

The recklessness of being Irvine Welsh

Irvine Welsh has revealed just how close he's come to death thanks to drink, drugs and recklessness – before choosing a life more mundane.

The Trainspotting author believes he's cheated it at least five times in his lifetime and is now lucky to be alive.

Tragic events including the deaths of two friends in a stolen vehicle when he was a teenager, a fatal bus crash that left him in hospital and the passing of his father also contributed to a “nihilistic phase” in his life.

Welsh, who turns 65 this week, said he is now settled and more conservative. He said he looks back on the scrapes of his “former selves” like the actions of a series of embarrassing “pesky kid brothers”.

Welsh landed in hospital after an electric shock when he was working as an apprentice TV repairman after leaving school in Edinburgh. Around the same time two friends died in a crash after they stole a vehicle to get them home after a night out. Welsh and another friend weren't in the vehicle because they'd been hungry and gone for chips.

A few years later he was almost killed when a double decker bus he was travelling on to watch his beloved Hibs crashed and he was hurled through the front windscreen onto the motorway near Perth. Another young passenger, Mark McGhee, was killed.

He said: "I've had loads (of near death experiences). I was probably about 19 or 20 when the bus crash happened, and Mark was killed and it was a horrible death. As a young guy it's a terrible thing.

"I had a bad electric shock one time when I was an apprentice and I was hospitalised by that.

"I had a drowning experience in the Phoenix Hotel in San Francisco, in the pool, in the 1990s. I was saved by a vodka promotions model from Boston.

"They gave me her email and I wrote to her and the first thing she said back was 'I don't know why I was in that pool' – she was the only other person there – 'I think God told me to be there'.

"Another time, at a big rave in Chicago I fell down this mad hole. My mate (the Chicago writer) Bill Hillman just basically swung on the bar and grabbed a hold of me and pulled me back up because it was a massive sheer drop and I'd have been badly f***** up."

He said many of the close shaves in his younger years were to do with being "a tall gangly clumsy f*****r", being over intoxicated and reckless.

He said: "I was very reckless. If we were in Rio, for example, you run into these guys in a bar and they're saying 'we have party in the favela', I'm right up there. Then you end up in some kind of favela and you're kind of with this lassie and then her boyfriend or something comes in and then you're doing a runner on the back of somebody's motorbike.

"That was the kind of s*** that I would get myself involved in back then – I don't now. I've done all that, and it's time to be settled and a bit more conservative."

He added: "You live in the present moment. You think 'that was

a close shave' and then you just forget about it. Because most of life is quite mundane and regimented."

Welsh said filming two documentaries about his life – the first of which premiered at the Edinburgh Film Festival last month and the second is due out next year – had brought out "key points" in his life.

He said: "One was getting arrested at eight years old for playing football in the street. The other one was the bus crash, which was compounded with my dad's death.

"The bus crash was almost the start of me getting involved in hard drugs. I was getting involved with heroin. The old man had died, I almost died myself in this bus crash – and a young guy died in it – so there was a nihilistic thing, like 'what the f*** is this all about? I'll just do what I want to do and I don't care', basically.

"Another thing was that a couple of pals died when I was 16. We were all, four of us, out for a night out on the town and they nicked a car to get back to the scheme and they crashed on the Forth Road Bridge and they died.

"The only reason me and the other guy didn't was we weren't in the car because we were in the chip shop, we were greedy f*****s and went for chips.

"I'd just started as an apprentice and the old guys were like, 'aye, we heard your mates f***** died'. Now we'd be in trauma counselling and all that kind of stuff.

"It was the same with the old man dying and the bus crash, I would have had some kind of stress intervention counselling but you were left to go on your own."

Welsh returned to that darkness to write the second series of *Crime*, starring Dougray Scott as deeply disturbed detective Ray Lennox. The hit drama, set in Edinburgh, began on ITVX

last week.

Crime, written by Welsh and Dean Cavanagh, won Scott an International Emmy Award.

Welsh said: "The second season is so much better than the first season. It's a massive leap on from the first season because we were able to build on the characterisations and give everybody a strong character arc to build on Lennox's family drama.

"We've been able to smash it up another level.

"We want to do a third season to resolve it and that'll be based on my book that comes out next year, Resolution. Hopefully we'll start writing the show, Dean and myself, shortly."

* Irvine Welsh's Crime is on ITVX and STV Player now.



Irvine Welsh – Edinburgh International Book Festival – Day 17,
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