The Number One *Sunday Times* Bestseller



Greg James

All the Best for the Future

Notes on Growing Up Without Growing Old

Praise for *All the Best for the Future*

'An uplifting journey of being a good friend to yourself. I devoured this book in a day!' ***Anonymous***

'Greg has inspired me to be more childlike and embrace the moment.' ***Anonymous***

'Delightful, funny, insightful, hopeful, refreshing. Everything I needed in my life right now and more. Comforting and joyful, but made me pause, reflect and reframe my current stage of life. If a book can do that, that's extremely special.' ***Joanne***

'Greg has an amazing way of looking at the world and the small joys of everyday life.' ***Sinead***

'A true philosophy for doing life right!' ***Kyle***

'Quite simply perfect. Ruthlessly honest and side-splittingly funny.' ***Alex***

'Loved this book – it was like a hug for my brain. Full of funny anecdotes and stories about his life but also down-to-earth thoughts and observations about life and living it.' ***Caz***

'Greg just fixed my life.' ***Ellen***

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'Wow, I loved this so much. Every chapter rings true and brings fun, honesty and perspective.' ***Lorna***

'Just what I needed right now – a hug of a read.' *Ella*

'This book made me laugh out loud and felt like the existential crisis chats I've had with friends over the years in the most positive way. I loved it.' *Kayleigh*

'Warm, funny, wonderful.' *Penny*

'Safely the best minor national treasure memoir I've read in my life.' *Anonymous*

'I just inhaled this book. Everything will feel boring compared to this.' *Kerry*

'Greg uses his gift of authenticity, humour and candid honesty to create a joyful book filled with lots of laughs and some more poignant moments.' *Ewan*

'This made me happy to be alive!' *Fiona*

'Fantastic! Loved it from start to finish, so truthfully written.' *Janina*

'10, 10, 10, this has become my entire personality.' *Liz*

'Such a brilliant book, it was everything you'd expect it to be: funny, heartwarming and inspiring.' *Lois*

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About the author

Greg James likes to think of himself as a celebrated radio presenter, author and all-round light entertainer. If you have kids, they might have read one of his children's books. Chances are either *Kid Normal* or *The Twits Next Door* as they're the ones that sold well. If not, you might well have heard him on Radio 1 where he has been since 2007 and on the prestigious *Breakfast* show since 2018. He also pops up on Radio 4 when they have some space to fill with his archive show *Rewinder*. As well as all this and enjoying faffing about online and on the TV, he hosts many podcasts. Some might say too many. They include his pride and joy: the loosely cricket-based one, *Tailenders*. And in the summer of 2025, he was presented with an honorary doctorate by the University of York for his service to dead ducks. Dr Greg lives with his wife, Bella Mackie (a much more successful and talented author, but not yet a doctor), and their dog, Barney (not yet an author nor a doctor, but it's only a matter of time), in a house.

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1

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For Alan, Rosemary, Catherine,
Bella and Barney

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Contents

From Me, to You	1
The Murder of Greg Milward	13
The Art of Doing Fuck All	29
What's the Rush?	39
A Quick List of Other Things I'm Forced to Like	49
Radio Car Car	53
School Daze	63
Greggy No Mates	73
Shove It Up Your Class	85
Give Us a Job, Mate?	101
Did I Mention I Love Radio?	111
Holy Shit	119
Advice from a Smug Prick	127
I'm Not Coming to Your Wedding in Greece	135
Always Meet Your Heroes	149
Are You That Bloke off the Thing?	165
Nemesis Inferno	179
Daddy Issues	183

Copyrighted Material

Get a Dog Instead 191
Are We Nearly There Yet? 197
Brain Rot 205
Don't Grow Up, It's a Trap 215
Woke Nonsense! 223
Long Boi 231
Worrying About Worrying 243
Look Out! 251
Martha 259
Just Boring Enough 265
I've Been Busy Thinking About Boys 273
What Would You Say to Your Younger Self? 283
Me, to Him 291
I've Written This Chapter on Purpose 305

