

Bonus episode #131 - Talking 'bout last week

Episode description

In this week's bonus episode, Andrew shares a story about trying to celebrate his mother-in-law's birthday. At first, they planned a hike, but heavy snow forced them to change their plans over and over again. In the end, he and his family enjoyed a cozy, indoor party instead. You'll also hear about a funny surprise about his father-in-law's new look! As you listen, you will learn useful English expressions and build your fluency.



Note: The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hello, everyone, and welcome to bonus episode number 131 of the Culips English Podcast. My name's Andrew. How's it going? I hope you're doing well. Thank you for clicking play on this episode and joining me for this English study session.

Here in our bonus episode series, I just tell you some stories from my everyday life as a Canadian guy living abroad in Seoul, South Korea. And I hope that by listening to these stories, you will be able to B.I.G.B. B.I.G.B. is our goal and slogan for this series, and it stands for build your fluency, increase your cultural knowledge, grow your vocabulary, and become a better and more fluent English communicator.

So, if those are your goals, then you're in the right place, and I'm going to try my best, try my darndest, to help you achieve those goals. We also have a 100% free interactive transcript and vocabulary glossary for everyone. You can get that just by clicking the link in the description for this episode. Plus, if you're a Culips member, then you'll also get a comprehension quiz.

Thank you to all of the Culips members out there, by the way. Guys, without your support, Culips wouldn't exist. So, thank you so, so much for deciding to learn English with us. And if you are interested in becoming a Culips member as well, then I encourage you to click the link in the description and visit our website, Culips.com. That's a place where you can learn about all of the benefits and bonuses and awesome study tools that you'll get as a Culips member. Including ad-free audio, our speaking classes, our member-only series, our member-only Discord, our helpful study guides, our interactive transcripts, our entire lesson library of over 900 episodes, and even more than that.

There's a lot of great stuff that you get when you are a member. And it's all designed to help you build your English-speaking skills and your English fluency faster and easier than ever. So just visit our website, Culips.com, to learn more and to sign up and become a member today.

If you are watching the YouTube version of this episode, then you can see that I have my Christmas sweater on. If you're just listening to the audio, I guess you can't see it, but I do have my Christmas sweater on. It's very cute if I do say so myself. It's got **Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer** on the front, and its red nose is very big. It's a big red **pom-pom**.

My wife and I bought these sweaters a couple of years ago for an ugly Christmas sweater party that we attended, and we got them at a vintage store. And I wish I could show you my wife's sweater as well because... this is a little bit **off on a tangent**, but this is a funny story, and I don't think I've shared it at Culips before. But we went to this vintage clothing store to try and find some ugly Christmas sweaters, and we found the sweater that I'm wearing now, this Rudolph sweater, and then my wife got a sweater. It's green and it has a Christmas tree on the front, and we wore them to the Christmas party that my friends were hosting at that time.

And it was great. Everybody had a great reaction to our sweaters and complimented us on them and said we had really awesome, ugly Christmas sweaters. But my wife was like, "There's something uncomfortable on my back." She's wearing this sweater, and she was like, "Andrew, can you check out if there's something rubbing on my back? Is it like a tag or something?" And so, I kind of turned her sweater up at the back, rolled it up to take a look and see if there was a tag or something that was scratching her skin. And I saw this little box, like this plastic box, and I was like, what in the heck is this?

And I noticed, I was like, "Wait a second. I think your sweater has lights in it!" Like it was a little box to put some AA or AAA batteries. And I was like, "Hold on a second. I think your sweater lights up! Like I think the Christmas tree that's on the front of your sweater, if we put in some batteries, then it's going to light up and flash." And so, we were all really excited at this discovery, and I asked the party hosts like, "Hey, do you guys have some batteries? Can we put them in this sweater and see if it lights up?" And my wife is like, "It's not going to work." Because, you know, when you buy secondhand clothes, like we bought them at the vintage store, usually it's a good idea to wash them, right, of course.

