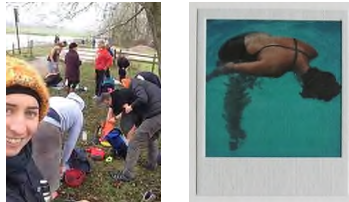


LXV – 65@65

Stanley Ulijaszek - 65 outdoor swims at the age of 65

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Starting out – The Rules of 65@65



Early in 2019, I went to a birthday swim of a friend I had been swimming with on and off for close to a decade. The swim was at Port Meadow, Oxford, and the season, Winter. It was Hywel's 50th. Much fun, new people, a pub in Jericho after, warmth, and cheerfulness abounding. I got talking with Hywel's friend Mike, who had come up from London. He told me how he swam in 50 places at the age of 50 in the previous year, and although finished, keeps adding to his tally. His encouragement do 65 swims at the age of 65 years was the starting point. As he explained - your rules. He included swimming pools; I struggle with swimming pools but have an affection for the lido - outdoor pools that do not totally avoid nature. I love the lake that my wife, Pauline, and I swim in most days; and I love swimming all year round. I also love the River Thames. So 65 swims at the age of 65 years - 65@65 - in rivers, lakes and the sea, but also lidos, especially in Winter. Starting July 3rd, 2019.

Turning 65 leaves pause for thought – traditionally a retirement age, a land-mark of sorts. A retirement age is now a nominal thing in most European countries, and I have 68 to look forward to. So rather than a landmark, I would make 65 a water-mark. 65 at 65, or 65@65, my rules, according to Mike. So here goes with rules – lakes, rivers and oceans all included; lidos too, especially in Winter. Sauna-swims permitted, encouraged even, in the darkest depth of winter – welcoming like the candles lit outside Copenhagen cafes in January. Where would I like to swim? There starts a random walk from my doorstep – ‘swan lake’ down at the sailing club; the Cherwell; the Thames at Oxford; an invited birthday swim in the Thames at Swinford Bridge. That’s the start. Then a swim to work, Eynsham Lock to Port Meadow – Thames again. The River (Thames) will feature large this year – such a varied and magnificent river. If I were German, it might be the Rhine or the Elbe. I have swum in the Rhine twice – in Bonn, and in Konstanz. This year, the Elbe... More than pause for thought, this year lights my ‘swimagination’, every 65@65 a celebration of a life and of swims to be swum. But reflection too, not just swimming but ‘swimaging’ – thoughts on how to grow old well.

Not planning swims in any more than broad outline, following the randomness of life itself and reflecting on the human urge to put a straight line through a random-ish set of points and claiming destiny when so much is chance and circumstance. Third July is when I was born, and when the celebration begins.