



On Finding a Body



I have always spent too much time in my head - occupying an intense space, from my neck up. Not in a mindful or centred way but trapped in a disturbing hum of fear and dread and anxious anticipation. I'm not sure what *Ian Banks* referred to in his book the *Wasp Factory* - but I had my own hornet colony buzzing away yet served no ecological benefit. My increasing incessant anxiety about anything and everything, miss firing synapses and a depletion of imbalanced brain chemicals, meant my

comfort zone - was far from ever being comfortable.

Earlier, when I was in my twenties, I was in a group that ran a lot and, in all conditions, and I loved it. This was not so much to get fit but to expiate mental tension - moving this tension to a place where it could be physically felt, punishing your body until you believe in your soul, that kind of Samuel Beckett "catharsism".

Developing a shoulder injury from poor posture and too many hours playing my violin, abruptly put my glittering career in music to bed. I'd spent over twenty years playing in bands doing what I loved, soothed by the languishing luxury of posh hotels, all paid for by record companies.

Over the following decades, my wasp factory got louder and my willingness to take part in life quietly diminished, causing me to feel I was rapidly draining away. I couldn't hear or control my thoughts or even know who I was anymore, what I wanted or what I would become - I was no longer the man of my dreams.

Today, I continue to be heavily furnished with an armamentarium of psychiatric meds and some of them do help. Over the last twenty years, I have been prescribed most treatments for depression and anxiety with mixed states of any lasting success. Having an enduring mental health condition has humbled me greatly and forced me to view the world from a very different perspective. Reinventing myself to create a life with purpose and value has been the one force that keeps me well - or as well as I can be. I feel immensely privileged to engage with our service users and their carers, as I feel we've broken bread together - albeit at different times, in different places, at different tables.

My partners understanding, patience and thorough knowledge around fitness and marathon running, led her determination and support to help me run again. She knew that running later in life (for me,) is not just about strapping up your boot laces and leaping along the street. She understood the importance of core strength, warming up, cooling down and having a structured programme to enable progress, ideally without injury.

Hitting my 60th birthday over a year ago made me determined to run again, and maybe aim for a 5k in the process. We would train in snow and ice, fog and rain and through my determined efforts, I discovered a body - my own fit, active body that could do what I wanted it to do.



I still run a lot, as I love it madly, it provides a good mental space for me that offers some peace, some respite, which usually ends as euphoria. I'm sure there are some EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing) benefits too - the light flickers, catching my eye through hedges and trees, resetting my mood. When I run, I feel part of a greater universal consciousness, where all of life flows through me and me through life, measured by the steady footfall of my quickening cadence. Along with the beauty of words, classical music, and contemporary expressionistic art, I strive to remain hopeful, stealing a glimpse of beauty, through someone else's creativity.

I now believe the twists and turns of all life are supported by the same goodness and balance that keeps the stars in the sky and our tides ebbing and flowing hypnotically. We too are supported by the same goodness. I find it helpful for me to place trust in the bigger scheme of things and not sweat the small stuff.

Finding my body has set me free. As the *Gosho* writings in Buddhism remind us, winter always turns to spring.



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