

FROM ONE HAND TO THE OTHER



PETE LangMan

In so many ways, Parkinson's is life, but more so. In all the other ways, Parkinson's is life, but less so. The irony of a disease that slowly diminishes you, a disease that gradually, imperceptibly erases

your you-ness until your you-ness is almost imperceptible, is that it makes you live bigger. If it doesn't simply wipe you out. The end-point is inevitable, but just as life is a journey during which the words 'are we nearly there yet?' are rarely heard, with Parkinson's we can choose to take the high road or the low.

So. Spring. A double-edged sword. For the cricketer, it's half excitement, half trepidation. Will the season start with a bang, or with a whimper? Practically every minute of practise, every ounce of mental energy is channelled into that first ball. Will it go for four? Will it meet with the stoutest of defensive strokes, or a play, a miss, and the rattle of the timbers? For the Parky cricketer, it's also a time of what ifs. What if my foot movement has diminished even further? What if I'm too stiff to bend down and pick up the ball as it whizzes past my ankles? What if ... I'm simply not good enough any more? Will I get the talk, with the half-embarrassed, half-pitying look that says 'this is hurting me more than it's hurting you'?

The old cliché for the breaking up of a relationship is never more apposite: it's not you, it's the, it's the ... it's the disease. I'm actually becoming a better cricketer every year, on the one hand, while my disease conspires to undermine my improvements year-on-year. Personally, I have two jobs: I bat and I keep wicket. As one improves, the other diminishes. This is mostly to do with practice, but also has a whole heap to do with one of the more counter-intuitive aspects of Parkinson's, the one that makes walking hard, but running fine. It's something of a mystery.



There are two types of movement: the voluntary and the involuntary, movements of conscious choice and of reaction, thought-controlled and muscle memory. This means that the catches I take are the stunning, reaction type, I struggle with the simple stuff, the whole body movements necessary to allow my hands to react. I freeze, and this means, as often as not, missing the ball unless it's coming straight at me. When I bat, I often play with little or no foot movement. That means, as often as not, missing the ball unless it's coming straight at me. This is fine when batting, not when keeping. Don't get me wrong, I bat better when I can move my feet, but it's less necessary.

More damaging is the indecision that so often follows me, the devil on my shoulder who keeps whispering non-pc things in my ear. Last season I ran out of Amantadine, like many others, and it was a week before I got new stocks. My body, ever slow on the uptake, realised on a Thursday, during one of the games when I am well out of my league. It started with a breathtaking piece of teamwork between midwicket and keeper, effecting a run-out on the first ball of the game. But that was it for me, as my body gradually slowed. By the time it came for me to bat, I was a shuffling mess. I faced five balls. Two hit my pads. One hit my bat. Two hit my stumps (one a no ball). No-one celebrated. They looked as embarrassed as I was relieved that it was all over.

Having Parkinson's means developing a new relationship with your body. Developing a new relationship with the things you love, with the people you love. Like all relationships, it ultimately means working out when it's time to say those fateful words 'It's not you, it's the disease.'

When it comes down to cricket, I'm not ready yet. I do hope it isn't, either.

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