**A Surgeon Reminisces (6) History Repeats Itself**

When I was a surgical registrar in Pontefract I worked for a consultant surgeon (subsequently referred to as ‘Boss’) who was simply the best technical surgeon I have seen in my career. He was a man of few words, uncommunicative, sarcastic, quick to anger (when his deep voice went up a couple of octaves) and expected high standards from those around him. When things were not going well in theatre he would turn to the scrub nurse and say ‘Come along, sweetie, let’s pretend we are operating’. His deep, slow distinctive voice could strike fear into his staff and patients alike. Now I prided myself in being a very good mimic and, many a time imitating the Boss’s voice, I would give the more junior doctors a rollicking over the phone, striking fear into their hearts.

One day the Boss said to me that he was going to a meeting in Leeds the following day and would not be back in time to start his operating list. He asked me to do the first case and said he would be back in time to do the rest of the list. The following afternoon I started the first case, doing impressions of the Boss while operating. There was much laughter in theatre, but just as I was coming to the end of the operation, I said ‘Come along sweetie, let’s pretend we are operating’, and instead of the laughter, there was just stony silence. Sister looked at me and indicated with her eyes that I should look behind me. There was the Boss, back from his meeting, Suddenly that slow ,threatening distinctive voice said ‘That’s a very good imitation, Raftery. At least there is something you are good at!’No further comment was forthcoming!

Moving forward several years following posts in Manchester and Cambridge, I arrived in Sheffield. There were occasions during the posts in Manchester and Cambridge when I told anecdotes about my former Boss in Pontefract, but I don’t think anyone ever believed me. Things had been rather more formal and correct in Cambridge. I was lucky when I arrived in Sheffield that things were a little more relaxed and we had fun in theatre. I behaved rather like the Boss in Pontefract. (Except ‘sweetie’ was replaced by ‘Sister’ as things were getting much more politically correct.) At this time I had an outstanding surgical registrar called Brian. Brian was correct, proper, thorough, punctual and an excellent surgeon, and was very well spoken, which stood out in Sheffield! (As the nurses would say ‘Brian were posh’).He was quite serious and ,I thought,lacked a sense of humour. He had to put up with all my anecdotes from Pontefract.

I had to attend a meeting one afternoon which would cause me being about an hour late for my theatre list, and told Brian to do the first case. The meeting ended early and I arrived in theatre to some considerable laughter. I stood there unobtrusively at the door and was surprised to hear Brian saying in a broad Yorkshire accent ‘Come along sister, let’s pretend we are operating’. The laughter suddenly subsided. Sister looked at Brian, directing him to the door, Brian stopped, looked round and saw me standing there. You could see the blush radiating through his mask. ‘Oh, Sir, Mr Raftery, I am so terribly sorry, I will apologise formally when I have finished the case.’ I was in hysterics. I could not stop laughing. Brian was perplexed and didn’t know what to say to me when he had finished the case as I was still laughing. The following morning he apologised again. I told him to stop apologising as I had not had so much fun for years.Brian clearly did have a sense of humour I only wish my former boss in Pontefract had still been alive. He would have loved the story.History repeating itself.

Andrew Raftery