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Introduction

The pregnant cow had no intention of going into the cattle crush inside the barn. She wasn't used to being handled by humans, having spent most of her life out on the moor, and we had been struggling to catch her for half an hour. Eventually we managed to lasso her and get a halter on, but she still stubbornly refused to go in to the rusty old crush, so we had to make do with just tying her to it, via the halter. The poor girl was giving birth, but her calf was enormous. There was no way it could be born without a caesarean section.

It was hard to see what I was doing in the gloomy light of the barn, but apart from the well-aimed and unpredictable kicks from my patient, the operation was going smoothly. The calf was sturdy and full of vigour, and was soon rolling around in the straw looking for its mother. Then, just as I was about to start suturing everything back together, disaster struck.

The cow jumped in the air. Both the cattle crush and the halter were old and worn out, and the halter quickly gave way. The cow,

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unaccustomed to being in a barn, raised her head, opened her eyes wide and charged, looking either for revenge, her calf, or a means of escape. There was a large open doorway in the barn, and this offered a clear route to the moorland beyond. If she chose escape, she would be loose on the moors with her uterus dangling from the large hole in her left flank, through which her calf had been delivered. This would be a catastrophe. The farmer and I could only stand and watch, as the cow chose her fate. She stopped her charge and looked out at the moorland, then turned back to look at her calf. Thankfully, her maternal instincts were strong. As she settled with her baby, we managed to fasten her up again so I could suture her uterus and her flank and finish the operation.

I drove back home that evening as the sun was setting, feeling very lucky. It was a great story, and reminded me of a conversation I'd had with my English teacher, Mr Clough, many years before.

'Well, Julian,' he had implored, 'if you are determined to become a vet, will you promise me one thing – you will, at least, write about being one?'

'I'll see what I can do, sir,' I assured him. Inwardly, I suspected that this was highly unlikely. I had yet to sit my GCSE examinations and could only dream of a place at veterinary school. The path to becoming a veterinary surgeon was beset by many hurdles, and it seemed ludicrous to imagine that I could become both a vet and an author.

But twenty-eight years later, hurdles negotiated, here I was, a veterinary surgeon, working in a wonderful mixed practice in my beloved North Yorkshire. It was, in fact, the practice where the most famous vet of them all, James Herriot, spent his working life, and

from where he penned the iconic books that inspired a generation of veterinary surgeons. I thought myself pretty fortunate. Life was good, but very hectic. Work was tough and busy, I was training to compete for the GB triathlon team, had two very sporty boys, and a wife who was also a vet and also very busy. We had many balls to keep in the air. After being called out during one night at 2 a.m., 4 a.m. and 6 a.m., to replace uterine prolapses in three different cows (a heavy and dirty job), I remember thinking that I could not possibly fit anything else into my life.

So, when the practice was approached, by Daisybeck Studios, about the possibility of making a television series called *The Yorkshire Vet*, we all had mixed feelings. It would be a lot of extra work for everyone and we would be putting the practice, our clients and ourselves on public display. But I thought it could be a fun and different way of approaching the summer's work. It would be a good advert for our modern but traditional mixed practice, and our links with James Herriot could not be overlooked. So we agreed to be filmed over the summer of 2015, with enthusiasm from some of us, and hesitation from others.

What followed was one of the most challenging periods of my professional life. Being filmed felt like doing two jobs at once, and I had thought doing just one was pretty hard. However, the series proved to be more popular than any of us would have dreamt, and soon the cameras were back, to start filming for a second series. Minor (very minor) celebrity status followed. I was asked to open a shop selling Christmas trees, I had a 'selfie' taken with the fishmonger in the market square and modelled shirts for a local clothes retailer. I was even recognized as I queued at the check-in desk at the airport

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and my eldest son temporarily thought I was a cool dad, rather than an embarrassing one. Although I was still just doing what I had always done, things had definitely changed and soon the chance arose to write a book, so I was able to follow the advice of my English teacher at last.

‘It will be easy,’ the publicity people said, ‘we will just send a ghost writer. You cannot possibly work, film for a second series *and* write you own book’ (and also train for the Patrouille des Glaciers, a ski mountaineering race through the highest mountains in Switzerland, for which my team and I had just got a much-coveted place). But then, I thought, it wouldn’t be my own book. My wife, Anne, agreed to help me. She had some experience writing for newspapers, so we decided upon a strategy. I wrote, and Anne bent and battered it into shape.

James Herriot brought veterinary medicine and Thirsk to the attention of the world. I hope he would recognize and enjoy my version of both. And Mr Clough, I have saved a copy for you!

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Hard Work and Determination

It seems to me, that the way life develops is a mixture of fate, luck, hard work, determination and making the most of the opportunities that come your way. I don't know whether it is simply good luck that these opportunities appear, or whether it is one's ability to make the most of them. However, as I sit in the dark kitchen of our house, having woken up at 5 a.m. to start writing this book, in the same street that Alf Wight, who wrote under the name of James Herriot, the world's most famous veterinary surgeon, lived for much of his working life, the feeling of destiny is strong. The story of how I became a vet and how I ended up at Skeldale Veterinary Centre in Thirsk, on the edge of the North York Moors, feels similarly preordained.

I did not come from a farming background, or even a rural one, as many aspiring veterinary surgeons did at that time. Far from it, in fact. I was born and brought up in the coalmining town of Castleford, in industrial West Yorkshire. If my choice of career was determined by my birthplace alone, then I should have become a rugby league