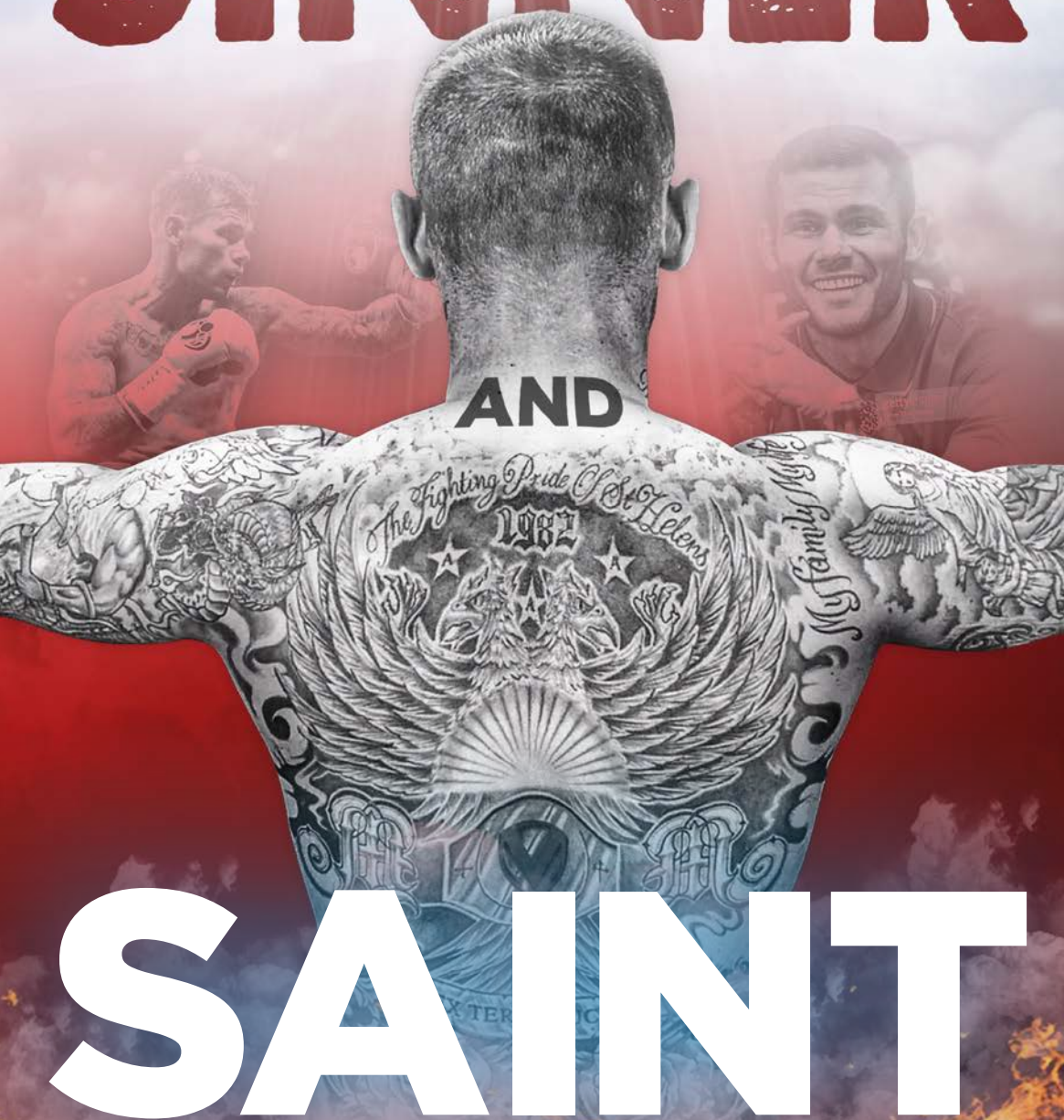


SINNER



AND

SAINT

The Inspirational Story of Martin Murray

PAUL ZANON

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of Martin Murray*

PAUL ZANON



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PROLOGUE

Banged Up Abroad

Martin Murray, Aged 18 – May 2001

I WAS on remand in Ayia Napa police station waiting to find out where I'd be moved on to next. There was only one cell, which was really rough, and I got treated like shit. Every time the guards saw me, they'd give me bits and bobs of hidings and slap me around.

