

# The Telegraph Magazine

**5 Life and times**  
Author Joanne Harris

**6 Wildlife**  
Celebrities hit the books

**8 The wrong trousers**  
David Thomas's  
transgender diary

**10 Charmed life**  
Partying across the capital

**13 The Midults' guide to...**  
Easter eating habits

# 14

## This woman bytes back

Former child prodigy  
Anne-Marie Imafidon wants to  
change the tech world – by  
inspiring young girls to build  
the future. By Gaby Wood

# 22

## The 500 million dollar house

Michael Collins tours the most  
extravagant homes in the world  
with the man who made them



# 28

## 'I'm too scared to have a baby'

Why Marie-Claire Chappet  
– along with thousands of  
other millennials – can't  
embrace parenthood

# 32

## The big cat con

Paying to visit South African  
lion farms, young volunteers  
unwittingly enter an industry  
that caters to trophy hunters  
and the market for big-cat  
bones. Sally Williams reports

## Do girls have a greater fear of failure than boys? 'One hundred per cent'

Anne-Marie Imafidon, page 14

### THE CUT

**43 House style**  
Setting the table for a  
special occasion

**44 Cook up a storm**  
How to maximise – and  
modernise – your kitchen

**53 Table talk**  
William Sitwell at Japanese  
Grill in Surrey

**56 Feast like a chef**  
Spring recipes from the food  
world's biggest names

**64 Have a cracking Easter**  
From eggs to hot cross buns  
– we've taste-tested it all

**75 Fresh from the Taverna**  
Georgina Hayden's crowd-  
pleasing Cypriot dishes

**90 Flashback**  
Joy Debenham Burton on  
working with Mary Quant



<This>  
<woman>  
<bytes>  
<back>



<ANNE-MARIE IMAFIDON> is  
the Oxford maths prodigy  
who's on her way to  
inspiring two million girls  
to take up careers in tech.  
> She tells <Gaby Wood> how  
boys can ruin science,  
where Mark Zuckerberg  
went wrong and why  
parents' digital ignorance  
is dangerous

<Portrait by <Felicity McCabe>



**A**nne-Marie Imafidon – sometime maths prodigy, vegan Nando's veteran, and force to be reckoned with in the tech arena – is having her picture taken. Imafidon is wearing magenta lipstick, a brightly patterned jumpsuit and Hush Puppies, and as she bounds up to me after the photo shoot, her big grey ringletted hair extensions bounce as if they were in even more of a hurry to get things done than she is.

She looks at the time. She hasn't got long. 'But that's OK,' she says, 'because I'm a professional, darling.' Two hours later, she is still talking, and getting up a new head of steam as I ask what makes her most impatient.

'Everything!' she says, laughing. She embarks on a list.

Microphones, and the men who put their hands down your top to adjust them. Reading long emails. Train tickets.

She calls out to her colleagues. 'What annoys me the most?'

'People who don't pay invoices on time?'

In 2013, at 23, she became a social entrepreneur. Having had work experience at Goldman Sachs and Hewlett-Packard and been an assistant vice-president at Deutsche Bank, she discovered that to be a woman with a high profile was to be an exception. (As recently as 2017, according to a report cited by Imafidon, women made up only 24 per cent of those working in STEM – science, technology, engineering and mathematics – industries in the UK.) So Imafidon founded Stemettes, an award-winning organisation devoted to championing the work of women and girls in STEM careers.

In an early blog post, Imafidon identified a number of reasons why there were so few women in STEM fields: she argued that girls 'don't see women doing "sciencey things"'; they 'don't think you can do "sciencey things" and be a mum'; they have poor guidance on careers in STEM; they 'think science is for boys'.

Since then Stemettes has worked to correct that, with 40,000 girls and young women attending

Inspired by the X-Mansion in Marvel's *X-Men* comics, in summer 2015 she gathered 115 girls aged 11 to 21 under one roof for a programme called Outbox Incubator – six weeks of intensive mentorship in the creation of new technology. In those six weeks, she's proud to say, the girls 'weren't purely discussing, or even at all discussing, Justin Bieber'. Supported by Microsoft and HRH the Princess Royal among others, many of those who took part have gone on to collaborate on start-ups.

