

## PODCAST TRANSCRIPT: [From The Ashes, S01E05](#)

My name is Becca, and this is From the Ashes, Episode 5: False Starts Are Okay

Today's story really speaks for itself, so I don't have much of a preamble other than to say this was one hell of an experience.

I'm glad to have experienced it. I'm glad to have survived it. And as always, I hope you enjoy the story.

The Charismatic Catalyst was sparking at his highest intensity. At this strength, he willfully infected all of us with his need to leave. That night. No matter how late it was. He didn't want to have to pay for another night at this campsite.

For the 25 days previous to this moment, seven of us had miraculously crammed ourselves and all our backpacking gear into a Volkswagen T3 Kombi named Margarita. Over the more than 3000 km up the infamous Ruta 40 in Argentina we had become family. A rowdy, beautiful, sometimes drunk, sometimes high, always adventurous, often dancing, hippy family. We also made terrible, atonal, arrhythmic music together. Music that we only performed twice in public, and for very select audiences.

We called our group Punto G.

Despite a collective understanding that this trip had been one beyond the scope of our imaginations, despite the immense amount that I personally learned about how little one really needs in this life, and despite coming to experience the depths of human kindness, generosity, and connection ... it was time for Punto G to split up.

Four of us were headed into Chile, and Chile was not a place where Margarita could go. If she went back to Chile, our Irreverent Captain might not be able to get her out again. And then he would never make it to Alaska, the hopeful end point of his journey.

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For the four of us breaking off, the initial plan was to make our way north and then west. The Complex Dynamo, the Philosopher Chef, and the Charismatic Catalyst were all going to to hitchhike.

As for me, I had announced to Punto G a few nights before that I was going to stay at an AirBnB for a few days, and then get on a bus to make it to our next destination. After a month of sleeping in a tent without regular showers, I wanted a small respite before beginning the next chapter.

But, as is often the case in traveling, new opportunities consistently present themselves when you least expect them. At some point following my announcement, the Charismatic Catalyst invited me to hitchhike with him.

He is a catalyst. And in me he catalyzed some really deep thoughts.

This whole trip. What I'm doing. The whole reason why I'm traveling. It's for discomfort. It's to step outside what I know, what I've done, and who I've been ... in order to grow closer to my truest self.

The idea of hitchhiking is wildly uncomfortable to me.

I wouldn't ever just do it, no matter how many successful stories I've heard from those I've met during this trip. I just don't feel comfortable with the idea of taking a ride from a stranger. However, the catalyst had been traveling for 4 years. He's an experienced hitcher. He speaks amazing Spanish. He has a righteous camping stove and a pot. And he had a knack for getting what he needed when he needed it.

If there were ever a person with whom to start hitchhiking, I knew it was him.

So, I made the choice to scrap all my plans and hitchhike with him.

Because of my decision, I had wrapped my plans up with the Charismatic Catalyst. Which made the day of our departure a rollercoaster of emotion for me.

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In the morning, I had spent time my time away from Punto G. Writing. Editing. Getting a podcast up. This thing is in me and I needed to get it out. I am trying to live more for me, and so I thought it would be okay to spend that time alone. I opted out of all discussion regarding future plans. For some reason, I thought we had at least another night at this campsite.

During my productivity, the crew that was staying with Margarita laid a plan to go into the city to recruit for more members at Hostels. They needed 4 people to fill the spots that would soon be empty.

The crew planning to leave Margarita and break off toward Chile decided that they were leaving today. They went shopping in order to cook a big meal to fuel their plans to hitchhike out of the city.

When they returned, the Philosopher Chef got to his last task of trying to pump out one final dank-ass meal in Margarita. This Philosopher Chef was from Texas, but had very very proud Italian heritage. Over the course of our time together, he cooked with limited ingredients using limited materials, and had still churned out meal after meal after meal of delicious camp cooking.

His one nemesis this whole time had been this cheap-ass pasta we bought for 6 argentinean pesos per bag at the Argentinean equivalent of Costco. (6 Argentinean Pesos is about \$0.40 at the time of this recording). When it was cooked, this pasta would absorb 100% of the water used for cooking and it would glob together ... and when you ate it, it's was like eating pure starchy gluten blocks.

