

Susan Bewley (Ed.): My life as a woman and a doctor—Beulah Bewley

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Beulah Bewley is a woman, mother, wife, daughter, public health doctor, treasurer of the General Medical Council and Dame of the British Empire. This is an impressive list of accomplishments, and Dr. Bewley's autobiography is a mix of both humility and quiet assertiveness. She was born in Derry, raised in Kilkenny, educated in Trinity and trained in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Dr. Bewley gives wonderful insights into a world, in some ways, very far away and in others very familiar. Aged twelve years of age she required an appendectomy in Kilkenny; the county surgeon performed the operation, her General Practitioner gave the anaesthetic agent and the GP's dog kept her company (by lying under the operating table during the procedure). As a medical student in Dublin, the policemen outside of Trinity would hold up traffic if he thought she was late for lectures. Her on-call rota as a senior house officer was one in two, with weekends in house starting on Friday morning and ending Monday afternoon. Her MD thesis concerned smoking

cessation and parents would write to her for advice on how to stop their children smoking—parents were allowed to bring children to the public house and they would follow the parent's lead in smoking cigarettes. Some of her stories reflect contemporary themes—on one occasion she was checking into a hotel with three male colleagues for a research meeting when the receptionist enquired which of the three men was Dr. Bewley. It was presumed that she was the secretary. Her response was to advise the three men that they could also become doctors if they work as hard as she had. The final chapter is a beautiful reflection on themes of importance to her—women and work, children and family, the importance of public health, the dangers of smoking and growing up in Ireland. The chapter ends poignantly with a reflection on failing health and facing death. This book is a reflection of a life well lived. It is a beautiful and fascinating read.

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