

feature

# Taming the tiger within

IT TAKES A STRANGER WHO TURNED INTO A REAL FRIEND TO SHOW TONY ANTHONY THE RIGHT PATH AND THE WAY TO REGAIN HIS SELF-RESPECT

by Joyce Au-Yong

TONY Anthony is a soft-spoken, humble man who comes across as almost shy. But if you had met him nearly 20 years ago, he might have frightened you.

"I was a violent person," he told *theSun* on a recent visit to Malaysia. "I was at the angriest point in my life, and I would be aggressive to anyone who came anywhere near me."

Today, Anthony is the founding director of British-based Avanti Ministries ("Avanti" meaning "go" in Italian), and travels the world as a motivational speaker.

Among those he speaks to are prisoners and young people – and they listen because Anthony was once incarcerated in Cyprus' Nicosia Central Prison.

"My fiancé Aiya passed away in a car accident in London," he said, softly, recounting the series of events that led to his imprisonment. "I found myself disliking people intensely. I wish I could have just died with her."

After her death, Anthony was consumed with rage, and took his anger out on others – physically.

"I've broken more arms, legs and jaws than I can remember," he admitted.

A three-time World Champion kung fu fighter (from 1987 to 1989), Anthony, born to an Italian father and a Chinese mother, was whisked off to China at the age of four.

In his autobiography, *Taming the Tiger*, Anthony writes: "At four, I couldn't have understood the complexities of my parents' lives." His father was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and his parents didn't have enough money to raise him.

"It was really scary. I couldn't speak the language, and it was very different – the looks, the smells, everything."

In China, Anthony was taught the art of kung fu by his maternal grandfather.

"Kung fu was passed down, from generation to

generation, from father to son for 500 years," he said.

At the age of 12, Anthony was sent back to England, where he was funded by the International Kung Fu Federation of Geneva to train and study simultaneously. He later began working as a bodyguard, protecting wealthy individuals.

While on assignment in Naples, Anthony found out about Aiya's death, and he writes: "... it was as though something snapped inside me. My anger was uncontrollable."

Soon after, his father was in need of £50,000 for an operation. Anthony broke into several homes, stealing

Anthony said that it was then that he realised who his real friends and family were. "They never wrote nor visited me. And I don't blame them because I wasn't really nice to them," he recalled.

"But I got a letter from a stranger, Michael Wright, who was a missionary from Northern Ireland, living in Cyprus. The letter had smiley faces all over it, and it made me so mad that I crumpled the paper up and threw it against the wall."

Eventually, Anthony issued a visit order, partly out of curiosity, but mainly because the prison authorities served Coca-Cola in the visiting rooms.



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– Tony Anthony

the necessary amount in one night. On Christmas Eve, 1989, Anthony ended up in prison.

"Prison was a terrible place to be in," he said, adding that there was no such thing as segregation – everyone was mixed up, regardless of age, sentence or crime.

"You get murderers, thieves, paedophiles, rapists – whatever that you have conjured up. People would walk around with blades and stab you for nothing more than a cigarette butt. Every month, men would get very badly beaten or cut up, gang raped or even killed."

Apart from having to constantly watch his back,

"I figured I'd get a Coke out of it. And if he [Wright] were to preach to me, I'd bash him up," he said humorously.

Initially, Anthony was hostile to Wright, but eventually, he began to look forward to Wright's visits.

"In prison, men boasted about their crimes all day long, talking about their contacts, boasting about rape, murder, and how they could do better the next time – and here's this guy talking about God," said Anthony, who was then a Buddhist.

"I didn't believe in God. But I respected him because he came to see me every week and he really cared for me – he was a real friend,



and it was very genuine?"

Wright's concern and testimony were instrumental in Anthony turning away from violence and becoming a

Christian. Following that, he gave up kung fu.

"I felt there was a battle in my mind and in my conscience. It was hard to go in two different directions at the same time," he said. "I'd begun to respect life more, and I lost that a long time ago."

He was released from prison in 1992. Fifteen years later, he sees himself as "living evidence" that somebody who could be "so lost, ruined, damaged and terrible" can change.

But he freely admits that he continues to face spiritual lapses and setbacks: "I'm only human. And I'll always be a construction site that God will continue to work on."

(right) Anthony sees himself as living evidence that somebody who could be "so lost, ruined, damaged and terrible" can change.

## Heading for big screen

TONY Anthony's autobiography, *Taming the Tiger*, has been published in 23 different languages.

Anthony reveals there are plans to turn it into a movie in five years' time. Costing some £35 million, it will be shot on location in China and England.

Anthony, however, will not be starring in the film, and will instead take on the role of a consultant – overseeing both the project and the martial arts aspect.



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"Much of our current emphasis on independence is a reaction to dependence – to having others control us, define us, use us, and manipulate us.

"The little understood concept of interdependence appears to many to smack of dependence, and therefore, we find people, often for selfish reasons leaving their marriages, abandoning their children, and forsaking all kinds of social responsibility – all in the name of independence."