

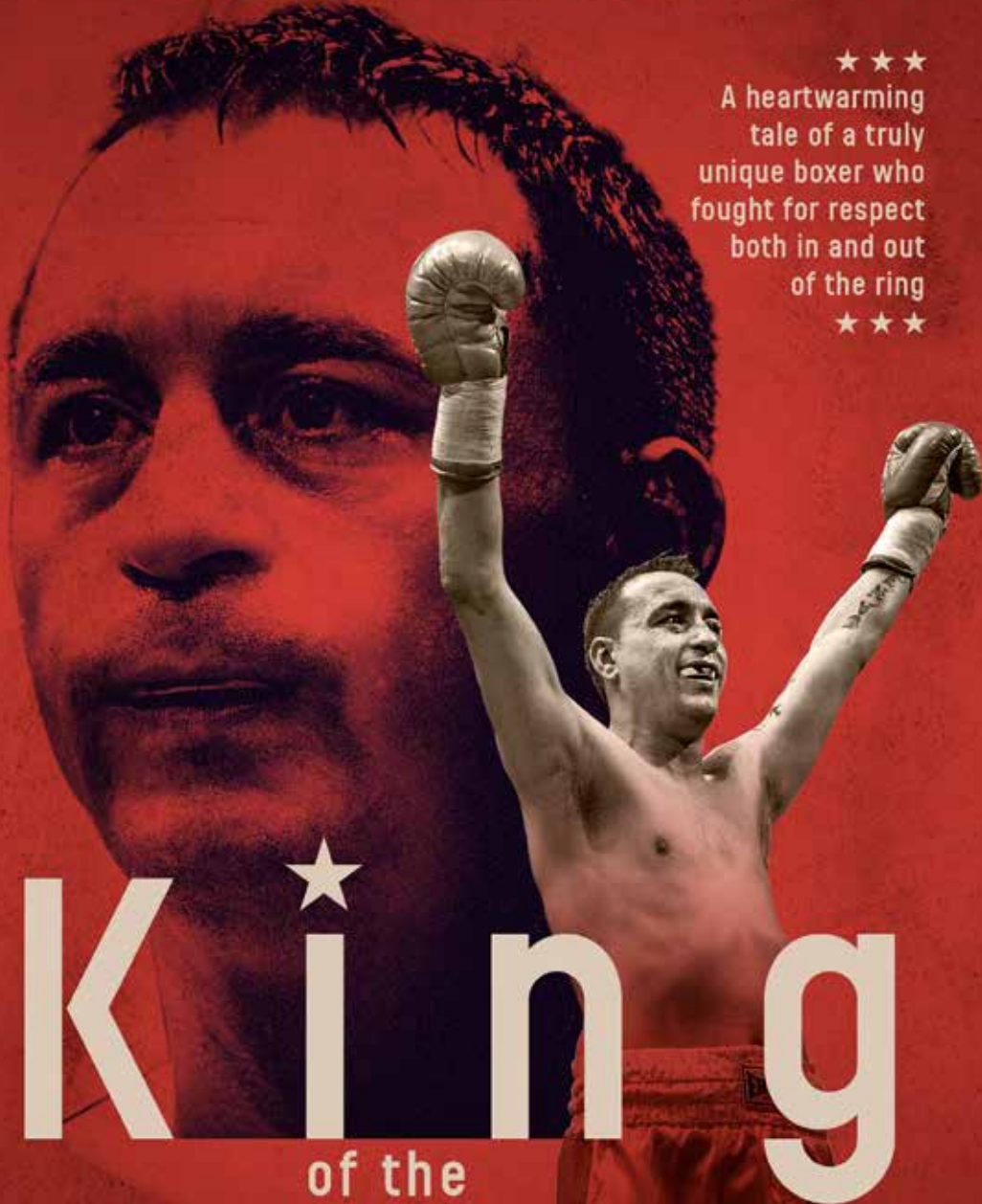
The Life of

PETER BUCKLEY

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A heartwarming
tale of a truly
unique boxer who
fought for respect
both in and out
of the ring

★ ★ ★



King

of the

JOURNEYMEN

with Chris Akers

K [★]**i n g**
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CHAPTER 1

Charlie Magri's jab

'Oh, that was a nice jab from Charlie Magri.'

Me and my brother David would always do commentary when we were boxing, trying out different moves on each other. This was a daily thing me and him used to do in the house in those days. The minute our mom left the house, I'd say, 'You wanna spar?' At that point, we would push the settee out, put the gloves on and start sparring in our living room.

