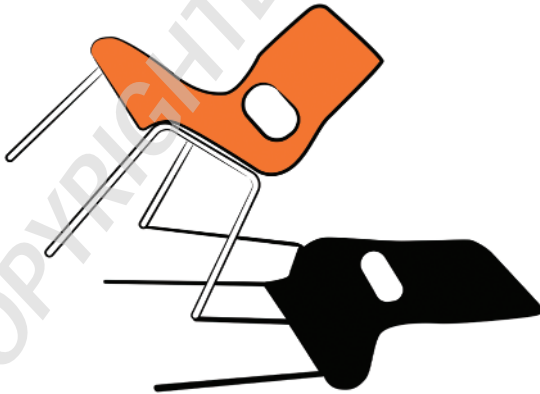


CHAPTER 1

It's Hard to Be a Person



I t's me.

Hi.

I'm the problem.

It's me.

Yes, I just opened with a Taylor Swift lyric. Don't worry though, whether you're a Swiftie or not won't affect your enjoyment of this book. It's not about the song or even knowing who Taylor Swift is. It's the words. Words matter, and these words perfectly capture the essence of what I'm about to share.

My daughter introduced me to Taylor's music, starting with 'Anti-Hero'. For the record (pun unintended), I absolutely love it. Regardless of genre or artist, a great tune is a great tune, and 'Anti-Hero' is *such* a tune!

I couldn't name many of her other songs, but when I heard the chorus of 'Anti-Hero', it was a lightbulb moment. Actually, it was more than that, it was like the entire lightbulb aisle at the hardware store suddenly illuminating.

After years of self-doubt, people-pleasing, seeking validation and battling fear and anxiety, I had a moment.

An 'I'm Taylor Swift' moment?

Not quite . . .

It was more of a 'Fuck, it's me. I'm the problem' realisation.

'We may think of ourselves as static anti-heroes, but in reality we're just waiting for our courage to kick in'.

Justin Alcala

My very next thought was, 'Does this make *me* an anti-hero?' which was then *very* quickly followed by 'What's an anti-hero?', I genuinely had no idea, I'd never actually had to think about it before!

After many, *many* listens, I think Taylor is telling us that she – the anti-hero in her story – is ultimately a nice person with good intentions, but that she has a load of flaws and can, at times, be very, very self-destructive.

Well, if this is the definition of an anti-hero . . .

It's me.

Hi.

I'm the problem.

It's me.

Surely I'm *not* the problem though when kindness is *always* front and centre with me, the fact I want nothing but good in the world, I work hard, I'm

incredibly loving, giving, hugely respectful and I genuinely just want everyone to be happy?

But that right there is the plot twist, even with all those positive qualities, we can still be our own greatest obstacle.

Ultimately, it boils down to this, like actual Taylor Swift, and many other humans, I'm not always good for me.

And that's the problem . . . the problem is me.

This realisation opens up a world of questions: Can we become our own anti-heroes? What does that mean for our personal growth? Are we all walking that fine line between hero and anti-hero in our own stories?

I invite you to reflect on these questions throughout this book.

Are you, perhaps, the Wolverine of your own narrative? Do you have a touch of Maleficent's complexity? Is there an Arya Stark within you, defying expectations?

Trust me, I know I'm already *definitely* overthinking this!

'To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best day and night to make you like everybody else means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight and never stop fighting'.

EE Cummings

Research tells us that all anti-heroes are, deep down, good people. Authentic, independent and courageous, we're told they can offer a refreshing perspective on life. We're told they reject traditional societal expectations and forge their own path. We're told anti-heroes are creative, innovative and unafraid of self-discovery. And we're told they're good at embracing the complexities of their character, even the darker impulses.

Nice, this all feels familiar to me and I'm confident enough to claim I'm ticking *all* the boxes, what could possibly go wrong?