So, she had washed them already, put them in the wash, and they'd been through the washing machine and the dryer. And so, she was like, "It's not going to work." But **lo and behold**, we put the batteries into the little case, and I flipped the switch, and boom, the whole sweater lit up. The Christmas tree lit up, and so she was the hit of the party. It was hilarious. It was a really funny moment that we discovered that her sweater was electric like that, and lit up. It was really, really funny and **a sight to behold**.

So, it's too bad I can't fit into that sweater. It's actually a little bit too small for me, but I do have my Christmas sweater on. And that's because it's the Christmas season here, and I'm trying to get in the Christmas mood. There's not too much time left before Christmas, just a few days. And maybe you can see also, if you're watching the YouTube version, there are some Christmas lights in the background here in my place. We don't have a Christmas tree this year, but we do have the Christmas lights, and it was kind of cute. I was recording recently with Kassy. As I was recording that episode, I was in my little office there, my little Culips recording studio. And when I came out, then my wife had decorated the home. She put up the Christmas lights and some other Christmas decorations as well.

So, I'm trying my best to get in the Christmas spirit, and there's not too much time left before Christmas. To be honest, I haven't felt too Christmassy this year, but I'm doing what I can to get into it. And I hope if you celebrate Christmas as well that you're starting to get into the Christmas season as well, because it is just a nice, enjoyable time of the year.

Anyway, I'm not going to talk about Christmas today. What I am going to talk about is what I got up to last weekend, which was going to my mother-in-law's birthday party. And a kind of hilarious, funny event that happened between me and my father-in-law at the birthday party.

After listening to this story, if you have any questions or comments, I'd love for you to **head on over** to our Discord server. That's the place where the Culips community gathers, and we hang out, we spend some time together, we practice our English, and we talk about everything under the sun. But we'll be having a discussion about this week's story over

there, so just join by checking out the link in the description for this episode. And we'll continue the conversation over on the Discord a little bit later. But for now, I think it's time to get started with the story, so without any further ado, let's get to it. Here we go. Enjoy.

So, about a month ago, it was my mother-in-law's birthday, and we were planning to celebrate by going hiking. We asked my mother-in-law what she wanted to do to celebrate. And she said, let's go for a hike, let's go up into the mountains, enjoy the beautiful fall air, the fall colors, the fall scenery, and then after the hike, we could stop at one of the restaurants near the bottom of the mountain.

Because here in Korea, it's awesome. All of the mountains have hiking paths, and at the bottom of the mountain, like, there's a parking lot area, and there's an area where there are many restaurants, and sometimes even a gift shop or something. The mountains here are really well-developed. Of course, not all mountains are like this. There are some out in the wild where you're in nature, but the ones around Seoul, at least, are quite developed, and the one that we wanted to go to was one of these mountains.

So, we were going to stop at the end of the hike, and I think she wanted to eat some kind of chicken soup, Korean-style chicken soup. So as a lover of hiking and an outdoor lover, I was super stoked to hear this plan. I was like, yes, this is going to be a great birthday, and I was joking with my mother-in-law, like, we're on the same page, we like the same thing, this is a great way to celebrate. And so, I was really looking forward to doing that.

But then on the week of the party, we got a huge snowfall here in Seoul, and it was a complete whiteout. Classes at school were canceled. People worked from home instead of going to the office, and it was just a really huge dump of snow. It, like, shut down the city and the surrounding area for a day or two. And because of that, we figured it's probably not a good time to go hiking. And after a day or two, the snow did melt here in the city, but who knows about in the mountains where you're up higher. There's probably still some snow and ice up there, and it's cold.

So, we decided to cancel that plan and reschedule for another time. Well, you know, these

days, probably your life is like this, my life is certainly like this. It is really hard to find a time among adults that works for everybody. My work schedule, my wife's work schedule, my father-in-law and mother-in-law's work schedule and social schedules, it was like really hard to find a time that **meshed with all of us**. And this was just for a small family gathering.

Usually, we have an extended family gathering with my wife's brother and his family as well, but this was just the four of us. We were planning just to do it the four of us this time. And so, it ended up that we kept having to reschedule and reschedule and reschedule, trying to find a time that worked for everyone. And then by the time we did find a date that was good with everybody and worked for everybody, well, we had missed my mother-in-law's birthday by like three weeks. But that was OK. She was fine with that.

