



Beyond a Broken Leg by Caroline Lang

One moment I am navigating rocky mountain paths on horseback and the next moment lying stunned on the ground. I am in the French Alps, leading a horse through a narrow gateway when she catches her foot in a cord, panics, jumps and the whole weight and wildness of a beautiful animal knocks me onto sloping, stony ground.

I had just emerged from teaching a retreat in a village nestled within a beautiful, rugged landscape of peaks and valleys, forests and alpine flowers. As my students departed and I settled into a day alone, I have a sense of summer and many plans stretching ahead of me. Then this happened

My femur bone was shattered close to my knee. At Grenoble hospital, I had major surgery. One might not associate freshness with pain, bedpans, the suffering of the elderly, long sleepless nights, but when the unexpected shattered my fear of suffering, hospitals, medical procedures and surrounded me with care and love, something new flowed through. I received two packets of another kind person's blood- an experience almost sacramental- which filled me up physically, emotionally and spiritually. My elderly French neighbour had broken an arm, two knees and her skull and received a transfusion at the same time. Apparently, in South Africa they have a saying about accidents: *The gods must love you so much to give you all that attention.*

Two weeks later and back in the UK, my partner of twenty years abruptly left our relationship in a way that was deeply traumatising. The first part of that summer was of consultants, scans and learning to use crutches, the second part was of discovering how to place both feet back on the ground.

Confined to moving on one leg in a house with lots of stairs and living through so much emotional pain, meditation and bed yoga saved me. I got absorbed in finding ways to reawaken the connections in my body that had been lost. And I felt very happy to find myself upside down in a shoulder stand long before I could walk.

I was carried by a sense of surrender but also by my determination and by the joy of doing mundane things in a very non- mundane way such as tidying my clothes drawers with the help of a zimmer frame in the early hours of the morning when for the whole night I could not sleep.

In the midst of those deeply broken-apart and grief-filled times, there was so much love in the green of the grass, the overgrown wisteria outside my window, the golden June sunlight, the silence of the short dark nights spreading into the freshness of the sunrise and the very welcome visits of friends.

My beloved therapist was always at my side and it still moves me to remember the extent of Jaya's support. Everybody cared so much. My students and friends cooked for me, gave me treatments, tackled the logistics of getting me to hospital appointments. When I was yearning for some wild space, my French teacher found places where he could push me in a wheelchair right up onto Dartmoor.

Receptive to so much support and good company, I got blasted open from my very self-reliant self but it was also a lonely time because I need solitude as well as friendship. It was when nobody was around that I started to experiment. After several weeks spent mostly on my bed, I discovered a way to walk on my bum as far as my yoga space across the garden - an arduous journey. When I finally lay down in a patch of afternoon sunlight in that place that had always sheltered me, I started to feel some new life flow through.

Eventually I could 'bum shuffle' to the top of our field. When I got tired coming back I rolled on my side the way you sometimes see people in India rolling towards or around a temple.

A few weeks later, I somehow made it to the South of France where I could just about walk with a stick, very, very slowly up stoney paths and submerge myself in the warm river when the aloneness did not feel too big.

In the delicious heat, life so slowed down, the colours of the flowers, the warm wind in the trees, the smells, everything became very vivid. My favourite times were those I dedicated to yoga and deep rest. The continuing journey into my new body, the pleasure of discovering how to move in so many different ways even with an unbending leg, sinking into subtlety, meditation and rest dissipated some of the intensity of my emotions.

Three years have passed. My leg is not the same one it used to be but mostly I can love it and it does not stop me doing anything. Breaking the longest bone in my body was painful, the way in which my partner left at that time was even more so. There have been many challenges but here I am, stronger and wiser, with so much that has grown and transformed in and around me. In a way it feels like I am still at the beginning.