Our mom used to go mad when she came home as both our noses would be bleeding. 'I told you no fighting when I'm out,' she would shout. But it always happened.

The fights between us would start off nice and easy. But they would always escalate. They would turn vicious. I'd hit him hard, then he'd hit me hard and I'd be like, 'What the fuck?' Gloves would be torn off and before you knew it, we would be on the floor fighting. That happened with most of our fights. My mates would tell you that growing up, when I was 13 and 14, me and my brother used to spar. Even though I was a better boxer than him, he was bigger and stronger than me and could punch a bit. If I caught him with a few good

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shots, I'd say, 'You prick!' I would get a broom handle and smack him and chase him with it. Now we get on really well but when we were younger, we used to really fight each other a lot. I've chased him with knives, cut his hand, and chased him with milk bottles. Just some mad things like that. We never used to really get on until we were older.

David wasn't a bad fighter. He would win two and lose one, but he was always in a good fight. Like me, he liked to have a fight. He would tell you himself that I was a better boxer than him. Even when we sparred I would jab his head off, though he was stronger than me.

Another thing we used to do, as loads of us in the area used to box, is go over the park during the summer and get the gloves on and spar each other. About 20 of us. Fucking loved it, I did.

My dad's attitude to all this was, 'Ah, they're just lads.' But when it got out of hand, he'd say, 'You've got to fucking stop now,' only because our mom would be doing his head in telling him that he had to do something about it. But my dad wasn't too bothered about us fighting. He had a big family, so he must have been fighting all the time!

* * *

Me and David sparring in the house and a big group of us sparring in the park when I was younger was not unusual for me. For as long as I can remember, I have always been a fighter. Whether in the playground, the ring, fighting with friends or with my siblings, I have always fancied a good scrap. Having the urge to fight has always been in me. I learned to fight within a boxing ring and made it my living for many years. I

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also fought on the streets during this time and moved to a 6ft by 8ft prison cell in my mid-teens.

I remember having fights with other kids in infants and in secondary school. I had fights in our house. My sisters used to pin me down and suffocate me. But I was always aggressive, even as a young kid. Even when I was excluded from school, I had fights with anyone. Even when I was in my twenties, I would never back down from a fight in my life.

How I ended up being in a lot of fights started when I was very young. I grew up in a family of 11 with my mom Elsie and my dad John. My mother was originally from Ladywood, an area next to the centre of Birmingham. She had a few main jobs during her life. She first worked at a factory and then she moved to Hall Green Dog Track, working there for more than 20 years. She served behind the counter in the canteen and as kids we used to hang around the dog track, eating burgers and chips while my mom worked. My mom always worked hard. After she left the dog track, she worked at my brother's father-in-law's catering shop for several years. They would cater for functions such as wedding parties, as well as sell food like bacon and eggs and ready-made meals, which my mom would make. At Christmas time, the shop would have orders for turkeys and my mom would cook about 20 of them during the holidays. My mom was a great cook and it was a great shop she worked at. It was a place that was always busy and everyone in Acocks Green knew who my mom was. My dad John came from Dublin and had a lot of siblings in his family. Fourteen sisters and six brothers to be precise. He and his family came over to the UK to settle and though some of them moved to Liverpool, most of them settled in London.

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My dad lived in London for a while but ended up making his roots in Birmingham. How he ended up in my hometown, I don't know. He may have been doing some jobs up here or had mates that lived here.

My dad was a plumber and gas engineer. My relationship with him was solid. I got on with him really well and he was a hard-working bloke. He never talked about politics or religion, but when the pub bombings happened in Birmingham in the early 1970s, he was a target because he was Irish. He couldn't get on the bus for work when we were kids and I think that's why he went to London later on to earn money for us, as his family from Ireland were all there. He was a good man who worked hard for his family and I always got on with him.

My dad used to take me down to London in the six weeks of summer holiday. When I would go and visit family there, they all knew that I was boxing as my dad used to take clippings from the local newspapers with him and show the family. He was very happy about what I achieved in boxing. I was a good amateur, so any time he came to watch me I didn't really lose, I mostly won. He was very proud of how I had performed in championships and he was always telling his mates what I had done. Some of his mates would sometimes come to the house after work or after leaving the pub and he would show them all my trophies and certificates. My dad used to mainly work in London, Monday to Friday. His family had their own jobs down there. He had nine kids to pay for, so he had to go where the money was.