Acknowledgements *319*

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From Me, to You

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I was getting closer. I was about to meet them. My heroes. Up until this moment, they'd only existed on the TV after a long and arduous day at primary school, but there they were. Actually real. I could hear them in the distance laughing and doing their catchphrases. They sounded like they were on form: they were full of energy, full of laughter. I could see their brightly coloured tops in the distance. As an act of reverence, I too was wearing my brightest shell suit for them. This only came out on special occasions. My god I loved a polyester tracksuit. The more man-made the better. Wipe-clean, comfortable … flammable. In fact, everyone had dressed up for the two titans of nonsense. A sea of bright primary colours as hundreds of children patiently waited, dressed in an array of baggy jumpers, new trainers and loose-fitting trackies. Kappa to the left of me, Fila to the right, here I was, stuck in the middle with them. The room was abuzz. Small pockets of screams and yelps erupted sporadically. It smelt of nervous energy. Farts and crisps, basically. If I could just get to the end of this interminable line, I'd get to meet the oracles in the flesh. I was ten years old so I didn't know what interminable meant. I also didn't know that the next 15 minutes would alter the course of my life. Forever.

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Our story opens in Weymouth, in 1996, which by this time was a faded-glory seaside town in Dorset. During the Victorian

era, Weymouth was the South of France, Mallorca and Tuscany all rolled into one. It was the place to be. In the summer months at least. The royal family used to holiday there. There's even a clock tower on the seafront to commemorate Queen Victoria's 50 years on the throne. As well as telling the time, its main function nowadays is less a celebration of royal visitors and more a prominent pillar for local dogs to cock a leg up. Not sure Big Vic would be looking down and particularly enjoying that her Golden Jubilee clock gets half-hourly golden showers from the local hounds, but that's life. Or death, in her case. And as the old saying goes: 'You can't stop a dog pissing up your clock tower.' The royals definitely don't go there anymore, though. I mean, one of the shit ones might if they need to catch the ferry to Guernsey to stand around at a regatta or something, but Wills and Kate definitely aren't sploshing around on the bumper boats at Lodmoor or popping in to say hi to the Humboldt penguins at the Sea Life Centre. My mum's side of the family are the reason we went to Weymouth every holiday when I was younger. And I loved it. I'd get to hang out with my three cousins, William, Piran and Guy, who were (and still are) a similar age to me, and my nan and grandad, who were a lot older than me (and are now dead). And they all lived *by the sea*. I was so jealous. What a great life. Well, in June, July and August at least. It's bleak as tits in the winter.

Back to the queue. I'm with my (now dead) nan, waiting nervously but patiently to get an autograph from my comedy heroes after watching – what I thought to be at the time – the greatest show on earth – *The Chuckle Brothers LIVE!* I loved the Chuckle Brothers. I still do. They were silly for the sake of silly. This was early

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exposure to slapstick, to catchphrases, to anarchy, to nonsense and to that really great pedal car thing they used to bowl around in, spilling tins of paint and knocking over ladders. They were clowns. And brilliant ones at that. They are to me what the Sex Pistols or The Clash are to people who think they're cooler than everyone else. To me, they were punk. The kid in front of me finally cleared off and it was my turn. I shuffled sheepishly towards the signing desk, pen and programme in hand. I panicked that the magnitude of the moment was going to get to me. I was so nervous. But the nerves dissipated as soon as I was greeted by the two brightest and biggest smiles I'd ever seen. 'El-ohhha!' they said in unison. Paul and Barry had developed a unique way of saying 'hello'. With their distinctive Lancashire Yorkshire accents, they managed a little trill on the end that was sort of an 'ah' but is very hard to replicate on the page. If you're lucky enough to have purchased the audiobook of this and you're listening to me read to you, I can tell you exactly what it sounds like. If you're stuck in the dark ages and you're reading these words yourself, the best thing I can suggest is to watch them saying it on YouTube. 'Hello!' I replied excitedly. I immediately clammed up. I panicked. Of course I did. The magnitude of the moment *did* get to me. And that's how it should be. I'm always a little freaked out by those kids that are *too* confident, you know? Why are you already talking like a grown-up? It's a red flag. They're probably using the word 'interminable' to describe the long queue. I can't remember the details of the chat but I imagine I told them my name and said they were really funny and I loved the show. They then grabbed a glossy photo card from the pile next to them and asked me my name. I said, 'Gregory.' I was rocking Gregory back then. Paul started to write:

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To Gregory,
All the best for the future,
Love,
Paul and Barry.

