

LEVEL A2

The Man Who Lived a Year Without Money

How He Ate, Washed and Stayed Warm

Mark Boyle, an Irishman in England, lived for almost three years without money. Olivia tells Sean how he ate, washed and stayed warm.

Key words

- bin
- rubbish
- skill
- share
- beg
- emergency
- caravan
- wild
- swap
- charity shop
- fix
- strange

In this workbook

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How to use it

1

Listen to the episode on YouTube.

2

Read the transcript and learn the key words.

3

Do the activities, then check the answer key.

Includes the full transcript, key words, activities and answers

Listen to the episode on the Aprendos YouTube channel

Key words

These words appear in the episode.

Key words	Meaning	Example
bin <i>noun</i>	A box or container for things you throw away.	<i>Please put your empty bottle in the green bin by the door.</i>
rubbish <i>noun</i>	Things you don't want anymore and throw away.	<i>After the party, there was rubbish all over the kitchen floor.</i>
skill <i>noun</i>	Something you can do well because you learned it or practised it.	<i>Cooking is a useful skill when you live alone.</i>
share <i>verb</i>	To give part of something to other people, or to use it together.	<i>My sister and I share a car, so we plan our weekends together.</i>
beg <i>verb</i>	To ask people for money or food because you have nothing.	<i>An old man was begging for coins outside the station.</i>
emergency <i>noun</i>	A sudden bad situation when you need help quickly.	<i>Keep some money in your wallet for an emergency.</i>
caravan <i>noun</i>	A small house on wheels. A car pulls it, and people sleep in it.	<i>Every summer we stay in a caravan near the beach.</i>
wild <i>adjective</i>	Living or growing in nature, without help from people.	<i>We saw wild horses on our walk in the hills.</i>
swap <i>verb</i>	To give something to someone and get something from them.	<i>At lunch, Tom swapped his apple for my chocolate bar.</i>
charity shop <i>noun</i>	A shop that sells old clothes and things cheaply to get money for people who need help.	<i>I found a great winter coat in a charity shop for only five pounds.</i>
fix <i>verb</i>	To make something that is broken work again.	<i>My dad can fix almost any bike in ten minutes.</i>
strange <i>adjective</i>	Different from normal, so it surprises you.	<i>The soup had a strange colour, but it tasted good.</i>

Full transcript

The Man Who Lived a Year Without Money: How He Ate, Washed and Stayed Warm

- OLIVIA** So there's no toilet paper. What does he use?
- SEAN** Leaves?
- OLIVIA** Old newspapers. He takes them from the **bins** behind the shops.
- SEAN** Well, that's one use for the news.
- OLIVIA** And one day, the newspaper had a story about him.
- SEAN** No! As an old news man, I find that very painful.
- OLIVIA** He says so himself.
- SEAN** This is Aprendos English, level A2. I'm Sean.
- OLIVIA** And I'm Olivia.
- SEAN** So who is this man with the newspapers?
- OLIVIA** First, quick question. How much money did you spend today?
- SEAN** Today? A coffee and a train ticket. About twelve pounds.
- OLIVIA** Our man spent nothing. Not one penny, for almost three years.
- SEAN** Three years? How?
- OLIVIA** That's our story today. His name is Mark Boyle.
- SEAN** I bet he's an old hippie with a long beard.
- OLIVIA** Wrong. He studied business and economics at university.
- SEAN** Business? Really?
- OLIVIA** Really. Mark comes from Ballyshannon, a small town in County Donegal.
- SEAN** So he's Irish.
- OLIVIA** Irish, yes. But in 2002 he moved to Bristol, in England. There he managed organic food companies.
- SEAN** So a businessman with a good salary. What happened?
- OLIVIA** At university, he watched the film about Gandhi, and it changed his life. He loved one famous line. "Be the change you want to see in the world."
- SEAN** Ah. Small problem there, Olivia.
- OLIVIA** What problem?
- SEAN** Gandhi probably never said it. Nobody can find those words in his writing.
- OLIVIA** Really? It's on every coffee mug in Bellingham!
- SEAN** I know. Gandhi said something similar, but much longer.
- OLIVIA** Okay, fine. Anyway, in 2007 he talked with a friend about the world's problems. And he decided one thing. Money puts a wall between us and our actions.
- SEAN** A wall. Quite deep for a business student.
- OLIVIA** And he acted on it. That year he started a website, the Freeconomy Community. People **shared** their **skills** there for free.
- SEAN** Oh, wait. I know this man now! He's the one with the walk to India...

