

Hip, Hip, Hooray

On 12th October 2006 I saw a horse and broke my hip.

I was going downhill on my bicycle at 35mph approaching a blind left-hand curve. Half-way round I saw the horse and rider and, as I seemed to be aiming straight for it, I tried to swerve to the left. As the wheels started to slide, as I tried to stay upright, I knew this was going to be different from any previous mishap. My brain must have shut down all systems before I hit the road, as I certainly don't remember any impact. When I came to a few seconds later, I found myself lying very still on my right-hand side, with my head resting on my hands.

Meanwhile Rob Roberts riding close behind, had tried (with his head) to re-design my bicycle, which successfully resisted him and remained undamaged. Then other club members who had been riding a bit more cautiously arrived on the scene. Ron Castle saw me lying in a pool of blood, a pool growing larger as he looked, and felt sick. Phil Benstead had a mobile phone and used it to call for an ambulance. When they asked him where we were I was able to tell him a name I shan't forget - Puddledock Lane.

I lay very still, aware that there was something different about my body, waiting for the ambulance to arrive. When it did, after about ten minutes, it was facing the wrong way and had to back off to find a place to turn round and face the right way. It was, you see, a very narrow lane. The paramedics then removed my clothes with scissors (giving me the opportunity much later to buy some new gear) and then manoeuvred me into the ambulance. This caused me to sound as though I was auditioning for The Mastersingers as I realised there was something wrong with my left leg.

Laid out on the ambulance bed, high on morphine, I was nonetheless able to express a preference for our destination. Tunbridge Wells sounded too disgusting, so off we went to Farnborough, to the Princess Royal Universty Hospital. After an X-ray I was cheerfully told that my left hip was broken, and they were going to mend it. The broken hip was the serious injury, but it didn't show. What did show was the bruising to my face and to my right leg, which became elephantine. As I had been on Warfarin, this had to be cleared from my system before the operation. During this time I was lying, high on pain-killers, in a state-of-the-art hospital bed having occasional X-rays and lots of visitors. Mary came to see me every day, which meant a train and bus journey for her. Julie and Ruby visited when they could and Celeste and Alexander came too. We had several games of Scrabble. There were lots of people from the Forty Plus CC too, especially Ray and Barbara - Ray's mother was in another ward.

The regime of pain-killers ensured that I enjoyed all this without experiencing any discomfort. Even lying flat without any movement became tolerable as I learned how to make the bed do what I wanted. The PatientLine terminal was there so I could make phone calls, check my email and watch TV. After three days the doctor thought I was ready for the operation. I was as happy as Larry, but it was a premature decision - still too much Warfarin. Then I was sick for the only time - nothing to do with pre-op nerves, all to do with my non-operational digestive system.

At last the operation, which was a hemiarthroplasty, or half-hip replacement. The doctor explained that the ball had snapped off the top of the femur, but the socket in the pelvis was untouched. I was cut open and given a chrome-cobalt ball on a titanium spike driven into the femur. This is a straightforward procedure which takes a mere 45 minutes, with the top of the femur being sliced off to allow the spike to be driven in. I was put back together, sewn up and returned to the ward. All I had to do then was have weird and wonderful hallucinations for a few days until the anaesthetic was out of my system. Reader, I enjoyed them.

On the eighth day I was encouraged to get out of bed to try and use a zimmer frame - one with fleece-lined arm rests, necessary because my left hand had broken bones and would not support my weight. I didn't have the strength to get up on my own, so the nurses pulled me up. I did a few steps and collapsed back on the bed exhausted. Over the next few days, I practised getting up and walking, usually to the toilet. One day Mary brought me new slippers and clean pyjamas, shaved my beard and helped me to have a shower. The other guys

in the ward thought I was being spoilt - they were right! Now I was able sit in a chair I needed my laptop! So Mary brought it, complete with a splendid leather laptop-bag which she just happened to have spotted in the charity shop in Locksbottom.

