

ROBBERY REPORT & COMMENDATION

Last week I was privileged to be invited to Mairi Kerin's bravery award ceremony along with her parent's brother, sister, sister in-law and one of her four nieces.

We only tend to see the Police when there is a problem or when we need to report on something bad.

To see the Police under these circumstances was certainly a delight and an eye-opener, possible a side to the Police force not many members of the public ever get to see.

From our arrival at the Police station Mairi was allotted a personal parking space with her name card being clearly visible.

Mairi really was given a hero's welcome by all the investigating team of which there were 3 DCIs plus Chief Superintendent Edd Williams.



The officers had just re-watched Mairi's actions on a big screen behind them when we entered the room. Cakes and biscuits were placed on the conference table. Each one of the detectives then went through the case and revealed how they had worked together with the wider team for a long time and how they gathered the evidence to arrest the perpetrators. The gang consisted of 3 men who were all found guilty of armed robbery after a 2-week trial and were jailed for a total of 18 years. All the officers remarked on Mairi's bravery.

Some of the facts that did come out about the offender were that in the robbery they had used a large knife and was in possession of a firearm.

It was Mairi's reaction to the robber's handling of a weapon which was hidden inside his trousers whilst he offered up a bag to the shopkeeper for his till money, made her act instantaneously. A shocking fact we found out at the award ceremony is that the offender also had a firearm on him.

People who truly know Mairi know how humble she can be when talking about her accomplishments within her martial arts career or just in general about herself. I have finally managed to get Mairi to give her version on how the day of the robbery unfolded which will follow my introduction.

Please remember in this kind of situation Mairi has a wide range of martial arts experience behind her 5th Dan Wadokai Karate including representing Ireland at 3 WKF World championships and medalled at 3 Wadokai World Cups in Japan. She took gold in the All-Nations Wadokai Championships and has won numerous medals at Wadokai European level and nationally in both kata and kumite. At the age of 36 whilst studying for her PHD in Engineering she represented the University of Birmingham and entered the British University Boxing Championships winning Gold in the -54kg category. She has also spent over 20 years training in karate and several years training in other martial arts including BJJ and Thai boxing.

On the day of the robbery Mairi acted instinctively her main concern was for the safety of the shopkeepers.

Remember to be sure of your own ability before getting involved, which Mairi was in this situation, and please try to avoid conflict unless absolutely necessary.

Police quote

"Your intervention helped bring to an end a spree of 15 known similar offences by the same gang over a period of only a couple of weeks. The offenders were charged with a total of 45 offences and have received prison sentences totalling 18 years."

Superintendent Edd Williams

MAIRI'S STORY OF INCIDENT

The incident happened almost 2 years ago. I'd unexpectedly, due to work commitments, ended up in the town where my sister's family live just before the schools were about to come out, around 3pm. I thought it would be nice to surprise my nieces so popped into their local to buy them some chocolates.

It was all over in 15 seconds. I had picked what I wanted for the kids and heard the shopkeeper quiz whoever had just walked in. "Why did you put the board against the door?." As calm as anything the voice behind me said what I thought was "because I am going to take your money...." Unsure of this, but also acutely aware something was not quite right, I put my phone and keys away into my jacket pockets to free up my hands and listened more intently. In that second, I had so many things go through my mind but strangely it was all about the inconvenience of the situation. I even had time to joke with myself about it not being my best day. At no point did I consider what I was going to do about it. I had so much time, it was as if everything slowed down.

As the shopkeeper stumbled over his words, the voice moved to my side which gave me time to check him out. For a moment I had a clear side view of what can be seen in the photo attached (taken as he entered the store). I knew instantly that he was carrying more than one weapon. As he answered back to the shopkeeper, again without shouting or swearing as if “you’re going to give me all your money” was the most normal thing to say, he stepped forward lifting the bag and fumbled trying to get out, whatever it was in his left pants pocket. We would later find out a knife and a firearm were involved but whatever was in the left pocket, for that moment it was not coming out.

I did not know or have time to think about what I was going to do, but I was ready to take the opportunity should it present itself. When I saw his left hand still in his pocket I took the chance.



I grabbed his wrist closest to me and once I had hold, I knew I was in control. As I let the kick go, I started to doubt whether I had read the situation correctly. I consciously slowed the kick down, but thankfully it was enough to make him run. I caught both his shins and had two bruises to show for it, but my new heels that I was breaking in for the new job, meant I couldn’t run after him, which, in hindsight, was probably a good thing...

As he fled my left hand came up as much in frustration than anything else. As for the John Wayne styled walk back to the counter, well many of you will have seen that before... I remember thinking that it all happened so quietly unlike in the movies.

When I got back to the counter the shopkeeper was still stunned and frozen to the spot. He would call his family before I suggested he should probably call the police. He did have a panic button but did not think to use it. I was still very relaxed at this point but as I left without having paid for the chocolate (gifted not robbed) I felt the need to take a drive away from my sister’s place and make sure no one was following me as if, for a moment, I was in Gangs of London. I got lost and at that moment I realised the adrenalin had kicked in. I needed to park up as I had forgotten how to drive...

I would return to the shop about 20 minutes later. The Police had arrived and wanted me to attend the station where I told them my version of events. The story took longer to tell than it took to play out, and shortly after my nieces got the Disney-ized version of the event with chocolates much to the shock of my sister and brother-in-law. For the 3 days that followed I was still riding the adrenalin. I was allocated a witness care officer who was in contact regularly and following a delayed trial, three men were found guilty and sentenced to 18 years for armed robbery in June.



At Christmas I received an invite to be presented with a Chief Superintendent Commendation and to meet the team (heroes without capes) that worked on the case. It was a lovely morning spent with my family and friends learning a little more about those involved in solving the case.

I am grateful that no-one was hurt and genuinely feel for the victims of crime. The time taken between the incident and the sentencing meant a lot of headspace was taken up with reliving the events, imagining alternatives, and trying to keep track of the case online. I cannot imagine how real victims must feel... Also, people have asked whether I was scared. No, I was not. I've imagined taking the legs of far more people than I will ever need to and have trained with this type of event in mind for over 20 years. I have sparred in full-contact sessions with people far heavier than me and have been through the mill many times. Significant bruising, grazing, dislocations, broken bones, and knockouts have all happened along the way. As a result, I am confident in my skills and would generally back myself in situations like these against someone of that size. In my opinion this is not stupidity or bravado... it's a reflection of self-belief.