

2<sup>nd</sup> equal, Poetry

## Graeme Bradley

*I am 34 years old with two small children and when not looking after them or working for a local charity, I head to the mountains. I love hillwalking and bouldering despite having an extreme fear of heights.*

### Head for heights? What's that?

Thick grey fog shrouded the summit as we approached from below. Finally, standing atop the mountain, the fog sank below us revealing a huge stone mound towering above the plateau.

HAVE YOU REALLY CLIMBED THE MOUNTAIN IF YOU DON'T STAND UPON THE HIGHEST POINT?

It was a question I had never had to ask myself before, but to me the answer was definitely negative. But how could I get to the top? I knew my fear of heights was debilitating. More than that, my body would shut down and fear travel through every nerve and into my brain.

YOU CAN'T DO IT! YOU'RE SCARED OF HEIGHTS!

I approached with reservation for a closer look. I could do this. I knew I could. But it wasn't about the climb, it was about the height. Looking at the steep drop onto the jagged rocks below caused it to start. The adrenaline is slow to kick in. First came the fear and dread. The stomach turns, arms and legs begin to shake.

It was time to go for it before the doubt took over.

TOO LATE, I'M HERE!

The rain had stopped but the rock was cold and wet to touch. Crawling through the eye of the needle, the rock came to an abrupt end and the drop came into full view, eerily coated in the fog sweeping over the surface far below. The adrenaline arrived just in time.

YOU'RE WELCOME!

Walk. One foot in front of the other. Left hand there. Hold tight. Right hand here. Push firmly. Left foot. Where could that go? There it is. Wedge it in. Lift the right. Not like that. Commit. Lift the right. Move your left. Pull. Stand up. Don't look down. Don't look down! Step up. Left hand. Right hand. Pull. Knee over. Get up. Stand up.

BREATHE!

That view! The sea of mountain peaks stabbing skyward dominated the north. The flat blue loch and rolling green hills to the south. And here with me, the relief to be standing at the top.

DON'T LOOK DOWN!

Height is not apparent when looking into the distance.

DON'T LOOK DOWN!

I looked down.

...

I panic.

LOOK UP! LOOK AT THOSE VIEWS!

It was too late.

Then the realisation. How to get down. Can I get down? Where do I start? Do I face forward or back?

How long would I be up here? How much food do I have? Couldn't I just jump onto the plateau? I look over that side to see if I could make it.

NOPE!

I wonder how many people have had the same fear, the same dread, the same doubt, not of getting up, but of getting down?

Would I have to spend the rest of my life here? Have supplies brought up to me to build a shelter. Food. Clothing. Phone charger. I would become a local tourist attraction - 'The guy on the rock'. I would go viral online. Become a celebrity. People would climb to the top to take photos with me. I could make small talk with visitors. Meet people from all over the world.

REALLY?

No chance. Let's go down.

By now the stone is slightly drier against the palm of my hand.

BREATHE.