

Episode 1: Surviving Sundays

“EM: *"I had felt hurt again. I just wanted the pain to end. It was in one of these moments where I talk about the sound of silence sometimes, where you've ever heard that, where the science actually has noise, there was a ringing and I felt so alarmed and I planned the inner days to come it would be the end. Somebody called my phone, who had not heard from me for a while, who I love, who I care for, but we'd not spoken for some time. Not somebody I speak to all the time and she rang and she rang again. Something just made me pick the phone up, a time when I wasn't really talking to anybody. We had a conversation and I told her how low I was feeling. She said, "Just give me a day. There's somebody you need to talk to that I know, trust me."*

[INTRO]

[0:01:04.1] LW: Hello, friends. Welcome At The End Of The Tunnel Podcast with yours truly, Light Watkins. This is the podcast where I strive to bring to life one of my favorite Emerson quotes, "Our chief want is someone who inspire us to be what we know we could be."

In this episode of At The End Of The Tunnel, we're going to hear about the story behind an online platform called Surviving Sundays, which was started by brand consultant and mental health first aid instructor, Emma Mainoo. survivingsundays.com is a storytelling platform, where stories of self-love, hope and survival are shared so that conversations around mental health may be normalized, and so that people living with or affected by mental health may know that they are not alone and that healing is possible.

I discovered Emma's platform in 2019 in one of the Soho House magazines as she does a lot of work with Soho House and I started following it on Instagram and even featured it in my monthly magazine, The Daily Meditator, which hopefully you're subscribed to. I think that what Emma's doing is so important now more than ever as the conversation on mental health is becoming more prevalent and loneliness in adults is on the rise.

Her movement has been quickly gaining traction and her work has become a lifeline for many others who on the surface may appear to have it all figured out. Maybe they have a great job,

or they have lots of resources. Behind the scenes, they're struggling. Maybe that's you, or someone you know.

As a professional, Emma identified Sundays as being a day of the greatest loneliness, because it means having to spend the next five days pretending to be okay. She thought, "I can't be the only one struggling this before the work week starts." That debilitating feeling coupled with a devastating breakup that she experienced helped to catapult Emma into action and to realize that the way out of the pain was to help others navigate those dreaded Sundays. I want her to be the one to tell you more about that.

Without further ado, I'm pleased to welcome Miss Emma Mainoo.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:03:21.7] LW: I always to start these interviews talking about childhood. What was your favorite toy as a child and why?

[0:03:33.9] EM: My favorite toy was E.T., the Extra-Terrestrial, who's still in a cupboard at my mom's house actually.

[0:03:41.2] LW: Really? Wow.

[0:03:43.4] EM: Yeah. He has traveled the world with me. Even when I first moved to London 12 years ago, he came with me. I loved him. I was really attached to that toy. I think it was at a time – I mean, I can't remember what year that maybe came out, but I was young. I think my parents had got divorced around that time and it wasn't a particularly happy time and there was just something about that toy and the movie and just seeing this alien that felt quite lost, but he'd made his friend Elliot and they had this really special bond.

I think when I look back now and think about it, obviously I don't think about that then, but I probably needed a friend. I was having a lot of emotions going through me that I couldn't – I obviously wouldn't have had the emotional language for a young age. Yeah, he was my best friend. I used to tell him secrets.

[0:04:28.6] LW: Okay, what's an example of a secret if you would tell to E.T.? The E.T. doll.

[0:04:34.1] EM: He was a teddy. I just think things like, you know, where I might have hidden something in the garden, or perhaps things I was thinking, or just feelings I had right, really I guess around my dad not being around and stuff that was happening at home. He was my best friend. If you really wanted to upset me, you would take E.T. away from me. I would be in hysteria.

[0:04:55.9] LW: Did that happen to you?

[0:04:57.1] EM: Yeah.

[0:04:57.9] LW: Really, that was your punishment?

[0:04:59.0] EM: No, no, no, no, no, no. My mom –

[0:05:01.7] LW: “Give me that E.T. doll.”

[0:05:02.7] EM: No. I had something like, let's not call them friends, but there were little kids around that time who knew how much I loved E.T.. He used to pick on me. When their mom would come and see my mom and we'd go off to play in my bedroom, they'd start throwing ET around the room, or trying to take him away from me and I'd be hysterical. Yeah.

[0:05:24.8] LW: That's interesting.

[BREAK]

[0:05:33.2] LW: Okay, so let's fast-forward to now you're living in London. You grew up in Manchester, right?

[0:05:38.9] EM: Yeah.

[0:05:39.4] LW: Now you're living in London, you're working in marketing and design and branding and you're very successful in your work. All right, take us a little bit up until the point where you started the platform, Surviving Sundays. What were you experiencing? What were you feeling? What was happening behind the scenes?

[0:05:58.4] EM: I've worked in brand and communications for about 20 years and in one way or another, so whether that's been PR, or marketing or media. I managed to get myself to quite a good level in the media world. In 2012, I experienced a breakdown. For a lot of my life, I've been living with depression and anxiety.

I don't think I would have labeled them as such at those times. I think I just always felt a little bit other, or when I wasn't at work or out with my friends, I would feel a little bit dark and a little bit heavy, but I don't know. I just guess I thought that was life. I would often have this stomach churning feeling, or overthinking. I just thought that that was just me, or that's what everybody did.

[0:06:38.9] LW: For someone who's never had a breakdown, what does that feel like? What's happening?

[0:06:43.6] EM: You cannot underestimate the impact of a breakdown. It's exactly what it says. For me when that moment happened in 2012, right leading up to that time, nobody I guess would have known what was going on, because I was leading teams, winning pitches, I had clients with big budget. I was doing some really great work. I was partying. It looked like everything was great.

[0:07:08.0] LW: Weren't you in a relationship?

[0:07:08.7] EM: I was in a relationship. The relationship was actually the trigger. The end of the relationship was unforeseen and the consequences of it were quite huge for me, in terms of the way that my life was going to look in the very near future and the way that then it ended in that moment. There was a lot of hope riding on the future, imminently.

[0:07:28.6] LW: Because in 2012, you were in your early 30s, which is usually the stage where people want to start to get serious, maybe have a family and started nesting.

[0:07:40.8] EM: Yeah, so I was 34. I was in love. I was in a relationship with somebody and we were moving to America. It wasn't just being in a relationship. We were planning a life in another place. We'd spent the best part of a year planning that life together. I was so excited about this new future, who wouldn't be? Going to live in LA with somebody that they loved. It was you couldn't write it. As far as I was aware, we were a really good couple. We got on. He was happy. I was happy.

What transpired was that there was a conversation in which he told me that his feelings weren't there and he thought the wrong thing will be for me to come to America with him with the way that he had been feeling. His LA dream continued.

[0:08:27.3] LW: You never saw that coming?

[0:08:28.4] EM: Never saw it coming. I think for me, that was the thing that took some time to get over was that — I remember the day that the conversation happened; the ball of stress I felt in my stomach. He was doing a big deal at the time; it was one of the reasons we were going to America. I'd said to him in the weeks before, "You seemed a bit stressed. Are you okay?" He was like, "No. We're just moving our whole lives. There'd been some family illness," and he was concerned about that, but there were all these reassurances that you are the most important person in my life.

"Everything is going to be great. I can't wait till we get away." I remember that day that the conversation happened saying, "You told me only last week that you love me." The response was, "Have you never told somebody that you love them and not meant it?" Not really any apology. Just an explanation that he felt it would be disingenuous to continue and that he wasn't feeling it, whatever it was, and the way he had. It was over in that conversation.

[BREAK]

[0:09:39.3] LW: Did it come out later how much earlier he had initially started thinking about?

[0:09:43.5] EM: I've never seen him, or spoken to him since that day.

[0:09:46.6] LW: Is that right?

[0:09:47.3] EM: Yeah.

[0:09:48.1] LW: Okay. Then what? Where were you when this breakdown occurred and what was happening?

[0:09:54.6] EM: Physically, it was Christmas time. We were leaving probably six weeks later, or I can't exactly remember. It was not a long time between Christmas and when we were due to leave. Our visas were going through, arrangements were being made, I'd sold so many things to be able to have some financial independence there. We'd gone back to our parents houses to spend Christmas with them as the last Christmas for a while and we'd come back to London. He'd met me at the station. We got in the apartment.

I remember we'd left all of our Christmas presents there to have our Christmas moment together. I turned the Christmas tree lights on and said, "Should we open our presents?" He said, "Yeah, I just need to say something first." Then that was the conversation. It was all a bit of a surprise in that moment.

I think when somebody says to you, "I don't love you," there isn't really a way of arguing your way around that. As shocking as it was to me and I've spent a long time replaying that conversation and the conversations before that and there were moments when quite honestly, he was unkind and he was cruel and I think that that was distancing behavior, but there was always this explanation that it was about work, so I could write it off against that I guess.