By now I was having physio-therapy, and I was given exercises to start to build up the muscles in my left leg. I was starting to get around a bit more, using crutches. Sometimes Mary would put me in a hospital wheelchair and we would pop down to the cafe. As I got stronger, she encouraged me to walk further, until I made it to the cafe without the wheelchair. Before I could leave the hospital, the physio-therapists also had to make sure I could go up and down a few stairs. The routine was easy to remember - good leg up (to heaven), bad leg down (to hell) - trouble was, it felt like I had two bad legs. On 27th October I was deemed ready, so off I went in a hospital bus, complete with crutches, ready to take up residence again at home, where Mary was waiting for me.

Before this Erica, the occupational therapist, had advised us on what was needed at home - generally we had to make sure that anything I had to sit on (chair, bed, toilet) was at least 21" high. There was the commode, which Mary had bought from the same charity shop, and a throne-like upholstered dining chair which she got from a second-hand shop in Bromley. This had cushions on it to ensure the required height. But because the hospital is in Bromley and we live in Lewisham, Erica was not able to arrange any raisers for the bed, and suggested we get in touch with Lewisham Hospital. Mary did this and was appalled at the bureaucratic and unhelpful nature of the response.

She realised that it was a case of 'if you want anything done you have to do it yourself'. So on the day I was due home, she went round to the local timber yard ('ooh no, we don't do that') to persuade them that they really could cut four nine-inch wood blocks. She was so persuasive that they even delivered them - there they were on the doorstep when we arrived at half-past-eight in the evening. Ruby and Lee came over to lend a hand. Lee fixed the wood blocks on the bed - they're still there because we like the new height. My 'office' was upstairs, so that evening Mary and Lee were very busy bringing all my toys downstairs - laptop, scanner, printer, stereo and swivel chair. Next day Mary amazed us all by connecting all the bits together so I could play all day without going up the stairs. Then Julie and Ruby arrived hot-foot from a Brighton charity shop with a super upright upholstered armchair (which is now my favourite chair) complete with elephants-feet risers, and a week later Julie brought a lightweight wheelchair borrowed from her friend Harvey.

In hospital everything had been done for me, and I never had to get up to go to the toilet. In November I was home and had to get up every hour or so in the night for a pee. This is apparently normal for people recovering from trauma - for me it was bloody annoying and somewhat exhausting, but I suppose quite good exercise. During the day Mary was my life support system - I needed help on a 24/7 basis. She had leave of absence from St Pauls, initially for a month but extended to six weeks. She made herself responsible for all my needs, in particular ensuring that I remembered to take pain-killers regularly. She fed me and had soon devised a way for me to have occasional showers, using the commode with an upturned plastic basin for a seat. With two crutches I couldn't hold anything, but as I became marginally more mobile, Mary devised ways in which I could help in the house. She fixed up a tiny doll's push-chair, which had been one of Ruby's infant props, so that I could use it to carry things around the kitchen. It became a serious occupation for me, calculating the amount of push needed to propel it exactly the distance from table to sink, from sink to plate cupboard, from fridge to table, etc.

Now began the next phase of my recovery - physiotherapy at Lewisham Hospital. For every visit we had to book transport. The bus would call at the house anything up to an hour before the time of the appointment - ramp down and wheelchair on (with me in it and Mary pushing) to be tied down very firmly. Then off to pick up all the others on the way to the hospital. After the session, the same again in reverse, after a wait of anything up to two hours at the hospital. You learned to be very patient (excuse the pun) and also to be very grateful for all these services. After a few weeks, I managed to fold myself into the Micra and I was able to drive to Lewisham Hospital, park round the corner and walk with Mary to each session.

In December we were able to drive to the Forty Plus Christmas Lunch, where we had a great time meeting the club, followed by a quick visit to the Locksbottom charity shop while I recovered from the festivities in the

reclined driver's seat. (This was my first appearance in public since the accident, as I had to decline the kind offer of help from JD to take us to the NS25 reunion in November.)

My physiotherapist was a guy called Louis and we got on like a house on fire. He was a mature student and had once been in the Olympic weight-lifting team. I was really stimulated by our sessions, as he made it feel like we were both past athletes. After four weeks, his time at the hospital was over and his tutor, Lisa, took over. I got to use their exercise bike, but could hardly push the pedals round. Then Lisa noticed I wobbled when I walked. She checked up and announced that my left leg was 3cm shorter than my right leg, and referred me to the Dalton Clinic in Sangley Road. A few weeks later we were finished with physio-therapy and I said goodbye to her.

