the book.

CHERYL: Yeah.

DAVE: And I mean the first chapter is called "Proper Funked Up." I'll leave you to work that out. I've tried to write it in a very conversational tone. And I am aware that actually maybe there is too much swearing. Maybe I need to go back. But I kind of am quite a swearsy person.

CHERYL: I don't think you should change that because it's true to who you are. And that's real. But the other thing about the sense of humor is kind of a gallows sense of humor. And being able to crack these insider jokes, I just love it. When is your book gonna be done, for crying out loud?

DAVE: Well, I hope it's nearly done now. God, don't say it's gonna be a lot more! I don't know. I think especially in the hospital, there's that gallows humor. Just as I say in the book, because I was euphoric, it wasn't a case of me sort of going, "Well, let's look at the funny side. Come on." It was actually things were, I found, flipping in it-- I'm watching my mouth now--I found them hilarious at the time. I think that kind of goes on and runs through the book. Not all of it: the bits about dealing with depression. But you know. It's an old adage, but it's very, very true: you've gotta laugh, ain't you? Really? You've gotta laugh.

CHERYL: Yeah.

DAVE: It's like in the book, going back over it, you realize that I'm talking about having--I'll say it in clean terms--I'm having my bottom wiped by nurses. And a lot of these things are very rude. And having my first proper poo. And I read it back, and part of me goes, "Oh yeah, this is really rude." I wasn't writing it to be rude. It's just when you're in hospital, your bowel movements turn into a talking point. Hospital's dull. So it's like, "Oh, I had a really big poo today!" I don't know. I've never consciously been offensive or overly rude for the sake of it. It was just more that's how I am, and that's what happened.

CHERYL: And I appreciate it because--Oh, look. It's raining!

DAVE: Hey!

Your memoir writing is very honest

CHERYL: Ugh. Ok. What I really like about it is that it's the stuff that most people don't wanna talk about, and they don't wanna believe it's real. And they say, "Oh, brain injury. Um, you'll be forgetful, and that's it." No, actually.... And I think it doesn't seem rude or crass. I appreciate how honest it is. And the other thing is, when you think about all sorts of things around disability, especially if you have a physical disability, you don't have any privacy--certain physical disabilities. So if you're a person who needs an assistant to help you do daily tasks, you don't have any privacy. Some people can never wipe their own bottom, and so someone is always doing that for them. And so they can't be shy about it. As much as polite society doesn't wanna talk about it, it's real.

DAVE: Yeah, yeah.

CHERYL: It just is what you gotta talk about.

DAVE: I can write truthfully about it.

CHERYL: Yeah.

DAVE: And also it was the brain injury. I was kind of fascinated by pooping, and it was--

CHERYL: And yogurts.

DAVE: as I say--a scratch on my record. Because early on in my injury, you kind of get a bit fixated on things: pooping and yogurts.

CHERYL: Yogurts. Strawberry yogurts. That came across too, that very kind of brain injury fixation on things that interest you, and they just stay very, very interesting. Plus, you forgot that you were telling these stories over and over. Before your brain injury, you probably didn't think that much about what it took to poo. You just went when you had to go.

DAVE: Yeah.

CHERYL: And when you were in the hospital, you didn't have the luxury of taking things for granted. There was a lot of effort and planning and relearning. And so that's the other reason I appreciate that it's in the book is because for anyone who doesn't have to think through and plan out and get assistance to go to the bathroom, that's a luxury. And they don't realize it.

DAVE: Yeah.

CHERYL: And so you really kinda put it out there.

DAVE: I hope the one thing where I address that is carrying a cup of tea. Cuz I do do this thing where it's spilling a cup of tea, spilling a cup of tea. And you know, when I first carried a cup of tea successfully, it was great. It felt like a huge victory. But yeah, that is brain injury: it makes you realize that within the body, within your brain there's all these little things going, these hundreds of turning calculations. For me, anyway, early on in the brain injury when you're stripped of them, you suddenly realize, "Oh no! They're there. Isn't that amazing? Isn't the brain incredible?" Because yeah, it's as simple as carrying a cup of tea. But actually, your brain is kind of, as I say in the book, it's like suspensions on a car. It's taking in how you're walking and how you're holding it and the ups and the downs. It's doing all that. Although it was annoying and very irritating, when you conquer it, you appreciate it more.

