

Chatterbox #121 – Aleks: Part 2

*The words and expressions that appear in **bold blue** text throughout this document are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanation section that follows the transcript.*

Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone. This is Harp, and I'm here with my friend Aleks. And we're here at Culips bringing you an exciting episode. Make sure you check out our website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. Because there, you can sign up and become a member. And when you're a member, you have access to the Learning Materials, which include a complete transcript, detailed explanations, and even a quiz. Now today, we're doing a Chatterbox episode. Today's episode is a continuation of last week's episode, when we met our new, very interesting friend, Aleks! So if you haven't listened to that one yet, you might want to check it out before listening to this episode. All right, so I'm here back with Aleks because the stories were just too interesting and we couldn't stop talking. So, when we left off last week, we were talking about The Rocky Mountains in British Columbia. The Rocky Mountains. I've mentioned this a million times in other Culips episodes. I love the Rocky Mountains. They are absolutely stunning. Now, do you do a lot of outdoor sports that you were drawn to the mountains, or it was more their beauty, or what was it?

Aleksandra: It was just the... I learned to walk in the mountains. Both my parents are passionate campers, and skiers, and outdoor lovers, so the only type of vacationing that was ever done in the family was long car journeys and a lot of camping, and almost always in the mountains. So, the **legend has it** that I was forced to walk at the age of 10 months, just because my parents were too impatient to wait for their kid to start walking. And it happened in the mountains. And I think it somehow got imbedded into my spiritual blueprint, and maybe it's also in the genes because of my parents. And it continued into my youth and my adulthood. So I'm just thinking of more and more ways to be outdoors because in the summer, I absolutely love hiking and a little bit of rock climbing, mountaineering. And in the winter, I would say cross-country skiing is my greatest passion and the second on the list is probably snow-shoeing.

Harp: Oh, I love snowshoeing. Yeah. I'm a fan. OK, so did you work in Vancouver as a researcher as well, or did you completely change directions?

Aleksandra: I actually changed direction. I could not... I was not authorized to work right away upon arrival, so I spent my time doing some really, really, fun things. One of them is cooking and the other one is writing for... volunteer-based writing for Alive Magazine, which exists to this day and you can usually get it in health food stores in Canada when you purchase enough goods. They're actually based in Vancouver and I got connected with them pretty much upon my arrival, and was fortunate enough to be given some writing and editing tasks because, while they focus on topics related to nutrition and complimentary health therapies, they're also very concerned about sound and solid scientific coverage for their articles. And that's where I **came into the picture**. And then I also thought it would be interesting to marry the world of science with the world of crafts and creativity, and nutrition's always been my great interest. So believe it or not, I started volunteering my time in a couple of fine dining restaurants and catering companies.

Harp: Wow!

Aleksandra: Yes!

Harp: Working in the kitchen?

Aleksandra: Absolutely!

Harp: Wow! Volunteering your time!

Aleksandra: Volunteering my time, of course. I was paid in food. So that, to me and for me, is absolutely priceless. But I just wasn't authorized to work for a few months, and so during that time, I was picking up some new skills and exploring some new territories.

Harp: Wow. So now you must be an amazing chef?

Aleksandra: I never would call myself a chef, but my knives are my most prized, precious, and costly possession. Definitely.

Harp: OK. K, so then after Vancouver, you went to Interior BC?

Aleksandra: Well, Interior BC was a back and forth. It's a cross-country ski paradise. It's a place with a very interesting climate, so it was a very welcome change to spend some time there after the wetness of Vancouver and Whistler. So it was definitely also interesting to spend some time in a place where it's so sparsely populated. You can imagine... Belgrade is a city of two million people. Copenhagen, something comparable to that. New York City, we all know, it's about 10 million when you look at the surrounding areas. Vancouver is a couple of million people. So to suddenly end up in a place like 100 Mile House and 108 Mile Ranch, that don't even count seven, eight thousand people living there, it was such an interesting experience, a much larger interface with nature.

Harp: OK. Did you miss the city, or you were just enjoying nature and being in a smaller town?

