

## Square Peg podcast

### Part 7: Purpose

<https://www.squarepegpodcast.com/part7>

### Transcript

*NOTE: Square Peg is intended to be heard, not read. If possible, please listen to the audio, which relays feeling and tone not captured by the transcripts.*

[car sound]

FRANK: Germany, when you mention Germany, the Germans, the second world war and all that crap, well, to me, my image was a dismal, cloudy, dirty, dark, horrible place to be, in Berlin. But when you actually get into Berlin, it's a bloody beautiful place.

ROB: Oh there it is, there's the Brandenburg---

FRANK: Yeah.

ROB COLLINS (narration): After our morning with Dr. Linden, Frank and I rested a bit and then headed out to do some sightseeing. We had largely been in the western part of Berlin, about six miles from the city center. So we headed east, towards where the Berlin Wall had once stood. I hope to bring down another wall.

ROB: If it's something that you want, if you're open to some kind of a reconciliation like we talked about with Dr. Linden, if John could say, "Yes, I did this. I'm responsible for it. I didn't mean to destroy your eye." Maybe you're never going to be friends--

FRANK: Let's put it this way, I know something that nobody else knows for sure. But I know that I haven't got long to live. Now in the light of that, with what you've said and what you think and what's going to happen, I really-- When you say about reconciliation, what is the point? What is the point?

ROB: Well would it give you any--?

FRANK: What it would do, not that I'm a spiteful bastard like him, what it would do if I said nothing now, at least he will know when I've gone, that if he has got any feelings and a heart, he will probably mentally suffer because he didn't say cheerio and he didn't say sorry before I went. He can then live with that the same as—

ROB [chucking]: Does that give you pleasure, to think of him after you die, having regrets?

FRANK: Well, I won't know about it but I can, in me dying breath, I can at least think to myself, "Well, he can-- hopefully he'll have a bit of a shit ending to his life too."

[laughter]

*Jesus.* Revenge by death. This might be more difficult than I thought.

[music]

This is Square Peg. I'm Rob Collins. Part 7: Purpose.

Frank and I are walking around the Brandenburg Gate, next to where the Berlin Wall once stood.

ROB: You know, in a way, Frank, it's actually poetically appropriate that we're walking around Berlin when we're talking about you and your brother.

FRANK: [laughs] It is, yeah.

ROB: Because you've got the possibility of reunification, you've got division, I don't know.

FRANK: What do you want me to write in the book?

ROB: [laughs]

FRANK: I was walking through this place in Berlin and a voice said to me, "You know what? This is a sad memory of a war that shouldn't have happened, so go back home and say sorry to your brother." Bullshit.

ROB: He'll say it to you. Let's walk down towards where the wall was, I think.

[pause]

FRANK: We'll get there, we'll get there eventually.

WOMAN: Are you going to have a yard waiting for us when we get there?  
[laughs]

A few minutes earlier, Frank had struck up a conversation with two middle-aged American women.

ROB: Where are you all from?

WOMAN: California.

WOMAN: And you?

ROB: I live in Virginia but I'm doing a radio podcast story about this man from Northern England.

WOMAN: Oh, cool. Well, we will have to know the podcast so we all know.

WOMAN: We'll have to spend a day hunting the internet for a podcast by two gentlemen in Berlin on April 18th, 2018.

FRANK: April 18th. Hey, in three days' time, I'm going to be 55.

WOMAN: It's the 19th.

ROB: Sunday is Frank's birthday, he's turning 23.

FRANK: I don't like celebrating birthdays. It's a reminder that you're getting old and I don't like that. I should have been dead two years ago.

[laughter]

FRANK: No, seriously. I had bowel cancer, liver cancer, now I've got lung cancer. I'm basically peddling time.

ROB: All right, we better cut it off there because if we go longer, you're gonna start showing her your scars and I don't think she wants to see that.

[laughter]

ROB: Bye-bye.

FRANK: See you, take care. Bye.

We move on. But about 30 seconds later, one of these women runs back up. She says she has a birthday present for Frank.

WOMAN: I have a birthday present for you. Just in case you don't know what your purpose for life is.

FRANK: Thank you very much.

WOMAN: Happy birthday.

FRANK: Yeah, well, cheers.

WOMAN: Cheers.

FRANK: Thank you very much. Bye.