[BREAK]

[0:11:17.4] LW: Had you been experiencing any mental health stuff before that moment?

[0:11:21.4] EM: I look back at that time now. Although it's one of the most defining moments of my life is what worked out to be because of what followed. I see that in that relationship and then I know that in the relationships that were previous to that, I wasn't authentic. This was a dream to me, to find somebody – I'd had some terrible relationships.

This guy was kind, he was pretty normal, it wasn't abusive, we had this big dream. I think internally, there were so many moments when I could have taken up more space and been more of myself. I was afraid to do that, because a fear of I guess of revealing who I might really be, or losing him, or disappointing him.

There'd been many times through previous years where, as I say, I was either high or low in mood. At that time, I was actually in a really nice space. That relationship made me happy. I felt very comfortable, very loved, very supported. So it was even more surprising when what happened happened.

[0:12:26.2] LW: That was the breakdown night?

[0:12:28.1] EM: It didn't happen like that. In the lead-up, when you decide to obviously move, there are a lot of factors to consider. I'd been in a job that I had left because he had said to me this is a really big move like, "Why don't you just put your efforts into thinking about that? We're going to be leaving soon." I'd left a job. I'd given up an apartment, so I was moving in with him before we went away. I'd had a birthday dinner a month before where we'd said effectively goodbye to some of my friends and I told a lot of people I was going to LA.

When I walked out of the apartment that night and didn't look back, it was between Christmas and New Year, so there were no hotels, a lot of friends were away. Immediately, I was faced with this challenge of who could I go to in London. I couldn't even get back home to my parents on this particular day, and having just arrived a few hours earlier as well. There was this fight-or-flight response. That moment was just all about survival and just getting to a place of safety. My uncle and the family put me up for a little bit. What then happened was as I came through that immediate moment just trying to find a place to be, within a day or so, there was a breakdown. I mean, it was completely debilitating.

[BREAK]

[0:13:49.0] EM: It's all so vague. It's funny how your mind protects you from this stuff. I left my auntie and my uncle, I went back to Manchester. I just remember being in bed. Showering was off the cards. Feeding myself. Getting from my bed to just go to the toilet was really – you're just lying there for so long just thinking, “I need the bathroom. I need the bathroom. I need the bathroom.” Just willing yourself to just get up and do that. That's how I describe a breakdown, it's the inability to meet even your most basic needs. I was experiencing that in a home where my mum and my stepfather were there.

There was a time in which I would come back to London and be on my own, which is when it got really quite dark, really even darker. In those initial times, I couldn't speak to anybody. The phone was ringing. Some people started to find out what had happened. I couldn't speak to anybody. It was just the darkest thing. When you look at a wall, where you can see the light come up and down in the day and you know that that's happened and a day has gone by, but you're just looking at a ceiling.

[BREAK]

[0:15:02.1] LW: Prior to that, did you have any philanthropic endeavors that you had been doing in your life, in your professional world or outside of that?

[0:15:10.4] EM: I mean, I'd worked as an event producer for years and often had produced charity events, either on behalf of clients, or I'd wanted to do something and I was like, “Right. Okay, I would think about the charities that I thought were important,” but it was by no means any more than anybody did where I come from.

[0:15:28.6] LW: Had you been the beneficiary of any philanthropic organizations?

[0:15:32.8] EM: No.

[0:15:34.6] LW: Okay.

[0:15:35.0] EM: Mm-mm.

[BREAK]

[0:15:45.7] LW: Okay. Then what happens next? I want you to talk about Surviving Sundays, but how long from that moment that you had the break down until you have this idea to launch this platform? What happened just before you took the action?

[0:16:03.8] EM: Yeah. Well, between the breakdown and Surviving Sunday is being launched, there's a period of six years of which all of it wasn't about recovery. The initial recovery period, I would say was a year of just getting back on my feet, getting a job, facing the challenges that came with that.

The most significant thing that happened within that early, early phase was that there was a time when I knew I had to get a job, because I didn't have any money. A friend of mine who lived in America had a house in London –

[0:16:35.7] LW: What do you mean you didn't have any money?

[0:16:36.9] EM: I was running out of money, because I'd given up my job to move to America.

[0:16:39.6] LW: Okay. You had no savings or anything like that?

[0:16:42.6] EM: All that I had was my part – my ex-partner had said to me, “Look, when we get to America – ” He had been really generous and said, “I want you to come with me. There's some provision for you to come with me and explore the things that you want to do. Don't worry about finding a job in LA before we get.” There was something inside me that was saying, I don't want to be relying on that. It wasn't comfortable to me. I had sold my car. I had sold some clothes. I had sold some small jewelry.

[0:17:11.5] LW: Did you envision changing careers, or evolving in your career in some way? Or were you going to get there and do the same thing?

[0:17:18.0] EM: I had started to practice a lot more yoga at that time. I thought maybe about being a yoga teacher. I thought about maybe doing some leisurewear line. It's all a bit cliché, but I think the main thing was just knowing that I – he knew that I'd worked hard for so many years and he said, "Has anybody in your life ever said to you – here's like a ticket to think about the things that you want to do." This is why it was so much more –

[0:17:46.0] LW: Because that's what he was doing, right? He was doing what he wanted to do, so he probably felt like he wanted you to have that same experience.

[0:17:52.2] EM: Yeah. He had a golden opportunity and he was trying to share that with me. He was saying, come and this is the experience. There was something in me, I don't know what it was that was just thinking, "This is not so comfortable. I don't feel comfortable ever having to ask to go for money for a coffee," because I would have no money. I would have had to ask for everything and it just didn't sit well with me.

I'd saved some money and somebody who was aware of what happened very generously helped me with some money, so that I would have a rental deposit when I got back to London, which was very kind and on of those things that really I'd forever be grateful.

[0:18:30.8] LW: An angel came in.

[0:18:32.2] EM: This person is an angel, was an angel then and is very angelic in the way that he continues to live his life. Had it not been for him, I don't know – I think things would have been even more difficult when I decided to come back to London.

[BREAK]

[0:18:54.1] LW: Can you say any more about your relationship with this person, or you rather not?

[0:18:58.8] EM: I would rather not, but this person is a really beautiful person. I think that you have to look back at experiences sometimes and wonder what came out of what happened.

Had it not been for my partner, I would never have come into contact with some of the people that are still in my life and this was one of them.

[0:19:18.0] LW: Because you probably weren't in many situations where you needed help like that from other people. You're very self-sufficient at that point.

[0:19:23.7] EM: Very self-sufficient. Then suddenly you're in a situation where you feel humiliated. Even a few months after it all happened, just going back into my nail salon when I made it back to London, the girls were like, "Haven't you gone to LA?" Just the humiliation is over and over again.

It's when you see people. I removed myself from all social media. People I was a distant friend who had heard from other people I was moving to America to live this dream. I'd met this guy. Suddenly, they're seeing you somewhere. Reliving this humiliation. It's like being jilted at the altar and somebody going, "How was the wedding?" It didn't happen.

[BREAK]

[0:20:16.3] LW: Over these next six years, you are rebuilding your – you're establishing yourself.

[0:20:19.2] EM: Yeah, I'm rebuilding. The thing that led to Surviving Sunday, so there was – you look back on your life and you see the angels. I felt them at the time. There was the first angel that came to me in this really difficult time, when I was scratching pounds together to just get back on my feet in London, and to try and get – if you try and rent an apartment in London, you're looking at a couple of months money to go down. It's not cheap. Trying to find somebody that you can cohabit with when you're feeling really bad is really difficult.

It was my first angel that came forward and enabled me to have a month's rent, which was really helpful on my deposit. Then there was a very, very dark moment, the darkest moment of my life when a friend had offered me an opportunity to come – I needed to get back to some job interviews in London and I couldn't afford to stay in a hotel. A friend gave me her house.

She lived elsewhere. She said, “Stay in my house.” I stayed in her house. In this very silent space away from any support that I'd had for the previous four weeks –

[0:21:23.4] LW: Which was all back in Manchester?

[0:21:24.3] EM: Which was all back in Manchester. I'm putting myself out there trying to get interviews, trying to put CVs out. It's a situation I've never been in before. One job followed another. Word-of-mouth had always been a thing. I'm reaching out to try and get work, nothing's coming back to me.

I'm just in this place where I can see that my partner – that life is gone. Not just he is gone, the love has gone, the dream has gone. I can't get back on my feet. I don't have an apartment. There was a moment when I'm staying in my friend's house where I really thought about taking my life. It went from the thought to the preparation of that.

[0:22:04.9] LW: You had devised a plan and everything.

