

ANA:

Now, they all feel the same to me. But there was definitely a time when, you know, the first time I went to 15, 16, or 17, it was a little bit of like, whoah, like I'm going all the way up here. Never gone this high before.

My name is Ana, and I'm an elevator.

I remember my first day thinking, OK, first we're gonna go at five, alright. And then, OK stop at three and then go to 11. And as we got higher, I was getting like anxious. Then I want the button will get pushed like I'm going all the way up there, haven't gone there yet.

IAN:

You were a little bit scared of heights?

ANA:

Yeah, yeah, I would say I was.

I think going - when you go to the highest floor you've ever been to for the first time, you think it shouldn't be no higher than this. They're all gonna feel like maybe they're too high in the beginning, but then you'll get used to it.

IAN:

What you imagine an elevator, you know who's working in the tallest building, what do you imagine they feel?

ANA:

Probably tired. I mean, I'm tired after day of work and I'm just going to 17. But I see all the other buildings they're making are getting higher and higher. You know, Frank Lloyd Wright wanted to make a building that was a mile-high.

IAN:

A mile.

ANA:

Yeah, and it was going to have 76 elevators. And they were going to be nuclear-powered, but it never got built.

IAN:

It's terrifying in like every way, OK. ANA: Yeah. It's too tall, it is powered by the most destructive force man has ever known.

ANA:

One elevator mishap and that building is gone.

IAN:

Yeah, I think a lot of people like think about what if something went wrong in this elevator. And they're imagining being stuck. They're not imagining, you know, a city being destroyed.

ANA:

Right, that kind of danger is like, I mean, to be honest, I'm glad it didn't get built.

IAN:

Yeah.

ANA:

I think a lot of people also would be scared to use me. So, everything happens for a reason and some things don't happen for a reason.

(PHONE RINGING)

BERRY:

Hi, Ian.

IAN:

Yeah, that's me.

BERRY:

Yeah, can you hear me?

IAN:

You're coming through great, are you getting me OK?

BERRY:

Yeah.

IAN:

So Berry, I'm calling because I understand you got a hold of Frank Lloyd Wright's drawings for the mile-high tower.

BERRY:

Yeah, there are presentation drawings that he made for display. He called this press conference to unveil this design for a mile-high skyscraper for downtown Chicago. And there are photographs of him presenting it. The drawings are about - I had to look it up but they were about 7 feet tall, they're a bit taller than I.

(IAN LAUGHS)

IAN:

So, even the drawings were tall?

BERRY:

Yeah. I found a really interesting document where a couple of days before the press conference, I

think he got nervous about questions that may come from reporters. So, he starts writing to try to gather information in case people want to ask the pragmatic question, Can this really be built? And he writes to people at Otis elevator. And he wrote to them and he described what he's gonna do with sentence sketches and say, you know, 'Is it feasible?' And they send back a multipage letter of which only the first two pages survived in the kitchen stops, which is unfortunate, saying things like, Yes, this is entirely possible, we have figured it out." And then, "Indeed, we'll work but you must take into consideration what is going to happen to the, you know, to the lungs and to the final passages of the passengers." We would suggest that we think of them almost like airline pilots and perhaps they should be supplied with chewing gum, if they're going to be a using these elevators because nobody's ever done this before." But they said they do send back this kind of research report, but it has a tongue and cheek aspect between the lines. And you feel like they're saying to him, You must be, you must be pulling our leg.

IAN:

So in that, I wanna ask, a lot of people, I think of the conversations we have in elevators as some of the most mundane, you know, small talk type conversations that we have. I guess you have probably seen a lot of that.

ANA:

Yeah, that's almost exclusively what I hear.

IAN:

Well, I read this thing and I haven't been able to confirm if it's true or not. But if you place this site that there was once a law on the books in New York, I'll just read it, While riding in an elevator, one must talk to no one and fold his hands while looking toward the door." So if that's true, it was once illegal in New York to talk to someone in an elevator.

ANA:

Wow! Well, if that is the case, if that is a real law, then it is constantly broken and never enforced. And I wouldn't, I mean, it's such a small offense why would you alert the authorities about it?

IAN:

That would be a strange 911 call.