CHERYL: Yeah.

DAVE: Yeah.

CHERYL: Yeah, I mean you have to think about. I drop glasses. I drop things. I don't know why. I pick up glasses, and they just fall outta my hand. I'm guessing that one of those hundreds, thousands of calculations just stopped for a second in my brain. And my brain said, "Ok, fingers, you're done holding that glass." And it just, boop. It happens so fast.

DAVE: There's another quote I heard from some scientists. Oh yeah, I love quotes. He says, "The two remaining sort of things after a lifetime in science" and he says something about the universe. I don't know. But he says, "also the capability of the human brain"--it might be brain or "humans to recover." When your brain is a bit wrong, you also notice when it recovers and how well it does it, I think. Or I did, anyway.

CHERYL: Yeah, and it is a wonderful feeling when you notice it. But you have to stop judging the past. Like before your injury it was probably easy to carry a cup of tea to the lounge, whatever the hell a lounge is.

DAVE: A lounge. It's the room you'd have the TV in.

CHERYL: Oh, the TV. Oh. That's the living room.

DAVE: Yeah, yes, the living room.

CHERYL: But sometimes it's easy to get stuck in this space and say, "I'm a failure. I'm a failure. This used to be so easy." But when you stop and say ok, I'm gonna conquer this, and then you do, it does feel pretty nice. Yeah.

Seeing myself and my recovering as a project

DAVE: Yeah. I hope I talk about it in the book when I started to swim again, I started seeing myself as a project. And I think that was a huge shift. I mean, I was quite good in hospital, but then it's like right. I'm gonna do that. Come on then! Yeah, seeing yourself as a project and working on things.

CHERYL: Right, right.

DAVE: After learning how to swim again, I thought well, if I can learn how to swim again, I can do anything. It's a line I've actually cut out of the book cuz I feel it's too self-congratulatory.

CHERYL: I have to say, I agree with you on taking that line out. But for different reasons because there are so many people who will be able to accomplish one thing they try but then not be able to accomplish the next thing.

DAVE: Uh-huh.

CHERYL: And they'll feel like [beep]. They'll be like, "Well, I thought if I could do this, I could do anything!" And then the other thing is, I think for people who don't have any access to resources like being able to stay at their parents' home and getting a ride to the swimming pool and all that--

DAVE: Oh yeah.

CHERYL: Then they've got so much stacked against them. And so I think that is good that you took that line out even though it's true for you. And even though it may play a role in your life.

DAVE: So I've been working in a charity shop recently. I met a kid in there. He kind of hobbled in. He had the voice. And I went, "Brain injury?" And he went, "Yeah." I found out about his life, and he'd done it on holiday. And he had to be shipped back over. And then he was homeless, and his parents didn't even put him up. We were actually brain injured at the same time. But he said something like, "You know, when they were saying to me you've really gotta work in the first two years, but I was out getting drunk and doing coke" or whatever. Yeah, and he came from a very poor background with parents who weren't supporting him. And he was still more fucked up--that's the clean version--than I was because he hadn't got the--I mean, my parents live down South in England, which is just a more affluent area. But he obviously didn't get the care he needed at the real vital time. So yeah, I do realize I'm very lucky as well in my recovery.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah. I first read at least the first 1/3 or 2/3 of your manuscript when you were posting it in blog posts on your website.

DAVE: Yeah.

CHERYL: Are those still up there?

DAVE: Well, I took them off recently. Although they are still on there. You have to just go back through all the archives. But no, I took them off because I've since rewritten it. And also a friend said to me, "Oh, you shouldn't have them." I don't know. I might reblog them.

CHERYL: At least parts. I do think a free little teaser will help. Because your book is so uniquely written. I just really want people to not say, "Oh, a memoir written by a guy with depression and brain injury. Oh, I know how that's gonna play out." Cuz your book does not play out in an expected way at all: your writing style and the way you craft the stories. So I would like other people to get the chance to get a little teaser.

DAVE: Ok.

CHERYL: Thanks very much.

DAVE: I'll do that.

How Cheryl and Dave met

CHERYL: Speaking of which, do you remember how you and I met?