[0:22:06.7] EM: A plan. I thought about the means. I thought about when. I'd thought it through, because I go on now, and I teach a course that touches on this. It wasn't about wanting to die, it was just about wanting this pain –

[0:22:25.7] LW: To end.

[0:22:26.3] EM: - to end and not being able to see a future in which I would be of any value. We've not really talked about it, but this wasn't about the guy. It was about a lost dream, but all of that meant so much. Because when I look back at my past, I saw so much pain, so much rejection, an internal belief in my very core that I was unlovable and worthy of love.

[0:22:51.5] LW: Were people reaching out to you at the time, offering to be there and help you and talk to you and listen and you felt like, “I was just being a burden to them,” or no one was really reaching out at the time?

[0:23:00.8] EM: Some people reached out. It was somebody actually – I had come off social media. I was quite active on social media, so some people noticed, but a lot of people are just wrapped up in their own world, or they think you've gone.

[0:23:11.5] LW: You felt lonely?

[0:23:12.5] EM: Yeah, I felt incredibly lonely. I felt ashamed. I'd been so confident of this relationship and where it was going and there was talk of all the things you talk about when you're with somebody. This great future. Let's share that with people close to me. I felt so humiliated. It was just a time of great pain and loss and looking back at the past and just thinking, "Well, this is what happens. This is what happens when I dare to dream," because so many painful experiences that come in previous years and relationships in which I had felt her again, I just wanted the pain to end.

It was in one of these moments where I talk about the sound of silence sometimes, where you've ever heard that where the silence actually has a noise, there was a ringing. I felt so alone. I planned that in the days to come, it would be the end. Somebody called my phone, who had not heard from me for a while, who I love, who I care for, but we'd not spoken for some time. It's not somebody that I speak to all the time.

She rang and she rang again and something just made me pick the phone up, at a time when I wasn't really talking to anybody and we had a conversation. I told her how low I was feeling. She said, "Just give me a day. There's somebody you need to talk to that I know. Trust me. Trust me."

She came back with a phone number of a therapist that I would go on to meet. I'd had experiences with therapists. Therapists in my late teens, I had some really unfortunate experiences in the therapy room with people that just either weren't for me, or who I believe weren't practicing in the right way. I went and met this lady that went on to be the figure that has been the most central in my healing. Through my conversations with her, I learned – I found a path of recovery. It's through those experiences that go beyond the therapy, to things you have to practice in your life, the spirituality.

[0:25:14.5] LW: Did you have a strong spiritual belief at the time, or did you feel things were happening randomly and by accident?

[0:25:21.5] EM: I had no belief. I grew up in a Catholic household. I went to a convent school, and whereas for many people, that's a label. When I was a young girl, I was deeply religious. I prayed a lot. I was still praying by habit. I think you just do that as a Catholic. That had left me. I had nothing, because as I said when I look back, I had evidence, I believe was evidence of how unworthy of love I was. I was in the current moment where I'd lost this big dream. I'd lost all belief in anything; the belief that I could have ever have a happy time had left me completely.

I now see the angels. I noticed them one or two at the time. I now see more. Through a 50 minute session once a week, sometimes twice a week, where I could go into a space when I was in crisis and be held by somebody in that space, I was able to firstly, address the crisis that I was in. She knew. I don't know. I just wanted to go in there and talk about my current situation. She knew we had to go back. She waited until the time was right to do that, to look at past events that had contributed to a lot of the way that I was feeling, because that breakdown did not happen solely because of this incident. This was always going to happen. This was the trigger.

[0:26:48.4] LW: That was your tunnel moment. Yeah.

[0:26:51.3] EM: I don't think there's a lot of experiences I've had that I don't share on Surviving Sundays. To me, it's quite incredible that nothing more serious happened before the age of 34 to me. It's a miracle I made it to that point.

[BREAK]

[0:27:21.2] LW: Now you're on the path to coming back to your most authentic self.

[0:27:26.1] EM: Yes.

[0:27:27.1] LW: Maybe even for the first time in your life.

[0:27:28.6] EM: For the first time.

[0:27:31.6] LW: When you get the first nugget, the first breadcrumb that you now can recognize as this is the thing that led me to creating Surviving Sundays.

[0:27:41.7] EM: I started to write. My therapist gave me really good advice on tools that might help me. I was desperate when the sessions used to end like, "How am I going to cope then till next Saturday?" She would talk about journaling. My mom encouraged me to write a journal from about the age of eight or nine. I just was write notes about things. They weren't for any purpose, but they help me to free my mind of things that were in there. A collection of stories I guess started in that time. It was intermittent.

[0:28:14.5] LW: You would you it write in the mornings. First thing in the mornings, you would write in this journal.

[0:28:18.0] EM: I was writing a lot any time.

[0:28:21.4] LW: When I've kept journals before, it's always a situation where I'm trying to decide how detailed am I going to be. Am I just going to do a stream of consciousness? Am I going to tell stories? Am I going to write as if I'm going to go back and read it one day? Am I going to write as if someone else is going to read it and I'm going to edit based on who I think may be reading this? How are you actually writing in your journal?

[0:28:40.5] EM: My younger diaries are really quite amusing. It's like, "Dear diary," I think I found one the other day. "What is circumcision?" Very innocent.

[0:28:51.6] LW: This is back in the E.T. days?

[0:28:54.5] EM: Yeah. Beyond the E.T. days. Or like, "I went to the fair today. It was really fun. I went on a ride." Whereas, this was reams and reams of not measuring the day I'd had. It was pure feelings on a page. "I feel hopeless. What is he doing? Who is he with? Has he moved on? Will I ever be loved?" It was pure raw feelings that didn't really make – there was no narrative.

[0:29:23.7] LW: Just a brain dump. Or heart dump.

[0:29:25.1] EM: It was like a brain dump.

[0:29:26.4] LW: Just get it out. Just get it all out.

[0:29:28.1] EM: The only person having these conversations with at the moment is my therapist and she's not available until next Saturday. To get me from today until next Saturday, I'm just going to put this out here, because your friends are there, but you reach a point of exhaustion with the same old story. Having a place to put it, for me was cathartic. Those stories started to be written.

The point of healing, I guess started to come. I had one goal at the time that this all happened when I started to get into recovery mode. That was to just try and get back whatever that meant to the area where I lived before I met him and to try and see if I could make London work again, because I'd written London off. Then I would decide if life was still worth living.

[0:30:20.2] LW: I do have one technical question before we move on. In the states, the best therapists are often the most expensive and they're cash-based a lot of the times. What it was like in the UK? Was it difficult? Was it difficult to pay for the therapists, or was it covered by the system? Or how does that work?

[0:30:38.3] EM: At this point and this is what we have to look at fate, I guess. I had sold my car. I had sold some things. There was a small, but not infinite amount of money to one side that was going to be my rent and my deposit for when I got back to London.

My therapist was firstly in the north of England. In the north of England, now you might be looking at 50 pounds for an hour, where here in London you might be starting in an equivalent practice at 80 and it goes north of that. I was paying that and I was paying for it myself, because this money was there and I was staying with between my parents.

[0:31:16.1] LW: You were broke at the time.

[0:31:17.0] EM: I was broke. I'm fortunate that and I will always be honest about this. Broke, there's broke and there's broke. I had a bed to sleep in. I had parents who were feeding me. When I wasn't with them, I was with my uncle and my aunt. I had a friend in New York who'd given me her house. I had a roof over my head. I had the ability to pay for a train to get there. I was able to go to the shop and buy food. I had resources. I wasn't on welfare.

When I look at what I had compared to a regular salary that was coming in, I wasn't yet renting a property. I didn't know how I was going to be able to do that yet, in London, I knew that I had a month's deposit. There was a real panic. I'm running out of funds, because my parents would say, "Come stay." They're not the people are going to be dishing out cash like that. It's just not where we were.

[0:32:04.7] LW: You realized very quickly that 80 pounds an hour was saving your life –

[0:32:08.7] EM: Like 50 pounds an hour. Yeah.

[0:32:09.9] LW: 50 pounds an hour was saving your life.

[0:32:11.0] EM: When I was younger, I'd had therapy sessions on the NHS. That's our National Health Service that were paid for. There's quite a complicated process. I'm really mindful when I talk about that to other people. Now I'm an advocate for therapy. I was fortunate I could fund my own therapy. Before I then when I want to get a job and then it was one of those things that was non-negotiable.

I would rather not go out for dinner and drink, or do the other things and have my therapy. In that moment where even I had a little, it was so important to me to pay for it, because often you go to a doctor, you tell them that you're depressed, you're then waiting for a referral. You can be waiting for a long time for that. You can then go into a room with somebody that you have no chemistry with, or that you don't get along with and what do you do? You go back to your doctor, you wait for a referral.