And yeah, that's just, that happens. But also, it had become winter. It went from this really nice fall weather when we were planning the hike into now it's like winter here in Seoul for sure. It's not super cold or anything like that, but it's below zero. Temperatures are below zero. And again, once you get into the mountains and it's higher up, it's a little bit colder and everything. So, we had to **scrap that plan**. We had to cancel our original plan to go hiking, and we made a new plan which was just to meet up for lunch.

And then my mother-in-law suggested a chicken and beer party which again, I was like, my mother-in-law and me, we are on the same page. We enjoy the same things. Chicken and beer sounds like a great way to celebrate a birthday to me. So that's what we decided to do. And then last weekend, finally, after I figure like a month of going back, trying to schedule this thing, finally, we were able to do it.

So, we went out to my wife's hometown. She grew up not inside Seoul exactly in one of the smaller cities, one of the satellite cities surrounding Seoul. So, it takes us about an hour and 15 minutes to an hour and a half to get there by subway depending on if we catch all the subway transfers or if we have to wait for the next subway train. That can add sometimes between 15 to 20 minutes depending on your luck. But we had good luck that

day, and we made it out there in just over an hour.

We arrived at the restaurant to meet my in-laws, and they had selected a very good restaurant for cold weather. It was a shabu-shabu restaurant. And for those of you who don't know what this food is, I believe maybe it's originally Japanese food, and our Japanese listeners can chime in and tell me if I'm correct about that or not. But it's just essentially hot pot. So, it's a hot broth, and then you can put in some meat and put in some vegetables and have a hot soup that way.

So, this restaurant served shabu-shabu, and they also served barbecued meat. So, you could barbecue your meat, K-bbq at your table. And when we got to the restaurant, we met my in-laws. They were already waiting in line. This restaurant was super busy, and so there was a little bit of time that we had to wait before we got our table. But it was funny. When we saw my in-laws, my wife was like, "Does my dad look any different to you?"

And he had had a cold. I knew that he had caught a cold this week and wasn't feeling so good. So, he was really bundled up. He had like a winter hat on, and he had a mask on and a scarf on. And so, he was sitting down too when I saw him. So, I took a look, and I was like, "No, he looks the same." I couldn't really notice anything different about him. He was kind of just like bundled up waiting at the restaurant there in the reception area, waiting area of the restaurant. So, I was like, "No, what are you talking about? What do you mean?"

And so, my wife was like, "Oh, OK." And actually, my in-laws said, "Hey, why don't you guys go and do some looking around?" We were in kind of a shopping center, department store kind of place. And the restaurant was really busy, and there were no seats in the waiting area. My in-laws had a seat. So, they said, "Yeah, just go look around for a bit. And when it's time to eat, we'll call you, and you can come join us at the restaurant."

So right after that, then we left the restaurant. We were just walking around the mall, checking things out. And yeah, about 10 or 15 minutes later, we got a call saying, come back to the restaurant. It's time to eat. And so, we went back to the restaurant. And this

restaurant was kind of half buffet, half order from the kitchen. And all of the vegetables that you could put in the shabu-shabu, they were buffet style. So, you could just go up and choose as many vegetables as you'd like. There were several different types of cabbages and bean sprouts and bok choy and mushrooms and tofu and noodles, many different types of things that you could get from this buffet.

And also, I don't know how familiar you are with Korean food, but Korean food is famous for having many different kinds of side dishes on the table. Kimchi is the most famous one, but there are probably hundreds of other different little side dishes that you put on the table. And yeah, you don't eat 100 at one meal, but there are many different options that exist in the cuisine. And at this restaurant, those were buffet style as well.

So, when we arrived and we got settled to our chair, then pretty much we were at the buffet bar loading up on vegetables for the shabu-shabu and side dishes for the table. And so, my wife and me and my mother-in-law, we were all going back and forth. You also had to get cutlery. It was very serve yourself kind of place, cutlery, bowls, everything, rice. So, we were going back and forth and back and forth. And finally, our table was like totally filled to the max. I thought there's no more space on this table to put any more side dishes or any more vegetables.