I muttered a thank you, and he handed it to me. 'To you,' said Paul. 'To me,' I replied. They chuckled. Of course they did.

My nan thanked them and ushered me away from the grinning brothers. I was stunned. I was ecstatic. As we walked out of the bar area where they were stationed, down the stairs and out into the bright Dorset sunshine, it dawned on me that this was the greatest moment of my life. I'd done one of their catchphrases *with* them. For a brief moment, I was the third, much younger, Chuckle. It was my first face-to-face encounter with showbusiness. And it felt good. Little did that ten-year-old know that one day he'd also be making parents and grandparents wait for fucking ages in order for their kids to nervously come up to a rickety signing table, receive a signed book and exchange a silly catchphrase of his own. 'Are you well? I thought you were.' 'Oh, and give my regards to your lizard.'

That ten-year-old didn't really know anything. How could he? He had no idea how life would pan out. We started the walk back to Nan's along the seafront, or 'The Esplanade', as the locals insist on calling it, past the clock tower as another dog was in full flow and my nan asked to have a look at the autograph. 'To Gregory, All the best for the future,' she read out loud. 'That's a weird thing to say to a ten-year-old, isn't it?!'

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I didn't think that at the time. I didn't really think anything at the time apart from I'd had a nice afternoon watching some funny

men splatting each other with custard pies for a couple of hours. I was also thinking about whether Nan would let me get McDonald's on the way back to hers. But on reflection, I agree with her. 'All the best for the future' is a fucking mad thing to say to a child. But it's also hilarious. It's oddly formal. The sort of thing you'd say in the leaving card of a colleague you barely know. But from them, to little me, it's funny. It's a grand statement to a small boy which means simultaneously everything and also nothing. And I still remember it vividly and it makes me laugh every time I think about it. Ten-year-old Gregory had no idea what was in store for him as his life panned out. No one knows what's coming. And that's really the point of this book. You might have had (and you still might have) huge plans. Specific plans. Big dreams. Little dreams. Ideas about how your life might end up. Fantasies about how it will go. When you'll get married, where you'll live, how many children you want, what job you'll end up doing. But really, we're not in control of much of it. And as a concept that can be hard and upsetting to deal with. But life can also be beautifully surprising and take a course you never imagined. I want this book to serve as a companion for you if you ever need a reminder of this. And hopefully something to make you laugh and remind you to try your best to always find the fun.

Over the next few hundred pages, I'll cover the big life things, the things that wind me up, the things that make me sad, the things that make me laugh and the little things, passions and interests that we all rely on to get us through the day – whether it was a good one or a bad one. I also want to tell you a bit about who I actually am, who I thought I'd be and who I think I still

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could be. You might have listened to me on the radio for years but even then, you've only really been exposed to a small percentage of me. People are many things. For example, I can be incredibly grumpy, I scream when someone wakes me up from any sleep, when I'm sad or anxious I'll watch a James Bond film, I am prone to huge bouts of self-doubt, I love very sad music, I crave physical contact and I am a tragic nostalgist. We're all guilty of reducing each other to simple caricatures and one of my aims is to let you in on a few other bits of my life in the hope it'll give you confidence to express yourself fully and not be inhibited by what the world or your family or your friends want you to be like. I started writing this book as a reminder to myself to always continue to seek out the fun and to never lose sight of or move away from my true passions and interests.

