

I interviewed Trevor Buxton in the summer of 2013 at his home, Brook House, on the edge of the West Midlands dormitory village of Wombourne. His wife brought in tea and fruit cake to Trevor's snug, a room with a large screen TV, a view of the garden, and the faintly kippered smell of Benson & Hedges. Trevor used his inhaler before we started, a bronchodilator, to ease the breathlessness caused by his lung disease, COPD.

LG: You've had a long career as a GP.

TB: More than 40 years. I went up to Bart's in '61, graduated in '66. I didn't go straight into general practice. Even in those days you had to get some experience under your belt, before you settled. But my father was getting up in years - people got old faster in those days - and it had always been on the cards that I'd take over his practice. This room used to be his surgery, before we moved into The Lindens.

LG: You've seen a lot of changes?

TB: I'll say. Custom-built medical centres, nurses, receptionists, practice managers. My mother used to take care of all that. Unpaid, of course. When I started, we didn't even have an appointment system. Dad had never needed one. His patients used to come in, sit out there in the hall, nice and polite, and wait their turn. It was like they were queuing for an audience with God. Actually, some of them were, because by the time they came in for a consultation they were really ill. At the departure gate, so to speak. Not wanting to make a fuss, you see? Then again, a lot of things GPs get pestered for these days, weren't even on the menu.

LG: Such as?

TB: Weight loss, cosmetic stuff, you know, boobs too big, boobs too small? Feeling 'down'. That's another one.

LG: You don't think those should be a GP's concerns?

TB: Look, what I'm saying is, your family doctor only has 24 hours in a day, so if everybody's going to bring all their problems to him, it stands to reason they'll have to wait in line. I mean, we all feel 'down' sometimes. We all have days when we wish we hadn't looked in the mirror. What would your granny have said? If you're fat, stop pigging out. Don't like your shape? Buy a good brassiere and get over yourself. Feeling glum? Go for a nice brisk walk, before you clog up your doctor's surgery, demanding pills. Or help somebody who's feeling more glum than you do. We're not magicians.

LG: Did you ever consider any other career?

TB: Not really. I'd liked to have ridden a Gold Cup winner, but I was too tall and too chicken to be a jockey.

LG: Do you ride?

TB: Heavens, no. I did, as a boy. But one day I realized any control I thought I had over the horse was an illusion. If he decided, on a whim, to get shot of me, I'd be toast. And like I said, I'm a coward.

LG: How do you feel about retiring?

TB: Depressed. Furious. Nobody to blame but myself, of course. I should have given up the smokes years ago. But I didn't, so I've made my bed and I'll lie in it. I'm not fully retired. I suppose Helen Vincent'll try to get rid of me one of these days, but I do still have my occasional uses.

LG: Can you tell us about your relationship with Helen?

TB: She's very bright.

LG: Do you like her?

TB: Like her? We're chalk and cheese. Which is fine. It's good to have a mix of personalities. Helen's brisk and business-like, Mac's a schmoozer. Was. And Vaz, well he's just too damned nice for his own good. Terrible dress sense, though.

LG: And Dan Talbot? He's been your most recent trainee. What do you think of him?

TB: Dan's going to make a cracking doctor. When patients first meet him, they think he'll be a pushover, but he's not. He's got a mature head on his shoulders, and a sense of humour, too. It's a pity we can't keep him, but he needs to move on. He can't spend his whole working life on Tipton Road West.

LG: Why not? You did.

TB: Out of laziness and convenience. There was a practice set up and waiting for me. It suited me. And Mrs Buxton wouldn't have wanted to move away. She likes to be near her sisters.

LG: A question I know my readers would love me to ask is, what is Mrs Buxton's name?

TB: I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to say.

LG: A State secret?

TB: Revealed only on pain of death.

LG: You've been married a long time.

TB: Longer even than I've been a GP. We got married when I was a senior houseman. She hardly saw me that first year. And we didn't have two pennies to rub together. I think it's been 42 years. You get less than that for murder.

LG: Where did you meet?

TB: North Staffs Infirmary. I was clerking in A&E and she came in with a busted ankle. She'd been runner-up in the Miss Cannock Chase beauty contest and fallen off the rostrum. She was still in her bathing costume when they brought her in.

LG: Was it love at first sight?

TB: It was for me. I faced a bit of competition because she was quite a beauty. She still is. But the white coat and stethoscope swung it for me in the end.

LG: Have you had patients fall in love with you?

TB: Oh yes. Not lately, I might add. You can understand why it happens. It's an intimate setting, the consulting room. Quite intense. A patient puts herself in your hands, sometimes literally. Then, maybe things aren't too rosy at home. It's not a big leap for her to start fantasizing. It's flattering, I won't deny.

LG: But not tempting?

TB: Not tempting enough.

LG: You've met Dan Talbot's wife. What do you make of her?

TB: Chloe, yes. Brains and beauty. Not short of money, either.

LG: Do you think she's the right woman for Dan?

For the first time in our conversation, Trevor seemed lost for an answer. He lit a cigarette before replying.

TB: I hope so. I'm fond of Dan.

LG: They've had a couple of wobbles.

TB: I know. Although I think it'd be more accurate to say she's had a couple of wobbles.

LG: Would you agree that by all appearances Chloe is an immature and spoiled brat?

TB: You might say that. I couldn't possibly comment. Now eat your cake or Mrs Buxton will want to know why.