

Speaker 1 ([00:00:07](#)):

You're listening to the journey on podcast with Warwick Schiller. Warwick is a horseman, trainer, international clinician, and author whose mission is to help people achieve a deeper connection with their horses through his transformational training program, just

Warwick Schiller ([00:00:34](#)):

G'day, everybody welcome back to the journey on podcast. I'm your host Warwick Schiller. I'm so excited for this. You guys are listen to this podcast. You know, this is the journey on podcast and it's all about the journey and the guest I have this week, her name's Helen Spencer, and she's a veterinarian from the UK, but I met her in Mongolia when my son Tyler and I went on that called camel expedition in the Gobi desert a couple of years ago. And when we when we went from the capital of, of Mongolia, which is a, a city called Oland Batar we drove out into the desert in these, in this van for about 12 hours to get out, to, to the camels and on the way out there, Tyler and I, you know, we've been a few places. So we started telling travel stories.

Warwick Schiller ([00:01:20](#)):

And after, after some of the people started telling their travel stories, we shut up because we thought we've been some places, but there were some people on that trip. Who've been a lot of places, but none more so than Helen she's been to at the time, she'd been to 78 countries. As you'll hear here in the interview, she's been to 80 something now and what an adventurous spirit. And yeah, I, I just can't say enough about Helen and, and what she's done and where she's been and the experiences she's had. And I was just mesmerized when we recorded this podcast here in some of the, some of the stories she had to tell. So without any further due, I'm gonna let you be just amazed as I was listening to the journeys of Helen Spencer, Helen Spencer, welcome to the journey on podcast.

Helen Spencer ([00:02:16](#)):

Thanks a lot, Warwick. It's good to see you again.

Warwick Schiller ([00:02:20](#)):

Yeah, you too. It's been almost two years since we met in Mongolia. What a fun time. That was

Helen Spencer ([00:02:27](#)):

My gosh. That was a trip of a lifetime. That really was epic. Yeah, it was,

Warwick Schiller ([00:02:33](#)):

It was well, yeah, it was, it was epic. It was epic for me. But that's the thing. The reason I got you on here is because you've had a lot of epic trips in your lifetime. How many countries have you been to?

Helen Spencer ([00:02:45](#)):

I think it's in the eighties now, somewhere

Warwick Schiller ([00:02:48](#)):

Around there. Oh, there, because it was, I think it was 78 or 79 when we were, we were in Mongolia. It was funny, you know, when we got to Mongolia, we were there in the capital Oland Batta for a couple of

days. And then we pile in these vans and drive 12 hours out in the desert to go to where the camels were and on the way out, Tyler and I started like telling some stories about our travels, cuz we've been some places. And then we realized, oh, we're in a van full of real adventurers and we need to shut up cuz you guys would go or more stories than we have. And, and you were you were one of those. So you are a veterinarian.

Helen Spencer ([00:03:24](#)):

I am yes of 22 years now.

Warwick Schiller ([00:03:28](#)):

22 years. Wow. Yeah. And so some, some, I wanna talk to you about here on the podcast and I, I'm sure people that are listening will be fascinated by this is I, you know, every veterinarian I know and been in the horse game, you get to know a few veterinarians. They tend to work themselves to death as in it's it's almost like they it's almost well, it's the same as in the horse training industry, you know, it's, it's almost like, oh yeah, I, I didn't even take a day off. I work seven days a go, I won't, you know, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I worked till 10 o'clock at night, all this, all this go, go, go stuff that I think, I don't know. Sometimes it can be sometimes it's because you're passionate about what you do. But sometimes I think people get busy to avoid facing life in general. I don't know. I don't know what it is. So you have managed to be a, for 22 years travel to 80 something countries and do both, how do you, how do you go about doing that? Well,

Helen Spencer ([00:04:28](#)):

I think you're exactly right. That vets work themselves into the ground. And that is a huge problem at the moment. I mean, I dunno what it's like, where you live, but in the UK, vets are leaving in their droves, which is really sad leaving the profession because they're burned out. So I know that the way I deal with stress and there's a huge amount of stress for vets, for nurses, for anyone in our profession is to take myself away from it every now and again in, and I've made very certain to do that in my 22 years. <Laugh> as a vet, I've gone to some really remote places where there's no communication either. And that makes sure that people can't contact you from work because the norm is to anywhere from 40 to 60 hours. And as you said, be proud of it.

Helen Spencer ([00:05:27](#)):

And actually I want to live and not live to work. I've always had a fascination of other cultures and other places, and I've incorporated working as a vet abroad as well, but I have very much made sure that for my own mental health, I have escaped from my job and experienced other cultures and got right away from work and my phone and being able to be contacted. And that I think has helped me through enormously. I can't say it's easy. I mean, financially I don't live a very extravagant life, but I do put an awful lot of my finances into travels and adventures cuz that's my passion. So finance has to come into it to travel to remote places, but also preparation. You know, I have worked a full day on a Friday with my backpack in the office and got straight to the airport by the skin of my teeth, made a flight Friday night and you know, come two weeks later, very late Sunday night or even one day it was like five o'clock Monday morning and straight back to work again.

Helen Spencer ([00:06:43](#)):

So I've maximized every second of my leave as well, which is pretty exhausting. And to prepare to leave my job for a week, two weeks, whatever it might be can sometimes take a few months and to deal with

the site that builds up when I've been away for a few weeks, because I am a practice owner take several months to undo. But and that used to really, really stress me out as well. But I had to learn to, to live with that if I wanted to travel. And that's just part of traveling is all the preparation and also the getting things back on track when I'm, when I'm back at work again. So I can't say it's easy, but I've made it my a huge importance in my life. That's, that's what I get my kicks doing. And that's how I, I deal with the stresses of being a vet.

Warwick Schiller ([00:07:43](#)):

You know, I'm a big fan of BNE brown. You ever heard of BNE brown?

Helen Spencer ([00:07:47](#)):

No, I'm afraid not.

Warwick Schiller ([00:07:51](#)):

She's a let's call it she's in the mental health field. Put it that way. Okay. Here in the us. But she, in one of her books, she talks about how she went to a, an office building in New York. It was a big law firm and she wrote up and down the elevator all day, listening to elevator conversations. And these guys were like, you know, two guys are getting the elevator, like I worked till two o'clock this morning about

Helen Spencer ([00:08:15](#)):

You and they're proud of it, probably

Warwick Schiller ([00:08:18](#)):

The other one. And the other one says I, and go home. And they're like, yeah, high, you know, like that, that sort of, that sort of thing. And, and, you know, you mentioned before that people are leaving the, the like veterinary profession in droves, but I think isn't there. I dunno about the UK, but know a lot of countries, there's a high rate of suicide

Helen Spencer ([00:08:38](#)):

With vets too. Yeah. Unfortunately the highest rate of suicide is vets and farmers. A and that is to do the pressure of the job. I mean, until recently, very recently to work part-time as a vet was very much kind of looked down on unless you had a reason like children <laugh> now things are very much changing. I went down from five or six days a week for many, many years, four years ago. I, I, I now work four days a week, which is perfect for me, but I, the guilt I felt, or I, I perceived is huge. Now this is where, this is how we're gonna save our profession, I think is flexible working. And people working less hours and therefore not burning out. It's the only way to go really. And, and why not? But, but I think things are changing.

Warwick Schiller ([00:09:35](#)):

Know, you said something very interesting then the pressure, and then you said, or the perceived pressure. Yeah. And it's, it's it's pressure we put on ourself, you know, when you're in that sort of situation, it's only pressure you put on yourself and well, it's that too, but it's also the perceived pressure from other people, or it might be pressure from other people, but they're not really pressuring you. It's just, it is just your it's your perception of what they're thinking of you, you know, I've read, have you, you know who Jay, she, he is

Helen Spencer ([00:10:08](#)):

No, I'm afraid. Not,

Warwick Schiller ([00:10:10](#)):

I'm not very well read. Jay, she he's British, he now lives in LA. He was a, he was a Buddhist monk for a few years. And he, so he is sort of a, you know, an influencer dude, but he's got a book called think like a monk and the very first start of the book, it says, you are not who you think you are. You are not who I think you are, you are who you think, I think you are.

Helen Spencer ([00:10:34](#)):

Yeah, absolutely.

Warwick Schiller ([00:10:36](#)):

And it was like you know, I don't know if you are, you know, I dunno if you are who you think, I think you are, but that's kind of who we think we are is, you know, like what the perception, what our perception of what the other person has of has of you. And yeah. And, and I think getting to where you get, I don't know, with yourself to where you don't really give a, what other people think of you and you make decisions for you and not, you know, based on whether someone's gonna like you or not, or whatever. I think that's, it's a very it's a very freeing sensation when you can get to that point in your life.

Helen Spencer ([00:11:23](#)):

Absolutely. I think that comes with perhaps age experience. I don't think things like social media help, particularly a younger generation, you know, they're judged on their Instagram feed and some people live their life. I've just bought Instagram and not perhaps as themselves. But yeah, I do feel for the teenagers in, in, in the world at the moment, living with social media at such a young age, but I think I've just gradually become a bit more comfortable in my own skin and less caring what other people think, but I'm still guilty of that for sure.

Warwick Schiller ([00:12:07](#)):

Yeah. I think we all are, but I, yeah. And I think, I think when you become aware of, I, I think the thing with getting over anything like that is first becoming aware of it, cuz I think for a long time, we're not, we're not even aware that that's how we view the world. Well, that's how we think or that's how we feel and you just have this general level of unease or whatever within you that you don't even know why it's there. You know? So I think, yeah, I think a lot of times identifying things like that are pretty important, but anyway, we're getting kind of morbid here. I wanna hear about your adventures. So you've been a vet for how so have you always had a bit of an adventurous spirit?

Helen Spencer ([00:12:48](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. I grew up on a farm. I grew up on a farm with a hell of a lot of freedom. I'm the youngest of four. So my mom didn't have her eye on me all the time. And I was able just to have, you know, many adventures on my own with my dog for years. That's what I did. You know, just, you know, pair of shorts and that was usually it, maybe some wellies and wet days, but off I'd go with my dog in the morning and I'd come back for tea in the, in the evening. I also grew up with quite an adventurous family. So my paternal grandmother, my dad's mom she was a, a very wealthy lady born in 1901 and traveled after the first world war quite extravagantly, you know, on the big ship.