Without wanting to cause you to spiral into an existential crisis, I found that realising there isn't an ultimate and final destination in life made living it a lot easier. I mean, there is an ultimate end point, I guess. Eventually we'll all end up as ashes thrown off your favourite cliff. Or memorialised with a commemorative bench overlooking your favourite cliff. Or laid to rest in a cemetery next to a man called Cliff. You get the idea. But don't dwell on that too much. Oh, hang on, I've managed to spin that positive thought into a bleak one. Let's do as Pitbull would do and turn that negative into a positive. Dale!

Mantras tend to be clichéd and oversimplistic, I realise that. Before you know it you've bought a 'Live, Laugh, Love' cushion and you're singing about 'living each day as if it's your last' and telling everyone that 'it takes more muscles to frown than it does

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to smile'. But if I was to try to come up with a mantra, it would be something like, 'Try to do some fun shit before you run out of time if you possibly can.' But that's not particularly catchy and your aunty would hate it if you bought her cushion covers with that plastered across.

Obviously most of us need to work to be able to afford life and a decent job makes it easier, but getting the balance of work and play right is something we all struggle with. Becoming an adult, for the most part, is really fucking hard work and it's a complete shock to the system when it's suddenly all on *you*. Not only do you have to hold down a job where you give the illusion of being a fully functioning, fully formed human being at all times but you also might have to juggle kids, a partner, mortgages, rent, council tax, the food shop, booking things, cancelling things, re-booking things, fixing the roof, cutting the grass, washing up, hoovering, taking the dog for a walk … you get the idea. All the while, when is there time or space for you to prioritise some of the things that you're truly passionate about? The things that make you, you. Just because you're getting older, it doesn't mean you have to get *old* and forget about all the things you loved doing before you became an adult.

It's all too easy for work to become our whole world. We are not defined by what we do as a job. Lots of things make up a life and I'm partly writing this book as a reminder to myself to keep the balance in check. I'm guilty of working too much. I've turned a lot of my hobbies into jobs. I loved listening to the radio so decided to be on it. I adore cricket with my whole being so I started the *Tailenders* podcast and now I get to talk about it once a week with

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other cricket tragics. I liked reading books so much that I started writing stories for kids. And as wonderfully fortunate as that is, I have to watch that I don't overdo it and end up with no time off to pursue *other* interests and end up with no real personality. And zero friends.

I want to take you through some of my observations of the world and give you my thoughts on some of the big life crossroads and choices we're all confronted with along the way – and hopefully encourage you to take a look back at what you were like as a kid. What excited you? What were you obsessed with? We shouldn't lose touch with our younger selves because that person will probably be a good reminder to prioritise the things that have always made you truly happy.

This isn't one of those books that will encourage you to blow your life up, by the way. But I do think that along with forgetting about our childhood passions and interests, we're all so busy that sometimes we sleepwalk into quite big commitments without truly working out if it's what we want to be doing. There's a temptation to do things because you *should* instead of doing them because you *want to*. Just to say, there are no right or wrong answers. You could well be very happy living the life you always thought you'd have, but that definitely won't be the case for everyone. We're all in a massive rush to grow up and reach the key milestones of life. School – job – marriage – bigger job – house – bigger house – baby – even bigger job – bigger baby – even bigger house – retire – no job – all your babies leave you – smaller house – dead – won't work for everyone. And nor should it. It's less scary to think that life is like *Mario Kart*, with things to collect, banana

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skins to avoid checkpoints to zoom through, levels to unlock. And, at times, it can be like that. But crucially, I think it's best not to approach life as if it's a race. Because it isn't. And it's a shame that we're partly conditioned to hurry through life's checkpoints; some of us pushed through them without even giving it a second thought, let alone a critical one.

The notion of 'growing up' itself is probably quite unhelpful. Growing is largely seen as a good thing. I suppose it is. Trees growing big and strong is nice. Same with people. But I know loads of happy short people. I've also seen loads of happy tiny trees. Conversely, 'growing' is bad if it's Japanese knotweed. Or verrucas. So let's not just assume that 'growing' is always good. Or necessary. Or simple.

