

THE OTHER SIDE OF AN ACCIDENT

By Nic Burne

Nic Burne explores the nature of risk, and the importance of adventure to our lives...

Early Dec 2012

A year has gone by. David is back in his boat. His knee is nearly back to normal and he did not even miss a year at university. We are truly blessed.

Late Nov 2011

The oft expected phone call came. "Dad, I am in hospital. I have had an accident on the river but I am all right."

I suppose I am partly to blame. We have brought up our kids to be adventurous, to push the limits yet to understand and manage the risks. I am truly grateful that we have not had more of these calls.

The accident in question has been discussed

In detail on these pages and elsewhere. David dislocated his knee on the Douglas Water and, during his enforced withdrawal from active canoeing, filled his time by writing about it.

There are two meanings to the title of this article. The first is from David himself. Last summer on a drive back from the Tryweryn he got a text message. He went quiet. After a while he said that his previous flatmate and a very good friend had had a paragliding accident and had not made it out the other side. I appreciated his way of expressing this. Words like died and killed seem so final, so pointless. To me "not made it out the other side" speaks more of a journey, a progress through life. It makes me

feel that adventure sports are not separate from our everyday lives, they are not an end in itself but part of what makes our lives worth living.

Adventure sports are part of us, an expression of our personalities and individuality, and part of our social lives. In this journey through life, both in the adventure and the other part of our lives, we make decisions, decide how far we want to push things, decide what risks we are prepared to take and assess the consequences. These decisions can be financial, emotional or practical to list three. All can have consequences of varying severity, some even terminal if, say, financial stress leads to suicide, smoking to an earlier death or fast driving to an



Telling the tale... 76

accident list. I get those 'normal' to go for though not how have we... I as far

Th m Fr a n r

accident. I would like to add adventurous to that list. I get comfort from the idea that adventure, for those who partake, is part of life's risk, an everyday norm that mostly goes right but has the potential to go horribly wrong. We choose to take part and for those of us who do, adventure sports are part of our journey through life. When someone does not make it out the other side of an accident, however tragic, wasteful, and distressing it is, they have experienced another part of life's process that we all must face sometime.

I find it difficult to think about these things as we still have David after his accident yet four families last winter were not so fortunate.

The other meaning of the title of this article is more cheerful but not any less worth considering. For David, having been extricated from the river and stabilised by his paddling partners, what next? An ambulance and two paramedics to a grid reference 5km off the tarmac road - free. An airlift to hospital - free. Initial treatment and assessment at Kilmarnock hospital - free. Transport back to South Yorkshire - Dad's taxi. Three operations in Doncaster with associated treatment, nights and meals in hospital - free. Transport to and from hospital for the operations - Dad's taxi. Physio sessions - free. Follow up consultant appointments - free. Transport to physio and consultant appointments - Dad's taxi. Transport to University as not able to use train - Dad's taxi. Daily transport to lectures - Emily's taxi (David has some very good and patient friends! Thank you Emily.) In Britain we are privileged and blessed to live in an affluent and caring society and remember "free" usually means "at the public expense".

At home David did his best to be independent but you cannot easily carry a cup of tea when you can only weight bear on one leg and crutches. The same applies for the myriad of our daily needs that required fetching and carrying - laptop, pen and paper, phone, sweater, etc. Of course we were very happy to do what we could but, like banging your head on a wall, it was nice when it stopped!

As an aside - our caring involved only fetching and carrying, feeding and transport and I did find it an imposition on my lifestyle. I do not know how

those who offer 24/7 care for very dependent people cope - I doubt if I could - they deserve all the help they can get. They're the unsung heroes of our big society.

So far this seems to be rather a personal rant but I use it to illustrate the other side of risk, which may seem rather disingenuous as, as I stated at the start of this article, I have encouraged my children to take risks.

When we assess the risk of, say, running a waterfall we consider what could go wrong and how to manage the consequences on the river. Do we ever consider the wider consequences, the consequences for our friends, family and society as a whole? In this



The air ambulance arrives on the bank of Douglas Water back in 2011.

country we are very, very lucky to have a free rescue service from either the military services or volunteers, free that is at point of service but who pays behind the scenes? We are very, very lucky to have to have a free all inclusive health service (at the moment). I do not know how we, as a family, would have coped if I had not been retired and able to run Dad's taxi at short notice. The demands on us as a family could have been much more committing both time wise and

Words like died and killed seem so final, so pointless. To me "not made it out the other side" speaks more of a journey, a progress through life.

emotionally if things had been different.

There are risks in all we do in life, adventure sports just push the boundaries. Having seen the other side of an accident I felt I wanted to question whether we should add another tick box to our mental list of risk assessment before running a committing drop or rapid. Should we be asking ourselves as well

what are the consequences if things go wrong not only to us but to our friends, family and loved ones?

Keep stretching your own comfort zone but play safe for your and everyone's sake. Have fun. And most of all - Good luck. ☺



David's friend who died is Guy Joseph. His adventure sports were diving and paragliding. He spent much time in Nepal, indeed he learnt to fly there. In memory of Guy a trust has been set up to build a school in the Kaski district in Nepal. I asked for his parent's permission to mention him in this article and in return I said I would mention the trust website should anyone feel inspired to contribute towards building a school in Nepal. www.guystrust.org