- OLIVIA ...you know about the walk?
- SEAN I read about it years ago. Can I tell it?
- OLIVIA Go on then.
- SEAN In January 2008, he started to walk from Bristol to India. To Gandhi's birthplace.
- OLIVIA With no money?
- SEAN No money at all. He helps people, and they give him food and a bed.
- OLIVIA How far did he get? Turkey?
- SEAN Calais.
- OLIVIA Calais? In France? That's just across the sea!
- SEAN Just across the Channel, yes. The problem was his French. People in France thought...
- OLIVIA ...that he was **begging**?
- SEAN Yes, begging, or looking for work. And he had very little food.
- OLIVIA So how did he get home with no money?
- SEAN A girl of seventeen walked with him. Her mother gave her travellers' cheques for an **emergency**.
- OLIVIA So a teenager's mum paid for his trip home! Nice telling, Sean. But in November 2008, he tried something much bigger.
- SEAN One year with no money.
- OLIVIA One full year. No cash and no bank cards. He started on Buy Nothing Day, at the end of November.
- SEAN So where did he live? In a tent?
- OLIVIA Good guess, but no. A **caravan**.
- SEAN A caravan costs money!
- OLIVIA He found it on Freecycle. It's a website...
- SEAN ...for free things, yes. I know Freecycle.
- OLIVIA Somebody didn't want it anymore. He parked it on an organic farm near Bristol. He worked there three days a week...
- SEAN ...and the farm gave him the space.
- OLIVIA Exactly, and a space for his vegetables.
- SEAN And electricity? A caravan in a British winter is very cold.
- OLIVIA Okay, confession time for Mark. Before the year, he bought one thing.
- SEAN I knew it. What?
- OLIVIA A solar panel. It cost about three hundred and sixty pounds.
- SEAN Lovely. A year without money, after a little shopping trip.
- OLIVIA He says so himself, in the Guardian newspaper. The panel gave him a light, and power for his laptop and his phone.
- SEAN He had a phone?
- OLIVIA A phone for incoming calls only. He couldn't call anybody.
- SEAN That's my dream phone, actually.

- OLIVIA For heat, he made a wood burner from an old gas bottle. The pipe came from a skip...
- SEAN ...the big metal box for rubbish.
- OLIVIA A dumpster, for us Americans.
- SEAN So he cooked on the wood burner too.
- OLIVIA No, he cooked outside. Every day, in the rain and in the snow.
- SEAN On what?
- OLIVIA A rocket stove. He made it from two old olive oil tins.
- SEAN Rubbish again.
- OLIVIA Rubbish again. And he loved it. In winter he watched the moon while he cooked. So, food. Guess where his food came from.
- SEAN He grew it on the farm.
- OLIVIA Yes, that's one. He had four ways, and he called them the four legs of a table.
- SEAN Okay. Leg two, he picked wild food?
- OLIVIA Yes! Berries and mushrooms, nettles and nuts.
- SEAN And what did he grow?
- OLIVIA Potatoes and beans. And a lot of kale.
- SEAN Kale. Of course there's kale.
- OLIVIA What's wrong with kale?
- SEAN It's a vegetable for people with a lot of hope.
- OLIVIA I grow kale on my balcony in Bellingham. It's great.
- SEAN And the other two legs?
- OLIVIA Leg three is waste food. Food from shops and restaurants that goes in the bin.
- SEAN Wait, wait. That food comes from the money world...
- OLIVIA ...and somebody paid for it, yes.
- SEAN So he still used money. Just other people's money.
- OLIVIA He agrees with you, actually. But the food was there, so he ate it before the bin.
- SEAN Hmm. I'm still not sure about that.
- OLIVIA Noted. Leg four is swapping. He used his skills to get other things.
- SEAN Now, washing. That's my big question.
- OLIVIA He washed in a river.
- SEAN In winter?
- OLIVIA In winter too, I think. In summer he also had a solar shower. For soap, he sometimes used a plant, soapwort.
- SEAN And his teeth? Please say he had toothpaste.
- OLIVIA He made it himself. Guess what's in it.
- SEAN Salt and water?
- OLIVIA No. Cuttlefish bone.
- SEAN Cuttlefish? The sea animal?

