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Third Angel presents

CAPE WRATH

Written and performed by Alexander Kelly

Directed by Rachael Walton



Parts of the text for Cape Wrath are semi-improvised, and allow for, or even invite audience interaction – questions, comment and conversation. For this written text, those sections are based on a transcript of a performance at The Crucible Theatre, Sheffield, 6 June 2014.

The development of Cape Wrath was supported by ARC Stockton, Leeds Beckett University and Northern Stage.

This version of the show premiered at Northern Stage at St Stephens, as part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, 9 August 2013.

Cape Wrath is performed in a minibus – meaning there are usually fourteen or fifteen seats for audience members.

The audience gather at the minibus, where Alex greets them, and invites them in. Alex is wearing a good quality but clearly vintage suit, and has a laptop bag/rucksack on the front passenger seat.

Once the audience are all in the bus, Alex gets in the back with them and closes the sliding side door.

His introduction varies depending on the actual minibus design, but goes something like this:

Okay. Afternoon everyone! Thanks very much for joining me.

Before we set off, just a couple of little bits of housekeeping. I have got the windows open because it gets very hot when the minibus is full. If you need to open the window further, just twist the, kind of little nob thing and the window slides quite easily. If it gets too noisy outside and you want to close one, same thing.

In about a minute's time the minibus might make a slightly disconcerting noise as if you've all been locked in... You haven't been locked in. Other people have been locked out though, that's what's going on. But if it came to it there are these two emergency hammers, if we have to break a window to get out. But it's not come to that yet. I think we'll be alright.

Okay, I think we're about ready. Let's set off.

Takes out Envelope One.

This is to Mrs Margaret Radcliffe, 76 Norman Road,
Walsall, West Midlands, WS5 3QN.

Letter Number One.

Opens the envelope and reads from the letter.

Wednesday the 21st of September, 1988.

He gets a lift with his son, from his home in Walsall, which is in England (not Poland). To Digbeth coach station in Birmingham. Also in England. He waits 'til the

last minute to join the queue towards the coach – the 11am to Glasgow (which is in Scotland) and he's second to last on board.

The coach is full and he does not get a double seat to himself.

He sits next to a man of about thirty and the man tells him that he is a) unemployed b) unable to afford the £6 needed to join the Youth Hostel Association c) going to Glencoe for two weeks and is staying in a bunk house because that's cheaper than a hostel and d) unable to afford anymore bus fares.

The rest of the journey to Glasgow is uneventful, save for the presence of two dogs, one of whom, a West Highland terrier, is clearly up for a bit of bother.

He drinks two coffees in the six hours it takes to get to Glasgow. He shares his sandwiches with the unemployed man.

There are long delays on the A74 around Ecclefechan, as they say.

The coach is late into Glasgow so he has to board the Inverness coach straight away and again the coach is full.

He sits next to an old woman in her 80s who spends the journey smoking extremely long cigarettes, and coughing. The old lady asks him if he minds her smoking. He smiles and says, 'Of course not.'

He eats his apple, banana and Kit-Kat. This coach has no buffet service so he has a couple of swigs from his flask. One outside the Fisher's Hotel in Pittlochry, where he drinks a toast to his friend Harry, and another as he passes Dalwhinnie.

It is a beautiful evening in Inverness when they arrive at 9.30. He struggles up the hill with his haversack to the hostel, and the hostel is full. All 240 bunks.

He's given the address of a Mrs Law who will be able to provide him with bed and breakfast or pass him onto someone else if she is full. He walks for ten minutes and

he finds the house. It is dark. He rings the doorbell, twice. And when Mrs Law answers the door she's wearing a dressing gown. She's not taking people in tonight because she's got to be up early to go to Aberdeen.

After some negotiation they agree that he will be up as early as needed in order to let her do this. She says she won't bother with breakfast and it will only be £5 for the night. She shows him to the bathroom and to a neat downstairs bedroom with three single beds.

She reminds him that she has to be out early. He tells her to wake him as early as she needs to.

At 8.30 the next morning she brings him a cup of tea and some rich tea biscuits. 'Snack time!' she says. And they talk for an hour.

She tells him about the Chinese girls who stayed the night before who had shown her how to write her name, Mrs Law – very common in China - in Chinese characters. She tells him about her 96 year old mother in a nearby home. About her son and grandson, near Aberdeen. About her son and two grandchildren near Derby. About her brother who doesn't do his share of looking after their mother. About her friend who has just moved back to Inverness with her husband after 40 years in England.

He tells her how he and his wife have talked about moving back to Scotland, but with their children and their grandchildren all nearby in Walsall, it's too hard to up and leave.

She says, 'My friend and her husband were glad to get away from all her family down there in England.'

When he leaves at 9.30 he apologises for delaying her. She says not to worry as her husband is still out in the shed doing a wee job.

He likes the house, he decides that he would go back there, even if he had to share that room with two others. He leaves in good spirits and on good terms.

He buys two potato scones and a wholemeal loaf and he rushes onto the train to Lairg where he plans to have a pub lunch.

The train is quiet and when the buffet car comes round he buys a coffee and a packet of Rich Tea biscuits.

In Lairg there's no time for a pub lunch, but he does post a postcard to Margaret, his wife, and then he boards the Durness bus, a new Rapson's post bus.

The bus is full of boxes and bundles of papers, magazines, parcels, mail, which are all unloaded at the post offices they pass on the way through the highland towns and villages.

Indicates the view through the windows.

It's wild, rocky country. Not many people. Lots of sheep. And one other passenger. A girl of about 20 who gets off at Kinlochbervie.

For lunch he has his 2 dry potato scones, 3 dried apricots, 2 squares of plain chocolate and a swig from his flask.

He arrives in Durness just after 5pm.

He walks one mile up the hill to the hostel and the hostel is full, but including him. Sixteen blokes and four girls. Six cyclists all travelling alone and a German girl whose birthday it is. The German girl phones her family but she doesn't get any reply. He gives her a Mars bar and a Durness postcard with Happy Birthday written on the front in biro. She smiles and says thank you.

He waits until the kitchen is less busy, about 7.30, and then he makes himself sardines on toast, ginger preserve on toast and Abernethy biscuits for his tea.

The German girl phones home and she gets a reply this time so she's happier.

