



# Episode 19: Christie's Story Transcript

**Bree:** I remember visiting my uncle's firehall where he worked as a fire firefighter when I was little and I thought 'when I grow up I want to be a fire firefighter'. Then we studied oceans at school and I thought 'maybe I'll be a marine biologist'. But for today's guest, Christie, she always knew she wanted to be one thing, a dancer.

In today's episode, Christie describes how she fell in love with dancing while listening to Swan Lake and watching performance programs on television. Many years later, Christie tells us about the moment she received an amazing opportunity to work for the same company she used to watch on TV all those years ago as a child. From there, Christie encountered some unexpected highs and lows: from flying to Europe in first class to spending a night in an immigration deportation cell waiting to be deported back to Canada. We're calling this episode 'Ballet and Better Days'.

Before we begin listening, let's talk about some of the vocabulary and expressions you'll hear Christie use:

1. Firstly bread and butter. We can of course talk about bread and butter as a food but also in English the phrase 'bread and butter' refers to someone's main job or source of income. In today's podcast episode, you'll hear Christie talking about doing ballet performances in the Nutcracker as being the 'bread and butter' for many professional dancers.
2. Next out of the blue. If something 'happens out of the blue' or if someone 'arrives out of the blue' it means that they arrive suddenly and unexpectedly. For example you could say 'I wasn't expecting anybody to come over last night but suddenly my friends arrived out of the blue.' Se puede decir 'sin avisar' o 'de la nada' en español.
3. Bump up. Bump up is a phrasal verb we use to mean upgrade or to move to a higher position or level. In today's episode, we'll hear about how lucky Christie was to get bumped up to first class on the plane journey to Europe.
4. Bump up. Next long story short. Long story short is an expression we use in English to say that we are explaining only the most important parts of a story or situation and leaving out unnecessary details. En español sería 'en pocas palabras'. For example you could say, 'We were shopping all day.'
5. Long story short, we didn't find what we were looking for.' Long story short.
6. Finally to burn out. To burn out is a phrasal verb that can be used in different contexts. If a fire burns out, it means there are no more flames. Or if a light bulb burns out it stops working because it was old and needs to be changed. In Christie's case, she talks about burning out after she exhausted herself during a dance audition tour around Europe.



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And always if you need more help with understanding the podcast, you'll find a full transcript, vocabulary list, and listening comprehension activities on our website [acingles.com/podcast](https://acingles.com/podcast). OK let's get into the story...

**Christie:** My name is Christie Cunningham. I started Loving ballet when I was about three years old. My granny was Scottish and she had been traveling and she brought me back a tutu from Scotland and she used to have a record player and she would play Swan Lake and we would dance around the living room. So I started going to professional ballet school when I was 4 years old in Vancouver. We had this show in Canada in the 90s called Adrienne Clarkson Presents and one of the things that is on this was a company called La La La Human Steps and I watched everything. I remember I would jump on my mum's bed. I had a single mother at the time. And we were in a basement suite and we didn't have a lot of money. But I'd just be practising barrel turns on my mum's bed. They were always my idols. I never thought that I would ever do something like that in my life like I love dancing but I was also very realistic.

After high school, I was still dancing, I went to University. After I finished my BA then I went and started to try to make it as a dancer. I was training in Montreal although I wanted to be a contemporary dancer, I still had to pay my bills and the big bread and butter for dancers is always the Nutcracker and I wound up being in a local production of the Nutcracker and having to really work on my ballet skills and I was getting really strong.

Then I guess somewhere I saw this poster for La La La Human Steps that they were having an audition in Montreal. I was like oh I'm just going to do this, like just as a joke. Just for fun. I just went right up to the front super confident and there were about 200 people in the room with me. And at one point they opened the door and the director came in and he was watching us a little bit and then he just, out of the blue, he just walked over to me and said you know 'hello my name is Édouard Lock'. I was like yeh, I know who you are. And he was like, 'can you try this and this for me'. Long story short, in the end I was the only one that made that audition out of the room of 200 people.

I had a solo choreography and it was always you need to do it faster you need to get your legs higher. I was working on it outside of hours. I was late one night in the studio and I was just getting really frustrated cuz I couldn't....



