

Book Case

Professor Jim Dornan recommends 6 books for the weary off-duty Medic to enjoy.

INTRO

While travelling life's journey, it is surely important to shape one's view of its every element as we encounter daily challenges. We are all open to potential impression by what we hear, observe and read. Of the hundreds of books I've read, I thought I'd choose six to share that either emboldened and empowered me, informed me or, better still, totally changed the way I thought.

I find fiction mostly not stimulating as I'm always convinced my own imagination would be better than that of anyone else! I do though relish scripts that describe human battles with the elements, whether it's climbing Everest, crossing the Atlantic, conquering Space or indeed I also enjoy avidly devouring books that are full of political intrigue.

But for my six I've chosen ones that changed or impacted on my views at the time, and enduringly.

A SPANIARD IN THE WORKS

John Lennon (Penguin 1981, ISBN-13: 978-0140049268. Paperback. Out of print)



As a teenager growing up in Bangor there was a make your mind up time. Were you a mod or a rocker? Some years later a lifelong friend commented, early in our relationship, that I was very impressionable. So, in reality, I became a bit of both. Deep down though I was a rocker, though I was more the Beatles than the Stones, importantly I was more Elvis than Cliff.

Rules, rules, rules dominated our lives at school, socially, certainly at home and most definitely on a Sunday. What people might think seemed more important to those around me than what was probably or necessarily correct. Rules meant power to those who set them. 'Hypocrisy rules

OK' would have been a mantra for many.

Of course, we couldn't understand why we got caned for very little, why we had to wear our school cap at all times. Why our hair could never touch our collar. Why our trousers had to be more than 14 inches at the hem. Why our team couldn't play sport on a Sunday. Why our parents could not have a glass of wine with the neighbours. Why we would go to hell for ...well whatever sin was defined as at the time. Then fifty years later we find that these rules were now considered irrelevant without any actual rewriting of the Bible required. Fantastic and intriguing. Yet these rules were relevant and enforceable at the time, if not actually set in stone.

So, when we found a role model who supported us in trying to hold back and even actually turn the tide, we were going to embrace him. That was John Lennon. I so much admired him, his music of course, but his rebellious streak more than anything. He was empowered before I knew what the word meant.

Lo and behold, after a constant school diet of Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge and their ilk, along came an anthology of poems by MY very own John Lennon. A Spaniard in the Works.

Maybe not a literary masterpiece, but he was my literary master.

John Lennon told it like it was. He took no prisoners. He wasn't impressionable, weak or hypocritical. A good man. A man who saw what was wrong in the world and tried to change it. When you've read this piece, google the words of "Imagine", or "All you need is Love". Both were and are away beyond their time. If they don't make you think, you're in the wrong profession or place.

Yes, reading this book made me dig the heels in a bit more. Fight for rights. Thanks John.

THE DA VINCI CODE

Dan Brown (Corgi, 2003, ISBN-13: 978-0552159715. RRP £7.99 paperback)



While waiting for my suitcase in Nairobi airport in early 2005,

a paperback version of this book arrived alone on the carousel. All watching were bemused. I picked it up, and saw it as a sign, as I'd forgotten to pick a book at WH Smiths at Aldergrove.

I read it, and it's not so much the story itself that I learnt from, but Dan Brown's wonderful and inciteful evidence which revealed the view of women's place over the ages taken by all, and I mean all, of the main religions. The facts unearthed stimulated my research further and laid the basis for my Annual Oration delivered at Queens in 2011 which was entitled The Fall and Rise of (some) Women.

Brown highlighted how women were revered during the pagan era. Mother Earth was worshipped, as she was simply provided with a seed and produced the miracle of life. Religious men from the east weren't too impressed with this and as the various churches emerged and established, without exception patriarchy ruled. Men's rules prevailed, women were put in their place by the established church. Organised religion was all about male priests collecting taxes from hard working congregations with a view to securing a place in the afterlife. Even when Islam came along and took their opportunity to provide an alternative, they too focused on male dominance. They missed a huge trick.

Meanwhile in the dark ages, tens of thousands of midwives, herb growers and so-called witches were burnt at the stake by the Christian church in the name of God. Truly this was all news to me at the time of reading and my further research triggered by Brown has convinced me that to a great extent, the position of women in society today has been molded, coloured and shaped by the churches. It is little wonder, though sad that they appear to be so reluctant to relinquish their powers. But it's inevitable.

