

A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of a forest. Numerous tall, slender tree trunks, mostly without leaves, reach towards a clear, vibrant blue sky. The perspective creates a sense of height and growth. The tree trunks are dark against the bright sky, and some show lighter bark. The branches are intricate and spread out in all directions.

**THINK
CLEARLY**

Annual Report 2023

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Reflection

Every year when I sit down to write my annual report, I face the same question: why do I keep doing this? What's the purpose? Why do I write it? And why share it with others? I'll get back to that in a moment. One thing I know, is that even if I had good reasons for doing it and sharing it, the way I wrote it last year was just too much. It took me until September before I was done with it. I'm still glad I did it, despite the enormous extra effort. But this year I wanted to simplify.

At their core, all my Annual Reports are about reflection. A practice I love. But I also get lost in it. Perhaps I spend too much time on it? Other times I can't seem to get started at all. And at times I try to use it when it's really not the right tool. I often struggle with it, getting stuck thinking about what each question might yield instead of actually writing.

But I still believe in it. I believe in the power of slowing reality down for a bit, which is what happens when I write. With the speed limit of my pen, all motions and events slow down. Looking at what has happened. Examining my reactions to it. Looking for clues. Seeing what comes out, and sometimes taking the freedom to write it in a different way. This is a powerful mechanism. It can be harmful too: For a period of my life I used reflection and journaling to put my anger aside. Instead of seeing my anger as a sign that I was being treated unfairly, I treated my anger as an unfortunate reaction in myself, that I should write away. Through writing I was free to shift the perspective just enough to make my anger wrong, and I could make it go away. It worked well, at least up to a point. I would still get angry, but first I'd simply go numb and then the anger would happen with a delay from the event. So instead of reacting in the situation I could sit at night and 'process' my anger alone, until I was able to sleep. Back then I thought it was useful, but I don't recommend this approach. Like alcohol or other mechanisms to make you numb, reflection and the freedom to write the world in whatever way you think you want, can be a form of self harm. That anger I was shifting away was here to help me. To protect me from the wrong that was happening. I'm slowly learning to feel my anger again and to channel it more responsibly. To say no and set boundaries, instead of going numb. I believe there's a chance of getting a bit wiser in life.

One of my reflections this year has been around the ever increasing importance of the questions we ask. This was already a big theme when I worked at SYPartners back in 2017, and it continues to resonate. With

Google search and most recently ChatGPT and other large language models, there's so much power and money behind getting answers. But we still need to ask the questions. And while there's currently a good amount of focus on the need to check the answers, I believe we often fail to question if our questions are the right ones to begin with. This is also true in my work. Often we spend too much effort answering a question before we have taken time to consider if it's the right question to begin with. Who is interested in the answer? Why are they interested in it? And what will they do with the answer? Other times it's like a game of Jeopardy where nobody has explicitly asked a question and yet we are all working on getting the answer. Taking a step back to consider what the implicit question might be, can help us focus.

In Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* (a satirical sci-fi cult classic) the mice from the fifth dimension want to know the answer to "The Ultimate Question About Life, The Universe and Everything". They partner with a firm to build an enormous super computer named Deep Thought, a bit like ChatGPT, although the calculation needs to run for 7.5 million years. At this point the supercomputer has not just calculated the answer, but in the process also become sentient enough to realize that the mice from the fifth dimension will perhaps not be happy with the answer, which has turned out to be 42.

This has commonly been misconstrued as "the meaning of life", however this is inaccurate. It is simply the answer to "the ultimate question about life, the universe and everything" which upon closer inspection turns out not to be an actual question, which is perhaps why the answer is so puzzling. The mice are thus advised to build a new and even bigger supercomputer to find out what this "ultimate question" that yields the answer 42, really is. The lesson for me is that reflection isn't a one off hunt for the ultimate answer. Nor is it a quest for the perfect question. It's a messy and human inquiry, ongoing and evolving. A question that seems dull and flat today can be the key to an incredible insight next week. Some questions can be answered in words. But other questions require action before it makes sense to write anything. Which brings me back to my opening questions about why I write these annual reports. For years I've tried answering with words. But perhaps the only way to find the answer is to just keep on writing them, and hope that it will make sense some day.

This year I will share a lot of the questions that have been driving my life in the past year. I will also share a few of my own answers when I feel that they are appropriate for sharing. As always feel free to skim, skip and read only what appeals to you and discard the rest.

With much love
— Mathias



Riding my bike to work on a cold morning

Dimensions to reflect on:

- Dreams
- Local community
- Politics
- Relationships
- Food
- Work
- Nature
- Family
- Health
- Home
- Things
- Fitness
- Mental health
- Happiness and sorrow
- Wealth
- Looks
- Clothes & style
- Travel

Where did I come from?
Where am I now?
Where am I going?
Where would I like to be?

You can ask these
questions for each of the
dimensions. I've shared
some of my answers
below.



