

LXV – 65@65

Stanley Ulijaszek - 65 outdoor swims at the age of 65

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Swim #28, Seebad Enge, Lake Zurich



Seebad Enge at the top of Lake Zurich, and is set in a beautiful location, Zurich-Enge. In the late 1800s the city of Zurich extended and modernised extending South to the Lake shores. The arboretum and ornamental gardens were designed and planted during this development, and the mature trees and well-tended gardens that I walked through to get to Seebad Enge are the legacy of this far-sighted project. So, feeling good, even before getting there. Pauline and I visited this bathing facility earlier this year, in March, and enjoyed the swimming, if initially surprised by the no-clothing-at-all policy in the saunas. We were reprimanded immediately when we sat in the mixed sauna in our togs – “no, no, no!” we were told. I have heard that there is a very strict adherence to rules and regulations in Switzerland. I have never really experienced it, but have heard it about people being told off for using the washing machine out of hours / out of turn in the joint utility room of an apartment block. It isn’t a ‘tut-tut’, or a ‘tisk-tisk’, but an outright Moses Descending From The Mountain With The Commandments – “thou shalt not”. Covet thy neighbours’ lawnmower; eat shrimp on a Saturday; wear garments not made with linen, that sort of thing. In this case “thou shalt not wear thy togs in the sauna, lest thy un-hygiene the fine smoothed Swiss pine wood of the sauna bench”. And we did not wear togs thereafter. We responded immediately, apologised profusely for wearing clothing, laid towels and stripped immediately, taking care, on my part, to place my cold-

shrivelled flower arrangement in a discrete way. Rules are good, of course, they help everyone know how to behave, to be on the same page. This way leads to comfort and security. The sauna at Seebad Enge is about comfort and security, and it is good to feel secure when you are stark naked. Thinking this through and in this way makes it a little odd – we were scalded for wearing togs because by breaking the rule, we were making other people there feel uncomfortable.

Anyway that was then, in March this year, and this is now, November, and I am ready. I know what to do, I know what type of bodily disposition is needed, to behave very modestly, silently. Coming in, I noticed the first set of rules. First of all, the word 'sauna' means wooden room, in Finnish. The sauna rules were thus in two languages, German and Finnish. Then the main rules, those that apply to everywhere else – the inner deck and shallow pool, the outer deck and steps into the lake. Rules are rules, and I will keep them. No togs. And do the swim-sauna thing in the order they do it here – sauna then open water, then back in again. Usually I prefer to swim before the sauna, as a treat in a way, or so that I can push myself a bit further than usual. But -when in Zurich, stick to the rules -sauna then swim. Shower before you do anything else. Wear a towel between the sauna and the outer deck. Having showered, sauna'd, I took the slow walk to the deck, taking a recyclable plastic beaker and filling it with lemon- water. Surprised how good it was – almost sweet (question to self – 'does the hot-cold thing affect other senses, like the taste buds?') At the out deck, the Alps and the water look very inviting. I am so warm I feel it could be Summer, so I take my time. I put the towel to one side, noting that I am naked in the middle of Zurich (as is everyone else around me), about to launch into the wonderful Lake Zurich again. The water doesn't bite immediately – too warm from the sauna. It takes a minute or so for my mind to work out that yes, my body is in cold water. From relaxed and warm to cold and contracted to relaxing and stretching out from the initial cold muscle / can't move so quickly / the water feels heavy, to feeling comfortable and enjoying just being there, senses alive. Then back into the sauna, then out again and swim, then sauna again. Then swim again, I always like to finish cold, although there are mixed views and conversations to be had about this. I have had these conversations, in Copenhagen, where I am a member of Vinterbad Bryggen, the Central Copenhagen Winter Swimming Club. In free-wheeling Copenhagen, improvisation and a certain amount of creative rule-breaking is allowed and even enjoyed. But not too much... In Zurich, no. Stick to the rules, sauna then swim.

The whole process is a slowing down of the mind and body, and I think I swam all told around a mile, but it took two and a half hours to do this. If this isn't slow swimming, I don't know what is. There is a winter swimming club that meets regularly here, who put more emphasis on the swimming, but I didn't manage to connect them, and after all, this felt good in itself. I could be a happy Zurich-er. This all took time, and it was night time by the time I finished my routine, went and stood by the lit brazier on the inner deck and chatted with others, dressed in stripy Saunabad Enge towel or bathrobe . I showered and left, somehow reluctantly. Feeling good is the term I keep coming back to, and I couldn't improve on it - felt so good! I felt I had a (perhaps mistaken) understanding of why people in Zurich seem content – there may well be other things beyond the sauna-swim-sauna-swim-sauna thing, but for me everything comes back to the water.