

**ALISTAIR BREWIS, DSc**

Mr Chancellor,

There is a small sketch of a frog jumping for joy in a frame above my desk. It's drawn on a piece of RVI note paper dated 21/3/91 alongside the words

Dear John,

terrific

delighted

congratulations

thank God for that

Alistair.

It was one of many letters of congratulations I received when I became a professor but it was the one I held most dear.

I had first met Alistair Brewis, or Ali B as he was affectionately abbreviated, as one of the countless medical students who had crowded round to hear him speak. I was so impressed that I

applied to do my pre-registration house job on wards 14 and 15 under Alistair and Hewan Dewar. During those few months and subsequently on the RVI senior house officer rotation I had many opportunities to observe Alistair in his interactions with patients, family members, students, trainees and fellow professionals. He became a role model who has influenced my practice of medicine ever since. I know many others who would say the same. He conveyed a sense of calm organisation regardless of the challenge. He would converse gently with a sick patient, all the while piecing together the jigsaw of symptoms. He personified all that was good about the doctors of the RVI. It is, therefore, a special pleasure to present him for this honorary degree.

Robert Alistair Livingstone Brewis (I didn't know until this month what RAL actually stood for), qualified from King's College Durham, as our medical school was then known, in 1960. Alistair was born into a medical family; his father George Brewis was a consultant at the RVI, one of the first generation

of paediatricians. George was a larger than life character, a star student in his day who is remembered with affection for being an entertaining teacher. He was also a hard task master and expected a lot of Alistair and his siblings Ian, a rheumatologist, and Elspeth, a senior nurse in Glasgow. When Alistair became a house physician at the RVI, George would call the ward at 8AM to check that Alistair was on duty. Alistair's excellent working relationship with the ward team ensured George was always reassured, regardless of reality.

Alistair met his wife Mary in medical school where she too qualified with honours. She went on to work as a radiotherapist. They have three sons. Alistair successfully completed the London exams for Membership of the Royal College of Physicians in 1962 and the Edinburgh exam the following year. He earned his MD in 1966 and was made a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians in 1974. When he was appointed as a consultant physician at the RVI in 1970 he was one the youngest to achieve this accolade and he soon became a leader in the field

of respiratory medicine. His textbook on respiratory diseases became a standard and he worked for a time as editor of the leading respiratory medicine journal, Thorax.

After a distinguished 5 years as Medical Director of the hospital, Alistair retired and, with Mary, took up residence in Bassenthwaite, where Mary had spent a lot of time in her early life. There he has been free to pursue his other talents, for Alistair is a true polymath. The life of spiders, Bell pits on the Town Moor, anthills in Cumbria, Alistair is a fund of stories but his greatest love throughout life has been to draw and paint. As a student at Royal Grammar School he would draw pictures in his ever-present notebook of his environment like the ships on the Tyne. His wonderful paintings produced while he worked at the RVI were regularly displayed and he has continued to paint, now donating money from the sale of his paintings to the Calvert Trust to provide holiday facilities for disabled children.

His most recent enthusiasm is the construction of automata. Last year he raised charity funds and much cheer with his contribution to the local scarecrow competition; an old man pedalling a bicycle with a barking dog in the basket and a squawking parrot on his shoulder. This year he turned his hand to a life-sized tumbling acrobat. I wonder if their six grandchildren realise how lucky they are.

Mr Chancellor, I commend Alistair Brewis to you for the degree of Doctor of Science honoris causa in recognition of his abundant talents, his humility and his humanity. I can think of no better representative of the qualities of the doctors who have walked the corridors of the RVI over the last century. For you

Alistair, I have 7 more words:

terrific  
delighted  
congratulations  
thank God for that

I'm afraid I'm not very good at jumping frogs.

**Citation by Professor John Burn**