DAVE: This was amusing, because I realized I couldn't remember how we met. So can you remember how we met?

CHERYL: I do. Well, first of all, today is the first day we're actually meeting. Because even though I think our weather is the same--no, it's cloudier here than where you are.

DAVE: It's very sunny here. It's nice. A bit of chill in the air, though.

CHERYL: Yeah, we've got the chill in the air. Well, you're in the U.K.

DAVE: Yes.

CHERYL: And I'm in the U.S.A.

DAVE: Yes.

CHERYL: So what happened was, a long time ago, somebody reblogged one of my blog posts. And so I went to their site to see who they were. I couldn't figure out who they were. I couldn't see any relationship to anything that I do. But the same day that they reblogged me, they reblogged one of your sections from your book. And I was like, what is this? Stroke? Brain injury? What? Who is this guy? So I went to your website right away and read all the blog posts, went back and watched your comedy. And I think it was pre-brain injury comedy where you did The Workshop, the residency in the girls' school?

DAVE: Yeah.

CHERYL: And so I started commenting on your blog. I can be a bit of a stalker, I think. I don't have a good sense of appropriate conventions.

DAVE: Yeah, I mean this is nice. But I'm slightly scared of you as well.

CHERYL: You should be. You should be. Does any of this sound familiar?

DAVE: Uh, I don't know. I can't--No, it does it, it does. It does, it does, it does. I knew we met--Sorry, this is interesting for the listeners: two slightly brain-injured people talking to each other. Who the f-- Who are you? Anyway. But yeah, no, I remember now. And then we emailed, didn't we?

CHERYL: We emailed a little, but I wanted to do an experiment because I saw that you had a background in comedy and improvisation. And I do too. So I knew you had a background in comedy improv. Oh, wait. I already said that. Ok, I have training in comedy improv, and I've taught it. But I was really, really, really bad at it and was always one of the worst students in my acting classes. And the teachers didn't hesitate to let me know that I was terrible. But when I had this huge bike wreck in 2010, it just unlocked all these layers of inhibition and self-criticism and shyness. Just threw them in, as you might say, the rubbish bin. Would you call it that? The bin?

DAVE: Yes, correct.

CHERYL: I threw it in the trash or the bin. And now I'm not shy at all anymore, and I just will go up and say anything to anybody. And so I wanted to do an experiment with you to see if--without ever having met--if we could engage in a long-form improvised comedy scene just over video. And so I started sending you these videos, and you sent a couple back too. And then we just sort of stopped. But it was pretty funny.

DAVE: Yeah. Just your comment about brain injury making you funnier. No, not the case with me. I was always one of the best before. If anything, actually, it's made me slightly less funny in the improvised comedy stakes. But yeah, you were saying. And I felt for you. You struggled, and you were one of the--But if it makes you--Well, I wanted to make you feel worse, basically. I was one of the best.

CHERYL: [laughs] But now that I bruised up my brain, I'm starting to catch up to you. Or quite possibly, I've overtaken you. I don't know.

DAVE: Yeah. Well, you are American. So the comedy stuff. No, but Americans are--There's a lot--I don't know what I'm saying. There's so much good American comedy.

CHERYL: Oh no. You guys are funnier.

DAVE: Aw, well.

CHERYL: Especially, let me tell you: your comedians with disabilities over in the UK, you've got us beat over here.

DAVE: Yeah, there are some good folks around.

CHERYL: Yeah. Now, we've got [Maysoon Zayid](#), but you guys have [Laurence Clark](#) and [The Lost Voice Guy](#). Do you know The Lost Voice Guy?

DAVE: No.

CHERYL: Hilarious! I think when he was about 18 months old, he got an infection in his brain, and he's unable to talk now.

DAVE: Oh, is that the guy with tape over his mouth?

CHERYL: I don't think so!

DAVE: No.

CHERYL: This guy doesn't need the tape cuz he can't speak. He does his comedy on an iPad. So he sets the iPad up on a stool next to him and delivers the jokes. And they are hilarious. Now, speaking of British humor, just a little bit more if we may.

DAVE: Yep.

