

Background

When planning this book, I considered several approaches to the subject matter. It became obvious, almost immediately, that treating it as a traditional biography, or ghost-written autobiography, was not going to work. Furthermore, a simple transcription of interviews would be entirely impractical.

The first, and most obvious challenge, is that the protagonist has an entirely different value system and perception of reality to most, and in particular has little grasp of the accepted linear passage of time. This is especially evident when he is asked to recall the chronology of events from the distant past. Distant, in this context, meaning more than a week ago, or in some cases prior to the start of his previous sentence.

This atypical worldview also informs and shapes his conversational style. He veers, with charm and enthusiasm, from subject to subject, via circuitous detours and bizarrely idiosyncratic word associations, resulting in a cubist collage of information, that rarely relates directly to the question asked, but is often insightful, remarkably candid, engaging, and hilarious. This voice – stripped of all pretence and subtext – is his central means of survival. This is the voice that connects with strangers. The voice that shapes his improvised lyrics. The story makes no sense without this voice.

It slowly dawned on me that my task was to somehow convey this voice. It would be so easy to lose in editing, yet often incomprehensible in direct transcription. After some time, floundering, wondering whether I had bitten off more than I could chew, I began to understand that the magic was contained not in his monologue, but in the space of pure candid human communication that exists between Karl and his audience. His audience is central to his story. Their engagement, on a daily basis, is literally the currency keeping him alive and travelling.

It therefore falls to me to adopt the role of audience in this instance since the act of writing and publishing short-circuits direct communication with the curious reader, and as such, I am obliged to become a character in this story. I should therefore explain how this came to pass.