At 10pm he sits down and he writes down his travels as a letter to his wife, Margaret. He signs off, TTFN H.

Ta ta for now, Henry.

Puts letter away on front passenger seat.

Produces giant photo – folded up like a map – of a bearded man in full highland gear, holding a hawk. Holds the photo up, speaking from behind it.

Now, Henry Radcliffe was Scottish.

He was born in Glasgow where he grew up and where he met Margaret, who he married in 1945. They started their family in Glasgow, two sons and an older daughter who would grow up to be my mum.

Sometimes the children would go and stay with relatives in Dundee because the house was small. But eventually they all moved to Dublin, in Ireland and then to Walsall in Staffordshire in England. Where their children grew up, had children of their own, and didn't leave.

Looks at the photo.

This isn't a picture of Henry. This is a picture of a postcard that he sent me, at least 8 times during my childhood. Pretty much every summer without fail I'd get one of these. He would always claim it was a picture of him though, in disguise. And he'd always write something like,

Speaking from behind the photograph again.

'Dear Alexander, this is me. Your grandad. I AM THE GREATEST.

Love from Grandad.'

Folds picture away, puts it back in jacket pocket.

He had a heart attack in his late 50s and he took early retirement and after he'd retired, and after it became clear that my Nanny was never going to move back to Scotland - away from her grandchildren - my grandad began what my mum refers to as, 'his jaunts.'

These were solo expeditions back up to Scotland, usually to somewhere he'd not been to before. And I remember him telling me about one of these jaunts really clearly. I was 19, he was 62 and he'd just got back from Cape Wrath, which is the most north westerly point of mainland Britain. The top left hand corner of Scotland, if you like.

We were sitting at kitchen table, which was laden with food as it always was, when there was visitors. My nanny was there and I was visiting with my dad. And this is

the... the story of the journey that I remember him telling me that afternoon.

He'd got a lift into Birmingham with his son, his youngest son, also called Henry. And then he'd got public transport as far north up the east coast as he could and when the public transport ran out he started to hitch-hike. And his first lift was with a postman whose route went past Cape Wrath. So his first lift took him exactly where he wanted to go, but it took ages because the postman stopped at every farmhouse that he delivered to and went in for a cup of tea and a chat. I don't know that my grandad went in for a cup of tea and a chat as well but I can't really imagine that he was left outside in the van.

When they got to Cape Wrath the postman told my grandad he would be back on that road in about two hours time so he could pick him up on his return journey if he wanted. My grandad told me, 'So I went and I sat on the cliff, I looked at the sea and I thought about my life.'

...

And sure enough two hours later, the postman came back, picked him up at the roadside - and my grandad went home.

And after we left my nanny and grandad's that day, my dad said something to me that I've always remembered. He said that listening to my grandad talk about sitting on the cliff and looking at the sea, made him think that my grandad was a man who was happy.

Who was content with his life and everything that had happened in it.

My grandad died in 2007 and when I spoke at his funeral I talked about the image I have of him in my head, sitting up there at Cape Wrath, looking at the sea, thinking about his life.

And after the funeral I kept thinking about that journey and how I wanted to retrace it, re-enact it. To follow in his footsteps I suppose. And so I got out a map of Scotland to figure out how I would actually get there. Now I love maps.

Reaches into backpack and produces an OS map of Cape Wrath.

I don't need much of an excuse to look at a map, particularly a map of Scotland – I'd happily just read the place names.

Looks at audience.

Hang on.

Produces four more OS maps of Cape Wrath. Moves in amongst the audience to distribute them, ending up squeezed onto the back row, or in a spare seat if there is one.

The following section might be something like this:

I haven't got enough for one each but we can probably do one per row I think, if you don't mind sharing? That would be easier. Can I give you two that one? I'm going to squeeze through and if I give you guys that one. If you open them all the way up so you get a sense of... There we are. If you like, share them across the aisle maybe and I'm just going to squeeze in at the back here and share with you...

The maps are all open now, and completely fill the minibus. Raises his voice.

So you'll probably spot Cape Wrath pretty quickly. I'm sure a lot of you are very familiar with this sort of map but just in case you're not - some people are more used to reading maps on their phones aren't they? - the way we can find our way around it is use just like a simple version of the Grid Reference System. So you see the numbers that run along the top and along the side of the map? If you count along the top of the map to, let's say, number 43. And then you count down to 60. You'll find yourself in the middle of Loch Eriboll. That's one of my favourites. Although I heard recently that the American soldiers called it Loch 'Orrible... But some of the place names up here, actually, I like the look of them but I don't know how you would say them. If you count along the top to number 23 and down to 69 you see in that square there, you see the little outcrop of rock.

What's that called?

Audience attempt to guess the pronunciation.

Well there's too much punctuation in it for a start, I think...

But a couple of the places we do need to have a look at, slightly more usefully... If you count along the top to number 40 and down to 68, you'll find Durness. Everyone got that? Yep?

And then one square east of Durness, you'll see Sango Bay. Which has got an award winning beach, and one square west of Durness you'll see Balnakeil Craft Village. Two squares north of the craft village you'll see Balnakeil Bay and if you come two squares south of the craft village and go two squares west you'll find yourself in the middle of the Kyle of Durness and you'll see that there's a ferry route goes across the Kyle, just in the summer. A passenger ferry.

And where it re-joins the mainland, that ferry route, you'll see it's a double dotted line. That means it's a single track road. And that single track road goes through a DANGER AREA and that's because the Ministry of Defence own this land and they they practise their war games up here with live ammunition. You see the Danger Area actually goes out over the sea as well. That's because they're a really bad shot. Or maybe there are submarines involved.

But if you follow the single track road you'll see it ends up at Cape Wrath and in amongst the rocks you'll see a symbol for a lighthouse. The road up there is actually a dead end and actually it's a dead end back at the ferry port. It is part of the National Road Network, it just doesn't connect to any part of it.

So Cape Wrath isn't somewhere you can drive past. It's not somewhere you can be dropped off by a postman who will pick you up on his way back because, where would he be coming back from?

Looking at this map I realised that the story of the journey that my family had always told, was maybe not quite the whole truth. So what I did, is I dug out my Grandad's diaries, which are two big photo albums that

he made up after my Nanny died, that tell the story of their lives together. And these albums, they contain all of the letters and all of the postcards that he sent to her when he was off on his jaunts, and that's how I figured out what the journey that I actually had to recreate was.