Don't get me wrong, it was filling as fuck, but not super enjoyable. The Philosopher chef had avoided having to use it as much as possible, but since we were splitting off, today was the day to use it.

Luckily, a woman who lived at the campsite had a pot larger than the small one we were used to cooking in. The extra space in the pot gave the pasta more room to cook, and the Philosopher Chef put together a meat carbonara in cream sauce .

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It was dank as fuck. He had finally conquered the pasta, and I was super stoked about it.

It was restaurant quality, and so I went back for a hearty portion of seconds, wiping the plate clean with bread I had been given.

When it appeared that I was going to stop, the Hedonistic Climber, knowing we were about to hitch hike recommended I go back for thirds. "Becca, sometimes you don't know when your next meal will be. Eat some more."

Even though I was already full to bursting, I took another half-portion and crammed it into my body. I would be uncomfortably full the entire afternoon, but later that night, I would be glad for the Climber's advice.

Very shortly after finishing our meal, the catalyst started sparking. He wanted to leave. Right then. To get a jump on hitchhiking while it was still light outside.

The Philosopher Chef, the Complex Dynamo, and myself were all getting caught up in his spark, and we understood that he was right, logically. Even though we knew he was right we still resisted at first.

We had been on the road with Punto G for 25 days. We had lived some serious adventures. We had become family. And you can't move on to the next chapter without taking the time to say goodbye to family.

But the Charismatic Catalyst continued to spark. He continued to want to leave. He kept expressing his need.

The Hedonistic Climber earned us some time. He asked the Catalyst to help him get his long board fixed. Being super loyal, the Catalyst agreed.

While they went out to get the long board fixed, the rest of us stayed at the municipal campsite, reading, lounging, slowly packing, and trying to figure out when

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our Irreverent Captain and the Unassuming Artist would return so that we could say goodbye.

We still had no word when the Catalyst and the Climber returned from their journey. They returned to us with a tale of riding around in a cop car with the police force, being given an impromptu tour of the town, and being taken to a mechanic who could help with the Climber's broken long board truck.

Once the retelling of that tale was over, however, the Catalyst's attention turned back to leaving.

He sparked again making bold declarations, "I love these people, but I will not wait that long for a goodbye, for something that takes 5 minutes."

I sent a frantic message to our Captain, letting him know that we wouldn't last much longer here. That I had tied my fate up with the Catalyst, and that even though I wanted desperately to say goodbye, and that when the catalyst left, I would have to make a difficult decision to maybe leave without doing that.

Our Irreverent Captain finally responded. He was at the bus terminal. He would come back to see us off. He just needed 30 minutes to get back.

I announced that our Captain was returning. Knowing that the Irreverent Captain was returning mollified the catalyst, but his energy was still anxious. He was pacing, packing, and it was obvious that his mind was no longer with us in the present. It was on that next step, on the side of the road, on what had to be done next to get a ride where we were going. On returning to the style of travel that brought him the most joy and satisfaction.

Our Irreverent Captain and the Unassuming Artist finally returned, and we gathered for a final goodbye.

We engaged in a ceremony to mirror the place in which we all had met:

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The Charismatic Catalyst, the Complex Dynamo, the Philosopher Chef and myself formed a ring, our Irreverent Captain, the Unassuming Artist, and the Sweetheart Climber slapped their knees, let out a cry, and rushed in to hug us.

The hug transformed into a group hug, we jumped up and down in a circle and chanted Punto G, Punto G, Punto G, Punto G until it naturally tapered off.

We exchanged individual hugs, the three members of Punto G remaining in Margarita walked us to the gate. Our Irreverent Captain gifted us with his standard goodbye, "Don't do anything I wouldn't do, boys."

While I was glad for the goodbye, it felt rushed. It felt a little off. But the catalyst was sparking and pushing and we had to go.

By the time we took our first steps, it was 630pm. The darkness was starting to creep over the city. And the forecast was for rain. But the sparks of the catalyst were pushing us to act, so we collectively decided that even though it was late, even though it might be wet, our best chance for hitchhiking was to walk out of the city center, find a good spot to hitchhike, find a spot to camp nearby, wake up early the next morning and start our process.

