





# EDITORIAL

Hey readers! I hope you're all well and enjoying the somewhat delayed sunshine! Not entirely sure what happened last week with all that rain in JUNE, but I guess the planet thought we needed yet another reason to stay inside...

This week, we interrupt our usual 'broadcast' to share a special edition with you! Three very talented Year 8's are sharing their autobiographical accounts with highlights from their lockdown experiences.

Tino brings the Welsh countryside to life with gripping stories that have you holding onto your last shreds of hope like they're the last bag of Doritos your sister is trying to rob from you... However, he quickly lightens the mood with his boyish humour. Oddly refreshing after hearing about the intense misadventure. Side note: there's an adorable baby animal involved.

Aya brings us a beautifully written piece, reflecting on both her current endeavours as well as fond early childhood memories. She describes her ascent to Kung Fu victory that brewed from a young interest born of family legacy which will develop and grow to become professional victory.

Liam brings us insight into what it's like to be on a football tour in Russia! The hazy early mornings, the "night life", the highs, the lows, as well as the

hilarious – depending on your status: the victim or the culprit – pranks and practical jokes.

These writers have clearly worked hard on collecting their experiences to create a rollercoaster of emotions which really give insight into their personal thoughts and feelings. They inspire you to look back on your own lockdown accomplishments and how you might retell your stories to curious young things asking, "Grandma? What was it like living in 2020?" in the year 2070. Although in future, I'm sure we'll squirm and shudder at the mere mention of 2020, there must be some entertaining tales to tell? Right? Surely? Hopefully?

Additionally, Vlada and Ryan tell us about a moving virtual speech given to year 9's by the brave Holocaust survivor, Marcel Ladenheim. He recalls his childhood experiences and discusses how we can prevent such atrocities from happening again, setting the young listeners' mental cogs a-turning.

As we move further into summer, it was recently announced that some lockdown restrictions will be lifting on July 4th. I'd like to just remind you all that despite this respite, it's still important to stay safe. Although the corona virus threat may no longer seem as invasive as it did a few months ago, doesn't mean it's gone. For the safety of not only yourself and your families, but

for that of other's families and loved ones, please continue to practice social distancing and take safety precautions.

School is almost finished, the weather is looking less bipolar, so enjoy the rare, pleasant British weather, but remember to stay safe and save lives!

This is the penultimate issue. Issue 13, next week, will be the last of the Rogue for this academic year! It's sad to say, but we'll be back in September so keep an eye on your inboxes next week and in early September.

Thank you, readers, for all your support, and thank you writers for your hard work! Finally, thank you Louis Kennedy, year 12, for the beautiful front cover he sent over for us. It's a biro, observational study done to support his A-level Art coursework. Can't wait to see more covers from you in year 13!

Later everyone :)

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# MARCEL LADENHEIM

On Wednesday, 17th of June, Marcel Ladenheim, a Holocaust survivor, gave a virtual talk about his traumatic childhood experience amidst the Second World War. The talk was for the Year 9 students as a result of the cancelled Holocaust Memorial Day. However, at first it didn't go as smoothly as planned due to many technical difficulties. As a result, Year 9 listened to his talk through someone else's phone through Microsoft Teams. Nevertheless, the audio quality (due to the phone) made it seem a lot more authentic!

Mr Ladenheim was very emotional when talking about his past. He spoke of his family and of the immense fear he felt when he saw his father being taken away by the French police. In 1942 his father was killed in Auschwitz like so many other innocent people before him. His mother was left alone with a two-year-old Marcel and was heavily pregnant, they went into hiding to avoid meeting the same fate. However, his mother was soon hospitalized due to stress. Marcel had nowhere else to go but was kindly taken in by a Non-Jewish family, two sisters of Italian origin, Olga and Esther Masoli, who put their lives at risk to save young Marcel. Even though Marcel was living through times of continuous fear, he still recalled his happier moments, especially the "glorious Christmas days" when he used to play with toy soldiers and toy cars. Eventually after the war was over, Marcel was reunited with his mother, but sadly that happiness was short-lived, as his mother was incapable of taking care of both him and his 4 year old brother. They were on the streets of France, struggling to survive until they were saved by the same women, Olga Masoli & Esther Masoli.

Later on, in 1948, their Uncle and Aunt came to pick them up and took them back to Manchester. Olga and Esther were like family to the two Ladenheim brothers, so naturally saying goodbye was hard.