So, your job everybody, is to fold these maps up – correctly – please!

Exits the minibus through the rear doors.

Comes back in to the minibus through the passenger door and kneels on the passenger seat facing backwards.

Gathers the folded up maps from the audience.

Are you sure that's folded up correctly? That was unfair of me to leave you with that one on your own. (Etc.)

Audience: I'm still going! I'm still going! I'm there... (Etc.)

Thank you.

So, my trip to Cape Wrath started on the Wednesday the 21st of September 2011. I got a lift with my family to Meadowhall. Or Meadowhell as we refer to it locally. And then I walked across the footbridge, over the River Don and down to the coach station where I was getting the 10.30 coach from Sheffield to Inverness.

The 10.30 coach from Sheffield has actually started in London first thing that morning and by the time this one got to Sheffield it was exactly half full.

Each double seat had got one person sitting in it and everyone was guarding the seat next to them with their bag or their coat. Some people were pretending to be asleep across two seats like that...

Demonstrates...

...and I realised that what I was going to have to do, I was going to have to annoy someone by sitting next to them. By stealing their double seat from them. Then I was going to have to sit next to somebody who I'd annoyed, for possibly 8 hours, all the way to Inverness.

So I stood in the middle of the aisle and I kind of made a bit of a fuss about taking my bag off and taking my coat

off and looking round for somewhere to sit. Thinking that, you know, people would notice that and someone would free up a seat.

But everyone just ignored me and stared straight ahead, and waited for someone else to crack.

So I looked round for the least protected seat and there was a woman who'd just got a cagoule on the seat next to her, so I said, 'Sorry could you just er...'

And she just moved the cagoule without looking at me, without saying anything.

So the coach set off. North up the M1. And after a couple of junctions the coach pulled off the motorway, turned round and re-joined the M1 heading south. And I thought, this isn't the way to Scotland.

And other people were clearly thinking the same thing but er, none of us said anything to each other, we just sat and worried about it on our own. Because we're British.

Then the coach pulled into a service station and there were passengers at the service station waiting to get on the coach. Pedestrians at the service station. How had they got to the service station?

But the driver didn't seem phased by this at all. He just let them on. And then he got off, made a phone call, then he got back on and said, 'Right you've got a 15 minute break here because the next driver is not in any hurry today.'

Unscheduled 15 minute coffee and cake break!

So most of us piled into the services and got supplies. And when people got back on to the coach everyone was, well it would be overstating it to call it a party atmosphere, but people were definitely happier and started talking to each other.

I got talking to Cagoule Lady as we set off and the coach turned round and started going north again. Now, Cagoule Lady wasn't even meant to be on this coach. She had meant to be on the last coach out of London the night before but she'd got to Victoria Coach Station just in time to see her coach disappear through the shutters then she

had to spend the night on a bench in Victoria Coach Station then get the dawn coach the next day.

She was a teacher. She taught English as a Foreign Language and I was really interested in that. I asked her, which nationality finds English the hardest to learn?

She said, "Well that's the wrong question. Because it's got nothing to do with your nationality, it's all to do with your age. It's much easier to learn foreign languages when you're young."

So she teaches lots of children. She runs courses all over Britain and she has children sent to her from all over the world. She told me about this one little boy whose mum had put him on a plane in Moscow, to Heathrow, on his own, and she'd given him enough cash to just get a taxi straight from Heathrow to the course. The course was in Lancaster! A 360 pounds taxi ride! And the little boy was only eight. By the time the taxi driver dropped him off he'd been crying for the last hour of the journey because he was so far from home.

When we got into Newcastle it was Cagoule Lady's stop. I asked her her name. She told me her name was Sandy. I told her my name was Alex. And then we said goodbye.

North out of Newcastle, over the Scottish border, which is marked by Scottish flags. Although, it's also the English border, isn't it?

Into Edinburgh where we had a scheduled 15 minute break. I went looking for espresso, as usual. And when I got back to the coach the big luggage doors were still open down the side of the coach and there were three bags out on the concrete. And one of the bags was mine.

I said to the driver, "That's my bag."

And the driver said, "Is it? Well...we had to take all of the bags off. We were looking for a bad smell. We found the bad smell. But now we're only putting the bags back on when we know who they belong to."

I said, "Well that really is my bag" and he said, "Okay it can go back on."

But then no one else got on the coach after me so I don't know what happened to the other two bags. Maybe they're still there.

North out of Edinburgh, over the Forth Bridge and sunset around Kinross, which was really beautiful. But after the sun had set the coach suddenly seemed like a much less pleasant place to be. It was dark outside, there weren't many of us left and the only lighting was those overhead reading lights, you know that are set into the roof. They're really harsh and you couldn't turn them off.

And I also got a low battery warning on my phone and on my laptop at the same time.

We got into Inverness and I went to find my B&B. Now I had looked to see if Mrs Law or her family still run a bed and breakfast in Inverness, but no luck.

I got into my room and I put all of my electronic devices on to charge. Although I was aware as I did that, that spending a lot of the journey catching up with email and on Twitter and Facebook on my phone, was probably not in the spirit of my grandad's original journey.

He would have read a newspaper, read a book and just talked to people. But he would also have started writing his postcards and his letters quite early on. And if he'd written a letter to me, which I'm sure he would have done, he would have written it in code, with some puzzles in it that I would have had to decipher to figure out what he was going on about.

He was a great puzzle setter, my Grandad. I've got one of his best ones here, actually, that I thought you might be able to help me with...

Produces pencils and quiz sheets on mini clipboards from the dashboard or roof compartment.

I've got enough of these for one each if you'd rather, if you're feeling competitive. But if you're feeling more cooperative then you can work in teams. If you just pass those back and we'll see how many we need.

The quiz sheet is a hand drawn 5 x 5 crossword grid, with 5 clues across and 5 clues down, like this:

	1	2	3	4	5
A					
B					
C					
D					
E					

1. *vegetables*
 2. *sheep*
 3. *birds*
 4. *oceans*
 5. *often dropped*
-
- A. *a tool*
 - B. *a drink*
 - C. *a puppet*
 - D. *a blow*
 - E. *a magazine*

[replace this with photo of sheet]

Something like this:

Do you want to go solo or team? Solo!

