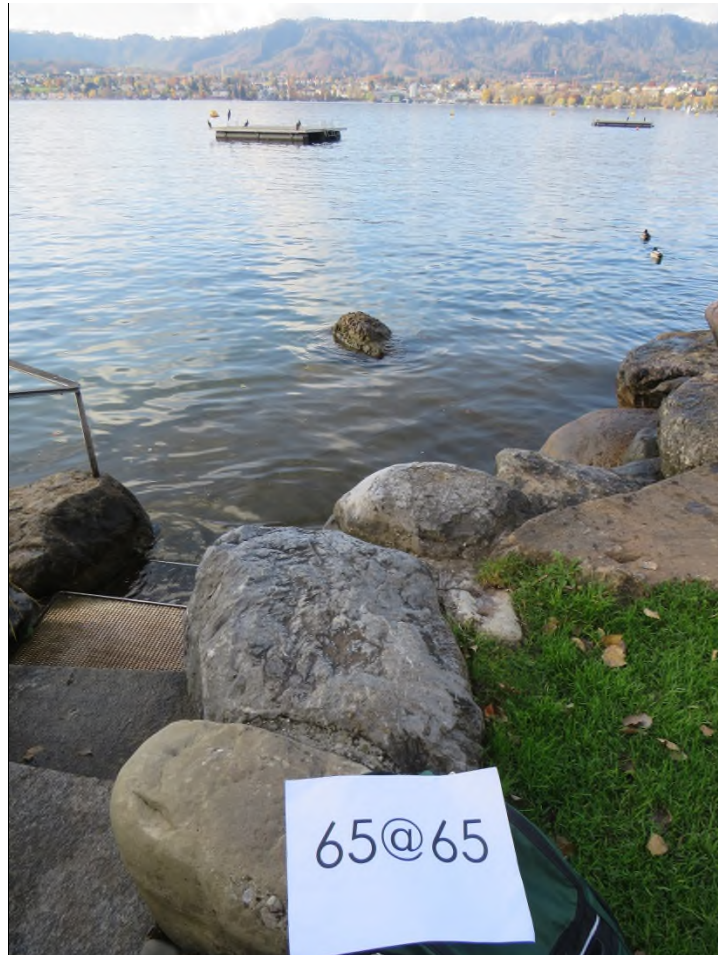


LXV – 65@65

Stanley Ulijaszek - 65 outdoor swims at the age of 65

www.lxvswim.org

Swim #26, Lake Zurich, Strandbad Tiefenbrunnen



I arrived in Zurich bright and early – certainly early, and not really so bright, having left home at four in the morning to get to Heathrow, to fly into Zurich in time for the working day. I love Zurich. It seems a hugely liveable city, very friendly, efficient, clean with the trappings and furnishings that make a city liveable for me. There is enough here to engage both mind and body. There is the art, the opera, the history, the trams, everything being sensible. Then the lake, the gardens, the Alpine backdrop, the clean air.

I love it, and it's not really about the weather. Many places have better weather, although there is a clear and distinct Summer and Winter here, and days in the in-between seasons when it feels like it should be Summer, and then people turn out to enjoy the outdoors, knowing that tomorrow the sleet and rain and drive them back into their (very nicely appointed) shelters. The lake is the centre-piece to the city, from the water front to the Alps in the distance. A city in nature, even if not of nature.