CHERYL: I have Microsoft Word on my computer. You know, Microsoft Word, probably like it does anywhere in the world, tells you when you've spelled something wrong. Well, since I read your manuscript on my computer, Microsoft Word is now forcing me to spell words like "humor" with the British spelling. It just happened today. I can't spell "humor" anymore.

DAVE: Well, ironically, the program I've written it on corrects me. It's taking Os out, putting Zeds in. So it makes it American, which really gets on my nerves. I wanted to be rude then, but I--gets on my [bleep]. Is that rude in America? Ok, yeah. And there's one word that I'm thinking I might use it too much. But "realization." Because the book is about a lot of realizations. Yeah, it keeps sticking a zed in there for Gawd's sake.

Some terrible jokes about whose country is more imperialistic

CHERYL: Well, it's just one more sign of how imperialistic our country is. Compared to your country which, you know, it's got its imperialistic history.

DAVE: Yeah, we were imperial before you were even born, mate.

CHERYL: It's true. We were born because you guys came over here, right?

DAVE: Mmhmm. And we're only tiny as well. You know what? Sorry. I'll just say this about England, Britain. That's what we need to realize is that we're only tiny. And we need to get over ourselves and stop thinking we're like a world person. I don't know.

CHERYL: [giggles] I think my country needs to do the same thing.

DAVE: Yeah. You are bigger, though.

CHERYL: That doesn't mean better.

DAVE: Oh, well, I've said this a few times. I think America--Sorry, I'm going off script here. But I think America, you have a very beautiful dream. I know that sounds like I'm taking the mickey. But it is the dream of America. If you ignore all the slavery and stuff, it's quite beautiful. Every man is equal, and every man can make what he wants of himself. And I think it's maybe infatuation with that dream which turns you into [beep], you know?

CHERYL: Well said. I think the interview is just going to be that line on a loop for an hour. [both laugh] I agree. And I'm grateful that I live in a country where I can say I agree with you about that.

DAVE: Yes.

CHERYL: Yeah, so I'm not surprised to hear that your software on your computer is trying to Americanize your spelling. But your manuscript infected my computer. Because now it's trying to British-icize my spellings.

DAVE: It's not Briticizing your-- It's just correcting you. Because you know, it is our language. So spell it correctly, please. Stop mucking about with it, for God's sake. [both laugh]

CHERYL: Yeah, I guess I'm being a bit of a [bleep] with that. I'm sorry. Oh, I wrote in my notes, I didn't mean to say that you infected my computer by changing the spelling. I meant to say "you are an influence on my art."

DAVE: Oh.

Why you're writing the memoir and The Clinical Depression Concept Album and performance

CHERYL: Sorry! It didn't come out that way! On a less serious note, would you tell us why you're writing the book and why you wrote The Clinical Depression Concept Album and performance piece? And what kind of response do you hope from these works?

DAVE: Well, I think both being depressed and brain injury are both very profound experiences. Just happened with me that brain injury was quite profound on the other end of the scale. It was actually quite an enjoyable time for me. And next, I wanna write a musical about chairs or something. As I was saying to you earlier--I don't know if you can put this in--I'll pronounce it correctly so maybe it'll work. I wanna stop crawling up my own [beep]. I've made art before which has little to do with me. I think when something very profound and life-changing happens to you, as an artist, you have to write--I have to write about it. Well, The Clinical Depression Concept Album show, I hope will give comfort to people who've been there and also maybe go to people who haven't been there, "Oh, ok, that's what it's like." But the weird thing is, with writing the book, I was never at the start conscious, consciously going, "This is about brain injury. Listen to me." I was never consciously trying to broaden people's awareness. For me it was just a cracking story or a cracking series of moments. Like in the first section, which is largely comedy, I talk about having my catheter taken out and how that affected me. By the way, for the listeners, the first wee after your catheter coming out is very nice! It's intense! But yeah, I mean how it started was I was at home recovering, and I just started posting notes about being in hospital. Cuz it was funny, and it was weird and unusual. And so I don't think with the book I've consciously set out to enlighten people. I've set out to just tell a ripping yarn of sorts.

CHERYL: Excellent. And might I point out, ironically, at the start of the book, you weren't conscious either. [both laugh]

DAVE: Yeah, right, good. Conscious, conscious. Nice.

