
1981 – My part in its downfall

Dr Jon Garvey looks back at the 'watershed of civilisation' – or should that be this year?

January

THE limpid winter sun rises on the bright dawn of a new year – no, a new decade. The world is vibrant with new promise, and I myself with new hopes and horizons.

I am about to strike out in a new career in general practice – a bright creature newly-emerged from the chrysalis of nine years of training into the morning. Actually, I seem to remember very little of the dawn of New Year's Day, and not a great deal about a good part of the morning, for some reason. But that's more or less how I felt.

Ah, 1981! The watershed of civilisation! You and I are about to make our mark on the universe.

February

Become famous. If only I had realised years ago that writing school essays could earn me as much money in an hour as I normally make in a day of sweating over hot backaches.

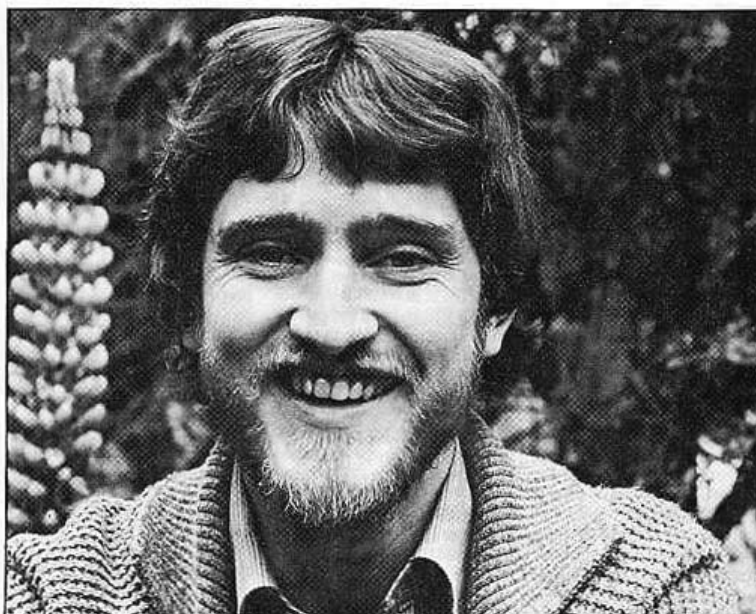
In the ensuing months I have written on nuclear war, industrial relations, microchip technology and extrasensory perception, to name but a few, and the only thing that has provoked any public reaction at all is my suggestion that not all doctors should dress alike.

It is nice to know that we are a profession concerned with the deep things of life.

March

Discover old air-raid shelter in garden of surgery, but fail to convince rest of practice that it should be converted into a nuclear fallout shelter. This year, everybody has suddenly remembered that nuclear bombs are dangerous, after a period of some 15 years when we all thought it was aerosol propellants that were des-roying the world.

Doctors seem to be writing volumes of correspondence to PULSE reminding the world that the



Future ages will tremble when they recall 1981: Dr Jon Garvey is a GP in Chelmsford, Essex.

NHS would not be able to cope with 30 million people dead from radiation, and that they'd have to go private.

I don't know why doctors should form an organisation against the bomb – it's the gravediggers who are going to be overworked.

April

The launch of the space-shuttle heralds the age of the reusable rocket. This new type of technology could have wide repercussions in medicine. For example, I envisage that one could develop a 'reusable syringe', which could be made of, say, glass and metal, and boiled for reuse after each injection.

We need a few more revolutionary ideas like these to put the country back on its feet.

May

Getting on for three million unemployed and I realise that, as my plans for redevelopment of our air-raid shelter are never going to be accepted by the other partners, I shall be forced to join the dole queue.

I regretfully give in my notice, and bleakly look forward to another few months of travelling round the far corners of the British Isles, trying to prove to jaded interviewers that I am better than the 120 other doctors they have spoken to, despite being the same

idiot who writes in PULSE every couple of weeks.

Ring previous trainer to cry on his shoulder, and am immediately offered job in old practice, another partner having decided to leave. Did my trainer learn *nothing* in the year I was with him?

June

Review Body recommendations ignored by Government. I come to realisation that I'm still going to be paid as an assistant and not a locum while working out my notice.

That means no travel allowance for the 100-mile daily journey, and no subsistence allowance. Mortgage rate has gone up, car has broken down. Quick, write more articles!

July

Doctors everywhere are joining the newly-fledged Social Democratic Party.

It would be nice to think that this reflects insight into Britain's new political opportunities, or even a disillusion with the Conservative Party's policy of building as many ICBMs as possible – Social Democrats only want to drop the bombs we already have – but is more likely to be due to the Review Body's failure of the previous month.

'Never again', roared the BMA, which I seem to recall it saying most years since I was at school.

August

In one weekend, I leave my job, go on holiday, and hear that my wife's father has had a heart attack. If life events are bad for your health, I may as well book my funeral now.

All over the country, citizens are clearing up after weeks of rioting. It must all have something to do with sunspots.

September

The limpid summer sun rises on the bright dawn of a new month, and I am about to strike out in a new career in general practice. . . at least I know there are no air-raid shelters in *this* surgery.

October

October's a sort of non-month really, isn't it?

November

Margaret Thatcher announces that the recession is nearing its end, so eagerly anticipating my sudden increase in income, I buy a new car, sell my house and buy children pair of shoes each instead of old bits of crepe bandage.

Next stage – digital watch, electric toothbrush and quadrophonic stethoscope.

December

The time to pause and look back

over the year. Ah, 1981 – how future ages will tremble when they recall this year! Historians will tell how it was

spawned from the restless turbulence of 1980, and sages how it gave way to the restless turbulence of 1982.

It has been between these two an ocean of restless turbulence. Somebody once said that the only lesson we learn from the past is that the lessons of the past are never learned.

So I will cease this reflection, and invite you to join me in striking out into the uncharted frontiers where the hand of man has never set foot: into 1982 – the watershed of civilisation!