In 2017 this work earned Imafidon an MBE. Still not yet 30, she is aiming, she says, to 'change the social norm', and to reach two million people by 2025. Her track record suggests she's quite likely to succeed. Last year, Sky launched a competition for female tech talent and asked Imafidon to judge the juniors category. She said, 'I can't mark this because nine out of 10 of these girls are alumni from my programme.'

If there's one overarching impression I'm left with after speaking to Imafidon about the next generation of young women – today's teen-



Imafidon receiving her MBE in 2017



Inspiring future techies in Derry, November 2018



At this year's Stemettes Monster Confidence event, February

'God, yes.' To me: 'Can you put that in?'

Another voice comes over the upholstery: 'When there's nothing vegan on the menu?'

'There we go,' Imafidon confirms. 'No vegan options on the menu. It's 2019. Get it together.'

The truest way to render the energetic presence, no-nonsense impact and roller-coaster hilarity of Anne-Marie Imafidon is to let her speak. She has views on everything from black hair to Mark Zuckerberg, from big data to God. But none of that would explain why she matters.

Imafidon, 29, grew up in Stratford, east London, and passed two GCSEs, in maths and ICT (information communication technology), before she left primary school. She was admitted to Oxford to read maths and computer science when she was 15 – one of three girls in a class of 70 – and she became, at 20, one of the youngest ever students to receive a master's degree there. If that makes Imafidon sound like a freak, one of the reasons why she matters is that she is making this sort of ambition in young girls par for the course.

events, workshops and experiences across the UK and Ireland. Imafidon calls it a 'movement', with activities including hackathons, school trips, mentoring programmes and weekly after-school clubs, available to girls as young as five. Stemettes' partners include Deutsche Bank, Accenture and Bank of America Merrill Lynch. Imafidon recently announced her latest initiative, Stemettes Future Summits, funded by the latter bank, in which young women in STEM industries share their experience and expertise with up to 250 young girls a session, in cities including London and Chester.

Just as comics used to be for geeks and have now become multimillion-dollar franchises, Imafidon operates on blockbuster principles.

**'Girls are going into this world where everything is subtly pitched against them'**

age girls – it's that they need to know they are not the problem. 'Girls are going into this world where everything is subtly pitted against them,' she says. Whenever a boy has been present at one of Imafidon's events, he has invariably 'overpowered the situation', she says. When I ask if she thinks girls have a greater fear of failure than boys, she replies, 'One-hundred per cent. Because they're conditioned to be perfect.'

'It continues into adulthood,' she says. 'If you have a job description with 10 points of things that are needed, the woman will look at it, see she's got eight, and say, "Oh, no." She needs to go and work on herself before she can apply. And a guy will look at it and see he's got four, and be like, "Yeah, good enough. I'll make up the rest of it as I go."' As a result, she argues, women are underpaid because they only apply for jobs for which they're (comparatively speaking) overqualified.

Imafidon herself deals with this in granular ways. For instance, her programmes for young STEM entrepreneurs don't just accept applica-



## SUPER SIBLINGS

> Anne-Marie (second right) isn't the only brainy Imafidon



Paul: Imafidon was the youngest-ever secondary school student at nine (with twin Peter)

Samantha Imafidon passed GCSE maths aged six and went on to study at Oxford

Peter Imafidon passed A/AS level maths aged seven (along with Paula)

tions directly from the girls themselves, they also consider nominations – say from a friend or family member – because it's known that girls won't necessarily put themselves forward.

She also refuses to call any of the funding she offers a 'scholarship', because that implies the recipient should use it to attend university, and she doesn't think that's for everyone ('we don't want you to go there and have a rubbish experience just because we gave you the money for it'). In some cases, a mentorship, apprenticeship or seed funding are much more effective. Also, she adds, 'We don't like age groups.' Perhaps understandably, all of her thinking has the possibility of future child prodigies built into it.

This is the mentality that Imafidon encourages: don't expect the next generation to live in your world. Give them confidence, and the tools

to move forward, and they will design the world they need to live in themselves.

When I ask whether there's anything girls need to be especially concerned about in this digital age – cyberbullying, privacy, other perils of social media – Imafidon argues that 'bullying was always a massive thing; cyberbullying has just kicked it up a notch. Young people will always find themselves in situations where they need to figure things out.' She's more worried about the rest of us, knowing so little. 'Sometimes we pro-

**'You're not learning to code to be Zuckerberg – but because you need it to go through life'**

ject our own lack of digital awareness on to the next generation.'