Aleksandra: I'd say I'm a split personality in a way. I wilt, shrivel up, when I'm only immersed in an urban environment, and I start to get itchy and lonely when I'm only in the bush. I cannot be without one or the other.

Harp: OK. I see. I see. OK, and then how, after this love affair with Vancouver and the beautiful city, did you end up on the East Coast?

Aleksandra: That was a love affair with a job. I really got a very interesting opportunity to work for the National Cancer Institute of Canada, and being that it's a very large organization with lots of superbly interesting research projects, it was an offer I could not decline. Absolutely. So that was... That, in and of itself, was enough to move me east.

Harp: OK. So you worked with the cancer research institute for a couple of years?

Aleksandra: It was about somewhere around 8 years. And it was **a very steep learning curve**. I don't know how else to describe it because it was not basic research that involves working in the lab and working with animals. This was actually work with people. This is work that involves testing new... not just drugs, new therapies, for both preventing and treating all types of cancer. And so it was a tremendously precious experience to see how long it takes and what it takes, both in terms of human and financial resources, to get a potentially useful new drug out on the market and make it available to the patients.

Harp: Yeah. I imagine that it was quite challenging. I've heard some about the behind the scenes. Because I think the general public just thinks that prescription drugs and all of them just come **at the snap of a finger**. But I know there are years and years and years of painstaking research behind them. So you were a part of that team. That's amazing.

Aleksandra: Yes. All I can tell you is it takes about 10 years to get a drug from the lab to the market when it comes to cancer research in particular, so it really is a very long time. There are ways to speed up the process, but not very many ways. And yes, it is incredibly interesting to see how the whole world of cancer research and cancer therapeutics research has gone from very invasive, very damaging, very hard-on-the-body therapies, to what we now refer to as biological therapies that recognize that all cancers, in their essence and at their root, pretty much have the same or similar causes. And new cancer drugs are actually getting closer to treating the root of the disease as opposed to its manifestation.

Harp: Wow. That's very interesting. And then, you moved to our beautiful town of Montreal.

Aleksandra: I did. It was also a work-related move. I continued to work in the world of cancer research. It's just that another opportunity that was very appealing to me came up in Montreal. And I was also interested in living somewhere with more of a European flare. If I had to choose in North America, I would say New York, Montreal, somewhat Boston, would be the cities where I could see myself landing. An additional motivation for me was that while working at the National Cancer Institute, I completely... To balance out my work and my hobbies and free-time activities, I was discovering dancing. And slowly but surely, having made my journey through ballroom dancing and salsa dancing, I started falling in love with tango, Argentine tango.

Harp: OK. So are there more dancing schools here? Or how did that relate to Montreal?

Aleksandra: Montreal is the Argentine tango Mecca of North America. There is no better place to dance than Montreal. It's a whole parallel universe. I knew very little about it, but I could pretty much smell it. It was a huge draw for me.

Harp: Wow. I've never heard that. I've seen quite a few posters for tango classes, but I didn't know it was a Mecca.

Aleksandra: In North America, Montreal is considered by far the best place to dance tango, although you'd be **hard-pressed** to find a city anywhere in North America where people don't dance. New York City is quite big, as well, on the tango scene, but tango's been in Montreal for the last almost 30 years. And next to Buenos Aires, where tango originated, Berlin and Paris in Europe, Montreal stands quite high up there.

Harp: Wow, interesting. I need to take some tango lessons here.

Aleksandra: Why not? Why not?

Harp: So, you must be very good now?

Aleksandra: The more you like something, the more you love something you do, the less likely you are to pronounce yourself good at it, so I won't. I will just say it is soul food, it's a passion, it's an expression, it's a way of being. It is something I cannot imagine myself living without.

Harp: Wow. How many times a week do you tango dance?

Aleksandra: It is an average of four times a week.

Harp: Wow. That's great.

Aleksandra: It is absolutely necessary.

Harp: I love it. Do you go to lots of different... Are there tango clubs? Or where do you dance tango?

