

LIFELINE

**W Ian Lipkin**

W Ian Lipkin is a member of an endangered species, the physician-scientist. A professor of neurology, anatomy, and neurobiology,

and microbiology and molecular genetics at the University of California-Irvine, he studies neurotropic viruses, lives in Laguna Beach, California, and regrets that after more than 15 years in proximity to large waves he has never learned to surf.

Who was your most influential teacher? A grammar-school teacher, Betty Bodian, who taught me to compose concise, coherent sentences.

Which aspect of your work gives you most pleasure? Seeing students and fellows evolve into independent, rigorous, creative scientists.

Which single medical advance would benefit most people? The low-technology measure of convincing physicians to wash their hands after examining each patient.

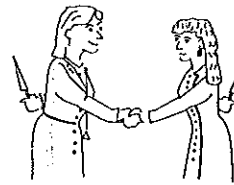
Which patient has had most effect on your work? An HIV-infected patient with rapidly progressive inflammatory polyneuropathy who responded to plasmapheresis and prompted me to forego a private-practice post in clinical neurology for training in molecular microbiology and immunology.

What is your unrealised ambition? To write a great screenplay. One story involves polar exploration, defrosting mammoths, and the release of a Pandora's box of ice-age microbes.

What would be your advice to a newly qualified doctor? Listen to the nursing and support staff. These are dedicated, frequently unappreciated people who can simplify your professional life or make it a nightmare.

Whom do you most admire? Sigmund Freud for contributions to neuroscience, clinical medicine, and philosophy as well as his pithy postscript to the statement he was required to sign before leaving Nazi-occupied Vienna: "I can most highly recommend the Gestapo to everyone".

JABS & JIBES

**Police stopped play**

Cricket is an ancient game played by gentlemen. Cricketers pride themselves on high standards of sportsmanship and fair play. The only policing that the game requires is enshrined in the 42 "Laws". All this I believed without question, until a summer's day in the mid-1980s.

I was a very humble research assistant at a very proud medical school on the outskirts of west London. My department had been challenged to a "social" game of cricket. The professor who led our challengers had a well-earned reputation as an aggressive competitor and tireless fast bowler. Our not-so-secret weapon was the head of the diagnostic laboratory, a skilful batsman with a classic style. The medical school was next to a vast area of playing fields, on which we booked one of the cricket pitches of dubious quality maintained by the local council.

On the morning of the appointed day it rained briefly, breaking several weeks of dry weather. But by the time the two teams made their way to the field of play in mid-afternoon the sun had reappeared. Conversation turned to what effect the morning's shower might have had on the pitch, for in cricket the quality of the 22 yards of turf on which play takes place can determine the outcome of the game. There seemed to be no cause for concern—the rain had merely darkened the surface of the otherwise rock-hard earth.

Preparation for the game began: players wrung their stinging hands as they practised inexpertly catching the ball, the coin toss took place between the self-appointed captains, and a reluctant girlfriend was given a quick lesson in keeping score. The batsmen walked to the centre with an unconvincing air of confidence, and the fielding side moved into place.

Just as the umpire called "play" I heard the unmistakable chug-chug of a diesel engine and turned to see a tractor approaching driven by a small, wildly gesticulating man. Jumping from the

tractor and marching towards the pitch, the man's first words were: "I can't let you play here". He was, he explained, the groundsman and it was more than his "job's worth" to allow play when the pitch was "so wet". Disgruntled players gathered round the man, fronted by the professor. Discussions became heated, the groundsman was implacable; finger jabbing started. The professor, by now livid with anger, opined that the real reason the man wanted to be rid of us was to get home early for his tea. "Right", said the groundsman, "If that's your attitude, I'm calling the police". We laughed disbelievingly, and the groundsman retreated.

Play resumed, and I soon dismissed the incident. Then, from a distant road came the wha-wha-wha of a police siren. Moments later a sleek white patrol car burst onto the scene, bouncing at speed across the rough grass. Braking sharply at the boundary, two of the Metropolitan Police's

finest emerged. The groundsman had by now reappeared. The two sides were invited to explain their positions, the groundsman insisting that we be arrested, the professor blunt in his opinions. A night in the cells for a significant fraction of the medical school's faculty seemed a distinct possibility.

One of the policemen, a tall mustachioed man, revealed an in-depth knowledge of cricket (do the police maintain a skills database for just such occasions?). He crouched down and rubbed a hand across the pitch. "Looks like it might take spin", he said. With this action the humour of the situation seemed to dawn on the protagonists. A compromise was reached—we could use an old unprepared pitch that, with a heavy covering of grass, we were unlikely to damage.

The police departed, the groundsman went home for his tea, and the game was won. By which side I don't recall—it doesn't matter of course.

John McConnell