ROB: So let's say what just happened. This woman from California just gave you a birthday present. It's a little booklet called "What on Earth Am I Here For?"

FRANK: Ah well.

ROB: I think it's a Christian publication. She's trying to evangelize to you. So this is also maybe a little on the nose but we're having this big discussion about your life and about your relationship with your family and here in the middle of Berlin, this American woman hands you a booklet that says, "What on Earth Am I Here For?" Fate. Fate, my friend.

FRANK: Fate, fate.

[music]

I'm not actually sold on the whole fate thing, but I gotta say, this does feel like a special moment. Maybe even a sacred moment.

I mean, it's all *probably* random, just haphazard chance. Everything from the typo that brought Frank into my life, to this woman from California who gave Frank a birthday present in Berlin. But even if that's true, that there's no divine power or fate or God that's making these strange things happen, even if it's all just meaningless coincidence, I'm still struck by this moment. *What on earth am I here for?*

I used to think about this kind of thing a lot. Why am I here? What's the point of existence? As I've gotten older, I've more or less accepted that there's no way to know. You try to be kind to other people, do some good work, find a team to root for, and hope for good health and a long life. If you're lucky, like I've been, you have some good relationships, and some fun along the way. There may not be some transcendent purpose, but it's not so bad most of the time.

But now, I'm not so sure. Maybe I'm on earth to bring together two estranged brothers in their seventies. And help a man who may be near the end of his life meet his grandchildren for the first time. And maybe that could inspire others with broken relationships. That's a pretty decent purpose for life.

All of a sudden, I'm feeling inspired. I wanted to change Frank's life, but it seems like my life is changing too. What started as curiosity about an alleged crime has somehow led me here. To reevaluating who I want to be as a person.

[music cue]

The next day, Saturday, we return to Scunthorpe.

ROB: I'm trying to say here's where we are, you turn 71 years old tomorrow.

FRANK: Don't remind me. [laughs]

ROB: I'm sorry. Tomorrow is your birthday. You're worried about potential growth in your lungs. You're worried about your health. Going back to what Dr. Linden, what we talked about in terms of-- Again, I don't want to push you on this, it's your life. But you're estranged from your brother, you're estranged from your grandsons.

FRANK: But I have been for years, Rob.

ROB: I know, but I have a new piece of information I think, that could be helpful for other people to know about you. That you potentially have traumatic brain injury, which if they perceive....

I go on to say that, rightly or wrongly, there may be less of a stigma concerning brain injury versus mental illness, and that Frank's family may feel more sympathetic toward him if they knew. They *have* to. But this time, I can't go behind Frank's back. I need him to want this too, or at least be open to it.

ROB: I'm not predicting we are going to have a happy ending in this story where you're going to be best friends but if there's a possibility for at least to have some closure and for him to understand a little bit more about you for you to hear the words, "I'm sorry," that could be helpful to you and, of course, it would--

FRANK: It would-- Do you know what would give me pleasure and relax my mind a lot? For him to stand up in public and say, "This is what I did to my brother and I want to tell him and everybody listening that I am so sorry." That would say, I'd say, well, that would do.

ROB: Okay, would it be okay with you if I gave him that opportunity on audio to do that?

FRANK: I've just told you.

OK, so that's what I'm looking for. I wanted Frank's permission to try to broker peace with John, and now I have it. But there's one more thing that I need to tell Frank.

ROB: And the other piece though I want to bring up to you is what Dr. Linden said as well is with your grandsons primarily. He pushed you on, yes, why aren't you in their lives? You've got these great stories, you could be a figure in their life and it's personal and it's--

FRANK: That was a touching story, that.

ROB: Yes. So the last piece of information that I got, and you may know this already but you may not, I learned that at least one, that John is the godfather of one of your grandsons.

FRANK: My God.

ROB: I heard that and I almost choked up. That breaks my heart.

FRANK: Breaks my heart. The enemy, the enemy is a bloody godfather, to my blood. That's bullshit, innit.

ROB: But you're estranged-- you've never met these boys.

FRANK: Don't know 'em.

ROB: You don't know them. If I can be helpful in at least helping you establish some sort of relationship with them, I would love to do that.

FRANK: Can I envisage?

ROB: Because it would be so good for you.