Well, we're also taught that anti-heroes often feel isolated. Unfulfilled, lonely and insecure, we're told they often find themselves in cycles of negativity and stagnation. We're told anti-heroes often have a face that doesn't fit with societal norms and often struggle to accept that this is ok. We're told anti-heroes are often racked with feelings of guilt, regret, often undermining their own feelings of happiness and contentment.

Dear reader, the anti-hero isn't some distant, fictional character. The anti-hero might just be the person staring back at you in the mirror; complex, flawed and beautifully human.

And we're told that over time they experience the consequences of these things, many of which can be detrimental to wellbeing.

Fuck.

It's me.

Hi.

I'm the problem.

It's me.

**‘I feel so alone – no one could
ever understand this feeling’
thought a thousand people,
together, in unison.**

Parm K.C.

This Is How It Feels to Be Me

Imagine you were back in school, about 10 years old and you're swinging on your chair. I'm sure we've all done it. Much of the time I didn't even realise I was doing it. As I sit here reminiscing, I'm actually quite proud of my ability to hit that sweet spot of balance at such a young age. That awesome song (Defying Gravity) from Wicked could have been written for me. Holy shit, maybe I'm Elphaba! Elphaba Swift . . .

Of course, it was against the school rules to swing on your chair. It was all about being able to hold it long enough, teetering on the edge of being a rule breaker or a class conformer. And if you didn't get caught or fall then it was a fleeting triumph in the art of young rebellion.

But swinging on your chair in class isn't all fun and games, is it? It's not all sweet spots and defying gravity (Honestly, such a tune. And film!). I'm not even talking about when you fell and hit the ground, sure that wasn't fun and the teacher was furious, but we all know, don't we, there is only one thing more terrifying than actually falling, and that's 'nearly falling'. Falling sucked, but *nearly* falling? Awful. That horrific moment is unrivalled in life's 'shit yourself' moments!

It didn't last long but it was enough to make you shit yourself good and proper. Not even half a second and your life momentarily unravelled, flashing before your eyes. A lightning bolt of top-rate panic ripping through your entire being. Head to toe.

I have been on some of the world's biggest rollercoasters and yet nothing even comes close to the fear generated by a 'nearly fall'. A teeter to the extreme.

But when you saved it . . . wow!

There is no better feeling than a 'nearly fall' saved. If you were to film someone swinging on their chair, nearly falling, but then saving it, and watch it back in slow motion, it would be like nothing you've ever seen. A ballet of emotions, arms and legs moving in ways not even invented yet. Science wouldn't be able to explain it. Facial expressions we can't even comprehend.

Gravity well and truly defied! And with that moment comes utter relief.

Even with the magnificent relief that follows, as good as that feels, a 'nearly fall' leaves you well and truly shot to shit! That half second of near death takes a good few minutes to recover from.

Now, imagine this . . .

You're swinging on your chair, you swing too far and just before you save it, there it is, as always, your half second of impending catastrophe. Ooft, every nerve in your body screaming with unease. Your heart and lungs leading the way to absolute physical and mental distress.

And then . . . as if by magic, someone presses pause.

On you.

Right in that horrible moment.

Pause.

For four months.

Four.

This too shall pass
(but holy fuck)

You see, anxiety for some of us isn't a little bit of sweating and a racing heart. It's *not* worrying. Adding to the already physical and mental distress, it's a lack of appetite, zero sleep, the inability to sit still, to focus, it's body pain, it's intense loneliness, it's thundering doubts and overwhelming sadness. It's teetering, in darkness, and it's debilitating. It's crippling.

'I don't have anxiety, I have "What-if?" Olympics'.

Anon

Experts often conceptualise anxiety with words/phrases such as 'a multifaceted construct, encompassing emotional, cognitive, and physiological dimensions, with dysregulation in one domain amplifying the impact across the entire spectrum of human experience'.

That last part though; '**amplifying the impact across the entire spectrum of human experience**'.

This. *Exactly* this!

Now let me put in my own words . . .