And so, it was finally time for me to sit down at the table. But my wife and my mother-in-law, I guess they have bigger stomachs than me because they were able to see more space on the table than me. I'm not sure because they were still going back and forth bringing other things. But yeah, my work was done. And so, my father-in-law and I, we started grilling the meat and getting the barbecue going. And it was at that time that I looked at him, and he had now taken off his hat and his scarf and his mask. And I could see his face now finally for the first time.

And we were just sitting together alone, and I looked at his face. And then I noticed what my wife was talking about earlier when she asked me, does my dad look any different to you? Because I noticed that my father-in-law's eyebrows were super, super bold and

super, super dark. And so, I asked him, like, "What's up with your eyebrows? What did you do?" And he told me that yesterday he had gotten eyebrow tattoos, eyebrow tattoos.

So, I don't know if this is common in your culture. To be honest, in my kind of Canadian culture, of course, Canada is a multicultural country. So, there are many different kinds of culture within my country. But in the kind of cultural background that I have, this is not a thing. People don't get eyebrow tattoos. But I guess here in Korea, and I think in some other Asian cultures as well, as you age, it's common for your eyebrows to thin out. And as they thin out, a lot of older folks actually get them tattooed in. So, it doesn't look like they have no eyebrows.

And after a while, it actually seems really normal. I see a lot of older folks who have the tattooed eyebrows. But because it was just done yesterday and it was so fresh, it was really dark and very thick and a little bit funny, every time I looked up at him, I had to try and not laugh in his face. Every time I looked up at him, I was a little bit surprised, and I had to not laugh. I had to be polite. Of course, you don't want to laugh at something like that. And I'm sure now it looks totally fine. But just because they were so fresh, it was kind of a funny situation.

And yeah, listeners, I would love to hear from you as well in your country, in your culture. Is this a thing? Do older people get tattoos for their eyebrows? We were joking that I probably will never have to do this because if you're watching the YouTube, you can see me right now. But if you're just listening to the audio version, perhaps you don't know what I look like. I have very thick, very bushy eyebrows, almost like caterpillars. So yeah, I don't know. It's kind of funny. Like, **the grass is always greener on the other side**, isn't it?

Like, you always want something else. Like, my father-in-law was saying it would have been nice if he had thicker eyebrows. And I've always thought perhaps I would be more attractive if I had thinner eyebrows. So, it's always like we want what we don't have, right? Isn't that a funny thing about human psychology? But I guess now my father-in-law kind of got what he wanted because he has these new tattoos.

And yeah, another funny story that I heard about this recently, and this is just kind of serendipitous. It's weird how these kinds of things sometimes happen at the same time. But I was watching a YouTube video, actually, which was an interview with an American woman, I think college student. Maybe she's in her early 20s. But she speaks really good Korean. And the interview was about how she learned how to speak Korean. And of course, if you're a regular listener of Culips, you'll know that Korean is my second language and the one that I'm learning. And of course, I think from time to time, these kinds of stories can be really motivating to hear about how other people learned the language.

And so, in this video, she was describing that. And she said what she would do was go to supermarkets when she lived in the USA. She would go to the Asian supermarket that was in her neighborhood. And she would go there, and she wanted to try and practice speaking Korean with the Korean grandmas at the Asian supermarket in the USA. And so, the interviewer asked her, like, "How did you know who was the Korean grandmas?" And she said, "Ahh there's an interesting thing that I learned. When you go to these supermarkets, the Chinese grandmas and the Korean grandmas have slightly different eyebrow tattoos."

And so, she was able to just tell by looking who is a Korean grandma and who is a Chinese grandma just by the kind of style. She said there's a little slight nuance, the different ones that they get. And so, what she would do is just **scope out** the Korean grandmas in the grocery store. And she'd be able to notice by the eyebrow tattoo who's Korean and then go up and start a conversation and practice speaking Korean that way. And that's how she learned to get really good at Korean. Very funny, right? Getting good at a second language because of eyebrow tattoos. Wow, the world's an interesting place. All sorts of stories out there, right?