Symbolism, ceremony, secret societies and rituals act are the backdrop to Browns wonderfully crafted works, but buried within is his role as a truly contemporary feminist shining through. A life changing read... if you ignore the story.



FOUR-IRON IN THE SOUL.

Lawrence Donegan
(Penguin, 1998, ISBN-13: 978-0140260144. RRP £9.99 paperback)



I have futtered at golf for many decades. Always loved the opportunity to get out into the fresh air and have a bit of craic during and after the round, but as to the occasion providing an opportunity for me to reveal my skills, prowess and competitive nature? Sadly no! Not yet! For you just can't go out without hope and I just know I'm going to get my handicap down to 16 someday!

Obstetrics when I was a boy required a lot of our time. Though when I look for sympathy from my wife, a fellow carer of women, by saying, "In my day...." she invariably stops me in my tracks and says "Jim, it's not your day". Sad, but true.

Anyway, I just don't know how some of my colleagues became so good at the blooming game, 'cause I have truly struggled.

In 2012, I retired from the NHS and vowed to crack this game once and for all. Professor Lamki, my lifetime friend and mentor stopped me in the corridor and said "Jim, I hear you're taking up golf," I concurred. He continued "I can hardly think of a game worse suited to your personality!"

So there you go. What hope did I, or do I, have?

Laurence Donegan in "A four iron in the soul" provided me with huge insight into what is required to be a successful golfer.

Donegan was a journalist and handy golfer who took a year off and acted as a caddy to a young pro golfer, Ross Drummond, on the circuit. This gave him the opportunity to determine the key qualities necessary to make the cuts and bring home the bacon. A fascinating insight into the personalities involved reveals that the best golfers are those with absolutely nothing in their heads, especially at the top of their back swing. I realised then what Harith Lamki was referring to!

Donegan noted that the best golfers were focused almost to the point of despair. Not for them the pint immediately on trudging off the eighteenth. Rather, straight round to the range for two or three hours getting the muscle memory established and the rhythm engraved in their soul.

When they do reach the locker room and bar, the good ones truly don't know the difference between politics in North Korea and North Down, and tellingly, don't care.

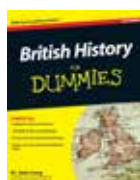
My lack of ideal attributes hasn't stopped me trying though, and "A four iron in my soul" provided me with all the excuses I need.

In my retirement I have been a frequent playing partner with Brian Dean, the Doc's Doc from the Ormeau Road. He's tried and tried to talk and walk me round some fabulous courses. He almost has a face-saving expression for every one of my shots, and there are many, which I produce. In utter desperation recently, he caught my eye at the end of another gross swing and said, after a suitable interval and light blush, "I've run out of words!"

Need another golf book, with instructions this time.

BRITISH HISTORY FOR DUMMIES

Seán Lang (John Wiley and Sons, 3rd revised ed, 2011, ISBN-13: 978-0470978191. RRP £17.99 paperback).



My father was so keen to have a son who would study medicine I became aware of constant pressure to read anything scientific between the ages of 12 and 18. History, now one of my favourite subjects, was relegated to the bottom of the list, and while I did enough to get through, it was never presented to me in a fascinating manner to grab my interest. That all changed later in life when I bought myself British History for Dummies. Wonderful. Like Classic FM for those who didn't know classical music could grab their soul given the chance.

Dr Seán Lang was not a Grade A history student himself, but did go on

to become a University History don. It's never too late to learn. He relates the major changes that have coloured our place in these Celtic islands in a fair and illuminating manner and provides logic, where possible, to explain the big moves that shaped our culture. Sadly, much (as was evident in Da Vinci Code) can be explained by too much misused testosterone running in the veins of our Lords and Masters.

I particularly liked how he explained how the Britannic knights tired of clamping up their maidens in chastity belts to keep the serfs at bay while they went off to the religious wars to fight for "Christianity" (something wrong there. Yes?) when over fifty percent of Britain's nobility got wiped out. Those who survived yet another cull met around the table one more time and decided... 'I tell you what, let's invent armies, made up of our serfs, and we'll direct operations from behind the lines, with our maidens by our sides' Voila! The course of wars changed forever.

Those who knew my management style will realise that those delegation skills I gleaned from these books were key to my success as Clinical Director in RMH.

GEORGE BEST, A LIFE IN THE NEWS.

Richard Williams
(Aurum Press, 2006, ISBN-13: 978-1845132019. Hardback. Out of Print).



