

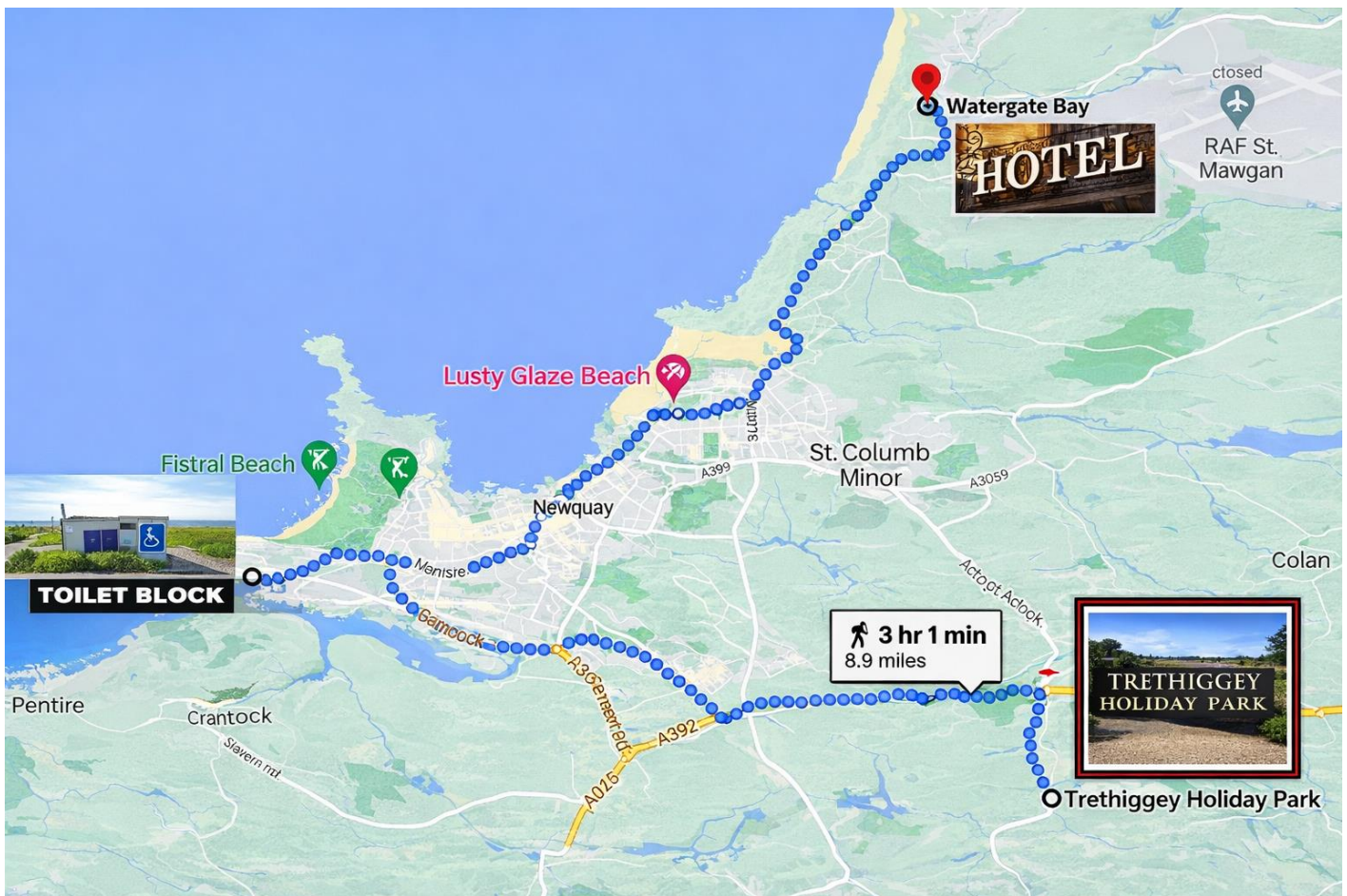
## Chapter Four

### 'The Toilet Block'

February 2008 ~ to ~ September 2008

19 years & 6 months old ~ to ~ 20 years & 1-month-old

### Newquay



#### Moving to Newquay Day (continued)

After getting off the train in Newquay, I went in search of an urban camping spot. By nightfall, I found myself deep in the countryside, surrounded by miles of farmers' fields. I didn't dare camp there—too worried about what might happen if I were discovered by an angry farmer with a shotgun and an even angrier dog.

As I kept walking, I started to lose hope—until, to my surprise, I stumbled across a campsite.

As I ventured down the driveway, I was approached by the campsite owner, James. He showed me to a square of grass that would become my home for the foreseeable future. After

pitching my tent, I explored the campsite and felt like I'd hit the jackpot upon discovering the facilities: toilets, showers, washing machines, dryers, and even a fully functioning computer room where I could go online and charge my mobile phone.

It quickly became clear that urban camping in Newquay was almost impossible, given the landscape I'd seen. Still, I was excited to pursue my other purpose: becoming a surfer. I went to bed that night feeling extremely happy and excited about my future.

I woke up the following morning with a huge smile on my face—it felt incredible to be in Newquay, living out my dream. I walked to the campsite office to pay a few weeks' rent, but when I arrived, James presented me with a dilemma.

If I paid three months' rent upfront, he'd give me a special deal of just £5 per night. The downside was that I'd be left with only £180 to my name—which meant I wouldn't be able to afford a surfboard—despite having left Nottingham with £1,100.