It fucks me up. And because of this, it affects every ounce of my life; the entire spectrum. That includes the lives of others, those around me, my family and my colleagues. It makes my job damn hard, and I hate what it does to me.

It's quite literally the opposite to hitting the sweet spot of balance in life. My inner ninja, with his remarkable ability to bend without breaking, the very same one that saved me so many times in my formative years from falling, now – in his 40s – has failed me.

Again.

Again?

This is the third huge run-in I've had in the last six years. I've written and spoken many times about my anxiety, it's something I've lived with forever. But this? This was the worst yet, next level. I couldn't leave my house, never been so scared and I've never cried so much in my life.

'Overheard a child at the park today tell his sad friend "It's ok to be sad. Sad stands for Secretly A Dinosaur". Then he let out a big roar'. "That kid is going places."

Matthew Pepper

Some people see anxiety as a weakness, I hope these same people never have to understand the strength it takes to come through it. At my lowest moments, I couldn't see a way back. I questioned how much more I could take. In my darkest moments, I wasn't sure I wanted to fight this fight.

Mental health challenges aren't always at 3 a.m., sometimes it hits you at 3 p.m. in the middle of a meeting. Sometimes it hits at 9 p.m. when you're with your friends and you're halfway through a hilarious conversation, pissing yourself laughing and suddenly you just stop.

Have you ever been so anxious in public that your brain, in all its survival wisdom, suggests, *'Do a fake faint. Right here. Dramatically. Shut your eyes and take the floor.'* I have. Many times. Full-on, Oscar-worthy floor flops feel like the only escape route. I've never actually done it, but in the moment, the sheer absurdity of it almost calms me. Almost.

Anxiety is always feeling like there is something out of place, something wrong. And when you can't find what it is, unfortunately, you start to believe it's you.

'Having anxiety is the most painful experience. It makes no sense, and you sit there alone and suffer for an unknown reason'.

Anon

I had that feeling when you don't even know what the fuck you're feeling. I had to dig deeper than I ever thought possible. Everything I'd learned in the past failed me. All my tools and tricks, nothing was working. I watched everything I could online, read a multitude of books and blogs, re-read all my favourites. Everything I tried seemed utterly ineffective. The 'what if's?' and the 'why me's?' just kept coming, snowballing, getting bigger and bigger.

I did all the things, the journaling, the meditating, the spirit-lifting sprinkles allegedly sourced from Himalayan goat breath (not really). And still, I was knee-deep in lavender-scented anxiety (really).

Unpopular opinion: the wellness industry is not well. Wellness might be the word on everyone's lips, but are we all feeling well? If this is what 'well' looks like, maybe we need to redefine it, because behind the green juices and gratitude journals, there's exhaustion, anxiety and a whole lot of pretending. And pretending isn't healing. It's hiding. All the turmeric in the world won't fix what we're too scared to talk about.

I began to wonder if it might be easier for everyone if I wasn't here.

And then one day, in our back garden, a glimmer . . .

A Glow in the Dark

In its simplest form, a glimmer is a lovely wee something that makes you smile, an unexpected moment that gives you a lift, a little victory that can make your day. A hot bath, the sound of the birds, a massive crisp, a cup of tea, a particular song, a hug, even the sound of the ice cream van.

But, glimmers are *so* much more than that, and to do them justice, they deserve a proper grand introduction, after all, this entire book has kinda been inspired by them, so here goes.

Deep breath . . .

At their best, glimmers are the unexpected bursts of magic that catch us off guard, lifting us from the depths and guiding us towards brilliance. They're the sparks that ignite within us, illuminating paths we never knew existed. In moments of uncertainty, they're tiny beacons of hope, shining through the darkness with a promise of possibility.

Glimmers fuel our creativity, setting ablaze our imaginations with the light of new beginnings. Sometimes fleeting moments, sometimes lifelines, offering joy, comfort, hope and the courage to persevere, glimmers are essential for maintaining resilience and mental wellbeing.

