

For the Record

Or how we saved Port Bren with cake
and other household goods



Ellie Irving

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About the Book

Luke is a gifted but awkward ten-year-old who is obsessed with world records, and is nervous about starting senior school a year early as 'the swot with the dead dad'. When Luke's tiny, unique Jersey village is in danger of being bulldozed to the ground to make way for a waste incinerator plant, the only way to stop it is by putting the village on the map: by breaking fifty world records in a week.

With the help of geeky adjudicator Simon and a colourful cast of oddball village characters, this is Luke's chance to shine, to solve his mum's relationship problems, and to face his biggest fears – with bizarre, extraordinary consequences.

For the Record

Or how we saved Port Bren with cake
and other household goods

Ellie Irving

The Bodley Head
London



For Mum and Dad, the World's Best.

There are no deaths in this story. Well, except for my dad, but that was over a year ago. Oh, and Dead Glyn, whose farmland started the whole thing off. No real live dead bodies, anyway.

A tower of cake, on the other hand? Yes. Forty-seven half-washed dogs, a secret plastic-coconut thrower and a hula-hooping granny? You bet! Why wouldn't there be? Every good story has a hula-hooping granny, right?

Oh, and world records. There's a whole lot of world records.

It all started with my list ...

Monday

Chapter One

The oldest person ever to have lived, in the history of the whole world, was Jeanne Calment, a French woman, who was 122 years and 164 days old, which was pretty old considering she'd eaten whatever she wanted and smoked as many cigarettes as she wanted every day of her life to get there. Mum said I wasn't to copy that – the smoking part anyway. She died in 1997 – the French woman, not my mum – and still no one has lived long enough to beat her record. I figured that being the world's oldest person wouldn't be a bad record to hold, so I added it to my list. It was my birthday and I was ten, so I was already part way there.

This is what my list looked like:

RECORDS TO HOLD BY THE TIME I'M OLDER

BY LUKE S. MELDRUM

1. First Person from Jersey to Travel to the International Space Station. (I was realistic enough to know that travelling all the way to the moon might be pushing it.)

2. Winner of the Fastest Wheelbarrow Race. Current record: 14.87 seconds to cover 50 metres. (The downside was I'd need a new partner, because whenever we did wheelbarrow races in PE, I was always lumbered with Martin, who had asthma and weak wrists, and had to keep stopping every three seconds.)

3. Squirting Milk from the Eye for the Furthest Distance. (I was pretty A-OK at this, except I had to practise when Mum was out and then secretly fill up the milk bottle with water because Mum thought

squirting milk from my eye - or squirting anything from my eye, for that matter - was disgusting.)

4. Fastest Cup Stacker. Three cups stacked into three pyramids, three times. Current record: 5.93 seconds.

It was a work in progress, and I knew I'd have to wait a while before I could break the world's oldest person record. 112 years and 165 days, actually. But I reckoned I'd do it. On the very day I was born - 25th July 2001 - a village in France broke the record for the most people in a conga line, so luck was on my side.

As I added to my list, Mum shouted up the stairs for me. She was worried that I was too short for my age, so every birthday, after giving me my presents, she made me stand against the kitchen wall while she measured how much I'd grown. And every year Grandad Barry always laughed and said, 'If you don't grow, we'll have to put you on the rack and stretch you,' which I didn't find particularly funny. That was exactly the sort of thing they used to do in medieval times, and I bet no one who'd had their bones stretched had ever laughed about it.

So for a few weeks before my birthday I had been doing my secret reaching exercises before bed, where I tried to reach up to the top bookshelf in my bedroom and grab any one of my record books from 1971-1992 to make myself taller. I'd borrowed a yoga book from the library and followed the instruction to *Stand on the balls of your feet, and extend your chest through your side ribs*. Except I secretly didn't mind if I didn't grab any of my record books from 1971-1992 because they were the ones without the glow-in-the-dark pictures, and weren't as interesting as the rest.

But the thought of presents more than made up for all the medieval-rack jokes, so I ran down the stairs as fast as my still-growing legs would take me.