What's the rush then?! Why are we so desperate to get older? It seems that every kid in my life is hellbent on making sure they're ageing as quickly as possible. How many times have you been furiously corrected when you've had to guess a kid's age and you don't supply the months too?! 'I'm six and seven months, *actually*, Uncle Greg!' Oh pipe down, you precocious turd. Adults should start doing it just to creep people out. Why do we often fall into the trap of wishing away our younger years by racing into adulthood, getting our ears pierced and driving cars, but at the same time also think we have to become more serious?

'Oh, grow up!' we're told if we're being childish and fun. Right, so when we do grow up, fun isn't allowed? I love the idea of getting less and less serious the more you age. I'm actively trying to do that, but it's not easy and you don't just stumble into that frame of mind. You obviously have to give consideration to some of the serious

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life things I mentioned above, but once you've done that and have made peace with what you can control, the rest of the time could be set aside for play. And that's where I can help. Hopefully.

As I traverse the adult world, it's really easy to become detached from that excited, joyful, naive kid who was waiting impatiently for the Chuckle Brothers. But that is still me. That really is the essence of me. That's maybe the most me I've ever been. It's easy to get so bogged down in adult life that you forget to have fun. I reckon we're all guilty of forgetting to 'prioritise pleasure', as the brilliant Self Esteem says. I'm here to help you unlock those things that make you *you*, in case you've drifted a bit. Because I bet there's something you loved when you were ten that would still make you happy if you revisited it. As I approached my late twenties and early thirties, I consciously leant into the things that made me *me* all those years ago when I was falling in love with comedy, music, sport and nerdy hobbies. And it turns out you can be a fully functioning adult with bills to pay and kids or dogs to look after and still find time to play with a train set. As one of my favourite artists, Mr Bingo, says, don't forget to have fun. I want to encourage you to take fun seriously.

So, thank you for picking up this book. I've really poured my heart and soul into it over the last couple of years. Reading it may completely change your life. And in that case, it's 20 quid well spent. Or £11.99 if you bought it from Amazon because they run the world and are able to undercut everyone, meaning no one makes any money from it apart from them. Thanks a lot, Jeff Bezos. And well done again on that space mission; everyone thought it was brilliant and in no way depressingly dystopian and a

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complete waste of money. There's a chance that this book doesn't change your life and I'm prepared for that, but what I do hope happens by reading this is that you ask yourself some of the questions I'm going to put to you and, in turn, you might learn a bit more about what you like, what you want to do in your life or, more importantly, what you *don't* want to do. I want to make sure you're still finding time to play, time to embrace the things that gave you joy when you were younger and started you on the path to the person that's reading these words right now. This is as guru-y as I'm going to get, by the way. But more than that, as I do on the radio, I will be trying my very best to make you laugh and have a nice time. I want you to get to the end of this book and have an even better idea of who you are. And in the spirit of that, let me try to answer that question myself. Who the fuck am I?!

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The Murder of Greg Milward

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Wikipedia thinks it's got me nailed but it doesn't know the full story. Firstly, I'm not Greg James. Well, I am. I've been Greg James for longer than I haven't but it was a name I started using on student radio in 2004. My full name is Gregory James Alan Milward. Yes, that much is on Wikipedia but it's actually a relief to write that down. It's often felt like a dirty secret but actually the origin story makes me laugh whenever someone asks me about it, so I don't know why I haven't ever properly addressed it. It's appeared in the odd interview or profile piece but I've largely just ignored it/him and perhaps I was embarrassed by it/him but now, over 20 years later, I've had all shame beaten out of me by showbusiness.

It was the autumn of 2004, the setting: the University of East Anglia. Freshers' fair. And a beanstalk of a man called Dave Bradshaw lumbered up to me outside the Brutalist concrete block that was the student union and asked if I wanted to join Livewire 1350 AM (UEA's home of new music), the student radio station on campus. Of course I did. Yes, the fact that I could do English and Drama two hours away from home, which was far enough away to feel like I was being adventurous but not too far in case I couldn't find any friends or needed my washing done, was very attractive. But so was the presence of a student radio station. Obviously I'd

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checked on that before submitting my UCAS form. I knew I'd find it at some point. I just didn't expect to do so in hour one of day one. This encounter with Big Dave inadvertently changed the course of my entire life and simultaneously killed off its main character – him, Greg Milward, RIP. Dave Bradshaw was the murderer. More on that later.