We borrowed a 'turbo trainer' from Jean Jessett (in the Forty Plus CC) so I could use my own bike at home. After mounting my town bike on to the trainer with much cussing and sweating, I climbed on to it and tried to turn the pedals. It was almost impossible, but I made myself do it and repeated the exercise a few times. The result was that my hip hurt so much it took a few exercise-free days to recover. Then Celeste returned the exercise bike she had borrowed from us and I was able to use it - initially with the belt removed so there was no resistance and pedalling was easy. Another purchase at the Cavell shop in Hayes was an armchair exerciser, a tiny pair of pedals on a low frame. I used this frequently, and as a result the armchair has never been fitter.

With me in my wheelchair, we started visiting the local cafe near the station, and then discovered the wonders of travelling by train, where with a bit of luck you will be met by a man with a ramp. Mary suggested a visit to Tate Modern to see the Strindberg exhibition, which meant pushing the wheelchair over some difficult terrain along the South Bank. It was well worth it though because then I found that I could whizz round the exhibition sitting down. Brilliant! By now I was getting stronger and needed only a walking stick rather than crutches, which made carrying things possible - time to say goodbye to the little push-chair. I began to find the stairs manageable, so it was time to transfer all my toys back up to my room and let the front room assume a patina of normality.

Four months after the accident I started to use my town bike for *very* short rides - to the paper shop, the doctor's or the park - slowly building the distance up to two or three miles. Then one Wednesday in February when the sun was shining, I managed with Mary's support to ride my road bike from Pratts Bottom to Knockholt, two-and-a-half miles uphill, to meet the club for lunch. It took thirty minutes to do this ride, with Mary riding *very* slowly in front and me trying to keep up. It felt as though I hadn't got any muscles in my left leg, which was about right, and getting on and off were hazardous operations. Riding the bike was good for me, but I had to concentrate on the various exercises (from the physio-therapy sessions) designed to build up the strength in my left leg. Also the weather was bad now, and going out on the bike was not so attractive.

Three months after the letter of referral was written by Lisa, I was given an appointment at the Foot Health Care Clinic in Sangley Road. Imagine our surprise when we discovered that it was the wrong clinic, that the letter of referral should have gone to the Orthotic Clinic in Lewisham Hospital. It took another three months to get an appointment there, by which time I already had a pair of boots made by Robert Merrifield which have the 2cm difference built in. Since then he has also modified the left sandal of a pair bought in France, at St Omer at the time of the Forty Plus visit. Meanwhile the Orthotic Clinic is working on the left boot of the pair I had been wearing, leaving only my cycling shoes and slippers (both of which I wear with an internal raise) to be modified.

On Wednesdays during March, Mary and I would drive to the Forty Plus lunch place and enjoy the food and conviviality. In April we took the bikes on the back of the car to East Peckham, and rode to Tudeley Church before returning for lunch at The Man of Kent with the club - a ride of about nine miles. The following week, Muriel was staying with us on visit for a few days. We drove (with my bike on the back) to Hawley Garden Centre to meet the club for elevenses. Then I rode with the 'C' group to lunch at The Golding Hop at Plaxtol, where I was pleased to find that Muriel and Mary had arrived. With the bike on the back, we drove to Otford for coffee and cake at Eleanors's, and then home. A lovely day out, including my first ride with the club, a distance of about twelve miles.

With a gradual increase in mileage on each ride, cycling for me returned to its normal level of activity, so that by mid-May rides were between twenty and forty miles. Although I still need to continue with the exercises (from physio-therapy) designed to strengthen the muscles around my left hip, my everyday life is now, eight months later, much like it was before the accident. I have learned a great deal in that time, and feel myself thrice blessed, by Mary, Julie and Ruby. I look forward to this year's London-Brighton ride with Julie, although we will be riding only the last thirty miles, from Turners Hill to Brighton.