- OLIVIA Their bones wash up on British beaches. He mixed the bone with...
- SEAN ...please say mint.
- OLIVIA Wild fennel seeds.
- SEAN That's the strangest toothpaste in England.
- OLIVIA And then there's the toilet.
- SEAN Oh, here we go. The newspapers.
- OLIVIA First, the toilet itself. He built a compost toilet from old wooden pallets.
- SEAN So no water and no flush.
- OLIVIA No flush. And then the newspapers from the bins in Bristol.
- SEAN With a story about himself.
- OLIVIA Only once. Probably.
- SEAN So was it hard?
- OLIVIA He says the hardest part was time. He washed his clothes by hand, and one wash took two hours. Everything took so long.
- SEAN But was he happy?
- OLIVIA He says yes. His security moved from his bank account to his friends.
- SEAN His friends, yes. His friends with a farm.
- OLIVIA You're very hard on this man today, Sean.
- SEAN I was a researcher for years. I always read the small print.
- OLIVIA So, the year ends in November 2009. What does he do? Guess.
- SEAN He runs to a shop and buys a big burger.
- OLIVIA He's vegan, Sean.
- SEAN A big vegan burger.
- OLIVIA No. He kept going. He lived without money for almost three years.
- SEAN So when did he finally spend money?
- OLIVIA In 2011. The first thing was a pair of shoes from a charity shop. He said it felt very strange.
- SEAN And after that?
- OLIVIA In 2010 he wrote a book, The Moneyless Man. It sold more than seventy-five thousand copies...
- SEAN ...wait. A book about no money made money?
- OLIVIA It made money. In 2013 he moved back to Ireland. Some of the book money helped to buy land in County Galway.
- SEAN So he bought a farm with money from not using money.
- OLIVIA He sees the joke too. He and his partner grew their food there.
- SEAN So, a lot of kale again.
- OLIVIA Yes! He told the Guardian they ate a lot of kale. Maybe too much.
- SEAN I rest my case.
- OLIVIA And they made an old pig house into a free pub. Its name is the Happy Pig.
- SEAN A free pub? Now that's an idea I like.