Helen Spencer ([00:13:40](#)):

She traveled all around the world in the sort of 19, 19, 1920s steamboats paddle ships. She went all over the world to the Caribbean or Fiji Australia, and it took amazing photos and she also bought trinkets and, and, and bits and pieces and postcards. And from a very young age, going to her house, she had a walk-in cupboard that she would let me go into and it was full of all the, just stuff she bought back from traveling to say, it would be postcards. It would be little trinkets made of, of coral or ivory. It would be coins notes, and then all have photographs. And I would spend hours and hours and hours in that cupboard learning about the world and where these amazing places were and wondering, you know, maybe one day I would get to experience that as well. So I think, I think that was probably what probably what sparked my interest interest particularly coins and everything that goes along with what's on coins and bank notes and things like that.

Helen Spencer ([00:14:46](#)):

I was fascinated with all of that, but, but growing up on a farm, I didn't ever get to travel myself till I left school. I had horses, I live on a farm, we've got dogs, we've got rivers, we've got everything a kid could want. So we never left the country. We just had a lot of fun on the farm locally. So I didn't really get to travel until I left school, but I always dreamt of it. And I've grown up with all the stories. There's huge amounts of books and, and paintings and things around my house of Everest expeditions, the Victorian explorers, discovering the river Nile where the source, all of that kind of thing was in my bones from, from growing up around my dad's family in particular.

Warwick Schiller ([00:15:40](#)):

Wow. That's a, a, an early early influence, huh?

Helen Spencer ([00:15:47](#)):

Yeah, for sure.

Warwick Schiller ([00:15:49](#)):

So when you, when you get outta school, where, where was the first country you went in?

Helen Spencer ([00:15:55](#)):

Well, actually the day after I left school I put on a backpack and with a couple of friends who went into raiiling back then you could get a pretty cheap train ticket. And you could go anywhere in Europe for an entire month anywhere. So off we went literally the day after I left school at never traveled off, we went through France Germany, Berlin, the wall had just come down. That was, that was quite a, something to see it come down a couple of years before, but it was pretty edgy and rough east Berlin. And we went all the way to Hungary, checkers of all sorts of countries. And then down through Italy, Greece, Spain, it was really eyeopening. I had no money. I'd washed cars to, to earn some money. I had 10 pounds a day and that had to be spent on everything from food to accommodation, to tickets, to get into museums and places that didn't go very far.

Helen Spencer ([00:16:57](#)):

It's probably about \$10 actually. So most of the time I slept in stations I slept rough on the street quite a lot and experienced what that was like. I definitely don't wanna do that again. And I slept in trains sometimes up high on the Lu Lu or just pick trains that went long distances overnight. So I could sort of

sleep in my seat. It was hard work, but it meant that I saw very rapidly, an awful lot of Europe. And the last week of it, I actually split up with the two girls I was with and they wanted to go some bathing and I wasn't done with traveling at all. So off, I went on my own wrecking, my mother out, cuz she'd, you know, I'd never been abroad really before, but there, I was on my own traveling around Europe and I made it by the skin of my teeth. I just made it back to Dover before my ticket ran out at midnight. I, I got back at hop past 11 and phoned my mom to come and get me because my ticket wasn't valid after that. But yeah, that was my first taste of travel and, and I was hooked. And how long was that? That was a month. Oh, wow.

Warwick Schiller ([00:18:11](#)):

And so what was the, what was the sleeping rough like they're sleeping outside. How was that

Helen Spencer ([00:18:16](#)):

Tough? You know, people treat you like crap. It really, it really was an eye opener. It's not something I wish to do again, but you know, I'm glad I've done it right now. I actually volunteer for a charity called street bet in London. And we look after the homeless people's dogs and cats sometimes, but mainly dogs in London. And, you know, I, I can't say I know what it's like to sleep rough long term. I have only done it for a few weeks, but it was tough. And I know that if I had to do it long term, I'd want a dog for comfort, for warmth, for protection. And also an, an awful lot of the, the people that I've got to know through street BES have issues, you know, who, who have issues with, with drugs or substance abuse and a dog or a cat.

Helen Spencer ([00:19:12](#)):

There are a few cats, but it's a reason to keep clean. It's a reason to look after yourself as well. So it was just a small taster into that. And and I've been volunteering for street vet for three years now. And it, it's, it's a real highlight actually of living in London for me and using my skills as a vet for, for good. We, I work on a particular patch in north London, so I've got to know the folk around there, most of them are fairly regular. Their animals are really well looked after. And we sit and we chat. Sometimes they need a bit of veterinary attention. It's mainly FL and worm treatment. And, you know, we also have an account where, where kind folk can donate jackets for dogs, blankets, toys, food. So I take a big backpack full of basic veterinary care, but also that kind of thing around and you know, we sit and chat and find out what they need.

Helen Spencer ([00:20:19](#)):

They know we'll be there every two weeks. So we take what they'll need, but so, you know, often there's new people on the street, just having a chat with them, making sure they're aware of who we are and that we'll be there every two, few weeks and we have an emergency number and then seeing the regulars. It's amazing what you can do on the street. If you think about it, you know, I can do a full consult with a dog, take them somewhere quiet. I can get a blood sample, urine sample skin scrape. There's not an awful lot. We can't do on the street that we, that we can do in a normal consult room. Just these people don't have an address. So they don't qualify for, you know, your, your, your standard better treatment. And there's, there's no way they could pay for it either.

Warwick Schiller ([00:21:05](#)):

Wow. That's amazing. I was watching a doc, oh, I watched a documentary recently by a Canadian, a Canadian doc named GA matte GA Mae is one of the world's leading experts. I guess you could say on

addiction, you know, basically says that all addiction comes from some sort of trauma mm-hmm, <affirmative>, you know, usually childhood trauma. And a lot of times that that ends up with you end up with some sort of chemical imbalance, you know, where you have that, that leads you to, to the addictive thing. But so it was a, it was a, it was a documentary called the wisdom of trauma. I think it was called. And there was a, there was a section in there on homeless people. And there was this lady that, that looks after a lot of homeless people in a certain area. I forget where it was, but she was saying, you know, the, the biggest thing for homeless people, they feel not seen <affirmative>.

Helen Spencer ([00:22:11](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. It's so easy to walk past, isn't it?

Warwick Schiller ([00:22:15](#)):

Yeah. Like they're invisible or mm-hmm, <affirmative>, they're less than. Yeah. And, and she said, the best thing you can do is just look 'em in the eye and say, Hey, how's it going? Yeah.

Helen Spencer ([00:22:25](#)):

Chat. And, and it's working with homeless people. I, I was in the same boat. I was over to talk to them. Why would they wanna talk to me? What do I say? When I started volunteering? I was a little nervous, but yeah, just have a chat, sit down, have a chat. Or somehow they're doing today. It's kind of easier. I have to say when they have an animal, because we talk about the animal mainly. Right. Yeah. And I do find that easier, but if everyone would just take the time to have a chat, buy, 'em a coffee, it's pretty lonely on the street and it's, it's bloody hard. So yeah, and they, they, they all have their own stories. Every single one, some are career homeless, if you like, they, they, they belong in the streets. They've tried living in accommodation, but just don't like it can't hack it, unfortunately in England. Sorry, it's very difficult. There's not many shelters that will take animals as well as their owners. We're trying to change that as street bet. That's a big drive that we are doing to encourage homeless shelters to take animals. But for a lot of people, it's a choice either go into some sort of sheltered accommodation hostile, or have an animal and live on the street. And, and most of the guys I know, would prefer to keep their animal.

Warwick Schiller ([00:23:59](#)):

Wow. Was there when, on your first little Jat around on your train ticket, when you were sleeping rough, was there a lot of, are homeless people then? I mean, cuz these days, I mean, there's, you know, I dunno about in England, but here in the, around, well, at least around here where we live in, in California since the start of the pandemic, you know, like there's homeless camps. Yeah.

Helen Spencer ([00:24:20](#)):

No, it's way worse now. It's sad. Way, way worse. Definitely. I mean, I, I notice people more as well just because I've worked with them, but, but it, yeah, even since the pandemic, it's got way worse in London, unfortunately for all sorts of reasons, but it, it, it is really sad and it's a huge problem in London.

Warwick Schiller ([00:24:46](#)):

Yeah. It's, it's pretty battery in here. Okay. So that was your first little Jat around the countryside. So you got back from then that was, I think that was after high school.

Helen Spencer ([00:24:57](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. When I was 18. Yeah.

Warwick Schiller ([00:24:59](#)):

When I was 18. Yeah. And so then how did the whole vet thing come about? Did you always wanna be a vet?

Helen Spencer ([00:25:04](#)):

Yeah. I mean, I, I, I can't imagine wanting to do anything else. I grew up around all sorts of animals. I live on a farm, but also a zoo. And I didn't spend a lot of time with humans growing up. So I've never, ever, ever wanted to do anything else. Having said that I never thought I could be a vet because there was this stigma that you had to be so clever and you know, it was so hard and you'd never get into vet school, but somehow they let me in, I, I didn't actually get the grades, but I think they did listen to my experience. And, and let me in, I, I didn't believe that for a bit, but anyway, they did let me in, I, I still think it might have been a clerical error, but hopefully I've them now. And second

Warwick Schiller ([00:25:51](#)):

Ago, say a second ago, said, I, I grew up a second ago. You said I grew up on a farm and a zoo, and then you skipped over that. What's the zoo bit.

Helen Spencer ([00:26:01](#)):

Oh, so I have an amazing neighbor before she's passed on now, but he was called John and he was a gambler and an animal lover. So he was a high class gambler. I'm talking mega bucks. So in the sixties, he won the estate next to my father's in a bet. And he moved in. He's the sort of guy that, you know, he owned a Thai and this pictures of him on the Kings road, in London with his tiger on a lead sports cars, you know, the lot, he had a helicopter at one point, but anyway, he moved in and he had this beautiful estate and he had his own tigers and he had his own gorillas. But over time, you know, he was, he, he, they were for him and his family. But over time he eventually did let the public in, I'd say late sixties, early seventies, but only to parts of the zoo.

Helen Spencer ([00:27:04](#)):

So even until now it's, it's a big place now with all sorts of animals, every animal is on a breeding project, apart from the tigers, because there's nowhere to, to release them. Unfortunately, I think there's more tigers in captivity than there are in the wild, but every other animal is on release, breeding and release projects. You can't see all of them, or if you can, you can only see one side of the cage, which is very much not the case on a lot of zoos. But anyway, she has the biggest family of gorillas, low longers anywhere in captivity and, and a huge head of elephants. I live next door to 16 elephants and a lot of tigers all, all sorts. And as a kid, I was the same age as his son. And I was able to go whenever I wanted freely between our farm and, and the zoo.

