

THE ADVENTURES OF BOVRIL BOY

by

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DAVID IS TALL, LANKY, TIGHT JEANS, SWEATSHIRT, MULTICOLOURED SOCKS AND A MULTICOLOURED BOBBLE HAT. HE TALKS AT A MILLION MILES AN HOUR, HE HAS SUCH JOY IN HIS CHILDHOOD HE WANTS TO MAKE SURE HE GETS OUT EVERY BIT OF IT. HE HAS QUITE A POSH ENGLISH ACCENT BUT ISN'T A 'TOFF'.

DAVID

I used to be scared of the end of the world.

This was my nightmare for ages. I used to think...it's a shame we can't live every walk of life in this life. I was seven years old and it's so annoying when you can't be everywhere all the time and it's so annoying we've only got one set of eyes, one pair of legs and I used to get really frustrated about that.

My parents moved to Vietnam when I was a kid, we lived in Columbia then Dad was transferred to Vietnam. When I was ten my parents wanted to send me over to England to further my education. I went to private school, boarding school in England and I'd only come back Christmas, Easter, and so I'd fly thousands of miles on my own and I'd live with boys, all boys at boarding school. So that shaped me, that time is when I started being shaped into the calm, cool, chilled relaxed David, so I was able to be the relaxed guy I am.

I just want to be happy and be always surrounded by people who love me. Family, friends whoever.

I was really up for going.

At the time I had just finished the second Harry Potter book and I thought "Yes, hell yes - let's go, yeah let's go to England, let's go

live in a castle and use wands and moving staircases and all that".

It wasn't quite like that, it was like home, but there were rules I needed to learn. There was no time for fun during the day which I found a bit weird because even when you finish school you are still in a school not a home. My first year wasn't great, I had to adapt my attitude, I was a naughty kid, I won't lie. I was one of those kids who had always been adventurous and flying for me wasn't daunting - the fact I was going back to England without my parents was exciting.

It was the best time of my life,

there's nothing like being with your own gender, it's not so primal with boys being lads and the drinking culture hadn't set in by the age of 13, there wasn't misbehaving, it was constructive and productive. I've never been able to connect on a gender level. With all boys everyone was neutral.

Summer days were the best days, just mucking about with your mates, playing tennis, squash, running about the grounds which were massive.

So the first day, this was pretty damn embarrassing...basically I was too shy to ask anyone where the toilet was. I couldn't bear to ask and all the people looking after me ran off and played British bulldog and I thought

"Oh god I haven't got anywhere to go to the toilet"

so I just did my business in my

trousers...

...so I guess I just learnt to ask people. I didn't want anyone to think I was a burden and being the new kid I didn't really have any like...

...when you're a kid if you don't have any presence and no one is talking about you you don't have any power or any kind of bargaining tools or no one looks at you - so me being a newbie I didn't have any strength. I had even less strength after they found out I crapped myself on my first day. But ummm...

...I found my feet, I found the one true friend who stood by me, it was really strange as when we met each other we almost knew we were going to be best friends. I looked him dead in the eye I said:

"Hi I'm David"

"Hi I'm Will"

I said:

"We're going to be best friends aren't we"

"Yeah probably".

He was from Dubai, just like me, shipped over to boarding school. And we massively clicked.

I was Bovril Boy - I always had a tub of Bovril with me, I liked Marmite but once my uncle

introduced me to Bovril - boom! I couldn't have anything other than Bovril.

So then I started bringing these biiiiiig pots of Bovril and all my mates used to congregate around me, and that in a way brought people towards me. It wasn't served on the table, it was a treat, a luxury and I saw it as a tool to get friends and make relationships.

One time my Bovril was going the wrong end of the dining table - my friend Will didn't realise these guys were trying to play a joke on me, it passed through Will's hands and he heard from his righthand side to pass it down the table and I get my fist and I slammed him on the back, and I saw his face just bawl up in tears and I was like you know that moment:

oh crap I've just done something.

And he literally sat there crying his eyes out and I was like

"Oh my god"

and I was like

"Oh man"

and then I started crying.

I was about 11 or 12 but that was the way I used to deal with my problems, I used to just cry and it was the most frustrating thing as I'd be

"You're making me really angry"

and then I'd just start crying and I couldn't speak to get my point across as I'd be too busy crying. You can imagine just us two boys crying with a pot of Bovril in the middle between us and there we were just crying our eyes out.

He said

"Sorry it was really the shock more".