Has everyone got one who needs one? I'll give you a minute. Um, I'd start with the acrosses if I were you. I think they're slightly easi... less difficult than the downs.

Has anyone done it yet? Has anyone got any answers at all?

Audience: I've got one answer.

Have you? What answer you got?

Audience: Number two down, flock.

I told you to start with the acrosses didn't I? I'm afraid flock is incorrect.

Audience: Is one across Punch?

One across, a puppet. Punch. Yes, correct!

Audience: I was way off, I'd got Sooty.

Sooty is actually the most popular answer! But Punch is the correct one.

I'll give you an extra clue 'cos one of them is a bit unfair because the magazine is out of print now...er...it's a satirical magazine called Punch, yeah. Named after the puppet in fact.

Audience: They're all Punch.

They're all Punch?! A drink...well a drink is punch. A hole punch. And a blow is punch. Punch for all of the acrosses! But no, no, hang on. How does that work for the downs? What kind of crazy talk is that? Because for vegetables you'd have a load of Ps. For the sheep you'd have a load of Us. Birds are Ns. Oceans, Cs. That's not technically correct is it, the ocean seas one? Geographically speaking, that is incorrect. And the H is often dropped from the 'ens!

Well that was pretty, you did pretty good then after the first clue that was pretty fast you two. Winners on the front row.

I need the clipboards back and the pencils but if you want to keep the quiz sheet and torment your friends, that's allowed. Just don't tell anyone else in Sheffield the answers until, until after tomorrow night.

Gathers in the clipboards.

So the next morning I walked down into the centre of Inverness. Over the footbridge across the River Ness and down to the bus station where I was looking for the 804

from Inverness to Durness, which is the longest bus route in Britain. Five and a half hours stopping bus service that goes from Inverness right across the west coast to Ullapool and then north to Durness.

The bus itself wasn't much bigger than this, it was already waiting at the bus stop. The driver was in his seat and he just waved me on 'cause he was chatting to someone. There was another guy on the bus, a guy in his sixties dressed in tweed, very dapper. And I sat on the second row and I could hear some of what the driver was saying in his conversation and I heard him say to the other guy,

"You know what Les? He died."

And then the strange thing was, the guy he was talking to didn't say that he knew anyone called Les and didn't ask how Les had died. He just carried on talking about whatever else they'd been talking about, the timetable changes or something. So the driver tried again. He said,

"Yeah, that Les. He died."

And the other bloke still didn't acknowledge that he knew Les and he just kind of finished what they were talking about and wandered off and I kind of felt sorry for the driver because he'd obviously wanted to talk about it. But then he turned his attention to us, me and the other passenger. We both bought a £26.50 return to Durness, and then we set off.

Exits the minibus via the passenger door, comes round to the drivers side and climbs in. Perches up in the driver's seat, facing the audience.

So, the 804 from Inverness to Durness. It's the longest bus route in Britain. Five and a half hours. And we ran exactly to timetable. Because no one else got on or off the bus for the entire journey. And the driver talked to us all the way to Durness.

As soon as we pulled out of the bus station he pointed out the window and said, "Look that's just the first of the many rainbows that we'll see today." And he was right.

He told us that the first leg of the journey, which is west out of Inverness, that's his least favourite bit of the journey because that's just mile after mile of wilderness.

We talked about Tesco towns, which are Scottish towns where Tesco has built a supermarket on the outskirts and slowly the town centre dies. The problem's much worse, he says, in towns with a low crime rate because the empty shops don't get vandalised so it takes much longer to see the damage being done.

We talked about the price of meat and how people should just get used to paying the price it costs for meat to be produced shouldn't they?

We talked about our kids. He has a son and a daughter, I've got two girls.

We talked about the driver's accent which is Aberdeen via Australia.

We talked about the Brummie who was on the bus the day before and so we also talked about my accent which is a Black Country accent and how that's very different to a Brummie accent. And that's very important distinction. If you're from the Black Country.

We talked about the Panini Van that was waiting for us at Loch Inver where the driver was planning to have his lunch, so I started planning to have my lunch at the Loch Inver Panini Van as well.

We talked about Bonsai Islands, which are the islands you see in the middle of Scottish lochs that are really overgrown, rich with foliage and they are home to certain species of plants that only grow on those islands because there aren't any sheep to eat them. And because they're so overgrown, the trees on them, they grow smaller than full size so they look like bonsais.

When we got into Ullapool over on the west coast the driver said, "That's it. That's the last of the arable land. The last of the land affected by people."

In Ullapool we got a 15 minute break. It was really raining so I just ran into the ferry port looking for coffee and there was a big flat screen TV in the corner showing

the weather forecast but with the sound turned off so a bunch of us gathered round the TV trying to understand the weather forecast just from the pictures.

Turned out not to be that difficult actually. It was going to rain. And rain. And rain.

Back in the bus, north out of Ullapool and the driver said, "That's it. We're leaving Tesco territory now. Now it's Spar country all the way to the north coast."

We talked about how in Scotland now, all of the road signs are written in English and in Gaelic. Even around Caithness. Which is weird isn't it? Because they never spoke Gaelic in Caithness. They spoke Norse in Caithness. "Why aren't the road signs in Caithness written in Norse as well?" The driver wanted to know.

By this point I had explained to the driver where I was going and why and he said,

"Well, brilliant. If you get to Cape Wrath and you meet the woman who lives there, ask her if the story about the turkey is true."

And I said, "Errrr...what? Woman who lives there? And what's the turkey story?"

And the driver said, "Well there's a couple who live at Cape Wrath and the story, locally, or in the north of Scotland at least, is that the previous Christmas Eve she'd gone out to buy their Christmas turkey, it had snowed, she got stranded and she didn't get back for Christmas day."

And I said, "That is brilliant! I will ask if I meet... I mean it probably wasn't brilliant for her at the time but it's a brilliant story and if I meet her I will ask her."

When we got to Loch Inver the Panini Van wasn't there. The Panini Lady was on holiday for the week. Garage sandwiches all round. Rubbish.

That last leg of the journey the main road sort of winds up north, up the west coast of Scotland but the 804 itself has to turn off the main road a few times and go down

into the little towns or villages, to their one bus stop, turn round and then go back and re-join the main road.