I got one meal a day, usually some kind of tinned food like corned beef. They didn't give me any cutlery, so I had to eat it with my hands. When you're that starving, you just get your fingers in there and eat. The shower in the cell was something else. It was a little hole in the wall without a shower head. The water trickled down and you had to press your body up against the wall and spin underneath it to get some water on you.

The beds were hanging. I got bitten that much by insects that I was full, and I mean *full*, of bites all over my body. When I got to the main jail a couple of weeks later, between only eating one meal a day and because the bite marks had turned to blisters and scabs, people thought I was a smackhead.

I now needed to get court representation and didn't know where to start. When I got nicked, this horrible-looking skinny man with dead-long, greasy straight hair had heard about my case and offered to be my lawyer. He looked like a total creep. I had a meeting with him and he asked if I had any money. I had about 500 quid in Cypriot pounds and he took that. I didn't know, but this guy had been banned from every other police station for being a conman. I never saw him again.

In the middle of the night they took me to this other remand centre, in a place called Paralimni, which was about 45 minutes away. My mate had got nicked a few days before me and was already there. The guards drove round the back and there was this little wing of four cells, with a toilet at the end of the landing. This is where I spent the next week.

After a couple of nights, they told me I was going to join my mate. What had happened was, two girls from Birmingham had arrived at the remand centre I was at and they needed to put them in the same cell, and I needed to be moved out as we couldn't share a room with girls. I was buzzing to see my mate.

I hadn't seen him in ages by this stage and it was about three in the morning. When I got in, I shouted dead excited, 'Alright pal!' He was stretching and walking on the way to the toilet for a piss and said, half asleep like, he couldn't be arsed, 'Y'alright cock.' So much for the big Hollywood-style reunion.

Most of us hadn't had a proper wash in ages, so you can imagine what the smell was like. There was also this Scottish lad in our cell called Bruce, who was in his 30s and had been nicked for smoking a bit of weed. Lovely lad. He'd never been in trouble in his life and couldn't believe he was behind bars.

The catering wasn't any better. Still one meal a day. They used to give us a couple of tins of ham, a cucumber and a bit of bread to share between us. We used to have our meal and then try and save a bit for later, even though it would be stale.

The exercise area was this cage above the cells, outside of the prison, but was still part of the complex. We'd have one hour a day out there, as people would drive past and look at you like animals.

We ended up getting this other lawyer from the British Embassy, who my mum sorted and paid for. He said, 'You're under 21 and British.' Apparently, as British citizens, they would go more leniently on us. They wanted us to get a folder together to help prove that back home we were good people. My mate said, 'I'm not getting anything sent over. Let's just do our bird, innit.'

When it came to the court, the lawyer, reading from my folder, said, 'Martin Murray. He's done a bit of boxing, won the schoolboys

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title, went a little bit off the rails,' all that kind of stuff. Then, when it came to my mate's defence, the brief pulled out this massive folder that his mum had sent over, which included his record of achievement from school and everything he'd done since he'd left. I couldn't believe it. It was that detailed, it had everything from when he'd won a Blue Peter badge.

We were up for importation, supplying and possession of drugs. We were advised to plead guilty for possession only. When the judge announced that we'd have to serve an eight-week sentence, I was buzzing. From what the locals had said, I thought I was going to be behind bars for at least ten, maybe 15 years. After being sentenced, we were escorted to this car by armed security, which would then transport us to the main prison in Nicosia a couple of hours away.

At the time, I was smoking and there was this big meathead of a guard sitting at the front of the car and one sitting in between us. As we headed off, I opened the window and the burning end of my cig flew off and landed on the shoulder of this meathead in front. The guard in between us hadn't spotted what happened.

I didn't want to touch the guard in front because he might have thought we were attacking him, so we just watched it burn away there on his shoulder until it got through his top and on to his skin. The second it burned through, he jumped up and went ballistic, turned around and gave us a slap.

The prison in Nicosia was mental. It was exactly like one of them prisons you see on telly when someone's been arrested abroad. There were people on towers with guns and helicopters circling the jail a couple of times a day. When we arrived, they did the full search on us. We then went in, got put in our wing and were given bits and bobs like clothes, a towel and a toothbrush.