Marcel was able to get a good job as a dentist after graduating from the University of Manchester and is now retired and happily married with three children and five grandchildren. However, whilst he is living the rest of his life in peace, Marcel knows that racism is still very prominent in this day and age. At the end of his talk, Mr Ladenheim encouraged the Year 9 students to never let his message fade, the only way to change the world is to remember the past and not repeat the same mistakes.

BY VLADA MEDVEDEVA AND RYAN APPADU



BY ZOYA LULU KIRMANI



## THE BEST DAY

Have you ever had that feeling of waking up at 3 am to go to the airport in freezing cold weather and then arriving in the country in weather that's even colder? Well today was my lucky day, well unlucky but I knew that this tour was going to be great. I was in my mate's car at 3 am on my way to Heathrow to go and represent my favorite club on a tour to Russia. I was in the car and I remember talking to my friend and he just dozed off, to be honest I was the joker of the team and of course this was going to be a long 7 days so I had to pull a prank on him! I cannot remember the prank that I pulled on him but I know that I couldn't sleep that day because of all the butterflies in my belly.

When we arrived at the airport everybody was half awake and half in their own world. My coach gave the team a quick speech before we went and left our parents, about our behavior and then suddenly he calls me up to the front and tells me that I have a big responsibility on my shoulders. I was wondering and dreaming because I was in my own world at the moment thinking about lifting that trophy above our heads and I heard clapping from the parents so I joined in. I was passed the vice captains armband and the smile on my face just grew and grew. Happy, overwhelmed I led the team to the check in gates and I felt like a king on his throne. It was all going well until I fell over and well that was the start of the trip.

As we arrived at our destination, Nizhny Nivgorod we had a long hour drive which felt like it was going on for days. All the lads where very tired after a long hard day of traveling and just as I was about to doze off into my own universe I heard a sudden bang as the doors opened and we arrived at our destination ready for a good night's sleep. We went into our rooms with our friends and prepared ourselves for a good night's sleep for our day ahead.

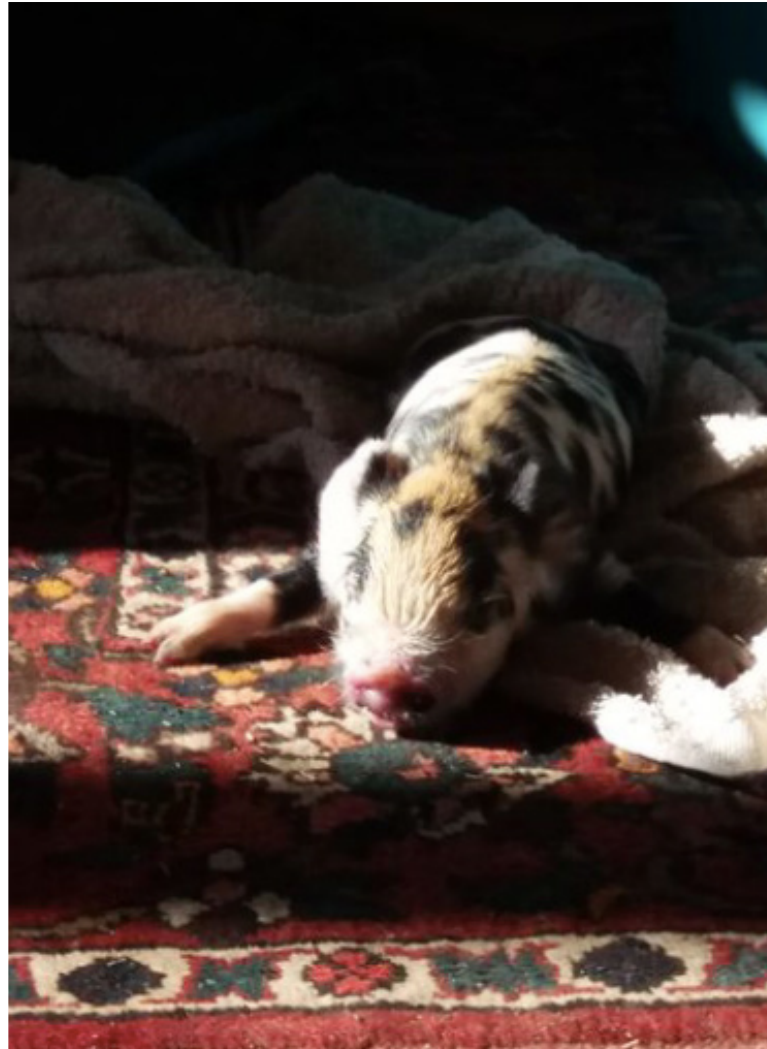
It was the 18th of November 2019 and today was the biggest day of my footballer career. We woke up at around 8:30 am so we had a good 9 hours sleep ahead of our first game against Moscow. The boys all met outside