The driver said a lovely thing. He said that what he'd like to do, one of these summers, is come back in his car with his family and drive the bus route, but take all of the turnings he's not allowed to take when he's driving the bus.

Despite the weather forecast, when we got into Durness it was a beautiful sunny afternoon. The driver didn't bother with the bus stop, he took me to the door of my hostel. So I went to check in.

Exits the minibus through the driver's door, and comes back round and gets into the back through the sliding side door.

Now I actually had to check in, in the hotel next to the hostel, because they own it. But then I went through to the hostel and I'd got a dorm to myself so I could choose whichever bunk I wanted so of course I chose the top bunk closest to the window. But I put all of my stuff on the bottom bunk underneath just to stop anyone else choosing that in case they arrived while I was out, so I would have a double bunk to myself.

And then I thought I'd got for an explore, as it was a nice day. There was a guy in the hostel doing maintenance work, although weirdly this guy looked exactly like the guy who checked me in the hotel half an hour earlier, but just wearing overalls. Anyway he said, "If you go west you'll get to Balnakeil Bay and that's worth seeing."

So I set off walking and after about a mile and a half I got to Balnakeil Craft Village, that you'll remember from the maps. And this is a set of World War II bunkers that have now been converted into artists' studios and furniture restorers and a very nice coffee shop called Cocoa Mountain. It's called Cocoa Mountain because they also sell artisan handmade chocolates, made in an open kitchen on the premises. I always think it's important to support independent local businesses so I bought some artisan handmade chocolates, and a double espresso, and they were very nice. But by the time I'd finished eating them, it had started to rain.

So I decided to walk back to the hostel. But by the time I got back to the hostel it had stopped raining so I carried on walking east and I got to Sango Bay, with its Award Winning Beach. I know its got an Award Winning Beach because there's a sign on it that says AWARD WINNING BEACH.

And then it started to rain again, properly this time. And I was practically blown back up the hill 'til I got to the hostel and I got so wet and so cold, so quickly, that I kind of got a bit hysterical with myself in the street, laughing out loud at myself at how ill prepared I was for this weather.

When I got back into the hostel I discovered that I had forgotten to pack: any water proof trousers, or any teabags. Beginner's mistake.

I took all of my wet clothes off and I hung them in the drying room and I went and put on my pyjamas even though it was only 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

Two guys had arrived while I was out though, Bob and Tim, and they made me a cup of tea, bless 'em. Bob and Tim were there to recce a cycle ride they wanted to do the following year. The following summer they were going to cycle from Cape Wrath all the way down to Dover for their 65th birthdays. They'd already done Lands End to John O'Groats twice, bit bored of that one now. I told them about a guy I'd heard about who'd cycled from the southern most point of Britain to the eastern most point, to the western most point, to the northern most point in a big zig zag and Bob laughed and said, "We'll do that for our 70th!"

Bob also told me that, that day, the Cape Wrath ferry hadn't run because of the weather. The Cape Wrath ferry runs twice a day usually, over the Kyle of Durness. Once at 11 in the morning and then again in the afternoon. But if they can't run it in the morning because of the weather they don't bother trying to run it in the afternoon. So I'd basically got one chance the next day to get across the water and get to Cape Wrath. So I went to bed and I lay in my top bunk, which was very close to the corrugated roof...

Drums fingers on the inside of the roof of the bus.

...and I listened to the rain. And it was still raining at whatever time I finally got to sleep.

But in the morning, it had stopped and it was a beautiful sunny day.

I went through to the kitchen to find that Bob and Tim had gone but they'd left me a neat pile of six teabags on the counter.

The weather forecast though was still saying rain and storms were coming, so I phoned the ferry people to find out if the boat was going to run. They said there's no way of knowing in advance because even though it's only two miles away, the weather at the Kyle of Durness can be completely different to the weather in Durness itself. The only way to know for sure is to be at the ferry port at 11 o'clock and see if the boat runs.

I'd got plenty of time so I thought I would walk to the ferry port and I would go and get myself some water proof trousers on the way, just in case. So I went down to the Spar General Store and Post Office, which is run by a guy who looks exactly like the guy who'd been doing the maintenance the day before. I think this one bloke just does all of the jobs in Durness, I don't know what everyone else does for a living.

He'd got one set of waterproof trousers left and they were too small for me... but I thought better to be safe, better to have an overly snug pair than none at all. So I bought them but I didn't put them on because it was a nice day.

I set off walking but after after a mile, inevitably I suppose, it started to rain. And I thought about that first story of my grandad's journey where he'd hitch-hiked and I used to hitch-hike quite a lot as a student and I also knew that anything coming past me would also be going past the ferry port so I thought it was worth a try so I put my thumb out

Puts thumb out.

when I heard something coming and the first thing was a big white 4 x 4 and as it got closer...

Indicates through the windscreen.

...I could see that hanging from its rear view mirror there was a pair of white frilly knickers.

Slowly lowers thumb.

I kind of lost enthusiasm with my thumb a bit and I didn't mind when they didn't stop.

The next thing though was a little white van with just the driver in it, and I thought that's a banker that that is, so I put my thumb out.

Thumb back up.

Have any of you done any hitchhiking? Yeah? Okay well you'll probably recognise this. If you haven't done any hitchhiking, there's a gesture that drivers do to hitchhikers that means, 'I've seen you. I've seen that you've seen me see you and I want you know, or at least think, that I do usually pick up hitch-hikers but I can't pick you up today, even though I've got an empty passenger seat, because of this really good but complicated reason I've got.'

This is the gesture in case you ever need it.

Demonstrates the gesture, which is raising a single finger from the steering wheel to point at the hitch-hiker.

Packs a lot of meaning into quite a small movement I always think. The wonder of communication. That's what the driver did to me anyway, and he just sped past. And by this point I was properly, properly wet again and I know from experience that once you're wet you don't get a lift. They don't want you in the car once you're wet. So I took a short cut through a very wet field, past some very wet sheep, down to the ferry port.

Now, I'm calling it a ferry port but what it actually is, is a little wooden jetty that goes out over the water and at the top of the jetty there is a rain shelter like you get at a bus stop and the rain shelter was completely chocka-block full of people dressed head to toe in really expensive looking water proof clothing. They'd even got these little water proof coats for their backpacks.

I'd got this!