I've been in that cycle before and had therapists, one that wasn't fully trained and one that you definitely just thought, I'm sorry to say it, a person of color before her with some of the things she was coming out with were not unbiased. Being able to go to a person that's been recommended, that you can pay for is certainly been a gift. Had I not have took the steps to be able to be financially independent in Los Angeles, I would not have been able to do that. I was fortunate.

[0:33:30.7] LW: Selling the car was probably one of the best things you did.

[0:33:33.0] EM: Yeah, it was. It was.

[0:33:34.1] LW: Even though on the surface it was one of the worst things, because you were lost. You're there without transportation.

[0:33:39.6] EM: I was there without a car. I'd sold clothes I liked. None of it mattered, because I just wanted this financial independence. That small pot of money became the money that gave me the ability to have weekly therapy and to eventually get trained down, to able to go back to have interviews, to be able to feed myself, to be able to then go look at apartment at the area where I once lived, where it's not cheap. To look at how sure, I had the means to do that.

[BREAK]

[0:34:17.1] LW: What was the next breadcrumb?

[0:34:18.7] EM: The next breadcrumb was I wanted to live – I was just so – honestly, just this is the strength within. I would not live anywhere other than the streets where I had lived before I met him. I had this real thing. I had a map. I had four streets. I had to get back there. That had to happen. I could feel I had not had too much taken away from me, but it's really expensive.

I'd been in good work beforehand and I wasn't in that situation at that moment, but there was a job on the horizon by this point. Somebody had hooked me up with somebody and there was something coming. I've been to the interview. They said, "When something comes, we're going to give it to you." I was like, "Right. For this little bit of money." I was looking at all the –

[0:34:56.3] LW: How long were you out of work at this point?

[0:34:57.7] EM: I think it was about three months, which is enough to make you start having real panic about how you're going to get back on your feet and what it might look like and am I going to have to actually just stay in Manchester where I had not lived for a number of years. I'm then looking at all these apartments and I'm like, "I know I'm not in a good space and I don't want to be living with party people, despite the fact that I'm in my 30s. That's just not where I was at."

I see this advertisement and this lady had published her full details. She obviously wasn't aware – as aware of the way that these things work, so she wasn't a native English speaker and she was much older. There was just something about the way that she'd written it that was like an older lady would write it. I went to meet this lady. From the moment that I met her, there was just something about her that was so special and we'd go on to live together for two or three years.

The first few months were just me in my bedroom, keeping myself very isolated. I was having night terrors at the time. At 2:00 A.M. on the nose, I would be screaming. I don't think she quite understood what that was about.

[0:36:04.6] LW: Literally screaming in the bedroom.

[0:36:06.0] EM: Screaming out loud. Yeah, screaming.

[0:36:08.3] LW: Unconsciously?

[0:36:09.8] EM: Unconsciously. Sometimes I'd wake up heart-pounding, palpitations, unbelievable. Other times I would sleep through it and she tell me that it happened. It's quite embarrassing, because you're waking somebody up every time it happens. Sometimes she's coming in, because she's worried, then she gets to understand that it's just something that's happening.

That went on for so long. She let me be and didn't ask too much. Then there was just one night where she came in and I was on the sofa and I'd had a few drinks and I was inconsolable. She caught me in the act, because when she wasn't in the house I would sit in the lounge. When she was in the house, I'd sit in my room. She caught me in just floods of tears, inconsolable, just really struggling.

[0:36:51.4] LW: Was that one of your coping mechanisms at the time?

[0:36:53.4] EM: Alcohol.

[0:36:54.2] LW: Drinking alone.

[0:36:55.1] EM: For sure. For sure. Yeah. She came in and she asked me what was happening. In that moment, I told her about what happened with me. She told me about a huge personal loss of a family member that she'd experienced. It was two people found each other who needed a little bit of a helping hand. We are the best of friends to this day. She's in her 70s. She's one of my idols in life. She's an angel.

[0:37:25.0] LW: Right. One of your angels.

[0:37:25.9] EM: Yeah, she is. She's amazing.

[0:37:29.0] LW: Okay.

[BREAK]

[0:37:35.5] LW: Then next breadcrumb?

[0:37:37.3] EM: At that time, I've been living with this wonderful lady. Sometimes I'm coming in and I've got bouquet of flowers in my room, or a book she thinks I might like, or a handwritten postcard and things are starting to feel more positive. I then get the best job of my life. The phone call comes, "You've got the job." I went to work on a project for our government. I'm not going to get into politics, which is quite a hot topic here at the moment, but it's like going to the White House, I guess. Going and doing a project at 10 Downing Street, which was a creative

project. It wasn't a governmental project. It was a creative project about boost flag waving for Britain, showing how creative we were. We are.

It was a really great achievement. I get to go and work for them on behalf of a creative media agency. I'm going to work there every day most days of the week, meeting with people I'd never imagined that I could meet. This job was – it was far bigger, I guess, than I had ever imagined that the thing that came in would be. With that, came a lot of pressure, at a time where I'm having anxiety attacks and I'm having night terrors and I'm depressed.

I'm back to wearing masks again for a while. It was an amazing thing to be given a project like that, to be able to go in there, to feel good. My confidence was really just starting to just build a bit and my self-belief was starting to build.

[0:39:04.5] LW: As a woman in her 30s, you're obviously working around other people who around your age group. I'm sure sometimes people open up about experiencing low-level anxiety and maybe imposter syndrome and things like that. Are you feeling normal, or do you feel – you still feel what you're experiencing is worse than what everybody else is?

[0:39:28.2] EM: At that time I knew I was in hell. Obviously, I'm still having – even though my therapist is in Manchester, I'm Skyping with her. I'm still clinging on, week-to-week at this point and not really being very sociable. I'm going into these meetings and I'm dressed immaculately. I'm going in and they partnered me with a wingman who worked for the government on this campaign and he was brilliant and really charismatic and we made firm friends. I've always been quite good at being a performer. I could to a degree, getting to the meetings was quite difficult.

I had a problem with public transport. It was really setting my anxiety attacks off at that time. By the moment, I got to that building and had to do the meeting of the day. I was able. Of all thing quite good at shifting gear, doing that meeting, giving everything that it took. There was a cost to that, because then you leave and you're depleted, you're tired, your weekends become a different thing, because you're putting so much into just trying to be normal. I have a voice. Of course, I have a voice.

I'm young. I don't work in government. I stick out. I'm not a white man in the room. I'm younger than most people I was working with on that project. At first, I think they didn't get my capabilities, because I've come from a media agency. These people are attached to the government in some way and you're trying to talk to them about creative ideas for a campaign that they would like to see delivered. You're trying to win hearts and minds while you're struggling as well. I felt like an imposter for the first few months of that every single day.

They came on a journey with me and they saw my value. As it started to happen, I started to feel more valued. Work for me has been one of the places that I felt most safe during all of my recovery time. It is a place where I needed tangible examples of my worth and my value. When you're receiving praise and you're being told that you did a good job, and that you did something well, for me, that was really helpful.

Work was also a place where I could be that wasn't home, where I wasn't sleeping well. I was living with this lovely lady, but I was wanting to spend more time in the office than I was at home, when I would have to go and just be alone and watch TV sometimes. It was a real lifeline.

[BREAK]

[0:41:58.3] LW: You're no longer contemplating suicide. You're not experiencing that depth of depression at this point?

[0:42:02.5] EM: No, I was. I've moved from the preparation of it, but it was every time that I was alone, I was thinking about it.

[0:42:16.5] LW: Is that hyperbole? Every time, or you literally mean every time you were spending this –

[0:42:20.2] EM: I mean, I'd go from Monday to Friday in the office. I'd leave the office most times and go for drinks with friends, that just went too far. You've always got that moment when people have got to get home to their families, their kids. That was a real low moment for me. I'd often go home quite drunk, feeling lonely, feeling dark, feeling desperate. Then the

weekend would kick in and I didn't have a lot of energy and I didn't have a lot of plans, because I either didn't want to spend time with people, or I didn't want to go and be the third wheel with the couple friends that I had, or the fifth wheel with their kids.

Some of my friends were out doing really brilliant and brave things. I didn't have the mental or physical energy for that. Home, weekends at home alone in bed, I often think about the fact that I don't want to be here. I was just making it through.

[0:43:08.5] LW: What was it about Sundays as opposed to Saturdays that stood out?

[0:43:15.0] EM: The thing about Sundays for me was obviously, you've got the tasks of the week ahead that are looming and you know you've got to be on your A-game. I was in a business where you're not playing, right? There's always a big client, or there's always a deadline, or there's always something.

