

## The Apology

Let's get straight down to business. The salient truth is that one day the life I once knew came to an end. Yep, gone, t'ra, toodle pip.

It is an ex life. It has ceased to be, I trotted off this mortal coil in order to push up some buttercups. Is it buttercups? I forget.

It was so very difficult, sometimes impossible to comprehend that all I knew had gone. That sentiment only increased over the years and there have been twenty one of them. Twenty one long years. My new life has matured and is now old enough...

To vote; when it remembers to.

To drive; it can't, partial blindness caused by the brain injury would make driving an absolute lottery. That and the complete lack of spatial awareness. After all, I can't walk down the street without colliding with lampposts. I wouldn't be safe in a bubble wrapped bumper car. I'm not sure the roads of the UK are ready for me just yet.

To drink alcohol; it can't, epilepsy denied that pleasure. Due to medication I feel half-drunk most of the time anyway. Without alcohol I have the memory of a goldfish with Alzheimer's disease. I hardly need the odd libation to wipe what recall I do have.

To have sex; if I can stay awake long enough. I'll say no more. It was all I could do to prevent myself typing 'stay up' long enough. Ooh-er Mrs.

And it's now old enough to know what the hell happened to me. And is still happening right up to this very day.

That's the nature of a bang on the bonce; confusion. Massive disorder in my mind, incomprehension shadows me like the gloomiest raincloud preparing to unleash a deluge of perplexity. I know it's there, it's always there. The monkey on my back, the albatross overhead, the angry weasel with a chip on its shoulder. I learnt to live with it.

That and the ability to invent nonsensical idioms. It's a gift.

However...

Back in the day, long before I became twenty one again, it began. The curtains were closed, slammed shut. Well, to be fair, they were curtains, not so much 'slammed', but more 'flopped'. They needed opening, I had to let the day begin. And commence it did, as the flaccid curtains were swept aside and the hard graft started.

While I was hurting, while I was struggling, while I was learning, there were other people around. There still are, every day. It's just a question of tenses really. Watching, witnessing, feeling my pain. Either on the side-lines or directly involved, family, friends, all observing the effects. Mostly it was no spectator sport, it was grim viewing if I'm honest. And still they remained, standing by with a collective arm outstretched. Twenty one years later and it's still there. A comfort blanket, a safety net cushioning the unavoidable falls.

It's a whole new world out there, and that world has a habit of biting back. Sometimes it is just a nip, although occasionally, it's like a bite from a hungry shark. And those nibbles come thick and fast.

Each bite eroded away my former self and ate away, no pun intended, at the life that had sadly departed. All the while...

Watching, witnessing, feeling my pain...

Two entire decades, my memory now plays tricks on me. There are so many bites that they all seem to merge into one. Remembering can be exhausting beyond belief. I had never thought it possible to get so drained, so shattered simply from attempting to recall what the day is. Another aspect of my life that my previous self had taken for granted. There was never any reason not to. I was a twenty five year old man and it didn't seem a lot to ask to remember where I kept my keys. It was never a conundrum. However, after the injury, I could then forget where I kept my pants and socks, let alone my keys. Not when I was wearing them, obviously; my pants and socks that is, not my keys. And with the exertion of something as basic to a human being as 'thought' came the inevitable headaches. The first to strike shook me to my very core. It smarted, just a tad. They continue to this day, bless 'em. Pass the Nurofen.

Other pain relief is available...

Almost a year after the old brain took its battering and continued to fight the good fight, epilepsy was thrust into my life. The unwanted gate crasher causing havoc with every appearance. A lightning bolt from the deepest blue. Body spasms, unconsciousness, confusion, memory lapses, post seizure headaches that make the usual head pains seem like old friends. Well, it keeps me on my toes. And still...

Watching, witnessing, still feeling my pain. The outstretched arm remained, absorbing the anger and feeling my frustration,

Fatigue and apathy soon entered the fray. More undesirable visitors cluttering an already overloaded brain. They pushed aside my old friends 'eagerness' and 'concentration' as 'alertness' looked on with all the subtlety of a slightly annoyed bricklayer wielding a sledgehammer. Oh, he had anger issues too.

The passage of time was a cruel mistress. Particularly when my addled brain was struggling to establish some form of normality... whatever that may be. My life in its entirety had altered beyond recognition. Epilepsy could now strike without warning at any given moment, throwing the day into chaos. Fatigue that plagued almost every aspect of my life began to throw up barricades. It was hard to live with what I had become. To live in the present and not rely on the past.

And still they watched, witnessed, felt my pain. And for some, it was too much, too difficult, too much like hard work. Relationships ended and friendships broke down. Ultimately, people vanished. They had their reasons, I was never told what they were, but I'm sure they had them. Occasionally I had the courtesy of an invented tissue of lies that possibly salvaged their own conscience, but only served to batter my own into submission.

Relationships with everyone in my life, friends, new acquaintances, and even the odd member of my family seem to be based on the flip of a coin. Should a 'Head' land on terra firma and whatever my brain throws into the mix, they'll hang around. Should a 'Tail' drop gracefully to the ground and they'll turn that tail and run for the hills. And that's how it's been since the day I landed on my cranium with one hell of a thud. But wait a moment here...

I like to think I'm not a stupid man, I pride myself on it in fact. I'm forty six years old now, time is marching on relentlessly like a runaway train with only one destination. I'm married to my best friend, a couple of children have their place in my life and I'm still learning more about my own limitations and abilities. Only one thing has remained constant throughout the journey that became my second shot at this rollercoaster we call 'Life'. That damn scar on my brain still throws its weight around whenever it fancies a bit of a giggle. And thus...

I still forget things with frightening regularity.

I can't control my emotions like I should.

Background noise irritates me to the point of exasperation.

I still invent idioms like a ferocious aardvark with a knuckleduster.

I may have a seizure with varying degrees of severity at any given moment.

Fatigue is a pest that simply won't leave me be. And sleep is my panacea.

I can't socialise like I once could.

I can't drink, I can't drive.

I am no longer the 'me' I once was. And do you know what? I no longer care. I wouldn't change one God damned thing.

I throw out these statements with gay abandon, almost on a whim. The fact remains that while I was coming to terms with the throwaway facts, those people close to me WERE watching, they WERE witnessing and they WERE feeling my pain. For instance, let's start at the very beginning. I was in a coma in hospital. Essentially, I was asleep, just for a smidgeon longer than usual. I always was a lazy sod. While I slept my family and friends sat at my hospital bedside wondering whether I would live or die. I had it easy, I really did. I still do.

The first epileptic seizure and every single one since sees my good self disappear into another world for however long, while whoever is there can only watch, wait, and worry. Again, I repeat, I have it easy.

And presently, I have a wife I adore. The lady who came along and turned out to be the missing piece in my jigsaw. Who knew? The rock to my roll, the milk on my cornflakes. Much like my friends and family who were there long before that missing piece arrived, she tolerates the moods and the headaches. She lives with the forgetfulness, the now thankfully muted anger, the annoyances, etc. They're all part of just another day.

Twenty years of watching and worry. Good grief, I'm so sorry for putting you all through this journey, none of you asked to be passengers, you really didn't. You still don't, you never so much as complain. I certainly didn't want to be the driver and I'm sorry for handling the steering wheel with buttered fingers.

For SN (and others)

