

Cricket at Broadmoor

I had visited Broadmoor Hospital at Crowthorne in Berkshire several times to play cricket against the Broadmoor Patients' XI by the time in 1959 that I was offered a job at the hospital. Dorothy and I, John, Peter and Diana all agreed that I should accept the offer so we left Thorpe Bay and moved into No. 2 Broadmoor (a house near the main gate of the hospital). I had to start work immediately, Dorothy had to find her way round our 5-bedroom house and one acre of land, the boys had to go to new schools, Diana had to explore our house and gardens and secret places where fairies might live.

On my first day at work I was asked by a patient who worked for me whether I would play for the Patients' XI (one or two staff men would always be in the team for security reasons). So when the Medical Superintendent (Dr Patrick McGrath) came into the office I asked him whether it would be in order for me to accept the offer. He had no hesitation. His reply which I remember well was "You'll do our Patients far more good playing cricket with them than sitting on your bottom in this office". So started 15 years of my playing cricket for the Patients' XI. We played most Saturday afternoons during the summer season and often on a Wednesday afternoon too. All games were in the grounds within the walls of the hospital and our opponents were outside clubs who were not afraid to come inside. Many of them suffered a little embarrassment however by assuming that we staff members were patients. I often shared a laugh with one of them when they told me all about life in the outside world and I had tell them the truth about my status.

After a few weeks the Hospital Chaplain, the Reverend Basil James, a man of a large heart, large girth and large appetite, who was Captain and Senior Selector of the team, saw his way out of some of his problems. He asked me to take his place and persuaded the Medical Superintendent that I should become Captain. I had that pleasure and honour for 15 years.

A lighter moment I recall during my time as Captain. John came home from his new school (Forest Grammar) and asked if I would play for the Fathers' XI against the School team. I accepted the invitation then received a note from the sports master asking my strong points. Was I a good batsman or a good bowler, etc, etc? I replied by letter very simply. I wrote "Captain, Broadmoor Patients' XI". When I turned up for the game we were fielding first and I found myself being kept at least 50 yards from every other father in the team!

For matches inside Broadmoor grounds, the hospital kitchen would supply a large flat laundry basket full of food, cake, sandwiches, etc for the two teams playing and several more baskets of food for patients watching the game. Our son John had a regular job holding one handle of a food basket. His regular fellow carrier was a patient who would tell John the most lurid details of his crimes, etc. John was proud of the confidence this patient bestowed on him! Peter likewise joined in Broadmoor life and was allowed to play the organ in the chapel.

Many of our friends came to visit us during our time at No. 2 Broadmoor, partly because of the nature of the hospital and little bit of daring involved in visiting and partly because we had a tennis court – a tarmac rectangle in the garden. We also had the occasional novelty like the young kestrel that John brought home from Porlock Hill in Somerset where he found it injured – and of course there were also the guinea pigs, the occasional injured snake, the ferrets and any creature unwise enough to pass near John.