Produces laptop bag from front seat.

Which although it is a back pack, it's actually a laptop bag and it's not water proof, it's absorbent!

Even though my jeans were already wet I thought I better put my water proof trousers on. My new water proof trousers. Which were too small for me and they're not my first choice of colour, or pattern I have to admit.

Produces a pair of small, camouflage patterned waterproof trousers from the bag. Starts to put them on, over the suit trousers.

I wasn't completely unprepared though, I do have a waterproof coat and it's quite a good one. But it happens to be green. So once I'd got these on, I basically looked like a badly prepared survivalist.

But once I had struggled into these, in the rain, the interesting thing was, the waterproof people all shuffled to the side a little bit and made room for me in the rain shelter.

Moves in amongst the audience and squeezes into a spare seat or onto the back row.

And once I'd got into the rain shelter that's when I realised that parked up next to it was the little white van that hadn't given me a lift! And it would turn out that the guy driving that was going to be our minibus driver! It's his job to give people a lift! And I was one of his customers!

Parked up next to him was our ferry man and he got out of his car and he walked past the rain shelter and he was cursing God for the weather as he went past. He went down onto the jetty and he got into this little red plastic boat that he took out onto the water and he swapped that for a slightly bigger blue plastic boat, and as he brought that back to the jetty it stopped raining. And it was so windy that the clouds just cleared from the sky in a matter of minutes and we had a beautiful morning.

No-one had said anything to us but me and the waterproof people, we shuffled down onto the jetty and

then half of us got into the boat, 'cause the boat isn't big enough to take everyone for the minibus in one go. Half of you go over and then half of you wait, then half of you have to wait over there while the boat comes back and gets the other... If that's your business, you get a boat big enough to take everyone for the minibus in one go, don't you? And the other thing they need to get is they need a ticket booth. Because they can't sell you your ticket before you get in the boat, they wait 'til you're in the boat and you're half way across the water in an open top boat in a howling gale and the guy who's meant to be driving the boat starts selling you your tickets. Paper money for paper tickets! That is a disaster waiting to happen that is.

I refrained from sharing my business acumen with them though. I just shut up and got in the second boat. I was last onto the minibus and I sat in this seat here, right at the back and then the driver set off at quite a pace up that single track road and he obviously fancied himself as a bit of a tour guide because he'd got a lot to tell us. He said,

Not acting, exactly, and not doing a Scottish accent, but speaking as the minibus driver...

"Right so the first thing you need to know today, the good news, I suppose, is that the Ministry of Defence aren't firing so I don't have to dodge any ammunition shells on the way. The other thing you need to know is about pronunciation. We're going to Cape Wrath. A lot of people call it Cape Wroth and they think it's because the sea's angry or something like that but it isn't. Wrath is a Norse word that means turning point. It's the place where the Vikings realised they couldn't get their boats any further around Scotland and they had to turn round and go back. Cape Wrath means the place where you turn round and go home. You see these ruined buildings, they've all been painted with a black and white check pattern. That's to help out the American air force because they really are a terrible shot. And this bridge, this bridge we're about to...this is a temporary bridge that they built about 25 years ago but I'm sure, I'm sure it's still strong enough to take the minibus so...it was fine yesterday. And those cliffs over there, over to our right, they're the highest cliffs in Britain. Yeah I know you all thought it was

Beachy Head in England but the highest cliffs in Britain are up here in Scotland. And this lighthouse, the Cape Wrath lighthouse, this was the last staffed lighthouse in Britain but now it's automated, just like all of them.

Stands up amongst the passengers, and points the directions as if the minibus is facing north.

Before you get off the minibus there are some things you need to know. Directly west of here there's no land until Canada. Directly north of here there's nothing until the Arctic Circle. Directly east of here, well there's a little bit of Scotland, but after that there's no land until Norway. When you get off the minibus please remember that the cliffs are very high, the wind is very strong, the grass is very slippery when it's wet and: there are no railings. Please be very careful at the cliff edge because I would like to take all of you back to the boat."

And then he told us that he would give us our tickets when we got off.

Moves back to the front of the minibus. Opens the sliding door and stands in the doorway.

Now everyone else got off the minibus and they just kind of milled around by the side of the door for a bit, or they went straight into the café to get a cup of tea. But I ran straight up to the lighthouse and took photographs of it and I ran round the lighthouse and took photographs of the big red foghorn that's round the back, no longer in use. And then I climbed down into the structure underneath the foghorn which is about as far out over the cliffs as you can get...

Hangs out of the bus for a moment.

...and I took photos of the views directly north and directly northwest. And then I realised that what I was doing, is I was running around documenting the experience of being there rather than having the experience of being there. I thought about my grandad. And I went and I sat on the cliff and I looked at the sea,

Indicates the sea.

...and I thought about how far down it was and how it was quite windy up on the cliff and how I was actually a bit frightened. And I decided to go in to get a cup of tea.

Everyone else had come out of the café by this point so I went to the hatch at the end and I asked the guy for a cup of tea.

Uses the open door as the the café hatch.

And while he was making it a woman came through into the kitchen bit and you know when you can just tell from how people are with each other that they don't just work together, I could tell these two were a couple and so I said,

“Sorry... but do you live here?”

And the woman said, “Yeah we do. There used to be seventeen families on this peninsula and a little school, but now it's just us.”

A bit in awe...

And I said, “What's it like? Is it brilliant?!”

And the woman looked at me and she said, “Well, it has its moments.”

Then I took my cup of tea outside and I looked at the sea from a safer distance, felt a bit less scared. But then we had to get back on the minibus almost straight away and set off.

Slams sliding door shut.

And as I sat at the back and we pulled away I could hear the conversations that the other passengers were having and that's when I realised that, that woman was Turkey Woman! And I'd forgotten to ask her about it...!

...

So I cheated. And I looked her up on the internet that night.

Removes waterproof trousers during this next bit.

And it's true. The previous Christmas Eve she'd set off to get their Christmas turkey, she'd gone all the way to

Inverness to get it, for some reason. I don't know why she had to go quite so far. But on her way back from Inverness it started to snow. She got back as far as Durness but by then the snow was too deep, too heavy, and she couldn't get across the water. So she stayed at a friend's house that night and the next morning she sort of ignored the fact it was Christmas day and she waited for the snow to melt. But it didn't melt. And *six days* later a local news crew heard about her story and they offered her a helicopter ride home!