Aleksandra: Well, as I said, it's a whole parallel universe. And for every day of the week, and every night of the week, there are at least two places, at least two clubs, where you can go. So tonight, we're speaking on a Wednesday, there is a place called Studio Tango. It's on Notre Dame West here in downtown Montreal. It is Wednesday night, and there's going to be a couple of hundred people crowded out on a dance floor of maybe barely 1000 square feet. It's quite a lot of energy that's packed up there. And people will go out on a Monday night and on a Wednesday night, and go home around one o'clock in the morning, or two o'clock in the morning, sometimes even later, because you come back so charged up and so full of life and so full of music that you're pretty much ready for the next day.

Harp: Wow! I really need to check this out. I need to try tango.

Aleksandra: Any time! Any time!

Harp: Are you going to tango after we record?

Aleksandra: Yes. I'm going home to actually get myself prettied up. You can't tell, but I'm wearing jeans and a sweater right now and I just prepared the most beautiful dance dress that I'm going to wear tonight, and my satin high-heeled shoes—chocolate brown—to go with the dress, and some makeup. And of course glasses come off and contact lenses go in. And the identity changes completely.

Harp: Wow! So interesting. I think you should send us a picture of you dancing tango.

Aleksandra: OK. That's a deal.

Harp: All right. So, are you still working in research now here, or...?

Aleksandra: Here in Montreal, I am half way between hardcore research and medical education. Because I love writing so much and because English has become such a home... linguistic home for me, I took a step closer to working with the language and so... but not too far away from research. So what I do now is work in producing so called continuing medical education programs. So teaming up with physicians, who we refer to as KOLs—key opinion leaders—in areas such as cardiology, emergency medicine, endocrinology, **and so on and so forth**, and working on designing educational programs, some of which are web-based and others are delivered in the form of seminars or symposia. And in order to maintain their license, all physicians everywhere in the world have to take a number of courses every year that are accredited in order to get their points and maintain their licence. That's where I **come into the picture**, with the team that consists of physicians, some project managers, and usually some graphic designers, and sometimes even a video crew, depending on how we deliver the educational programs. So there is a research component in finding new information. There's some coordination work in order to bring to the same common denominator programmers, physicians, graphic artists, and writers. And then there's a little bit of logistics and planning involved. I love it. I love the multifaceted aspect of it.

Harp: Wow. It sounds very interesting.

Aleksandra: It truly is interesting. And for someone who loves to learn, it's a complete **win-win situation**. You never, ever get bored.

Harp: I'm sure you wouldn't be. Now, you're living in Montreal, which is a bilingual city. Do you work in French or English?

Aleksandra: My work is mostly in English. About 90% of it is in English, although sometimes, because we work with national programs and we also work with universities in the United States as well, some of the programs that we work on have to be accredited in Quebec, and so those programs are translated or designed in French to begin with. But most of my work is in English.

Harp: OK. Now, living in Montreal, it's been your home for the last 8 years. What's your favourite thing about Montreal? If someone were to come visit here, what would you tell them to do?

Aleksandra: Actually, my favourite things in Montreal are my little rituals and I will just **cherry pick** three. One is going to Oratoire Saint-Joseph on Sunday afternoons, 3:30 in the afternoon, free organ music concert. Absolutely amazing, bone-shattering experience, because the dome and the size of the space in which they play that organ is just enormous. It's such a humbling experience, and it's also... It gives you such levity. It's quite amazing. And I can walk up to the Oratory in about 20 minutes from where I live. Another **cherry-picked** experience would be a walk through Montreal cemeteries.

Harp: Yeah.

Aleksandra: Mount Royal Cemetery is my favourite. It's a piece of land covering one of the slopes of Mount Royal. It's a place where you feel the ages and you feel ageless and you feel everything. And you feel the most unusual kind of peace, so I go there to meditate. I sometimes go there to run. I sometimes just go and sit and look at the sunset. I absolutely love that piece of land.

Harp: Yeah. I agree with you, actually. That's something I love to do as well. What's your third experience?

Aleksandra: Food shopping! Markets in Montreal and ethnic food stores, particularly Middle Eastern food stores and fresh markets. That's my absolute favourite. It's just... Mmm. Even just to go and touch and smell and sometimes not buy a whole lot, but just being in touch with fresh food is amazing.