There was one roll call in the morning before breakfast and then one before dinner. In between you'd be out in the sun, having the craic with the other prisoners to pass time and playing a bit of football.

The jail was dirty. Seriously dirty. There were 16 men with a mixture of races and religions crammed into our cell, with eight bunk beds and four toilets per wing, which were basically holes in the ground. The showers were hanging. People used to take a crap in there and not

think anything of it. The only luxury we had was a telly room at the end of the wing, which had one film on at night with English subtitles.

The routine for the next few weeks was identical. We'd get up in the morning and have a bit of breakfast, which was the best meal of the day. They're mad for their coffee out there and they'd have these big jugs of it for you. We were allowed to use the freezer in the screws' office at the end of the landing and we'd put some coffee into two-litre plastic bottles and pop them in, so we could have cold coffee throughout the day.

People from all round the world were in that jail. We had this Ukrainian who spoke nine languages, which came in very handy as we had about eight nationalities in our cell alone and he ended up translating everything for us. There were also two lads from England on our wing called 'Big Gus' from Middlesbrough and a proper old-school Cockney called John. They both lived in Cyprus and were sound fellas. However, out of all the prisoners, the two I'll never forget were Algerian refugees. We named one Dracula, because he was obsessed with Christopher Lee in that film. His front teeth were missing and you could only see his canine teeth, like fangs. The other Algerian we called Maradona, because he was really good at football and had that curly hair like him.

Dracula was proper funny. A natural comedian. When he was in bed, he'd pull the white sheet over himself and then Maradona would do the chime like it was 12 o'clock, and he'd slowly rise up. We'd be in stitches and would be up until 1am most mornings having the craic. So much so that the screws would often be telling us to keep quiet as we were keeping the other prisoners awake with our laughter.

It turned out Dracula was a policeman in Algeria but due to the civil war he went over to Cyprus illegally for a better life. He got caught and had been in jail for ages while the prison system decided what to do with him. If he'd have been British, he'd have probably never even gone to jail.

When we went into that cell on the first day, straight away, Dracula and Maradona gave us some food, cigs and something to drink. These guys had hardly anything, but what they did have they shared out.

Not everyone was nice, though. There was this big firm of Russians and there was this one lad in particular who thought he was the big

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bully, but he was just a muppet. He came up to us once while we were having a fag and said,

‘Where are you from?’

‘England.’

My mate had a tattoo on his arm and this lad said, ‘Where we’re from in Russia, we cut tattoos out of you.’ Basically trying to intimidate us.

‘But we’re not in Russia now, are we, ye prick,’ I said.

Fast forward a few weeks and I’d been told I was leaving the prison in the morning. I knew I wouldn’t be able to sleep, so I got a Diazepam from the medical room to help me and then went to chill out and watch the telly.

For some reason, the tablet was giving me a bit of a bad turn and every time I looked over at that same Russian guy, it seemed he was laughing at me. I started to get paranoid and thought, ‘What’s he looking at?’

I went out of the telly room and waited for him. As he came out, I threw it on him. I didn’t hit him, I just fronted him. As bullies do, he shit it and swallowed what I told him. In the meantime, Cockney John was keeping the peace with the other Russians, explaining that it was just a misunderstanding. Thankfully, that’s as far as that episode went.

Over in Cyprus there was only one jail and if you got in trouble for violence inside the jail, they’d move you to Block Four, which is where all the lifers were. The lifers’ block had a real bad reputation and rumour had it that people got raped, seriously hurt, or both. That’s why everyone tried to keep their head down, do their bird and stay out of trouble as much as possible.

On the day of my release, I tried transferring all the money I had left over in my account into Dracula’s, but the guards wouldn’t let me. As I left, Dracula was there by the gates. It was like something off a film. For every day of the six weeks I’d been there, he was great to me. He was a lovely man who I’d grown close to. We had a little moment, almost knowing we’d never see each other again. I put my hand on the railings of this steel gate and he did the same from his side and we had a talk. It upsets me now even to think about it. Dracula was in his 50s at the time and I’ll never know what happened to him, and

will never be able to find out. I just hope, if he's still alive, wherever he is, he's OK.

Me and my mate then got handcuffed by two coppers, thrown into a van and driven straight to the airport. When we arrived, we were marched through, still in cuffs. All the holidaymakers were looking over at us. Looking back, it was proper embarrassing.