Which she didn't take. Because she's afraid of flying. And the snow didn't melt for another two weeks. So she didn't get home until the middle of January, but when she did get home, that's when they had their Christmas dinner, with the turkey that she'd brought back from Inverness and kept in her friend's freezer.

I sat at the back of the minibus and I ate my sandwiches and I kind of felt a bit deflated. Because I'd been looking forward to going to Cape Wrath for three years... and it wasn't there in the future anymore.

And sitting at the back of the minibus I realised that what this was, more than anything, was an act of remembrance for my grandad.

So I decided that what I would do that evening is, I would go and find one of the bars that I knew he'd had a drink in, in Durness and I would drink a shot of his favourite whisky for him.

Reaches into back pack.

Now, I don't like whisky. I don't really know very much about it, but I do know that my grandad's favourite whisky was...

Produces a half bottle from the bag.

...Famous Grouse. And I also know that whisky aficionados aren't very impressed with that because it's a blend not a single malt? Although I don't actually know what that means.

I really know so little about whisky, I've only discovered recently that whisky with a 'y' is scotch and whiskey with

an 'e-y' is Irish. All of my life I've just thought I've been spelling it wrong. The other thing I know is that a Scottish measure of whisky is a bit bigger than an English. I think I'm allowed to go somewhere between the two, being half and half.

Produces a fairly posh looking whisky glass from the bag. Then something like this:

Are any of you whisky drinkers?

Very enthusiastic!

Well you might have to guide me as to what, I dunno, such an enthusiastic whisky drinker, that's the wrong person to ask.. "Yeah, fill the glass!"

Audience: "I don't know what a Scottish measure is." "Two fingers!" etc.

Does that look like it...is that a good whisky?

The whisky is poured. We can smell that it is real whisky.

Agreement is reached as to how big a shot he should drink.

Replaces bottle in bag, holds up glass so the whisky catches the light.

So this is the joke that I told at my grandad's funeral.

The Romans are guarding Hadrian's Wall and one afternoon, on a hill just north of Hadrian's wall, a piper appears and starts playing the bagpipes.

The centurion thinks that's a bit cheeky so he sends two of his soldiers to go and sort the piper out and he watches as they go up the hill but the piper sees them coming and he disappears over the brow of the hill and the two Roman soldiers follow.

Five minutes later, the piper reappears, starts playing the pipes again.

So the centurion thinks, that's a bit odd and he sends six of his men to find out what's happened. And he watches as they go up the hill, the piper sees them coming, disappears over the brow of the hill and the six roman soldiers disappear after him.

Ten minutes later, the piper's back playing the pipe so the centurion sends twenty of his men and the same thing happens and by now the Centurion is furious so he sends the rest of his garrison and he watches them charge up the hill, the piper sees them coming, disappears over the brow of the hills and all of the Roman soldiers follow.

Twenty minutes later the piper's back playing a jaunty tune on his pipes and one Roman soldier reappears, clearly mortally wounded and he staggers down the hill, down to Hadrian's wall, and he gets to the centurion and he says,

Hamming it up a bit.

"Centurion... centurion...

...it was a trap...

...there were two of them."

That's the short version of that joke.

My grandad could spin that out for half an hour if you let him.

You know, in, in all but one of my memories of my grandad he's bigger than me. Taller and broader. This used to be his suit. When I first borrowed it when I was 19, it was way too big. It's still too long in the leg, see I have to wear it turned up – he didn't. I seem to have filled the jacket out a bit as I've got older but mainly around the waist rather than the chest.

But in my last memory of my grandad, he's smaller than me. Smaller than himself.

He was unshaven, which was unusual for him. And he'd stopped getting out of bed. Too much effort by this point.

I don't know why but I feel I should be able to say that I knew, I understood at the time, that this would be the last time that I saw him alive. But I didn't.

Cheers Grandad.

Drinks.

Coughs.

It's always like, two seconds where you think, it's going to be alright this time. Then you try to breathe.

I might be slowly acquiring a taste, but only very slowly.

Takes Envelope Two out of inner jacket pocket. Reads, still holding the whisky.

Letter Number Two. 22nd of September, 1988.

He sleeps on the bottom bunk in a room with three others, all lone cyclists going their separate ways the next day. And although he rests he doesn't sleep too well. Sore legs and an over active brain keep him from a sound sleep.

The next morning he's last to rise. Tea, two boiled eggs, two slices of toast and Robertson's Ginger Preserve.

He does his job, wiping down six tables and 36 chairs. He sets off for Smoo Cave. He buys a loaf of bread on the way. It's quite a climb down to Smoo Cave and back up again but it's worth seeing.

He walks back the $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile past Sango Bay. He visits the Sango Bay Hotel and he sits in the bar looking out over the cliffs to the blue sea, having a rest and a medicinal.

Drinks.

He begins writing letter two, but he doesn't finish it yet, he presses on. Through Durness to Balnakiel Craft Village, a concrete single story war time camp site, now white washed and flower planted. He picks up a leaflet detailing all of the activities offered and he notes that people live here too. He considers that it's going to struggle to survive.

He visits the Far North Hotel. An unlicensed family run hotel with lots of books for children. He drinks tea in the sun lounge with a view of the mountains. He reads some of Wainwright's Scotland. It rains outside.

He reaches Balnakeil Bay. There are spots of rain and bursts of sunshine and there are amazing single and double rainbows. He tries to photograph them.

He's two and a half miles from the hostel but he has no choice but to stagger back. After one and a half miles he falls over the step of the Sango Bay Hotel at 6pm and he takes fortification.

Drinks.

Then he resumes his journey. He thinks about cheese on toast on the square loaf that he's been carrying around with him all day. The hostel is much quieter tonight. He talks to the girl whose birthday it was yesterday, he estimates that she's 18 or 19 or 20. She's been travelling alone for three weeks and he asks her what her parents think about that.

She tells him that she'd started travelling with a friend but the friend had been called home unexpectedly and so she had a choice to carry on, on her own, or go home too.

She tells him that her sister used to work in Aberdeen and her mum had visited her sister in Aberdeen, they'd both travelled around a bit and they all thought she would be alright on her own in Scotland because they all liked it so much.

