

## Seconds to Live



This was it.

The big one.

I was on a countdown.

I only had seconds to live.

“Five, four, three, two, one”, IMPACT.

My name is Ellen Barton. I am 29 years old and a thrill seeker. Life just never seems interesting or exciting enough, that's why I create my own magic.

I don't think I was always like this. In my teens I found that I could get my kicks from doing all the normal rebellious things that most teenagers will try at some point. My friends and I would hang out at the park in the evening and mess about. The rage of hormones we were all experiencing at this time meant that someone was always showing off and making attempts to impress upon the rest of the group. Tommy liked to flash his body a lot. He would drop his trousers to moon at passers by. Disgusting, I know, but it was always met by great cheers from the rest of the group, especially when there was alcohol involved.

Cheryl's parents were quite well off and she would get far more pocket money than anyone else. We would all chip in and with Cheryl's extra cash we would have an array of buckie, cider and some rainbow assortment of cheap alcopops. In our intoxicated state we would be up for almost anything.

I had a big chip on my shoulder. Basically ignored by my parents for most of my life, I wanted to be noticed and loved using shock tactics to get other

people's attention. My antics would normally be to climb something very high and pretend to let go or jump off. Sometimes it was a tree or a high wall but I also liked to dangle from bridges and bedroom windows. How I never fell or seriously injured myself, I do not know but it was all worth it for the attention I received. My friends would scream at me to stop and I would hear them shouting "I can't watch", "she's a nutter", "Ellen's the best". I liked being called a nutter or the best. It made me feel accepted in the group. The next day they would all relay their story of how they felt when I was being "a nutter" and we would laugh and joke about my risk taking. It was a double whammy for me – attention at the time of my stunt and attention afterwards when everyone spoke about it. Ahh! The gratification.

Most people would grow out of this and my friends were settled with boyfriends, husbands and kids by the time we were in our twenties. Not I, the need for that "other half" or babies was farthest from my mind and I still had a desire for the adrenalin rush.

I attended college and trained as a fitness instructor. My first job was at an outdoor activity centre. Right up my street. What could be better for me than taking excited groups of people out paintballing, off-road driving and wall-climbing? Best of all I could use the facilities at a discounted rate and would often spend my spare time back at work tearing about wildly on quad bikes.

My love for vehicles and speed was becoming more intense and I bought my first motorbike when I was twenty one. My daily life was becoming a constant thrill. Sometimes I would leave work and take a detour on my bike before going home just to enjoy the buzz for a while longer.

By the time I reached my mid-twenties, I had changed jobs and started working for another activity centre that offered extreme sports. My new kick was ski-ing and snowboarding in the winter months. The summer allowed me to take to the water and surf or go out in the speed boats. Life couldn't be better. Every day I would be taking people out to meet the challenges on the ski slope or in the sea. Over-time was never a problem for me as I craved the excitement that came from never knowing what would happen next. I did receive a few injuries as no-one can escape the risks of messing with nature. My black, panda eyes and broken nose are in the photos from my first Christmas party at the centre. That was when I came off the snowboard and it rattled off my face. Painful as it was, again I got loads of attention which lasted for weeks.

My holidays were adventurous. White water rafting, parachute and bungee jumping, stock car racing, rock climbing, whatever met my need. There wasn't a better high than falling from an aeroplane and feeling that rush as the ground sped towards me or climbing a sheer face of a mountain and knowing that one slip could send me crashing down hundreds of feet.

The adrenalin rush was like a drug to me and I was always looking for my next fix. I had no fear and no regard for life. It didn't concern me at all that I was taking greater and greater risks. My only care was to be noticed by the people around me and see the look on their faces when I told them about my latest challenge.

I wasn't aware that although people noticed me, they actually found me annoying as well. This became apparent when I overheard a few work mates discussing my weekend's events in the locker room. I had forgotten my bike

helmet and returned to hear my name being mentioned. I stopped at the door and listened to the conversation “Ellen thinks she so cool”, “I know, always boasting about how daring she is”, “Quite sad really, she doesn’t have anyone, no real friends”, “Yeh, not surprising she does all those risky jumps, it must be the only fun she gets”.

For the first time I felt a real fear. Fear of being laughed at, fear of being disliked, fear of being pitied. I turned and headed down the corridor, the long narrow corridor where the walls were closing in. “They pitied me”. This thought kept repeating in my head as I barged out the main doors of the building and into the misty car park that swam before my eyes. Tears began to splash from my nose to the ground. “They pitied me”. The words echoed and echoed. I fumbled in my pocket for the keys to my bike. I wiped my face with the back of my hand and started the engine. I had no helmet, I didn’t care, they didn’t care, my parents didn’t care, no-one cared.

My bike roared as I revved and revved the engine. Disbelief was being replaced with anger. Anger at them. All of them. I sped from the car park and headed out of town. Faster and faster I tore along the coastal road. The tears smeared my face as the air forced its way past me. Faster and faster as I was whipped by the northerly wind. Anger, intense anger but now the anger was at myself. Why had I become this person? This sad, lonely person who didn’t let anyone get close, who needed to be popular, who needed to be the “nutter”.

It was as if my life was flashing before me. Those forgotten childhood birthdays with no presents, no cake, no party. Sitting alone in my room as dad didn’t want to be disturbed while he flicked through the TV channels.

Being told to go out and play because mum was popping in to the neighbours for a chat and a drink. Why had I moved away from friends who wanted to create their own families? They were right, I had no-one and they pitied me. I didn't pity me, I was angry at me for becoming this thrill seeking monster. But not anymore. This was it. This was the end. This was the grand finale.

I drove down the track that led to the cliff edge. Slower now. I felt a sense of realisation come over me. Was this what they called enlightenment? Slower, I drove nearer the cliff edge. I felt a great calmness, serenity, a peace that comes from having a great knowledge. Now I knew what to do. I had to end it, no more "Ellen the nutter", "Ellen the saddo", "Ellen the pitied".

The cliff edge was approaching, a little bit faster, nearly there. With an almighty rev my bike and I were launched into the air. I threw my bike forward and threw myself sideways and as I rolled along the grassy cliff top I counted "five, four, three, two, one", IMPACT. The bike crashed onto the rocks below. As I peered over the edge I watched as my bike was washed with the wild waves that drowned out the roars of the bikes engine.

It had been a close call. I had only seconds to live. Now I was dead. The Ellen Barton that had spent almost thirty years on this earth was gone forever. Washed away in the murky waves along with her bike. It was a new Ellen Barton that walked away from the cliff edge and towards a new life. She felt a great rush at the prospect of what lay ahead.