But there's more. Beyond their individual impact, glimmers are the threads that weave us together as a community, inspiring kindness, belongingness, compassion and collective action. In their radiance, we find unity and the power to transform the world.

A bold statement, I know!

'Plunge deep enough in order to see something that is hidden and glimmering'.

Matsuo Basho

But while we go huge with talk of changing the world – based on what you've just read – it may seem strange that we are not talking about great big, life-changing moments. A reminder: glimmers are micro-moments of goodness, they're freshly baked bread, a small act of kindness, a cosy blanket, a smile, a thank you, dogs, cats, or even the single guitar chord that rings out from a dimly lit stage.

A glimmer is a wonderful, calming, uplifting, occasionally inspiring, kick up the ass. It's the moment the sun catches your face. It's a sunkick, a sunkick up the ass!

Taylor Swift sunkicked my ass!

Kicking the Habit

Let me introduce you to the idea of Sunkicks. First, I'll define a sunkick in the style of an actual dictionary.

Sunkick (noun)

1. A brief, yet profound, surge of euphoria and elation experienced in life's ordinary moments, reminiscent of a sunbeam breaking through the clouds on a gloomy day. An instant of pure delight that uplifts the spirit and fills the heart with warmth and contentment.

Example: **'As she watched her child's laughter dance in the afternoon sunlight, she couldn't help but feel a sunkick wash over her, a fleeting but profound moment of joy that illuminated her soul with radiant happiness'.**

Not sure I have a future in writing dictionary entries but in its essence, a sunkick transcends the mundane, reminding us of the inherent beauty found in life's simplest pleasures.

I often describe a sunkick as not being the same thing as a glimmer. A sunkick is more a mindset, it's not just a moment. In the example above, the child's laughter is the glimmer, the result is the sunkick, it's the illumination of her soul. Like any other mindset, it's a choice, you need to be present in order to notice the glimmer, but then choose to let it work its magic.

So, the glimmer is the thing and the sunkick is the outcome? Yes, but you need to embrace the thing fully in order to experience the outcome.

You still with me?

To me, a sunkick mindset asserts that within every individual lies the potential to draw energy and inspiration from the radiant positivity of life experiences. This is about turning the everyday grind into your own personal playground. I like to think of it as the middle finger to mediocrity. Just as the sun infuses the world with warmth and light, so too can we harness the metaphorical rays from our glimmers.

But how do we start, Gavin? How do we get our glimmer on?

We'll get there, I promise!

Weird Science

I ain't no scientist, but a glimmer is essentially the opposite of a trigger. Whether it's the sound of a siren, seeing an old photo or smelling a particular food, our minds can quickly associate these cues with either negative or positive emotions. Triggers are cues that signal to our brain that we are in danger, whereas glimmers are cues that signal safety, granting us permission to let go.

According to Dr Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory, the nervous system plays a pivotal role in shaping our individual emotional and behavioural responses to our surroundings. Central to this regulation is something known as the Vagus Nerve, which modulates our heart rate.

Just as the body combats illness, the nervous system possesses the capability to ward off negative emotions by activating the Ventral Vagus. A glimmer is effectively a brief moment of engagement with the Ventral Vagus, highlighting the body's innate capacity for emotional regulation.

As humans we are incredible. Without even knowing it, we're like the conductor of our own emotional orchestra, conducting an entire symphony of feelings!

According to *The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy: Engaging the Rhythm of Regulation* by Deb Dana, in our overstimulated world, these lovely, warming, contented moments are not just pleasant and comforting, but they may actually be the answer to regulating our overwhelmed nervous systems. Get it right and we're no longer in the school band, we're in the goddamn London Symphony Orchestra!

Whelmageddon

As for an overwhelmed nervous system, my overwhelm was so overwhelming that my overwhelm was overwhelmed.

I'm not entirely sure what the recommended dose of overwhelm is these days, but I'm pretty certain I was scaling new heights and setting records. Maybe someone knows the answer but is any amount of overwhelm actually good for us?