their rooms at 9:15 but for my pre game superstitions I done a few kick ups with my socks to get my head focused for the most important game. In fact I remember that day, the boys where just relaxing on their phones listening to music. We had to meet down for breakfast and I was getting carried away with my kick ups that I was 5 minutes late but the coaches let me off because of what I was doing. The lads all went up for breakfast but I had to stay behind with my coaches and watch a quick few clips about the team we were playing against, I had to jot down some notes which would help the team try and find a few points from this match, after about 5 minutes I got up to get my breakfast and before a match I love to have scrambled egg because it fuels me with energy.

It was around 11 am and I decided to take the boys on a little trip around the complex where we staying on to get their minds off the game because the first game is always important. Remembering correctly I took the boys for a quick game of bowling which we managed to get for free since we were the only English club, we managed to get a game of bowling In before our match prep started. As we arrived back at our hotel we had an hour to get ready before we had to make a 10 minute walk to out pitch ready to get warm and be fit for our game ahead. Me and roommate where ready very early so we could get used to the new kit they provided us. A few mates where having a laugh and do knock down ginger on us so we decided to get them back and stand by the door ready to catch them. Have you ever been pranked like that before? I hope not because it's not funny, especially before our game that we was about to play. We asked our coach for a ball just to get used to the feel of it and we were just passing it. I gave it a quick hug just like it was my baby because I love to protect the ball especially in my position. We arrived at our venue prior to kick off with about 20 minutes to warm up and the tour started from there. In my mind I knew that this was going to be great.

BY LIAM MOORE





## MY TIME IN LOCKDOWN

*My name is Tino and I will be 13 years old on the 24th May. This is a part of my autobiography during the pandemic when I stayed on a farm in Wales. I am writing about this time when the lives of two animals were saved. This is a key part of my life and a memory which I shall hopefully, never forget. A big part of me says that I belong here, in Wales on Sarah's farm.*

'Pack your bags'! My mum shouted from downstairs. We were going to Wales! It was the night of the 18th of March. I got all my bags together and then dumped them down to the bottom of the stairs. I dreamed about what I would do in Wales, who I would see and what adventures may pop up and before I knew it, my mum was shaking me to wake me up. I slid out of my bed and quickly got changed; I grabbed a sandwich and hopped into the car just after 10 am. Since we have an electric car we had to charge it up twice on the way; I'm not sure how long it took to get there because I was asleep for much of the time, but I know that we arrived just in time for dinner.

We were greeted cheerfully by the tribe who presented us with a delicious meal after our long journey. Sarah, a doctor and a colleague of mum and dad owns the farm. She lives there with Tony, a 97-year-old Royal Navy gunner who is full of stories of adventures during WWII, and a number of other staff members and lodgers. Angie runs the show and Roderick is the most knowledgeable man I know. Mim is an osteopath, gardener and naturopath who is always on hand to help with anything from homework, making sauerkraut or choosing great films to pass the time. On the farm are other families both with kids and almost newborn babies too. Peter is the father of 2 little girls who is an Olympic champion in shooting. His wife Michelle is an amazing painter who loves horses. Certainly, there are enough impressive and fun characters here to avoid a dull lockdown. How lucky were we? On top of all the people, there are hens clucking around with roosters crowing and eggs being laid every day for fresh consumption. As my brother said, there are more sheep here than people with pigs around every corner grazing and begging for food. Murphy and Lancer are the thoroughbreds who graze on the pasture at the top of the hill. However, at the top of the hierarchy is Nance, Sarah's black terrier who truly is the boss.