Fire and ice



A family outing at an outdoor museum

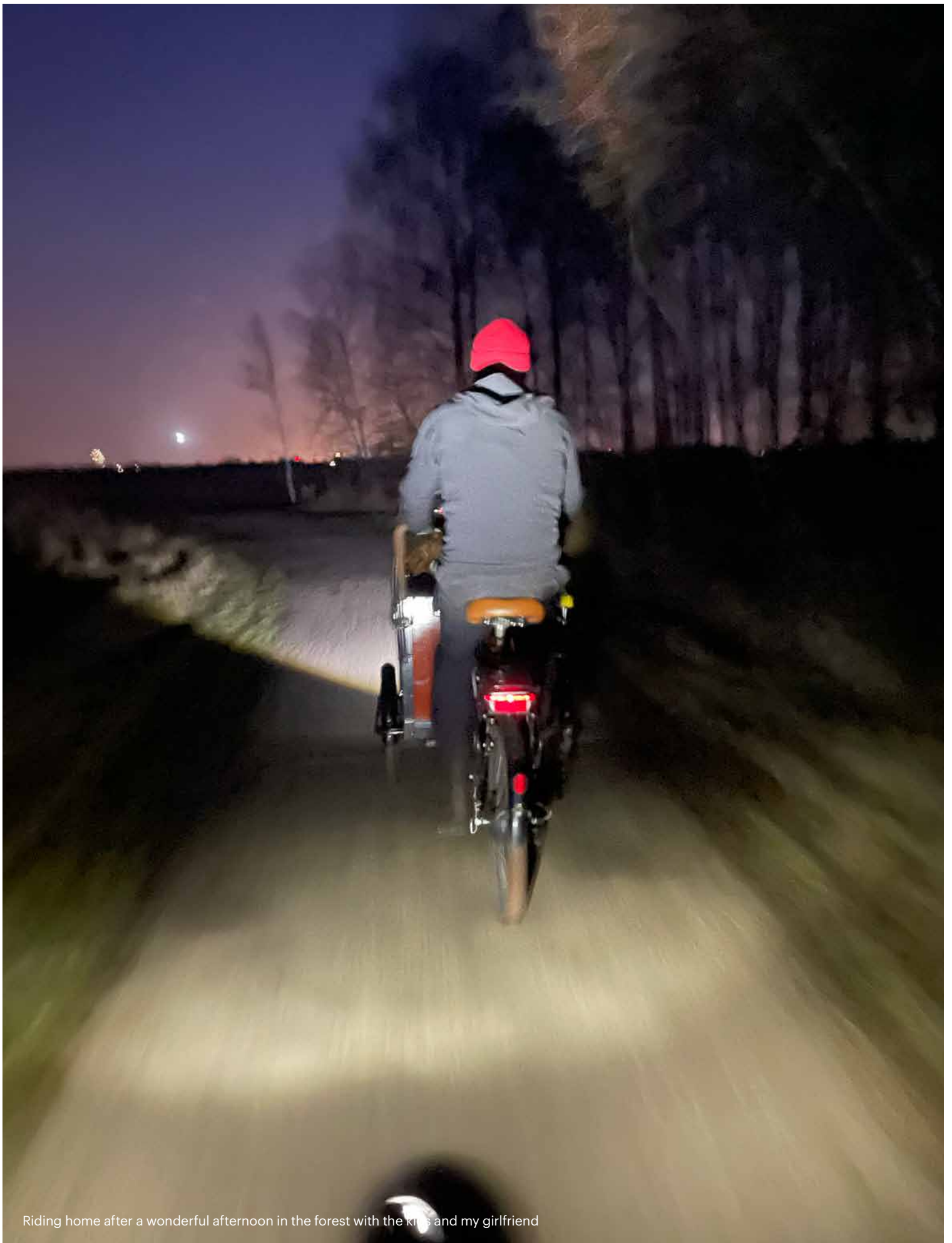
Relationships

Where did I come from?

In 2021 I got divorced, ending 16 years of steady relationship. I went into 2022 as a single-dad, exploring the wonders of Tinder and going on dates, exploring new sides of myself and meeting others. What is it like to be single? Who do I want to kiss? Why is it so amazing to have the whole bed for myself? I really didn't believe I would be ready for another relationship anytime soon, and yet something started to grow in the fall of 2022.

Where am I now?

On January 1st I told my kids that I have a girlfriend. They had already met her as "just a friend" but now I told them that we were together. She is now a steady part of my life. We support each other in living out each of our dreams. We can both take care of ourselves. But we can do more together. Everything is better together.



Riding home after a wonderful afternoon in the forest with the kids and my girlfriend



