

LI CUNXIN

The most heartfelt story I've ever read is the life of Li CunXin. I cried when I read the book.

The book "WAO'S LAST DANCER" by Li CunXin, published by Penguin Books, details the life of a poor peasant boy in China who became an international ballet **STAR**.

His family of nine (his parents and seven boys, including him) were so poor that putting food on the table at meal times was a Challenge for his parents.

He described how they ate dried, steamed or boiled yams almost daily, week after week, month after month and year after year.

If they were lucky, they would have a bowl of watery rice, wheat or thin corn porridge.

At times, they even had to borrow **FOOD** from relatives and neighbours.

They had a very hard life. Everything they had was rationed, including coal for heating.

During winters, the temperature in Qingdao could be as low as **MINUS FIFTEEN DEGREES CENTIGRADE**. And very often, the temperature inside the house was colder than outside.

He wrote: "Except in winter, I **HARDLY EVER** wore shoes for the first nine years of my life."

During the selection process for the Beijing Dance Academy, CunXin highlighted in the book that "one teacher lifted one of my legs upwards... two others held my other leg steady and straight. They kept asking me if it hurt. It was excruciating!

"But I was determined to be chosen, so I kept smiling and replied, 'no, it doesn't hurt', as they lifted my leg higher and higher.

"Be strong! Be strong! You can bear the pain! I kept telling myself.

"I did bear the pain, but the hardest thing was pretending to walk normally afterwards. They had **TORN BOTH MY HAMSTRINGS.**"

Eventually, he was **ONE** of the fifteen students out of **SEVENTY MILLION** students selected from Shandong Province, in China.

In 1972, at a tender age of eleven, CunXin was selected to attend the Beijing **DANCE** Academy; leaving his home, parents and six brothers.

The only time he could go home was one year later during the **CHINESE NEW YEAR** festive holidays.

The book describes how he missed home, his parents and brothers.

Every time he missed home, he would go to his bed, cover himself with the quilt his mother made and cry.

It also detailed the tough and strict training he went through in **Beijing**, the problems he faced and how he overcame them.

I can't imagine myself leaving my parents at eleven years old to survive in a big city on my own. Can you?

He stayed in the Beijing Dance Academy for seven years, coming home only once a year.

Here are some other **INTERESTING QUOTES** from his book: "Throughout my childhood in Qingdao, I'd always lived with the harsh reality of not having enough food, seeing my parents struggle, witnessing people dying of starvation.

"I had been determined to get out of that deep, dark well. I would have sacrificed my own life to help my family, but would that have made much difference?

"Yet, somewhere deep in **MY heart**, there is a buried **SEED OF HOPE**. That seed has always existed, and it implants itself in my mind. Its power is strong.

"It makes me feel that one day everything will be all right.

"Beijing is my chance. I am scared to leave my parents, yet I know this will be my only chance of helping them.