Mum was waiting by the vegetable patch in the garden in her faded jeans, wellies and T-shirt. All button-less, naturally, what with her phobia and everything. 'Happy birthday, love,' Mum said, and held out a present. I tore open the wrapping paper and saw the latest world records DVD game. It was the one where you could play against the clock and guess who broke which record. I loved those DVDs, because the one thing to know about me is that I know *everything* there is to know about world records. I've got a near-photographic memory, see, so I remember pretty much everything, and I *always* get all the DVD questions right. Well, almost always. Last year, I'd made the mistake of naming the reticulated python as the world's longest venomous snake, when everyone knows it's the king cobra. In my defence, I hadn't been paying that much attention because Mum had just given me a bowl of chocolate ice cream when that question came on.

'Brilliant,' I said to Mum. 'I wanted this one.'

'Really?' she laughed. 'It's all you've talked about for the last two months.'

On the back of the DVD was a picture of Vinnie Denton, who was just about the coolest person in the world. As an adjudicator, he travelled all over the world and confirmed whether people had broken a record or not once they'd attempted it. Vinnie Denton was friends with the World's Hairiest Man, and with the Woman with the Most Tattoos, and with people who swallow swords for fun, but Mum said I wasn't to copy that, either.

Then a few of the old ladies who lived in the village stopped by the garden wall and gave me a sponge cake. 'Happy birthday, Luke,' one woman said, and ruffled my hair. Not that you'd notice - Mum said my hair always looked ruffled and unruly.

Mum gave Gwyn, the lady with the Victoria sponge, a Look of Thunder when she gave me the cake. It was the same look she gave me when I said something I shouldn't

have in front of other people. Like the time Mum had said to her friend Jackie that she looked like she'd lost loads of weight on her diet and I'd said, 'That wasn't what you said in the car, Mum,' because Mum had told a fib. Mum had had to force a laugh, whilst Jackie looked like she was going to cry. She had a whole list of Looks, did Mum, but the thunder one was her worst.

'I'm making him a cake, you know,' Mum said, in a tone that implied she wasn't impressed by Gwyn's act of generosity. I decided not to say anything, because Mum's cakes were pretty awful, actually, and secretly I was pleased someone had brought me a backup. In fact, *nobody* said anything at that point, and it was clear that everyone was thinking the same thing. Mum's baking was a bit of a talking point in Port Bren, see.

Then Michael walked up the garden path and Mum got a soppy *Isn't he wonderful?* look on her face, which is what she always did when Michael was around, because she thought he was Jersey's answer to George Clooney. I didn't mind the look this time though, because as Michael walked towards me, he wheeled a brand-new BMX bike, which was silver all over. It. Was. Brilliant.

'Wow!' I shouted as I jumped off the garden wall in delight. 'Thanks!'

'Oh, you shouldn't have,' Mum said to Michael. He slung his arm round her and shrugged as if it was nothing. It *was* nothing – Michael could afford to buy the whole bike shop if he wanted.

Mum looked at me, and then nodded her head towards Michael. 'Well, thank him then,' she said.

'I did,' I replied.

'Properly,' Mum warned, and she motioned for me to hug him. I hung back a second because I thought hugging was really soppy, but Mum looked like she was forming one of her *Just do it* looks.

I shuffled over to Michael, held out my arm and gave him a quick squeeze. Michael patted my hand. 'You're welcome,' he said.

It was all a bit awkward really, so I jumped on the BMX as quickly as I could.

I was about to start riding round the garden when Mum blocked my path. 'Where's your helmet?' she asked.

'He'll be fine,' Michael said.

Mum shot Michael a *Don't start* look and went back inside the house, just as Grandad Barry was coming out of it. 'Oops,' Grandad Barry said as he tried not to barge into her, 'it's like market day in Cairo here.' Grandad Barry always found it hard not to barge into people if he got too close to them, because his belly was huge and stuck out a bit of a way in front of him. It made him look like he'd shoved a pillow up his top. Mum was forever putting him on a diet.

'What's all the racket about?' Grandad Barry yawned, scratching at his special-occasion toupee (birthdays). He pulled his dressing gown tighter around him, but it was either a size too small, or Grandad Barry's belly had expanded since he'd bought it, because his gold ceremonial chains were clearly on display.

'I've told you not to wear those things to bed,' Mum chided as the chains glinted in the morning sun.

Grandad Barry stuttered as he put his hand to his neck in an attempt to cover them. 'I didn't - I was just trying them on ...'

Mum wagged a finger at him. 'The gold keeps rubbing off on the sheets.'

Michael tried to hide a snort, but he was pretty rubbish at it. 'That's what happens when you buy cheap gold,' he laughed.