I believe 'as fuck' to be a fabulous unit of measurement, and I am very comfortable sharing that I was overwhelmed as fuck!

On the outside I may appear to some as fairly nonchalant, but on the inside, I am forever utterly chalang, never *not* chalang, like a pro! Someone once told me my biggest weakness is that I care too much.

But, I was triggered and I needed to find out how to *untrigger* myself. There's no quick fix in these situations, I knew it was going to take time and effort. There was so much going on in my head. Huge strength was needed to work through it and find my way again.

Some of you will know what I mean when I say I was dreaming of the moment I finally stop thinking about how I was feeling.

For very different reasons I'd been here before, so knew that I needed to find my 'package' of support that would lift me. It's never just one thing though, and finding the correct formula is exhausting.

My research tells me that the journey of an anti-hero is never just a straight line, it's a wild, unpredictable ride filled with twists, turns and moments of self-discovery.

But there was no journey, currently. Twists and turns definitely, accompanied by familiar feelings of 'here we go again!' coming through strong. I knew I was facing another long road ahead. A long road back to good health and happiness. It was coming, a new journey of self-discovery was about to start.

One problem, I couldn't move, I was stuck.

Dead Letter Office

Have you ever felt stuck? Stuck like you're frozen in time and things just aren't moving or happening the way you'd hoped.

Maybe you're stuck in a job you hate, stuck in a relationship that makes you sad or perhaps, as I was, you're stuck in an anxious or depressive loop that's just going round and round and round.

'When you are overwhelmed, tired and stressed, the solution is almost always . . . less. Get rid of something. Lots of somethings'.

Unknown

Years ago, I read an article about something known as the Dead Letter Office. I had no idea what it was; I didn't even realise it was thing. Now it makes perfect sense, *of course* there is a place that all the undeliverable mail goes to rest!

Basically, it's the Postal Mail Recovery Centre, a facility where undeliverable mail and parcels are sent because they have illegible addresses, outdated information or items that couldn't reach their intended recipients. I can only imagine some of the stuff that ends up there!

It didn't sound particularly exciting to begin with but the more I've thought about it, the more I am enamoured with the idea. And now I think I want to work there!

I'd be like a detective in the movies, rummaging through the evidence, eating doughnuts and drinking coffee, trying to reunite people with their lost packages.

I reckon there are all sorts of connections between the Dead Letter Office and humans. Some of it beautiful, some of it sad.

A place of lost communication. Untold stories. Tales of missed connections. Unfulfilled promises. Love letters never reaching their intended recipients. Apologies left unspoken. News of Joy. News of sorrow.

Dead Letter Offices must be crammed full of mystery, ideas, emotions, fears, hopes, ambition, worry, love, disappointment, opportunity, rejection, fun, possibility, beauty, kindness, anger . . .

All stuck. All frozen in time.

Exactly how I was feeling.

Let me go back to something I said earlier. I love the whole idea of the Dead Letter Office; I would love to work there. I guess the goal each day would be to reconcile and reunite items with their rightful owners or ensure they don't go to waste. And in the process have the privilege to see and even feel some proper special moments!

Maybe I could help others to find *their* 'package' of support . . .

I imagine it takes real effort and patience to process the neglected or unaddressed elements, joining the dots of unexplored emotions, untold stories, memories unspoken or buried.

I was in need of a trip to the Dead Letter Office of my mind. I needed to unpick what was going on in my head, work through my thoughts and feelings, working out why I was feeling the way I was feeling. I had to find solutions, I craved answers.

And of course, as many of us know only too well, it takes real effort and patience to process the neglected or unaddressed elements in our heads too. But if we don't, as I was learning – again – things go wrong.

I knew what had triggered me, but couldn't grasp the extremity of what I was experiencing, I didn't know why I was feeling like this, or where/when I would indeed find the answers I needed. I wondered if I ever would.