**We visited my
girlfriend and
made pizzas**



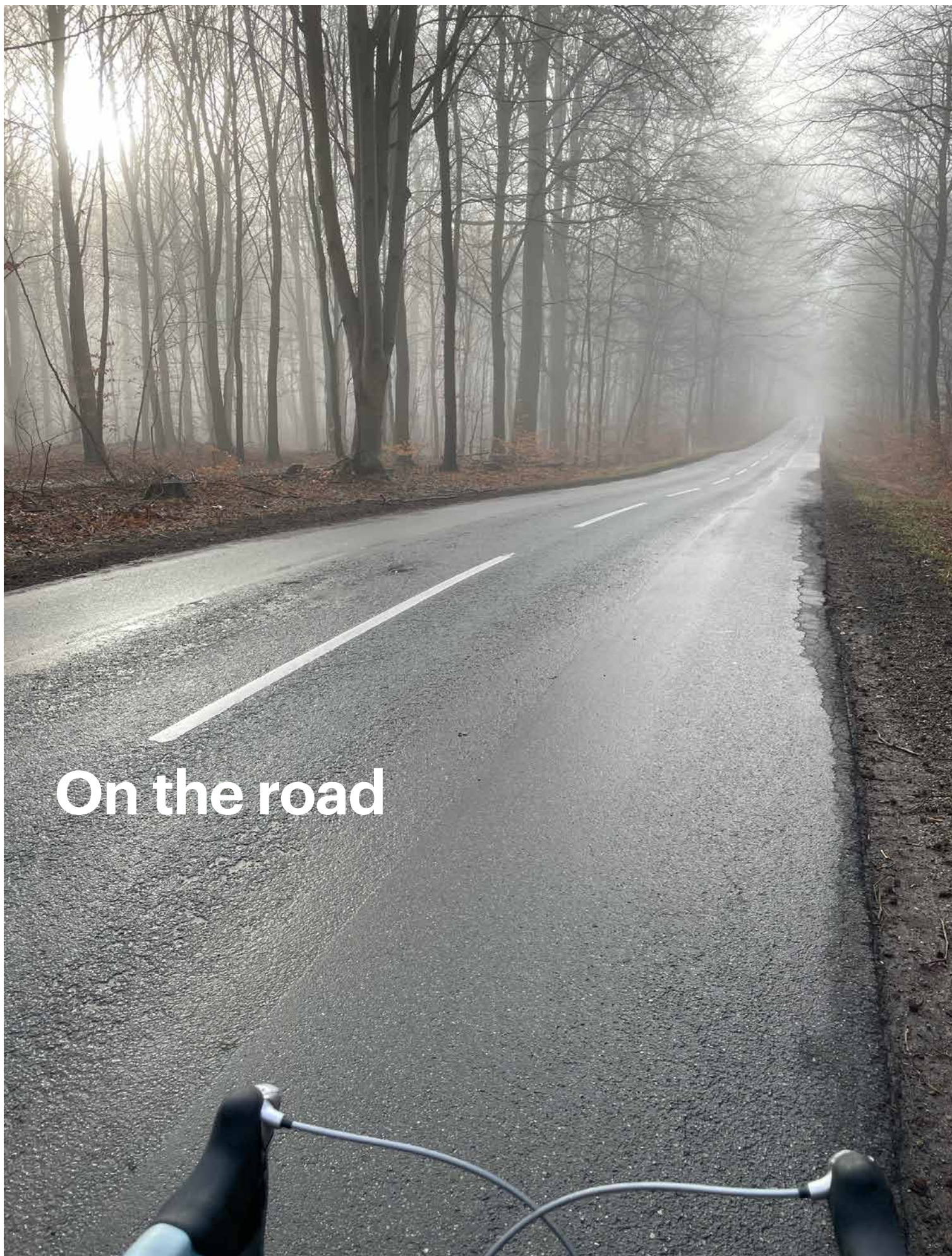
Friends

Keeping warm in
the cold





**Free dirt for
the garden**



On the road

Who am I attracted to?
What does attraction feel like? How is this different from what I thought previously? What are my fantasies about? How has this changed?

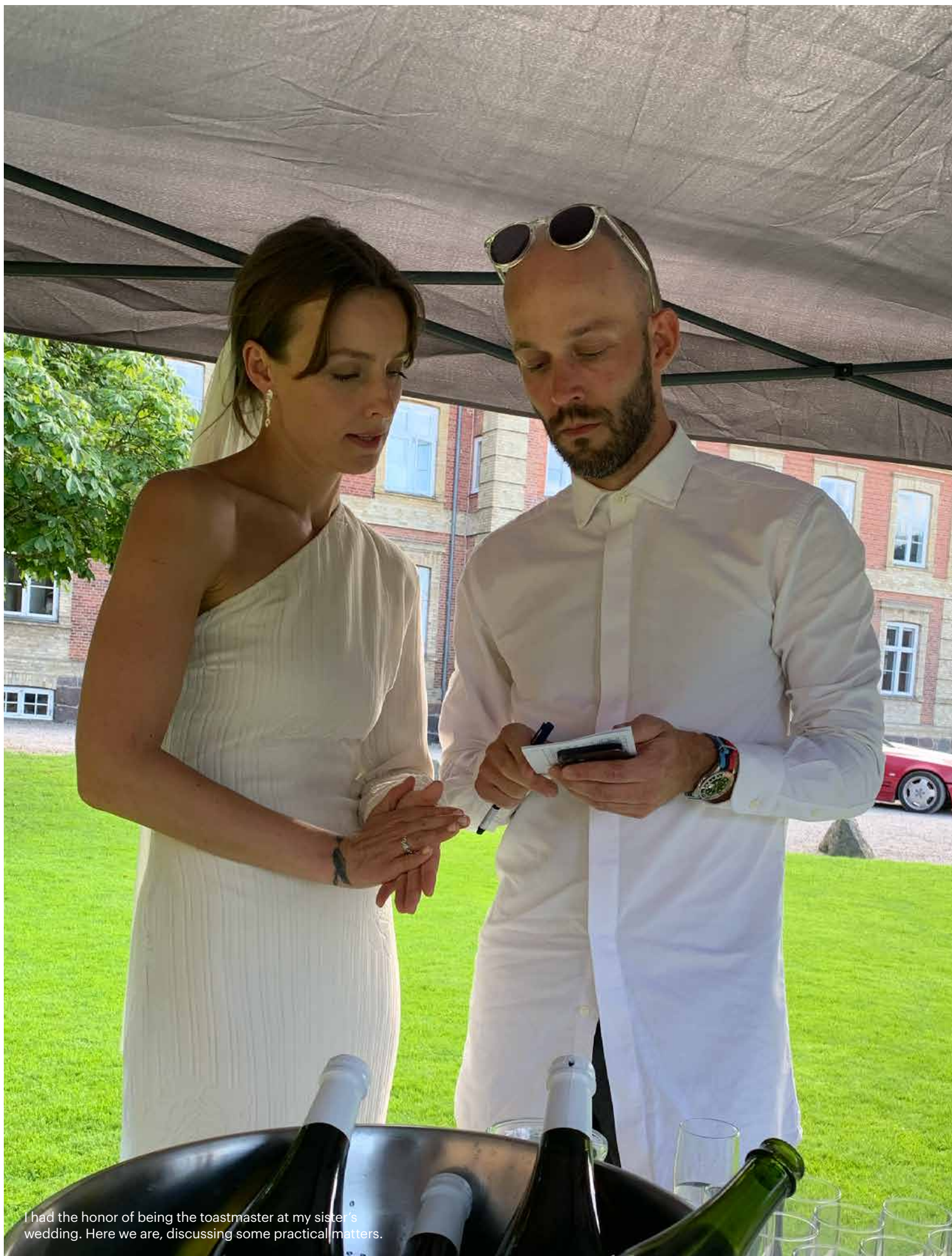
How does it feel inside me, when someone oversteps my boundaries?

Who truly respects my boundaries? With whom do I feel safe to share?

