

The Long Walk Back
What Am I Doing Here?
Not so long ago, even one step felt impossible.

Phuket, Thailand — where a long walk back began

The first thing I did after my road accident in Phuket was order a beer.

In fairness, adrenaline was doing most of the decision-making at that point. My pelvis had been badly damaged—though I didn't yet realise quite how badly—and internal bleeding had already begun.

But there I was, standing in a small bar not far from the crash, assuring the staff I was perfectly fine and asking for a drink.

In hindsight, it was probably not the most medically sophisticated response to traumatic injury.

But it did feel like a fairly British solution at the time.

It was only later, when the adrenaline began to fade and the true extent of the injuries became clear, that reality began to sink in.

Pain has a way of focusing the mind.

In the days that followed there were moments when the pain and uncertainty were overwhelming. I remember lying there wondering how long the road back might be, and whether life would ever truly return to normal.

There were tears in those early days—tears of pain, frustration and sometimes fear.

Before the accident I had rarely given much thought to something as simple as walking. Like most people, I moved through life without noticing it.

Mobility is one of those quiet privileges we take entirely for granted.

Until suddenly we can't.

A short time after leaving hospital, my Thai girlfriend offered to drive me to a rehabilitation centre.

On the way there she asked if we could take a small detour via Nai Harn Beach, one of my favourite places in Phuket.

As we approached the beach I realised it was the first time I had seen it since the accident.

The sea looked exactly as it always had—calm, blue, unchanged.

During the drive I asked her something that had been bothering me. I had very little memory of the ambulance ride to the hospital.

“What happened in the ambulance?” I asked.

She hesitated for a moment before answering.

“You called me after the accident,” she said. “So I came. I followed the ambulance.”

Then she said something that stopped me in my tracks.

“Your heart stopped beating for a couple of minutes. I thought you were dying.”

Just as she said those words we arrived at the beach.

For a moment neither of us spoke.

I looked out across the water and suddenly felt my eyes fill with tears.

Until that moment I don't think I had fully understood how close things had come.

Standing there, looking out at the sea, I realised something very simple.

I was lucky to be alive.

About a month after leaving hospital, my youngest son flew to Phuket to see me.

I went to the airport to meet him.

At that stage I was still moving slowly and somewhat awkwardly, but I was determined to get there myself. Recovery was underway, even if it was still early days.

When he came through the arrivals gate I felt an enormous sense of relief and happiness.

But then something completely unexpected happened.

A few moments later another familiar face appeared.

My oldest son had also flown to Phuket.

The two of them had arranged it without telling me because they were both worried about how I was doing.

For a moment I simply stood there in shock.

With tears in my eyes I looked at him and said,

“What are you doing here?”

Later, when I thought about that moment, another question came quietly into my mind.

Not what are you doing here?

But what am I doing here?

After everything that had happened—the accident, the hospital, the long road back—I realised how easily that day might never have happened at all.

Three months into rehabilitation I was having one of those difficult days when progress felt painfully slow. The temptation to skip the gym was strong.

But I went anyway.

While I was there I noticed a young man training nearby, probably in his mid-thirties.

Something about him immediately caught my attention.

He had lost his entire leg.

Yet there he was, training hard in the gym with a big smile on his face.

In that moment something shifted in my thinking.

I remember looking at him and thinking that my problems were nothing compared to what this man had endured.

A few weeks later I spoke to him.

I told him that seeing him training that day had been deeply inspiring to me.

He listened politely and then shared a little of his own story.

He had been a British paratrooper.

He had nearly died in Afghanistan after being blown up by a roadside bomb.

I told him again how much his determination had meant to me.

Then he said something I will never forget.

“You’re probably my Dad’s age,” he said, “and you inspire me.”

I was genuinely taken aback.

I asked him why.

He replied very simply.

“Because you haven’t given up. You train every day when many people wouldn’t. For guys of my generation, that inspires us to be like you.”

It was one of those moments that stays with you.

We had both been looking at each other thinking the same thing—that the other person was stronger.

Gradually, almost without noticing, my own recovery began to take shape.

Then one day something quietly remarkable happened.

For the first time since the accident I managed to walk across the gym floor without the help of a frame or crutches.

It wasn’t far, and to anyone watching it would probably have looked entirely ordinary.

But for me it felt extraordinary.

I remember stopping afterwards and thinking of Neil Armstrong's famous words when he stepped onto the moon.

"This is one small step for a man..."

In my case it certainly wasn't a giant leap for mankind.

But it was a giant leap for me.

These days, when I go for a walk, I occasionally catch myself smiling.

Because it's no longer something I take for granted.

Not so long ago, even one step felt impossible.

But step by step, I found my way back.

And every now and then, standing at Nai Harn Beach, I quietly remind myself just how fortunate I am to still be here.

For my sons, and for all those who helped me take the next step when the path forward seemed uncertain.