

Virginia's story

This is my story to help and hopefully inspire others.

I had always been fit considering a career in the outdoors, but pursued a career in the arts as a painter instead.

Mountains and horses were always an important part of my life, however in 1995 I suffered a Mental Illness and was put on Trifluoperazine, a drug that had disastrous consequences for my life, which as I knew it stopped as a result of taking it, I put on three and a half stone and was so slowed down by this drug I could not do the mountain scene anymore. I had palpitations! No one took this very seriously and people don't listen much if you are mentally unwell at least not in 1995. This drug I know has affected what is set out here below.

Ten years melted away with me going through the motions of life, the only thing keeping me going a problem horse I bought.

Then a divorce in 2005 brought great change, I sold and bought a new house, found a job, and in that year reduced the dose of Trifluoperazine.

By June 2007 I felt better, I thought I would take my old Boarder Terrier up Helvellyn just to see if either of us could do it. We put her in my rucksack looking like a teddy looking out of the top; we got some laughs from fellow walkers.

After that success I thought I can do this now, however September 2007, saw me in front of a charming Cardiologist. I had Atrial Flutter, he realised I was horse, and mountain mad, I told him I had had a mental problem, and he encouraged me once he was sure there was no underlying heart disease to carry on with my adventures in the Mountains.

This I did fulfilling a long held ambition to do many things including The Inaccessible Pinnacle on Skye with a guide Martin Welch. Also my first snow gully on Ben Nevis with the most amazing woman I have ever met Adele.

Adele has become a good friend as well as a guide, her friendship over this last year has been invaluable.

My Atrial Flutter was Ablated on 21 st December 2009, I was left with an ectopic beat.

Last July I went through a varicose vein operation, it went ok, however when I got back to the Mountains in the October I realised something was wrong, I was soon on a treadmill. I was told I have Left Atrial Fibrillation, what a blow.

Very down, I phoned Adele. Think we had best shelve my ice climbing trip to Norway with you I said, "never mind there is always Scotland!" Adele said.

My doctor then confirmed it, no Altitude or cold temperatures. So my long held ambitions to do the Himalayas and some thing in the Alps will have to wait.

Adele took me on my first Ice climb 6th of December 2010 in The Lakes, following a fantastic day on Helvellyn the day before.

I have since had two trips to Scotland of short duration, but packed full of ice, snow, and Mountain adventures.

I am very lucky, to do this despite my problem as I realise many are a lot worse off, its not easy though, I am slow and get out of breath, one reason I go to the mountains solo on easier mountains, and with guides for the things too dangerous solo.

On the 22nd of March I face an Ablation for the Left Atrial Fibrillation, and yes I am nervous.

I had always thought if I got free of the Trifluoperazine I should climb Everest to raise awareness and money for Mind, this thought I had back in 1995, however, having met a real Everest mountaineer, and having the problems I have, I doubt that Everest will ever be on the cards.

I would still at some point like to use my personal skills as an Artist and aspirant mountaineer to raise money for a charity or charities.

My thanks go to all the AMI Guides, and the team of doctors, including the team that did my first right side Ablation. Julie for always helping me stay on track, family and friends, and also the surgeon who has given my legs a new lease of life!

‘Update August 2011’

I had my ablation on 22nd March and it went well, after affects including 14 days of bad headaches and neck pain. Then just some chest discomfort, there has been nothing to worry about.

I have been AF free since, and well, my Mountain adventures have continued in the Lakes which I can now enjoy if walking with the dog at my pace. Although trying to keep pace with an average group of hill walkers does still make me out of breath, so not much change there.

I understand the vagus nerve is ablated and this controls heart rate and blood pressure, and that explains why my heart beat has been raised since the ablation, the Doctor said I would have to work harder to get back to where I was before the ablation.

Still let's hope I am AF free by next March as if I am, the Doctor says he will be happy for me to do Altitude, so by summer 2012 I might get my first taste of bigger mountains!