Helen Spencer ([00:28:03](#)):

I mean, even when I was in a PRM my mom would take me there. Most days, I was obsessed with the elephants and just to watch, just watch them interact with each other. And, you know, I've seen videos when she would turn the PRM around to go home. I would holler, <laugh> scream and holler to be taken away from them. So I had a pretty lucky childhood in the fact that I was around these incredible



magnificent animals, but also our farm. We have a huge herd of cows, well big for UK standards horses, ponies, dogs, chickens, you know, the lots. So my entire life revolved around animals and getting to know their behavior and understanding them. And that's really helped me as a vet as well. I was pretty surprised when I did get to vet school. I thought there'd be a lot of farm kids like me there, but most people have maybe had a pet dog.

Helen Spencer ([00:29:04](#)):

There was one other otherwise, you know, there was people who've never owned a pet at vet school and they got all of these, a grades, but they've never owned a pet. I do think that part of my skill as a vet is just understanding the nature of animals. And you can grow to know that, you know, the posture, the, the, the, I know when a cat's gonna attack or is gonna be angry, I can see a dog walk in and I have a general idea sometimes what's wrong with it. And that comes from knowing animals, which takes many, many years. So I had a very charmed upbringing, surrounded by animals, all shapes and sizes which I am extremely grateful for.

Warwick Schiller ([00:29:57](#)):

You know, Helen, I'm sitting here laughing, Hey, for you guys that listen to this Helen has, has, was a little bit nervous about coming on the podcast very nervous. And we've been trying to organize this for several months now, but like one of the Helen's early comments was like, well, who would, who would wanna listen to who would wanna listen to my story? <Laugh> and well, I wouldn't have anything, anything to say, anything interesting. People would find. Interesting. And then you just gloss over the fact that, oh yeah, well, I had animals as a kid in a zoo, and you just keep talking, like, that's not unusual that that is completely unusual. Haven't how many elephants living next door?

Helen Spencer ([00:30:37](#)):

16,

Warwick Schiller ([00:30:39](#)):

Haven't 16 elephants living next door. That's got

Helen Spencer ([00:30:41](#)):

Three baby, but actually, do you know what all 16 in the next few years are gonna be moved to Kenya?

Warwick Schiller ([00:30:48](#)):

Are they really a lot?

Helen Spencer ([00:30:50](#)):

Yeah, it's a huge project project. And it's taking a lot of fundraising, but I think there's a big move to remove elephants from captivity because of their intelligence and rarity in the wild. So it's a big project, but over the next few years, our entire herd will be moved to

Warwick Schiller ([00:31:11](#)):

Africa. Where in Kenya are they gone? Do you know?

Helen Spencer ([00:31:15](#)):

I'm not sure at the moment, it's all kind of in discussions and planning, but they've announced they're gonna do it. So that's what they're working towards at the moment.

Warwick Schiller ([00:31:24](#)):

You know, I'm a big fan of elephants too. Tyler and I went to the oh, what's, I can't think of the guy's first name. Cause this it's the shell Drake an elephant orphanage in

Helen Spencer ([00:31:38](#)):

Kenya in Nairobi in Nairobi. Yes. I, I, I volunteered there. Yeah.

Warwick Schiller ([00:31:46](#)):

When we went there and they bought out the little elephant and they're feeding them with the bottles that, that, so you've, you've volunteered there. Yeah.

Helen Spencer ([00:31:53](#)):

Yeah. And you fed the baby elephants with the bottles. Oh, wow. Oh, wow. I mean, they're magical. Aren't they they're incredible creatures. Incredible.

Warwick Schiller ([00:32:03](#)):

Yeah. They were amazing. There was one there when we were there that had got his trunk caught in a snare. Oh God. About, about halfway up. And it almost severe his trunk and they weren't sure he was gonna make it, but he he was good and they had these big, you know, the like 55 gallon, 44 gallon barrel, plastic blue plastic barrels had him cut in half, like his water barrels in <affirmative> and he had to stick his head all the way in it, because, because he had a whole halfway up his trunk, he couldn't suck with the end of it. Oh, my Were so cute. Okay. We're gonna get to that later though. I'm a big elephant fan <laugh> so you so then you, when you're in vet school, imagine you didn't travel a lot during that time or did you, well, I

Helen Spencer ([00:32:51](#)):

Did a bit. So what I realized is that the drug companies are, are desperate to get you on site at vet school. So if you come up with a project and, you know, you were willing to go speak to them about it or something like that, they would help fund it. So actually yes, I did. And a big part of that was, was in Africa. That's where I wanted to be. I wanted to work with elephants my whole life, if I kind of went to vet school, cuz I thought that's the route I wanted to go down. Maybe not as a zoo vet, but work in Africa. So I, I spent a lot of time in Africa and I, I managed to get quite a lot of it funded by the drug companies. So I didn't have a lot of money, but I really put the effort in.

Helen Spencer ([00:33:38](#)):

And there was only another guy in my year of vet school who, who did the same, it was kind of surprising. So at vet school, you have to do a lot of work experience in your holidays. You don't really get holidays, you have to work with vets. And that's really to be perfectly honest, the only time I learned anything, I didn't, I didn't really concentrate very hard at vet school. And it was all theory, whereas I'm quite a practical person. So you work your holidays with vets. And you know, that's, that's the most important bit of vet school for most vets. So I managed to slightly twist the meaning of working with vets and go and work in Africa with wild animals. So I, I, yeah, I that's, when I all volunteered at the she

center, I work with the Kenyan wildlife trust who monitor diseases in, in the wildlife. And I also spent a bit of time in, in South Africa in various different game parks. So yes, I, I did travel a bit.

Warwick Schiller ([00:34:41](#)):

Have you, when you're in Kenya, did you go to Amber national park at all?

Helen Spencer ([00:34:45](#)):

I never been there. That looks stunning.

Warwick Schiller ([00:34:47](#)):

Yeah. It was beautiful. That's where I went with Tyler and I went a couple years ago. Okay. So that's that's vet school. So when you get outta vet school then cuz you own your own practice. Now, obviously you didn't have that when you got outta vet school. So what, what was your next step out of

Helen Spencer ([00:35:02](#)):

Vet school? Yeah. So my first job, I don't really do things by halves. I wanted to work abroad. So I sort of thought by then I might not be cut out for being a wildlife vet. I have to say back then things might have changed, but it was quite a chauvinistic world. My L vets were necessary and also they wanted African vets and, and I, and I, you know, I don't blame them really. So I'd kind of gone away from that, but I really loved working in more developing countries. So my first job as a vet was in Morocco and it was looking after donkeys. I worked for a, a British charity called span the society for the protection of animals in north Africa that was set up in the 1930s by British women who went on holiday to north Africa and saw the plight of the donkeys.

Helen Spencer ([00:35:56](#)):

We, which is, is pretty bad. And unfortunately still is, but this charity was set up. So it's been going a long time and I was working for them in Mor in Morocco they have 12 different hospitals in Morocco. Each one had stabling facilities and we would do basic procedure is there and people would bring their donkeys to the, to the clinic as well. And we gave free treatment to everybody, but we also had a little truck and every day, most days of the week, we would go out to a market out in the countryside, the same market on the same day, each week to treat donkeys in the more rural areas. So we'd travel for several hours. We'd get there in the truck. Oh my gosh, there could be 200 donkeys waiting for treatment <laugh> so it was a huge eye opener because I spoke very basic French, which most educated people in I speak, but in the rural areas they don't speak French.

Helen Spencer ([00:37:00](#)):

They speak BBER, which is an unwritten language as well. So I was having to use a lot of MI sign language and you know, I had a, a technician, not really a nurse, but technician who had come along with me and help, but it was, it was fabulous. That changed. My life was sure working with working donkey. So these are donkeys that people use to anything from plowing the fields, to taking their produces to market, to transporting wa water to transporting people a, a donkey is someone's life in a lot of countries. It's not a luxury like we have horses for, for, for luxury in our countries, but there, it really is someone's life and the education was very poor and there just didn't really seem to be the, there was a big disconnect between looking after your donkey. So it would last longer to getting the most out of your donkey and then, oh dear it's it's dead.

Helen Spencer ([00:37:59](#)):

And once it's dead, you know, that's a huge blow for a family. So my job was patching up donkeys, horrible saws from their harnesses, horrible bits. People were making bits out of bits of Barb wire and stuff like that. I was worming, I was filing the teeth and also education of the kids. We did an awful lot of that as well. There's, there's not much point fixing up donkeys if the same thing happens again and again. So talking to people about, about welfare of donkeys and how to look after them and then trying to solve problems. So the reason that they were so bony is cuz they're, they're not fed on much, you know, the people didn't have a lot, so the donkeys are not fed on much, but if they've got very sharp teeth, they can't chew. So you know what grain they have just come straight out the back end.

Helen Spencer ([00:38:54](#)):

So, and then we helped set up a women's cooperative who would make numbness, like just you know, women, there's not many opportunities for work if they are allowed to work in those societies. But we had a, women's only cooperative where they would come and stitch these numbness stuff with straw or a cotton. And we would give them out for free in the market to put under the the cart structure to, to try and stop the rubs. And also we imported. So for people who don't know what a Nuna is, it's like a yes. Sorry, like a saddle pad saddle pad. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. And also the bits it was quite fortunate that I didn't understand Beba because I would go around the donkey park, just cutting off these bits, these homemade horrible contraptions of torture, I would be being sworn at left right.

Helen Spencer ([00:39:50](#)):

And center I'm sure. I didn't need to understand the language to get that, but I would replace it with a very, you know, standard snaffle bit that we had made there, and we would give out for free. So I would disconnect it up and off, off they went. So I absolutely loved that job and traveled all around Morocco. So they had 12 different hospitals treating donkeys of all shapes and sizes, some horses as well. I also did a few like mini experiments of my own. So I, I noticed that people would come every week to get their donkey worms, which doesn't really help. It can actually cause resistance if you worm your horse or donkey every week, it's not necessary, no one had ever done any studies about the prevalence of worms. So I thought, well, I've got a microscope back at the clinic.