I was working on this government project which was very, very important to my agency and I wanted to do that well. The worst thing I dreaded was Monday morning. I was checking in at the government, but I had an office in the media agency where I had to go. On a Monday morning, it's a really sociable place. Everybody's so friendly. There was a tea point where people are getting their cereal and they're making their tea and everybody's, "Hey, how was your weekend?"

The thought of that conversation and knowing that I would lie, but I didn't have the same plans, so that I didn't have a story that I could share was quite a dark thing. It was something I dreaded.

[0:44:05.6] LW: You would lie to make it sound you had a very active weekend, or you would lie to make it sound you were –

[0:44:12.0] EM: I mean, that's if I let the conversation go on long enough. I'd usually just say, "Fine, or great, or chilled."

[0:44:18.5] LW: That's a lie for you.

[0:44:19.8] EM: Absolute lie. Then I'd flip it back to you, how was your weekend? It was worse, after bank holidays or Christmas, because they really want to get into it with you then. It's like, "So where did you go? What did you do?"

[0:44:31.2] LW: What's a big holiday for people all over the UK?

[0:44:32.7] EM: Public holiday. It's a long weekend.

[0:44:34.9] LW: Usually on a Monday, right?

[0:44:35.8] EM: Usually on a Monday. Yeah.

[0:44:36.6] LW: Where everything is closed.

[0:44:37.9] EM: Yeah. Everybody's got these big plans. It's not just like "How was it?" They then want to know who are you with and what did you do.

[0:44:44.6] LW: Because in the UK, what I've experienced, everybody is so scheduled, they have their whole next three months planned out to the hour.

[0:44:53.4] EM: That can be quite difficult when you're single and your friends have kids, because everything works around kids' holidays and they want you to be with them. Often they've booked some Easter trip, six months ago with another couple and their kids. It's difficult to then go and join those things, or people are in relationships. Struggling to find time together, so things are quite – a lot of things are quite diarized. That's right. Yeah.

[BREAK]

[0:45:25.1] LW: You have the best job of your life, you're living with one of your angels, you're living in the area that is your most desired area in town, you're back on your feet financially, it sounds like.

[0:45:36.5] EM: Yeah, I'm getting there.

[0:45:38.3] LW: Where is your happiness level on a scale of one to 10 at this point?

[0:45:43.1] EM: About four or five.

[0:45:45.0] LW: Okay. Sundays are heavy day for you.

[0:45:49.7] EM: Heavy day.

[0:45:51.0] LW: What happens next? Take us to the Surviving Sunday inception.

[0:45:54.9] EM: Yeah. We get there, because there was around a time where I was just surviving. I was not thriving. I was not living. I was just surviving. I said to my therapist, "I'm just laying in the bed on the weekends, or I'm going out with friends that are free and just blowing my weekend up, because I'm just getting drunk and having fun, but I'm not."

She just said to me, "Why don't you just try one weekend to just get out of the door and just do something different?" I live next to one of the most beautiful parks in the country. It started with not even a walk in that park. I put my headphones in one day and I went for a walk around the block for 10 minutes. She said just put 10 minutes. Just listen to some tunes. You'll lift these – I was having really intrusive, obsessive thoughts at the time. That worked.

[0:46:43.2] LW: That was bigger. That was huge for you, because you wouldn't leave the house at all on the weekends?

[0:46:48.5] EM: Yeah. I mean, as I said if I did, it was like, I'd then be hungover on a Sunday. Or quite often, would be doing nothing. I'm not seeing anybody. Dreading even leaving my house and seeing my neighbors, because I would just be really slovenly and just not up for chatting, or asking, talking about the weather or anything.

[0:47:03.8] LW: Because you didn't want to have to lie.

[0:47:05.0] EM: I didn't want to have to lie. I just didn't want anyone to ask me anything about myself. I didn't want any spotlight on me and I didn't have energy to inquire about you either. I could just didn't have anything to give. I felt incredibly ashamed of myself and just nothing.

[0:47:19.9] LW: What did you discover on this 10-minute walk?

[0:47:22.0] EM: That by the time I got out, I believe it's only ever as hard as tying your laces. That's the hardest part. It's just getting the motivation to do a thing. When I got out, as I'm walking, the fresh air, it was cold, was just doing something, I don't know. That the thought started to slay, because then I'm looking at the cobblestones on my street, or I'm walking and I'm looking at a tree. I just felt better by the time I got in the house.

Then the following weekend, I picked up my yoga practice on a Saturday, a studio that I'd gone to for years before this mess had happened. I went to a yoga class on a Saturday. It was really hard to get through. On Sunday, I went to the park. That walk must have lasted – it was like I went into a time zone. There was no time, like three hours I walked, playing one of my favorite games that I still play now actually that day. Dogs who look like their owners. There's loads in this particular park. It's really weird. I didn't feel alone.

[0:48:23.0] LW: Just making mental notes.

[0:48:24.5] EM: You look like your dog. “What dog would I look? What dog would I look like?” Maybe like a poodle. I'm just walking. Yeah, there were the moments where I'm just like, I can't believe I'm here. I'm on my own. I'm in the park with people looking at me. Do I look weird? Do people wondering why I'm on my own? That narrative just started to fade a bit more and then it was like after that, I'm going to take myself out for a coffee, then I'm going to take myself out for dinner, then I'm going to go to the cinema on my own, because –

[0:48:50.4] LW: This is revolutionary for you, going out by yourself.

[0:48:52.1] EM: Yeah. Just this massive idea that if you go out, people feel sorry for you. Because where I'm from, I don't know, maybe it's a London thing, but where I grew up, that was just a really weird thing. If you saw somebody in a restaurant on their own, you'd be like,

“Bless them.” Mouthing, “Oh, she’s alone.” Or making up some stories to why they were on their own.

[0:49:10.8] LW: Absolutely. Yeah.

[0:49:11.9] EM: If you went for a walk like, “Where are you going? Why would you be going for a walk? Where to?” It just wasn't –

[0:49:18.4] LW: Just like dogs who look like their owners, we create stories behind why people are doing certain things and I think especially as a woman, I think with men and major cities like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, maybe even London, it's not as big of a deal to go out by yourself. For a lot of younger women, I think they have a lot more pressure to be more social.

[0:49:41.7] EM: I think there are safety aspects and reasons.

[0:49:43.9] LW: The safety. Yes, like as well.

[0:49:45.4] EM: You may not go walking alone. We've got a lot of messaging and there have been things that have happened, even with people. There are some incidents 20 years ago, women that were walking in the woods, or running in the woods and there are these things here, I think even though you're not always aware of it being that thing, like a nervousness. For me, it was very much about – I felt I had some sign on my head that was like, “Nobody loves me. I've got no company.” That’s why –

[0:50:09.2] LW: Right. Reinforce those old beliefs from back in the –

[0:50:11.3] EM: I’ve got to be honest. The fact was that people have probably asked me to join them that Sunday somewhere, but I was just saying no. Sometimes they weren't and they were on with their lives. There were a lot of people who said they'd be there and they weren't. I was very hurt at that time about a lot of things in life, past and present. Yeah, so the walking was a great healer.

Fast forward, you got to fast forward because there were just so much happened in that time, those small acts led to. Three years ago, I'm taking myself to Mexico for 10 days, swimming underwater in caves, coming up into beautiful lagoons.

[0:50:47.8] LW: In the synoptics.

[0:50:48.4] EM: Yeah. On my own, walking down into that space with a guide I've never met on a solo tour. Not even thinking about the implications of that, which in hindsight, were perhaps not as well planned as I thought. The bravery, the courage came from challenging myself to do small things at a time when I felt I had nothing to give. It's that journey of growth that I really started to feel and the bravery and living with this lady who'd never known me, who showed me so much love.

I remember thinking, "People like me." I mean, that's such a sad thought. She likes me. She really likes me, that enabled me to start to meet my new self, reacquaint myself with parts of my old self that needed love. To have these tools and I just became somebody that people started to come and talk to about things. I thought, there is something in this.

[BREAK]

[0:51:51.9] EM: Eventually –

[0:51:52.6] LW: People would open up to you about their own struggles.

[0:51:54.5] EM: Yeah, they would. Because I became quite vocal. By this point, I've had –

[0:52:01.2] LW: Were you posting on Instagram and Facebook and that kind of thing?

[0:52:03.5] EM: No. I mean, I was off all of that for about 18 months. People in my close circle knew that I was having therapy and I talk about it quite a bit and they'd see the journey that I was on. "My therapist says, my therapist says." That was everything. I wasn't ashamed of it. I just wasn't. There was just this new way of life is bravery, these boundaries that were being set, these people I was letting go of, these new behaviors.

I don't know. A couple years ago, I'd had by this point the therapy, the experiences, the strength, the proof points and I was feeling good about myself and I wanted to share it with people. I've met a lot of people along the way that were lost, who felt alone, who felt ashamed. I just wanted to – it was as simple as wanting to share my story. If 1 to 5 people read it, I would feel I had connected with this.