How he met my mom I don't know, but when they became a couple, they both moved to Ireland. While there, my dad became severely ill with tuberculosis and ended up in hospital for 22 months. During his recovery, he lost his lung and had

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to have surgery to remove two of his ribs, ending up with a big scar on his back. While he was in recovery, my mom would stay with my dad's aunt in Ireland for a few weeks at a time, visiting him in the hospital before returning to England. She did this for a couple of years. Once my dad recovered he moved to Birmingham. Initially, they lived in Ladywood, which is near the centre of the city, before moving and settling in Acocks Green, where I was born.

* * *

As I mentioned earlier, there are nine of us – five sisters (Ann, Pat, Phyllis, Tina and Jean) and three brothers (Noel, John and David). Me and John in particular were really close and he was always a scally, always up to mischief, though he died of a heart attack a week after his 40th birthday. David has his own business as a builder and Noel, who is the eldest, works as a roofer.

Noel was 15 or 16 when I was born, so I don't remember him much. He got married young and is still married to the same woman.

Our family was large, though we lived in a house comprising three bedrooms, meaning the rooms were shared between the 11 of us. My sisters shared the largest room, my parents had the smallest room and me and my brothers slept in the backroom. The kitchen was small but we had a big garden, which led out on to a park. We have always been a tight-knit family and even though my parents have since died, we still help each other out and all live close by.

Christmas day in particular was a great day in our house. Eleven of us would be sat round the table and it was crazy! *Top of the Pops* and the Queen's speech would be on the TV, but

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the only thing we liked was *Top of the Pops*. My mom always tried to get us to be quiet when the Queen's speech was on. She loved the royal family and always had Union Jacks out when the England football team played and also during the jubilee. We used to slag the royal family off but she would cut us down straight away.

I get on with my sisters really well. When I was younger, they used to beat me up. They used to suffocate me by putting a pillow over my face. Don't forget, I was the youngest out of nine, so my sisters were older than me. We all had nicknames for each other and my nickname when I was a kid was Jealous. Jealous balls, to be precise! That's what my brothers and sisters used to call me because I was the baby of the household and my mom used to dote on me. Even now, me and my sisters get on really well and they phone me all the time.

I always wanted my own way and most of the time I got it. I was the apple of my mom's eye. She'd be like, 'Give the baby this and give the baby that.' But when my mom used to go out, it was payback from my sisters. If I was cheeky to them, they would pin me down. In a funny way, there was nothing malicious in it! Tina had a dart board in the house. One day, I was cheeky to her and she threw a dart and it pierced my back.

'Wait 'til mom comes home. I'm fucking telling her what happened,' I screamed.

'Oh, you little bastard,' she replied.

When my mom came home, I told her what happened and Tina got a bit of a hiding from her. My mom used to dish out the punishments in our house, not my dad. If my dad had had a drink after work, he would come in and go upstairs to have

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a lie down. Within ten minutes of him lying down, because he was drunk, he would come back down the stairs.

'What's going on here?' he would say.

'Oh shut up! There's nothing going on,' my mom would reply.

He used to imagine we were fighting downstairs, just because of how he was feeling. But if our mom told our dad to sort us out, he would go upstairs for a belt, but would tell us to pull the quilt over us.

'You bastards!' he would say as he hit the quilt, not very hard. 'You better not be playing your mom up again!'

My mom had big, long fingernails. When she grabbed you, she would dig them into you. Every now and then, when we were really playing up, she would say, 'Right. I'm fucking off out of here.' When she did this, we used to shit ourselves as she would do it at nine o'clock at night and we'd be wondering where she'd gone. But she would be back in 15 minutes. All she had done is just walk around the block to cool off.

* * *

Both my grandmothers were very different people. My nan, my mom's mom, didn't have the time of day for me growing up. When we used to go to her house, me and my brother would go straight into the back garden. She wouldn't even give us a cup of tea. But my mom used to say she had a hard life. With my dad, I never really knew my nan on that side. When his mom moved over from Ireland, she moved to London like most of their family. When I visited her in London, she was very kind to me.

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When I was in prison as a teenager, my mother's mom had Alzheimer's. My mom used to catch the bus every day to her house to look after her. She would do her washing, her ironing and other chores. My mom was an angel. My nan used to call my mom Rosie as she used to think she was her other daughter.

'Our Elsie never comes to see me,' my nan used to say to my mom.

'Oh, don't she?' my mom would say. She never got upset over it.

I was in prison when my nan died. I never knew my grandad as he died before I was born. Even though my nan and grandad on my dad's side lived in London, I had more to do with them than I did my mom's mom, who lived in Birmingham, as bad as that sounds.

