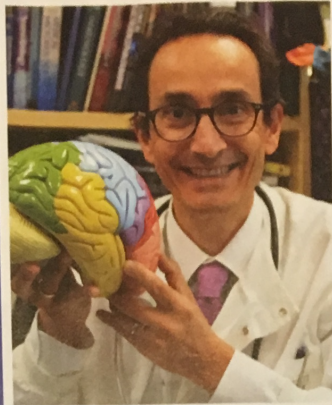


Tom Solomon



● **What sort of books inspired you as a child?**

I liked adventure and travel, starting with *Swallows and Amazons* and moving on to Somerset Maugham's stories of life in the Orient, which led to my interest in tropical diseases. In the 1980s, having watched Roald Dahl's *Tales of the Unexpected* on Saturday nights, I got hold of his short stories and loved them. I didn't expect that in 1990 I would be looking after the author in his final weeks, nor that he would regale me with all sorts of unexpected late-night tales.

● **What book can you recommend for giving a vivid picture of a doctor's working life?**

As a medical student in Oxford, I read Samuel Shem's *House of God*. It taught me more than any lecture about surviving as a junior doctor – the conflicting demands and pressures, the sadness and hilarity, the many different roles you play. To Dahl I was doctor, then friend, then confidant and finally comforter.

● **Which are your favourites among Dahl's books?**

Besides the short stories, many of which have a medical bent, I love *George's Marvellous Medicine*. During my discussions with Dahl, I began to understand what had driven him to write the book – the many medical tragedies that affected him and his family. He mentioned some extraordinary medical inventions he had developed in response. I thought the storyteller was exaggerating, but later discovered that his marvellous medical tales were true.

● **How would you describe the genre of your book about Dahl?**

"Is it a medical biography, a memoir or a popular science book?" the director of Liverpool University Press quizzed me when I first told him my idea.

"I don't know. All three, I suppose."

"Hmmm..." he frowned. "Sounds intriguing...unique even...we'll take a punt on it."

I think he is happy with his decision. The book sold out in a week, 1,000 copies, and is on its second print run.

● **What is the last book you gave as a gift, and to whom?**

My research in Liverpool is on brain infections, including meningitis and encephalitis. *Life after Encephalitis: A Narrative Approach* is a compelling compilation of patient stories, edited by Ava Easton. I gave it to my wife, Rachel Kneen, who also works in this area. Sadly, I also recently gave someone *The Grief Book*, by Debbie Moore and Carolyn Cowperthwaite. It is a wonderful little guide, full of sensible and practical guidance at a difficult time.

● **What books do you have on your desk waiting to be read?**

There is no space on my desk. However, on my bedside table are towers of precariously balanced books, a smorgasbord of popular reads mixed with more enlightening works. At the moment, John Le Carré's *The Night Manager* sits on top, then *For King and Another Country: Indian Soldiers on the Western Front, 1914-18* by Shrabani Basu. At the bottom is *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway. Dahl loved him and made me promise to read him, but 26 years after we met, I still have not quite got into it.

Tom Solomon is professor of neurology and director of the Institute of Infection and Global Health, University of Liverpool. His latest book is *Roald Dahl's Marvellous Medicine* (Liverpool University Press). All author proceeds go to charities in areas of interest to Dahl (see www.tom-solomon.co.uk).