Future-proofing, Imafidon argues, requires participation. 'Rather than it being technologists versus user, we should all be participants. We're not the first generation that had new technology. Electricity was new technology. The wheel was new technology. So we have to be clear on our principles around these things.'

About those principles: are certain algorithms sexist or racist, I ask. Imafidon cites the facial recognition software used by police, which has 'a big bias towards white European faces', because the algorithm is trained on data historically stored here, ignoring, say, the vast number of Chinese or Indian people the world contains. 'And you know, that seems quite harmless until you take it to a football match that the police are policing. So tell me: does that mean the algorithm is racist?'

It may not have a racist intention but it can have a racist result, I say.

'And that kind of semantic play is what we have with the tech giants. Zuckerberg is convinced that Facebook is not an evil platform. But just because you didn't build it to be evil doesn't mean there can't be evil consequences from what's happening there.' So, is the Cambridge Analytica scandal Mark Zuckerberg's fault?

'Yeah,' Imafidon says. Zuckerberg, she argues, 'could have had people in his team to think about these things as it was building'.

**A**t Imafidon's east London offices, a postcard bearing the words 'Dream it, wish it, do it' sits on the window ledge, and posters of STEM greats including US mathematician Gladys West are scattered across the room. Her motto – if you can call it that – is 'reading, writing, 'rithmetic, r-digital'. She smiles. 'Rolls right off the tongue,' she admits. All right, it's not catchy, but the point is made: 'You didn't learn to read to become a newsreader. You didn't learn to write to become JK Rowling or CS Lewis. You're not learning code so you can become Mark Zuckerberg – you're learning code because you need it to go through life.'

It's not uncommon for Imafidon to be the only woman, black person or young person in any given professional gathering. 'There are some rooms I go to where literally everyone is almost dead,' she says. Nevertheless, she says her own experience of racism or sexism is that, 'I've never been a white man, so I don't know what it would be otherwise.' Though some people may put being black at the top of their list of identity traits, Imafidon puts it 'slightly lower down'. For her, being female doesn't necessarily trump being from east London or being a regular at Nando's. If asked to describe herself in one word, she says, 'I'd be like: Anne-Marie?'

She says she has recently been made aware that being a black woman is 'apparently the bottom of the pile', but 'if someone does something to me that's not great, it's up to me to interpret why they did that'. In other words, the reasons why someone might take against you can be entirely



random, and therefore not the problem of the person on the receiving end of the prejudice. 'I don't take the time to process,' she says, with committed understatement, 'because I've actually got quite a lot to do.'

**Y**ou may wonder whether Imafidon - who is the eldest of five siblings aged 19 to 29 - grew up with some sort of 'tiger mother'. This makes Imafidon laugh. There were, she says, two TVs in her house, one stacked on top of the other, with two different programmes running at the same time. Her parents, an ophthalmologist and an English teacher - originally from Nigeria - taught their children, 'Whatever you do, do it well.' (Imafidon explains that this included 'eating ice cream'.) But she's playing it down. The Imafidons have been dubbed 'Britain's brainiest family': three of her younger siblings, Samantha and the twins Paula and Peter, all passed maths GCSEs when they were six. (The twins became the youngest children ever to go to secondary school in the UK.) Christiana, meanwhile, passed AS level maths at 14, with an A grade.

In fact, the key to their success seems to be less strictness on the parents' part than competitiveness on the children's. One is at university now, two are working in tech. 'It's not that we're copying each other,' Imafidon says with a smile, 'but it's this thing of like: "Well, if you did it I can do it, and do it better than you did. Why can't I be in tech? I can be in tech NOW." That's just what we're like.' Imafidon says people have contacted her sister in error, meaning to get in touch with her, and her sister has simply agreed to turn up for the job.

There was also the presence of the Pentecostal church. 'I can't say I'm the world's best churchgoer,' Imafidon says sheepishly, but she does still hold those beliefs. 'Maybe some of my confidence has come from that,' she reflects. 'Because I'm like, "Nothing that crazily bad is gonna happen. If it does, I'll be OK."

When I ask her if being a prodigy led her to feel there's anything she missed out on as a child, she says, true to the family competitive spirit, that she doesn't regret any of her precociousness, but she does still harbour a grudge that the younger kids were allowed to have sweets.