With the exception of a few stops to ask for directions to a good place to hitchhike, and a few moments where my smaller size put me at an advantage for weaving through the crowded city streets, the Catalyst led the way.

While I was enjoying the pace, there were a few grumbles from members of our crew.

Since I was the closest to the catalyst, I asked, just once, "Do you know where we're going?"

"No. But this is the way I like to travel. You get to see the city at night, get to see the pulse of it. You walk and you walk and you walk, and find what you need as you need it. You don't know what's going to happen."

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I liked his style, but I also kept that information to myself. While I was into the idea of the unknown at the end of the journey, I didn't think sharing that fact would help the rest of our group with morale.

After about an hour of walking, we reached the edge of the city, just beyond the bus terminal. We shucked off our packs, took a break, and the Catalyst walked off into the distance without explanation.

That's when the phones and the creeping doubt started to come out. Are we going the right way? Should some of us just take a bus? How much further do we need to go? Isn't there rain in the forecast?

The Charismatic Catalyst walked back up to us. "I just talked to a police officer. He says that 2km from here it has a police station where we can camp."

Despite a bit of hesitation, our entire crew kept following the Catalyst. We walked up a large hill, and I watched as the Catalyst put his thumb out, trying to see if we could get a ride to where we were going that night.

We walked at the same frantic pace, and then all of a sudden the catalyst froze at a gated off field.

The catalyst suggested we could camp there. "It's private property, but we can always play the gringo card."

It was too close to the side of the road, and most of us weren't into the idea. There was only 1.5km left to walk, let's just make it to the police station.

So we kept walking. The catalyst kept asking locals questions.

We paused and saw something dark in the Charismatic Catalyst's face.

"So. It seems that the police officer was bullshitting us, guys. The people here say it's another 5km to where we need to go."

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My far too heavy pack was starting to bruise my hips, and I had chosen to wear my vibrams. I had stepped heavily on a rock, creating a heel bruise that fucked every step I took. The too thin soles made it so that the balls of my feet were starting to get rubbed raw from walking with the weight of my pack. The news of needing to walk another 5k was not good news.

But at this point, we were committed. If not to finding this police station, then at least to finding somewhere to make camp. We sighed a collective sigh of resignation, and kept following the Catalyst.

After 2 hours of walking, the highway came into our view. It was a huge relief. This would be a prime place to hitchhike in the morning. All we needed was a place to pitch our tents for the night.

We all dropped our packs, and the Charismatic Catalyst walked off into a nearby neighborhood. I pulled out my wool socks, getting ready to pull on my sturdy hiking boots if we needed to keep trekking. After just a few minutes he returned.

He had talked to some people in the neighborhood, and they said we could camp in front of their house.

With extreme joy and relief, we all grabbed our packs, walked over to a really uneven plot of grass, and happily made camp next to the highway. It was 8:30pm.

After pitching my tent, I laid down. Bone tired. Weary from the trek, but glad that I had taken the advice of the Hedonistic Climber. Without that extra portion of carbonara, I would not have had the energy to make this journey. As I felt fortunate for the care of this boy almost 10 years my junior, I drifted off into a doze while the Catalyst cooked us rice for dinner.

I listened to the sound of conversation, the laughter, the whir of gas as it heated our meal. As I lay there, the sound of the slowly intensifying rain on my tent pulled me deeper and deeper into sleep.

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I have a hazy memory of conversation about there being another camping option. An option to move into a house. But it was already raining and moving our tents would mean wet tents. As I dozed, the group made a decision to stay. It was what I wanted too. I was grateful to not have to move.

And then some indescribable amount of time later, shit hit the fan.

The Catalyst shook my tent. "Guys, we are moving. If we go quickly, they will drive us."

My half asleep brain was not computing the situation. Why were we moving? Where were we moving? Why was there a rush to move? It was 11:30 ... what the fuck was going on?

Instead of going outside to get answers those questions, I lay there confused, and I decided that the most important question to ask was: "Is there dirt where we're going? If there isn't dirt I can't pitch my tent."