The guards then told us which flight we'd be on and also let us know we were banned from Cyprus for three years. Just before they left us, they said, 'Go home. Don't think about coming back. If you do, we'll find you and you'll get jailed for a long time.'

The flight back to the UK was a five-hour journey with free ale, so we ended up getting bladdered. I learned nothing from being behind bars and that became very obvious, very quickly, when I got back home.

CHAPTER 1

CHILDHOOD ROBBERY

Remember what to do, Martin. Get under the table, make out you're playing around a bit, then put that 20 quid into your dad's sock'

Carol Murray – Martin's mother, 1988

THAT was always my mission when visiting my dad at HM Prison Kirkham. My mum always used to say that I was the only one who could get away with it. Our Danny and Katie were too shy, whereas I was a cheeky little six-year-old and could make it look like I was messing about. The sock thing was like a game to me.

I'll always remember that journey to get to Kirkham. We used to pass a load of greenhouses in the middle of some massive fields on the motorway. Mum used to say, 'That's where your dad works.' She never once said he was in prison. Not that I really understood what prison or jail was at that age anyway. All I knew was that he was inside somewhere and we all wanted him home with us.

The fact is, my dad didn't get a great start in life. When he was a kid, his mum got divorced early and she met a man called Mike, who wasn't very nice to my dad. They were never at home. They spent most of their time going to the club up the road getting pissed, instead of saving enough money to pay for the leccy [electricity], which was always disconnected.

First chance my dad's mum had, she put him into a home in Gloucestershire. A great big institution, like you see in them old

Victorian movies. I can't imagine how rejected he must have felt. He started thieving and spent a lot of his teenage years bouncing between borstals, or approved schools, as they preferred to call them. When he did start to go back home, Mike soon picked up on my dad's thieving and realised he'd always have a few quid. He used to go into my dad's bedroom and steal everything. In the end, my dad moved out and stayed at a YMCA.

By now, he'd got into a routine of thieving and when you drive down a one-way street, you tend to just keep on driving forward, as it's difficult to turn. When my dad came out of prison for the last time, his brother, my uncle Dave, said to him, 'You've got this chance, Dek. Don't fuck it up.' He was referring to a new start with a new job. He got the job, stuck at it and never looked back. He's always been a grafter and like myself, all his life, if he did something, he did it proper, whether it was positive or negative. Considering he's had no education, I'm very proud of where he is today in his life. All I can say is that the love of a good woman straightened him up. Something I'd appreciate myself a few years down the line.

Back to Kirkham. When my dad came home from prison a year later, he kept himself 'busy'. He had a good mate who he'd go grafting with. Mainly stuff from warehouses and factories. The strict rule was never to steal from anyone on our estate in Fingerpost, St Helens. Nobody would rob off their own, nobody would grass on each other and everyone looked after each other. I've never heard of a story of anyone getting mugged on our estate. If an old lady was beaten up, God help them. The whole estate would be tracking them down.

Due to my dad's activities, our house was always full of boxes. All kinds of stuff. It was like Del Boy's flat from *Only Fools and Horses*. Funny that, as my dad's name is Derek. Despite the police raiding the house from time to time, I never questioned what my dad was up to. All I knew was that he never forgot about me after a good night's work.

There used to be this place near us which used to distribute magazines, papers and pretty much everything you'd see on the shelves in the likes of WHSmith. My dad had decided to visit in the middle of the night with his partner in crime, Ste Lynch.

CHILDHOOD ROBBERY

At the time, I was massively into collecting the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle cards and Panini football stickers, as the 1990 FIFA World Cup was on. On this particular day, my dad woke me up and gave me some stickers. Not just a few packets but boxes of them. I was absolutely buzzing. I stayed up the whole night ripping open every packet. Let's just say both the Turtles and Panini albums were complete by breakfast time and I made a few quid selling any doubles at school.

I can't complain about my childhood or where I grew up. There was always stuff to get up to with your friends on the estate, but as a little kid I was too young to really understand the difference between right and wrong. It was all a bit of fun. However, there was one man who did his very best to show kids that there were different choices that could give them a better start in life.