Harp: I one hundred percent agree with you. That's something we talk about often on Culips, are all the different markets here and food and, it's wonderful. We've posted pictures of many of the markets here. So if any of the Culips listeners out there haven't seen them, check out our Facebook page. What's your favourite place to go food shopping?

Aleksandra: Actually, my favourite place to go food shopping is Fruiterie Mile-End. It is just south of the corner of Bernard and Avenue Du Parc in Mile End. It's a big place that has the most amazing olive counter. They marinate their olives in 20 different ways over there, and they are the most unusually flavoured olives that I've had, in Montreal of all places. The food turnover is very quick. It's really, really rapid, so the food is exceptionally fresh. And it's one of the very few places where people working there know something about everything that's in the store. From nuts, to fennel, to ginger, to turmeric, they will be able to give you recipes for orange beets and red beets, and... Whatever you find in the store, they know where it comes from and what to make with it.

Harp: Wow. I've never been there. I definitely need to go visit.

Aleksandra: OK!

Harp: All right, Aleks. Let's go back to what I'm sure everyone really wants to hear more about. When did you first start learning English? Or actually, let's start with German, since you said that was the first language you started learning.

Aleksandra: Well, Harp. *Started learning* is not really the expression that captures how it went. Today I feel like I was pretty much force fed my first two languages at the early age of four and five, respectively. It started with German and then English followed. It was not my choice. I had no idea I had a choice. I had no idea how many languages were there out there in the world. I knew nothing about the world of languages. I just knew that for some reason, my mom and dad thought that this was paving a path to a brighter future; that they would be exercising the brain muscle of their child—or their children, actually. I have a sister. And so, why they chose German as the first language is **anyone's guess**, and a big secret, because neither of them speaks German. My mom is fluent in French and English. And my dad is fluent in Russian and English. So why they picked German I'm not quite sure, but it was really **tough going**; very, very tough and very counterintuitive. And I rebelled against it, and then they decided to take it easy on me and gave me a break from German. I later on had an opportunity to go on a student exchange and spend several months in Frankfurt, Germany, while a very good friend of mine was living there. So I picked up German after a maybe 7-, 8-year break. And it actually went much better when I gave it a second chance. English, on the other hand, was becoming fashionable in Serbia. And it was before everybody knew that it was going to become such a universal language in the world. But little by little, elementary schools, where kids start learning foreign languages from grade one... Little by little, the trend became... It became a popular trend to replace Russian with English. And in preparation for enrolling me in one of those schools, where I was going to start learning English from the very beginning instead of Russian, my mom and dad started me on some picture books in English and I think my mom was really having fun teaching me a bit of English, because it gave her a chance to practise a bit aside from the English she was using on a day-to-day basis, because she herself is a scientist and a lot of the scientific communication happens in English. And for her to step down into the **nitty gritty** world of picture books was a lot of fun.

Harp: Yeah. I'm sure it's a big difference from scientific research in English to, probably, a storybook in English.

Aleksandra: Indeed. Indeed. And I almost feel that I started learning English almost at the same time as my native tongue. I adopted it very quickly. It grew on me very quickly. And I was fortunate to have a wonderful English teacher who followed me through a number of years through elementary school and I will never forget. I will never forget being 13, receiving a present from my English teacher. It was a collection of Shakespeare's sonnets. Now, you would not give that to a 13-year-old. And the dedication at the beginning, on the first page of the book, which I only understood 15 years later, it was way **over my head**, my teacher wrote, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." I had no idea what she meant, but I felt so important and so important to my teacher. And I grew in my own eyes having received Shakespeare's sonnets with such an important dedication. And that actually spurred me on. I had no idea what it meant, but I was very inspired and then I started devouring lyrics from songs in English and more books, and more books, and more books. And eventually, English started pouring out of me and I started writing.

Harp: OK, interesting. In terms of school, you were saying that before they used to teach Russian. How much English did you learn in school? Was it a lot of your time that was in English, or most of it was in Serbian?

Aleksandra: No, the schooling is one hundred percent in Serbian, but it was just... We just had an English course, so throughout the 8 years of elementary school. So that would basically translate to 2 hours of English per week, plus some homework.

Harp: OK, so you did a lot on your own then.