The catalyst didn't understand. I wasn't sure if it was a language barrier, or if I had been unclear. So I persisted.

"Tierra. Dirt. I can't pitch my tent without stakes in the ground."

The catalyst responded, urgency in his voice. "There is an extra spot in my tent, you can sleep in my tent if there isn't dirt where we're going."

It was enough. Even though I had no idea what the fuck was happening, I knew we had to go quickly, so I stuffed my sleeping back into its sack, rolled up my sleeping mat, crammed my stuff into my pack, pulled on my shoes, threw on my waterproof jacket, and finally exited my tent.

When I looked around, there was a police truck and three officers. I knew now why there was urgency in the Catalyst's voice. I immediately realized how ridiculous my question about dirt must've sounded.

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The Catalyst had asked three neighbors to pitch our tents. One of the neighbors had called the cops on us anyway. Although most of us had been dozing, we still apparently had too loud.

I rolled up my tent and put it into its bag. It was soaked. I knew all of our tents were soaked at this point. I wondered where the cops were taking us.

With the rain pouring, we threw our stuff into the back of the police truck, and then all 6 of us piled into the cab.

The 4 of us from Margarita crammed into the back bench, and the 2 other travelers that had been traveling parallel to us sat on top of one other in the front seat. 7 people occupied 5 seats. In a cop car. Needless to say ... no one was wearing a seatbelt except for the officer driving.

We asked the driver where we were going, and he told us that there was a campsite about 5km back into the city where they were taking us.

My mind tingled. Just before I had drifted off to sleep, I had calculated how far our trek had been, and at first had mindlessly calculated driving directions instead of walking directions.

That distance? About 5km back into the city.

As my mind was tingling, someone else voiced my thoughts, 'You don't think they're taking us back to the campsite where we were, do you?'

I told them the news of my earlier calculation. I also recalled that when looking for campsites near the city, it was the only campsite that popped up. I predicted that they would be bringing us back to where we started.

The rain poured down on the squad car, and we pulled up to a police station.

We had to switch cars.

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We piled out of one truck, moved all 6 packs into an identical truck, piled into that truck, and began driving. Our direction, initially, was back toward our campsite, but then we veered off track.

"I don't think we're going to the campsite." said the Charismatic Catalyst hopefully. He had been telling the officers about how our tents were wet, how all our clothes were wet, how the women were tired, and about how we would all get sick if we needed to camp.

He had also confirmed with the officers that wherever we were going, we wouldn't have to pay for where they were taking us, so he was trying to get us rooms with beds.

We finally reached our first destination, and it was another police station.

The Charismatic Catalyst asked if we were camping at the police station. The officer shook his head. We had left a bag of food in the other police car, and we were just picking it up.

The Catalyst shook his head in disbelief. The Catalyst had put that bag of food in the first truck that we had entered, and I had been sitting next to it. When we switched into the second police truck, I had completely forgotten about and so had he, apparently.

We thanked the officer for taking the time to get that bag of food back to us, and then the Catalyst asked the question we had all been wondering the whole night, "What campsite are you taking us to?"

And then the officer confirmed our suspicions. We were being taken back to where this whole night had begun.

After a day of emotional turmoil, after a too quick goodbye, after 7km of trekking at a breakneck pace to an unknown destination, after getting our tents up just in time to be protected from the rain, after getting soaked taking down those tents, and

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after riding around in 2 police trucks for the past hour, we would have gotten exactly nowhere.

We laughed. There was nothing left to do but laugh.

The Catalyst was shocked. In his four years of travel, nothing like this had ever happened. And it was weird because he had spent the morning with the police as well. He also talked about how he had a weird intuition when saying goodbye to our Irreverent Captain that it wasn't the last time the Catalyst would see him. This was crazy.

The Philosopher Chef expressed full lack of surprise. The goodbye had felt weird to him, the route we had taken too haphazard.

The Complex Dynamo just sat, having spent our entire 25 day trip learning to be unsurprised by lack of efficiency and the results of haphazardly made decisions.