[0:53:03.1] LW: Was there a particular day, or experience that made it real, this idea of sharing it, sharing your experience with other people?

[0:53:12.0] EM: Yeah, there was a conversation. There was a conversation. Somebody who'd known me for a long time kept saying, "There's a book in you. There's a book in you." I was quite intimidated by that. I'd sat in Mexico trying to write this book. I'd been on a creative writing course trying to write this book. My book is rooted in reality. I felt to write a work of fiction would be disingenuous, but there were also people and things I didn't want to bring into the public.

I thought, "I don't think I can write a book." I didn't know how the structure of a beginning, middle and end. I had a conversation with somebody that I really respect who had published some books. He said to me, "Maybe your format isn't a book. Maybe it's a post. Have you seen TEDtalks? Look at those. Maybe it's a talk. Maybe it's a poem. Think about different formats." I just started to write things as a series of stories, like a story about loneliness, a story about social media and how it made me feel, a story about saying fine when I wasn't fine.

[0:54:05.2] LW: Right after that conversation, you started writing these posts?

[0:54:07.7] EM: Yeah. Yeah. Well, not the posts. I just was writing them in a Word document on my laptop.

[0:54:13.7] LW: You didn't really know what you were going to do with that just yet.

[0:54:16.0] EM: No. Then I knew then it was really good to just have this guide, right? Okay, it's just some short stories. It's not about my childhood. It had not led to there. One long linear thing, it's just about moments.

[0:54:29.0] LW: Were you a writer at the time? Would you consider yourself to be a writer, or do you have to learn how to write the stories?

[0:54:33.4] EM: I've written a lot. I just been something that had always been able to write. If copy came in, I could write it. I could see how it would be written.

[0:54:40.1] LW: It was one of your unique advantages.

[0:54:42.5] EM: I think so. I'd written columns in my youth, like social diaries when I was looking at a socialite back in our days. Writing is not an unfamiliar thing to me. I think a good writer loves to read. Reading has always been a bit of an escape and a salvation for me. I think I have a nice use of language. For me, it was also about being a bit self-deprecating and being humble and writing things like a conversation. The language would not be too – it would not be excluding anybody. I would always try and keep it light –

[0:55:12.5] LW: Did you have any other platforms that you were modeling your writing after? These stories that you'd read and thought, “Oh, this was really effective. I'm going to do something like this.”

[0:55:23.5] EM: No. It all just came from the heart. At the same time, I was really frightened because I found social media quite an intimidating place. My aunt, she's an editor and she's been working on a weekly magazine for years and years. I just said to her, “Look, I've got these stories. Could you look at them? I think I'm going to publish a blog.” Firstly, just to make sure that I've written as I say it.

If you're a reader who wasn't in that moment, you may have questions that would need to be answered. She had a good handle on that. She also knows me and what I've been through and was mindful of how I might need to be protected from naming anybody, or just observations I

might not have come up with. She read those stories with me and help me edit them. Then we decided to publish them.

[BREAK]

[0:56:19.0] LW: Did you have any experience with blogs, or with website, or –

[0:56:24.0] EM: No.

[0:56:25.1] LW: - how to find a URL and buy it and add it to the thing?

[0:56:28.3] EM: No. No. I mean, as with my most recent experience with podcast, that I was like, “I’m going to do it now.” Then I was after that, just either asking people questions. Usually, I got the Internet. I’m googling how to do a thing. I found a designer that I had worked with and she had some knowledge of Squarespace, so she helped me populate it.

I thought, “Before I go out there on my own, yes, there was a little bit of me fronting this and leading it and being the voice that would be like, this is my story.” I thought it was really important to show the stories of others, because I didn’t want it being all about me. I knew so many other people had experiences that impacted their mental health.

[0:57:02.5] LW: Right. Because at this point, people are reaching out to you.

[0:57:05.0] EM: Yeah. Well, I’d had a lot of conversations at this point. I knew people who had either lost people to suicide, or people who had lost a parent and had experienced life change because of the grief that they felt, or people that had had addiction problems. I went to them and just said, “Look, you can be anonymous if you want, but I’m doing this thing and I’m going to share my story,” and I shared what I was doing, so they knew that I was being vulnerable. When it went live, it went live with my stories and a collection of others.

[0:57:34.5] LW: What was that like, then you had the blog, everything had helped you, you were about to post it. What was that moment just before? Were you nervous? Were you liberated? Were you feeling excited?

[0:57:46.7] EM: I didn't sleep well in the week before. There were people who knew I was going to do it, who voiced their concerns quite vocally. They were very vocal.

[0:57:56.3] LW: To not do it.

[0:57:57.0] EM: To don't do it.

[0:57:58.2] LW: Because they don't want people –

[0:57:59.2] EM: "You will think – people will think you're mad. People think – "

[0:58:02.7] LW: It will affect your job.

[0:58:03.2] EM: "- you can't work. You need to be careful, you won't work."

[0:58:05.8] LW: Interesting.

[0:58:06.5] EM: "You don't want to go out there and do that." You want to meet somebody again. Somebody else was saying to me, think about your family, think about exposing yourself. These are people that I love, so it was coming from a place of love, but I was finding myself feeling very resistant to it, because I had decided and I've had conversations with my therapist about this. We talked about what the possible outcomes could be. I did everything to protect myself and others. It was annoying, if I'm honest. It was annoying.

[0:58:44.0] LW: Who were your supporters outside of the therapist and your aunt?

[0:58:47.5] EM: Oh, there were many.

[0:58:47.6] LW: Did you have some?

[0:58:49.0] EM: Before I published it, I shared my first stories with a group, a small group of readers. Some friends of mine that were really in my space and some friends of mine that I felt

might have been more cynical, because I wanted all angles. They just cheerleaded me. Friends, there's somebody that I used to work with who I told what I was doing. She cheerleaded me. I was like, "Can I just call it Surviving Sunday?" She was like, "Do it." She gave me really great advice.

[0:59:14.8] LW: Did you think about doing it anonymously at all?

[0:59:17.0] EM: Yeah.

[0:59:18.0] LW: What changed?

[0:59:18.8] EM: At one point, I just think, "How am I going to read the story of somebody and take anything from that?" It's just the way my mind works. I don't know who they are. Yeah.

[BREAK]

[0:59:33.9] LW: What time of day did you publish it?

[0:59:35.2] EM: I think it went live on a Sunday morning. Because I'd always had a love for the Sunday papers, even when I was depressed. Just the routine of just getting myself to that shop and getting the Sunday papers and laying them all out with a cup of tea was my thing. I wanted it to be – People had said, "Why don't you do video?"

For me, that slow moment of reading was important. I wanted it to always feel like that on a Sunday. I published it and I published it, first with a link to my Facebook, so that's where all the people you know and have known over time. There were hundreds of comments. People just saying, "We never knew this had happened to you. You've got balls. You're brave." All those things.

[1:00:12.5] LW: You linked — you shared it to your Facebook page, your public Facebook page. People had to click on that link to get to the blog to read it and then they left the comment not on Facebook, but on the blog itself.

[1:00:24.4] EM: No, they left a comment on my Facebook. At that time, I wasn't having comments on my post. I don't know. I was frightened, but I'd had Facebook. People comment on my Facebook.

[1:00:34.6] LW: Because with Facebook, there's a conversation that can ensue. Whereas on the blog, it's people leave isolated comments.

[1:00:40.2] EM: Yeah, they can and they can come from any world.

[1:00:41.7] LW: They can come from anywhere.

[1:00:43.5] EM: Instagram. I'd started to build a few weeks before, this separate account, which I think had 10 followers. Facebook was where my heartland of friends and people have known and cynics and everybody else who's ever going to have an opinion about you, or has had one and likes you, or doesn't like you, but still there as a friend, was there.

[1:01:02.7] LW: In that first post after you posted it and you started getting comments, did you ever go back and edited, or did you read it a lot of times at first day?

[1:01:09.6] EM: I've never edited my pieces.

[1:01:10.8] LW: Really?

[1:01:12.1] EM: I've read and reread and reread and reread. Unless I've seen a typo, I let them stay there.

[1:01:19.2] LW: Really? You let the typos stay with it.

[1:01:20.9] EM: No, no, no. I take them away. I take the typos out, what I mean is I've let my pieces remain as they were.

[1:01:25.8] LW: You don't change the content.

[1:01:27.1] EM: In that moment.

[1:01:28.0] LW: Right.

[BREAK]

[1:01:35.1] LW: Did you read it again?