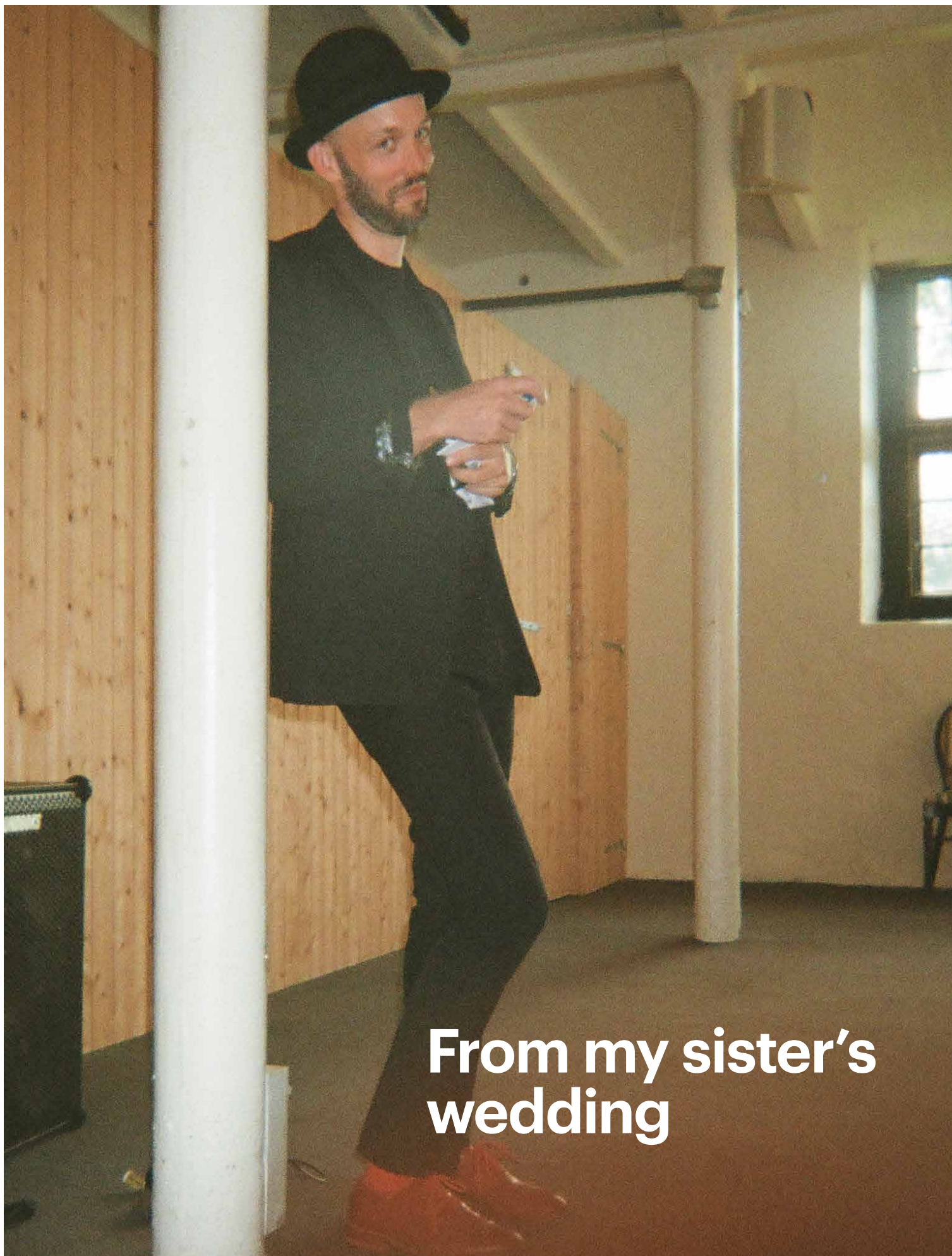
Who do I most want to spend time with?



On the way to Germany for summer holiday.



I had the honor of being the toastmaster at my sister's wedding. Here we are, discussing some practical matters.



**From my sister's
wedding**

Work

Where did I come from?

For most of my career I've acted as a consultant: in my case as someone who supports from the sidelines, sometimes by bringing a different toolbox to the table, and helping during times of change, before eventually moving on to the next thing. I've done it as a solo consultant with startup CEOs and cofounding teams. I've done with senior executives trying to get their minds (and teams) to think and act in a digital world. I've done it as part of SYPartners, working with top management teams, asking big and bold questions and helping bring out answers with purpose and vision. Since 2022 I've been working inside Ørsted, a green energy company, where I've been bringing human centered design into different business areas.

Where am I now?

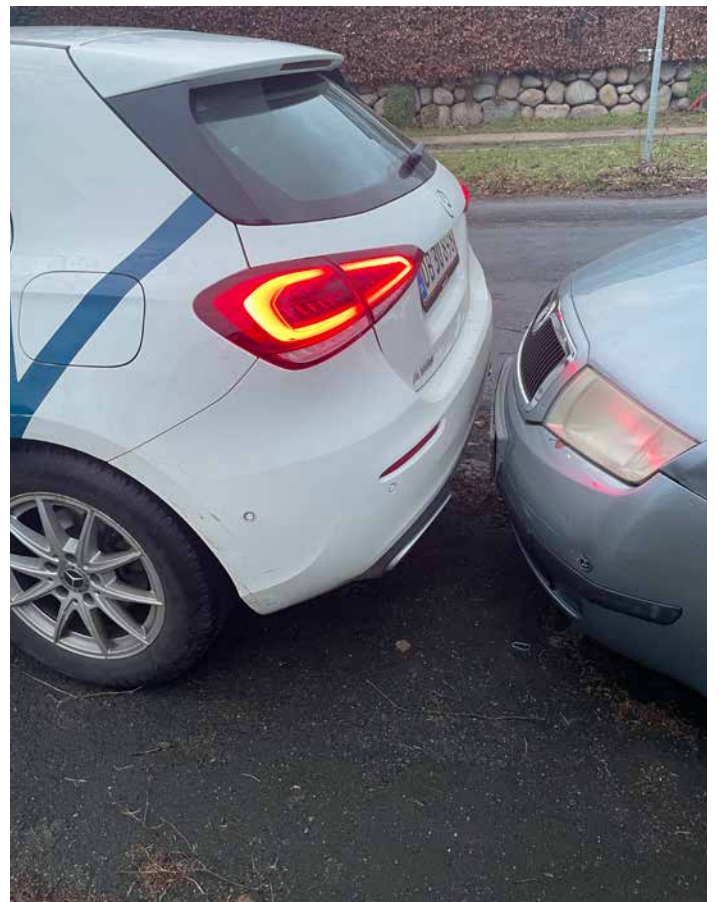
In January 2023 I was invited to join the Risk Management team in finance, and roll off all my other projects and commitments, in order to focus all my time on helping make change and improvements in this one department. It has been incredibly rewarding, interesting, fascinating and challenging. I'm still a foreign presence, in terms of the skills and experiences that I bring to the table. But I've also gone native in many ways, learning more and more about how risk management actually works both philosophically and practically. I've enjoyed having close coworkers that I see every day. I've also found myself in an area that has gotten a lot of attention and where many things are changing in fundamental ways, which has made it even more interesting. I've been involved in many projects, and at times I've still felt a bit scattered, but it has been much easier because all those projects are still under the same roof and they involve mostly the same people.

Where am I going?

I'm not sure about this. I mainly feel compelled to not go anywhere. To stay right here. I'm not sure what that will look like. But I am excited to find out.