FRANK: No. That's what I'm going to say to you. I envisage, it's natural... [fades down]

Frank hems and haws, but basically leaves the door open, even though he's afraid of being rejected. We wrap up, and I hustle back to my hotel. I need to make a phone call.

[phone ringtone]

RECORDING: Hello. We are not available now. Please leave your name...

ROB: Hello. This is Rob Collins. I'm calling for Mr. John Carver... I've just come back from bringing Frank to see a specialist in Berlin. It's a long story why we ended up there, but the basic question was, "what's wrong with Frank?" And I

have some answers and some new information that I'd like to share with you. I'd love to meet with you in person while I'm here if that's possible. If it's not, I understand... [fades down]

John didn't call me back that night. The next day is Sunday, April 22nd, Frank's 71st birthday. I go over to the house to celebrate a little, hoping my phone will ring, but it doesn't. And unfortunately, I'm scheduled to fly home early tomorrow morning. I needed this to be a relatively quick trip for work and family reasons, but I wasn't expecting for all of this to happen. I mean, it's Sunday, I can't really expect for John to be available today.

I briefly look into extending the trip, but I just can't. I've got a video shoot on Thursday, and while my wife isn't the type of person to tell me I *couldn't*, I know it would not be good for my marriage to stay in Scunthorpe hoping that I can get an old man to apologize to his brother. I could be here for a long time. So, I return home.

ASHLEY: I think it's fine that you do this over the phone, or long distance.

This is Ashley, my co-producer.

ASHLEY: John will probably be even more willing to talk over the phone. But even if he doesn't, we're good, we have our ending. We found out what was going on with Frank, and he's started to grow a little, which is great.

ROB: Yeah, but I really don't feel like he's a whole lot better off than he was before. He's so isolated.

ASHLEY: But he doesn't have to be isolated. He can call up his family and tell them that he has brain damage.

ROB: I mean, I guess he could, but I just can't imagine him doing that, partly maybe because of the brain damage—

ASHLEY: Oh Rob, he's not an invalid! He has free will and free choice. And that is his decision about whether or not he wants to call them or not, or get in touch with them.

ROB: Sure. But I feel like if I don't tell John and the family, they will never know. If nothing else, for them. I mean, it'll be good for them to know why Frank is the way he is.

ASHLEY: I think you need to mind your business.

[laughter]

ROB: Why start now?

[more laughter]

MARY KAY: I think Ashley's right.

This is my wife, Mary Kay.

MARY KAY: I think this is Frank's choice now. You've given him so much information, and so many opportunities, and now it's up to him.

ROB: I know, but I feel like I'm almost there. If Frank can just hear the words "I'm sorry" from his brother, then I think he'll be in a position then to decide what he really wants to do. I think he needs to hear it first.

MARY KAY: I know you think that, and I know you want that, but at some point you're gonna have to let go, to let go of the outcome, let go of this particular ending that you have in mind, and trust that---

ROB: [sighs] I know. I know.

But not *quite* yet. I get some news that makes me even more determined. Frank went for a medical checkup to scan his lungs, and it's not looking good. The tumors are growing, by about 10% every three months. That apparently is pretty fast. They offered him chemotherapy, but Frank decided against it. He told me that he preferred to feel fit and well given his shortened lifespan. He got the impression that chemo could extend his life, but of course you know the side effects. I would probably do the same thing at his age.

And it makes me sad of course, but also gives me a sense of urgency to try to bring about some kind of reconciliation with John. I don't know how much time I have. It's been over a week, and I haven't heard from John. So I mailed a letter trying to explain why I wanted to talk to him, and a week or so later, John called me.

ROB: Can you hear me?

JOHN: Yes, I can hear you clearly, yes.

ROB: Thank you very much for your time, and I'll be as brief as I can... [fades down]

After a minute or so, I tell him about Berlin and Dr. Linden's diagnosis, that his brother suffered from traumatic brain injury.



ROB: It helped me at least to potentially understand Frank a little bit better when some of these things that I can't make sense of, to know the part of the piece of the puzzle might be actual brain damage. Is that something?

JOHN: Umm, I wouldn't be convinced of that, to be honest. He's been the way he is for all his life really.

Not a great start, but I'm determined. I try to persuade him. I say I can send him a copy of Dr. Linden's evaluation, but John is not moved. So then I try to pull on his heartstrings. I tell him about Frank's lung cancer.