So anyways, we finally tucked into our meal. The barbecue was ready. The shabu-shabu was ready. My wife and my mother-in-law returned to the table, and we all had a delicious meal. And yeah, another thing that was interesting about this restaurant is that they had robot servers. I don't know if you've seen these at all. I don't know if they exist in your

country. Here in Korea, you know, it's a very high-tech place. So, we do have a lot of technology built into our everyday lives. I would say more than Canada for sure. And I think more than a lot of places.

And not at every restaurant, but from time to time, you'll see these robots that will serve your table. So, as I mentioned, this restaurant was a half buffet, half order from the kitchen style of restaurant. And if you ordered something from the kitchen, and in this case, it was usually just raw meat that you would order. And then you would grill it at your table. This kind of K-bbq style is where you grill it yourself at your table. Each table has a little barbecue built right into the table. So yeah, we would order the meat and you do that just at your table with a little tablet computer.

And then five minutes later, you would hear some music. It's kind of like... Something like that. I can't remember the tune exactly, but it was something like that. And there's this robot which has a tray, and it brings your meat to your table. So, a very high-tech restaurant and perfect for introverts who don't want to talk with a server. You can just order at the tablet and the robot brings it out to you.

But anyways, we had a nice, lovely meal of shabu-shabu and barbecue. And then we went back to my in-law's place, and we just hung out for a while. My father-in-law actually had another social engagement that he had to go to. And I think he was a little bit nervous about leaving with his eyebrows being so strong. He was like, "Should I try and wipe these off?" And we're like, "You can't wipe them off. It's a tattoo!" Like, it's permanent now. And yeah, so anyways, we were just joking about that. That was funny.

But he had to go out to this other plan that he had. And so, it was just my wife and my mother-in-law, and I was there, of course. And we just drank coffee and chatted and hung out. And after several hours of hanging out, we were starting to get a little bit hungry again. And then it was time for the chicken and beer party, which is a staple of Korean cuisine. It's KFC Korean fried chicken, another famous Korean dish. They're really proud of their fried chicken here in the country. And I do have to say it's pretty good. And it pairs nicely

with beer. You have the crispy, crunchy, and a little bit oily fried chicken. And then you have this cold, refreshing, carbonated beer.

And then you might be wondering about dessert. Like, weren't we going to have a birthday cake? It was my mother-in-law's birthday after all. But here's a really interesting fact about my wife's side of the family. They don't eat cake. They don't like sweet foods or desserts, really. And so, it's a little bit awkward every time when we have a birthday party. Because the tradition here in Korea as well, just like it is in Canada and the USA and pretty much all of the English-speaking countries. And probably even in your country as well, I wonder if this really is a worldwide tradition. I think many, many cultures do this. But when it's your birthday, you eat cake. And you have to blow out the birthday candles on the cake, right? And all of the party guests sing you happy birthday. It's your birthday. It's time to celebrate.

But in my wife's family, nobody really likes cake. And so, in the past, whenever it's been my wife's birthday or my father-in-law's birthday or whatever, whoever's birthday. And we do buy a cake and do that because they do like the celebration part, the singing of happy birthday, the blowing out of the candles. Whenever we do that, then when it comes time to serve the cake and eat the cake, then usually I'm the only one that eats. And so, they always give me like a big piece of birthday cake, which I honestly love. Don't get me wrong. I'm always happy to eat some cake. But it's always a little bit awkward because I'm the only one eating it or they'll just have a very, very tiny piece. And then they try to get me to take the rest of the cake home. And these days, birthday cakes are very expensive too. It's not something that's just like a cheap dessert at all. They're expensive.