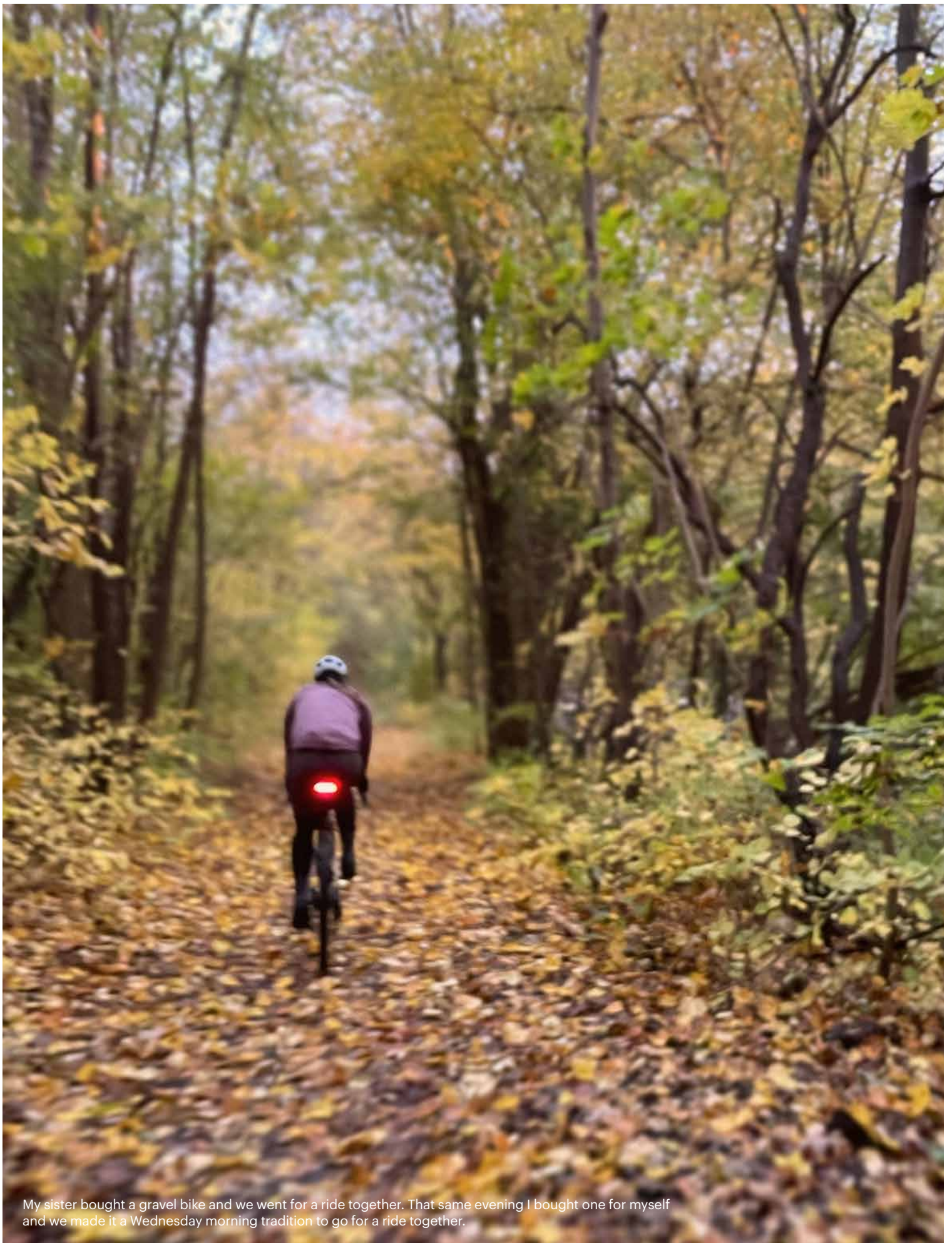
This year I participated in the DHL relay race for the first time in my life. I'm not really a fast runner, but I had a lot of fun with my coworkers.



I rented this white Mercedes for half an hour and when I was done with it I did the best parallel parking of my life.



Marshmallows



My sister bought a gravel bike and we went for a ride together. That same evening I bought one for myself and we made it a Wednesday morning tradition to go for a ride together.

Wealth

Where did I come from?