As per me, I found myself grateful, again, that I had eaten that third helping of Carbonara. Grateful for the kindness of the woman who had let us borrow the pot, grateful for the philosopher chef's dank cooking skills. Grateful that even though it had been 10 hours since the last meal, hunger was only just beginning to creep in.

I also found myself grateful that I had decided to take a risk. Although I wasn't sure I would hitchhike the next day, having made this decision lead us to this crazy adventure, and I was just grateful to be a part of it.

As we pulled up toward the campsite - the exact campsite we had left in too rushed a fashion just 5 hours earlier - the officer asked reception if they had received word that we were coming. The receptionist had not, and was even resistant to allowing us to come into the campsite. They were closed. He did not want to allow more people in, even though there were almost no people camped there.

After a small struggle, where once again the catalyst tried to get us rooms with beds,

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the receptionist would only allow us in if we were willing to pay and willing to set up our tents.

Without any other recourse, we had to agree.

And I chuckled inwardly to myself about the irony. In trying to avoid paying for a place to camp for the night, we had gone so far to go exactly nowhere and we had to pay to camp anyway.

And the funniest thing is that the price we were trying to avoid paying was 40 Argentinean pesos per person. The equivalent of \$2.60 in America.

As we slunk into the campsite, soaked, with kilos of sopping wet gear on our backs, our Irreverent Captain, the Unassuming Artist, and the Hedonistic Climber wobbled toward us.

“What the fuck!?! What are you guys doing here?”

They were drunk. Drunk as fuck, cheeks rosy, and planning on going to a folk concert to try to pick up two more passengers. We relayed the short version of the story as we walked toward the quincho under which we would sleep that night.

Our Captain and the Artist brought us cups of wine from the 5L jug bought by one of the new travelers that would be joining Margarita north through Bolivia.

We excitedly told them the details of our adventure, but it was late. There was another tent set up. A short, “Please Shut. Up.” was shouted and we hushed.

In whispers we continued talking, we put wet tents up to dry, and with the resources left to us we figured out the driest possible sleeping arrangements.

At 1:30 in the morning, the catalyst finished cooking the meal he had started cooking 4 hours before. Rice with sauce, supplemented with some bread generously given to us by our Captain, the Artist, and the Climber. Not enough for all of us to

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feel full, but enough to cut the edge off the hunger. We chatted into the night a bit longer, and then I felt the exhaustion hit me like a brick wall.

I excused myself from the crew, and lay down between the Complex Dynamo and the Philosopher Chef. Because our tents were wet, we were sleeping in a borrowed tent meant for two, and the Philosopher Chef recommended we sleep head-to-head in order to maximize space.

In a night where I thought I was going to begin the journey of discomfort in terms of hitchhiking, I finished the night with my head in between the very used feet of these two men. With the hood of my grey sweatshirt wrapped tightly around my nose protecting myself from the smell ... I was thoughtful about the night's end could be much, much worse.

I drifted off to sleep pondering how false starts are totally okay.

The next day, we all woke up, and the Catalyst immediately started the day sparking. He wanted to leave. Now. He wanted to get a jump on hitchhiking. I had a sense that this was a journey the Catalyst needed to take alone. He needed some space to move and to adventure at his own pace.

I let the Catalyst walk away without me.

I walked to the bus terminal.

And you made it!

Like I said, this was one hell of an adventure.

Even though I didn't end up hitchhiking in the end, I'm so glad I made the initial decision to at least try it. I don't know. Being a part of this is what traveling is about.

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It's finding yourself in crazy ass situations and surviving your way through it.

And! In case you're curious about how this turned out in the end, the Charismatic Catalyst did end up successfully hitchhiking to our next destination.

And because there were limited bus schedules from where we were to where we were going, he even made it there before I did ... so hitchhiking was actually more efficient than taking the bus.

Which is all good. I was still very happy to be on a nice comfortable bus trip.

And that is it for Episode 5 of from the Ashes.

If you liked this story, or any of the stories I've told, it would be fucking awesome if you could take two minutes to [write a review on iTunes!](#)

I'd love and appreciate any support you could give on that front.

I fucking love all of you!