And so, this year, my mother-in-law was like, "Let's skip the cake. We don't need to do it this year." Instead, why don't you buy some fruit, and we'll just enjoy some delicious fruit instead of having a birthday cake. And I guess it's a little bit awkward to put a candle into a piece of fruit. Perhaps if you had a piece of soft fruit, you could. But we ate persimmons and pear. And yeah, I don't think you could stick a birthday candle in a pear very easily. But of course, it was mother-in-law's birthday. So, she gets what she wanted. So, we skipped the cake. We skipped the birthday song. But that doesn't matter because we were

able to spend some enjoyable time together.

So, at the end of the day, we didn't get to do the hike. And I'm a little bit sad. This fall, I didn't do any hiking at all. So, I was really looking forward to that. But plans change. You know, sometimes you get a snowstorm. That's life. And you just have to adapt and adjust. And so that's what we did. And if adapting and adjusting means I get to eat shabu-shabu and fried chicken and beer and pears and persimmons, I'm alright with that. I can live with that.

Well, everyone, that's what I got up to last weekend. I hope you enjoyed listening to my story. And I hope you were able to learn a lot with this lesson. And now it's time for me to share this week's completion code with you. You can leave a comment on our Instagram page, on our YouTube page, or on our Discord community with the completion code. And this will signal to me and signal to our entire Culips community that you did it, that you listened all the way to the end of this episode.

So, for this week, the completion code is going to be: "Reschedule." Reschedule. So, leave an example sentence or just a one-word comment with this completion code. Reschedule. Because we had to reschedule my mother-in-law's birthday party several times before we were actually able to celebrate it. So go, go, go. You know what you have to do. You have your homework assignment. And I'm looking forward to reading your comments.

Well, everyone, it's time for me to go. But please have a great week of English learning up ahead. And Merry Christmas! I'll see you next time. Bye-bye.

Glossary

1. **Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer:** A famous Christmas character known for his glowing red nose. In the episode, Andrew mentions a sweater with Rudolph on it as part of a festive outfit. *Example: During the holidays, many children love stories about Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer.*
2. **Pom-pom:** A small, fluffy ball of fabric used for decoration. Andrew uses this to describe the large, red, decorative ball on Rudolph's nose on his sweater. *Example: She glued a bright pom-pom to her winter hat to make it more cheerful.*
3. **Off on a tangent:** Starting to talk about something unrelated to the main topic. Andrew uses this expression when he realizes he's telling a side story instead of sticking to the main point. *Example: I was explaining the recipe, but then I went off on a tangent about my trip to Italy.*
4. **Lo and behold:** An expression used to show surprise at something unexpected. Andrew says this when he discovers the sweater lights still work after washing them. *Example: I opened the old box and, lo and behold, I found my long-lost necklace inside.*
5. **A sight to behold:** Something impressive or remarkable to see. Andrew uses this expression to describe the surprising and amusing appearance of the light-up sweater. *Example: The fireworks display on New Year's Eve was truly a sight to behold.*
6. **Head on over:** A casual way to say "go to" or "move towards" a place. Andrew uses this phrase when encouraging listeners to visit the Discord server. *Example: After school, we decided to head on over to the park for a quick game of basketball.*
7. **Scrap that plan:** To cancel or get rid of a planned idea. Andrew says this when discussing how they had to abandon their hiking trip due to snowy weather. *Example: We were going to have a picnic outside, but it started raining, so we had to scrap that plan.*
8. **Meshed with (everyone's schedules):** To fit or work well together with other people's times or plans. Andrew uses this expression to explain how hard it was to find a day when everyone could meet. *Example: The group chose a meeting time that meshed with everyone's schedules.*

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9. **The grass is always greener (on the other side):** A saying that means people often think someone else's situation is better than their own. Andrew uses it to talk about how his father-in-law wishes he had thicker eyebrows and Andrew wishes his were thinner. *Example: She felt bored with her office job, but her friend reminded her that the grass is always greener on the other side.*
10. **Scope out** (the Korean grandmas): To look around carefully and learn information about a place or situation. In this episode, Andrew mentions a woman who used eyebrow tattoos as a clue to find Korean grandmas to practice Korean with. *Example: We arrived early to scope out the best seats in the theater.*

Episode credits

Host and preparation: Andrew Bates

Operations: Tsuyoshi Kaneshima