Grandad Barry looked sheepish, but stroked the chains fondly. 'They've done me well for my entire history in office, thank you very much. Elected Mayor of Port Bren for the

last nineteen years in a row. Except for that unpleasant business in 'ninety-four, but we don't talk about that.'

Grandad Barry passed me a small parcel. 'It's not much, mind,' he said as I tore it open in delight. It was a dictionary. *Who gets someone a dictionary for a present?* 'But you like your facts, don't you? And I know you like reading.' I *loved* reading, actually, but normally something to do with world records. Or at the very least, something with a bit of a story to it.

Michael tried to cover up a snort again. 'It's hardly a page-turner,' he laughed.

I frowned. 'Thanks, Grandad,' I replied. 'It's the best gift ever.'

It was OK to say this, because it was a White Lie, and after the whole Jackie-Weight-Loss incident, Mum had said that White Lies were OK sometimes, if they spared someone's feelings. Michael looked a little surprised by my comment, what with having just splashed out on a BMX, but I didn't care. Nobody insults my grandad.

Mum returned and held out my helmet. 'No buts!' she said before I could even say anything. I strapped it under my chin without protesting, because when Mum said 'No buts!' she meant it and there was no point in trying to argue otherwise. Especially when it came to safety.

'I'll go and see Dad now, I think,' I said after a while. I put the world records DVD into my pocket and rode off up the lane.

It was easy for me to see Dad whenever I wanted as he was always in the same place – the graveyard in Port Bren, the small village in Jersey where we lived. 'The shoulder', Dad had always called it, as Port Bren was a small bit of land that jutted out and away from the main island of Jersey. Surrounded by both farmland and the harbour, it was a self-contained community. 'One of the strongest parts of the body,' Dad said, and he would know – he'd tried to be the world's strongest man when he was alive.

As much as I'd rather have Dad alive and living with me, I knew at least he was only a little way away from our house. Martin, with the weak wrists, hadn't seen his dad since he was three, because he now lived in South America with another man called Paulo. I rode like the wind and reached the church in next to no time.

This is what my dad's gravestone said:

SCOTT MELDRUM, BELOVED HUSBAND AND FATHER, BORN 1972, DIED 2010.

The gravestone always looked nice and tidy, because Mum came over and cleaned it once a month, wiping bits of grass and bird poo off it.

I talked to Dad about the sponge cake and the world records DVD, and then I showed him the BMX. I felt a little guilty showing it to him, what with Michael being Mum's boyfriend now. Some ladies in the village gossiped that Mum dating Michael was too soon, but he made Mum laugh again, and I was glad because after Dad died Mum didn't laugh for ages. And he bought me presents all the time, occasionally for no reason, so that was nice. But Gwyn had said Dad 'wasn't even cold in the ground' when Michael asked Mum out and that worried me slightly. Should we have put a blanket in with him?

'It's pretty cool, don't you think?' I said to Dad about the BMX. I didn't mention the dictionary.

Then I heard a noise behind me. It was the sound of a skateboard trundling over the graveyard path, and I knew I was no longer alone. I spun round on my bike to see Tim in front of me. He flipped up his skateboard and fiddled with his earring. It was one of those earrings that made a hole in his ear lobe and pushed it open until the hole got bigger and bigger. It was disgusting. He always wore black too because he wanted to be in a death metal band. Typical. Owen and Izzy were with Tim - his little groupies. Izzy was all right at times, but Owen just did whatever Tim said. I

don't know why – Owen was stocky enough to take Tim on any day of the week.

Tim motioned to my bike. 'Nice wheels,' he said in a really sarcastic way. 'The colour sucks, though. It suits you.'

Quite frankly, I was used to this sort of exchange. Tim had picked on me for as long as I could remember. And only me. Not Martin, with the weak wrists, or Victoria, in my class, who was stockier than Owen. Just me. And it had got worse since Dad had died.

'What d'you want, Tim?' I asked, because I just wanted him to get on with it. I knew what was coming. In one swift move, Tim grabbed me by the arm and yanked me off my bike. I tried to struggle free, but at thirteen, Tim was bigger and stronger than me, and his grip was watertight. He grabbed my ear and I yelped in pain as he shoved my face underneath his armpit, forcing me into a headlock. It wouldn't have been so bad, I thought as I gasped for breath, if Tim had bothered to use deodorant.