Growing up, I always had fond memories of my mom. She used to be a smoker but stopped when she was 50, due to having a slight heart attack. She was our life and we all looked after her. My mom always put us first. No one came before her kids. After my dad died, my mom never had a relationship or married again. It sounds really selfish of me to say it now but I don't think we would have allowed it. Our dad was our life and we couldn't have had another man come into our house and tell us what to do. He would have had his head taken off and I think our mom knew that. She was all about her kids and her grandkids and where she lived was an open house for them. She was a diamond.

I went to her house every single day unless I was working away from Birmingham. Every morning I went there, I would bring bread and milk. My mom only wanted a certain small

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loaf. She would never want a full loaf. I'd have to go to three or four shops before I would find the exact small loaf that she wanted. Then I would go into her house and she would say, 'I'm a fucking nuisance.'

'No you ain't,' I would say. 'You're never a nuisance to me.'

The day I found out my mom died, it was the week before Christmas. I had been to work the night before at the NEC. I was with my wife Tania and my twin grandkids, who were one year old at the time. When we walked in and found her dead, we were devastated.

Tania and my mom got on really well and my mom thought the world of her. If me and Tania ever had a row, my mom always took Tania's side. She had also worked at the same catering shop as my mom for about ten years, and it was my mom who taught her how to cook, which is why they got on so well. It broke her heart when my mom died as Tania loved my mom to bits.

* * *

I was also close with my brothers. I don't really remember my older brother Noel because I didn't grow up with him, though he always used to call me Rocky from when I was 15 years old. His son is only six years younger than me, so I knew him more than I knew Noel. Regardless, I phone my brother all the time as we both bet on the horses and he's always sending me tips. I pop down to his house now and again.

My other brother David works as a builder. I used to work with him a few years ago and every now and then, if he had a bit of work on the side, he'd call and ask if I wanted to help out and I would go down and help. We get on now but when

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we were younger, we never got on. We used to fight all the time. It was only when we grew up and I had my daughter and he had kids that we became closer. Even then, at times, we would fall out.

One day about 15 years ago, when I was still boxing, I was at a job doing a load of digging for him. It then started to rain, followed by thunder and lightning.

‘Let’s call it a day now,’ I said.

‘No, no, we won’t,’ he said.

‘Look. I’ve been here since seven o’clock and it’s nearly four now. I’m fucking off,’ I replied. He then started moaning, so I told him to stop being a fucking prick.

We started arguing and I told him, ‘Stick your job up your arse.’

I walked off, heading back home. I had no car as David had picked me up. It was still pissing down with rain and I became soaked. My brother phoned me as I was walking. I answered the phone, told him to fuck off and hung up on him.

It was quicker to go to my mom’s house than my own. So, I arrived at my mom’s and knocked on the door. She opened it and saw how wet I was.

‘What the fuck’s up with you?’ she said.

‘I had an argument with that prick,’ I replied.

‘Why?’ she asked.

‘I was working with him and he was doing my fucking head in.’ My mom always took my side in situations involving my brothers.

‘That fucking bastard,’ she said. ‘You know what he’s like. Don’t work for him.’

‘I won’t. I won’t,’ I said.

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From then on, whenever my brother called to say he had a bit of work for me, I'd say, 'I've told you. I'm not working for you again.'

'Come on now. Fucking grow up,' he would say.

'I'm not working for you.'

It was only after about five years that I started doing a little bit with him now and again. If I had no graft, he would phone me up. He always looked out from me. I ended up doing some work with him in Leamington. I was there for about three months. While I was there David had a slight heart attack, so he stopped doing that job but the gaffer still wanted me to carry on working there. I was getting the train as that was quicker than driving there.

My parents always made sure that we were fed, that our clothes were clean, that we never went to school scruffy and that our house was always clean and spotless. We never wanted nothing but we never asked for nothing. We just got what we could. We always got presents for Christmas and always had birthday parties. My dad used to come back from London with a big bag of sweets, throw them on the floor and say 'scrambles!' and we'd all be like animals, trying to grab the sweets. He used to bring his mates back and put on the Irish LPs. It was a happy time in my house, never sad times.

* * *

Back then, Acocks Green was a bit of a rough area. There were a couple of Irish families who my dad knew, so we used to say hello to them. There were also a few black families and we all used to hang out with each other. There were a lot of Irish kids

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and black kids, that's what our street was like. Colour wasn't a thing in our street. I always hung out with black kids and it wasn't a big deal. On the road I lived on, we all used to get on. We would all meet on the street and hang around with who was out and about really. We would all be over the park most nights, playing football and the old games like tracking and British Bulldog. Even while playing football, I always wanted to do a dirty tackle. We were just rough and ready, always getting up to no good.