CHAPTER 2

CHIZZY

‘There were a lot of people and distractions around him. Sport helped keep him on the straight and narrow. Or perhaps straighter and narrower, as it was always going to be a struggle growing up in Fingerpost’

Ian Davies – Martin’s former PE teacher

FOR as long as I can remember, there had always been a pair of boxing gloves in our house. As little kids, me and our Danny would always be battering each other. We also used to have one of those punch balls on a stand, which you had to step on to keep it from falling over, but it wasn’t until a couple of years later that it became more than just a game in the house.

My very first boxing trainer was a man called John Chisnall. I didn’t know it at this point but Chizzy would become a lifelong influence, inside and out of the ring. He was one of four brothers who were heavily involved in sport and were well known in the area. However, he was the only one who boxed – the others were all into rugby.

Chizzy turned professional when he was 26 and fought by the name of Johnny James. He had an eight-fight career as a light-heavyweight, cut short just over a year after his debut due to a burst blood vessel in his nose. Soon after, he decided to set up a boxing gym and train kids in the local area. I’m so glad he did.

All he cared about was getting kids off the street and into a boxing ring. In Fingerpost, there was no community centre or anything like

that. He could see a lot of lads were growing up thieving, drinking and smoking, many before they'd even become teenagers. Even if the mums and dads had no money for their kids' subs, he used to let them train anyway, just so they'd be away from bad influences.

However, the way he got the kids to his gym, you wouldn't get away with now. He had this mad boogie bus/van and he used to drive around our estate shouting to the kids, 'Go and tell your mum I'm taking you boxing, then jump in th'van.' Can you imagine that happening these days? John and his van were a well-known double act in the area, so when I ran into the house and said to my mum, 'Can I go boxing? It's with John Chisnall,' I knew the answer would be 'Yes'.

The gym was St Helens Town Amateur Boxing Club (ABC). The first voice you'd hear at the door was my grandfather on my mum's side, Buller. I've always called him 'Father'. Becomes confusing when I'm talking about my dad (my dad) and my father (my grandfather). My 'Mother' is my grandmother and my mum is my mum.

My father used to collect the money at the boxing club. 'Where's your subs? Pay your subs. You don't get free passes for being my grandchildren. Turn that music down.' He was a proper grumpy old man. Still is now. But I love him to bits. My father grew up on the same avenue as Chizzy and were always fighting as kids. Nothing serious, the usual stuff. As adults, the two of them never strayed too far from each other. They both used to work at the market, with my father selling lino flooring and Chizzy selling fruit. They'd go for a pint in the evening and rumour has it they'd been known to get into a scrap or two.

I was only seven when I went to that first boxing session. You should have seen the trainers my mum found for me. They were massive. It looked like nobody owned me. They were easily my dad's. There's a video knocking about somewhere of the session and when I watched it a few years later with my mum, I said laughing, 'What the fuck were they on me feet?'

From the get go, I loved it, but you could also see Chizzy was buzzing. 'Go on, cocker. Hit it like this,' as he'd show me a move on the bag, or, 'Keep your hands up, lad. Hands up!' as he was teaching me my guard.

The first thing that struck you about Chizzy was that he was a hard man with a tough exterior, but a big heart. He probably scared more kids away than the ones who joined the gym. He'd start winding you up saying, 'I'm gonna get you a big lad for your first fight. It's gonna be tough.' Although he was half joking, it gave you discipline. Reminded you that there's always someone bigger, stronger and more experienced.

For the next three years, my father took me to Chizzy's to train. Mainly in the winter, though, because I preferred playing with my mates on the estate during the summer. It wasn't until I was ten that I started taking the boxing seriously. So seriously that I managed to knock myself out. The gym had now moved to Bobbies Lane and there was this big heavy bag which we used to swing and then catch. First time I swung it, it came flying back and hit me bang on the chin. All I remember was waking up on my back.

I started to look at boxing in a different way now. As kids, me and my brothers, Danny and Ricky, had bunk beds. Mine was the top one. I had a piece of paper pinned to the ceiling which said, *'If you want to be a champion, you've got to train like a champion.'* It would give me that little surge of motivation to get up and go for a run before school when I couldn't be arsed.