CHERYL: Conscious. You weren't conscious, yes. All right. Well, inappropriate. Um. You mentioned to me that writing a book is very lonely.

DAVE: Yes. So as I kind of said earlier, I've kind of messed around in art. I was in an arts organization, and I've acted, I've written and in a group. And I've played the piano, done a bit of comedy. But yeah, writing this book is by far and away the hardest, most challenging thing I've done. It's just so big and so complicated, and you have to really mess with it. And it's very lonely. Like, I came up with a new name for the book. I came up with it, and I was like, "Yeah, yeah!" And you've got no one to share it with at all. I shared it with my parents, but yeah. It's very lonely. And the thing is, no one understands. No one really gets it or understands how hard it is. I sort of feel like I've vaguely finished it, as in finished the writing writing. And how I want people to react when I say, "I finished the book" or "It's very close to being finished," how I want them to react is the same as people react when you say "I'm pregnant."

CHERYL: Oh, wonderful!

DAVE: Yeah! Oh, wonderful! And you have to put up with all these people on Facebook going "Oh, oh, yeah!" But they don't. They kinda go, "Oh, great." You know, people get that from a baby, and babies take 2 minutes, 5 minutes tops to make.

CHERYL: [laughs]

DAVE: And this is taking four years of my bloody life. [laughs] Yeah, it's a lot harder than having a baby.

CHERYL: Making, making a baby.

DAVE: And having a baby as well....Maybe not. Maybe not.

CHERYL: I've never had one, but I sure as hell know better than to say something like that to someone who might have had a baby. I'm thinking that's not an easy job.

DAVE: No, no.

CHERYL: Never been there.

DAVE: Just for the record, I don't think writing a book is harder than having a baby. You do a great job, ladies.

CHERYL: [laughs] I'm wondering if, sort of on the topic of lonely, did your brain injury, or the depression, did either of those lead to loneliness or isolation? Or have you always been able to stay in a group?

DAVE: I think obviously depression leads to loneliness and isolation. That's kind of par for the course, really. With the brain injury, I tend to think about actually the beginning was when I was really brain-injured. It didn't really because being brain-injured in hospital, it was very social for me. Cuz I was happy. I was talking to people, and I got to meet a lot of unusual people I wouldn't have met. So yeah, brain injury for me, in hospital at least, wasn't isolating at all.

CHERYL: Yeah, well, and that very much comes across that you were connecting really well with a lot of different people. What about after you left the hospital, and you were back living in a house again? And I'm asking because it's so common for people with brain injuries, when you've changed and you're behaving differently, that people sort of drop you. Did that happen to you?

DAVE: I've always been very rude, but the brain injury definitely made me ruder for some time. Disinhibition, I think it's called, is the technical term. And for a while I was very, very rude! And well, it was kind of weird. Old friends kind of stayed with me, I think. But then, I'm at that age when everyone's having babies and disappearing anyway. And then actually, new people I met kind of just accepted me as I was. But when I was in hospital, I told my Nan that she looked like my dad in drag. And it's something I've always thought but never said to her face. Not my Nan, my Auntie, my dad's sister. But yeah, there was a time, and actually I remember having an email exchange with someone. And I said, "Well, look. I know I've offended you, and I'm sorry about that." It's very hard for people to get their heads round me.

CHERYL: Yeah. I've also always been pretty rude and crass. Maybe not as much as you, but it was much worse. I had some, I still have some disinhibition problems, but it was much worse.

Parkin Presents and Metro-boulot-dodo

CHERYL: In addition to the book, which you've been working a lot on, you also do this quarterly performance called Parkin Presents. Are you still working on that?

DAVE: Yeah, it's just basically the local art center have this beautiful Bösendorfer piano. And so the idea is I have acts on. Oh, and it's kind of like a classy night. But it also deals with the young writers, people on the music scene. So rather than going to a smelly pub and seeing guitar bands, you can go to this place where I'm wearing

a suit, and there are sort of fake candles on the table. And people play this beautiful Bösendorfer. And I always do half an hour at the start cuz it's a good artistic practice to get into. Yeah, and mostly I just compare the event and introduce these. Nearly everyone who's ever played it is much better than me at the piano. I only learned in 2009. Yeah, so I introduce the acts and crack [beep] gags, that kind of thing.