I'm not in touch with him anymore. He's on Facebook, yeah he did a degree I'm not sure where, I'm not sure where he is now.

I know he has a back problem.

We had chapel after breakfast. I'd stay behind and I'd just be a boy tidying up the plates, putting them in piles, making them more available for the canteen staff and I did that for about two weeks. I wanted to help people and all the canteen ladies were

"This is our special boy"

and they'd give me extra helping at lunch and dinner which was a great bargaining tool, in fact food in boarding school is literally like cigarettes in prison. If you have food in boarding school you can get anyone to do anything...

...I remember one boy traded his scooter for twenty packets of Haribo. You'd always have these tuck boxes, mine was this big-off aluminium thing with a lock on it. You used to store all your precious things, your food, and there used to be all these

tuckboxes lined up on the inside of the common room.

There was never a time I turned food down ever, in boarding school, it was so hard to come by and there was there was so little of it everyone was so food orientated, you didn't care if you were hungry you just wanted to eat.

The teachers who gave out sweets were the gods, literally the gods. I had a supervisor slash mentor and I wanted to change mentor because the other one always gave out Doritos and Mentos. I said I didn't like Mr Baxter as I didn't get along with him, he's mean to me. I thought they'd switch me over, then I had a conversation with Mr Baxter who said

"I hear you don't get along with me I'm really upset"

and he was like

"Is there anything I've done"

and I was dying as I knew he'd done nothing and I was waiting for myself to crack.

And talking to my parents was a ballache in itself, they were miles away and there's nothing quite like hearing your son's voice. We used to have calls every Tuesday morning when I opened my eyes matron would be

"David your mum's on the phone"

and I remember thinking if I go and have a thirty minute conversation with my parents I lose out on the time to get first servings at breakfast.

It's all those really important

things where you needed to be first, all those things that drove you from place to the other just to be first, the satisfaction you'd get being first I couldn't tell you, it's like Christmas Day. I would talk to my parents...

...I've never really needed my parents there, I've been able to be in another country and not have contact with him but I think all the boys were like that so we all got through it together so it was just normality. Back in the day I didn't say much, it was like

"School's fine, Will's fine, maths's fine".

They were never desperate to speak to me, they were more desperate to know how I was doing at school, what grades I was getting,

basically they just cared about my report card. It was the most hurtful thing in that period when I thought the only way I could make my mum and dad happy was by making good grades. I went through a stage in year 7 where it was goal to get 'A's in everything, my sole goal. I cracked the system - you just gotta keep your head down, I nailed it, absolutely nailed it and I was getting A for effort, they loved how I engaged with everything. Massive improvement on last year and my parents were happy but I still felt like it wasn't enough...

...my parents were like what can I do more? I got 'A's for everything: I got commendations from my headmaster, if you got 3 commendations you got an award, in this one year yeah I got SIX so



double, I still got a standard award but I thought at what cost has this come at because really my parents will never be happy with anything I do.

This is actually what freaked me out at the beginning, my journey into adulthood, that actually my parents will never be happy with anything I do, ever, and I think it's only until after school that my mum has let off on me massively. She's relaxed so much more. She's caring about my life.

I love talking to my mum about that stuff cos I never did get to talk to her about that stuff. In a way I've always been the one most open to my feelings. I am the one actually willing to talk about things that don't get spoken about.

My mum's always said she's been proud of me - she would never use words like

"You're out of this world"

she's never been over on her praise she'd never go overboard on this,

"Yeah you're very very good David, we're proud of you"

but nothing too crazy. I never got that which drove me on in a way. I don't think I want the praise because it's not my parents. The first time I was going off to my boarding school she was a bit tiddly, she'd had a couple of glasses of wine and I was about to leave in my new nice school outfit and she turned to me and said

"There is this poem I want to show you"

I looked at the poem. It was all about a mother. She said to me

"I've always wanted a time to say this to you David as it's something that stuck in my mind and this poem shows my feelings...it finally shows to you that you're going off to a new school and to explore the world even more"

She never got this emotional when I was leaving Vietnam but this was in England and she'd had a couple of glasses of wine. The poem was all about how a mother is watching her son grow to become a man and how he's developed and how she's so proud of him and loves and cares for him, and by the end of it I said

"I've got to go to the toilet mum"

and I feel like I should have given her a hug at the time and I literally bawled my eyes out in the toilet as I've never felt her so passionate about the way she speaks to me. My parents give praise if needed but not normally in the way I expected but in some shape or form.

Hmmm. No I don't think I will ever get praise in the way I would want it.