David had mates who were a couple of years older than him. He started boxing with a few of them. The Shippereys, who were the same age as my two brothers, they were mad boxers. Desi Lane, a guy on our road, was a really good boxer. George Richards, who turned professional and fought future world champion Harry Simon on the undercard of a Prince Naseem [Hamed] world title defence at Wembley Arena. We all boxed and mingled together. We would play football and I'd probably end up having a fight with one of my brother's mates, and then we'd forget about it after five minutes. We all had fights. I had fights with the brothers of my brother's mates, who were my age. My brother would come in and give me an ear slap and say I was causing trouble. It was just how we were. Fighting every day, just mischief. Minor fights really.

* * *

It would be fair to say that I used to be in quite a bit of trouble when I was a kid, especially at school. From infants through to juniors and senior school, I was always cheeky, always in fights and always playing up. Not the class clown, but I would backchat teachers all the time. I generally didn't give a shit at

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school and always rebelled. Teachers even banned me from school trips as I was always in trouble.

An example of this took place when I was at junior school. There was a teacher who wouldn't let me and another kid go on a school trip as we had a fight in the classroom. The school had a garden at the back of this wooden hut where they used to grow strawberries, and it was this teacher's pride and joy. One morning as revenge, on the day the kids were going on the school trip, me and my mate woke up at about half-seven in the morning and we totally vandalised the garden. Just wrecked it to bits. We dug up all the plants and just smashed everything. The teachers knew it was us, but they couldn't prove it.

In assembly, the teachers were talking about the damage to the garden and we were just laughing. They asked me if I did it, but I said that it wasn't me. I lied to my mom and also told her that it wasn't me. I bare-faced lied to her as I knew that if I told her the truth, I'd have got a hiding, not off my dad but my mom. My dad would shout at us but he never hit us. Although my mom was the one who dished out the punishment, her bark was worse than her bite.

It wasn't the first time I had been mischievous as far as gardens were concerned. As kids, we used to go scrumping, where we would go into people's gardens and rob apples from their tree. The irony is that I would chase away anyone who would try to rob apples from the trees in my own garden!

* * *

Fighting other juniors was a regular thing for me. When I first went to junior school, there was another school that was over the park from where I lived. Kids from both schools used

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to share the park. During my time in juniors, I used to have fights with the kids from the other school all the time and would beat them up.

I remember once there was a kid who had just started at our school. He was a traveller and was very small. I remember me and him having a fight in the classroom and the teacher broke it up. He was like, 'Ah fucking hell. I'll get you after school.'

We later went over the park after school and me and this kid started having a fight. While we were fighting, these older lads came across to watch. They were probably about 16 or 17 years old, while me and this kid were 10. The fight with this kid went on for ages. The older lads ended up breaking it up, but I did manage to beat the kid up. We had a good fight. After that, we became not friends as such but we had a mutual respect. We didn't have any more fights between us. He thought he was a bit hard, probably because he was a traveller and he had fought a number of times, but I didn't give a fuck. It didn't bother me that he was a traveller. It was just a good fight for me. I had plenty of fights when I was a kid.

* * *

The mischief and backchat wasn't just aimed at the other kids. It was also aimed at the staff at the school. I remember one day in junior school telling a teacher to fuck off. In those days, they used to give you a slap across the palm of your hand. Well, I refused it.

'You're not giving me it,' I said and ran home.

I came home and my mom asked me what was the matter.

'The teacher wanted to give me the pump,' I said.

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My mom always said that if they tried to give me a slap across the hand or any other corporal punishment, that I was not to have it.

'What did she want to give you a slap for?' she said. I said that I didn't do anything.

My mom always stuck up for her kids. She marched up to the school and went to see the teacher in the classroom. She started going mad at this teacher.

'You want to slap my son? No one gives my kid the cane. I don't give him the cane so you're not going to do it. He hasn't even done anything,' she shouted.

'Oh, I think he has Mrs Buckley,' said the teacher.

'Well, what's he done?' she said.

'He told me to fuck off.'

Our mom's face just dropped and she looked at me, as she always taught us to respect others. She asked me for my side of the story. I said some bullshit, but she knew that I was lying.

'I'll deal with him,' she said as she grabbed me out of the classroom. As soon as we got home, I can't remember if I got a slap from her. But just my mom going mad at me was enough to do my head in.