

in the ink dark

*These are some words to wander with
as part of In the Ink Dark a new project
from Luke Pell and collaborators*

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PODCAST 3 TRANSCRIPT

“ I don't really like walking. It simply serves a purpose. To get from one place to another. From one seat to the next. In the shortest possible route...where is the next place I can rest my body. From where you are now...where is the next place you could rest your body? Is it somewhere that is “socially acceptable”? Or would it call unwanted attention to you...people don't like it if you sit down in the streets do they? So I have developed a technique for using my crutches as a seat.

Anyway, walking...It's not really what I would call pleasant. I haven't really, most of my life...gone for a walk. I am not the lone walker in the wilderness...conquering mountains.

Why do we do that? Is it the desire to look down on the world? Is it domination? I don't really have any patience left for narratives of overcoming, what's wrong with the base of the mountain? Or halfway? Always the compulsion that to see further is better...but then don't we miss what is right here? Up close. What is it to be with the details. The need to rest, to stop, let's me be still. Lets me sit and watch the world go by, rather than just passing by the world.

I am not a “strider”, as one of my other disabled friend calls them, charging through the streets looking people in the eye, running for the bus...or indeed eyes fixed on a phone. That's the joy of not having your hands free. It makes me break up my time. ...when the next seat comes, on the train, in the taxi, on the park bench, in the café, on the sofa...then I can reconnect with that other world. But while I'm moving, it's all about the ground beneath my four feet.

“Walk tall, walk straight and look the world right in the eye, that's what my mama told me when I was about knee high”...well actually my Nana, she would sing that with me when I was wee to get me to stand up straight, and we would march about together, knees high, elbows out...

I look down on the world all the time though.

Walking with crutches requires full attention – there are four legs to co-ordinate. 2 feet and 2 crutches. Four footprints...Four legs to trip, four feet to slip – on ice - Four feet to slip on gravel, on marble – at the Parthenon in Athens, where there are so many different textures of marble I lose count, to a crisp pack (as bad as ice underneath the end of a crutch)...keep looking down. It's safer that way.

Sorry Nana. I forgot to keep my head up...

But there's a world at our feet.

I can often tell where I am in the world from the ground... From the cobblestones of Edinburgh, to the high dusty typhoon-coping kerbs of Phnom-Pehn, the kerbs of San Francisco which have the street names carved into them, the broken concrete pavements of Salvador, to the clean pavements of Singapore, the spit covered streets of Glasgow tell me that I'm home

I see the startling *stolperstein* of Berlin, little square brass plaques, set quietly among the cobbles in the streets- the same size as the cobbles, but glinting out against the grey. They're easy to miss if you don't look down, but once you see them you can never un-see them. You see them everywhere. They are small and so require you to stop to read the scripts on them. They hold the names of Jewish families, names of whole families, dragged from their homes. And the start and end dates of the their lives.

These silent, patient and beautiful ways of memorialising horrors that went on, that don't shout at you but sit quietly waiting for you to notice them.

I think of the small square of glowing light in the ground outside the Reichstag, as you walk closer, it reveal itself as a glass floor, until you find you are standing softly above a white room, a library on the spot where the 3rd Reich burned enormous pyres of books

These memorials they stop you in your tracks, interrupt thoughts of banality and make you genuinely think

"Why?"

"Never again"

They make me think in sadness of the memorials I have grown up seeing in the UK, of soldiers, of instruments of war – bombs or guns or cannons– always about glorifying war...it makes me ashamed.

Not of those who fought, but of their memories being manipulated in this way...we built memorials that people are made to stand and look up at...in Berlin the memorials make you drop your eyes and hang your head....

The pavement, kerbs, grates, drains, grills. In Manchester, a sewer cover emblazoned with the name "Glenfield and Kennedy." The Glenfield, as it was known, was the factory that was the backbone of my hometown of Kilmarnock.

As I stand on that name I remember my grandfather and my great uncle who worked there. The sweet smell of pipe smoke drifts into my memory...

He was the kinda naughty uncle – the one I imagine lots of families have – who tells all the blue jokes and sang rude songs - which he was only allowed to once my big brother and I had been sent to bed - he was the life and soul of all our family parties.

I hear my uncles voice... singing, slightly muffled through the glass lounge door of the house we had when I was wee – from where I sneaked down the stairs to hear him - inching slowly downstairs, sitting on one step at a time, waiting to be caught - listening...I realise he's singing the tattooed lady...my favourite...one of the rudest ones in his repertoire...

“And tattooed down her back,
there was the Union Jack,
on her thigh was Rome and Sicily...
I was looking for Hong Kong...
when her husband came along....
so I let the rest of the world go by....”

And I think now about how - that wee girl in her pyjamas, keeking round the banister, - will see so many of the places he sang of....that wee girl that the whole family worried would be left behind cos she couldn't run...she couldn't climb to the top of mountains...she will see so much more of the world...by sitting, resting, taking her own path, taking her own timewill see that beauty is in the most unexpected places, and often right at our feet...all four of them....”