

London Dialogue 1

Yep.

I'm Mollie.

I've lived in London all my life. Most of my life. When there's been times I've not lived here I've stayed connected to it. Both literally and figuratively. I love London, and I've always loved it.

I can get quite defensive when faced with negativity about London. I wouldn't say I'm proud to be British, or English; but I'm definitely proud to be a Londoner.

I remember going on the DLR when I was very young, and going through Canary Wharf - seeing Canada Tower which back then was the tallest building in London - seeing all them, modern, luxury flats popping up around there - and thinking 'yeah, I'll live there one day'.

I haven't yet - I don't know if it's my kind of area now that I've grown up and I'm this type of me. I think as a little kid I thought it would be a bit more plain sailing in terms of what I'd do, like how I'd make a living.

But - I did know it wouldn't be totally easy.

I don't know if someone told me but I suspect so. You know, someone said "you've got to earn a lot of money to live there"

At some point over the years I know I felt a sort of sad acceptance that it really isn't easy living here.

I do still feel like I'm lucky to live in London. Or stupid to want to, sometimes I think. Not everywhere is as expensive as it is here, you could maybe get more for your money somewhere else. But that depends on what type of 'more' you're wanting really.

I've lived a lot of places in my life, I'm only 31 - 32 by the time anyone's watching this, and I've always known I want London as my home.

I can't really explain what it is at points - like I'm not ignorant, or so naive that I'm unaware of all the crap happens in London. But I've lived a lot of places where I've witnessed more racism than I personally ever have in London.

London Dialogue 2

There's a lot that appeals to me about London - the main thing I say - or I think of - when someone asks "what is it about London?" to me it feels like a home that everyone's welcome in. We're all equals, or we should be - we're all Londoners.

Like - what makes a real Londoner? In my mind it doesn't matter where you're born. Half the museums in London have things in them, from other countries. I know that's a bit crass. But if we're trying to claim all that in the British Museum, I'm gonna argue that anyone who wants to be a Londoner already has what it takes. By wanting to, you know, by being here.

I don't think you've always got to be here to be a Londoner. I've had moments in my life where I haven't lived in London. I've not strayed too far. Furthest I've lived would be Liverpool, and only for a year. And I came back to London most weekends.

That's what I mean - it pulls me back in.

You know - when I go out of London and then I'm back in after a weekend, or a few days whatever - as I'm coming back in I'm like that - smiling.

It doesn't take long to feel frustrated being here. Trying to walk out of Kings Cross as I often am and thinking 'how does no one in front of me know where the right exit barriers are?'

But then two minutes later I'm feeling humbled, waiting for the buses outside Kings Cross and you see so many homeless people.

I think if you're going to live somewhere you have to contribute. Doesn't always mean financially in my mind - I think that's not always possible. Sometimes it's possible - but it's not the only option.

Social contributions. Engaging in your environment to a degree, even if it's just looking up enough to say hello to people in the street you know.

I sit out on the front step where I live - and this isn't me advertising or condoning that - but I might be sat there or I might be walking the dog, popping to the shops, whatever - I say hello, maybe have a little chat with people.

I don't know if that's rare, in some aspects I predict it is - not many people ever talk about Londoner's being chatty, more the opposite. But where I live it's like that. Lot's of people say hello to each other, have a chat.

I'd like to hope that occurs everywhere really, and that maybe the people who say it doesn't aren't looking for it in that way, I'd argue. Because 'unfriendly' isn't my go-to descriptive for London, or Londoners on the whole.

I'm not silly, I'm not implying it's safe - I wouldn't want to leave anything even sat outside my house like a package because that'll be gone. We've had the milk delivery nicked from the front steps before; that happens sometimes.

We had our plant pots randomly smashed, I watched that one. But what can you do? Be glad you're not sat right there when it happens I suppose. Still doesn't make me not want to live here. Shit happens, you pick your battles.

I've experienced a rough side of London, yeah. I grew up, partly, in reasonably-rural, Essex though, and I witnessed that rough too. I don't think it matters much where you go - you go out, and you talk to enough people - you're gonna at least hear about something.

"Oh someone I know had this happen to them" or something.

I have been attacked in London. It was semi-random - wrong place wrong time. If you follow that type of logic - considering it wasn't that far from my own home. Walking distance. I think it was unfortunate, the person who attacked me was in clearly quite a bad frame of mind at the time - I don't think that's an excuse.

