

Episode 13: Jannike lay down on the railroad tracks

Four years ago, Jannike felt like a failure in every area of her life. She could not envision her circumstances getting any better, so she made the decision to end her life.

She wrote good-bye letters to her siblings and her four children, then she went out after dark one night, found a railroad track to lie down on, and waited for the next train.

Today, she's a much happier person and loves her life.

In our conversation, Jannike told me about that night on the train track, why her life did not end then, and what she did to overcome her problem and become someone who enjoys each day.

You can see pictures of her, as well as lots of other thought-provoking content, on my Instagram, which is [whatwasthatlike](#).

And now, here's Jannike.

Scott

Jannike, thanks for coming on the show!

Jannike

Thanks for having me.

Scott

You're Swedish by birth, right?

Jannike

Yes.

Scott

I understand that the language in Sweden is Swedish - or Finnish in some places - is that right?

Jannike

No, it's the opposite. In Finland, there are Finnish and Swedish.

Scott

Ah, okay. So Sweden is all Swedish?

Jannike

Yes.

Scott

Okay. How did you come to speak such good English?

Jannike

I had a very good teacher, I think, when I started to learn English.

Scott

Is it standard to teach English in schools over there?

Jannike

Yes, we learn from the age of 8 or 9 years old.

Scott

You have quite an amazing story to tell and I want to get into the the the details of that. Part of that story is what led up to it. So, I want to just find out what was your kind of background before that fateful day about 4 years ago? You got married and moved to Stockholm?

Jannike

Yeah.

Scott

Stockholm is a pretty big city, right?

Jannike

Well, it depends on what you compare it to. It has about 1.5 million inhabitants, I think.

Scott

Did you enjoy living there?

Jannike

Not particularly. I had no friends of my own. The friends I had are my husband's. When we got divorced, I had no friends at all. I'm quite lazy, socially.

Scott

Are you kind of an introvert?

Jannike

Yeah.

Scott

How long after you got married were you divorced?

Jannike

2.5 years. We got married at the end of our relationship as opposed to what you usually do.

Scott

But did you stay in Stockholm, then?

Jannike

Yeah. We had 4 kids together that moved between us. So, we had to live quite close.

Scott

How old were the kids at that point, roughly?

Jannike

The youngest one was 2.5, then 4.5, 7 and 8 years old.

Scott

Being sort of introverted and not extremely socially outgoing, how did you manage that while living in a big city?

Jannike

I had to work. I had a job that I could do from home. I did the subtitling for TV shows and so on and I could do that from my flat. So, I did that and didn't go out very much. I got a few friends but I didn't socialize very much until I had to quit that job and search for another one.

Scott

How would you describe your mental outlook or what was it that led to the decision to eventually try to take your own life?

Jannike

Because I felt like I had failed at everything. I mean, I had big dreams when I was younger and I didn't even come close to them. Then, I didn't succeed in my marriage. I divorced my husband and I couldn't keep a job. So, yeah, I saw myself as a failure.

Scott

But what about your children? Did you consider that to be a success in your life?

Jannike

Well, yes. They're the 4 good things I did in my life.

Scott

Were you clinically depressed?

Jannike

Yeah, I was. Later on, I was diagnosed as bipolar. I went on an emotional roller coaster since I was a teenager. I knew I had depression. I always thought when I was manic, I was myself. That's the kind of mindset that I enjoyed, so that must be who I am - right? I had depressions but I always got out of them. I knew the depression would fade sooner or later.

Scott

So you went, like, in that type of roller coaster, so to speak, for quite a few years?

Jannike

Yes.

Scott

Was there a kind of a trigger or anything that made you decide, "Nope, this is it! I'm done!"?

Jannike

Not really, I didn't think I was depressed at that time. I just had enough of being who I was - not getting anywhere in life and not doing anything.

Scott

Do you remember what day it was?

Jannike

It was at the beginning of August 2014 - 5th or 6th or something like that.

Scott

How long in advance did you plan what you were going to do?

Jannike

Three months in advance, I think.

Scott

What did that planning look like? What were the thoughts going through your head in thinking about this?

Jannike

I had to clean out my flat. I had to tidy up and make sure the kids would have money. I had to pay my due rent. I didn't have any money. I didn't work. I didn't have unemployment benefits. I didn't have anything to pay my rent for. If you talk about triggers, the main thing that made me make up my mind was that if I didn't pay my rent, I would get evicted. So, I thought it would be better for my kids to have a mother who committed suicide than have a mother who was homeless.

Scott

When you were planning to end your life, I would think that you would consider how your friends and family would react to that - especially your children. In your case, you were thinking that it would be better for them if you did that than to be homeless.

Jannike

Yeah. If you have made up your mind, you sort of find reasons not to go ahead and do it. I think. I thought a lot about what my kids would think. I wrote them letters and farewell notes. I thought, "Well, they are gonna be very angry, disappointed, and sad but they will get over it."

Scott

How many people did you send notes to?

