

It's only a scratch

I have been repairing the damage I did to the boat during our short trip last autumn. There is a surprising amount of it when you get up close and start to examine it but it's not all bad news. It turns out that rusty scratches and scrapes are a bit like music and perfume in that they bring back detailed memories to savour and roll around the mind. Admittedly, most of the memories that I am talking about here were tainted by fear, embarrassment and a strong sense of my own incompetence as I

bashed the boat into wharfs, trees, fences and the occasional other boat. (Don't tell anybody about that last bit.) However, it's the painful memories, the ones that recall what didn't go so smoothly that stay with us for longer and they mellow with time.

The scars on the boat remind me that the bad times rarely prevail anyway and mostly we find ourselves looking back on them with a positive slant. Relief that they are over, laughter at our own stupidity, an understanding of how easy it is to get things out of

proportion at the time. Bad memories will often trigger good ones too. When we were being blown against that horrible rusty old Armco barrier and the expensive paint was being stripped away with a horrible screeching sound, that was when the lovely hire boat couple came and rescued us. We enjoyed some really great times with Chris and Steph over the next forty eight hours, proof that losing a bit of paint isn't necessarily the disaster it feels like at the time.



Patchwork

I was a bit apprehensive about tackling the paint repairs as it was probably forty years since I had last done anything like it. Attacking our beautiful girl with power tools and wire brushes seemed counter intuitive but like so many things, the anticipation was far worse than the reality. I tentatively applied the screaming sanding tool to the first rusty patch and almost immediately felt

much better. What had felt like an aggressive invasive process very quickly turned into a healing one. It dawned on me that having done the damage in the first place it would be cathartic to repair it and make good my early blunders. As I progressed along the side of the hull I relived each damaging impact. I heard the sickening scrunching sound of concrete on steel and regretted not having tackled the repairs more quickly.



Re-living the damage

The rust was like a screeching voice, berating me for my lack of urgency and my timidity in not getting to grips with the job sooner. “A stitch in time” became my irritating mantra running around my head as I worked. But as I applied the first coat of primer paint my whole mood changed to one of achievement. The memories of those awful moments as I closed my

eyes, not wanting to see what damage I had done were replaced with ones of beautiful bright afternoons gliding along on sun dappled water. I found I could only remember the good times. The vibrant flash of blue as a kingfisher zipped along in front of us or the expectant heron reluctantly giving up his hungry vigil, rising on lazy gigantic wings to find a quieter fishing spot. The sense of satisfaction and achievement at the end of the hard day and the glorious first sip of a well earned pint in a canalside pub.



Oops! I remember
that one.

I have absolutely no doubt that there will be plenty of incidents this summer that will result in more paint being lost. I am hoping that as we get more skilled at manoeuvring they will become less frequent but even so I won't be quite so precious from now on. The scars I have covered up will remain visible due to my lack of professional skills but they will

serve as reminders of good times not bad. I will try to see them as minor negative incidents that form tiny parts of a much greater positive experience. Of course we could avoid any further damage to the boat by simply not going anywhere. We could spend the summer painting and polishing her lovingly and then sitting back and admiring her. But that isn't living is it?

The more I worked on repairing the boat and the more I realised how like life she is. Life is all about those knocks and scrapes.

Without scars to remind us of life's challenges and how we survived them what is the point. That's why we will be off in a few weeks to time to scrape some more paint off the boat and make some more memories in the process. I might take a pot of paint and a brush with me this time though.