Aleksandra: Indeed.

Harp: OK, so, now, for all those people listening and feeling jealous of how good you are, what are some tips on learning a language? Since you've learned so many more after leaving school.

Aleksandra: I would say one of the most interesting ways to grasp the sentence structure in a foreign language, for me, is to read magazines like the ones you find when you fly, where you see, in parallel, a story unfolding in language A and language B. One of those needs to be your mother tongue, or a language that you're really familiar with. I find that I follow... That's one of the strategies that I used in learning French, following magazine stories written in English and French, side by side. That was immensely helpful.

Harp: Did you read it in French and then make sure you understood it and checked in English? Or how did you do it?

Aleksandra: No, I would actually read the language that I was more familiar with first, then venture into the **uncharted territory**.

Harp: OK, OK, I see. And you listened to a lot of songs, so that was another way you learnt language?

Aleksandra: I find that when there's an emotional connection to whatever you're trying to learn, any type of knowledge that you're trying to acquire, it really, really helps. So songs and music we typically associate with important moments, important people, important situations, important emotions. And whenever there's that type of connection, I find digesting something new in a language comes more naturally.

Harp: OK. That's great advice for learning a language. And a good place to wrap up our interview. Thanks again for joining us. And, to all our listeners out there, if you have any questions for Aleks, please feel free to post them on our Facebook page. And don't forget to check out our website, at Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. There, you can sign up to become a member. And when you're a member, you have access to the Learning Materials, which include a complete transcript, detailed explanations, and even a quiz. We'll talk to you again soon! Bye everyone!

Detailed Explanation

Legend has it

We can use the expression **legend has it** to introduce something that we think is true, but might not be officially true or a fact. In this episode, Aleksandra says that **legend has it** that she started to walk when she was only 10 months old. She isn't sure whether she actually started walking when she was that young, but this is something her parents told her and she believes to be true.

A legend is a story from ancient times that may or may not be true. Some famous legends include King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, Robin Hood, and the Lost City of Atlantis. So, when we want to talk about something that we think is true, but really might not be true, we can use the expression **legend has it**. In most cases, this is kind of a humorous exaggeration, because a legend is a story that is very famous. There isn't really an actual legend about Aleksandra learning to walk, but the story is kind of a legend in her family.

Here are a couple more examples with this expression:

Tony: Have you ever been to Leap Castle in Ireland? **Legend has it** that it's haunted!

Brenda: No. I've never been to Ireland. And now I'm not sure I'd ever want to go. I'm scared of ghosts!

Ji: **Legend has it** that before my parents got married, my dad used to ride a motorcycle.

Tim: Really? Your dad? I find that hard to believe. He's such a conservative and safe guy.

Ji: I know. I can't believe it either. He must have been a really different person when he was younger.

To come into the picture

When something (or someone) **comes into the picture**, it becomes involved in a situation. In this episode, Aleksandra uses the expression twice. The first time, she tells us that she volunteered for a health magazine. She **came into the picture** at the magazine and offered her expertise in medical research.

The second time Aleksandra uses the expression **to come into the picture** is when she describes her job and her work responsibilities. When she mentions her specific role in doctor training courses and the point where she becomes involved in the creation of the courses, she says that this is where she **comes into the picture**.

So, whenever someone or something becomes involved in a situation, they **come into the picture**.

Here are a couple more examples with this expression:

Jamal: When I was a kid, my mom gave me a full set of encyclopedias. But now that the Internet and Wikipedia have **come into the picture**, those books are pretty much useless.
Heather: I love old books. If you're getting rid of them, I'd love to have them.

Ellington: As soon as Obama **came into the picture** on the political scene, I knew he was going to become president one day.

Esther: Me too! I just had a feeling that he was destined to lead the US.

A steep learning curve

A learning curve is the rate of learning a new skill, task, or job. Actual **learning curves** are graphs that show how quickly something new is learned, and determining **learning curves** is a technical process done by psychologists and economists. The expression **a steep learning curve** comes from this.

Whenever an activity, task, or job requires that you learn a lot in a short amount of time, we can say that it has **a steep learning curve**. Aleksandra's job at the National Cancer Institute of Canada had **a very steep learning curve**, because she had to learn a lot of new skills and information as soon as she started, since her new job was quite different from any job that she'd had before..