Jannike

All of my 3 siblings, my 4 kids, and my landlord.

Scott

Can you give us an idea of what one of those notes said?

Jannike

I wanted to give my kids good advice or something. I asked them to forgive me, of course. I wrote that I hope they would find ways to get over it together.

Scott

Did you send the notes by mail?

Jannike

No. To my siblings, I sent them by mail. But to my kids, I left them in the flat.

Scott

Knowing that they would find them, of course.

Jannike

Yeah.

Scott

When you're thinking about this, you decided to go and just lay down on the railroad track?

Jannike

Yeah.

Scott

How did you come to that choice? Did you consider other methods?

Jannike

I considered some other methods. I wanted something that was quick and definite. I considered jumping off my balcony - I lived 6 storeys up - but that was too-- I mean, I thought about the people that might find me on the street below. I thought that if I do it in the dark at night, the driver of the train won't see me so he won't know that he ran over me.

Scott

Did you know the train schedule in advance?

Jannike

No. Well, it's a busy, busy track. There are trains going all day and all night. So, I knew there would be an opportunity for me to-- I went late last night, about 10 PM. Then, I noticed that all the way beside the tracks were fences. I couldn't climb them so I had to dig underneath to get into the tracks. Then, I went to the spot that I had decided upon, sat there for hours, and felt cowardly because, from the ground level, the trains are so huge. I got frightened. I told myself, "Oh, I can't go back now. I have to finish this. This is stupid. Go up there and lay down." At last, I did that but it was too late. Someone had spotted me and alarmed the authorities. I don't know who saw me but there were security guards coming down all of a sudden, and there were no trains for some time then. They came down and asked me how I was doing and I was so pissed at them. I swore at them. I was so angry because they had interrupted something that I wanted to do.

Scott

So you were upset at them even though they had actually just saved your life.

Jannike

I didn't want to be saved. I didn't tell anyone. I kept it a secret because I didn't want anyone to stop me.

Scott

I guess that's why that fence was there.

Jannike

Yes, I guess so.

Scott

So, you were taken to the hospital, and what happened there?

Jannike

I don't really remember really. I slept, I think, for 3 days in a row.

Scott

Why do you think that happened? Was it from the mental exhaustion?

Jannike

Probably. Yeah.

Scott

So at that point, you're in the hospital. How long were you in the hospital?

Jannike

6 weeks.

Scott

So, the next couple of days, maybe, your siblings had already gotten those letters in the mail?

Jannike

Yeah. I texted them on the way to the hospital and said that I was on my way to the hospital because I had tried to take my own life during the night. So, they knew. They found my siblings. Of course, my siblings hadn't got their letters yet then.

Scott

So you were texting your children on the way to the hospital?

Jannike

Yeah.

Scott

And I assume they came to the hospital because they live close by, right?

Jannike

Yeah, pretty close-by, but I didn't want to see them. I couldn't I couldn't face them. The picture in my mind was that, "Well, I will be dead, they will mourn me, and then they will get over that." Now, I had put them in a situation where they will always worry. "Will she do it again? Have you spoken to mom yet recently? How is she doing?" That's the worst thing that I could think about if my plan did not succeed. I knew they were thinking that because they have told me also.

Scott

So when you got out of the hospital and went back home, what was your mindset at that point?

Jannike

I was still angry. I thought it was all this conundrum of hospitals, social workers, psychiatrists, and everything. My flat was being packed down. It felt so unnecessary. If they had left me as I was on the tracks, all of this wouldn't have made so much fuss.

Scott

So when you got out of the hospital and came back home, it's like, "Okay, well. Here I am again."

Jannike

Yeah, exactly. I've got 2 brothers. The older one - who lives here, by the way - said, "Well, come up to me, my woman, and my dog and just wait until you make any more decisions about your future. Don't make up plans. Just be here for 3 days or for 3 years - it doesn't matter." So, I did and that's the best help I got because that landed me here where I am now.

Scott

How far away is that from where you were living?

Jannike

Do you know the metric length?

Scott

You can say metrics. I'm an American so, of course, I don't know metrics.

Jannike

About 600 kilometres.

Scott

600 kilometers. That's quite a distance though. And that was north of Stockholm?

Jannike

Yeah.

Scott

How is life different there than it was in the city?

Jannike

I realize that for the most part, when I go back to Stockholm to see my kids - because I feel this annoyance built up inside me - everyone would be busy and in a hurry to do something, and no one meets your eyes or speaks to you. You're just in a very fast-flowing flood of something. Here, when someone walks too slow, you can start talking to them - it doesn't matter if it takes 4-5 minutes more - and people would say 'Hello' to each other. Here, they would talk to each other and everything is reasonably slow and relaxed.

Scott

The word 'relaxed' sounds like it pretty much describes where you are now. So, your brother invited you up there to live with him. When you got there the first day, what was that like? What did you think?

Jannike

Oh my God, we've never lived together. How is this going to end? How is this going to work? All I wanted was to lie down and sleep. If it hadn't been for his dog, I would have slept all day and all night. I had to take care of the dog and that made me have to walk a lot. So, we walked and bonded. That was the good therapy I got.