Helen Spencer ([00:40:52](#)):

So I took fecal samples from many, many, many different donkeys. And I wrote up a study that actually the prevalence was really low and we didn't need to be worm them very often at all, but also to try and stop people coming every week to worm their donkey. Cuz I think it was perceived as some sort of magic potion, you know? How do you stop that? The Don don't have names, the people can't R read or write, so there's no way of recording, but I was recognizing the same guys coming every week. So I devised a cunning plan is to just cut a chunk of tail just below the dock, the bone in the tail, big chunk. So it was very visible and also I could time how long that grew and, and then figure out how long ago they'd been wormed. So I kind of put all this lot together in, in a bit of a paper for a north African veterinary journal. <Laugh> simple but effective is, is what you need to work in countries like that.

Warwick Schiller ([00:42:00](#)):

That's amazing. And so how long did you spend in Morocco?

Helen Spencer ([00:42:04](#)):

I was there about four months, I think in the end. Really?

Warwick Schiller ([00:42:07](#)):

Yeah.

Helen Spencer ([00:42:09](#)):

Four, five months. Wow. Yeah, absolutely loved

Warwick Schiller ([00:42:11](#)):

It. It's a beautiful country. So where did you go for Mor? I think where'd you go from?

Helen Spencer ([00:42:16](#)):

So then I took a job in, in Kent, which is the county where I grew up. It was relatively near my family and it was fabulous. It was, I think, as a vet, it's so important to have a, a good support network in your first job, because it's scary as hell. Especially when you're working with horses cow I'm, I'm mainly dealt with large animals, you know, you're given a car full of drugs and a gun and you are told, you know, go to this farm, this farm, this farm, and you're on your own. But I was so lucky. I had the most amazing boss. He was called err and he was super supportive. He was a great guy and I really owe a lot to him. He would, you know, I'd be on call on my own. My first week, <laugh> in the dark going out to emergency calls at two in the morning, it's kind of sink or swim and it's terrifying, but he would always say right, Helen tonight, I'll be in the Rosen crown pub. I won't be able to drive, but you can always call me or come and get me if you need me. <Laugh> so <laugh> so that was great. I did have a, a, a great, great start. And he taught me a lot.

Warwick Schiller ([00:43:30](#)):

I was gonna say just one second before we get too far away, I just learned recently I read somewhere why British pubs are named like they're I dunno like the Rosen crown or whatever, because back like you were just saying you were in Morocco and a lot of people, a lot of people were not literate and they couldn't read and write well, back in the days when a lot of England people couldn't read and write, you couldn't have the name for the pub written there, cuz I wouldn't know what it was. So they put symbols. Mm. So what did you say? That one was called? The something in the crown, the

Helen Spencer ([00:44:04](#)):

Rose and crown,

Warwick Schiller ([00:44:05](#)):

The rose and crown. So we have a painting of a rose and a crown next to it. And so you remember, oh, that's that's, that's the pub. I go to the rose and crown. So yeah, just a little bit of, little bit of tri there for you.

Helen Spencer ([00:44:16](#)):

<Laugh>

Warwick Schiller ([00:44:17](#)):

You know, the funny, what was funny about Morocco? So this ties into Mongolia somehow long story. Not really, but so Chloe Phillips Harris who organized the Mongolia called C amazing eighties. I first met her. Yeah. I first met her in New Zealand at a horse expo and I had a booth at this horse expo and she, her booth was next door where she was, it was a, it was some sort of a nonprofit that helped donkeys in third world countries. And Chloe was a working for them. And that's how I met her because her booth was next daughter, two hours at this horse.

Helen Spencer ([00:44:58](#)):

Yeah. I think she did very similar work in Egypt and Fiji as well.

Warwick Schiller ([00:45:03](#)):

Yep. Egypt and Fiji is where she was. Yeah. Yeah. And the pictures she showed me, like when you were talking right then I'm like, yeah. Most of the pictures she showed me were of, you know, like big wounds in their back, like huge wounds. Yeah. And then fist

Helen Spencer ([00:45:17](#)):

Withers. I've never seen that in the UK where you get chronic rubs on the rivers and you get these huge non-healing abscesses and fiery. One thing that we set up was a fiery course because you know, they would donkeys don't need shoes, so they weren't shots, but some of the horses were, or the donkeys that were pulling carts for bricks on the road, but they would get a car tire. They would hack a bit off, put the foot on it, bang some, you know, wood nails in and they'd shop the front of, of the toe off, make the, but fit the bit of rubber. It was just awful. And how to Mae a donkey, a horse in one go they would make circular shoes if they were gonna make metal shoes. But again, it, it, it wasn't fitted to the hoop at all. So one thing that span I have set up and do very well is a, a, an intensive nine day fiery course. So they get, be sorry, barriers from all over north Africa and they come and they live in and they get taught proper fiery. They get given a full set of tools and sent to wherever they came from in north Africa to hopefully shoe horses properly and also spread their knowledge far and wide as well. So again, educating grassroots, educating does far more than just fixing the odd donkey.

Helen Spencer ([00:46:53](#)):

Yeah.

Helen Spencer ([00:47:02](#)):

He'll love me for saying that. Yeah. I was pretty busy learning my trade. It's, it's, it is terrifying and daunting becoming a vet. You really start from nothing. And so I was very much concentrating on that, but, but I, I did leave after a few years and I I wanted to travel a bit, so I took some time off and I went to New Zealand had a little bit of a hard time in life, you know, relationship breakup, that kind of thing. We won't go into that, but I ended up walking the length of New Zealand, which, which wasn't really planned, but a bit of a forest Gump moment. So I was away for quite a while, till I ran off money and then came back and got another job in the UK, again with mainly horses. And yeah, I've done travels, but in and around work.

Helen Spencer ([00:48:02](#)):

So the maximum you can usually take off time as a vet is two weeks. So I maximized an time I had off during those two jobs. I did all sorts of ridiculous trips. I led a team of Husky dogs across the Finmark

plateau, which is an Arctic Norway in the winter. That was incredible. Kind of as near to wild dogs, as you can get, which as a vet, I found really fascinating seeing their natural behavior as pack animals. So I loved that, but I did cross knit my fingers and couldn't feel anything for about three months, which wasn't great when you're trying to do surgery, but that was one of the more memorable trip, memorable trips I did at that point. But a lot of backpacking, you know, I'd love nothing better than grabbing my backpacking off. I go to whether it be Thailand or Cuba or Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Jordan Butan, Nepal, India, all, all sorts of places. I've been lucky enough to explore with my background. I am.

Warwick Schiller ([00:49:21](#)):

You gotta slow down. I am still envisioning you walking the length of New Zealand. <Laugh>

Helen Spencer ([00:49:28](#)):

Oh

Warwick Schiller ([00:49:28](#)):

Yeah. You walk both islands. Yeah. Oh my goodness. Okay. I, I was still trying to comprehend that. And then somehow you were in Finland with Husky dogs and I was still thinking about walking New Zealand and then all of a sudden, oh, you just rattled off like 15 countries you went to wow. Is this, and this is all, this is all little trips while you're. So this is before you had your own practice.

Helen Spencer ([00:49:56](#)):

Yes. Most of those, yeah. From that job, I, I moved to London, actually. I realized I did need a social life as well as being a horse vet. That was hard, that job that was loss of night's weekends. And I wasn't in the best place. Personally. So I moved to London to a job that I didn't do any nights. And that, that was kind of transforming as well. And, and I took a really crap job actually, but it was dogs and cats and it meant that I could finish it half six at night, shut the door, go home and have a social life. And I, and I, and I'd missed that. So it, it, it, wasn't a great job. It wasn't a great boss and I stuck it out for a few years. And then I approached my boss and said, it's time for me to leave.

Helen Spencer ([00:50:42](#)):

I've got big travel plans. I wanna to, you know, travel the silk route and do all sorts of things. I was pretty excited about it. And he said, oh, do you know what Helen, I've been meaning to talk to you. I actually need to skip the country. I'm in a bit of financial trouble. If I paid you time and a half, would you manage the company for me? For a bit. So in my head, I'm calculating God time and a half. If I stuck it out for six months, I could travel for even longer. Anyway, I'm still there 18 years later. So I, I didn't get to do that trip, but the reason was he was going bankrupt. He was such a terrible manager and terrible vet that he'd bankrupted his own vet clinic. So I managed it for him while he skipped the country literally overnight.

Helen Spencer ([00:51:35](#)):

And it was, it was awful. It was truly awful. The company had no money to pay the staff, no money to pay the labs. So I couldn't get results for, you know, blood tests and things like that. I couldn't get any supplies. It was dreadful, but I, you know, it was a massive learning curve into how not to run a vet practice. And I managed somehow by the skin of my teeth to find a finance. It was just before our credit crunch. And I somehow managed to buy the clinic off him the day before it went bankrupt. So one

actually, no one else had to realize, you know, that the clients didn't realize the doors didn't close and suddenly there, I am owning two veterinary clinics in London, which was never my intention, but somehow, somehow I, I put myself in that position and it was a few years of hell to be honest, trying to build back up a really fairly badly, very badly run clinic.

Helen Spencer ([00:52:38](#)):

It was a labor of love. I don't think I would do it again if I known what was involved, but with a lot of blood, sweat, and tears and a massive learning curve from being a vet owning, you know, a big business is a, is a huge learning curve. You're not taught any business skills or HR or accountancy or marketing or all of that when you're at vet school, nothing. So I, I just did that by using my own common sense and eventually getting, hiring the right people to help me, but it was bloody awful, but it meant that ultimately I was in charge of my own destiny. I had complete autonomy. And if I wanted to then start traveling and, and volunteering abroad again, which I did an awful lot of, I, I could, it was tough cause leaving my own business for a few weeks is really, it was super tough, but I, but I made it work and say, I'm here 18 years later in the same job I never left it. <Laugh> but yeah, I of love of

Warwick Schiller ([00:53:45](#)):

Love. Wow. That's pretty amazing. So your some of your travels, even after that were volunteering again, were they?

Helen Spencer ([00:53:58](#)):

Yep, absolutely. So I volunteered for spanner the same charity again short stints. So as well as Morocco Marley in west Africa and then also in Jordan, I've done voluntary work for other charities Ethiopia, Pakistan, and then I've done quite a bit of work in India. That's more been with street dogs and rabies vaccination project checks that I really loved. So I worked again volunteered for an organization called worldwide veterinary service who set up a training center in Southern I India in UTI where Indian vets can come and learn how to new to street dogs because Indian vets are not really taught any surgery at vet school. Very, very little. There isn't really the call for it in India. They are more farm vets on the whole and dispensing medication rather than hands on treating private people's dogs and cats, because that wasn't really a thing back then.