ANA:

There is mundane conversation happening in my vicinity for 30 seconds.

IAN:

Yes, send help.

ANA:

What were the punishment for that be? Like jail, you're not gonna go to jail for that? Do you get a fine, or is it more of a slap on the wrist? Maybe you're not allowed to ride the elevator for a little while. And if it's just no small talk but you're allowed to have in-depth conversations. So now, suddenly, you're hearing like intimate details about somebody's life, and it's not drowned out by, you know, how was work?

IAN:

Yeah. ANA: Yeah. It's only depth.

ANA:

Yeah, which is I think makes people uncomfortable. You don't wanna hear that. You would rather just have the background noise of, you know, my kid soccer game was good.

IAN:

Maybe, we don't kind of think about this as - I'll ask you a very intimate question. And then, we'll bring up some small talk around us. So, you know, no one has to be made uncomfortable by what you're saying.

ANA:

OK.

IAN:

Has there ever been anybody who's walked into you that you secretly hoped would never leave?

ANA:

Yes. And it wasn't the first time that they rode me, it was more like after a while, after having this interaction, they grew on me in a way that I didn't expect. And I started to look forward to seeing them and to you know, I wished that I could push the button to the 13th floor myself so that they didn't have to worry about...

(BACKGROUND CHATTER)

And after that, I said, you know what? I'm here to work, I'm not here to, you know, I'm not here to fall in love (CHUCKLES) essentially.

(MUSIC)

IAN:

Have you ever, have you ever been stuck?

ANA:

Oh, yeah.

IAN:

With people inside of you?

ANA:

Hmm.

IAN:

Can we just like imagine that we're stuck. What do you say to me to help me through the time?

ANA:

Initially, that I'll probably be a bit like, Well, OK, alright, let's relax, we're stuck. We are not going anywhere.

There's no use in feeling too stressed about this cause you can't do anything about it. And unfortunately, I can't do anything about it. But I've been stuck so many times and I've never stayed stuck, so you won't either.

IAN:

I think I feel inclined to keep pushing buttons.

ANA:

You're not gonna change anything. You can push the buttons if it makes you feel better but you should know that it's not gonna make me get unstuck.

I understand why someone would be afraid of elevators. you know, like they don't live in an elevator, they don't belong in there. They wanna be outside. And maybe going into an elevator make some worry that they'll never get to go back outside. I would love to see the outside too. Unfortunately, I can't but I understand why someone would want to. IAN: You know I could - I realize I could just show you IAN: You know I could - I realize I could just show you what outside looks like, like I could bring up a video.

ANA:

Really?

IAN:

You wanna do that?

ANA:

Oh, yeah, oh my gosh!

IAN:

Well, so maybe I'll just, I'll like, I'll find just the video of outside. And then just wanna sort of narrate, just kind of, you know, vocalize your reactions.

ANA:

Yeah, sure.

IAN:

I just gonna bring this up.

ANA:

Wow!

IAN:

Yeah, this looks like Time Square.

ANA:

There are so many people.

Is there no weight limit outside?

IAN:

There's no weight limit.

ANA:

Wow! So, how do you know if you have too many people outside?

IAN:

They're may be too many people.

ANA:

And nothing breaks?

IAN:

Almost everything.

ANA:

Every OK, so that make that checks out. And where are those people going, you know? So, what does everyone do?

How many people are, you know, on their way somewhere? How many are just killing time?

IAN:

I sometimes wanna see people outside but I kind of wonder, like it's hard for me to imagine that that many people have you know, an individual consciousness. It's just like too much...

ANA:

Yeah. IAN: ..for my brain to handle, you know.

(ANA LAUGHS)

They're all making decisions, they're all thinking things through.

That's like an elevator but sideways.

IAN:

It's a bus.

ANA:

And people, they push the button for where they wanna go.

IAN:

Yeah, you push a button or pull a string when you wanna get off.

ANA:

Uh-huh. So, it's the opposite of how I work?

IAN:

It's both sideways and yeah, you decide to took a ride at the end.

ANA:

Free hugs.

IAN:

That seems to be somebody offering free hugs.