ROB: The doctors haven't given him a timeline, but based on the measurements of his tumors in his lungs, it's not likely that Frank will live more than another year. He doesn't have any symptoms now, but within the next six months he's likely to start to begin to have those symptoms.

JOHN: Yeah, well anything like that is sad.

ROB: It is, and it would just be my hope if there was a way that I could help—You know, I don't have any fantasies that this will have a happy ending in the sense that the two of you will become reconciled and be friends. No, I don't think that's going to happen.

JOHN: No.

ROB: But if there's a way that I could, even just in a recording, of you saying to him what you would need to say to him, before he dies. Do you know what I mean? That you're sorry that this happened to him. If there's a way I could help before he dies to bring him, just to play that for him. To have you tell him that. I don't know if you're willing to do that or would do that—

JOHN: I know what you're saying and I understand absolutely. But after all we've been through all the years and particularly what happened a few years ago when the police are knocking on my door. As far as I was concerned, that was it. That was it.

ROB: But knowing that he may have brain damage and that he has lung cancer and that he's probably not going to live very long, is there any possibility that you would, even just right now on the phone to me, say some sort of message to him that I could play for him? Because I got the sense from you that after all this time you didn't wish him ill. You don't hate him. You just--

JOHN: Oh, absolutely not.

ROB: Right, but do you know what I mean? Is that something you could say to him?

JOHN: Well, not at this moment in time, no.

ROB: Okay. All right. I think it would just mean, and again, I know this is asking a lot... [fades down]

I keep talking, trying to convince him, but in the end...

JOHN: Look, leave it with me and I'll think it over and if I decide to go along those lines, I'll give you a call.

A few weeks go by. John doesn't call.

[break]

AMY: John really wasn't saying no, even though he hasn't communicated with you or gotten back to you.

I visit with Amy Rose, my friend who's a therapist and social worker, who you've heard from a few times. One of the things I love about Amy is that she's an optimist.

AMY: I would be surprised if there wasn't something in the future, you might have to call again or something, but I just felt like he wasn't actually saying no, and maybe that's my hope or me just projecting that but—

ROB: I do feel like he was *not* saying a lot. And so I just wonder if a lot of his, or some of his reluctance to record a message for Frank is just fear for himself. Frank denies it, but I'm pretty sure that Frank has made John's life very difficult over the years, and he's gotten to a place where he's cut off all contact, hasn't spoken to him, and the idea of opening up that box, the fear of what that might bring. Now, he didn't say that, but I just wonder if that's behind some of his reluctance.

AMY: Well, it certainly makes sense given everything they've gone through together.

ROB: So it's probably naive of me to think that I was going to come in late in their lives and effect some structural change when there's been layer upon layer of things—

AMY: Yeah, but that's what we're all rooting for. I'm still rooting for that. I think that's part of the beauty of a story that it's not finished. Even though it seems like it's a tragic ending if Frank doesn't get to have some kind of connection with

John, what really struck me about Dr. Linden was when he normalized or affirmed and reframed that Frank's a fighter. That's in his nature, that inability to say no, the soldier in him, that's his essence to the core of him. And so, maybe not trying to take that away from him is the happy ending. Maybe that's allowing him to be who he is and to live his life as he sees honoring his own code of standing up for himself, which is what no one his family, according to him, ever did.

Maybe Amy's right, but this isn't the happy ending I was hoping for.

I also reached out to Frank's son, Clint. I wanted to tell him about Frank's diagnosis of brain damage, and the discussion with Dr. Linden about the grandsons. But Clint wasn't interested in talking to me. He also apparently didn't want to have anything to do with Frank. Which means that he doesn't want his sons to either.

That could seem harsh, but I've heard stories from several people that Frank was a very difficult father. Even though Frank can be rather endearing now, I get the sense from him and others that there were many dark years, with lots of heavy drinking. Frank uses Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde to describe himself, and maybe it's Kiki's influence or just the general mellowing that comes with age, but he's now mostly Dr. Jekyll—that's the good one. But the long spans of Frank's life dominated by Mr. Hyde have left a mark that's not easily erased.

So I don't blame Clint, or John. I do kind of blame myself for thinking that I could pull this off.