Helen Spencer ([00:55:08](#)):

It, it is now you've got much more of a middle class in India now who do own dogs and cats, but but on the whole, we were, we were dealing with rabies. So the rabies situation in India is, is horrifying. It's terrible. And 99% of cases come from street dogs by children. So as the way that they deal with that, if they get a case of rabies, the council of the local counselors will basically order AEN poisoning of the entire village. And that kills not only the local street dog population, but all of the rats and mice and the, the birds are prey and anything else that eats it in a horrifying way. And then what happens is there's a bit of a, a gap in the market and you get street dogs come from all over the surrounding areas to fill it a, a very territorial street dogs.

Helen Spencer ([00:56:01](#)):

They will say in the same area. And also the, the local population will feed their kind of eat street dogs. So they're often relatively tame. So anyway, it's a pretty terrible situation because you're not solving the problem. So it took a British vet who worked out in India about 15 or 20 years to prove to the politicians that if you actually capture new to vaccinate and release these street dogs, it keeps the population



stable and therefore the rabies situation under control. So it took an awful lot of years trying to prove this and looking at hospital numbers of rabies cases, but finally they did. So the government then agreed to pay Indian vets to Nutra street dogs. But if they've never been taught how to neuter you know, that can go horribly wrong. There's no way you should embark on surgery like that.

Helen Spencer ([00:57:02](#)):

It's serious surgery, it's life or death stuff, unless you do it properly, you do it humanely as well. So this charity set up a center where Indian vets from all over India and also the, the technicians. So they're not trained nurses. So we call them technicians, but they're the ones that are gonna catch the street dogs and are one to that in a minute. But also they are administering the IV catheter. They're administering the IV fluids and they're monitoring the anesthetics. So they all need to be trained as well. So it's a live in 10 day course. I got involved with the technicians in the afternoons. We would go to the local villages and try and catch street dogs, which involves running around with a massive butterfly net chasing these dogs all around the slums, through temples, past people's houses through washing lines.

Helen Spencer ([00:57:55](#)):

It's hilarious. I was terrible at it, but you try and catch 'em in a big butterfly net. And they're terrified, you know, obviously, and also the local people think that you you're gonna kill them. So they come out screaming, everyone's screaming. And the guys are with, with would have to calm everybody down and tell them what we're doing. We we're gonna bring them back in a few days, but they will be nud and they will be vaccinated against rabies. So we would put 'em in the truck. They'd spend the night in the truck together, usually about 10 or 15 so that their pre star for the next morning and the next morning would be surgery time. So you know, going through all the, the different drugs, proper pain relief, proper sterile technique, operating theaters training the technicians and then training the vets, how to Nu male and female, and then keeping for three days in the kennels as meticulous notes taken of where they pick these dogs up from which street wear.

Helen Spencer ([00:58:52](#)):

And if we were happy with the wounds in their recovery, after three days, we would then take them back to the same streets. And they'd be vaccinated. The top of their ear is just chopped off as well, where they're under anesthetics. So it's very obvious from afar that they've been muted. Cuz so obviously with a female dog, you wouldn't be able to tell from the outset. And then in the afternoon I would be giving lectures on rabies on how to set up rabies, vaccination drive. So people, some, some vets, there's no way they could have the facilities or afford the facilities to Nuta. But one thing they can do is at least set up a, a RABs vaccine project in their local area, catch the dogs, vaccinate them mark them as vaccinated and then release them. The life of a street dog is, is probably not that maybe a few years.

Helen Spencer ([00:59:41](#)):

So just one vaccine should protect them for most of their life. So it was a really fascinating project and it was wonderful to meet vets and, and technicians from all over India. I'm still in touch with, with many of them now. And that was so successful that that project has been extended to Thailand and also south America now. And they also take on other nationality, vets, new grads often who pay a bit and come and learn how to Newton and live in India or undo the course as well. You know, they pay and that helps fund it as well, but ultimately it's funded by different charities. Most of them British charities and a bit from the Indian government. And then those Indian vets can now earn a little bit from the government

by Turing street dogs. I did hear one quite funny story is that some vets were perhaps not, not quite telling the truth on how many dogs that they'd muted perhaps to, to up their payment at the end of the month. So there was a drive to set up a they had to keep the bits they removed. So all the testicles and the uric is in a big jar of formula and some more bastard from the government then had to come round these different clinics and count out the bits. Can you imagine, Ooh, I dunno if that's still going on, but it did for a while. <Laugh>

Warwick Schiller ([01:01:08](#)):

How did, how did you like India? Cuz India kind of fascinates me. I'm pretty fascinated

Helen Spencer ([01:01:13](#)):

By India. I think it's love hate. I I've been to back to India many, many times all over India. It's the most fascinating country on earth and me. It's got everything, beaches, mountains, jungles deserts, temples beyond age. The culture is incredible and so diverse people are wonderful. It, it really does hit you in the face when you land. For sure. And for some people that is too much, the poverty is, is horrifying and, and striking. And I can't say that I would ever get used to that, particularly in the big cities. It, it really is horrifying, but the noise, the traffic, the color, the, the sun, the dust, everything it's it's whew. It hits you slap bang in the face. But I absolutely love it. And I can't wait to go back. I'm hoping to go back in about a year's time if COVID is under control.

Warwick Schiller ([01:02:16](#)):

Yeah. I dunno if that's gonna happen as we, as we record this, there's that new variant that just came out of Africa a couple of days ago. So South Africa. So we'll have to see what happens with that one. Yeah. Wow. So what about travels that, where you weren't volunteering? You've been to some pretty crazy places with those two haven't you?

Helen Spencer ([01:02:39](#)):

I guess I, I, I thrive on long arduous journeys, type two fun where it's not necessarily fun at the time, but looking back it was bloody awesome. So I've done some really long, difficult expeditions journeys. So one, I did crossing Madagascar east to west through jungle, hacking through jungle with a bunch of people that was one of the most brutal things I've done. It was three weeks. No hope a rescue. There is nobody there. That was phenomenal within a day of leaving the coast. We were traveling through villages to start with. Most people had never seen a white person and that was, you know, it's, it's quite a privilege and, and it's very important how you act and how you are perceived. And there's a huge responsibility there, but it's a huge privilege massive privilege and, and places like that, places which are, which are wild, which are, which are not much visited are where I thrive on.

Helen Spencer ([01:03:54](#)):

So that's the places I've picked. Maybe I've become a bit of a travel snob and I, and I've been a lot of the places where people generally travel. So I pick more wild and, and remote places. So Madagascar was incredible, very hard work, brutal. I've got many scars all over my body from that flesh, eating parasites wounds, you name it trench foot, but, but I made it I'm the highest mountain there as well. Other places, Afghanistan in the mountains of Afghanistan live the, the wacky people. So I made a, an expedition to, to, to basically Trek up, to see them, to see how they live their herdsman with goats and sheep, living a really, really tough life away from all the politics and Taliban and all that kind of stuff.

They're way too remote for anyone to bother with them. But fascinating people and nomadic. So that was again, quite a brutal expedition.

Warwick Schiller ([01:04:57](#)):

How did you find them? Like not find them, but how did you, like, how did you put your finger on that spot on globe and go, Hey, those are the guys I want to go hang with. How did you discover them? <Laugh>

Helen Spencer ([01:05:07](#)):

I think I read a lot. I, I, I look at a lot online and that part of the world has always fascinat fascinated me. They're very much more central Asian than perhaps people would perceive. And we also traveled through the area. So again, nomadic still part of Afghanistan, but mountain people horse people the is, are the, the people that they play buzz Cay, which you might have heard of. It's the kind of national game, national sport of Afghanistan, a very small claim to fame. It it's where they play something between polo and rugby with a dead goat, a headless on horseback. It's violent, it's fast. I have no idea what the rules are, but women are not even allowed to watch, but obviously as Westerners, they didn't really mind us watching. But then I was asked if I rode I, yeah, so they gave me some sort of beach donkey of a horse to sit on and I was getting on.

Helen Spencer ([01:06:18](#)):

All right. So eventually they sort of said, do you want to play? There's a game going on in front of me. And I'm like, well, yeah, you know, women are not allowed to watch. They're certainly not allowed to bake. But then I thought, well, hell, let's give it a go. So in amongst them, I went again I'd and know what side I was on, let alone what the rules are, but I got amongst them to start with they, I think they were pretty reticent. They were pretty hesitant about hurting me, cuz it's really violent. You know, they're pushing people off. I saw people with needles, like stabbing them in each, you know, they were injuring each other on purpose to win the game. So they a bit standoff to start with, but the more I got involved and I pushed and shoved and, and gave it my all as well, the more they just let me be. And, and, and that was one of the most horrifying painful half an hours of my life. And again, I have scars from that as well. But I think a very small claim into fame is I might well be the first woman to have played bus cashier in Afghanistan. <Laugh> I have no way of knowing that, but they'd certainly never seen it before.

Warwick Schiller ([01:07:31](#)):

That's amazing. Do you know how to spell that? Like I'm sure people I'm like, I've seen video of it on, on YouTube or something other, but people need to look that up. How do, do you know how to spell that thing?

Helen Spencer ([01:07:40](#)):

I think its B UED K a S H I that's how I spell it anyway.

Warwick Schiller ([01:07:47](#)):

Yeah. Have a look at that. I mean, I'm imagine if you're typed in Afghanistan game with dead goat on horseback

Helen Spencer ([01:07:53](#)):

Either. I sure it will come up that it pop up

Warwick Schiller ([01:07:55](#)):

What it is, but if you haven't ever seen what that looks like, you need to have a look at it. Cause it's pretty crazy.

Helen Spencer ([01:07:59](#)):

It is what island, I mean, as, as, as a vet, I was also the medic. So when I wasn't playing, cuz these games go on for hours and hours and hours, I, I was done and injured and, and in pain by the end of half an hour. But I then took on the role of patching up the riders. We had guys with black eyes, bleeding noses, too unconscious. They just got dunked in the, in the river, the ice cold river to, to wake them up again. We had a guy with this FEMA showing, you know, and they have no medication. There's, there's nothing there with, with D from, from help. So I was part of an expedition which had a medical box. So at least we had some antibiotics and some painkillers. So I set up a little area where I could at least patch people up, which I think they were quite happy with the guy with a bit of FEMA showing I could see his FEMA. I patched him up, gave him some pain, antibiotics, cleaned it and Offy rose. And he said it was gonna take him five hours to get home. And it was dark by then. <Laugh> Offy went

Warwick Schiller ([01:09:06](#)):

Bloody

Helen Spencer ([01:09:06](#)):

Hell God knows what happened, but he wasn't T bothered.