Here are a couple more examples with **a steep learning curve**.

Gio: I really want to learn how to play the piano, but I don't know anything about it.

Kate: You should sign up for some lessons. Playing piano has **a steep learning curve** at the beginning. You'll learn a lot about it pretty quickly, and then after that it's all about practicing.

Ariel: When I first started working as an engineer, the **learning curve was so steep**. There was so much that I needed to learn to do a good job.

Mark: How long did it take you to adjust?

Ariel: During the first few weeks, it felt like I was learning about 20 new things every day. It actually wasn't until after a few years of experience that I really felt comfortable doing my job.

At the snap of a finger

When something occurs very quickly, we can say that it happens **at the snap of a finger**. In this episode, Harp says that there's a common misconception that pharmaceutical drugs are developed **at the snap of a finger**. What Harp means is that many people think that pharmaceutical drugs can be created quickly and without much effort. In reality, these drugs are not created **at the snap of a finger**. A lot of time and research is devoted to their production.

We can use the expression **at the snap of a finger** whenever something happens very quickly.

Many English learners make a mistake and say *at the snap of fingers*. This seems like it should make more sense, since it takes two fingers to snap, but for some reason, the expression is always **at the snap of a finger**, so when you use this expression, avoid pluralizing the word *finger*.

Here are a couple more examples with **at the snap of a finger**.

Kip: When I was 17, my luck changed **at the snap of a finger**.

Mary: Really? What happened?

Kip: A music professor heard my choir singing, and after our performance I was offered a scholarship for university.

Rick: A few months ago, I hired a carpenter to build some cabinets in our kitchen, but he still isn't done. I'm getting impatient.

Tina: I'm sure that in the end you'll be happy with his work. Doing a good job takes time. You can't just build nice cabinets **at the snap of a finger**.

Hard-pressed

When you're **hard-pressed** to do something, it's difficult to do it. In this episode, Aleksandra says that you would be **hard-pressed** to find a city in North America where people don't dance. This means that it would be difficult to find a city in North America where people don't dance, because dancing is a popular activity that occurs all over the place.

When something is difficult to do, or even impossible, you can say that you would be **hard-pressed** to do that thing. This expression is most often used in the conditional mood (in conjunction with the modal verb *would*), when people are speculating about something.

Here are a couple more examples with **hard-pressed**:

Tran: I'm thinking about dropping my economics class.

Gina: Why? Dr. Adams is such a great professor. You'd be **hard-pressed** to find a better teacher at this university.

Tran: I know, but she gives so much homework!

Pam: I want to move downtown. I'd be much closer to work and I love the hustle and bustle of city living.

Yan: Yeah, but it's so expensive! You'd be **hard-pressed** to find a studio apartment for under \$1000 a month.

Pam: I know. I'll just have to be careful with my money so that I can make things work.

And so on and so forth

We use the expression **and so on and so forth** at the end of a list to indicate that it could continue in a similar way. In this episode, Aleksandra says that she creates medical education programs that are taught by doctors who are specialists in areas like cardiology, emergency medicine, endocrinology, **and so on and so forth**.

Aleksandra uses the expression **and so on and so forth** at the end of her list of specializations to communicate that there are more doctors involved in the program too. Instead of mentioning each area of expertise, she says **and so on and so forth** to show that the list continues in a similar fashion. In this way, Aleksandra avoids having to give a complete list of all the doctors involved in the education program.

The expression **and so on and so forth** is always used at the end of a sentence. It's a synonym for another common expression, *etcetera* (*etc.*).

Here are a couple more examples with **and so on and so forth**:

Frida: What do you do yesterday?

Henry: The usual. I went to work, went to the supermarket, went to the gym, watched TV, **and so on and so forth**.

Frida: Yeah. My day was pretty uneventful too.

Pat: What's your favourite kind of music?

Rina: I like all kinds of music, but I'm especially into Brazilian music. You know, bossa nova, samba, tropicalismo, **and so on and so forth**.