[music cue]

ROB (on Skype): I was hoping that John would record a message for me for the podcast that he would say, "Yes, I'm sorry." Then I could play that for you. Then maybe, even if you never spoke to each other again, I was hoping that you could at least hear each other's voices. I don't think right now that's going to happen, but if that's the case, I wonder, the next question for you is, if that doesn't happen, how have you felt this whole experience, has it been good for you? For me to become involved and to--

FRANK: Of course, I've thought about it. It's good to have you as a friend. I've enjoyed your company and I've enjoyed what you're doing, I've got the hang of it to a point. And I'm thinking I really hope this goes somewhere and does some good.

I have no idea how this podcast will do any good for other people. And after all of this, it feels pretty anticlimactic for the end to be Frank feeling affirmed as a fighter who cannot tolerate the word "no."

MARY KAY: Rob, you have been so obsessed with finding a good ending to this.

That's my wife, Mary Kay.

MARY KAY: And it is so out of character for you, because you walk around in life accepting life, and are not typically challenged. There's just so much that you've accepted.

ROB: Yeah, I'm generally pretty good about the whole "accept the things I cannot change" philosophy. But I don't know, something about this.

MARY KAY: It almost seems like Frank has rubbed off on you.

ROB: How so?

MARY KAY: I mean, the whole "square peg" thing

ROB [laughs]: Oh, so like I'm the square peg?

MARY KAY: Well, it sounds like you're trying to make something fit.

ROB: Oh shit. You're right.

To refresh your memory:

BETH: There is no such word as "can't." When there's a will, there's a way. Yes, you can fit a square peg into a round hole.

Am I turning into Frank?

[music cue]

A month or two goes by. Then I get this voicemail.

FRANK [voicemail]: Hi Rob, it's Frank. I've had news from the hospital, it's not good. We're looking at the end of March.

This was early February, 2019. Frank was told he had until the end of March—to live.

FRANK (on Skype): That camera's off.

KIKI: No—yeah, it is off.

FRANK: So if I put it on—

KIKI: Well, it should work.

FRANK: Turn video on.

ROB: There you are, I see you now. Frank, you look great, you don't look like someone who's about to die next month.

FRANK: I don't know where the hell to start because it's such a story. Basically, I'm at a point now where I believe, I believe, that I will go. I also believe— The doctor said, you could go on a bit further. With your constitution, you seem to be able to just push. I said, well I've done it all my bloody life. I just don't give in, I won't give in.

[music cue]

ROB: I have a question for you, and I hope this doesn't sound too morbid.

FRANK: Go on.

ROB: What do you want your funeral to be like?

FRANK: I want to get ditched in the North Sea in a fish box.

[Kiki laughs]

ROB: But you're gonna have some kind of service, wouldn't you?

FRANK: What for? I believe in fate, and that's what's been my life is fate.

ROB: Yeah, but we have to come together, and people who knew you have to have a little ceremony to talk about you.

FRANK: At my funeral-- Rob, I really don't know.

KIKI: I will need your help for that [laughs].

ROB: I would love to help with that. I'm thinking like Westminster Cathedral, down in London maybe?

FRANK: Bullshit!

[laughter]

FRANK: You're taking a piss, you are.

ROB: And I'm also going to write to Elton John, I'm gonna get Elton John to sing at your funeral. Remember like he sang at Princess Diana's, that "Candle in the Wind" song? He's gonna rewrite it for you.

FRANK: That'll be a good one. I'd call it "Pissing in the Wind."

[laughter]

I sort of expected Frank to keep pissing in the wind for quite a while. But just a week or so later, I get this voicemail.

FRANK (sounding very weak): Hi Rob, it's Frank. I'm having a hell of a job. Things have got much worse.

I call him right back.

ROB: Frank, what are you doing, what's going on?

FRANK: Well, I've got nothing left to do. And I honestly feel like going to shut my eyes, and they'll never open again. I'm in a hell of a state, Rob.

ROB: I can hear that, and I'm so sorry. I'll do everything I can to get over there to get to see you. I do want to see you. But is there anything?

FRANK: No. There is no sense in you coming here, because I honestly, honestly believe I will not be alive when you arrive.

ROB: OK.

FRANK: So that's finished, but your work hasn't finished. It's all here, for you to do what you want, when you want, feel free. OK?

ROB: I will. So, Frank, you rest and...

