



HONG KONGISH

港人・港語

THE STORY OF AN EXTRAORDINARY FAMILY FROM SAI KUNG

西貢區內一個非凡家庭的故事

ROG THOMAS describes the heart-rending battle for his daughter to be accepted in her community – and in the wider world

Rog Thomas細說他的女兒如何克服障礙，贏得社區和全世界接納的感人過程

'Sai Kung in the eastern New Territories of Hong Kong is a surprise, a breath of fresh air, a relaxation, a break, a quality of life; Sai Kung is coffeehouses, bars, little bakeries, eclectic eateries, seafood restaurants and al fresco dining; and beyond the town itself, Sai Kung is rugged beauty: rolling hills, uninhabited islands and white sand beaches; wild monkeys, barking deer and feral pigs, and cows that wander through the streets. Sai Kung is a world away from the picture postcard images of Hong Kong: the hustle and bustle and towering glass skyscrapers of downtown Central; the "girlie" bars of Wan Chai made famous by Richard Mason's The World of Suzie Wong; and the madding crowds of densely populated Mong Kok.'

Extract from *The Girl Behind the Face* by Rog Thomas

SAI KUNG IS also where my wife Tina and I raised our daughter, Mui. We became Mui's parents quite by chance.

It was summer and Tina suggested we volunteer for a couple of weeks with young children. It sounded fun. We were introduced to Mui, an abandoned one-and-a-half year old Hong Kong Chinese girl with a rare deforming and life-threatening skin disorder called *harlequin ichthyosis*. We looked forward to having Mui visit us in Sai Kung.

But each time we visited Mui in the hospital where she lived, she screamed and turned away and ripped off her skin, tearing out clumps of hair until she was a bloody mess. For Tina, winning Mui's trust quickly became a stubborn battle of wills. And each time Mui would finally calm down, she was inseparable from Tina, like a baby kangaroo in her mother's pouch.

It wasn't until the beginning of the following year that this battle was won and Mui finally came to visit.

Twenty years ago, caring for a child who looked as different as Mui did in Hong Kong was a constant challenge: people in wheelchairs were stared at. Taking Mui outside meant walking the gauntlet of staring and occasional cruelty: sometimes people shouting insults at us, sometimes people screaming at Mui. Once, someone spat in Tina's face.

But Sai Kung has always had a strong sense of community – although connecting with the warmth and kindness of the local Chinese population meant making a bit of an effort. It began with our first ever walk through Sai Kung.

In the market curious Chinese women, men and children clustered round us. Tina smiled and said *jo san* – good morning – to the different faces in the crowd and told Mui to say hello, too. An old lady pushed forward and demanded to know what had happened to Mui. Tina told her it was a skin disorder and added, *Mui's Heung Gong yan* – a Hong Kong person. The woman smiled and gave Mui sweets. Tina told Mui to say thank you and give the woman a hug, and with a hefty nudge of encouragement Mui hugged the woman, who smiled, and the cluster of people was soon smiling, too.

When we left the market Tina told Mui to wave and blow a *fei man* – a 'flying kiss' – and everyone smiled and waved and blew kisses back.

In the street, some people stopped stiffly, some stared silently, some screwed up their faces. Some people recoiled or jerked their heads back like they'd been scalded. We walked on and smiled at them, said hello,

made eye contact and sometimes held their stare, or chose not to see them.

Treating Mui as an ordinary child seemed to put the people we bumped into in Sai Kung at ease. As she has grown up, folks in Sai Kung have tended to embrace her and regard her as a sweet and confident girl.