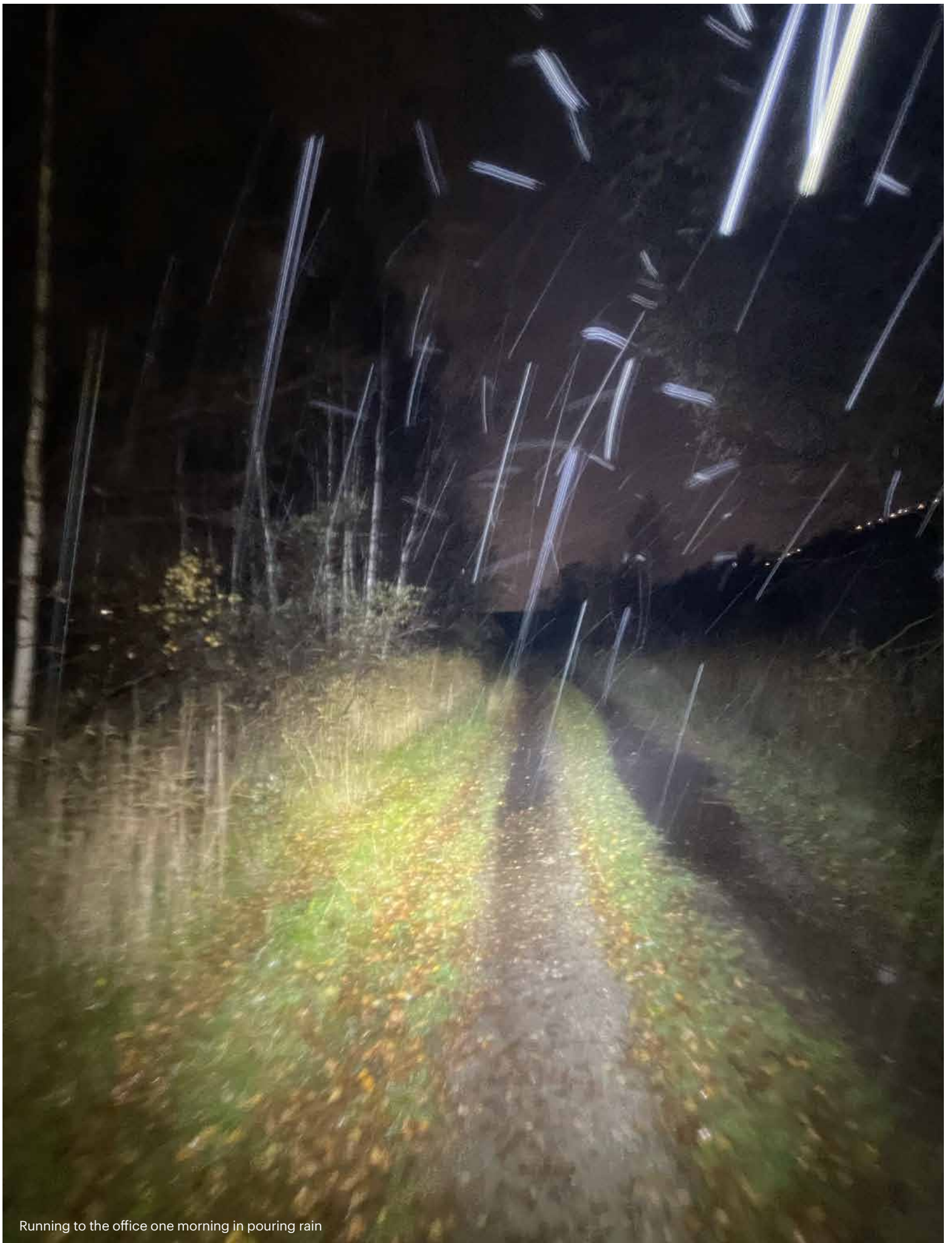
As a young man I was fortunate that my parents had saved up money for me. And because I was entrepreneurial, I was able to make money, so I rarely had to spend those savings, but it gave me a substantial buffer against financial hardship. Especially because my cost of living was very low. I had enough runway to survive without income for several years. I could also make big financial decisions without having to ask anyone for permission. Not all my choices were equally wise, yet, in the long run I somehow managed to be responsible. When I cut into my savings, I was able to replenish the buffer.

Where am I now?

A lot has changed. Following the divorce, I no longer have any significant buffer. And because my current cost of living with three kids is at least five times higher than when I was studying, the runway I have without income is a few months. Fortunately, I'm in stable employment, and I've been able to make ends meet while saving up a bit over the course of the year. I've also made some changes to our overall setup that has resulted in extra free cash flow month to month. I've increased my saving ambitions, but also allowed myself to enjoy the freedom to spend on things that increase my quality of life.

Where am I going?

Mostly I just make sure that my salary covers the monthly expenses. I've also done occasional audits of my spending, looking at the past 6-12 months and splitting it into different categories in order to get a feel for where the money is going. But this has always been retroactive, and not something that has informed my spending decisions. Going forward I would like to make a budget and get a more accurate picture of my cashflow and cost. For example, on the 15th of the month I want to be able to easily see if I've spent more or less than half of my budget for groceries. I want to put aside money each month for costs that are billed quarterly or annually, in order to even it out. I want the balance on my spending account to reflect the money that I am literally free to spend (this month) because I've already put aside money for all foreseen and planned future expenses.



Running to the office one morning in pouring rain



Arriving at the office after three hours of running in the rain



My niece Wilma came for a sleepover.

Summer holiday





My summer tradition of driving my dad's old convertible



The local church on Sundays

There's the act of asking questions and reflecting on the possible answers through writing or other creative outlets.

But there are also questions that we can't answer through reflection alone.

Questions that require action, observation, attention. That require us to be engaged in life and everything around us.