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I was trying to get this grand battement faster faster faster and I was doing it again and again and again and I hear this pop! Something just happened in my hip. So I wound up going for an MRI and they said yeah you've torn your labrum. It's a mess. I had a pressure because we were going on a tour and so I wound up... the company arranged for me to have an operation. The operation went well. Two months after the operation I was back in the studio. But in the time that I have been away, they had found another dancer to take my part. Eventually they said okay, we're not really sure what we're going to do with you by you're going to come on the tour with us anyways and you're going to be in the core. You're going to be in the background and I remember it was Christmas... we're working over Christmas and there was really just a lot of stress and a lot of pressure. Eventually we pulled a show together and then we went to Amsterdam!

It was my first time in Europe. I was 24 at the time. I was excited to see Amsterdam, to travel. Somehow I got bumped up to First Class and the other dancers had to stay in economy class. Yeah I think some people really hate me but I had a great flight to Amsterdam in first class. So then we were in Europe and we had the show in Amsterdam and then we went to Norway and then suddenly there was a problem with money and as I was sort of not doing a big role my salary got cut. I remember we went to Burger King, one of my friends in the company and we split a hamburger. We cut it in half and that was our meal for the day. And we are performing at a high level on very little sustenance.

Then, we were in Germany and then by the time we got to Italy, Édouard called me down for a coffee and he said you know Christie, it's just not working out. We're going bankrupt here and we can't afford to have you on the tour. But we've arranged for you a ticket to go back to Canada. And at the time I just didn't, I was just like hell no, I'm not going back to Canada! I'm just going to get another job, you'll see! I'm going to get into another company and so I packed up my suitcase which at the time was full of some evening gowns, pointe shoes and dance clothes and I just walked away! I booked myself a hotel and I arranged this crazy audition tour for myself. But at that time I was recovering from a major injury I wasn't strong so I was really not in a place where I should have been doing that and so I really burnt myself out. Eventually I got in touch with my cousin who is living with her husband and in England at the time. Can I come by and crash for a while by you? And she said yeah like for sure we've got space come on by we would love to see you.



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So I got to Heathrow and got to immigration and there was just this really nice lady working there. She was friendly and smiling and asking me about things. And I just was so happy to have someone speaking to me in English and smiling at me and I just opened my big mouth and said you know my grandfather is actually Scottish and I could actually qualify for a heritage visa here. Suddenly appears like three men and they are like, 'excuse me can you come with us to this back room'. So this guy, you know, was just asking me, you know, about what I was doing and I said you know, I came here with a dance company and I have been on tour and he was like 'your whole story is a lie'.

They wound up taking all my things away and they put me in some cuffs and they took me to an immigration deportation centre. I had no idea where I was going. I was in the back of a track to essentially a jail. It was a prison. It was like you know big, with wire fences. The cell was, it was just me and some bunk beds and a really dirty nasty toilet and there was a TV. Really weird cartoons playing loudly and the lights were always on so you couldn't sleep. And then I guess at some point someone came and said that we've arranged for you to be deported back to Canada.

Then the next morning they got me out of there and took me back to Heathrow and they loaded the airplane first and then I was with two security guards and they had me in plastic cuffs and I came on last and I just remember all the people looking up at me like I'm some kind of criminal coming on the airplane. So I arrived back in Montreal and the security guards led me in my handcuffs to immigration.

Before I had got the job with the company I had been working at the Hard Rock cafe in Montreal and my manager, the guy who trained me at the time, Gille, he had got a job with immigration. I got there and who should I see standing at the immigration counter but Gille and he was going to burst out laughing. Eventually I was released back into Canada but of course this became a grand story on social media. What's going on Christie? We heard that you were arriving back at Trudeau airport in handcuffs! So yeh! It was definitely a good lesson on how things can switch on a dime and life is not predictable at all. When you're younger, when you're in your 20s, you kinda base yourself on the external things that are happening to you and this is something that I learnt from this experience: who I am, it doesn't matter if I'm first class, or in handcuffs, it's the same.



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**Bree:** Since her time on stage as a ballet dancer, Christie has found new ways to enjoy movement. These days, you'll find Christie in the dance studio either training or giving barre, pilates or gyrotonics classes. Christie has also returned to Europe since that first adventure-filled visit. She now lives in Switzerland with her wonderful family.

Gracias por haber escuchado la historia de Christie. Si aún no lo has hecho suscribirte a Into the Story en Spotify, iTunes o tu plataforma preferida. And if you have a story to tell we'd love to hear it. Send an email [hello@acingles.com](mailto:hello@acingles.com). Thank you for listening, until next time we hope you have a good time, or at least, a good story to tell.