And that's the end of that story.

He has toasted cheese sandwiches with a scraping of tomato puree, a pint of milk, a pot of tea and two squares of plain chocolate.

Would anyone else like two squares of plain chocolate?

Birmingham's finest...

Produces a giant bar of Bourneville from the bag. Cracks it and opens it.

Bars are so big these days you might get more than two squares.

Can I just give you that and er, pass it back.

Audience: Thank you, etc.

Takes out Envelope Three.

This is from Letter Number Three. 24th of September, 1988.

On Saturday morning he's up early but there's no one around. He cleans the cooker tops and the warden makes him a cup of tea. He's short of time.

He gets the 8.30am bus from Durness to Lairg in order to get off at the Cape Wrath ferry point. The driver is a man of 65 to 70, who looks just like Popeye but without the pipe.

Demonstrates what this looks like.

He's constantly chewing away at nothing as he has no teeth and from his driving he obviously fancies himself as another Sterling Moss.

It's 9am and the ferry isn't until 11. He goes for a walk along the hilltops and he finds an old fort. At 10am he goes to the Cape Wrath Hotel, which confusingly isn't at Cape Wrath, where he orders tea, toast and marmalade. To his surprise it's beautifully done and he enjoys it very much. Although he's sure the unsmiling waitress says £1.40, she gives him £4 change from a £5 note. He's only got 4p in change so she doesn't get a tip.

He charges down to the ferry point. There is a sudden blustery gust of rain which sorts the men from the boys. Needless to say he is one of the men smirking from inside his waterproof coat, waterproof trousers and waterproof boots. The boat is low in the choppy water and the crossing takes 15 minutes until they arrive at a small, slippery, rocky pier. They pile into a mini bus. It's a 30 minute, hell for leather, twisting run along a deep, rutted track. The Cape Wrath lighthouse is an imposing sight. They are allowed out for 30 minutes...

...

...and then they are back on the minibus for the return journey.

On the shore of the Kyle of Durness he sits on a sheltered rock and he eats a lunch of two thick Orkney oat cakes, Canadian hard mature cheese, Brazil nuts, dried ready to eat apricots and yes, two or three squares of plain chocolate. With sun and showers it is a splendid way to spend a Saturday.

At about 5pm the bus from Lairg to Durness picks him up at the roadside as arranged earlier. It drops him at the Sango Bay Hotel where he falls through the door for a medicinal.

Drinks.

He walks the mile up the hill back to the hostel which he finds completely full. Two Chinese men and one Chinese woman, a new German girl, a German couple, two Londoners, three Australians, one Tasmanian male, two ladies of 65-70 years old and two ladies of 50-60, who he guesses are from Glasgow.

Progress, he thinks. The old and the female are taking over.

On Sunday he's last up. He makes a breakfast of porridge, boiled egg and toast and he does his job cleaning all the sinks and the worktops.

It's a beautiful sunny day and he sets off east along the cliffs. He climbs back up to the Smoo Cave Hotel. It could be open, he thinks. He might get a drop of the Grouse, who knows. It is, and he does.

Drains glass, puts it aside.

A young couple come in. An Asian man with an English girl and although not a deathly silence, he does notice that all chatter in the hotel bar ceases and it's very quiet as they finish their lunch of soup and sandwiches.

They leave straight away and he follows.

It's started to rain and it gets heavier.

He climbs down onto the beach looking for shelter but you can never find a cave when you need one.

He finds a slab of rock though, jutting out from the bottom of the cliff, resting on a boulder. He lies under it and he gets out his survival bag (at last!) to cover his legs.

Half sitting, half lying, he eats a lunch of two oatcakes, cheese, Brazil nuts, dried apricots and plain chocolate. Delicious.

He sits and he looks out to sea.

He thinks about his life.

...

It will take him an hour to walk back to the hostel.

He'll do his hostel job that evening to allow for an early start the next day.

He'll get the 8.30am bus to Lairg again.

Then the 11.35 to Arjay on the Wick to Inverness route.

After an hour's wait at a service station he'll pick up the express coach to Inverness.

In Inverness he'll find a pay phone and he'll telephone Mrs Law and he'll arrange bed and breakfast for the night.

I asked my mum about the fact that my grandad didn't stay in Durness for very long.

She said, "He never stayed anywhere for very long. It was the travelling that he liked."

On my last morning in Durness I went to visit the last couple of places I knew my grandad had been to. I climbed down to Smoo Cave, and back up again. It's worth seeing.

And I went and found his hostel, which is still a Youth Hostel Association Hostel, but it doesn't open in September anymore so I hadn't been able to stay there.

As I was packing my things they were cleaning my hostel from top to bottom because they were expecting a wedding party. A surfer's wedding on the beach the next day.

The photographer was very excited. "There's a storm coming."

At 3.15 I found myself at the bus stop outside the Spar General Store and Post Office, waiting for the 804 from Durness to Inverness. It arrived on time, and it was the same driver.

We didn't get to talk as much on the way back because the bus was actually quite busy. Eight passengers. And

four of those eight passengers were a Canadian family who had got on the 804 in Inverness that morning, come all the way to Durness, got off and had their lunch then got back on the same bus for another 5 hours back to Inverness. "It's a day out," they said.

And it is only 5 hours on the way back, actually, the 804. It's half an hour quicker because the driver gets less breaks. And also because, he explained to me, on the way back the 804 gets into Ullapool at 5 o'clock and if you have a 15 minute break in Ullapool at 5 o'clock everyone goes to the chip shop and then they all get stuck in the queue and the bus is delayed because it has to wait for everyone so it's only 5 minutes in Ullapool on the way back, but we got in two minutes early and one guy made a break for it, got over the car park to the chip shop, got himself a fish supper, got back to the bus in time and we had to smell his chips all the way home. That's not fair, it?

When we got in to Inverness I went round to talk to the driver.

I asked him his name. The driver told me that his name was Alan. I told him that my name was Alex. And we shook hands and we said goodbye.

And that's us about done.

When you get off I'll give you your tickets but before we do that... I wondered if we could just tell each other our names?

The audience take it in turns to say their names.

And I'm Alex.

Goodbye.

Opens the sliding door and lets the audience out. As they leave, each audience member receives an individually numbered 'ticket' for the Cape Wrath minibus.