Warwick Schiller ([01:09:11](#)):

See, and that's, that's something about, but you know, what's it like being around people? I mean, they've gotta be a different people and us modern

Helen Spencer ([01:09:25](#)):

People like all day are tough.

Warwick Schiller ([01:09:26](#)):

You know what I mean? They're not hunter gatherers, but you know, like people who don't have access to all the things we have both medical and whatever else, but they've gotta be, they've just gotta have a different mindset about, you know, I, I was doing a, a clinic in Australia a few years ago and there was a, a lady at the clinic from South Africa and that night at dinner, we I happened to be sitting next to her and I said, sir, how long have you been in this Australia? And she said, oh, only three years or something like that. And I said, so how do you like Australia? She goes, well, the energy here is different. And I thought she was gonna say, yeah, it's kind of laid back and beachy vibe, you know, whatever. I said, what do you mean? She goes, well, it's just not as much of it. And I'm like, what do you mean? There's not as much energy. She goes, oh, when I get off the planes South Africa, when I get off the plane, the energy of South Africa just hits me. And I said, well, what do you think that is? And she goes, oh, that's easy. She says that energy is every man and animal in Africa knows today's the day I could die.

Helen Spencer ([01:10:35](#)):

Yeah, she's right. Right.

Warwick Schiller ([01:10:39](#)):

And when you, you know, you don't have the security of, you know, law and order police, ambulances, hospitals, all that sort of stuff. Life's just gotta have a bit of a imagine. It's gotta be more vibrant. You know what I mean?

Helen Spencer ([01:10:58](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. And, and I think you see that out all over the world. We in, you know, the developed world have it easy. And I think traveling around so much the energy, for sure, the entrepreneurial skills, you, you have to earn a living somehow there aren't companies that will give you a job and pay you a monthly salary in, in most of these areas. I mean take Mongolia where we were both together. Those people have to survive. And, and every day they strive to alive against the weather you know, with their livestock, whatever it might be. But absolutely that takes vibrant energy. And these guys in Afghanistan also knew how to have fun. And their fun was, was part and playing this game between the local nomadic groups risking their lives. I mean, if you break your leg, then you, you know, you can't be at a hunter gather or a shepherd, so it was risky, but they were prepared to take that

Warwick Schiller ([01:12:12](#)):

Your story about the guy breaking, he, his leg, and then gonna ride our five hours home in the dark, kind of reminded me of our last two herds in Mongolia. Gangue who we, we named genus can and the godfather, but wow, wow. They were a couple, but you know, that last day we get to camp and you know, it's late in the afternoon and they, oh, off they go. They give us a waiver and set off out across the planes there with their, with their, her of camels. And we know that they're gonna, you know, it's gonna be minus whatever it is that night, and they're gonna ride six or eight hours in the dark to get home in

Helen Spencer ([01:12:47](#)):

The dark, in the dark

Warwick Schiller ([01:12:49](#)):

Across.

Helen Spencer ([01:12:50](#)):

That was pretty rough. I dunno. Did that. Yeah. Unbelievable. No GPS, no nothing to show them where to go across the planes. There's no, there's nothing to, there's no landmarks there even. I mean, I guess they used the stars, but that was, they were double hard bastards <laugh> they were awesome. That's but again, cheeky, Chuckies as well knew how to have fun.

Warwick Schiller ([01:13:16](#)):

Oh yeah. That's the best description for them too. The double hard bar Atine mm-hmm <affirmative> yeah, I I've told this story. I think we talked about it when Chloe was on the podcast, but the night that they showed up, we were in the, were you in the ger that night when they showed up?

Helen Spencer ([01:13:29](#)):

Absolutely. Again showed up in the dark it's

Warwick Schiller ([01:13:33](#)):

Nine o'clock at night, its freezing cold outside. He two new herds show up cuz we were getting our last set of camels. So they bought the, the new light of camels. But they'd come in the girl about nine o'clock at night. And when you they, when you come in the girl at nighttime, they'll give you a bowl of fermented camel's milk to drink and the bowl. I mean the stuff is boiling hot and the

Helen Spencer ([01:13:58](#)):

Bold, oh it was scolding.

Warwick Schiller ([01:14:00](#)):

You can't hold 'em in your hand cuz they'll burn your hand. No. So these, these, these two, as Helens said, double hard bastards walk in, you know, it's nine o'clock at night. So when know they've just ridden in the dark with a herd and herd of camels in minus 20 degrees what's

Helen Spencer ([01:14:17](#)):

That they were covered in fur, in fur. They amazing, amazing outfits.

Warwick Schiller ([01:14:24](#)):

They walk in just cuz you don't knock. When you go into a girl, you just go. So they walk in, walk around to the left and see it down. And the lady hands in a feature bowl of this boiling hot stuff and these bowls are so hot and they just hold it in their hands and start slurping out of the bowl. And we are just, and they're just looking at us over the li over the rim of their bowls. I don't say a word and just looking at us. And it was like, holy. You know, I think the last night that was an, the last night we're in Eland. Batar when we went out to dinner before we all left the country, the next day we had a dinner and, and I think we went around the table like, well, I think that was when it was, but at some point in time, what was your favorite moment of the trip? And that was most, if it, what if that was, it was the favorite moment. The trip was either that or most people said either that or sing an hallelujah in the cave,

Helen Spencer ([01:15:18](#)):

In the cave. That was incredible in a pitch black cave, inside a mountain at Mongolia. Yeah. That still makes me emotional thinking about it.

Warwick Schiller ([01:15:29](#)):

That the Buddhist monks hid from the communist persecution. Pretty cool stuff. So you have another story about Afghanistan, don't you? I have many Taliban.

Helen Spencer ([01:15:47](#)):

Oh, okay. So, so we were a little, a little removed from the Taliban. I mean, most the time as we crossed into the border, they were only about 20 kilometers away. So that was pretty scary. But when we were up in the mountains, they were nowhere near us. So we felt quite safe. But you know, we were trying camp, we were camping and carrying all our gear. We did have a, a pack horse as well and a yak as, as well when we go really high. But we camped near a family often. And then we would be able to sit in their GU at night. And they would often have a fire and we could thaw out cause it was freezing cold, really high three and a half thousand meters, 4,000 meters high and snowy. So yeah, often they to have a girl, especially for, for visitors where, where we could just hang out and eat.

Helen Spencer ([01:16:41](#)):

And they were as fascinated by us as we were of them. And one night we were sat in the girl and this guy again just came straight in, sat down and he looked at us, he had eyes, bright blue eyes. He looked very different. He from that tribal area, very, very different. And he was looking at us with hate in his eyes, which I just never seen. We could tell he was not happy about us being there. I didn't understand who he was at all or what was going on, but you could feel this bad vibes across the girl. This guy was hateful of us. And it turned out he was a Taliban member. He couldn't do a lot all on his own, but he was there to buy sheep and take them back. And he was trading in opium. So he, a lot of the people are hooked on opium in that part of the world.

Helen Spencer ([01:17:44](#)):

And I was quite good friends. We had like a guy with us, we had a guide and we had someone to help with the cooking and the supplies and stuff like that. And I was getting on quite well with them and chatting about all sorts and they were talking about opium and I quite wanted to try it. So anyway, this guy bought some opium and I found out later that the, that the guy sold quite a lot of our supplies for the opium. So we ended the expedition with no food at all bar, anything for the last two days cuz unbeknownst to any of us, he'd sold it for opium. But, but anyway, that night I did go back to my tent, try and go to sleep. And then the, the, the, the guy from, from the kitchen woke me up and said, now's your chance? Do you wanna come and join us? So I was like, well it's now and ever. So there was me, him and the Taliban guy yeah, smoking opium. And they have a specialist opium smoking tent in each village, which I didn't know about. So it was, it, it was quite anxious an evening. But yeah, I guess that, that, that was me smoking opium with, with the Taliban member. He wasn't happy about me being there, but it's something that you only get do once in your life. So that was my chance.

Warwick Schiller ([01:19:09](#)):

Not, not only do you only get to do it once in your life, you might be doing something that no other Western woman

Helen Spencer ([01:19:18](#)):

Maybe taking a few risks. But, but, but I live to tell the tale, I think with risks and traveling, my brother taught me very early on. You've gotta use your heart, go with your gut, feeling your very first gut feeling when you're putting yourself in situations things can go horribly wrong. And I, and I've taken some ridiculous risks, a lot of stuff. I will never tell my mother <laugh>, but I've always gone with my gut feeling. And if it isn't right, if it doesn't feel right, I've, I've not gone ahead. You know, I, I'm not the sort of person that will put myself in ridiculous risks that I feel are, are wrong. I value my life. And and I wanna keep doing this for a long time, but, but there are certain things that have been a little on the edge, which, which I've gone ahead with after some thought,

Warwick Schiller ([01:20:21](#)):

You know, quite a few of the guests on the podcast, we get to talking about things that they do. People who are, you know, quite successful in their, whatever it is they do. And a lot of it comes down to being able to say yes to opportunities that arise.

Helen Spencer ([01:20:38](#)):

Absolutely.

Warwick Schiller ([01:20:41](#)):

And so you happen to be sleeping in the tent and someone come in and said, Hey, you wanna smoke open with a guy from the Taliban? And you said, well, okay, well, why not?

Helen Spencer ([01:20:52](#)):

Yeah. saying yes is, is a big feature. I think I, I should probably learn to say no more. My life is utterly, utterly hectic because I say yes to, to most things, adventures people. I find it very hard to, to say no, but, but I'd grab opportunities as well.

Warwick Schiller ([01:21:15](#)):

Yeah. Well there's, there's, there's grabbing opportunities and I think that's different for me to say no, because, so, you know, I send out 20 questions to everybody who comes in the podcast and they choose, you know, four to seven of 'em or whatever. And you've and some here, one you didn't choose, but it's one of the questions in that, in that list of questions is in the last five years, what have you become better at saying no to? And it's usually, that's usually not addressing opportunities. That's usually addressing, I don't know, probably our people pleasing tendencies, you know, like can't say no because of what someone will think of me or, or whatever. You know what I mean? I, I, I think that the saying yes to opportunities is, is different than the saying the saying no, because I think the, the saying yes to opportunities is probably about being brave, maybe a bit vulnerable, whereas saying no is more about giving up those people, pleasing tendencies that we all have that kinda get in our way a little bit.

