

Oleg Sentsov: 'Autobiography'

I was born on Monday the 13th. I guess that's why I've had such a fun life.

My childhood was like any childhood, a happy time. I grew up in a village, in a semi-educated family: my mother was a nursery school teacher, my father a driver. We didn't have much money, but I only have good memories.

I did well in school, was top of the class. I read a lot. Did my homework, but wasn't a swot, I got by with a good memory and a thirst for knowledge. I was an outsider in my class. Skinny. I got beat up.

When I was twelve I got a really bad cold. It led to complications with my legs, I developed polyarthritis and they got paralysed. After half a year of treatment, I started walking again.

In my final years in high school I would argue with my teachers, sometimes on the topic we were discussing, sometimes just out of insolence – I can't stand people who think they're smarter than everyone else but really aren't. I began to fit in better at school with the cool kids, started to hang out with the troublemakers, and life started to take on new dimensions. I got into sport, although the doctors warned against it. Medicine gave up on me, and I gave up on it. I got stronger and tougher.

After school I moved to the city of S. to study at college, a prestigious place, and applied for a state-funded place. They didn't want to accept my documents:

'Where are you from, son?'

'From the village of S.'

'Did you finish school with a gold medal?'

'No.'

'Silver?'

'No.'

'So what do want from us?'

'To study!'

So I studied on my own. Scraped in with the bare minimum grades. The happiest day of my life. But half a year later I got disillusioned: the students only pretended to study, and the teachers only pretended to teach. I gave up on attending classes. Passed everything, but only just. I had a good time. I hung out with rockers and

musicians. It was fun. I had no money, but it was fun. Things will never be like that again.

I finished my studies. I didn't try to find a job in my specialisation (marketing). Nine-to-five wasn't for me. I'd have murdered all my co-workers by the end of the working day.

When I was twenty, my father died (I was only able to start talking about it ten years later). My carefree days were over. I had been doing odd jobs here and there since I was about thirteen, but now I really had to start earning. I worked at the market. I sold Herbalife products for a year, cheated people out of their money. I started my own business with a friend. I borrowed a lot of money and lost a lot of money. My friend disappeared. But I survived. That was 1996.

I worked as an administrator in computer clubs, and then as manager. I got into gaming. I played online video games professionally for four years. I took part in competitions, became the champion of Ukraine. I travelled a bit. I created my own gaming team, my own website, gathered likeminded people around me, and now I'm the leader of the Crimean gaming movement.

The last year and a half I've been busy setting up the biggest Internet Centre in Simferopol. I did it. Business is good.

When I was twenty, I wanted a lot of money. I didn't have any, and somehow I just couldn't earn any. By the time I turned thirty my worldview had changed completely, and money was no longer so important in my system of values, but I had it... I guess that's how things should be. I don't know.

A bit about my personal life: for more than ten years I've been living with the same woman. I'm married to her. I've got two little kids with her. I love them all.

I never dreamed of becoming a filmmaker. But I've loved movies since I was a kid. Good movies. The older I got, the more I educated myself about films, and the more refined my cinematic tastes became. The more I matured, the narrower the circle of people I could talk to about films got. Today, there are only two or three people left.

I've always read books. A lot of books. At school I wrote essays. Always got top marks for them. After I got into gaming, I started writing articles about it, my thoughts just built up inside me, I couldn't hold them back. And as my beloved Mikhail Mikhalych Zhvanetsky used to say: 'writing is like pissing, you should do it when you no longer have the will to hold it in'. I no longer had the will to hold it in, and I did have the will to write. At first, it all came out wrong somehow, though it was fun. After writing about ten articles, I had refined my technique and found my own style. I wrote a couple of stories or essays – I don't really know what to call them myself. Now I'm writing a book.

I want to make films. My thoughts are building up again, and paper just isn't as expressive as celluloid. I'm trying to get onto a directing course. It seems like a pretty good one. If I don't get on it, then I'll go ahead anyway, on my own, without any preparation – it won't for the first time.

I don't like Grebenshchikov much, but once he said something interesting in answer to a question about his musical education: 'thirty years of listening to music and twenty years of playing it'. I've been watching movies for thirty years – time to move forward.

Translated from the Russian by Dr Uilleam Blacker

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