

Loneliness of the Long Distance WiKo Runner

(Author's Cut)

I didn't know that I could run. In the long, languid, first days of endless WiKo summer, why not join a club? Become a full throated choir singer, or crazy lake swimming triathlete? A German wine connoisseur, or close reader on the linguistic anthropology of the Nazi state? Or a runner, with the fabulous WiKo Runners...?

D. offered us pain and a T-shirt if we joined; a promise to take us up to half marathon level, into the woods, along pine needled trails, around lakes, up and down sand hills, and onto the great mountains of wartime rubble that overlook Grunewald from Teufelsberg. And so I ran, Fridays at 8.

You limber up as the team gathers, kicking gravel. Friday morning hangovers. Anxious thoughts. Let's go... Leave the blocky classicism of the Kosovan embassy, start slow, plod even, warm up a bit, run... Oh, there's no way I can do this, I can't go on, really... No, well, I can go on... And soon, yes, you are running with the hounds, man, I'm *running*, like *I could ever* do this?...

Svevo, our mascot, a flash of black wolf, leading the way with his bouncing toes and fluffy tail, disappearing occasionally to run headlong down a slope after some wild boars or for a dip in a smelly pond. D. and D. always someway ahead in conference, D. doing little additional circuits, just to keep it challenging; H. and E., or S. and E., chatting, at ease with the rhythm; me just about keeping up.



Soon I am addicted and running alone, on Tuesdays too, before the colloquium, with the promise of a luxury breakfast on the terrace, and a few minutes with the *LRB* before this week's talk. Remember to stretch, check your pockets. I contemplate for a moment getting squished like Roland Barthes on the tarmac race track outside the villa, in a moment of academic distraction; all those black *deutsche* saloons hurtling angrily down the *Allee* early morning towards Ku'damm. No, not today, and soon you are off, towards the forest. Past the early morning cafe, coffee and croissant waiting; the first corner, the Putin stencil, gun to the head; over the road, up the alley, the Grieg statue and Red Pill; along cobbles, then down dusty stairs to the lake side.



The dogs and their ladies are out in force, the dog lake J. calls it. Lots of wealth and face work on show. Morning conversations. Russians everywhere it seems. Four lakes good. We are going to follow the deep woods and canals to the tip of Krumme Lanke and back today.

The tread of soles, breathing. A soundtrack of bird song. A red squirrel scuttling up a tree. Woodpeckers boring. Morning bells.

I'm distracted and trip. Hop, skip, and crash. H. and D. catch me; I'm ok, just bruised, and we run on. My apologies. The team demurs. No man left behind: we will start and finish together. Only one time in the year do my calves just go *ping*, when I have run too far or too fast, and I have to limp home.

Past an old ruined bunker, and down the slope to the water. Maybe even a swim there someday? In the summer, perhaps, swimming across to the patch of sunlight over the trees; no dark Scottish lake this, no monstrous Jungian coincidence, just the septuagenarians who belong here, naked in the water. I swam this whole lake once. Long behind S. and L., and H. and E., who powered across without me. Dragging myself out cold, numb and chastened at the other end, before a painful kilometre run back to the bikes over stony gravel. My greatest achievement this year?

Heading home now. I tell myself it's training. For when I am back running *à deux* on the Merseyside trails and Sunday morning football pitches of Chorlton. Trying to keep up. I think of the international space station, orbiting, alone. M. taught me how to see it at nights, abandoned without gravity, free of us all, as the world spins furiously below.



But I am not alone. Along the ridge, we are together again. I swear robustly as the going gets tough — and the tough are going too fast. S. teases me again. Will I only be remembered for expletives and Wittgenstein? The leaders go easy to let us catch up. Or yet, now alone again, with just a strange Gormley-like statue up ahead; a standing stone with mobile phone, while his dog examines with some satisfaction his foresty doings. Over another big road and round the sandy turn, taking us back up and down to the lake again.

What will I remember of the year? The Blue Skies over Berlin, surely. Everyday it seemed. Perpetual blue and perpetual peace. Watching the chem trails over the country club. Wondering. Listening to the fireworks at night, the distant rumble of explosions, with the moon big like Melancholia, over a dark blue Walt Disney skyline, my view of the church at night, high in the Villa.



It was snowy once. It was cold and grey maybe. Maybe it rained, I don't recall. Ah yes, there was a storm one day. We had missed the incoming weather alert, and went running early morning in the calm before it descended; the trees suddenly alive, agitated, and blowing their leaves against the wind, creaking and bending wood over us, as E. grabbed my arm, and we ran for our lives.

The talks. The talk talk talk. Speaking as a philosopher, we are all philosophers here. Speculating about Hegel or Aristotle, Adorno or Latour; or whether Gibbon had the balls to envisage the end of it all.

Through the clearing, left towards the road, then out across and down. Another lake. Peaceful and rich, villas and rowboats — is that the American Academy? — as the sun slants in orange across the water. A dog paddling, a couple throwing a stone. The Steffi Graf stadium — they seem to be dismantling something, desultory workers with a digger truck, as I struggle up the stones and onto tarmac again. There's a line of formidable tennis poster girls, then over the road again, to the Rewe carpark, and down past Grunewald station and Floh, and Gleis 17, impassive and metallic in its anguish, *Polizei* eyes watching warily as more joggers go by; then the wasteland with sand, S.'s extra loop with Svevo, before it's new houses again; and then the last glorious slope of absurd villas down Baraschstraße (*nee* Wissmann) — *die fetten Jahre sind eindeutig noch nicht vorbei* — right onto the stone path, past the final home lake, and across the road. Yes, like the furtive red Grunewald fox, scrawny and exhausted, but still ready for a final sprint.

It's evening. The final days. All my running is done. The bags are packed, the tickets checked. I go into the garden, onto the pontoon, and look out over the lake

at the back of the Villa. High in the friendly sky, a plane. Flying west, a shining
dart against the dusk, catching the last sunshine rays high in the stratosphere.

Adrian Favell, Berlin 2021-22



With apologies to W.G.Seald, 1944-2001