[1:01:36.7] EM: I read them. I read something the other day. It's even 18 months, I think now. There's a change between when I launched it and now for sure. There was still a little bit of the inauthenticity in that the way that I first presented it was, "I'm Emma. I had a breakdown. Here's some really awful things that happened to me. Here's how I came through them." I wanted everybody to be, "Now it's all great and I'm healed."

Whereas in this last 18 months, I started to talk about other things, so giving up alcohol. I've realized there's no shame in still saying that. Although, I'm not experiencing depression. I've experienced heartbreak, I've experienced sadness. I'm still in therapy.

[1:02:20.2] LW: Okay. We'll get to that in a second. Let me just ask you one more question. When you go back and read that first post, or if you were to read your earlier posts now, does it seem as though you're still – you're the one that wrote that? Because I noticed it with my own writing a lot of times, I'll go back and read stuff that I wrote a year or two years, three years ago and it almost seems like somebody else wrote it, or I channeled it or something like that. It's an interesting –

[1:02:44.5] EM: It feels like me. It certainly feels like me. I think there's a lot more humor. This one, so I'm really forcing humor in there and that's typical of me with the jazz hands and everything's great. There's a lot of jokes in there. I do try and put humor in now. I think with those first ones, I was mindful of people not wanting to enter it and follow a piece if it wasn't really humorous.

[1:03:05.5] LW: Have you developed a structure around your posts now, where you maybe you keep it to a certain number of words?

[1:03:10.6] EM: When I'm asking for contributions, I ask for them between 800 and a 1,000 words. The one thing I always ask, you don't have to give me a happy ending. You don't have to say that everything's fine now, because I think actually, we're all going through things all at the time. Just to leave something behind for the readers that they can go and apply, whether that's the gift of let's say, meditation, or it could be like, have a conversation with a friend. What can you offer? Make the story honest from your own experience. Other people might have their own view on that moment or experience with you. You tell it as honestly as you believe it happened to you and what really is for the reader.

[1:03:46.1] LW: Because you recognize the impact of being brutally honest, versus not.

[1:03:52.8] EM: I do. Yeah.

[1:03:55.0] LW: Did you have an idea when you first launched about the structure? I'm going to do it every week. I'm going to do it every three days. Am I going to do just my own posts? Am I going to invite other people? Did you know all that when you launched, or you just figured that out as you went?

[1:04:06.5] EM: I knew the frequency and I look back now and I don't know how I did it. I was in a proper job then and I'm publishing every weekend for a year. I think there were three week –three or four weekends I didn't publish, because of summer holidays. I published something every week.

[1:04:23.0] LW: A 1,000 words.

[1:04:24.2] EM: I learned to do that. Not all my posts. I would do, this as a combination of my stories, your stories and then I realize that people were reaching out to me for advice that I was not qualified to give. I then created a network of experts that we put in what we call the Sunday Surgery.

We have therapists, mindfulness teacher, yoga teacher, nutritionists, hypnotherapists that would contribute stories. Then that gave it some credibility, but also you should have a duty of

care if you want to create a community of people that are going to come and look for hope and advice. You need to give that from professionals. I was able to do that with a community.

[1:05:04.4] LW: Do you find that the people who find your site, find your work now, or even back then, do they get the Surviving Sundays meaning, or is it something that usually needs to be explained to people?

[1:05:17.7] EM: If you were to click on 'about', it's there. I don't think people necessarily get what it's about. I went to do a talk somewhere recently. I think they thought it was about hangovers.

[1:05:27.5] LW: Hangovers. How to overcome a hangover.

[1:05:29.2] EM: I thought it was a great joke at the beginning. This is the place to get through your weekend and go over something, you came to the wrong talk. I can talk to about many Sundays where I felt pretty hungover. I don't think they get it, initially. I mean, if I heard it, I'd be like, "What is that?" I would think it's about Sunday fear, which it is in essence, but then you're not going on to write, read post about lots of Sundays.

I think it draws you in. I think you know it's about surviving something when you come there. When you come to the way that I limit the bio on both surviving Sundays and on Instagram, it's tales of self-love and survival, because that's what it's about.

[1:06:03.7] LW: You also have this tagline that you use a lot. It's now been one of your hashtags on your posts. "You are not alone."

[1:06:11.9] EM: Every post since I started.

[1:06:13.4] LW: Right. Tell me more about you are not alone. What does that mean to you?

[1:06:17.0] EM: It means that when you go through an experience, when I was in my darkest moment, I was going through that alone. Even if my best friend came and sat and held my hand, even if I had a boyfriend at the time and I would have been having depression. Many

people have depression and are surrounded by people that love them. You have to go through those deep, dark, horrendous moments on your own. You're at the bottom of the well. You can look up. There can be a basket, or a bucket to come and help you. You have to do this alone.

In that moment, you feel nobody else is going through it out there. You feel ashamed, I'm the only one. The reality is that somewhere under that same sky, somebody is having not the same experience, but very similar feelings to what you're feeling. I think it's really important to me that we start to lift the veil and we stop shaming and we start to come forward and use our vulnerability as a vehicle to help others.

[1:07:16.4] LW: What's a commonly accepted example of shaming people who are having that experience?

[1:07:21.2] EM: "Man up. Man up. People have it worse than you. You'll be all right. What are you crying for? You're very negative. Stop going on about it." It's awful. In this country, I mean, I just saw some recent figures. Last year, there was a big project.

[1:07:37.4] LW: "Snap out of it."

[1:07:38.5] EM: Yeah, there was a project last year, called Project Eighty Four, where statistics showed that 84 men were taking their lives each week in the UK. The numbers this year according to the Samaritans on 94. I think it's 30 something for women taking their lives every week. These are preventable deaths. I don't know all the circumstances, but I do know that we have a huge problem here in the UK with talking about our feelings. We look at people like there's something desperately wrong with them, or they'll never be fixed if they talk about having had a poor experience of their mental health, or going to therapy. It has to stop.

[BREAK]

[1:08:25.8] LW: If you could outline, or maybe you've done a post about this before, but if you could outline a Surviving Sundays kit for someone, what would it include? I'm thinking in terms of maybe therapy, a 10-minute walk a day, going to a park, playing with a dog. What would that look like? Something that most people would have access to.

[1:08:46.8] EM: Walking, absolutely. Those walks are so important. I'm lucky as I said, I live on the edge of a park, the very first walk for me was around my block, but I couldn't get to the park. I just think when you're sat with those thoughts and they won't leave you alone, just to change your scene and feel the breeze on your face, or some raindrops, just to change the mood. A walk.

The most important thing for me has been the ability to identify, to set and to stand by my boundaries. People who are overstepping my boundaries, because I didn't really know that they were there, so how could they know that they were there? It's led to a lot of pain. Difficult when you enforce them, but that's when the real work begins and the rewarding work.

I don't suggest this for everybody, but for me the thing that's helped me live my biggest truth and go on to achieve great things this past year has been the choice to not drink. Reading, a really important thing for me. Journaling. There's an exercise called morning pages, which is from a book called *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron.

This is the idea that we put two sides of A4 paper beside our bed at night. When we wake up in the morning without doing anything, we pick up that pen and just do stream of consciousness writing, letting whatever needs to come out, come out. You put that away, you discard it, you don't sit there, you don't dwell on it. That's been a really important exercise for just clearing the mind. Music. I start every day with a song.

[1:10:19.6] LW: Do you dance?

[1:10:20.3] EM: I dance in my living room. I do. I've got some sound in my house that I can do from my phone. Sometimes I'm just sat in bed with that song. I start every day with a song. And meditation.

[BREAK]

[1:10:39.5] LW: Tell me a little bit about your meditation practice.

[1:10:41.9] EM: That started, really started I would say about now, about six years ago. When I got back on the mat, I started around that time on the advice of my therapist. My anxiety was through the roof. To start practicing and being more mindful of my breath. I went to some classes that were attached to my yoga studio in Notting Hill and went on a course and went on to download an app that I use still today, Insight Timer. I love it. I think it's brilliant.

I've had times in my life where I practiced daily, twice daily, particularly if I've been on a retreat. Every year, I would go on a yoga meditation retreat. Then there are times where it's not happening at all.

[1:11:24.8] LW: You're doing mostly yoga nidra. I heard you say it before.

[1:11:28.0] EM: I love it. Every day.

[1:11:29.1] LW: Right, which is lying down, listening to a guide.

[1:11:32.9] EM: A guide. Yeah.

[1:11:34.0] LW: There's some music.

[1:11:35.1] EM: There's some music.

[1:11:36.8] LW: Does it help you sleep better at night?

[1:11:38.0] EM: Yeah. It knocks me out. Yeah. I mean, like nothing else. I've taken sleeping tablets, when I was having anxiety attacks, not long after my stepfather died. My panic disorder came back and I was really struggling every day and using this app called Yoga Nidra Light for 10 minutes would really, really help me.