The next morning, I woke up to a beautiful sunny sky. The cockerel in the stables was my 'alarm clock', the smell of bacon and eggs

got me out of bed, but the thing that I was really looking forward to was the hot tub and the eco-pool which is fed from the weir via the reed bed. The swimming pool had a slide, which came down from a big bank, and the diving board was about 5 meters high so I could practise all of my diving moves and flips. I gobbled up my breakfast with the 'tribe' before we all went up to the pool house and got change into our swimming costumes. 'First one in gets a cider'! Sarah shouted. Nancy, who is like a daughter and a best friend to her not to mention her nightly ratting partner, was never far from her side. The water in the pool comes from a spring which is usually about 10 degrees Celsius, so that is why whoever was brave enough to jump in would get a cider prize. Well, not me because I'm under age! Regardless, I ran up the stairs to the diving board and without looking down, I did a twisty flip and nearly landed on my mums head! After the pool, the steaming hot tub beckoned me to jump right inside. Once I was hot enough, I went back into the pool and for the cycle to continue.

Once we got out of the pool, we would usually go and feed the pigs and the chickens. One of the pigs was pregnant so we were waiting for her to give birth! Sarah went inside to do some work, so did my mum and dad, but I went and helped with the gardening. There is always much help needed on the farm, so I planted leeks, carrots, and potatoes in the green house to the delight of Ange. After a couple hours of planting, I went and had a jump in the pool again. It was so refreshing compared to being in the hot green house. By the time I got out and dried myself off, the dinner bell rang. It was pork belly with potatoes and salad. For dessert we had a chocolate cake with whipped cream and berries. YUM! Life felt good until the Easter bank holiday weekend. We didn't think anything could go wrong in this paradise.

On the Saturday afternoon we were all by the pool enjoying the sunshine as usual. Nancy was having her long-distance conversation with Sarah, 'YIP'! She barked as she scuttled around the huge north facing bank of the



pool area. 'Go Nance'! Sarah would reply to encourage her. Then, Nance would 'YIP' away on Llangunlo Mountain every time she found a rat or a rabbit down a hole. By dinner time we realised that Nancy hadn't come back. Sarah reassured us that she was probably in mud paradise going down the tunnels in the bank, but as the dark evening descended and there was no sign of Nancy, Sarah's usual smiley confident face turned more worried. She rushed outside half-way through dinner into the inky dark night, lit by the glorious starry light. Venus was particularly luminous, as if She was a torch guiding Sarah up the hills; the full moon was helping too.

As we finished eating dinner the unease was growing and everyone was trying to remember the last time they had seen Nancy. At eleven o'clock Sarah walked down with her head torch shining on her pale face. Some of the adults joined her again with Rabbit, one of the other dogs but as it got later we suspected that perhaps Nancy had been attacked by a mother badger or a fox protecting their young, somewhere down a tunnel and had met a nasty end.

We spent the whole of the next day looking on the hills for her. Peter raced me up the track on his quadbike to start the search again, this time at the very top of the hill. Unfortunately, all we could hear was the wind howling. Sarah looked desolate. I had never seen her like this before. None of us could smile. We knew how much Nancy had meant to her. We zoomed down the hill nearly capsizing off the edge of the cliff but in the end arrived at the bottom safely. We called it the day when it grew dark again. After 2 days with no sign or sound of Nancy, Sarah was giving up on hope.

Angie's Facebook message attracted two neighbours who owned Terriers with Terrier-Location-Gear, probes and spades. The special technology used radio transmitters which were placed on the dogs when they went down into the tunnels. On the second day of the search, we came up with nothing in the drizzle and grey weather. With the first light on Monday morning, the team started to

dig again. All we found were rabbits and no Terrier. A phone call from a friend suggested that water dowsers had successfully located lost Terriers in the past. Roderick stepped forward with carefully moulded wire coat hangers swinging in our biro tubes to try and find the area for our next search.

Roderick asked Sarah, to mark out the site she felt would be worth looking in. Sarah recounts the critical moment when she decided where Nance may be unearthed. 'My eye alighted on an ancient tumulus over one of the peaks where we had buried a much loved Terrier, Jake some 20 years previous. "Come on Jakey boy" I sobbed "give us a clue". Then I noticed his gravestone.... Muttering apologies to the Gods I moved the stone to find a passage leading into the Hill.' When she buried her head in for a moment, she thought her imagination was playing tricks on her. Was it a whine? Was it a lamb? Or just the wind? She decided to call the troops over with a wolf whistle who quickly scrambled up to where she was for the 10th time with all their spades and pickaxes, dogs and devices, looking muddy and tired with very little hope.