FRANK: Thanks for ringing, Rob. I think the world of you like a brother.

ROB: I want to tell you the same thing, that getting to know you over these past few years has been one of the greatest experiences of my life, Frank—

FRANK: Okay.

ROB: And I'm really grateful to you for all you've done in opening up your life to me, and I think the world of you.

FRANK: And I do you too. So, let's say ta-ta for now, and if you miss me then I'll see you in heaven. OK?

ROB: All right, Frank.

FRANK: Give my love to family, hope Dad's OK. Cheers, Rob, ta-ta, mate.

ROB: Bye-bye.

Frank said at the end there, "Hope Dad's OK." He's referring to *my* Dad, who's about Frank's age, and has been having some pretty serious health issues too. I'm touched, and surprised, that he remembered my father. I mean, that kind of thoughtfulness isn't especially remarkable for most people, but this is Frank Carver, who some might call a bit of a sociopath. And here, probably on his deathbed, this small act of empathy.

But Frank holds on. He is a fighter. I check in every day for a week or so. I can tell he's in a lot of pain, but he wants to hear my voice. It seems to mean a lot to him when I call.

Because Frank is *not* surrounded by family, as I hope I will be when my time comes. He's got Kiki, and one other person who comes to see him, a woman named Sharon. She lives across the street, and has been a friend to Frank and Kiki for some time. I met Sharon briefly on a previous trip, and she seemed like a kind person. But that's it for Frank, just those two.

FRANK: Hello?

ROB: Hey Frank, it's Rob, can you hear me?

FRANK: Oh hell. Yeah, carry on, Rob. Carry on. I'm not too good, honestly I'm not very good at all. He said you're just gonna have to hang on the best you can, until you die. And that's it. I don't know any more.

ROB: Ohh.

FRANK: But yeah, I'm not far off.

ROB: Hey, can I tell you something that might bring a smile to your face?

FRANK: Go on.

ROB: So, you remember how you met me because you were trying to contact Rod Collins?

FRANK: Yeah?

ROB: So I tried a couple of times over the years to get a hold of Rod Collins, because I thought it would be interesting for the podcast to talk to the person who you were trying to reach.

FRANK: Yeah?

ROB: And I could never get a hold of him, but finally a couple weeks ago I did, by email. I asked Rod, I said, “Rod, could we talk on the phone? Cause I’d like to interview you really briefly, I think it might be interesting for the podcast to hear *your* voice, you know just to hear, “I’m the guy Frank was trying—”

FRANK: Oh yeah, yeah...

ROB: OK, but here’s the part that you could never make up in a million years: Rod told me he was sorry, but he could not do that, because he has paralyzed vocal cords and he cannot speak.

FRANK: Oh my God—I don’t believe it!

ROB: Isn’t that the strangest thing? Of all the things, trying to do this podcast and want to talk to a guy and he would talk to me, but he can’t, because he cannot speak.

FRANK: Oh my God, that is so, so—just incredible. I can’t believe that, you know. I really can’t.

ROB: I know.

FRANK: It’s incredible. Anyway, my friend.

ROB: All right, well you try to rest, and I hope—

FRANK: I’ll try. I’ll dream about you.

ROB: I’ll do the same. And I’ll keep calling you, and—

FRANK: I’ll try my best, my mate.

ROB: All right.

FRANK: All my best to you.

ROB: All the best to you.

FRANK: Thank you very much.



ROB: Thank you, Frank.

FRANK: Ta-ta. Bye.

Frank died a few days later, on March 26th, 2019, three weeks shy of his 72nd birthday.

I guess it's normal when someone's death is drawn out and painful to have mixed emotions about it. There's sadness, but also relief. I feel those, plus some regret. I wish I had gone to see him. I think he wanted to see me. And maybe that, right there, is enough. That longing, that connection. Those phone calls meant so much to me. And I think they meant something to Frank. It's still kind of tragic that he died estranged from his only child, and never having met his grandsons. But he had Sharon, and Kiki. And me.

About a week later, I go to England for the funeral, and Marie meets me in Scunthorpe.

ROB: I don't know if I recorded when I called to tell you he had passed, but you were emotional? What have you felt like in the week since then?

MARIE: I wasn't expecting it. And it's also the first time I'm losing someone. I never went to a funeral before.