Xmas running with my brother

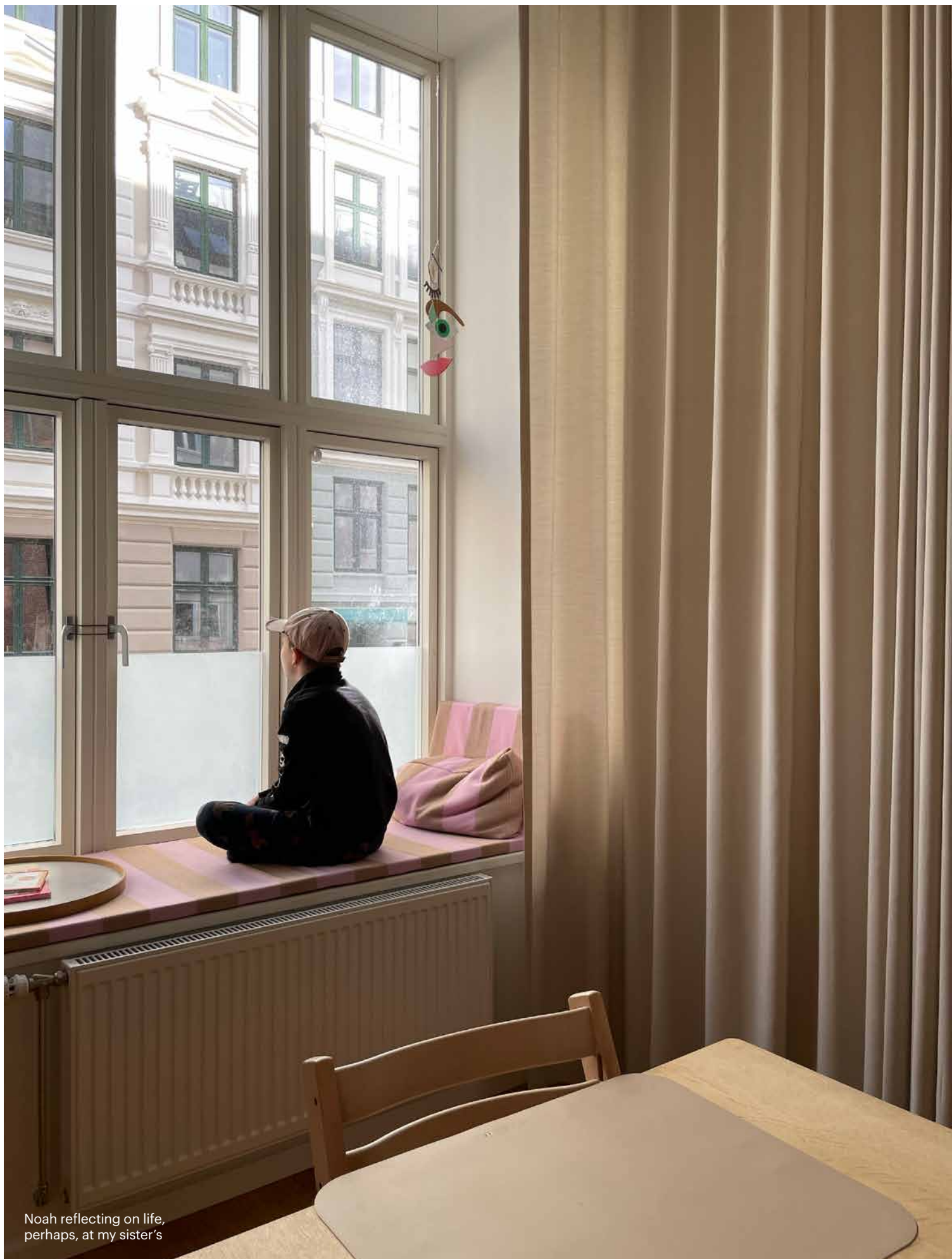




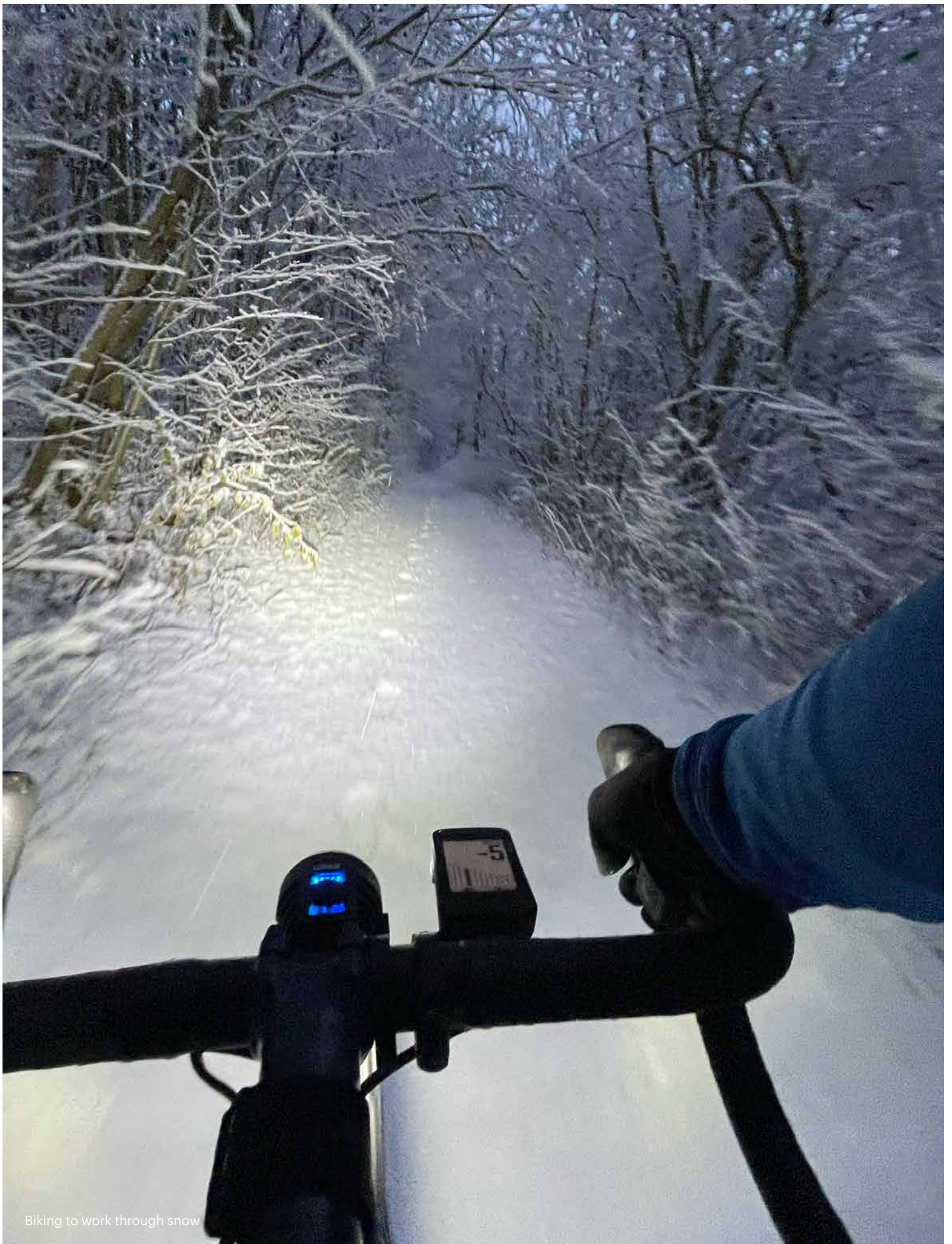
Hiking in Harz.



