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I Like a View

by Lesley Dawson

The view from the classroom window wasn't inspiring. It showed continuous rooftops of back-to-back houses in row upon row up the hill towards Hyde Park.

This was the 1960s in inner city Leeds and the School of Physiotherapy was located in a wedge-shaped building that had previously been a two up and two down terrace house at the end of a cobble stoned street.

Even this view was more interesting than hearing about the functions of the thalamus or the course of the sciatic nerve. In fact this scene became the subject of a pen and ink sketch I drew to take my mind away from the boredom of the lecture. I entitled it:

'Boredom during a physiology class' but because I sat at the back of the class I never got caught. This boredom did finally catch me out and resulted in me failing my first college exams.

I was convinced I would be thrown out and couldn't face the prospect of telling my family that, the only one to get the chance of higher education, had failed. Nor could I face the supercilious faces of the women on the Local Council Education Board who had awarded my bursary. I could almost hear them saying,

"I told you so. I knew her sort wouldn't be able to make the grade."

Apart from the view from the classroom, my concentration for studying the ramifications of the brachial plexus and the factors influencing blood pressure was eroded by my social life. I was a student who lived at home and none of my friends were in full time study. The phone at home never stopped ringing with invitations to parties, to the pub and weekend trips to the Lake District. How could I say no?

“I can’t come to the pub, I have to pass this exam or they will throw me out,” I repeated time after time until the invitations dried up. I began a ritual then that has never left me. When entering the lecture room, I looked for a seat where I could sit with my back to the window. I never wanted to give my mind any excuses for wandering and was determined to concentrate on learning physiology rather than being bored by it. I did pass the exam and never failed another one in my life.

The man who tried to instill the basics of the nervous system in me was surprised that I managed to graduate on time and would have been amazed to know that in future years I would teach neuro-physiology and become renowned for “Dawson’s tour of the nervous system”.