If my brother hadn't cut his holiday short, or if I'd had the courage to go back into the flat to collect my belongings, I would've saved myself a small fortune. Oh well.

I accepted James's offer because, financially, it made sense in the long term.

I immediately began job hunting online in the campsite's computer room and was delighted to find a vacancy at the famous Watergate Bay Hotel. They were looking for a room cleaner. I applied straight away and was later successful in securing the role.

After my first shift, I sprinted to the hotel's surf shop and hired a board and wetsuit, which was free.

I managed to stand up and ride the waves almost immediately. Afterwards, I sat on the beach reflecting on my journey, feeling like the happiest man on the planet.

I made a couple of friends on the campsite, Ali, he'd lived there for years in his static caravan. Matt, he'd recently arrived in his VW camper van. He told me his engine had blown up on the way down and that he was worried he might have to return to the Isle Of Man. I suggested he should apply to the hotel, and then I put a good word in for him. He later moved into the hotel's employee shared house. I remained at the campsite.

Months later, I quit the job, left the campsite, and began camping on the cliffs, near a toilet block next to Fistral Beach.





A couple of weeks before acting on my crazy plan, I confided in a trusted colleague about how miserable I felt. She told me that humans can only know happiness by experiencing sadness. She said that while the aim in life is to be happy, nobody is happy twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year—and that I shouldn't condemn myself during unhappy times.

All I knew was that I was miserable every day.

I asked her whether she enjoyed working at the hotel for eight hours a day, five days a week. She replied, "Boring bits before the benefits."

The people around me had accepted their roles as workers. I hadn't. I believed that human beings only get one life, and I wasn't willing to spend most of mine working—earning money to buy things I didn't necessarily need—even if that made me seem selfish or arrogant.

I thought the subject was debatable, depending on who you spoke to. Everyone carried a unique set of opinions and perspectives, shaped by their experiences and the people they'd encountered along the way.

I figured I'd be able to get drinking water from the taps in the toilet block. I planned to use that free access to wash myself and my clothes each day, and I intended to become completely self-sufficient by living off the sea.

I knew it was risky—but with danger came excitement, and with excitement came the feeling of being alive. I was scared to quit my job and leave the campsite, but I couldn't stay. My unhappiness gave me the courage I needed.

Plus, I told myself, it would be fun.

### **Day One – Moving to the Toilet Block Day**

I quit my job at the hotel and decamped from the campsite. I then cycled to the toilet block, as planned.

Eleven days in, I started to feel unnervingly unwell. I suspected it was either the water I'd been drinking from the taps in the toilet block or the fact that I'd been eating mackerel—caught straight from the sea—for breakfast, dinner, and tea every single day.

On the eleventh night, my camping spot was hit by a ferocious storm. When I'd pitched my tent earlier that evening, the weather had been calm and eerily still, so I was shocked to wake up to my tent being battered so violently by the wind that it was almost tipping over. Cold water began leaking through the roof, soaking me, my sleeping bag, and all my clothes.

Then I heard it—a long, loud ripping noise.

That was enough.

I ripped out the ground pegs and dragged my tent—still containing all my belongings—across the field toward the toilet block. When I reached it, I went inside and locked the door.

Twenty minutes later, three thunderous bangs slammed against it.

### **BANG. BANG. BANG.**

Whoever was on the other side began aggressively twisting the handle. I ran to the door, lay flat on my back, and extended my right leg, pressing the sole of my foot against the handle mechanism to stop it turning. I stayed completely silent, barely breathing, until the stranger finally went away.

After that, I waited for the sun to rise. It took hours. I tried to sleep at first, but I was too cold, so I did press-ups and star jumps to stay warm and pass the time.

As soon as the sun climbed into the cloudless sky, I went to the beach and laid all my soaking wet belongings out on the sand to dry. While I waited, I cooked mackerel for breakfast—but I

couldn't eat it. After eleven straight days of nothing but fish, the smell alone made me gag. When I forced down a bite, I felt physically sick and almost vomited.

That was the moment I knew I'd had enough.

I needed help.

I gathered my belongings and walked to a phone box, where I made a reverse-charge call to my sister. I didn't know what else to do. I explained everything. We hadn't properly spoken since she'd left Nottingham to move to London—leaving Gary behind—but without hesitation, she paid for a hotel room for me in Newquay and invited me to move to London the next day.

I gratefully accepted her life-saving offer.

The reality of urban camping without a job had stripped the romance from the idea. I'd spent the entire time scared about the future, hungry, unwell, and smelling as bad as I felt. I still planned to urban camp again one day—but I now understood that holding down employment would, unfortunately, be vital.

Hating work was better than being scared, thirsty, hungry, ill, and smelly.

Having a hotel room all to myself—paid for by my sister—felt surreal after six months in a tent and my failed attempt at “toilet-block life.” I felt like a quadrillionaire simply because I had a flat-screen colour TV and a big, comfortable bed.

It was there that I had the third-best shower of my life.

Afterwards, I walked into town and sold my bike at a pawn shop. The coach company I planned to use to get to London didn't allow bikes, and the train was too expensive. I then went to a nearby restaurant and ate the best chicken kebab I've ever had.

(To this day, it's still the best kebab I've ever eaten—entirely because of what came before it.)

### **Day One – Moving to London**

I woke up feeling like a king in that big, comfortable bed. I decamped from the hotel, walked to Newquay coach station, and boarded the coach to London.