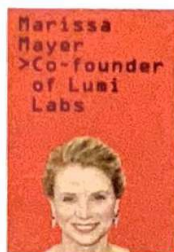
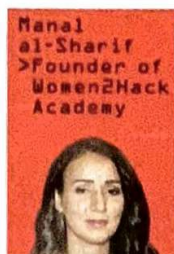
For all Imafidon's entertainment value, it strikes me that for a prospective romantic partner it might feel like being thrown to the lions. Before I've even finished asking the intimidation question, she's leapt in. 'One time, my boyfriend was with me, and someone asked this question. He got annoyed and left the room. He was like, "Why would you ask anyone that question? Why would they be intimidated?"'

Well, I suggest, because you're so brilliant.

'Yeah, but my life isn't maths equations. Like, if we're down the pub, they're not useful. Do you know what I mean?'

Imafidon's boyfriend works 'in digital'. They don't live together ('my parents would kill me'), but she talks about getting married and having children and saving up to buy a particular house nearby. (If she moved into the dream

**CRACKING THE CODE: Women in tech**

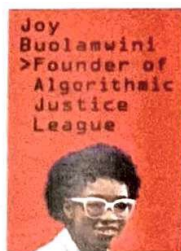
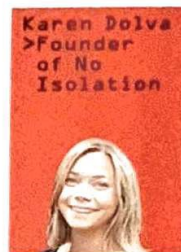


Computer scientist and activist al-Sharif, 39, founded Women2Hack Academy to foster tech talent in Saudi Arabia and create female leaders in cybersecurity. She spent nine days in a Saudi jail after posting a video of herself driving on social media, protesting the driving ban.

Mayer, 43, joined Google in 1999 as its 20th employee, and influenced the creation of products like Gmail, Google Maps and Google Images during her 13 years there. She went on to become Yahoo's CEO, before co-founding consumer media and AI incubator Lumi Labs.

Since becoming Facebook COO in 2008, Sandberg, 49, has worked hard to position it as a platform for advertising - last year, the site reported advertising revenue of \$16.6bn. Her book *Lean In* offers advice to women in the workplace and has inspired a peer-mentorship movement.

Dr Black, 57, runs the charity #techmums, which empowers mothers through on- and offline classes in tech, allowing them to enter new careers or gain confidence returning to the workplace. She is also a Government advisor and led a successful campaign to save Bletchley Park.



With Dr Emmanuelle Charpentier, Professor Doudna revolutionised DNA editing by using the CRISPR-Cas9 protein - technology that has enormous potential to cure serious diseases and can make permanent genetic changes to human embryos.

In 2015, Dolva, 29, from Norway, founded No Isolation, a tech start-up dedicated to ending loneliness. One of Dolva's patented products connects unwell children with their classmates through a robot while they recover from long-term illness.

Ghanaian-American computer scientist Buolamwini, 29, founded the Algorithmic Justice League to identify potential bias in artificial intelligence. Her TED Talk, exposing the racial biases in software such as facial recognition, went viral, bringing the issue to global attention.

Wojcicki, 50, rented her California garage to Google founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page in 1998, before joining them as their 16th employee. After persuading Brin and Page to buy YouTube in 2006 for \$1.65bn, she became its CEO in 2014. It is now valued at \$160bn.

house, she says, laughing, 'my whole life would be concentrated almost entirely in the borough of Newham.')

And although she's heard that 'when you have kids, it changes you', she has already alerted her boyfriend to one unbending principle: she will not be travelling on planes with their future children.

Is that out of superstition, I ask. For safety?

'No. Just - I've seen children do a lot of things on aeroplanes that I'd rather not witness. I was

**'My life isn't maths equations. If we're down the pub, they're not useful'**

like: "If we fly anywhere, and they're under five, best believe *you're* booking your tickets with *your* children. And I'll book my own ticket and I'll sit somewhere else on the plane."

She continues in this vein for a while, until I say, jokingly: thinking about it, it sounds like you'd better take a separate plane.

But Imafidon is not laughing. Ironically it's this silly banter that makes me realise how her achievements have come about, and why Stemettes is likely to change a great number of lives. When Imafidon means business, no matter what sphere of life she's talking about, she is deadly serious.

'You're right,' she says, emphatically, as if we were collaborating on a business plan. 'Thank you. I'll add that to the notes.'

[stemettes.org](http://stemettes.org); [aimafidon.com](http://aimafidon.com)