'Not been taking self-defence lessons from your dad, then, no?' Tim hissed in my ear, pinning one of my arms behind my back. 'Oh, wait, you can't. He's dead.'

I looked up and locked eyes with Izzy. She looked a little uneasy with it all, hopping from one foot to the other. 'C'mon, Tim,' she said and tugged at Tim's arm. 'Let's go.'

Tim shook her off. 'Shut up, Izzy,' he snapped at her. 'The little genius has gotta get used to this, 'cos when he starts our school in September ...'

I'd planned on enjoying the summer holidays as much as I could because as sure as eggs is eggs, when I went to his secondary school in September Tim would be doing this all the time. I was dreading it.

But what made everything a million times worse was that Michael was Tim's uncle. *Urgh*. Mum's new boyfriend related to my Worst Enemy. If I was being totally honest, if

Mum was going to date anyone after Dad, I'd have preferred it to be someone without the nephew-from-hell.

Tim yanked my arm so hard I thought it was going to come out of its socket. My eyes watered at the pain, but I couldn't let Tim see me cry.

'Wait,' Owen yelled, 'he's trying to say something.'

'What?' Tim smirked at me. 'What is it?'

I turned my head to the side, opened my mouth to speak, then—

CRASH!! An almighty sound rumbled across the graveyard. I'd never heard anything like it.

Tim let go of me in surprise. 'What was that?' he demanded. As he looked around the graveyard, I seized the opportunity to escape and twisted out of Tim's reach. Panting heavily, I jumped on my BMX and didn't stop to look back as I sped away.

I followed the sound of the noise. There it was again, booming across the entire village. It sounded like the rumble of thunder, but there wasn't a cloud in the sky. As I rode out of the graveyard I saw a crowd of people gathered at the edge of the farmland opposite the church.

I dumped my BMX on the ground and elbowed my way through the crowd. As I got to the front, a bulldozer drove over the land. In one swift move, the driver pulled a lever and manoeuvred the bulldozer forward, its metal scooper snapping away like jaws. With the flick of another lever, a steel demolition ball smashed into the side of the farmhouse.

'What's going on?' I asked, still trying to get my breath back.

Grandad Barry, Mum and Michael joined me, and they were just as puzzled as I was. 'That's what I'd like to know,' Michael said as he stared at the half-destroyed farmhouse. 'That's my dad's land.'

Grandad Barry did a little cross in front of himself and said, 'God rest his soul,' because Michael's dad had died six

months earlier, and Grandad Barry always said you shouldn't speak ill of the dead.

Jimmy, a boy in my class, hovered behind me. He took off his glasses and wiped them as if he couldn't believe what he was seeing. He was out of breath too, but not because he'd run away from Tim. Jimmy was always a bit out of breath because he was fatter than most boys.

Mum pointed to the bulldozer, and everyone saw that it was hoisting the demolition ball up in the air again. It swung once more, and she placed an arm round me to shield me from the debris. Villagers jumped back in shock and scattered out of its path. 'Watch out!' Mum cried as the remains of the farmhouse came crashing to the ground.

Chapter Two

Mr Pringle-Bliss stood on the steps of the village hall by the back of the church, his beady eyes darting from side to side as he took in the crowd. He had the misfortune of having a bulbous nose, and on top of that he was suffering from a cold, which caused his nose to balloon even further. Mr Pringle-Bliss licked his lips nervously as he stood there, and by now the whole village had gathered to find out what was going on.

‘We’re baying for blood,’ Grandad Barry said to me. I hoped not, because I was a little squeamish when it came to blood. I once fainted when Dad accidentally sliced the top of his finger with a can-opener.

‘Please,’ Mr Pringle-Bliss squeaked nervously from the top step. ‘Quieten down. Quieten down.’ From where I stood near the front of the steps I could see him gulp. ‘The council have appointed me official spokesperson.’ Mr Pringle-Bliss’s voice sounded a little higher than usual. ‘And I have to tell you that there are to be some changes in Port Bren.’

Villagers whispered to each other in surprise. ‘What changes?’

Mr Pringle-Bliss blew into a handkerchief. ‘Now, bear in mind this is a good thing,’ he said through his sniffles. ‘It will generate income.’

The crowd started up again. ‘Income?’ *What was he talking about?*

Mr Pringle-Bliss winced and took another deep breath, clearly nervous about what he had to say. ‘Port Bren is—’