But the Dead Letter Office is a place of hope and potential. For rediscovery, for reflection, for what once was, what could have been and what might be.

But I was lost. Deep down I knew I wanted to be full of hope and potential again. I longed to rediscover and reflect on what once was, what could have been and what can still be!

But when you feel broken, it feels unachievable, impossible even.

I think there is real beauty in a Dead Letter Office. The letters, once filled with urgency, now rest in collective silence. Imagine the stories that never unfolded, conversations that never transpired and the connections that were left unmade.

A sanctuary for the unsaid.

Unreal amounts of human connection that is lost in the vast expanse of time and space. And in many ways, it's beautiful.

But it's also sad.

Life, much like the undelivered letters, is an intricate blend of missed opportunities and unexplored possibilities. Many of which we may not have known a single thing about.

The Dead Letter Office for me serves as a reminder of the importance of seizing the moment, expressing our emotions and cherishing the connections we have. And acceptance of it all, even when things feel shit or weird and life isn't going the way you'd hope.

It makes me think about the impact of words left unspoken. If there was ever a time on planet earth we needed more people to talk, to share and to connect, my goodness it's right now.

'If we don't tell people how we feel, how will they know?'

Anon

I guess nowadays, in the digital age, The Dead Letter Office is also a metaphor for the virtual spaces where messages remain unread, emails go unanswered and sentiments linger in the digital ether.

It makes me think I need to try harder to embrace the time I have and the profound significance of the words and emotions I choose to share, both professionally and personally.

Maybe there are things that aren't meant to be said, emotions that aren't meant to be shared but bottling it all up doesn't help anyone. Acceptance is key. Acceptance that this is where you are in life and this is how you are feeling, right now. And in time, things will get better. Things will shift, the darkness will lift and you will find you once again.

Dead Letter Offices don't only serve a practical purpose, the official line is that they contribute to the **'preservation of personal connections and historical documentation'**.

Your personal connections are yours, protect the ones that matter, the ones who love, listen, support, lift and see you. The others? Send them to the Dead Letter Office of your mind. Don't let them get stuck but instead pick through them, join the dots, process those unresolved thoughts and emotions, let them rest and set yourself free.

Your story, your journey. This is who you are, creating your own history each and every day. Preserve it.

Think of your Dead Letter Office as a 'mental greenbelt'. A mental space for processing unresolved matters that allows for emotional release, self-reflection and personal growth. By consciously choosing a healthier mental landscape, we open the door to a more balanced, serene and fulfilling life.

Try and Decide

Decision making is seen as a must-have skill in life and in this bonkers world there are two types of decision makers.

There's my wife, the gunslinger. She makes the decisions so fast you can blink, and you'll miss it. The thing needs doing, it shall be done, now. Not now but NOW!

At the other end of the spectrum, there's me, the flounder. The thing needs doing, it shall be done, another day. Maybe not another day soon, but another day EVENTUALLY!

In my journey through the world of personal and professional development, alongside my own mental health struggles, there's a phrase I've encountered more times than I can count: 'I'm trying to be happy'.

I used to believe, like many others, that the solution was simply to try harder, do more, and happiness would follow. I wasn't finding happiness; I was chasing it. And in my relentless pursuit, I realised I had to shift my thinking. I'd become a happiness try-hard, exhausting myself in every way imaginable. I had to change my attitude.

Trying to be happy is like chasing a rainbow, it seems beautiful, but it's always just out of reach, it's elusive. I kept experimenting with new things, different techniques, searching for what would bring me joy. But the harder I tried, the more I found myself stuck in a loop of endless searching without ever finding.

Then came a game-changing realisation; not deciding to *be* happy, but deciding to *allow* happiness into my life. I didn't decide to be happy, I decided to be positive. I just needed to work it out and get good at it . . . soon.

There's no time to be a flounder when your own happiness is concerned. It's not about waiting for circumstances to change, it's about cultivating a mindset. *Deciding* means committing to positive actions and thoughts, practising gratitude, embracing kindness and focusing on personal growth.

