CHESTER CHRONICLES.....

EASTGATE CLOCK, CHESTER

The right island

Surely you don't expect Dr O'Mahony to make it on his own to the Isle of Wight on the right day and the right time! He's as likely to end up in Jersey or Guernsey as he is the Isle of Wight." This was Dr Foley's dire warning to Julia the conference organiser on the Isle of Wight. Stung by such criticism I resolved to make sure I would be there in very good time; calm, cool, collected, and with a well manicured talk. I had a carousel collection, unparalleled in its depiction of the papilloma virus in all its glory. I had small ones, big ones, soft ones, hard ones, fleshy ones, keratinised ones, Axminster carpet-type, and even cauliflower. This would be a tour de force through wart territory leaving no stone unturned.

I set off dead early in the morning on a typical south of England July day. It was bucketing down with rain, overcast, and with winds that made the prospect of a sea crossing about as inviting as a pilgrimage to Loch Derg (remote penitential island on a lake in the west of Ireland). At Southampton docks, I had to park miles from the ferry. I trudged through the rain, carefully protecting the carousel from the horizontal sleet. Happily ensconced aboard the bucketing ferry I phoned Julia and left a message saying that I was successfully under way. Comfortable in the knowledge that I was going to be early for once, I had one last review of the slides. My heart froze as I pulled out slide after slide and realised I had grabbed the wrong carousel from the boot of the car. I considered accosting the captain and demanding that we return immediately to Southampton docks, but I realised that my wild demeanour and Irish accent would be a hindrance! I sat there seething with internal rage as we jolted our way across the Solent. All rational thought had now left me, as I furiously decided I would stay on the ferry, go back to Southampton, swap the carousels, and come over again. This plan would leave me perilously close to being late and bearing out the uncanny premonition of Dr Foley. As we returned to Southampton docks, the steward pointed out that I had less than three minutes to sprint down the docks to my car and back again because, unlike Godot, this ferry waited for no one. I clattered down the gang plank and legged it through the driving rain to my car, frisbeed in the offending carousel, grabbed the wart one, and set off for the imminently departing ferry. Bought another ticket! Steeled my nerves and constitution for yet another gut churning skim across the choppy seas.

By now, of course, Julia on the Isle of Wight was wondering what dreadful fate had befallen her star turn, as the ferry had come and gone, and no calm, cool, collected, lecturer type had got off. However, I finally did arrive in Cowes with minutes to spare and, once again, girded my loins for the half mile sprint to the Royal Squadron Yacht Club conference venue.

As if in recognition of my good fortune, the rain suddenly stopped, the clouds melted away, and the English Riviera sun burst through. It should have cheered my by now fermenting frame as I entered the magnificent conservatory lecture hall. It was only when I engaged the first slide that it truly came home to me that the elements were conspiring to ensure disaster. This beautiful conservatory captured every ray of sunshine in all its brilliance and the derisory efforts of the 100 watt bulb in the projector were insignificant when pitched against the illuminator of the solar system. You could see absolutely nothing!! Where were the horizontal sleet and black thunder clouds when you needed them? For the second time that day, I experienced frozen heart syndrome. However, I hadn't come all this way to admit defeat, so I took the only course of action open to me. I threw myself on the mercy of the audience imploring sympathy, describing in graphic detail the trials and tribulations of my legendary journeys. I have to say, the audience responded magnificently. Hazardous travel is a fact of life that the islanders put up with on a daily basis and it was funny to see me flounder so hopelessly.

The feedback forms were a joy to read. "Brilliant," "Inspiring," "Wonderful," even one that bewilderingly said "Superb—warts demystified."

So, take heed of Dr Foley's warning. "Intrepid traveller" are not words used in connection with Dr O'Mahony. Like any deep, thick, opulent Cabernet he doesn't travel well, needs to be laid down for a while on arrival, and vintage expectations may not be realised.

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