CHERYL: Did you want to talk about, tell me if I say it right, Metro-boulot-dodo?

DAVE: Yeah, that's right. Metro-boulot-dodo. OK, yeah, so Metro-boulot-dodo was an art organization I was in for 15 years. And we met at university, and then for a while we were a touring theater company. And then we started making installations and doing audio tours and all sorts of things. And I performed for them. We all wrote, but I was the main kind of writer, which makes me sound important. But I really wasn't. I made the tea as well. When I came to writing the book, I realized what a great training ground that was for me because we'd often do stuff which was personally influenced. But also we did stuff like historical tours. So like I had to write poetry about bricks. Yeah. You realize you're gonna write poetry about bricks, first thing you do is go "bricks, sticks..."

CHERYL: [laughs]

DAVE: "thick..."

CHERYL: Got it. Candle wicks! That's what you were gonna say.

DAVE: Yeah. But yeah, I had to really write to order. Yeah, and one of the best things for writing is just writing again and again, over and over and over. And I realized being in this arts organization was a really great sort of training ground for writing a book. I decided to leave them shortly after the brain injury. There have been times when they've been making this incredible stuff, and I've been starting from scratch. I look back going, "Well, maybe that was a little bit brain injury of you?" I was more forthright and confident. Not confident. I don't know. And I had some arguments. Yeah, so that's Metro-boulot-dodo. It was a really great 15 years, but it was time to move on.

CHERYL: Right. The Workshop that you did, the bullying workshop, was that a project of them, or was that just you?

DAVE: Yeah. No, that was a project with Metro-boulot-dodo.

CHERYL: Because that is so stinking funny, and I think one of the reasons it touched me so much is because I used to do that. I used to do residencies in the schools and do those improvisational things and devise these performance pieces with the kids based on social issues. And I watched that, and you just nailed every single thing! It's so funny!

DAVE: Just to explain what The Workshop was. It was only a one-off. What it is, is me going into school. And it's a kind of documentary workshopping some kids about bullying. And it's basically a homage to "The Office," the first one, the proper good one. [both laugh] And it's basically me doing a sort of Ricky--I'm not pretending to be Ricky. I'm pretending to be me but worse than me. And then an incident of bullying actually occurs. And you have this sort of vague seriousness that "The Office" did. Occasionally a project just works, and everything comes together. I improvised the script with the girls. What really worked with those bunch of girls--I hope none of them are listening--was that actually it was a group of girls who were eager. When I was mucking about being myself with the group of girls, all the reactions is completely realistic. They didn't quite understand what I was doing, and so when I'm mucking about and talking about Lenny Kravitz and doing these workshopping games

with them and being generally a bit of a moron, they're not quite sure? So it's one of my favorite. They did a big poster, and I've still got that poster up on my wall today.

CHERYL: Oh, that's great. Yeah, that was one of the impressive things was that the students' responses looked, they looked genuinely uncomfortable and disturbed by this weird guy who kept coming and doing workshops with them but then ignoring everything that they said.

DAVE: [laughs] Yeah.

CHERYL: I mean just really hilarious.

DAVE: The poster is a whole list of quotes that I said that they've written down. One of the girls put the quote. I obviously said this, cuz they were saying, "Oh, you say lots of things." But she wrote down the quote, which I said, "I don't feel very quotable today," which I think is very clever and post-modern.

CHERYL: It's very clever and post-modern. I love it! A little bit self-centered. Just a little. But "The Office?" By the way, I did watch the British version. I did.

DAVE: I've not watched much of the American one.

CHERYL: It's ok. It's ok.

DAVE: I'm sorry.

CHERYL: I'm not a big Steve Carrell fan myself. I am, however, a really huge fan of Ricky Gervais. As I said, I believe that your country has better comedians than mine. But I don't know them all.

Reading a bit from the book

CHERYL: I'm just gonna read a quotation from the book. You had written, "I had been thinking the lines for a long time. I had pondered my sorry broken heart, at length, but it is only with music, when I sang them aloud, that their nakedness and their truth, really hit home.

Oh Dave, you poor messed up sod.