'If you want to make the wrong decision, ask everyone'.

Naval

Sure, in the 1300s, as they tried and tried again, Robert the Bruce and his spider pal embodied the timeless truth: perseverance is crucial. But beyond the struggle lies a pivotal choice, being open to happiness. While *trying* reveals our path, *deciding* to embrace joy transforms our daily experience.

So, I decided to let happiness in. But there was more, it was like the floodgates opened . . .

I decided to be open to help.

I decided to embrace contentment.

I decided to accept my quirks.

I decided to let go of negativity.

I decided to say no to things that make me unhappy.

I decided to say thank you to the people who show up for me.

I decided to let go of people who aren't good for me.

I decided to allow feelings to flow, not edit or judge them . . . just feel them.

I decided to focus on being healthy but not compare myself to others.

I decided to embrace this feeling of being lost.

Choosing to let happiness into our lives empowers us to find contentment in the present and live it every day with gratitude.

After a genuinely unreal experience that seemed to absorb all of me, I decided to work on finding the shit that really matters once again.

I decided to be confidently lost.

Every Brilliant Thing

I love the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. I have performed in it many times and I enjoy nothing more than finding new shows to go and see each year.

In 2023 I saw no shows. None. I couldn't, I was in the thick of my darkest days and I couldn't leave my house.

Fast forward 12 months. August 2024 and feeling so much better, I saw a show called *Every Brilliant Thing*. A beautiful, heartwarming one-man show that explores mental health through the power of hope and humour. The story begins with a seven-year-old boy who, faced with his mother's depression, starts a list of 'every brilliant thing' worth living for to share with her.

What starts as a small gesture, a simple collection of things like 'ice cream' and 'water fights', grows into a lifelong pursuit of joy. As the list expands, so does the boy, navigating love, loss and life's rollercoaster.

This isn't just theatre, it's not just a performance, it's a celebration of resilience. The audience is invited to engage, playing roles in the protagonist's journey, making every performance unique, raw and electric. Through the light of everyday wonders, dancing, laughing, vinyl records, the show masterfully tackles heavy topics like suicide and depression with sincerity and levity.

The genius of *Every Brilliant Thing* lies in its simplicity. At its core, it's about connection. It's about how one person's simple act of optimism can ripple outwards, reminding us that even in our darkest moments, there's always a reason to keep going.

When I was a kid, no matter what bug or virus anyone seemed to have, a bottle of old-school Lucozade (in the orange foil wrapper) and a bunch of grapes were the order of the day. I can remember my Gran telling me there was nothing better.

Every Brilliant Thing for me is effectively mental Lucozade and mind grapes, uplifting and real, a vibrant testament to the human spirit, it's a love letter to resilience, joy and the countless brilliant things that make life worth living.

I feel like I was meant to see this show. I feel like the time was right. I feel like I will be thinking about it for a long time. It confirmed that I was writing the right book at the right time.

Until this point, it was like I had been stuck in a John Lennon song. He sang;

How can I go forward if I don't know what way I'm facing?

How can I go forward when I don't know which way to turn?

How can I go forward into something I'm not sure of?

My dark, lonely path back had been lit by many glimmers along the way. I made a note of them as I went.

Below is the very list that I made on my phone throughout my experience. I hadn't even realised I had been keeping my very own list of every brilliant thing. These were my answers to John Lennons questions. My very own mental Lucozade and mind grapes!