Scott

Dogs are wonderful.

Jannike

Yeah.

Scott

What's the dog's name?

Jannike

Shushteen.

Scott

Okay, that sounds like a nice Swedish name. Does it have a meaning?

Jannike

No, it's just a girl's name. Well, it's a Border Collie. He has sheep, so she's a working dog.

Scott

So you're living at a sheep farm?

Jannike

Yeah. Well, a small one.

Scott

So you went from living in a city of 1.5 million people to a small, kind of, village?

Jannike

Yes.

Scott

And what's the population there?

Jannike

About 500 in the village. There are a few smaller ones outside, but between 500-700 people.

Scott

What's life like today? What's a typical day like?

Jannike

I work now. I'm a Spanish teacher and I work 3 days a week. On other days, I would listen to podcasts or audiobooks when I'm free. I don't do much but I enjoy my work and my pupils enjoy me too. It's really a flip from worst to best.

Scott

So, you're a Swedish lady who speaks English but teaches Spanish?

Jannike

Yes.

Scott

I wouldn't have thought students in Sweden would have a need or a desire to learn Spanish.

Jannike

Well, you have to learn one other language besides English and you have to choose between Spanish, French or German.

Scott

And Spanish is probably the easiest.

Jannike

Yeah, Spanish is the most popular. I am not a trained teacher. Thanks to the shortage of Spanish teachers, I have a job.

Scott

And are you still with your brother?

Jannike

No, I have my own flat now.

Scott

It's interesting to know that the students in Sweden are required to be trilingual. I think that's a great idea!

Jannike

Yeah. I think that children from the age of pre-school should learn, at least, one language other than their own. In school, from day one, you should learn at least one other language. I mean, the earlier you start, the better you are able to sponge it up, in a way.

Scott

The fact that you already knew some Spanish is what enabled you to have this job, right?

Jannike

Yeah.

Scott

If you could speak to the person that you were 4 years ago, could you have imagined your life today?

Jannike

If I had the opportunity to speak to myself back then, I would say, "Change now. Do something else. Move away. Make a step out of what you're in now."

Scott

But none of your therapists told you to do that?

Jannike

I didn't go to my therapists before my suicide attempt because I didn't think they would solve my problems. And the only solution to that problem which I could imagine was ending my own life.

Scott

Was there anything that someone, back then, could have said to you that would have made a difference?

Jannike

I don't think so. Because I was in a bubble, I couldn't see beyond me and I couldn't come up with logical solutions. I am not sure that anybody could have said anything to change that.

Scott

It seems like when you're in that kind of mindset, you'd kind of have blinders on. Even though the solution might be over there, you can't see it because you aren't even looking for it.

Jannike

Right.

Scott

For someone who is listening to this now that may be considering taking their own life, what would you say to them?

Jannike

That's a tricky question because-- I mean, I don't know. I could come up with a few cliches. What I would say is you know what you are and what you feel right now, but if you don't hang on, you weren't able to see what you could be, what you could feel, and what you could think later on. My brother and I have talked about this so much - death is a back door but you can only use it once. And it's true - you can't take it back once you've gone through with it.

Scott

Many times when you want to help someone who's like that - if you happen to come into contact with somebody like that - it feels like whatever you say is, like, a cliché. Things will get better and you've got so much to live for - like, that just means nothing to some people when they're in that mindset. But now, you have the advantage of looking back on it for 4 years, knowing that was a wrong decision - it's good that you weren't able to go through with it - is there anything else about any aspect or anything that we haven't covered that you want to talk about?

Jannike

Yes. For quite a few years afterward, I felt I was mourning the loss of my suicide. I was feeling very sorry for not having been able to make it through. For me, for everyone else in my family, friends, and all that, it's obviously better that I didn't succeed. But four years afterward, I was in grief for not having to pull it through.

Scott

And this is even after you move to where you are?

Jannike

Yeah. Not every day, but sometimes.

Scott

How long did it take before you got to where you are now?

Jannike

I felt at ease with myself this past summer. So, I'm not sorry anymore. I'm thankful that I didn't succeed.

Scott

I think your family probably is too.

Jannike

I hope so. Yeah.

Scott

Do you see your kids regularly?

Jannike

Yes. Not very often, but a couple of times a year.

Scott

I looked at 600 kilometers, which is about 370 miles. So yes, that's a long distance. And they still live in Stockholm?

Jannike

Yeah.

Scott

Well, that's good. You get to see your kids sometimes. You're happy with your life there. What's the name of the village where you live now?

Jannike

Nasorked

Scott

I am happy that you're happy. As I've said before on several other episodes on this podcast, I love a happy ending. I can tell just from talking with you, and even from our emails prior to this, that you just seem like a happy person now.

Jannike

Yeah. I know.

Scott

Well, thank you very much for sharing your story with us.

Jannike

Thank you.

Scott

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