Twitter Thread by Matt Forde



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Here's a happy story to end the week. For years @RonJichardson and I had fantasised about going to New York. For almost as long as we'd known each other we'd dreamt of going and having a holiday there. In 2011 we sorted it and set off on our adventure.

We went for 10 nights which is a long time in New York. It was emotional. For both of us NY was the land of dreams. Seeing the Ghostbusters Fire Station is still one of the highlights of my life. My main memory is of the bars. I think we went to every bar in New York.

The best thing about going for 10 nights is you can do the tourist stuff pretty quick and then you're just mooching about as if you live there for a week. The days are long, especially when you're doing a pub crawl every day.

One of the games we'd play at home was The Lookalike Game. On a train, in a pub or on the Tube you'd spot someone and say "over your right shoulder, looks like a short Les Dennis" or "by the bar, a male Barbara Streisand". It was purely for our own amusement.

Towards the end of our trip in New York we're walking down a busy street in downtown Manhattan. We're playing the lookalike game. Jon says "he looks like Billy Connolly". I look up and there's a radiant man in a North Face gilet. He didn't look like Billy Connolly.

It was Billy Connolly. Jon isn't the sort of bloke to go up to people, but I absolutely am. "Excuse me, are you Billy Connolly?" I ask. "Aye, I am ayyyee" he replies in that beautiful voice. "Oh my God" I say "we're two comedians from Britain and we're massive fans of yours!"

Of course we're massive fans of him. He's one of the greatest comedians who's ever lived. Of all the places we meet this GOD, it's in the street in New York. The first thing that struck me was how wonderful he looked. His skin was fresh, his eyes were bright.

It was as if he was lit on a film set, he was magnificent. It was his personality too, he was full of beans and greeted us as if we were old friends. Immediately he asks us "have you been to Caroline's on Broadway to try out some stuff?".

We had to tell him that we were just there on the piss. He asked us about what sort of comedy we did and he chatted away to us like we were colleagues of his. We must have seen quite green and we asked him a lot of advice, which I won't repeat here. His answers were perfect.

He was so positive about comedy. Didn't slag off the new stuff or different genres. He had a sense of solidarity with every comedian, whatever they were doing. Aware we'd stopped a living legend going about his daily business I said a couple of times "we'll let you get on Billy"

He was having none of it. He'd keep chatting away, giving us the best pep talk we've ever had. When the conversation did end we walked off and Jon was in a state of shock. As we proceed in opposite directions he then shouts back at us down the street:

"BOYS! BOYS! It'll happen, it'll happen!". What a line to end on. That day, one of the greatest comedy talents of all time, one of the inventors of the modern form, gave two blokes he'd never heard of a great gift. When I daydream, I hear him shouting it at us.

As the years have gone on I've told the story a few times but changing phones every few years meant I'd lost the photos. I always thought Jon would have a copy somewhere because that's the sort of guy he was but I was annoyed that I'd lost my copies.

Until today, when I got an old laptop working and found the photos. So, here they are. Jon Richardson and I, in New York, with Billy Connolly. Whoever said "don't meet your heroes" had never met Billy Connolly. He was everything you'd hope he'd be and more.


THE
NORTH
FACE

I’m aware I look terrible in that photo. In my defence it was freezing and I have very sensitive skin. The 10 day pub crawl may also be playing a small part.