I immediately went upstairs to meet the third years, who were having the time of their lives in the fully decked-out *live* radio studios. This was it. This was the place that immediately felt like home. I get quite emotional thinking about it. I remember it so vividly.

Livewire was situated on the top floor of Union House overlooking the campus and consisted of two studios that were littered with CDs without cases, tangled wires, old wheezing computers and, most excitingly, fully functioning and surprisingly professional radio desks. It was heaven. Faders, buttons, dials, knobs, microphones, CD players, a computer for playing clips and jingles. I couldn't believe it. Strewn across the walls were posters of bands that had recently played downstairs at The LCR and in among them were signatures of celebrities and artists that had been interviewed on the radio station. The Libertines, Kings of Leon and The Yeah Yeah Yeahs are some I remember from that first visit. It was scuzzy, unrefined, full of old equipment, racks of dusty copies of *NME*, stacks of vinyl and cupboards full of promotional tat. It was busy, vibrant, smelled of chips and teenagers and it was the most magical place I'd ever set foot in. Radio at its most pure and unfussy.

Along with Dave, I met Francis Hamlyn and Simon Williams, who immediately became my best radio friends. Oooh radio friends. We spent the next few years making shows

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together, putting on club nights, interviewing new bands, setting up outside broadcasts and generally arsing around and learning the basics of how to run a radio station.

It was a complete joy from start to finish. Some of the happiest memories of my life. I'd found the radio nerds. To my mind, they were the coolest people on campus. But, of course, they were anything but cool. They were absolute eggheads, all of them. Big virgin energy. It was fantastic. They made ME feel cool. I'd hit the jackpot and found my tribe.

I was no longer embarrassed to say I loved radio and that I wanted to do it as a job one day. I used to be ashamed of everything I loved when I was a teenager. I loved acting. I really wanted to be an actor. I still sort of do, actually. I also loved singing. But even now I feel hesitant to admit that I was in the school choir when I was a kid. I loved being in the choir but was mortified if anyone spotted me in the music room. Kids are insane. We're all insane. Why are we like this? What the fuck were we worried about? Was I careful who I told about those passions? Did I hide them from people? You're damn right I did. Why? Aside from the fear of getting bullied by repressed thick twats, I have no idea. Singing and acting are two of the coolest jobs. Actors and musicians are among the most revered and respected people on earth. We all love actors. We all love singers. For example, at the time of writing, the world can be split into those who want to have sex with Jacob Elordi and those that want to be best friends with Olivia Dean. Why is it that we're OK telling everyone we love these people but are terrified of anyone finding out we might want to *be* them?

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But back to the murder of Greg Milward … In order to get a slot in the Livewire schedule for the upcoming term, you had to write a show brief, with some sample ideas and explaining the style of music you'd play, and submit a short demo tape of you in the studio pretending to do a show. Obviously, I made sure I absolutely smashed this brief with a mixture of features robbed from Scott Mills, delivered in the style of Ricky Gervais and accompanied by the playlist from XFM in its indie heyday, all the while taking notes from watching the first series of *I'm Alan Partridge*, in which Alan is on Radio Norwich. In fact, *I'm Alan Partridge* was my favourite show not only because it was the funniest thing I'd ever seen but also because it was my first look inside a radio station. Armando Iannucci, one of the creators of Partridge and a comedy hero of mine, actually started his career on the radio at BBC Scotland. As soon as I saw the level of detail in Alan's fake studio, I knew it could have only been created by a proper radio nerd. The desk, the clocks, the faders and mics were all, as we say in the industry … 'industry standard'.