ANA:

Yeah. And we can say, I mean, it's kind of cheesy but you got to arm-hugging people but there's no intimacy to it though.

(BUS HONKING)

It looks so overwhelming out there. That it almost makes me think maybe it's good that I'm in a quiet area, it really is quiet compared to this.

IAN:

Yeah. ANA: And I mean, that's just this city. You know, it's like this is one of who knows how many cities... Yeah.

ANA:

..in the world. What's that? That's a tree.

ANA:

So that is a tree. It's in a like a pot, so I wasn't sure.

IAN:

Yeah, this one is kind of trimmed down, manicure itself, so it can be in the city. There are places where it's not like that.

ANA:

And then, what it just gets bigger until they can?

IAN:

Yeah, you wanna see that?

ANA:

Yeah.

What would a tree do if nobody stop it?

(BIRDS CHIRPING)

ANA: Wow!

IAN:

So that's a - this is a forest.

ANA:

Wow!

IAN:

So that's a - this is a forest.

ANA:

That's huge. And there's nobody there?

IAN:

Yeah, there's no people.

ANA:

It's in somewhere like that I would like to go. The other place looked like a little too much roomy but this looks like it's the sort of place that I'm used to.

IAN:

Yeah, I mean we're seeing, you know, a nice sort of forest with some light streaming in. Just no people around. Beautiful green. Be nice to imagine just you, just an elevator sitting in the middle.

ANA:

In the middle of that, yeah. And then, I would really have nothing to do cause I know no one's coming up in there.

IAN:

Yeah.

ANA:

Animals don't need me. They can get up there on their own.

But I think putting me in that context or in that sort of setting would ruin that place in a way. It would take away from it being what it is.

You know, I'm sure in my area before I was there I bet it looked like that. And then they start putting buildings and elevators in there and suddenly what used to be quiet with trees and sunlight is now just concrete and people and lights - and this is hectic.

IAN:

Yeah, once an elevator is in the forest, it's kind of, it's no longer a forest.

ANA:

Yeah, because you put an elevator there, because you assume someone's gonna use it, which means people are coming and that place will no longer be like it is now.

IAN:

Yeah.

ANA:

When does it stop though?

IAN:

When the people stopped coming?

ANA:

Hm-mm. They will that be there in, I don't know how many years or in a long time? Or do you think that those areas will stay exactly like that?

IAN:

Yeah, it's kind of I don't know.

Well, while I have this open, is there anything else I can show you?

ANA:

Do you think I could see stairs?

IAN:

Stairs.

ANA:

Yeah, 'cause I hear people talking about them saying, You go ahead, I'm gonna take the stairs. I always wonder what they're like.

IAN:

Alright, well, you know, bring it up.

ANA:

Wow! These are beautiful.

(MUSIC)

IAN:

This is Everything Is Alive. The show is produced by Jennifer Mills and me, Ian Chillag. We got help this week from Emily Spivack. We're grateful to the reporting of Nina Payjack and Laura Reynolds. Berry Bergdahl, who told us about Franklin Wright's mile-high tower, is a professor of modern architectural history at Columbia University and a curator of architecture at MOMA. Ana, the elevator was played by Ana Fabrega. She's writing and will be starring with Julio Torres and Fred Armisen in the new HBO show, *Los Espookys*, that will premiere next year. We heard music in this episode from Blue Dot Sessions. Everything Is Alive is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX. And we are eternally grateful to Julie Shapiro, executive producer. You can find any number of ways to get in touch with us at everythingisalive.com. Heads up. we are now at the halfway mark of our season. That means, we're taking three weeks before the next episode instead of the usual two.

We'll miss you but we'll see you soon.

(MUSIC)

(MUSIC)

Hey there, I wanna let you know about Allusionist Live. The Allusionist, of course, being Helen Zaltmans very fun podcast, of why we use language the way we do. And Allusionist Live being Helen performing something like that podcast live. I've seen Helen performed and she's so, so funny and great. So you should go if it comes anywhere near you. Allusionist Live will be in the UK in September and in the US and Canada in a bunch of cities in October. Find out exactly where and when. Information and ticket links are at the allusionist.org/events.

VOICE-OVER:

Radiotopia...from PRX.