There is always a swim, of course. Today it is Strandbad Tiefenbrunnen. This is the place for me that makes Zurich so open, so good – there are other places, of course, but this is the first place I ever swam in Zurich now 45 years ago, and I choose to think the lake has a trace of the shape of my body. Coming back, I think nonsensically that if I try to keep my body in shape, Lake Zurich will remember me, and be a friend. It can so easily be not a friend, when the wind and rain push and drive up the lake to the ground-end of Zurich the city. Today is a friendly day. A lido was established here at Tiefenbrunnen in 1886, and the extensive water front with gardens, changing rooms, café, and bathing platforms and off shore pontoons came in 1939, when the Fourth Swiss National Exhibition was staged in Zurich. Tiefenbrunnen was the site of this hugely successful show, and its legacy was this landscaped complex of buildings and structures to promote healthy living. I am enjoying the legacy of this National Exhibition today, as also in the past. I step across the lawn up to the shore - a little boggy today, careful where you tread - to a landscaped rocky front, which is where I change. Right next to some steps into some of the clearest and cleanest water. On a clear day you can see the Alps, but not today. I am framing them in my mind's eye as I step in, slowly, taking the measure of the water – how cold? Therefore how long? Entering the water gives a pleasant chill, not biting, not cold, pleasant. Enough to clear my head, be awake and in this nature of clean air and clear water. Out to the pontoons, beyond, to the markers which designate the swimming area. A kilometre today is decent, long enough to feel the chill, earn some cake.

There are a few people swimming today, swimming into the Autumn, one of them into the winter. I speak to her once she is changed, comfortable and in her seventies. This is Belle Vue, an old established area of lakeshore Zurich. Some people walking here have the look and the stride of people who are calmly in control of the world. "They probably are" she says. This is Bellevue, and this is Zurich, where it simply isn't cool to shout your wealth or your worth. What is cool is to earnestly tell me of the swimming she has done in her life-time. In Zurich she did the annual marathon swim once – 26 kilometers. Too much she says, too far... "But I did it!" Today is just an ordinary day. She tells me she is from Ticino, on the border with Italy, where the lake and the water are so much nicer than here... I struggle to imagine it to be so, but agree it must be so. Mental note – must visit Ticino. This time, the closest I got to Ticino was to buy some red maize polenta grown there, and on sale in a lovely store in one of the new food markets here. This bag of maize meal got me pulled up at airport security when leaving Zurich. The fine grain made it look like liquid. The young security guard turned out to be a foodie, loved Ticino, loves her swimming, but... But Lake Zug is better. She comes from Zug. I struggle to imagine it, but again, I agree it must be so. Mental note- must visit Zug too. Perhaps I have hit upon a Swiss form of rivalry?

My thoughts turn from polenta to cake. The place I want to go to I have never been to before, but have passed, looking in, looking at the images of people who have taken coffee there, hot chocolate perhaps, cake for sure, maybe schnapps sometimes, champagne when there is something to celebrate. The names and the faces - Vladimir Illich Lenin, Albert Einstein, Frank Wedekind (who wrote the Lulu cycle of plays, which formed the basis of the libretto of Alban Berg's opera Lulu – I love the cool savagery of this opera), Somerset Maugham (he worked for the British Intelligence Service in Switzerland during the First World War), and James Joyce. I

imagine James Joyce to have swum at Tiefenbrunnen – how could he not have? While Sandycove is featured in *Ulysses*, much of *Ulysses* was written and was finished near Tiefenbrunnen. This, the Café Bar Odeon, was no light-weight place, and the cake should therefore be good, I thought. I briefly played with the idea of these great minds frequenting the café more-or-less at the same time –who would say what to whom? Who would get on, who would clash? I can make guesses, be entertained by them, but really it's impossible to know. Perhaps it would be the making of a sit-com, or a drama series? Perhaps its already been done? The café was all it promised to be – warm, welcoming, friendly, chatty even. I was placed by the window where the lone souls seemed to be placed, and within minutes was talking with a very engaging young lady with a warm smile. She was visiting Zurich for the first time –from Colombia, following the revolutionaries, political history, learning, learning, avid for learning. Doing a doctorate – how long along? The fieldwork stage, gathering resources, doing the Zurich libraries. And drinking coffee, spooning the froth from her cappuccino in the here and now with mindful care. This brief encounter, pleasant and kind, made me think about this, the Odeon Café, as a place of importance in the history of ideas. A place for chance encounters, for meeting and not meeting people, a place to be on one's own but not be alone, a place for quiet companionship and also for introspection. Yes, the cake was good, a Swiss apple cake with a garnish-string of red currents, each mouthful a pleasure and a future memory.