

Writing back

Irish Author Nigel David Kelly on how helping to launch a new publishing house has helped him battle with his own devastating disability

Irish Author and Mensan Nigel David Kelly has helped to launch a new American publishing house. Nigel has contributed a chapter to *Firsts: Coming of Age Stories by People with Disabilities*. An anthology of stories by writers who relate some of their first experiences of being disabled, it is also the first book by the new American publishing house Oleb Books. (www.olebbooks.com). Nigel's contribution talks about his own experiences after being struck down by a brain tumour in 2013 – a rare form known as an Acoustic Neuroma. It left Nigel in a bad way. "It was probably just as well that I was totally unaware and unprepared for what a devastating affect it would have on every aspect of my life," he says.

However, he adds, writing for the Oleb debut book and coming into contact with its founder has helped him determined to make the most of circumstances.

The story of Oleb Books really begins in 2007 when Belo Cipriani, then 26, was walking in the Castro District of San Francisco and was attacked and beaten so badly that he was left completely blind.

For many people this life-changing event would have left them permanently detached and estranged from the world. But Belo is made of exceptionally strong stuff. He embraced his new reality. He completed his Masters of Fine Arts degree in 2010. In 2011 he wrote his first book *Blind: A Memoir*, in which he talks of the attack and his recovery to build a new life. Today Belo is a very busy man. Among other pursuits he is an equality rights activist for the LGBT, disabled and ethnic minority. He writes a monthly column, *Seeing in the Dark*, for the Bay Area Reporter as well as hosting a weekly talk show *Get to Work* where he shares tips and advice on career moves for the disabled.

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And now he has started his own publishing house, with 'Firsts' being its launch book. This is where Nigel comes into the story. A mutual friend of he and Belo, author David Elijah Nahmod, had known Nigel for many years. They worked together when David contributed to Nigel's first book, *Quentin Crisp: The Professional of Being*, in 2011. David was writing his own chapter for 'Firsts' and being aware that Belo was looking for other disabled writers, put them in touch. Nigel says that working with Belo has been a hugely rewarding experience for him, "Writing about becoming disabled has been a cathartic experience for me and has also expanded my writing skills. I had written other books, but this was a new style for me

and Belo became my mentor. He was encouraging and patient as I tried to master it." Since contributing to 'Firsts' Nigel has gone on to explore other new fields of literary endeavour. "I have written blog posts and conducted interviews for Oleb Books. So my association with Belo has opened up these new areas of the literary world for me

and I am immensely grateful to him for giving me the opportunity." Since writing his chapter for 'Firsts', Nigel's condition has unfortunately deteriorated resulting in brain tumour surgery in April 2018. He is now retired from his day job as an analyst/programmer. But he still sees an interesting future ahead. "I am now very limited in what I can do and can only use a computer for short intervals, but I intend to pursue my writing and have started working on my next book." So while life for Nigel is now very different it is still productive and rewarding. Find out more about Nigel at www.ndkelly.me and about Belo Cipriani at <http://belocipriani.com>