

I have two journals: a before and an after. I would imagine that the word count in the first is about the same as the second. They both have the same hardback silver cover. But beyond this, they are worlds apart.

I haven't looked at the first one since my recovery or what I have come to see as my epiphany; the second one is a constant source of joy.

That it was a cool September morning is about all I can remember of that day. It isn't the trauma of it that has made me forget. I was just quite a different person back then. My mind was too full of personal bests, calories needed, gradients, gears. I barely noticed the landscape around me. There was the usual chatter at the start point. But I was so focused, that it became a kind of background hum, punctuated by laughter and shouting.

I won't bore you with the gentle ascents, the twists, the jostling. I am not an athlete. I have always been a sports enthusiast. Cycling became my hobby in middle age and it took up my whole life outside of my work as an accountant.

The first fifteen minutes were uneventful. I was in the fray of the first seven cyclists. It was after that, when I headed to the front, exactly at the point I had hoped to, that I first noticed colours on my left, as I gathered pace, storming ahead down the hill. When I spoke about this afterwards I still insisted that I had seen a small woman run out in front of me. That is what made me swerve and go over the handlebars. A flash of sunlight through hawthorn leaves, a loud squawking, followed by pain.

I was to relive the events as a series of snapshots over and over.

Even now as the anniversary approaches, I sense an edginess, a foretaste of shadows lengthening, of a complex melancholy that paradoxically contains within its death a new beginning. I suspect a poet would capture its essence much better than I have, but I didn't understand any of this then or straight afterwards.

Light flickering through leaves, a sudden movement from the undergrowth. At the time, I was certain it was a woman with a red headscarf shouting. A sharp jolt, as I was thrown over the handlebars to land awkwardly on jagged rubble and corrosive gravel: man-made hazards. Then pain.

I won't bore you with the medical details of my injuries, suffice it to say that they involved my pelvis and collarbone, had me laid up in bed sedated with morphine. No-one was talking about when I would be riding again.

I had been keeping a diary for about three months before all this. It was full of the science of cycling. I wondered as I gazed at the second empty journal, how on earth I would fill it now I was bedridden. From my window I could see the uppermost branches of a wild walnut tree that must have been planted by our resident squirrel. I had never looked at it before, always being in such a hurry. I could hear and see the wind gently ruffling its leaves. It was hypnotic. I was alone. I couldn't hold a pen or type. But I began to describe out loud what I saw from the window. Eventually I recorded it into my phone.

For a short time, I used assistive technology to write up my observations: prose and poetry. But once the physiotherapy started and I began to use my arms and hands again, I even began to set some of the descriptions to music.

Months down the line, I was in the garden, sketching the copper beech leaves in the morning sunshine. I stood drinking my coffee and watched a garden orb weaver constructing its web. In a previous life every second passed, every gradient encountered had to be measured. But now, here I

was spellbound: marvelling at this tiniest creature's industrious endeavours. All sense of time was gone.

A beautiful early morning. The season was somewhere between the end of summer and the beginning of autumn. Only very few leaves were burnished with bronze and gold at their edges. But the thick lush uprightness of summer foliage was already waning; that giving way, that gentle weakening and eventual falling and loss of the trees covering, was already signposted by the drooping branches and drying leaves. The air had that coolness, the sun's angle had already altered, there could be no change in the direction of the seasons: the die was cast. I walked to the start of where the race had taken place, conscious of the gentle breeze, the reflections of dew in the grass verges and the subtle shade of blues and reds as the sloe and hawthorn caught the sunlight.

I returned to the spot every week, sometimes writing a few lines, or accomplishing some hasty sketches, noting the subtle changes in the season. Each time, I felt myself growing stronger.

I have seen more life in that hedgerow and in my tree than I ever knew existed. Just by standing and staring. Hawthorn, elderberry, bramble, sloe, crab apple and dog rose. Looking and touching wasn't enough. I began to research, collect and cook. Jars of rosehip syrup, crab apple jelly, bottles of sloe gin began to stack up in my cupboard. At first my old cycling buddies teased me, but in time I became something of an expert on wild plants and foraged recipes amongst my friends.

Rose-bay willowherb. Sparrows, goldfinches, robins. Plump elephant-hawk moth caterpillars. One afternoon a sudden rush of wind against my cheek was my first close encounter with a sparrowhawk. Another summer day, a call of nature took me to the other side of the hedge where I disturbed a pregnant grass snake that beat a hasty meandering retreat. Rotting tree stumps, chicken of the woods and best of all a dusty wandering toad heading who knows where.

In my garden too, the same transformation was underway. Each day in November, the walnut tree altered. It slowly lost its foliage to reveal the naked skeleton of its dense silver trunk. Divested of its outer garments, it actually appeared stronger and more resolute in its protection of me. That is how I came to see the garden; it was as if my own recovery and ultimate destiny was determined by how its fortunes fared in the coming year.

A year has passed and I am heading out with my bike. I have my helmet on and that is about the only thing that remains the same. The bike is actually my grandfather's old wrought iron model. It is solid, but not terribly fast and the suspension is different. But it means I can amble along slowly enough to take in the countryside alongside of me.

As I round a bend, a pheasant, colourful and loud, squawks clumsily out in front of me. Everything about it is out of keeping with its environment. It has been brought here for the shooting season. As I watch it awkwardly gain flight, I almost feel sorry for this foreign interloper, until I realise that it was because of its near collision with me that I was able to savour my life to the beat of a slower drum. I stop to pick up one of its feathers and pop it into my helmet as a token of thanks and feel lightened as it takes flight over the distant beech trees.