

Ella Parry explains how even in the most challenging times, you can achieve your dreams



Art is universal and knows no boundaries. Do people who create art have enough space in their heart to embody the whole world, and see everyone as equal?

I was born among nine siblings, with dark skin and curly hair, in a Cambodian Chinese immigrant family. My father's ancestral home was in Chaozhou, China. In 1977-78, when I was just a few years old, my family escaped from war-torn Cambodia to Thailand, then Macau, and finally landed in Hong Kong. At the time it was illegal for immigrants to enter Hong Kong from mainland China, but fortunately, due to the 'touch base' policy launched by the British Hong Kong government in 1974, the whole family was able to stay and become official residents.

If that whole experience didn't seem challenging enough, it didn't stop there... In school, I was made fun of and discriminated against because of the colour of my skin and my curly hair. My parents told me to keep my Cambodian past a secret to avoid further issues at school, but it was emotionally painful to feel like an outsider and keep it locked inside.

During that time, I found refuge and comfort in drawing, which became my spiritual support and strength. I particularly liked to draw different cartoon characters and

I dreamed of becoming an artist one day and creating something that could become as popular as Hello Kitty.

Because of my early experiences, I have learned to cherish everything. Although my childhood was tough, I am grateful that I had the opportunity to draw and do what I wanted to do.

Deep inside my heart, an image of a naive little girl was born. She was cheerful, optimistic, and loved everyone and everything in the world – and she also had curly hair! This girl was a projection of me. The unhappy experiences from my childhood did not adversely influence my creativity. On the contrary, they led to an even better world full of creativity and possibilities.

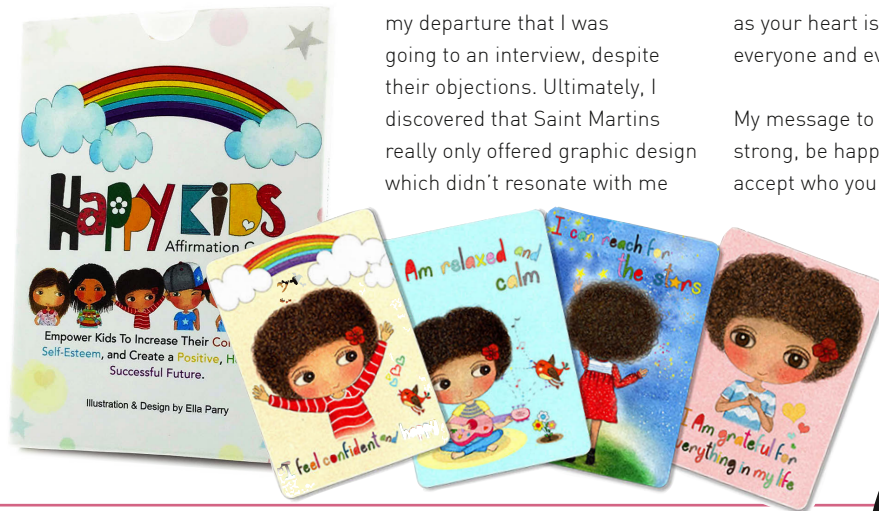
After I graduated from secondary school, I was admitted to the First Institute of Art and Design in Hong Kong to study art. Two years later, I enrolled at night school at Tsing Yi vocational school. One day, I decided to apply to Central Saint Martins in the UK. I booked the air ticket without telling my parents and told them one week before my departure that I was going to an interview, despite their objections. Ultimately, I discovered that Saint Martins really only offered graphic design which didn't resonate with me

and, soon after starting there, I left and went to Camberwell to study visual arts instead.

Halfway through my studies, terrible news arrived from Hong Kong. My brother had been diagnosed with cancer. My parents could no longer subsidise my tuition fees. I had to quit school and find a job in London to support myself, but I still managed to draw in my spare time. The naive little girl with curly hair was reborn again in my heart. I gave her a name – Little Curly – and from that point onwards, she became part of my life. This time, Little Curly had a serious mission. Her mission was to spread the message that everyone is equal, regardless of their history, culture, race, gender or belief system.

Living in various foreign countries and experiencing different cultures made me realise that everyone in the world is one and the same. Nobody is an outsider, as long as your heart is broad enough to embrace everyone and everything.

My message to young people is to be kind, be strong, be happy, and most importantly, to accept who you are and do the best you can. ●



Ella Parry now lives in Spain with her husband, Glyn. She has designed a series of products for Little Curly to help her fulfil her mission. The main product, Happy Kids Affirmation Cards, is designed to empower children to increase their confidence and self-esteem, and to create a positive, healthy and successful future. littlecurly.com