As they started to dig down the tunnel they had to cut through the roots and move stones for over an hour. We were getting nowhere. Again, Sarah thought she heard a sound like Nancy yipping, we couldn't hear anything but still carried on until Sarah tucked her head down the hole and suddenly, we could hear a terrier whimpering! The Tribe howled like a pack of wolves! The sound grew louder. 'Up a bit. No, down a bit. No, she's on the left. Careful with that spade! Forget the pick! Just use hands.' Then The Nance burst out of the depths, happy, muddy, wriggly and bouncy. We gave her some food and water but she didn't touch a thing. As soon as she got out of a tunnel, she zoomed straight back into another hole as if being down one for three days wasn't enough. Sarah's face was filled with joy and happiness. This felt as amazing as the Easter Resurrection story in the background!

The celebrations went on for days!! Nancy had gained a whole other level of reverence

for this great feat of survival. The Gods must be on her side.

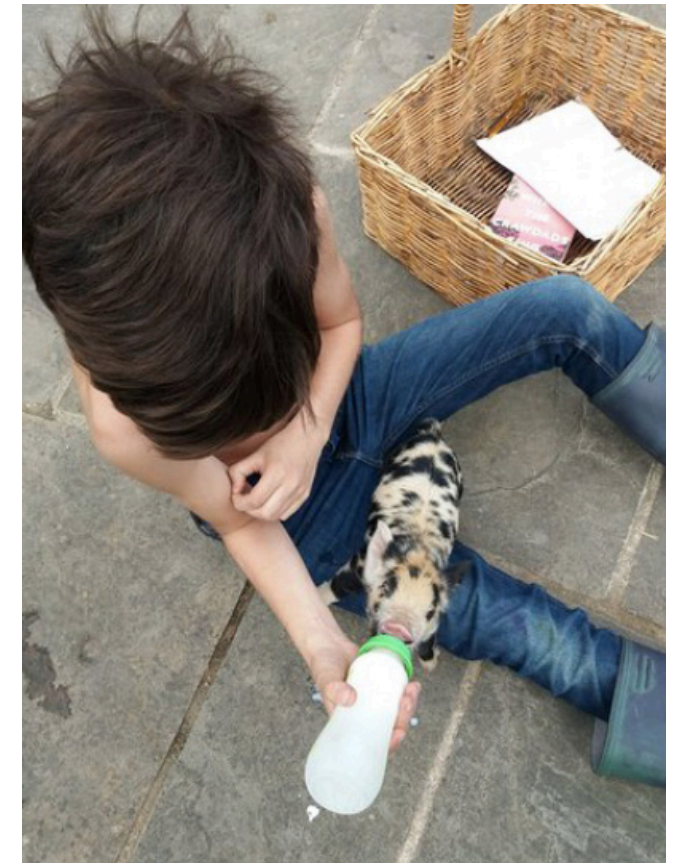
The day after Nancy's reappearance, one of the sows gave birth to 7 piglets. Unfortunately, two of them were squashed to death by their mother clumsily sitting on them. Another one was injured in the same way but survived because we rescued her from underneath her mum. I remember seeing this runt piglet every time we went to feed the pigs, who was much smaller than its other brothers and sisters. The greedy piglets were not letting her suckle on the sow. By the time VE day rolled around, she was almost lifeless, lying on her side hardly breathing and skin and bones. I acted immediately and with Sarah's permission brought her home. We managed to get some ewe's milk from the neighbour whose sheep had been lambing while Sarah dug up an old baby bottle. She was suckling weakly at first but with each drop of milk she grew stronger and started to feed more hungrily. It was VE day, so Roderick and Tony named her Vera Lynn! My brother and I weren't fond on the name, so we called her Piggy. (She actually responds to piggy when I call her!) We have been bottle feeding her since but she is still very small. She is a small, ginger and black piglet who sees the world as a big tit. Whatever moves turns into a producer of milk in her eyes! She wakes up at least three times during the night, oinking away like crazy for a bottle of milk, and then doesn't go back to sleep! In the end she crawls into my bed which is twice her height and snuggles up in between my legs or in my brother's arms for a nap.

The main reason I love piggy so much, is because of how small and cuddly she is. She's like a small barrel shaped money box on legs who oinks her little squeaky oink all the time.

We tried to send piggy back to her mum and when she first left, the house felt so empty and sad. But she came back quickly when we realised that she wasn't getting much milk at all. So, now we feed her during the days and take turns with her siblings to play with her. When she is in the pig pen, it's not the same as

having her sitting on my lap asleep while I am at 'school' or watching her running around the conservatory. I love it when she comes running to me when I go to the pen, squealing with delight. And then she follows me like a little puppy all the way home. Thankfully she is now sleeping with her family outside so we can catch up on our sleep.