On the application form for Livewire, I vividly remember writing my name out: GREG JAMES. It was a bit of a joke really. I fancied a DJ name. Milward isn't a DJ name. It's just not. It's a good name for a headteacher. Just ask my dad, the retired headteacher Alan Milward. But it's not very Radio 1, is it? SCOTT MILLS. Good radio name. ZANE LOWE (real name Alexander Zane Lowe). GREAT name. SARA COX. Again, amazing. GREG MILWARD. No. Sorry, next. So, I killed him. Quickly and painlessly. In hindsight, I could have been a bit more adventurous. In creating my new identity I only ventured as far as my

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middle name, which doesn't scream 'creative powerhouse', does it? What would have been more exciting? GREG MAGIC. GREG VOLCANO. GREG BLAST. GREG STORM. Could have gone quirky: GREG GREGSON, GREG GREGORY, GREG TALL, COUSIN GREG, GREG WOW, GREGORIAN CALENDAR, GREGGINGTON WORLD OF ADVENTURES. All good options and yet I chose GREG JAMES. I really love having an alter ego. I've been called that since I was 18. The only people that 'Greg Milward' me are the bank, EDF Energy (who I hate) and the police (who very rarely contact me). GREG JAMES accidentally became a permanent fixture in my life when I won a Student Radio Award and part of the prize was to do a one-hour show on Radio 1 in 2005. I won the award as Greg James. And before I could really even think about it, that name appeared in the *Radio Times* and that was it. I was on air to millions of people as him. Or rather, me. I've been him, or he's been me, ever since. Is there any difference? Maybe at first it gave me confidence to play a role. Looked at another way, I've been in deep cover as a radio presenter called Greg James for 20 years. It's been the role of a lifetime. Hopefully I've been convincing. But who's who? And who are these people? Maybe we should try to unpack that. Probably a useful task. But perhaps a daunting one. To quote my mum when I urged her to go and have therapy – 'oh no, I don't fancy that. What if they dig up something uncomfortable?!'

I was born on 17 December 1985 at Lewisham Hospital in south London. Yes, I'm old, 39 at the time of typing. Please alter the age depending on when you're reading this. For example, if you're reading this before 17 December 2025, I'm 39. Anytime up until 17 December 2026, I'll be 40. And so on. If I've tragically

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died and you bought this because I'm being celebrated on a series of special broadcasts across the BBC and you've only just realised how brilliant I am, then I am still the age I was when I died. That happens to lots of people, doesn't it. It might happen to me. People only truly realised how lucky we were to have Bowie when he wasn't around anymore. A similar thing happened when they threatened to kill BBC Radio 6 Music. No one really gave it a second thought until they threatened to close it and everyone complained and it was saved. Thank fuck. I've got distracted but I guess what I'm saying is in terms of cultural significance, I sit somewhere between David Bowie and 6 Music.

But before I was Greg James and knew who David Bowie even was, I was just a kid. A normal kid. Kid Normal, if you will. It's weird being a child. If an adult friend behaved like a two-year-old, you'd intervene, wouldn't you? When my wife, Bella, and I were on holiday recently with Bella's sister and her two-year-old son, he ate a peach, two tomatoes and a slice of shepherd's pie for lunch and then went to bed for four hours. That's unhinged. He hadn't got a fucking clue what was going on. It's a nice life, though, isn't it. My nephew has all of us fawning over him, peaches on tap, talking to him like he's a very clever deaf dog. Applauding when he smiles and finishes a drink without tipping it over his head, or mine. You're a mess when you're two. Or maybe we're a mess at every age.

The thing that always baffles me with kids that age is that they'll never remember any of it. He'll be able to piece it all together with the extensive collection of photos and videos we've all taken of him but you don't remember what it's like to be two. The

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people that tell you they remember what it's like are lying, by the way. There's no way to critically analyse your early years. What sort of kid were you? Did you have a nice time? Were you annoying? He's a good one, though, a really good one. Laith, one day you'll realise this bit of the book is about you and you'll also realise how much of a national treasure your uncle is/was. Anyway, he's a very sweet child and objectively not a rubbish one. It's awful when your friends or family have a shit kid. It's such a shame, isn't it? No one talks about it – but everyone knows deep down that you've got a bad one. A screamy one. A miserable one. A dictator. One that disrupts every adult interaction by throwing a glass on the floor or having a meltdown because the iPad was taken away. But whether you were a baby Hitler or a … baby … Teresa (Mother, not May), you won't remember any of it at all.