Who knows where their imagination has taken them



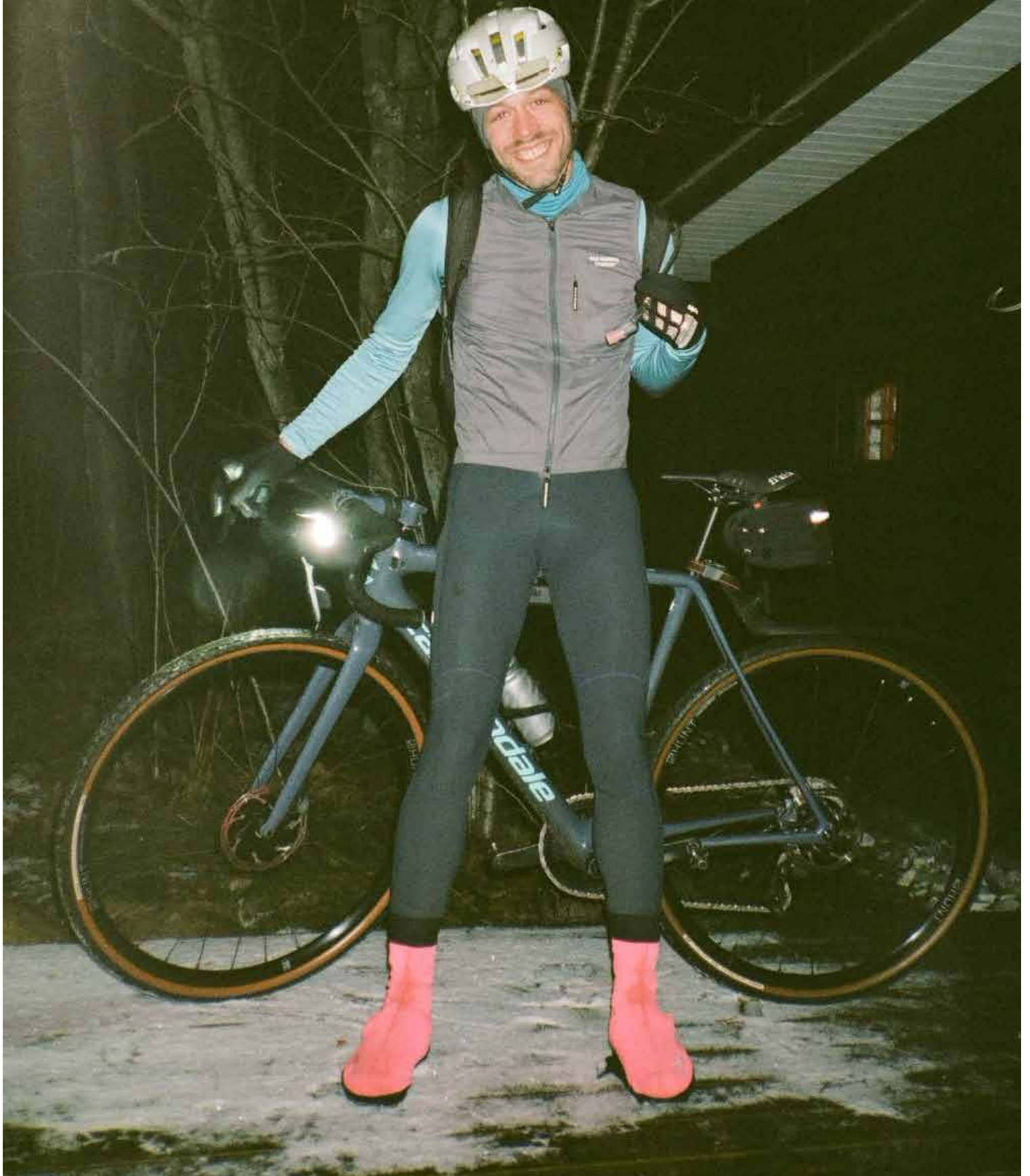
Noah reflecting on life,
perhaps, at my sister's



Biking to work through snow

How can I build exercise
into my everyday life?
What will it take to bike
in all weather?
What will happen if I
exercise for more than
10 hours every week?
What changes will I see?
What changes will I feel?

**After 190 km in freezing
headwinds**



Fitness

Where did I come from?

I've never been totally out of shape. As a teenager I didn't participate in sports or regular exercise, as such. But I biked 10-15 km most days as part of my commute, and sometimes more. As a boy scout we went on long hikes with heavy backpacks. I simply had what you might call an active lifestyle. During my decade in New York I biked a lot less. I walked a lot and often at a fast pace. I would go running on occasion. And for a several years I was really into bouldering. I've not measured it but I would guess it averaged 2-3 hours of actual exercise per week. In the past three years after moving to Denmark I've gradually kept increasing this. More access to nature means more enjoyable running. And better infrastructure means much more enjoyable biking. 2022 was a year where I had a consistent exercise routine, mostly mixing road biking and trail running. In 2022 I started biking in the late spring/early summer, once the weather was good, but kept going all the way through fall and into December.

Where am I now?

This year I kept gradually increasing my training volume. I was out on the bike from early January. No winter break. I got a locker at the office so I could bike to work and change into civilian clothes when I arrived. At first I did it only a few times a month. But as I got used to it, it became increasingly enticing. Around august, when my sister bought a gravel bike for herself, I made a snap decision and bought one for myself. Now I wanted to commute to work on bike every day. Before that, I probably did 3-6 hours of exercise on any given week. Suddenly I was doing 10 hours of 'zone 2' training just for commuting, and then weekend rides and running on top of that. I loved it. My body felt even more amazing, as I got used to it. It helped, of course, that my route to the office is also a beautiful one, through open land and small forrests. The hardest part was adjusting my diet to cover the calorie deficit. I also kept increasing my running distance and a few times I decided to ditch the bike and commute to work on my feet, turning the one hour

bike ride into a three hour trail run. It all culminated at Christmas where I decided to bike home to my parents and back. More than 400 km in total, in strong and cold headwinds, over the course of four days. It was an incredible experience.

Where am I going?

When I made the switch to commuting by bike every day, I also knew I had to really commit. I didn't want to just do it for a few weeks and then go back to the train as soon as it got cold or started raining. I wanted to figure out how to be comfortable in all weather. But I also became a bit obsessive. I barely had any days to rest. Some weeks my most restful days included a slow 9km "recovery" run. From August through December I doubt that I had two days in a row without exercise. Even when I was sick I would still go for a run. I felt that it just had to be and there were no excuses. And I enjoyed it. It wasn't like I truly had to push myself. It was almost as if I couldn't stop. One time, while biking through a dark snow covered forest I had a crash. I was lucky that nothing serious happened, just some bruises. But I kept riding in all conditions, and as I write this in early January 2024, my luck finally ran out. On a particularly icy and dangerous day, and despite my attempts to be careful, I crashed twice on the way home. Bending a rib in the first crash and breaking my collarbone in the second. I want to get to a place where biking and running are activities I can enjoy, but where I am also able to take the train when the risk of crashing is too high. Where it doesn't need to be quite as obsessive. Where I can rest properly for several days in a row, without feeling like I'm missing out.

My collarbone in two pieces



**Thank you for being part
of my life.**



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