I will miss her more than anything when we eventually go home, back to London.



BY VALENTINO KHAMNEI



# WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT? THE EXCEEDINGLY UNLIKELY ADVENTURES AND MISADVENTURES OF A RELUCTANT OPTIMIST (OR PERHAPS AN ENTHUSIASTIC PESSIMIST?)



*In which young Aya recalls how destiny shone a light along the winding  
(and occasionally painful) path of the martial arts*

Winter, 2018

The Kung Fu school willingly presented its familiar and unremarkable grey facade as my father and I approached, both of us walking briskly, hand in hand, and wrapped against the equally grey winter elements. Today, however, that comfortable familiarity was shaken and the place felt more foreboding – a sensation that I had anticipated. After seven long years of practice, the moment that for so long had been nothing more than a vague imagining, suddenly crystallised and demanded my total attention. Despite the chill air, I sensed a bead of sweat fall from my forehead, and gradually meander down my neck. Now less than an hour stood between me and Second Degree Black Belt elitism... or possibly the ignominy of a First Class failure.

My right foot wavered over the threshold: frozen in doubt. Any remaining confidence that had resided within me evasively slipped away, leaving a rapidly emptying carcass with a depleting sense of hope. From an unknown but welcome internal source I finally reconnected with the assurance that I had trained rigorously, and soon found my optimism burning more vigorously, kick-starting my limp figure back to action.

The Phoenix room (the venue for the pinnacle of my junior grading) was more or less an inflated replica of my socks draw: a chaotic excuse for something it's not. The imposing, claustrophobic walls were painted a dull and vaguely insanitary beige – staining the retina much as the lingering scent of damp cardboard suffocates one's nostrils. The flaking plaster walls were lovingly (or rather desperately) bandaged by an eclectic assortment of posters and other ornate décor. These ranged from elegant Chinese calligraphy and faded photos of past masters (some smiling benignly, others staring down with steely eyes) to oversize, glossy Technicolour posters advertising Hollywood's latest fascination with all things martial, in which a rotund and apparently inept panda stars as the unlikely hero. One particular poster displayed the most monstrous, most gargantuan, and undoubtedly the most obnoxious Kung Fu Panda ever inflicted upon

my sight. His conceited facial expression and flamboyant stance favoured an uncanny resemblance to my own Shifu (chief instructor). The revealed kindred ties extended, however, beyond their often vain visage. Just as the film director at Dreamworks had decided that Po's stomach would evince his love of dumplings, so too did Shifu display a distinct adipose tendency. Further, in our Kung Fu school it appeared that corpulence was worn as a belt of superiority, as indicated by the incremental expanding waistlines throughout the ranks of instructors. (This initially perplexed me, as it opposed my existing belief that all instructors of the martial arts were the content owners of impossibly toned torsos, wiry biceps and impenetrably self-controlled spirits.)

To start my warm up routine, I stood in my 'horse stance', and in grim isolation, towards the back of the Phoenix room – one of the Kung Fu school's three training areas. Unlike the simplicity of the Tiger room, and the larger Dragon room, which both bore daily witness to the countless stretches, grunts, thuds and footwork drills of both stumbling beginners and artful practitioners alike, the Phoenix room presented a bemusing combination of sights, sounds and scents that assaulted the senses with a forceful impact not unlike that of a zealous training partner intent on laying you flat.

A disarray of firmly corrugated, stout brown and crumpled cardboard boxes had been hastily discarded on top of the school's main toilet cubicle, which was squashed incongruously into the corner of the Phoenix room. These heaped, faded boxes were unstably piled, like a set of antique dishes that you happened to find resting uneasily beside a skip. They shared this lofty platform with some broken electric fans, stacks of out-of-date promotional pamphlets, lethal butterfly knives, wooden practice katanas, and a cavernous sack of pungent training mitts that could hammer the students' olfactory senses as forcefully as a cantankerous, charging cow. This erratic assortment of miscellaneous items caused many students, myself included, unwanted distraction and discomfort throughout the duration of most



classes, yet the offensive sight melted away and became a mere, distant oddity as my mind resolved to focus solely on my imminent, vital performance.