A win-win situation

A win-win situation is one that's good for everyone involved. When everyone is satisfied with the outcome of a situation, then it's **a win-win situation**, because all the people that are involved are happy. Everyone wins.

In this episode, Aleksandra tells us that her job is **a win-win situation** for her. This is because she loves the work she does and her employer is happy with her work too. So, because all the people involved are happy, this is **a win-win situation**.

Here are a couple more examples with **a win-win situation**:

Ross: Do you like the new painting I bought at the charity auction?

Tina: Yeah, it's beautiful!

Ross: I know. I love it. And it felt good to buy something when 100% of the proceeds went to charity.

Tina: Yeah, that's a real **win-win situation**. You get a new piece of art and the charity gets some extra money.

Ted: My wife and I agreed to babysit our neighbour's children every Friday night, and they'll watch our kids every Saturday night. That way, we both get a date night every week. And our kids really like spending time together, too.

Lim: Wow! What **a win-win situation**!

To cherry pick

When you **cherry pick** something, you select the best options and leave the ones that aren't as good. In this episode, when Harp asks Aleksandra about her favourite places to visit in Montreal, Aleks **cherry picks** her top three places, since she doesn't have time to talk about all her favourites.

The expression **to cherry pick** is often used when talking about selecting people to join a group. However, it can also be used to talk about things, as Aleksandra demonstrates in this episode. Things that have been **cherry picked** are the best ones. Whenever someone chooses the best things and leaves the others, they have **cherry picked**.

Here are a couple more examples with **to cherry pick**:

Judy: Wow. Tom's hockey team is really good. I think they'll win the championship this year. How did they get to be so good?

Ernst: They're only good because the coach **cherry picked** all the best players. There were no talented players left over for the other teams.

Nadine: I'm really frustrated with the school board in this city. They're doing nothing to stop the obvious cheating that's going on at Riverside School.

Martha: What do you mean?

Nadine: They totally **cherry pick** their students. They only let the best students attend their school. Then they get high test scores and more funding from the government. It's such a scam!

Martha: Yeah, that doesn't seem fair at all.

Anyone's guess

When a piece of information is **anyone's guess**, it means that it's something that no one can be sure about. If no one knows something for certain, then we can say that it's **anyone's guess**.

In this episode, Aleksandra mentions that it's **anyone's guess** why her parents decided that she should learn German. This means that no one knows why her parents made this decision.

Another popular way to phrase this expression is to say **anybody's guess**. Both expressions mean exactly the same thing and are equally common.

Here are a couple more examples with **anyone's guess**:

Karl: I'm so excited for tonight's World Series game. Who do you think will win? The Dodgers or the Yankees?

Wilma: I have no idea! It's **anyone's guess**. They're both great teams.

Emma: Have you heard the news about the mayor?

Dino: No. What happened?

Emma: He got caught taking bribes from the mob.

Dino: Wow. Do you think he'll resign?

Emma: I don't know. **It's anyone's guess**. Sometimes politicians can overcome scandals and sometimes they're career enders.

Tough going

The expression **tough going** is used to describe a situation that's difficult to deal with. In this episode, Aleksandra tells us that learning German was really **tough going** for her. In this expression, the word *going* is used as a noun, meaning work or progress, and the adjective *tough* means difficult.

So, whenever something is difficult to work on or make progress with, we can describe it as **tough going**.

Here are a couple more examples with **tough going**:

Ariel: How's your math course coming along?

Yan: It's **tough going**, but I think I'll be OK as long as I study hard.

Pablo: My wife and I just celebrated our first wedding anniversary.

Pam: Wow. Congratulations. How is married life treating you?

Pablo: To be honest, sometimes it's **tough going**, but overall I'm enjoying it.

Pam: Yeah. Sometimes relationships are difficult. But I'm sure you guys will be fine!

Nitty gritty

The **nitty gritty** is the most basic, important, or essential information or component. In this episode, Aleksandra says that her mother enjoyed stepping down into the **nitty gritty** world of English picture books, because it was here that she was able to experience the language at its most basic.

Whenever a situation or issue is boiled down to its most basic elements, we can describe this state by using the expression **nitty gritty**.