Helen Spencer ([01:22:26](#)):

Yeah. No, that's definitely true. But I'm definitely better at saying yes.

Warwick Schiller ([01:22:34](#)):

<Laugh> sounds like it's speaking of those questions. Why don't we, why don't we get to Helen Spencer's questions here? You probably answered some of these cuz the last one was, what did you wanna be as a kid

Helen Spencer ([01:22:44](#)):

In New Zealand? That's easy. <Laugh>, that's a no brainer. That's

Warwick Schiller ([01:22:47](#)):

A bit I wanted to be. I wanted to be an adventurous veterinarian world. You can check that one off your list, cuz you are definitely that. So if you had a message you wanted to spread to the world, what would it be?

Helen Spencer ([01:23:01](#)):

Don't be an. Now I say that in all seriousness, it sounds candid, but I think don't be an to yourself, to others. And also, you know, our environment, nature, animals, the planet. I think the Dai Lama probably words it slightly better than me, but he says to follow the three RS in life, which is respect for yourself, respect for others and respect for all your actions. But ultimately don't be an.

Warwick Schiller ([01:23:42](#)):



I think that's a, that's a very concise message. Okay. So what, this is gonna be great. What's the most worthwhile thing you have ever done with your life?

Helen Spencer ([01:23:58](#)):

Well, I, I guess that's volunteering. I've done a lot of it. I do a lot of it here in London when I can't travel, but I, I, I get a massive kick out of it. I think that's by far the most worthwhile thing I've done. So volunteering as a vet here for street vet with donkeys, with with the rabies vaccine nation projects, that's definitely, for me been the most worthwhile thing, but also it's taught me the most and that I've grown because of it. It's not always been easy. You see some really difficult things. But I will keep on doing that till till the day I drop.

Warwick Schiller ([01:24:52](#)):

Yeah. I think that that's, I didn't know that part about you, but I, I, I find that that's very admir quality in anybody, especially in you. Okay. So what is the accomplishment you are most proud of?

Helen Spencer ([01:25:09](#)):

Probably just basically being a vet, a vet, you know, I'm, I'm proud of that. That's who I am. I I'm amazed. I got through vet school, but and, and where it's taken me, but, but ultimately yes, I'm proud to be a vet, but I think the really hard physical beats that I've managed when I personally am proud of myself, I'm quite hard on myself. I'm quite a perfectionist and I'm never particularly happy with myself, but conquering a mountain or something that conquering something, conquering something difficult is when I feel the most at ease with myself and I guess that's being proud of myself.

Warwick Schiller ([01:25:58](#)):

Wow. So, so you walked to length New Zealand, you took the, the Huskies across Finland. You hacked your way through meta gaskets from one side of the other. What are some of the major physical feats you've done? Have you ever climbed Mount Everest?

Helen Spencer ([01:26:14](#)):

No. I have been to Everest space camp because I I've always wanted to climb Everest. Since I was a kid, I have the picture on my wall here. I mean, that's what I've wanted to do and I've grown up with all the stories around it. So I took myself to Everest base camp with, with a lady who climbed it the year before. And I hung out at base camp for a bit. And I think what I realized is the whole logistics of, of getting there of base camp. There's about 2000 people plus in the climbing season at base camp. That's what I wanted. The, the death rate is huge. You walk past all of these memorials and that was before the huge avalanche and, and, and earthquakes and things every year, people die. And for me as a, you know, just a hobby climb, it's not worth it.

Helen Spencer ([01:27:07](#)):

There's many more things I want to do in life, but I've been there. I've stared it in the face. I've spent time. I've looked at it every day and I've spent time with, with people climbing it and I've seen dead people who, who didn't make it. And I, no <laugh>, I do know wanna climb Mount Everest, but I've climbed many other peaks. And getting to the top of any peak, whether it be in the UK or, or a huge Alpine peak elsewhere is the most incredible feeling, a and moment myself all the way up. I hate walking uphill, but I keep doing it to myself and getting to the top does make you feel proud.

Warwick Schiller ([01:27:50](#)):

What's the highest peak you've climbed.

Helen Spencer ([01:27:53](#)):

I don't really know numbers. I climbed some high peaks in New Zealand and also in the Alps Alpine peaks. The highest I've been well pro probably is Callum PATAR, which is just before Everest is about five and a half thousand meters. And I've also been to that height in India, but on a motorbike.

Warwick Schiller ([01:28:20](#)):

Wow. what I ask about Everest base camp? Yeah. What's the, I mean, I was gonna ask you what's the atmosphere like there and I mean the energetic atmosphere, I mean, just think while you were talking about average, I was thinking about my son, Tyler lived in Hawaii and we went and visited him recently. And everybody hangs out with there is from somewhere else and the all very adventurous, they all climb, they surf, they sky over, they open sharks. They they're all very similar in, in a, in it, in, in like levels of adventurous adventurousness, I guess. I imagine, you know, being at Everest base camp, there's so much of that there. I mean, there's no slackers,

Helen Spencer ([01:29:13](#)):

Oh, likes phenomenon gotta

Warwick Schiller ([01:29:15](#)):

Be what's what's

Helen Spencer ([01:29:17](#)):

That like, it's fascinating people from all over the world and people trying to climb it for various, so many different reasons, but you know, to be the first guy with Crohn's disease or to be the first blind person from Sri Lanka to climate, everyone has this kind of agenda going on. But there's also the buzz of there's so many people involved and legit logistics who, who I was hanging out with, whether the communications there was better wifi there than, you know, anywhere in that vicinity in Nepal because people need to Instagram it, I mean, this wasn't the days before Instagram, but you know, they need to record what they're doing to report back. I hung out with the medics a lot. I found altitude medicine, fascinating. And I got to spend a few days in Everest space camp, which is a volunteer run medical camp set up there at Everest space camp and doctors from all over the world come and do a stint there.

Helen Spencer ([01:30:20](#)):

And you are not just dealing with high altitude you know, frost by it and broken legs and things like that. You are actually the, the, the Western climbers. If you pay a hundred dollars towards the Everest space camp, it means that all of your sheers and porters can also visit Everest that the, the medical tent and what that meant is were seeing people from the lowlands in Nepal, who had heard that they could see a Western doctor and they have no way of doing that normally is they will carry massive loads to Everest base camp. They, they're not sheers from the mountains. They were from the lowland just to be able to see a doctor. So we were seeing all sorts of things from leprosy to, to horrible skin conditions and all sorts of things. So that, that was a really fascinating part of being at base camp chatting to all the climbers, learning about the, the sheers and their culture.

Helen Spencer ([01:31:18](#)):

It's a very spiritual place for them and they don't take it lightly. There's a lot of PS serum that go on before people climb. And also when you perhaps have people who haven't made it, I was in one camp when word went round that they were noticing that the kind of crows Ravens, something like that were flying around with bits of hair and human clothing. And what that means is that a, a body's been uncovered from the melting ice somewhere near Everest base camp. So we were all dispatched to see if we could find a dead body. Some of these people may have fallen in halfway up Everest. Some may have been last year. Some may have been 20 years ago, but they're swallowed up in Arava. And then eventually the, that Krevas moves down the mountain and they end up somewhere near base camp and the ice melts and their body is revealed.

Helen Spencer ([01:32:15](#)):

So we found three people like that. It's impossible to say how long they had been dead. You know, they're, they're white, they're frozen in time, but, but it was quite a spiritual thing that the sh how the, she has dealt with it, it then becomes a complet logistical nightmare. And whose embassy is going to pay for that national person to be removed, or do the families want them left there? That it was really like mind blowing what the life and death on Everest, but all of that adds up to the most fascinating place on the planet. And I was just so happy to hang out there and meet all of these people and find out how it all worked and have no of climbing Heest now. Wow. That's some

Warwick Schiller ([01:33:02](#)):

Pretty heavy, right there. Any other amazing adventures you wanna share with us?

Helen Spencer ([01:33:11](#)):

A few, I mean, more recently, I have always wanted to learn to ride a motorbike, but it's the sort of thing I've never got round to. So cousin of mine phoned me one Christmas a few years ago and said, right, we're going to India to ride Royal in fields. Like, but I, I can't ride a motorbike. He's like, well, bloody learn. So, so I did I went and bought a little motorbike in, in London once the snows had melted. And I started commuting on the London traffic, which was terrifying. I didn't get as far as taking my test. So three months later I was in India riding a really big roll infield in England, sorry, in England, you can ride a 1, 2, 5 CC motorbike with just a day course. You don't have to do your test. But we were riding 800 CC roll M fields which are huge.

Helen Spencer ([01:34:11](#)):

And across right up into the Himalayas, you know, it was three weeks I think. And we went from the muddy foothills of the Himalayas right up into Laak and then all the way to five and a half thousand meter passes the highest Naval pass in the world, and then finished up in Kashmere. So it was an incredible journey because we went from Hindu Manali, Hindu Manali into very Buddhist area of Laak, which is very Rocky and dry, but very, very high and isolated. And then into cashmere, which is very green. It actually looks a bit like Switzerland and, and Muslim. So at that was an incredible journey, utterly terrifying. I fell off seven times in the first two days, mainly cuz of mud road conditions. There's cows on the road, there's massive trucks, there's checkpoints, there's everything and everything thrown at you and the weather and the altitude. But somehow I survived that that was type two fun. And two years later I got my motorbike license in England. <Laugh>

Warwick Schiller ([01:35:28](#)):

<Laugh> I imagine 800 CC Royal. Infield's probably not easy to pick up either when you lay it down.

Helen Spencer ([01:35:35](#)):

No, you do not wanna drop the absolutely not. No, <laugh> no very heavy bikes, beautiful bikes. It, it was a phenomenal trip, a huge learning curve, but fascinating. And I got to do that with some of my cousins who all live in Canada. So it was a really good chance to hang out with them and experience Indian roads. You know, some of these huge mountains, one of them had 52 switchbacks and doing a hairpin bend on a motorbike when you're a real novice is really not very easy. But add in muds and, you know, 20 army trucks coming the other way at you. It's, it's pretty hairy, but I didn't drop the bike apart from falling off. And then I had people around, you need two people to pick it up again,

Warwick Schiller ([01:36:28](#)):

Right? No, that's what I meant about the falling off, you know, <laugh> okay. We need to get to rest of your questions here. Oh, okay. Oh, okay. One of your questions that you chose was how do you relieve stress or recharge? I think we found that out. It's like traveling to 80 something countries

Helen Spencer ([01:36:45](#)):

<Laugh> yeah. And pushing myself physically. That's how I recharge. If I'm in a difficult situation, very stressful, you know, mental health type situation. I push myself to the limit physically and, and that's how I recharge some people sit on a beach <laugh> I've never really done that.