Along the training room's left flank, a row of polyurethane 'Bobs' momentarily gave me the impression that they were eagerly leaning inwards to get a better view, before their ardent guises abruptly transformed uniformly into a vaguely stern but ultimately inscrutable gaze. Behind them, the 'wooden dummy', known in China as a Mook Yan Jong (literally a 'Wood Man Post') exhibited beautifully polished limbs, born from the myriad blows it had absorbed and endured over the years.

The clashing aromas drifting from the toilet behind finally lost their grip over me, as I gradually regained my full concentration. Similarly, the resonating echoes of parents chatting about the progress of their children and the commitment demonstrated by the instructors, which was annoyingly emanating from the other side of the feeble partition that separates the Phoenix room from the Reception area, finally receded. At last, all distractions and obstacles were removed from my mind and I found myself (to my great relief) absolutely centred on the task before me.

As the clock ticked down to Shifu's dreaded entrance, I pondered momentarily how I came to be standing here.

#### Summer, 2010

The regular call to breakfast was as reliable, sweet and reassuring as the bird song from the garden. As a three year old, and living with my grandparents (whilst my father dutifully set off each day to painstakingly renovate the decayed hulk of a once elegant Edwardian house that would eventually become our home), I delighted each morning in inventing ever more creative ways of descending the smoke-green carpeted staircase. One morning I would walk down in the most civilised manner I could muster and another I would purposely slide down head-first, hurtling to my destination. Some drawn-out descents were

punctuated by posed fashion shoots, or even gymnastic routines. However, regardless of the absurd method of my daily descent, I was invariably greeted at the base of the stairs by an imposing yet avuncular figure (in both senses of the word!). His sepia toned and highly muscular arms would reach forward, as if to greet me, his face a picture of perfect poise and concentration, yet remaining soft and welcoming.

I would often envisage this ancestral figure emerging from his celluloid abode to perform an arcane display of the finest boxing arts, yet retaining his sepia form. Subliminally, I comprehended this was his spirited way of inspiring subsequent generations of the family to follow in his incredibly fleet-footed footsteps, even if we'd never reach his rarified standard.

Thick, black hair grew solely on his exceptionally brawny forearms, which created a sudden contrast from his otherwise pale, smooth skin. Though dressed in the uniform, black training garb of the era, his torso and legs appeared to have been stolen from separate sets; his upper body positioned almost as if it were to collapse of the sides if his legs – yet remained curiously solid. He wore supple leather ankle boots. These were bound tightly around his surprisingly small feet, and laced firmly before being bowed just above the ankles. Despite the blissful tranquillity displayed on his face, his eyes hinted at a long history of menacing threats he had faced and the deep concentration he had mastered to overcome them. This came as no surprise. Resting on the hip bones above his waist, the Lonsdale belt sat snugly: gleaming and immaculate. An

it quickly became for me both a fascinating curiosity and an inspiration. My great, great, great uncle Matt had, I fancied, taken a deep personal liking to me and, no doubt, wanted most earnestly to discuss with this three-year-old her future plans to become a warrior. Our silent conversations absorbed me greatly as I looked up each morning to this charming figure, framed in his never-changing world – so much so that my toast, egg or hot milk would typically have lost their heat by the time I danced into the kitchen.

Thanks to my grandmother's wealth of family heritage and her long-held determination to pass this on in perpetuity, I learned at an early age that her grandmother Blanche (my great, great grandmother) had arrived in the UK as an immigrant child, with the family's entire possessions folded and squashed into a single wooden trunk. Sitting in the back bedroom, it

In the 1890s, on the tough cobbled streets of Victorian London's East End, Blanche's younger brother Matt showed an equally tough determination to stand up for himself, apparently building a fearsome reputation in the neighbourhood. My grandmother once told me he had the softest heart for those he loved but an iron fist and a granite jaw... qualities that no doubt served him well as he grew to manhood and journeyed his way through a boxing career that took him from the amateur British lightweight title (with that imposing Lonsdale belt), via the 1908 Olympics, to the professional ring and eventually to the heavier Welterweight division. And ironically, by exposing himself to the constant dangers of the ring, his frequent personal battles as a pugilist may well have inadvertently saved

his life. In 1913 he headed on a steamship to the farthest shores of the Empire, with the aim of training for a World title attempt. After toiling through his intense daily training under the equally intense summer sun of southern Australia, Uncle Matt went on to victoriously claim the professional title of Welterweight Champion of the World. He lifted this prize in Sydney, during that antipodean autumn of 1914, just as countless other young men in Britain were about to be sent into 'hell on Earth', in the form of the trenches of northern France and Belgium – many of them never to return.

