

# Suzy Lishman

## Grateful to the air bubble



PETER LOCKE

**SUZY LISHMAN**, 47, consultant in cellular pathology at Peterborough City Hospital, has been the president of the Royal College of Pathologists since November 2014. She has her hands full overseeing the college's move from London's swanky SW1 to the grittier environs of Whitechapel—once Jack the Ripper territory but now manifestly on the up. She is vocal in promoting the cause of women in science, extolling pathology (under the Twitter name @ilovepathology), and asking with increasing exasperation why, 15 years after Harold Shipman was sentenced, death certification has yet to be reformed by the creation of medical examiners.

### What is your pet hate?

"It's always frustrating when people think that pathology is only about dead bodies. I spend a lot of time putting them straight"

### What was your earliest ambition?

I always wanted to be a ballerina; in fact, I still do. I attended ballet classes for many years, but it was never more than a hobby. Luckily, I also wanted to be a doctor, having come from a medical family, and I turned out to be better at that than at ballet.

### Who has been your biggest inspiration?

My aunt Gilly, now a retired respiratory physician, who showed me that women can have good careers in medicine. I followed Gilly to Girton College, Cambridge, and then the London Hospital Medical School. As a student I spent occasional holidays with her at work, watching my first bronchoscopies. I always wondered what happened to the biopsies she took; I never thought that I'd be interpreting them one day.

### What was the worst mistake in your career?

I took my part 1 FRCPath [fellowship of the Royal College of Pathologists] exam at the first opportunity and failed it. I'd read lots of journals and books but hadn't spent long enough looking down a microscope, and it showed. I'm sure that it was good for me not to sail straight through my training, but it didn't feel like it at the time.

### What was your best career move?

Applying to University College Hospital to study histopathology: I had five years of excellent training, which has stood me in good stead for the rest of my career. I didn't know very much about histopathology when I applied, but I quickly realised that I was born to be a pathologist and have never looked back.

### Who is the person you would most like to thank and why?

My parents, for their unconditional support and encouragement. My father, a GP, showed me the importance of hard work and how fulfilling a career in medicine could be. My mother, who died seven years ago, taught me the value of kindness.

### To whom would you most like to apologise?

My family and friends, for never having any spare time and forgetting to send birthday cards (which I used to be very good at). I'm quite good at buying cards well in advance but not so good at writing and posting them.

### If you were given £1m what would you spend it on?

An Aston Martin for my husband, a painting for me, and research grants for medical students and pathology trainees. Funding for academic pathology has recently been cut drastically, but it's essential that the next generation of doctors has the opportunity to learn more about the specialty and to contribute to its advancement.

### Where are or were you happiest?

I'm happiest with my family, anywhere, but ideally at home in Rutland.

### What single unheralded change has made the most difference in your field in your lifetime?

It's difficult to pick just one—particularly something that hasn't been chosen before. In 2012 the college published *A History of Pathology in 50 Objects*,<sup>1</sup> which highlighted the pathology related objects that members thought had made the greatest contribution to healthcare. If I had to pick one of those I'd choose the air bubble—something so simple and cost-free that made a huge difference to the ability to analyse multiple blood samples in rapid succession rather than one at a time.

### What book should every doctor read?

*The Bright Side* by Kate Granger—essential reading to understand what it's like being a patient and what a difference doctors can make, not just with their knowledge and skill, but by being kind and seeing the person behind the illness.

### What poem, song, or passage of prose would you like mourners at your funeral to hear?

*Dancing Queen* by ABBA—it's been my favourite song for nearly 40 years. I'd have it playing as people walked out at the end, to make them smile.

### What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Salted caramel puddles from Hotel Chocolat.

### What television programmes do you like?

I don't watch much television, but I enjoy Sunday evening period dramas such as *Downton Abbey* and *Mr Selfridge*. And I enjoy *Silent Witness* from time to time, even if I do find myself shouting at the television when it takes the occasional artistic liberty!

### What is your most treasured possession?

My mother's gold Tiffany heart necklace.

### Summarise your personality in three words

Enthusiastic, determined, and optimistic.

### What is your pet hate?

It's always frustrating when people think that pathology is only about dead bodies. I spend a lot of time putting them straight.

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