- OLIVIA** You pay with help. You work behind the bar, or you play some music.
- SEAN** So an Irishman found a way to get free drinks. Very impressive.
- OLIVIA** Then, in December 2016, he went one step further. No phone and no internet...
- SEAN** ...wait, no phone at all? Not even for incoming calls?
- OLIVIA** Nothing. No electricity and no clock. He moved into a straw house, and he built it himself.
- SEAN** So how did he talk to people?
- OLIVIA** Letters. He wrote his Guardian articles with a pencil and posted them.
- SEAN** And does he like this life?
- OLIVIA** In his 2019 book, *The Way Home*, he says he sleeps better than ever.
- SEAN** And the washing? Still the river?
- OLIVIA** A metal tub and a jug of water. Later, a hot tub outside.
- SEAN** A hot tub! Now I'm interested.
- OLIVIA** Does he live like this today? The last articles we found say yes, but they're a few years old. And we can't email him!
- SEAN** We could write him a letter.
- OLIVIA** With a pencil, of course. Listeners, your turn. Could you live one month without money? What's the hardest part? Write it in a comment.
- SEAN** You can read our whole story again, too. Get the PDF for free from the info box. Now the truth, Olivia. How long could you do it?
- OLIVIA** Until my first morning coffee. So maybe one day.
- SEAN** One day! The woman with the kale balcony!
- OLIVIA** But I'm going to try one new thing. Next time something breaks, I **fix** it. No shopping.
- SEAN** And the cuttlefish toothpaste?
- OLIVIA** My toothpaste stays, Sean. Goodbye!
- SEAN** Wait, one more thing, listeners. If you want a new true story every week, subscribe to Aprendos English.
- SEAN** Bye! And read your newspapers carefully.

Did you understand?

Choose the correct answer.

1. What did Mark study at university?

- ☐ Music and art.
- ☐ Business and economics.
- ☐ Farming and food.

2. In 2008 Mark started to walk to India. How far did he get?

- ☐ Turkey.
- ☐ Gandhi's birthplace.
- ☐ Calais, in France.

3. Where did Mark live in his year without money?

- ☐ In a caravan on an organic farm near Bristol.
- ☐ In a tent in a friend's garden.
- ☐ In a small flat in the centre of Bristol.

4. What was in Mark's toothpaste?

- ☐ Salt and water.
- ☐ Mint and olive oil.
- ☐ Cuttlefish bone and wild fennel seeds.

5. What was the first thing Mark bought in 2011?

- ☐ A pair of shoes from a charity shop.
- ☐ A big vegan burger.
- ☐ A new phone.

Exercise 1. Odd one out

In each group, one word doesn't belong. Find it and think about why.

1.

- ☐ rubbish ☐ kale ☐ bin ☐ skip

Why doesn't it fit?

2.

- ☐ solar panel ☐ wood burner ☐ rocket stove ☐ compost toilet

Why doesn't it fit?

3.

- ☐ berries ☐ mushrooms ☐ nettles ☐ potatoes

Why doesn't it fit?

4.

- ☐ caravan ☐ tent ☐ charity shop ☐ straw house

Why doesn't it fit?

Exercise 2. What would you do?

You are living without money, like Mark. Answer in one or two sentences. Use the words given.

1. Your old bike breaks, and you can't pay for a new one.

Use: **fix** • **skill**

2. You find a big bag of good bread in the bin behind a bakery.

Use: **bin** • **share**

3. You are walking to India with no money. In France, you have no food and nowhere to sleep.

Use: **emergency** • **swap**

Exercise 3. Your turn

Could you live one month without money? What would be the hardest part for you? Write three or four sentences. Use at least two words from the list.

Answer key

Check your answers after you finish the activities.

Did you understand?

1. Business and economics.
2. Calais, in France.
3. In a caravan on an organic farm near Bristol.
4. Cuttlefish bone and wild fennel seeds.
5. A pair of shoes from a charity shop.

Exercise 1. Odd one out

1. **kale** The others are about things people throw away. Kale is a vegetable, and Sean doesn't love it.
2. **solar panel** Mark made the others from old things. He bought the solar panel before his year without money.
3. **potatoes** Mark picked the others as wild food. He grew the potatoes on the farm.
4. **charity shop** You can live in the others. A charity shop is a place to buy cheap clothes and things.

Exercise 2. What would you do?

1. *I would ask my neighbour to help me fix it. Fixing bikes is her best skill.*
2. *I would take the bread out of the bin and share it with my friends.*
3. *This is an emergency, so I would swap my old watch for dinner and a bed.*

Exercise 3. Example answer

I could maybe live one week without money. The hardest part for me is coffee! I can fix computers, so I would swap my skills for food. For clothes, I would find old things that people put in the rubbish.