Here are a couple more examples with this expression:

Julia: How did your meeting with your boss go?

Marc: It was great; very productive. We got down to the **nitty gritty** and worked out a new sales strategy. If it works out, I'm going to ask him for a raise.

Julia: Amazing! That's great news.

Nate: I'm going to go buy a new car tomorrow.

Lee: Oh yeah?

Nate: Yeah. And I have a strategy for how to get the best deal.

Lee: Really? What's that?

Nate: I'm going to be very direct with the sales guy. No small talk. I'm going to get right down to the **nitty gritty**. I think this will help me get the best price.

Lee: I'm not so sure that'll work, but good luck anyways!

To be over one's head

In this episode, Aleksandra tells us that when she was 13, she was given a book of Shakespeare's sonnets, and that the poems were way **over her head**. When something is **over someone's head**, it's too difficult or complicated for them to understand.

Shakespeare's writing is very difficult for a 13-year-old student of English as a second language. In fact, it's even difficult for most adult native English speakers!

The pronoun in this expression can be changed depending on who you're talking about, so you could say that something is **over my, your, his, or her head**; or **over our or their heads**. You can also replace the pronoun with a noun or a person's name, such as *the course material was over Tim's head*, or *the joke was over the teacher's head*.

If you find that something is too difficult or complicated to understand, you can say that it's **over your head**.

Here are a couple more examples with this expression:

Caitlin: What did you think of the play last night? Did you enjoy it?

Mat: I thought it was cool, but it was a bit **over my head**.

Caitlin: I agree. I thought the costumes and stage design was really neat, but I found the plot hard to follow.

Ana: I give up on this math homework! It's totally **over my head**!

Fae: Let me take a look at it. Maybe I can help you.

Uncharted territory

When you venture into **uncharted territory**, it means that you're experiencing something new for the first time. In this episode, Aleksandra uses the expression **uncharted territory** when she talks about learning French. She used to read magazine articles in English first, a language she was already familiar with, and then she would read them again in French, which was **uncharted territory** for her.

This expression comes from mapmakers and explorers, several hundred years ago. When explorers were discovering the world, they often went to places for which no maps existed. This was considered to be **uncharted territory**, since no one had ever gone there and charted the area onto a map. We still use this expression metaphorically these days to describe situations when people experience something new for the first time.

Here are a couple more examples with **uncharted territory**:

Jane: Congratulations on your promotion at work. You must be excited!

Terri: Thanks! I'm excited, but also a little nervous. I've never had so much responsibility before. This is **uncharted territory** for me.

Jane: You'll be great. The management at your company wouldn't have chosen you for the job if they didn't think you could do it.

Rick: My wife and I are thinking about buying a house, but we're a little hesitant. We'd be going into **uncharted territory**. We've never had to make such a serious decision.

Quinn: I completely understand. I was nervous when I first made the decision to buy my house, too.

Quiz

1. Which expression can be used to describe something that's too complicated for you to understand?

- a) near your head
- b) in your head
- c) wrapped around your head
- d) over your head

2. What is the nitty gritty?

- a) the least important information
- b) a type of sand paper
- c) a movie starring Tom Hanks
- d) the most basic and essential information

3. When something is difficult to do, we can say that it's _____.

Fill in the blank.

- a) tough getting
- b) rough getting
- c) tough going
- d) rough gliding

4. What is uncharted territory?

- a) a familiar situation
- b) a scary situation
- c) a very comfortable situation
- d) a new situation

5. Who benefits from a win-win situation?

- a) no one
- b) everyone involved
- c) only one winner
- d) only the loser

6. **Something that happens quickly happens at the _____.**

Fill in the blank.

- a) clap of a hand
- b) flick of the wrist
- c) snap of a finger
- d) snap of a thumb

7. **Which of the following expressions is used to show a vague connection between two things?**

- a) something to do with
- b) something or other
- c) to be closely related
- d) to be something or other

8. **What does a cherry picker do?**

- a) chooses lots of items
- b) chooses some good and some bad items
- c) chooses only the worst items
- d) chooses only the best items

Answers:

1.d 2.d 3.c 4.d 5.b 6.c 7.a 8.d