Gav's Mental Lucozade & Mind Grapes

Cuddles	The smell of fresh bread
Listening to music	Trampolines
Potato croquettes	Sorrento
Flumes	The greatest showman
A new notebook	Castles
Billy Connolly	Stretching
Crisps	Freddie Mercury
Laughing	Tractors
Ice-lollies	Balloons
Cats	Bunk beds
<i>Detectorists</i> – The TV show	Bobsleighs

Dim sum	Transformers
Walks with Ali	Scotland winning at rugby
Walks with Kev	Fuzzy felts
Walks with Jason	Stripey door handles
Walks with Ewan	Red squirrels
Sunkicks	The very hungry caterpillar
Fresh bed covers	Scooters
Jumping in to an ice-cold pool on a hot day	Forward rolls
New car smell	Party sausage rolls
Fire pits	Space hoppers
Crayons	Comfy sofas
Good coffee	Cottage cheese
Fresh snow	Lilos
Ordering another starter instead of dessert; starter, main, starter	Scotland
Collecting shells	Kwenchy kups
The smell of Christmas	Sloths
A perfect high five	Toasties
Olives	Heated car seats
Making a cup of tea for Ali	Sesame street
Large pasta	Diluting juice
Swings	Leaf blowers
Hotels	Potato croquettes (not the fancy ones)
	<i>A Place in the Sun</i> – The TV show

Viva Las Vagus!

Glimmer hunting. It's the new Pokémon. Pokémon hunting for mental health. Except you don't 'gotta catch em all!' The odd one here and there is all you need!

Catching those elusive glimmers tunes you into micro-moments of Ventral Vagal energy, the holy grail of groundedness and connection.

I once heard the vagus nerve described as the body's own messenger pigeon, flying between brain and body. When it goes the wrong way, it can be awful, but we're wired to hunt for danger. We need to survive, and safety cues matter too.

The very same nerve that kicks our ass can be the ultimate chill pill. The human body is a walking contradiction, but we can hack into that and make the most of it.

Remember, glimmers are the breadcrumbs of bliss, even fleeting moments can flip the switch on your vagus nerve, telling your body, 'We're alright'.

Small things can light folks up in a big way. It's science backing up the wisdom of 'stop and smell the roses'. It's like our brains are actually programmed for joy, if we'd only let them.

Who knew?

'The comeback is personal. It's an apology to myself'.

Unknown

And that is where the magic happens; joy! Studies show that the relentless hunt for happiness can actually backfire, leaving us feeling empty or isolated. But joy? Joy is raw, immediate and transformative. It's not a destination; it's a spark, a burst, a wild reminder that life is here to be felt, not solved.

Embracing life's micro-joys and celebrating these fleeting moments rewire us to embrace positivity without the pressure of a finish line. And who knows, maybe the clouds and the trees and the flowers love looking at you too.

Sometimes small, sometimes minuscule, glimmers are always lovely. But sometimes, just sometimes, glimmers become an adrenaline shot to the soul and when you catch them, they catch you.

Those, my friends, are some profoundly meaningful words to conclude Chapter 1. Indeed, this book likely owes its existence to seven of them in particular. So, let's honour them by closing this chapter with the reverence they deserve, as if they were the heart of the most mind-blowingly inspirational, utterly life-changing, deeply thoughtful and majestically relatable piece of non-fiction you've ever read.

When you catch them, they catch you.

Glimmer Tracker

Here's the deal. Every day this week, you're gonna spot one thing – just *one* – that makes you grin like a wally, snort with laughter, or mutter a wee 'Wow' under your breath like you've just seen a double rainbow over a Greggs.

Keep it small. Keep it lovely. Keep it daft. Keep it real.

A pigeon strutting like it owns the street? That counts.

A crisp the size of your face? Absolutely.

The smell of toast that reminds you of your gran's house? 100%.

Write it down. Scribble it. No moment is too silly, too weird or too 'what even is that?'

These are your glimmers, treat them as tiny rebellions against the grind. Micro-miracles. Wee bursts of 'still got it' in a world that sometimes forgets its sparkle.

You're not chasing joy here. You're *catching it off guard*.

So go on. Clock it. Claim it. Sunkick it.

One glimmer a day. You in?

Day	My Glimmer	Why It Mattered
Mon		
Tues		
Wed		
Thurs		
Fri		
Sat		
Sun		