The big emotions have faded. Yes, I do still cry easier, laugh to myself a lot more and still have a bit of a temper, but nothing like how I cried that day. The piano, it would seem, can still reduce me to a snotty, blubbing two year old. Maybe it always could. Nothing has such a direct line to the human heart as music."

DAVE: There's a quote, I'm probably misquoting it. It says, "All art portends to music." And although I think I'm a better writer, I wish I was a better musician, but I do think--As I said, I've messed around in all the art forms. And I think music is just--Well, every civilization that have never met all have music. It's just very fundamental, I think, to us human beings, really.

CHERYL: That's a good point.

[David Parkin's song "Tonight The Stars" from "Good Friday: A Clinical Depression Concept Album" plays for 5 minutes, 15 seconds.]

CHERYL: You did a tour in Canada.

DAVE: Mmhmm, yeah. Winnipeg.

CHERYL: How was that?

DAVE: Yeah, well, I went on tour to Canada with the one-man version of the show, which I did around people's front rooms before I turned it in. So the full show is--it's still a one-man show, really. It's just me talking, but I have two musician with me, two cellists and multi-instrumentalists. Because as I said, while the show is about I learned the piano, and then as I was learning it, I wrote this album. And I'm still not a very good pianist. But I took the one-man show to Canada. And yeah, I had a great time. Canadians really dig the English as well! You know?

CHERYL: As well! [laughs]

DAVE: You feel all you have to do is walk into a bar, and go, "'Ello, me duck! Gor, blimey!" And they're instantly in love, you know. So that was nice!

CHERYL: That would work over here, too.

DAVE: Ok.

CHERYL: Especially, "Gor!" Blimey! Right then! [both giggle]

CHERYL: Is there anything else that you want to talk about, crack a gag about?

[cell phone rings]

The book is about brain injury and also parental love

DAVE: Oh, it's my mother. Oh, I suppose I could talk about that, actually. For the record, I just got a phone call during this interview, and it's from my mum. And I think the book is about brain injury and depression. But it is also about parental love. Because my parents really stepped up to the mark, and we're a lot closer now. So a friend of mine said the book is kind of like a love letter to my mum. Which, now I say it out loud, it sounds kind of sexual and sinister.

CHERYL: It didn't come across that way.

DAVE: No, no, no. I'm just obviously being amusing.

CHERYL: [laughs] Oh, and I didn't get it! Classic! Ok, go ahead.

DAVE: But yeah, my mum phones every day now, which I don't mind. They've nursed me back to health. So you kind of lose the right to go, "Oh, God. It's my mum again." Yeah, the book is about my parents stepping up to the mark and being really brilliant, I think.

CHERYL: That's wonderful. Yeah, they came across that way, yeah.

DAVE: Good, good.

CHERYL: And that's lovely because a lot of people don't get that.

DAVE: So look out for, now I think it sounds hippie-ish, but I think it works. It will grow with you with the book. But I'm gonna call it rather grandly "The Next Life."

CHERYL: I like "The Next Life." I think it really suits the story the way you've written it.

DAVE: I hope so. Yeah, well I think it works on a few levels.

CHERYL: Yeah, it does.

DAVE: The next life could be death. The next life is also this next life with this thing. It is a different life. And it's more optimistic, I think maybe.

CHERYL: It is, but without being hopelessly inspirational and sappy.

DAVE: Mm. It's also got that broader feel to it cuz I realize I had to change it when I was there going, "uh, 'A Gray Matter?' um, 'Adventures With My Brain?', 'The Brain Bruise?'" And they all felt too jokey and specific. See what I mean?

CHERYL: Uh-huh. Yeah, yeah.

Where folks can find you online

CHERYL: Tell folks where they can find you online.

DAVE: My site is www.davidparkin.org. And there's, bits of my writing up there, and there's some of my music and all sorts. So check it out!

CHERYL: All right, Dave. Well, it has been an extreme pleasure to talk to you.

DAVE: It has.

CHERYL: So nice to finally meet you.

Join us the 1st and 3rd Friday of the month at 1:00 pm and find us online at blogtalkradio.com/brainreels. This has been Cheryl Green of StoryMinders. Email me at info@storyminders.com if you've got topics you'd like to hear on an upcoming show.

[music]