ROB: So like, your grandparents, you still have all your grandparents?

MARIE: Not all, I lost a grandmother, but I was one. When you told me his condition was serious, I was worried, but it had happened in the past two years and it could just be him being him and then recovering, so. I thought I would see him again, to be honest. I thought I would see him again. But yeah.

Marie had been to visit Frank and Kiki on her own about six months ago. She was finishing up at the University of York and wanted to see them before she moved back to France. I asked Marie to record while she was there, and she produced this piece that I want to play for you now.

MARIE HUYNH (narration): This is Sunday the 19th of August. I decided to take a year out. And so I'm here to move all my stuff. But I haven't started, that's the point. I haven't started. I don't know what I did those last two days because I did everything except the one thing I came for, so we'll see. I'll do this tonight, I guess, but now I need to go to Scunthorpe and meet Kiki and Frank.

[train sound]

When Kiki picked me up from the station, she spotted me right away. She was really cute, really happy, smiling a lot. It was just nice. We were in the car and then I got in the

house, I met Frank, he's hugging me. He said, "I'm so happy to see you, Marie." And I was happy as well. I felt like I was visiting my grandparents, to be honest.

MARIE: Test, *un, deux--*

FRANK: Can you get me from there?

MARIE: No, I'm going to—

FRANK: No, what I'm saying if you need help, because I'm going to sit here, I like talking to you.

MARIE: I'm just checking the sound. I think it's fine. So, let's start. Are you ready?

FRANK: Go on, have a go.

MARIE: Okay. Frank, I know you believe in fate. Do you have any? I mean, everybody has regrets, do you have any big—

FRANK: Do I have any regrets? I would say my life is all full of regrets, and that's where the word "fate" comes into it, because the regret turned itself around and became another adventure. That's what my life's been all, the way along.

And I also got Kiki to agree to record a short interview.

KIKI [laughing]: *Je ne veux pas dire des choses que je ne devrais pas dire* [I don't wanna say things I should say]

MARIE: *T'inquiètes pas. Ça va bien se passer.* [Don't worry, it's gonna be alright.] It's in English.

KIKI: OK.

MARIE: Is your relationship with Frank affecting your friendships or your relationship with members of your family?

KIKI: Yes, definitely. Definitely.

MARIE: In which ways?

KIKI: My son doesn't want to come here. He doesn't want him to go there. Yes, definitely.

[music cue]

MARIE: This podcast is about you, Frank. What is your parting line? What do you want the last line of the podcast to be, for you?

FRANK: Satisfaction? Well, the satisfaction that people out there will know what it's like to live a life and survive.

MARIE: You would want to inspire people maybe?

FRANK: Hopefully people will say, "Come on, he's got to the end of the line there. How did he do it?"

[music cue]

We went to a town nearby to have lunch. We were just talking, relaxing, and they're so happy. And I must admit, I was in a mood. I made this decision of meeting Kiki and Frank when my priority was supposed to be packing. And they figured out, it's quite easy to read me. They asked a question. They just said, "Marie, what's going on?" And I confessed that I was a bit scared of moving out, of leaving York, of packing, that's probably why I haven't done it before. And they were adorable. They're like, talking to me, trying to find a solution, what's missing and I said I needed boxes, I haven't done everything to find the boxes. They were like, "Should we go to Morrison's and get some boxes, should we give you some suitcases?" Then Kiki said, "Yeah, I have tons of suitcases."

Frank and Kiki decided to give me plenty of suitcases and to bring me back to York. That was the nicest thing ever. It would solve everything. I wouldn't have to take the train with four suitcases.

So we're in the car and Kiki is playing some French music. And I fell asleep. I was so tired. When we got to York, they helped me with the suitcases. That's it. They saved my day. They saved my last day in York.

["Ingenue," a song in French by Aulx Studio, plays]

*Je rêve de tes caresses qui m'ennuient  
De tes doigts dans mes cheveux  
Je rêve de tes mains qui me baisent  
Tes doux baisers dans mon cou*

[I dream of your touch, which bores me  
Of your fingers in my hair  
I dream of your hands kissing me  
Your soft kisses on my neck]

ROB COLLINS: Square Peg is a LUSID48 production. It was written and produced by Ashley Hall and me. Visit our website, [squarepegpodcast.com](http://squarepegpodcast.com), to learn more.