The fighters around me in St Helens were also a massive inspiration. My good friend at the time, Ste Birch, was boxing and I used to tag along. Ste was a real talent and a year older than me, so I really looked up to him. It wasn't just Ste, though. Bearing in mind how small the population of the local area was, we had some cracking fighters. The likes of John Lyon, Darren and Wayne Chisnall (Chizzy's sons), Mike Thompson, Lee Connor and Carl Pennington. I used to look at how good they were and realised that if I wanted to be like them, I needed to dedicate myself. But it was Chizzy who was the driving force behind all of us.

'Get gloves on. You're in next.' That was the first time I sparred. I remember just having it with this lad, with both of us windmilling, really going for it. Getting hit and wanting to give my own back in a competition setting was a massive buzz, although my discipline might not have been the best.

About a year or so later, our Danny started boxing and we used to spar pretty regular. We'd always be messing about with our boxing

gloves at home, even though we only had one pair between us. It was one glove each. I'd always have the left one and Danny would have the right. At the weekend, we used to stay in to watch all the big fights, the likes of Nigel Benn, Chris Eubank, Steve Collins and Prince Naseem Hamed. We'd be hitting each other before, during and after watching the fights, while saying, 'If we take our licks now, this will make us able to take a shot when we're older.'

Back to the sparring session. Our Danny was a sneaky little kid, but in a silly way. If he wasn't locking you out the house, he'd be pouring water on you when you were walking in. This time at Bobbies Lane, the bell went for the end of the round and he blatantly walloped me after it. I hit him back, then he kicked me and it turned into a street fight. My father jumped in and gave us a massive bollocking. 'If it was down to me I'd kick you both out,' he said. My mate Picko (Mark Picton) was standing at the side watching, absolutely pissing himself. My father then gave me a clip round the ear and I had to walk three and a half miles home. That was the last time me and Danny sparred.

Chizzy also used to do this thing where he'd have four people in the ring at the same time. We'd all start off in different corners, then when the bell went we'd start sparring with the person in the opposite corner. The second he said, 'Switch,' you'd turn around to the nearest person and try and wallop them. It taught you to keep your guard up at all times, that's for sure. I loved it.

I had my first amateur fight when I was 11. The date was our Danny's birthday, 5 November, 'Bombie' Night [St Helens slang for Bonfire Night] 1993. A lot seemed to happen on that very day in my life for some unknown reason, most of it best forgotten. My father took me to that first fight, which was in Northwich. I fought at 4st 9lbs, against a lad called Michael Blackmore. In fact, I ended up fighting Michael four times over the next couple of years.

I don't recall any instructions Chizzy gave me that night in the changing room. All I remember was getting kitted up and pacing up and down the room, dead nervous. My father told me to sit down, but instead I was moving around even more and ended up having an argument with him. The fight itself went alright. I won on points and

everyone was cheering me as I stepped out of the ring. I couldn't wait for the next one.

Someone I'd like to give a mention to is Brian Tonks. At the time, I was always the little runt of the boxers at Bobbies Lane. I hadn't developed physically as quick as the other boxers and I was surrounded by some genuine talent, lads who had all the skills to become world champions.

I only found this out recently. Chizzy asked Brian, 'Who do you reckon will make it out of them?' referring to me and a few of the lads in the gym. Brian pointed at me and said, 'He'll go far, him.' Chizzy was almost a bit shocked as there was the likes of Ste Birch, Craig Lyon and Gary Davies, who were smashing it at the time. Brian died in December 2016 and I'll be forever grateful of the faith he had in me and the encouragement he used to give me as a kid. RIP mate.

* * * * *

Chizzy was a master at bringing people together. The club was more than boxing. He knew that most of the kids coming into his gym would only learn the basics and maybe only compete in a few amateur fights, if at all. It wasn't just about creating champions. Chizzy wanted to get kids off the street, flush out bullies, build confidence and teach everyone discipline. Most importantly, he wanted to build a community under that roof.

No matter how busy he was, whatever the finances of the club were like, or how many boxers had fights coming up, he'd always do something for the end-of-season presentations. All the families and friends of the kids were also invited and we used to look forward to it. The parties were hosted at the social club next to the gym and during the evening there were presentations. Every kid got given a trophy. Chizzy never left anyone out and realised there were different levels of ability and that every person was as important as the next. Good memories.

Problem was, with the best will in the world, there was only so much he could do. When you grow up in an area where everyone is doing things they shouldn't, you start to become curious. And that curiosity can soon get you into a whole lot of trouble.