Children are always desperate to grow up, to be a big boy or girl. When does it change from this to 'Holy hell I hate this, why am I so incredibly elderly and decrepit? Oh shit, I'm going to die soon?' I think there are stages. And I think you regress and progress as you go through them. This stuff isn't straightforward. But from one to four, you're essentially a waste of space. If you're lucky, a cute waste of space, but a waste of space all the same. You're not adding much to the world on any scale. Four to ten I'd say is prime 'I want to be older' territory. You're talking, you're starting to find things funny, you're doing impressions of your parents, you've got a favourite Disney film, you start getting good at sport, you're reading. And by 'reading' I of course mean that you use your parent's phone to go on TikTok and start that long and toxic relationship with social media. But, despite that, you think you're pretty fly by ten.

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Ten to thirteen is tricky, isn't it? I remember hating the idea of being a teenager. The specific reasons for this will be discussed in a later chapter that will confirm to you what a fucking loser I was. But I think I quite liked being eleven, specifically. Eleven was a good year for me. I was good at computer stuff, I loved messing around making little films on a camcorder, I was really good at cricket, I enjoyed hanging out with my parents, I started properly falling in love with radio and pop music, I started riding a bike everywhere, I had a great remote-controlled car, nice friends … life was good. Then thirteen came around. Then fourteen. Oh, sweet Jesus. A horrible mess of wanting to still be that fresh-faced, sweet, happy-go-lucky eleven-year-old but now with weird hair growing everywhere. Honestly, what an insane process. You wait and wait for signs that you're maturing and growing up, hoping it might be an instant, striking signal to the world that you're becoming a man, and all you get are pubes. Oh, and your voice completely changes. And you get spots. You start getting really grouchy and you start to smell. Thanks a lot, God. In fact this is just another reason why I've never once believed in him/her. I added 'her' because I know a lot of the people who like me are women. I am an ally. Remember that. Even for your stupid fucking lady god that doesn't exist.

By 15, I just wanted it all to stop. I couldn't bear it. I would have been so happy to jump from 11 straight to 17. The years between were awful. And it wasn't because I desperately wanted to be old, it was because I just desperately wanted to be sorted. I didn't enjoy being a teenager that much. I guess this is pretty common but it didn't feel like it at the time. I felt like others wore being a teenager really lightly whereas I was wearing a heavy,

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uncomfortable cloak of awkwardness over a body I had to shuffle around in for a few years.

I didn't fit in as a teenager but maybe that's just teenagers: they don't fit in because they're all monsters bursting out of kids' clothes. To me, everyone else seemed like they had their shit together, though. Some did, some didn't, I guess. Other people my age looked like they were ready to grow up, they were embracing their adolescence. My teens were a load of years where I just didn't really know what to do. I still did most of the things I did when I was 11 or 12. I don't suppose that's too radical. It's only a matter of a few years and I'm still the same person now that I was at 35, for example. But somehow in your teens, a few years is like a lifetime: you morph into an entirely different person altogether. I felt pressured to grow up but I wasn't ready to. And I didn't want to. I liked my life as it was, I was content. At the time, however, I wished I was able to just automatically 'be cool'. It seemed like lots of kids in my year found this very easy. I just couldn't and instead focused on doing things I enjoyed. Of course, in hindsight, I'm so pleased I did. Turns out, I was accidentally doing it right! I liked all the things I was doing and all the hobbies I'd started, and being an adult seemed like hard work. My dad would always be home late and be stressed, my mum was often charging around getting stuff done and there was often talk in the house about debt and overdrafts and mortgages, which sounded worrying but also dull. I was much happier watering the front path when it was below freezing to give my remote-controlled car a skid pan. I still miss those days. Might do that this evening, actually. I got a new R/C car for my birthday from my mate Jonny.

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