



Back to Medical School

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In order to distract myself from the middle life flushes, I have returned part time to medical school to test the patience and endurance threshold levels of the lecturers. I was fairly apprehensive about going back to school on account of my reduced attention span and the fact that I have always been prone to daydreaming. I think it started in Standard 1. I must have been about seven years old at the time. One day of that year is with me forever. The master concerned was Mr Hall. I forget which subject, if any, he taught as I was so frightened of him, I seldom understood a word he was saying despite him speaking in the same language as myself, namely English. It was a hot summer's day and I had been staring out of the class window at the rolling hills of the Cotswolds, engaging myself in some languorous day dreams. I was probably thinking about a swim in the pool after the lesson or a visit to the tuck shop when I was interrupted by a thunderbolt of a voice. Mr Hall was looking straight in my direction and saying:

"You, boy. Stand up. What was I just saying? You weren't listening were you?"

He was in fact not talking to me at all but to a boy sitting in the chair in front, but by the time I realised this, it was too late. I had wet my pants.

It was with some concern therefore that I attended the first week of the course at my new medical school. The start went by without incident and I was pleased to note some surreptitious napping from our small geriatric section of GPs. It was day three that was the one. Again it was a warm summer's afternoon but this time the rolling hills were those of North Transvaal just visible through the top windows. I switched easily over to my temporal lobe and suspended myself comfortably from the proceedings. I don't know how long I had been away when I heard a demanding voice entering my surrealist vacuum:

"What is your opinion on this, Chris?"

I rapidly returned from the shores of the Natal

South Coast where I had been fishing with a rod in one hand and a frosty in the other, to the same sensation of alarm that Mr Hall had caused many years before. My mind panicked into a rapid series of escapist choices between lying my way out, making it up on instinct or coming clean. I couldn't even remember what the subject had been when I had left them, so I came clean. They are a very understanding lot in my adopted medical school. They just pretended not to notice. In fact they needn't have. My bladder control is much better. I hardly lost a drop.

Medical school has changed in other ways too. It has become more student centred. I think it must have come full circle from compulsory lectures to voluntary ones and now to consensus groups.

Lectures at medical school in the sixties were still technically voluntary. The authorities had at one time decided that we must all sign in on a form on the door for each medical school lecture in order to check on our attendance. On the day it was instituted I, not unusually, was late for the lecture concerned. I came upon the list to be signed, which was as promulgated on the lecture room door. It was full of names and if it was correct, some of the greatest personages in the land were attending our lecture on the physiology of the lower intestinal tract. Winston Churchill had signed at least three times in his enthusiasm. The Duke of Malmesbury was there and also the Duchess. Several stars of the world of sport were attending and the religious community were well represented by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Pope and the Aga Khan. The Dalai Lama had sent his apologies (something to do with China invading Tibet) and could someone take notes for him? I added my name beneath that of Doris Day, who was obviously as keen as mustard to learn about the machinery of the lower digestive system. The lists never appeared again and I see they have still not reappeared.

Perhaps our lecturers were overwhelmed by having to perform in front of such a celebrity audience.