There was a while after I felt paranoid to be out and about; looking behind me more than I would've before. I'm lucky that passed for me - I think that's part of who I am specifically. I had to search for forgiveness for the person after it happened, but I got there. Obviously I think that's sort of implies it wasn't as bad as it could've been. But I know a lot of people who that would stay with - I'm lucky I find I've often forgotten that happened to be honest.

First of all I felt like 'thank goodness it was me it happened to and that I wasn't like, a witness to it instead'. There were witnesses, it was 11 o'clock in the morning by a bus stop. People have shared their disapproval of that no one stepped in but I think it could've been worse if someone had really. So - I'm just thankful to the people who didn't totally walk away - strange and conflicting as it must've felt - they watched it - it was so brief - and they asked if I was alright after and that. I think at the stage it was, that's the best I could have got there from people nearby.

I got to a sort of level of forgiveness for the person after - maybe a few weeks. I was on the bus going through exactly where it had happened, and I hadn't actually see the attacker's face when it happened - they had a mask and a crash helmet on - but I was on this bus and i felt a bit - ooh, you know like emotional or something as I'm going past - but I turned and this guy on the bus was sat looking at me and as we caught eyes he smiled, I smiled back. And I sort of thought 'I don't know who it was that attacked me right, could well as be that bloke smiling, but I'm not going to not smile back at anyone again, in case it could be them'.

I do think that's a bit of a specific way I think. And without a doubt - I'll say again - I'm lucky it wasn't worse than it was, maybe I wouldn't find forgiveness so easy. And same again if it hadn't been me - if it was a mate of mine or something - I'd not have adjusted my thoughts so compassionately I don't think.

London Dialogue 3

I think if I don't live in London one day it'll be because I've been priced out - money, for me, has got to be the toughest part of being here. Nowadays, anyway. Now that I'm feeling otherwise pretty content in myself - it's money I can't really keep hold of. Literally.

In, I think it was 2013 or maybe 2012 - so over thirteen years ago now anyway - a housemate of mine at the time worked out it was costing about £10 a day living in London, including rent and travel, food, bills - all the essentials. I *think* it was about £10; that seems really cheap though. But in 2013 I was paying £333 to live near Camberwell which was cheap then, nowadays it would be just unheard of. Or a definite scam.

I don't want to try and work out how much it costs to live here per day now. I mean £10! Some people spend more than that just getting to work, never mind getting home.

I've had a lot of different jobs, working in London. I've been a waitress, a groundskeeper, a market stall operative - that was just putting up and taking down market stalls before and after business on weekends in Hackney. I was getting up at 4:30/ 5am in the summer.

That's alright - it was the same pretty much when I was a groundskeeper for a hospital. It was earlier than that when I was a postal worker - sorting mail in a warehouse in Stonebridge Park and because I started at 6am, but I was living in Wood Green - see any London drivers will probably know that early in the morning that's gonna be a thirty minute trip, maximum, along the North Circular.

I only know that because eventually I got friends with someone who gave me a lift in. I'm not a driver, so before that I was having to get up at about 3:30am to get a night bus from Wood Green to Trafalgar Square - that was the N29 - then get on another bus or maybe couple of buses going out to where it was in Stonebridge Park. The other people who'd go in on the bus they'd laugh at me because I couldn't keep myself awake on the way there. They were all used to it.

I was only contracted about a month - so I did not get used to it. I'd wake up in the mornings and sometimes my housemates would still be up from the night before.

At least one occasion I didn't wake up. Despite alarms and people ringing me - I woke up at 10am; so that became a day off. I just couldn't adjust.

I love mornings though, truthfully. And especially in London - the best time of any day is the morning, before people start waking up and making noise. When the sun's just first lighting up the sky and in London it's got that golden glow that reflects off all the glass for a bit and then it goes white, or more - I suppose - more commonly grey. It's like that special light disappears when everyone starts moving about a bit; you start seeing more and more people just appearing around you.

I think London has a lot of those moments where it's like 'you had to be there' to fully experience the wow factor.

Like, I suppose otherwise it is quite a grumpy, morning attitude I've felt coming from people though, you know - when they're tired and along with everyone else they're trying to get to work or wherever they're going. And that's not something I've noticed changed since Covid either. People say there's more 'hybrid working', so people get more days working from home than they used to but I think there's just so many people in London - it doesn't really get like, less busy on Fridays or something. Though I have noticed Thursday evening seems to be a bigger thing than it was before - more people lingering in town after work for a drink or whatever.

But yeah, morning time is the best, I'd say from about 4 / 4:30am until 7am. That's my favourite time of day anywhere, but especially in London. If you take those moments into consideration, I think there's definitely beauty in every day here. Even if it's raining - it's often raining.