At only five feet four inches, Uncle Matt may have been short in stature (especially by the standards of today's protein-pumped population) but his prowess and achievements in the ring cast a long shadow of influence over the following generations of our family, and apparently touched my own destiny.

#### Summer, 2011

Perhaps recalling his own Kung Fu training from his younger years ("far away, in another world", he told me), it seemed to me that my father was even more excited than I was as we travelled with my mother to my first ever lesson. The Si Je and Si Hing (respectively titled 'elder sister' and 'elder brother', following Chinese cultural deference to their ancestors) both beamed their encouragement at me throughout the session, and afterwards I was rewarded with a Kung Fu Panda sticker book for my efforts. (As a four-year-old, I had not yet recognised any similarity with the school's staff). Yet from that simple beginning grew a significant and deep set of routines that pervaded my entire childhood. An enigmatic visitor at the Kung Fu school that summer looked down at me, smiled and said "and though she be but little, she is fierce". I smiled back and ran to ask my mother what that meant.

#### 2011 to 2018 (Winter, Spring, Summer, Autumn, 'come rain or come shine')

Twice a week I found myself training in the Kung Fu school, interspersed with extra

## 'I WAS REWARDED WITH A KUNG FU PANDA STICKER BOOK'

training at home. At the end of my first year I was presented (to my delight and surprise) with the coveted annual trophy for 'Most Improved Student'. There were more than 500 of us registered, so I figured this was a serious achievement. It was a small cup, some might say verging on the tiny compared with the brash silverware waved aloft by highly-paid footballers, tennis stars and the like, but the weight of its stone plinth created immense satisfaction in my five-year-old palms. I insisted on taking it with me to show my aunt one night the following week, when the kind of disaster that only five year olds can experience suddenly struck. I tripped on a loose paving stone outside my aunt's house and in horror saw my trophy tumble full circle, in sickening slow motion, towards the ground. It hit the concrete with a jarring thud, as time instantly recovered its normal rate of passage, and a chip instantly flew from the miniature plinth. In the clear sunlight of the following morning, the cup itself was revealed to be miraculously unscathed but the new angular profile of the formerly perfect base caused me intense irritation and disappointment.

From that point on, my Kung Fu progress seemed to accelerate into a slippery and intangible blur. The ever changing coloured sashes around my waist became a silken rainbow in my bedroom display cabinet, and my once generously upturned Kung Fu trousers receded up my shins, giving me both immense satisfaction, but also (for anyone familiar with 'Only Fools and Horses') a Rodney-like embarrassment. Outside the Kung Fu school, once frail saplings survived the seasons to become broad-leaved trees, the Summer Olympics of London and Rio both passed in a flash with all of their excitement and fanfare, while the government's never-ending austerity policies slowly eviscerated both rural and inner city communities with equal disdain, before the country tore itself in two with a leap into the unknown, and with angst spilling as one of the ugliest sounding words of the decade also became its most commonly mentioned. I found myself wondering how the word 'Brexit' might be accommodated by the poets of the future.

## Winter, 2018 (concluding)

And so, as my memory's fast forward mode suddenly hit the pause button, I found myself centred again in the present moment. Punches, blocks, footwork, posture, breathing, focus... routines both mental and physical, all fusing into orchestral harmony to demonstrate that I was hopefully worthy of Second Degree Black Belt status. "Nothing new to learn, just keep it all together, let it flow" my inner voice assured me, "simply keep practising until Shifu arrives". Except... he didn't! The clock seemed to complain in sympathy with my increasing concern and puzzlement, until eventually Si Hing Charlie (Shifu's 'second in command') informed me that the Chief Instructor had unavoidably got caught up in other business and had asked him to assess me instead. In a brief, painless moment I leaped successfully to the highest level possible for a Junior practitioner, yet I felt vaguely unsettled by the sudden shift of plan. On the one hand it was a relief that my skills had been found wholly adequate, and a joy to have reached the highest rank, but there was a gnawing sense of having been cheated or dismissed, without completing the process in front of Shifu himself. "I wonder if life is like this?", I asked myself, pondering what other experiences and expectations lay ahead of me that might not ultimately turn out the way that I would expect!

BY AYA MOUSTAKIM CLARKE