How we came to adopt this courageous little girl, how our daughter grew up to inspire ordinary men and women across Hong Kong, how she won over a British prime minister, billionaires and royalty with her dynamism and spirit, and how cyberbullies drove her to the brink of suicide – that is our Hong Kong story. We've shared it in a soon-to-be-released book: *The Girl Behind the Face*. ■

「位於香港新界東的西貢令人驚喜，空氣清新，遠離塵囂，使人身心放鬆，為人帶來優質的生活。西貢也是咖啡店、酒吧、小型糕餅店、各式食肆、海鮮酒家和露天餐廳聚集的地方。遠離西貢市中心，還可找到樸實無華的優美景致，放眼盡是連綿山丘、無人小島和水清沙幼的海灘，還有野生猴子、鳴叫的野鹿、山豬和在街上遊蕩的牛隻。香港的明信片上往往以中環繁華市區和玻璃幕牆大廈為主題，西貢卻是另一個世界，不同於因Richard Mason的《蘇絲黃的世界》而聞名的灣仔酒吧紅燈區，也有別於人頭湧湧的旺角。」

節錄自Rog Thomas的《The Girl Behind the Face》

西貢也是我和妻子Tina養育女兒阿妹的地方。我們在機緣巧合之下，成為了阿妹的父母。

Photo: Gary Ng/Common Studio

Time out
The Thomas family in laidback Sai Kung Town

閒適時光
Thomas一家在悠閒的西貢市享受天倫之樂



某年夏天，Tina提議我們不如花一、兩個星期當義工，照顧一下兒童。我覺得很有意思，於是答應了。我們倆就這樣認識了阿妹，她當時只有一歲半，是香港華人，不但被父母遺棄，更患有罕見的遺傳病斑色魚鱗癬。這種病不但令她的皮膚變形脫落，更有性命之虞。我們都很期待阿妹能跟我們來西貢遊玩。

但我們每次到醫院探訪阿妹時，她都會大叫大嚷，轉過頭不去看我們。她更會不停扯掉自己的皮膚和頭髮，直至抓到自己渾身是血為止。對Tina來說，要贏得阿妹的信任，不久就變成了一場互不低頭的意志角力。所幸每次阿妹總會冷靜下來，然後像小袋鼠縮在母親的口袋一樣緊黏著Tina。

翌年年初，我們終於贏得阿妹的信任，她總算肯跟我們來西貢。

阿妹的外表與一般人不同，20年前在香港照顧這麼一個小孩，一點也不容易，因為當時就連坐輪椅的人也會受到異樣目光的對待。我們帶阿妹外出，就要忍受被人側目而視，甚至出言不遜。有時會有人大聲辱罵我們，偶爾更會有人對著阿妹叫嚷。有一次，甚至有人往Tina的臉上吐口水。

西貢一向有濃厚的群體意識，但要融入親切友善的當地華人社區，還是要花點力氣。於是我們首先在西貢散步，踏出融入社區的第一步。

我們逛市場的時候，一群好奇的華人男女和小孩圍著我們，Tina微笑向他們說「早晨」，也叫阿妹跟大家打招呼。這時，一位婆婆擠上前來，問阿妹為什麼會這樣。於是Tina對她說，阿妹患了皮膚病，又說阿妹是香港人。那位婆婆笑了笑，就給了阿妹幾顆糖。之後，Tina叫阿妹向婆婆道謝，再擁抱這位婆婆。我們輕輕拍了拍阿妹，鼓勵她伸出手去。於是，她擁抱那位婆婆一下，婆婆微笑了，其他人也跟著笑了起來。

我們離開市場的時候，Tina叫阿妹給他們飛吻，然後每個人都微笑揮手，回阿妹一個飛吻。

我們在街上的時候，有些人會突然駐足，有些人會盯著我們不發一言，也有人露出厭惡的表情。有些人則探頭探腦，不住窺望。我們會繼續往前走，向那些人微笑打招呼，彼此眼神接觸。有時候，我們也會瞪著那些定睛盯著我們的人，或者對他們的奇異目光視若無睹。

把阿妹當作普通小孩來養育，讓我們在西貢遇見的人對她卸下心防。現在她已長大，這裡的人亦衷心接受了她，更讚賞她是個可愛而有自信的女孩。

關於我們如何領養這個堅強的小女孩；我們的女兒如何啟發眾多香港人；她如何憑藉滿腔熱誠感動了英國首相、億萬富豪和皇室成員，以及網上欺凌如何令她產生輕生的念頭……這是我們的香港故事，我們會在即將出版的新書《The Girl Behind the Face》與大家分享。■