There were times in my life when I thought of George Best on a daily, almost hourly, basis. As a teenager I was enthralled by him. In my early twenties, I lived his every twist, turn, shimmy, sprint, lob, shot and cross. When he beat two or three men in one move, so did I. I so admired his skills, I so cherished the fact that he played for my teams of Manchester United and Northern Ireland. He could do no wrong in my eyes. He was never admonished for faking. He rarely, if ever, retaliated. He scored for fun. He dribbled for show. As a young lad from Castlereagh, he literally slept every night with a football in his arms. I tried it in Bangor, with little effect.



We did have access to Match of the Day, but the rest of the time we mostly had to get by with direct observation of his appearances for NI. (And yes, he did score a great goal when he took the ball from Gordon Banks at Windsor and slotted it into the net - I was there.) However most of the time we had to make do with match reports and commentary from football journalists. And truly they were often better than the real thing. Reality TV is just that, but literature is reality PLUS the writer's added colour and texture.

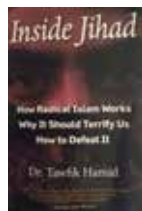
This book, George Best, a Life in the News, truly brings to life all his great times. The reader is transported as if by magic to Old Trafford, Maine Road, Anfield, Wembley, and yes, even Windsor, and George's finely-honed skills are imprinted into my psyche as though I was there myself, indeed perhaps even more so.

As I young boy I think I got more pleasure out of my crystal radio than from any other present. To lie in my own cold bedroom on a wet night in the 60s and listen to match reports, plays, book readings and political discussion on the Home Service, all by myself, accompanied only by the limits of my imagination was heaven. And George was centre stage.

One wee quote which I've only ever read in this book. George once said "If I hadn't been born so good looking, you'd never have heard of Pele." Think about it. Interesting insight indeed.

INSIDE JIHAD

Tawfik Hamid
(Mountain Lake Press,
2015, ISBN-13: 978-
0990808916. RRP
£16.50 paperback)



At the end of the last millennium, the

native American Indians were asked for their verdict on the previous 2000 male dominated years. They said..." It's been a time of moral corruption, widespread abuse of the environment, testosterone driven wars, and huge misogyny." Their verdict was... "Koyaanisqatsi" - "Life is out of Balance."

As I write these summaries I am aware that the world is in turmoil and indeed appears indeed to be out of balance. Maybe it always was, or perhaps it's the growth of information technology and social media, that makes us all see what's always been there.

Religions have brought huge solace, hope, guidance, succour and purpose to those who have followed them. However, many men, and I'm sorry, but I do mean men, have misinterpreted and pivoted the core messages on many occasions to increase their own power and their following numbers.

All are guilty, without exception.

Islam is particularly under the spotlight in recent decades and Dr Hamid has written a wonderful book which explains why we are where we are, and indeed advises what we should do about the current impasse.

In summary he informs us that the particular brand of Islam that is unattractive to many is "Salafism". It started in Saudi in the 17th century, and lay fairly dormant for three hundred years until the Americans found oil in that country. The Saudis imported huge numbers of oil workers from the Muslim world, poor men with impoverished families at home who they were then able to comfortably support with the generous salaries they received. That got these workers to consider that Allah indeed must truly have chosen to supply the Saudis with a bountiful supply of oil

because they were followers of Salafism, and so they all followed suit, hoping for the comparative rewards.

The problem starts because of one particular plank of Salafism, and this is the belief by its followers that the devil which must be fought, is not within, as it is say in Christianity and other forms of Islam, but is WITHOUT. The devil is you and I. We are the devil, the infidel. It's truly as simple as that.

Dr Tawfik Hamid was recruited in his first year of Medical school to be radicalised, to be informed, brain washed, whatever, to learn the 3 key steps involved in the process of moving from being an innocent, to becoming a violent jihadist. He clearly suggests three stages. Firstly, learn hatred of the infidel. Secondly, suppress conscience. Thirdly, desensitise the jihadist to violence. He says, "...radical Islam must remove from its followers any aversion to killing."

Dr Tawfik Hamid soon saw the error of his ways, and is now spending his time trying to correct a great wrong.

But as I write, there is hope. The Saudi crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, has just announced that the fundamental core elements of Salafism are to be readdressed. Let's hope, and indeed pray, that he has women on the committee.

Meanwhile, 'Inside Jihad' is an important read for all who care, believe and have hope.