[1:12:01.3] LW: Who's your favorite guide, your yoga nidra guide, if you have one.

[1:12:03.8] EM: There's a lady called Jennifer Piercy, who has a lovely soft voice, who gives really nice cues. I struggle to follow some of them. It starts to get like, "And you're in the woods

and there's a bubble and there's too much going on and I can't keep up." Then I'm like, "But how big is the bubble and what color is the bubble?" That's how my mind is. She just works for me.

[1:12:21.5] LW: Okay. Beautiful.

[BREAK]

[1:12:27.6] LW: Where is Surviving Sundays today? Is it just a blog? Is it more? Do you give talks? Do you have a podcast now?

[1:12:34.7] EM: Yeah, I do. You came on as my first guest. It was great. Surviving Sunday is people was – a lot of people, not always, but some people when they meet me they're like, "What's the plan for it? How are you monetizing it? What is that?" Honestly, just the purest thing for me is to be able to have it there.

I don't publish every week. I now publish every month. It has led to opportunities to come in and have conversations in companies, which is great. It's led to conversations with individuals. I've met people like you and the network of professionals that I might recommend to followers extends, because of those really honest, authentic connections that are coming without any transaction attached, any financial transaction attached. I like the purity of that.

I have to live. One of the things that I'm starting to do now is think about things like workshops, retreats, events, looking at how we can bring more of these conversations into the world, but in a way that can really help people beyond just, I guess telling a story. What's the next bit? How can I collaborate with people to give something more than just opening the door, I guess? I've trained as a mental health first aid instructor and I teach a two-day course, where we help people to spot the signs of poor mental health in the workplace and to help in crisis. It's incredibly rewarding.

As I do more and more in this space, I find that my brand works. It used to be about fashion and lifestyle brands. Might now be somebody saying, "Look, we're bringing forward some

non-alcoholic liquor. Could you look at that for me?" I'm just moving in a direction that is more purposeful and ultimately more rewarding.

[1:14:14.2] LW: Right. You're still mostly a one-woman show.

[1:14:16.9] EM: Completely. I do the blog. I have a regular event series here with Soho House that I do, which is on any topic that impacts your mental health, so that's on a Sunday. They're called Self-Love Sundays. I've now just started the podcast. All of these things are outside of my day-to-day job.

[1:14:32.3] LW: You're being recognized throughout the country and maybe even throughout the world as a mental health thought leader.

[1:14:37.7] EM: I guess. I don't know. Am I? I think I'm always really mindful of just – I'm not a professional. All I can share is my lived experience. I like to be really honest about that. There's not a lot of questions that I will shy away from. If that's connecting with people, then I'm really happy about that.

[1:14:56.0] LW: Are you officially a non-profit at this point?

[1:14:58.5] EM: I mean, I'm not making any money.

[1:15:00.5] LW: Have you have you filed papers to be recognized?

[1:15:03.0] EM: No.

[1:15:04.3] LW: Maybe get grants, or get –

[1:15:04.6] EM: No.

[1:15:05.7] LW: If someone want to donate a bunch of money to Surviving Sundays to help it whatever, reach a certain population.

[1:15:10.0] EM: Yeah. I mean, that's not happening. I mean, things that do happen are there are brands that might come forward and say, "Could we buy an hour of your time to do a talk?" Sometimes that pays well. Sometimes it doesn't. If it's offered and they can afford it, I will take it, because then that means I can go and do that thing at a school, or somewhere that can't afford to pay you.

It's not really profitable really, but it's led to then branded projects that are. In terms of charity and philanthropic aspects, I guess the only thing I'm really sharing right now is my story. No, there's no plan to do that, or make myself a non-profit.

[1:15:46.1] LW: What's the best on-ramp to your work with Surviving Sundays? Is it through your Instagram account? Is it through the website? Is it through any videos that are on YouTube?

[1:15:54.0] EM: It's definitely Instagram. Definitely Instagram. There's more things I'd like to do, but as you say, I'm a one-woman band. I did the week, did an event here at Soho House for men and then I was like, "Oh, this is so needed. I want to do a stream of events for men." There's only so many ideas I can do on my own. Then you're looking at partnering with somebody else and can they deliver on it in the same way, in the way, the tone of voice and have the same values as you have? It's quite difficult. Instagram tends to be the way that people find me and my events at Soho House. People then come to –

[1:16:27.9] LW: In London. In London, Soho House.

[1:16:29.2] EM: In London Soho House. Yeah. Then secondarily, they find the Instagram and then they see the website. It's funny, because I talk to a lot of people. They don't always realize that the stories on the website there. They're following my daily narrative.

[1:16:42.4] LW: Right.

[1:16:43.2] EM: Yeah.

[BREAK]

[1:16:53.2] LW: Let's say someone else is listening to this, they've been experiencing depression, anxiety, impostor syndrome, etc., they want – they have an idea for some way to help other people. What do you what do you recommend that they do, or what advice do you have for them?

[1:17:13.1] EM: I think firstly, research. At this moment, there are a lot of people out there having a conversation. I think looking at the ways in which you can do it that feel most authentic to you is really important, but also being aware of what else is going on because you might find collaborators that you can work with, because it was really hard to get this thing going on my own. If you look out there, there might be voices. Now I've recently started thinking about is there a man out there that I could collaborate with, who might be able to speak more to the male audience?

Researching and looking for collaborators is important. Being authentic is really important. I think going after followers is something that people often do, maybe because they like the aspects of having more of a profile, or because they want the message to reach further, but I think if you're just speaking with your truth, people come to you. I don't have loads of followers, but I feel they're really engaged. I think that that's important.

Also, just knowing why you're doing it. Really interrogating why you're doing it. For me, it helped me put a story out there. That was really healing for me. As frightening as it was, it was really healing. It helped me to connect with others. Ultimately, I've achieved my goal of helping others to feel less alone. I have many messages from people who tell me how alone they felt with something and that I speak their language. Knowing why you're doing it, being authentic to that and looking at who else is out there that you might be able to lean into.

You don't have to compare yourself to other people who might have skills that you don't have. You might not be the greatest writer, you might be a great photographer, you might be able to document the stories as a film when there might be people that you can –

[1:18:48.0] LW: Or producer, who can bring all these people together.

[1:18:49.4] EM: Learn from. Yes, I think researching other people in the space is —

[1:18:53.5] LW: What about people who just never feel ready? They have all of the skills. They may even have the resources, but they just don't feel they're good enough, or they're smart enough, or that people aren't going to be interested? What do you tell those people?

[1:19:08.0] EM: I think, take a leap, because you can sit on something forever and we all have regrets. We don't know what's around the corner. Start small. There's a lot of learning in the error of things sometimes. You could put something out there and we just did our first podcast recording the other day. I just didn't even know how to do one two weeks before. I listened to them. I don't know how to produce one. We've done it. It's great. There's things I'll know for the next time.

I think start small and you might get your confidence and the response that you get from just doing a small thing with a trusted audience. My first pieces were read by four or five people that I really loved before I published them to the wider world. You can take small steps. The leap doesn't have to be this big, huge thing that we talk about, the lightning and all of that. It could be just a small step.

[1:19:59.2] LW: Beautiful. I love it.

[1:20:00.4] EM: Thank you.

[1:20:00.6] LW: Well Emma, thank you so much for opening up and being vulnerable and sharing your story. I think it's going to help a lot of people to hear all the things that you've gone through and to lead to what you've created and Surviving Sundays. Obviously, we'll list all of the different references that we pointed to in the show notes, so that people can find them and find different ways. What's the best way to reach you personally? Do you have a personal presence?

[1:20:24.9] EM: Yeah. I mean, people can say hello at survivingsundays.com always. You can find me @SurvivingSundays, the Instagram account.

[1:20:33.8] LW: Okay. Beautiful.

[1:20:34.8] EM: Yeah. I'm really responsive. If somebody messages me, I will always respond.

[1:20:38.0] LW: Well, thank you for being an inspiration and inspiring us to be who we know we can be.

[1:20:43.4] EM: Thank you for having me.

[1:20:44.8] LW: Absolutely.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[1:20:46.6] LW: All right. I hope you enjoyed the interview and got inspired to live your most purposeful life, as well as to help other people who are trying to live theirs. Please, make sure you subscribe to At The End Of The Tunnel, so you don't miss any of our future episodes, where we're going to be bringing more stories about regular people just like you and me who got inspired to start their movement.

If you haven't already rated and reviewed At The End Of The Tunnel, please do so now, so that other people can find these stories. Finally, you can get links to everything Emma and I talked about down in the show notes. In the meantime, keep being the change you want to see in the world and I look forward to seeing you next week.

[END]