Warwick Schiller ([01:37:09](#)):

No, you don't seem like the beach sitting type. Okay. So tell us a myth about your profession.

Helen Spencer ([01:37:17](#)):

I, I guess a huge one that I come across every day is that, you know, vets are out to make money off people. Vets charge this for, for this, you know, it's always aimed at the vets. This is a terrible paid profession in the UK huge amounts of stress. We touched on the highest suicide rate. I think clients are hugely hard. I on their vet people believe that we should be treating animals for free, for some reason. Do you know how much we study, how much equipment we have in the UK? We have a wonderful free health service. I know it's not quite the same in the us, but people don't really understand how much drugs cost. So things cost money and having animals is a, is a luxury. So I guess the myth is please be kind to your vet, give them a break. Animals are not machines. And so sometimes we get it wrong. We try not to, we try our level best, but you know what? It hurts us as much as, as it does. You, it's a hugely emotional and stressful job. So please be kind to your vet.

Warwick Schiller ([01:38:29](#)):

Great advice. Yeah. I think that that is, that would be a huge part of the, the, the toll and vet. It's not just the, the stress of the job, but the, you know, you're not working with a piece of machinery here. You're working with a sentient being and you, I'm sure you get attached to your patients and oh

Helen Spencer ([01:38:48](#)):

God, yes, God. Yes. And yeah, they don't obey the rules of medicine sometimes. And we absolutely do our best with every single patient, whether it be loving us or biting us or kicking us. But we have to work

with financial constraints of the owner. And it's really tough talking about finance, balancing that with the love of an animal. It's really tough.

Warwick Schiller ([01:39:13](#)):

Yeah. That's gonna be tough. So you have one question F here that you chose. And the question is, what is the luckiest thing that's ever happened to you now? I gotta put a caveat on here apart from probably being the first woman to ever play the dead goat game on horseback of Afghanistan or possibly the first white first Western woman to ever smoke open with a Taliban. What, apart from those two, what's the luckiest thing that's ever happened to you?

Helen Spencer ([01:39:49](#)):

I, I, I would honestly say my, my childhood being born into my family. I come from a wonderful, big loving family who gave me every opportunity and that's who, that's why I am who I am. I had huge amounts of freedom growing up on a farm with not too many restrictions. And I've always been massively encouraged by my parents. You know, they've always done everything to make sure I have every opportunity and, and encourage me perhaps too much sometimes. But yeah, my family that that's the luckiest thing to ever, ever happen to me to be born amongst them.

Warwick Schiller ([01:40:36](#)):

That's you know what, that's amazing. That's, that's a great answer, you know, I think, I think you are. Okay. So you're lucky to have that, that upbringing, but then you've, you know, been lucky enough too, to have that, that outlook of, of, I don't know, accepting the challenges or accepting the, you know, embracing the opportunities that come your way, because you know, you, the, the it's crazy life that you've lived, doesn't just knock on your doorstep and say, Hey, you wanna come with me? You've gotta, you've gotta

Helen Spencer ([01:41:12](#)):

Seek you gotta go out there and get it. Someone recently said to me you know, they, they came from a family who have traveled who haven't lived in one place. You know, their family have moved countries several times. She's been to 10 different schools. And so when she, you, she's a vet, she qualifies, she's not really ever traveled. And I think she put, she talked about the fact that I come from a, a very, very solid Oak tree in life with huge roots. I come from an incredibly traditional family who have belong on the farm and we are all very close and that's given me wings. You know, I know that I have these huge roots and I always come back. My farm, my upbringing, my, where I come from is the most beautiful place on earth. And it's my safe space. And, and that's, that's the most remarkable place I've ever been to. And, and that's why I'm lucky to have been brought up there, but, but I think I able to travel because I always have this huge loving network to come to come back to at the end of the day.

Warwick Schiller ([01:42:22](#)):

Yeah. It's, you know, you said they, they gave you these huge wings, but, you know, you chose to flap 'em as well, so that, you know, and that's one of the reasons I wanted to have you on the, on the podcast is you know, I, I just think you're an inspiration and I didn't know all about the, really the, oh yeah. I didn't know about the volunteer stuff, but like just the, you know, just that adventurous spirit and just trying to, you know, spend your life experiencing all the richness that the earth has to offer and just, just seeing different cultures. And I mean, that's gotta, you know, that's gotta shape who you are as well as absolutely.

Helen Spencer ([01:43:06](#)):

You know, I'm just hugely curious. I mean, that, that, that's just innate in me E even being shut in London during lockdown for three or four months, I have, I explored every inch of my city. I, I can't sit still I've, I've taught myself all the history. I've, I've walked and cycled every street. I'm just like a sponge of knowledge. I'm just hugely curious, but, but learning about different cultures makes you hugely appreciate your own and where you come from and you, you know, your privilege, my privilege, I think it makes you a better person. And, and I think everyone should, should travel outside their comfort zone. At some point in their life to where they come from,

Warwick Schiller ([01:43:53](#)):

You know, I'm a big fan of the saying leaving and coming back is not the same as never having left.

Helen Spencer ([01:44:00](#)):

Absolutely. You're a different person every time you come back, usually for the better,

Warwick Schiller ([01:44:07](#)):

Usually for the better. Yeah. I know if I told you in Mongolia, but oh, a couple of months before we met in Mongolia, Tyler and I were in Holland and we, I was presenting in a horse expo in Holland and we had a day off and we took a bicycle tour of historic Amsterdam. So the historic parts of Amsterdam about the, you know, the Dutchy India company and the whole bit, and we were toodling around these bicycles with a group and we pulled up to have a cup of coffee at this little cafe thing we're sort of sitting around and one of the guys in our group, I said, now how many countries, cuz he sounded like he traveled a lot. And I said, how many countries you've been to? And he'd been to 90 something countries I think. And I said to him, you know, I read something the other day that said, there's a diminish rate of return after about 25 or 26 countries. Once you've been to 25 or 26 countries, there's a diminished rate of return for your time and money investment. Have you ever noticed that? And he said, no, I've not really encountered that at all. And I thought, Hmm, well maybe the thing was wrong that I read, you know, anyway, we're chatting. And about five minutes later I said, so what's a, what's your favorite country I've ever been to? And he thought about it for a minute. And he said whichever one I'm in now

Helen Spencer ([01:45:26](#)):

<Laugh> and I'm like, good

Warwick Schiller ([01:45:26](#)):

Answer. That's why he doesn't have a Trator return because he is not comparing this experience. That, that experience he's just being present and taking in what's in front of him. You know what I mean? And I thought that's a, yeah. Cause once you've seen 25, 20 countries, you've seen a lot of different cultures and then you're like, oh yeah, I've seen this before. If you wanna look at it that way. But if you wanna forget about what you've seen and just be present to what's going on in front of you, you don't have that diminish return, which I thought was a pretty fascinating concept. Okay. So let's give a blurb to any of the these places you volunteer in case anybody wants to volunteer or do something or donate or whatever, do something for them. What, what ones have you are involved with?

Helen Spencer ([01:46:16](#)):

Well, the ones I've mentioned, so in the UK street beds is the charity that, that, that I work for, that we, we look after homeless people's animals on, in all sorts of cities in England spanner S P a N a is the charity I work for in north Africa and other base. And then WVS or worldwide veterinary service is who I've been volunteering with with, with street dogs and rabies vaccination projects. They've just reached a massive target that they work all over India and, and all over the world now. But with their rabies vaccination projects, they've managed to manage to rid goer, which is one huge state in India of rabies. And that's a massive step forward. That's their aim for all over India, but also Africa and elsewhere. It takes a hell of a lot of rabies vaccines and work, but slowly but surely that's their aim is to have to, to rid this world of rabies. It's a big, big killer if you get it there's no cure.

Warwick Schiller ([01:47:28](#)):

Right. Any other ones you wanna mention?

Helen Spencer ([01:47:35](#)):

Those are probably the main ones that I've I've talked about.

Warwick Schiller ([01:47:38](#)):

Okay, perfect. Well, it's been an absolute pleasure and an honor, have you here on the, on the podcast with me? Well, thanks

Helen Spencer ([01:47:45](#)):

For having me. I hope it's. Oh, no, I've not, but hopefully I told you some stories you haven't heard before.

Warwick Schiller ([01:47:57](#)):

Oh, most definitely. And yeah, like I said, you know, about five minutes ago, I think having you on the podcast, you got some great stories. I love the stories, but just the, you know, the backstory behind the story about the, just the adventure spirit that you have. I just think you're probably you're a bit of an inspiration. I'm quite an inspiration to me, but I'm sure you're quite an inspiration to anybody who listens to this because it's not, it's not about, you know, it's not about going to 80 something countries or whatever. It's just about, you know, embracing opportunities that show up and, and yeah. Just enjoy in life, which, which you are like a, you're like a guru for that sort of thing. So thank you for all that. You do. Thank you for all your volunteering. I didn't know about all that stuff and that's, that's pretty amazing. So thank you for all that stuff. And especially, thank you for joining me on the podcast. It's it's been a blast catching up again and hopefully we'll get to catch up sometime soon.

Helen Spencer ([01:49:02](#)):

Yeah. Hopefully when you come over to the UK again for one of your clinics. Well, thanks for having me. I mean, I was surprised, but honored that you asked me <laugh> I hope it's been interesting if I and inspire one person that would be amazing.

Warwick Schiller ([01:49:20](#)):

Oh, I think you'll inspire more than one. So thanks for coming on Helen and you guys at home. Thanks for listening. And I hope you enjoyed this conversation with Helen as much as I did, and we'll catch you guys on the next episode of the journey on podcast.

This transcript was exported on Dec 22, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Speaker 2 ([01:49:34](#)):

Thanks for listen to the journey on podcast with Warwick Schiller. Warwick has over 650 full length training videos on his online video library [videos.warwickchiller.com](https://www.warwickchiller.com). Be sure to follow Warwick on YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, to see his latest training advice and insights.