

ABSOLUTELY FOXED

GRAEME FOWLER



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Graeme Fowler

with John Woodhouse



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For
Sarah Louise
Katherine Elizabeth
Georgina Ruby
Alexa-Rae Evie

Without their love, support and humour I would be lost.
I love you and am proud of you.

CONTENTS

[Foreword by Sir Ian Botham](#)

[1 This Is A Low](#)

[2 This Is A High](#)

[3 The Way Up](#)

[4 Bumble](#)

[5 Call-up](#)

[6 Beefy](#)

[7 An Opening Of Eyes](#)

[8 Quick](#)

[9 Anyone For A Double?](#)

[10 Escape](#)

[11 Crash](#)

[12 End Of An Era](#)

[13 Sarah](#)

[14 A New Start](#)

[15 The Stick](#)

[16 In The Head](#)

[17 Unlevel](#)

[18 Shutdown](#)

[19 No Future?](#)

[20 The Rhythm Of Life](#)

[21 Cricket's Fault?](#)

[22 Not Out](#)

[Afterword by Alastair Campbell](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[List of Illustrations](#)

FOREWORD

by Sir Ian Botham

My first night out with Graeme Fowler, the man we all call Foxy, came after the Ashes touring party of 1982-83 was announced. During the evening, as you do, I got him in a headlock, the idea being to persuade him to drink a glass of whisky – all quite natural at the time, an everyday part of an evening out – but I couldn't change his mind. He still doesn't like whisky, and I'm still trying to get him to drink it now.

I mention this because it shows a determination. As a player, Foxy was one of the gutsiest I ever encountered. When he went out to the middle, he always showed bottle and fight. We, as an England dressing room, always loved having him at the top of the order. We knew he was going to give his all. Never did you question his commitment to the cause. But his wasn't a game built solely on grit. Foxy was incredibly skilful, too. You only have to look at the double century he made in Madras to know he was a really good player. I was at the other end when he made a century against the West Indies at Lord's, too. As a batsman, you don't get to three figures against that kind of attack unless you know what you're doing.

In his last two Tests, Foxy scored 201 and 69, and then he didn't play again for England. How that happened, I'm not quite sure. He should undoubtedly have played more Test cricket than he did. He had many more good years in him, and it was England's loss that at Test level we didn't see them.

Alongside his skill came his personality. You need all sorts to make a dressing room, it is vital to have a balance, and Foxy was an integral part of that. He made a dressing room tick. His humour and wit were legendary – and he's still got that now – at least he thinks he has! Not only that but, like me, he knew you have to switch off. When you step off the field, you can't take the game with you. If you do, it starts affecting those around you as well. Foxy was one of those, and we understood each other from that point of view.

We also shared a similarity in that if he felt something was unnecessary or unjust, he'd say so. As he was coming up through the system, if he saw something he disagreed with or felt was unfair, he'd stand his ground, and I respected him for that.

Over the years, we have remained close. We still live near to one another, and we always enjoy catching up for what we call our 'board meetings'. We click, not just as former players, but as people. Foxy is as good a friend as I have ever made in the game. He's useful to have around when it comes to talking about the games we played, because I don't remember any of it!

We were together for the latter end of our careers at Durham CCC and you could see the way he was going to go. He always had time for the young players and I wasn't surprised when he went down that route of coaching. What he achieved in setting up and running the centre of excellence at Durham University, a system expanded across the country, was incredible. He is directly responsible for a large number of very good players making it into first-class cricket and beyond. The coaching system he put in place produced amazing results, and it's a great loss to the game in this country that it no longer exists. I can't understand quite why anyone would feel the need to change something that has had so much success. It's something I, and a lot of other people, can't work out.

In recent years, Foxy has been affected by depression. When I first found out, I didn't know how to take it. ~~I don't claim to understand about depression, I don't understand the problems people have mentally, everyone's different in different ways,~~ but I wanted him to know he has a friend if ever he needs one. These days he's got his issues under control, but he knows he's got that cushion there of people who care about him – and hopefully that in itself is some kind of help.

The fact he is no longer coaching doesn't mean the end for Foxy. He's not in the wilderness. He is a man with an immense amount of knowledge and I am sure he will put it to good use. The game of cricket owes a lot to Graeme Fowler. It needs people like him. There are many good years in him yet. You can't keep a man like Foxy out the game for long.

CHAPTER 1

THIS IS A LOW

I am lying in a tent in my back garden. It is late – the early hours in fact – and the family are all inside asleep. I find that particular escape elusive. It's why I'm here, outside. It's where I spend the nights, May to September, each year. Tonight, I lie with my head by the opening. It means I can look up and see the stars. Wonderful. And then a light rain starts falling. It feels beautiful, absolutely paradise. And it is in this state, I consider my life.

I was 47. I'm very lucky: I have a good constitution, I'm hardly ever ill, rarely get colds, don't have headaches, it's impossible for me to throw up. But every winter I get a cough, and this particular winter I couldn't get rid of it. I went to the doctor's, had four sets of antibiotics, steroids, and it was still there. It was that bad I'd have coughing fits and wake everybody up. So I slept downstairs, so it didn't disturb my wife Sarah and the kids.

I remember it clearly. One day I was sitting on the settee, and Sarah was standing next to me: 'You need to go back to the doctors,' she told me.

'I'm still on antibiotics.'

'No, not for that.'

'Well, what for?'

'You're depressed.'

'What?'

'Graeme,' she said, 'you haven't spoken to any of us for weeks.'

It was true. I just hadn't realised it – unlike my daughter, Georgina. 'Dad,' she said, 'you just sit in the conservatory with your Land Rover magazine – and it's the same magazine.'

At no point was I aware that this was what I'd become, and that this was the space I was in. I hadn't noticed that I'd stopped talking, stopped communicating. I hadn't realised I'd lost interest in everything. And that really is how it was. Nothing mattered, I didn't care about anything – family, my life, nothing. And when I thought about it, I realised I didn't really want to be alive. Everything was hopeless, pointless, worthless.

I'd been feeling like that, but hadn't stopped, sat up, and worked it out. For the first time in my life I hadn't analysed anything. It was as if my head had just stopped working. All I felt was like I was at the bottom of a well.

I'm going to cry now, but I'll carry on.

Once I realised I hadn't thought about it, I knew there was something massively wrong. So when Sarah told me to go to the doctor, because I was depressed, I didn't question it. I didn't say anything or deny it, I simply agreed to go. When I got there, the doctor asked me how I felt, and I replied: 'I feel terrible. I can't sleep, I'm not interested in anything, everything's pointless, I've no appetite.'

He asked if I'd thought of suicide? 'No, because I know I have a nice life. I have a great job, great family, lovely wife. I know all that exists, but I can't get to it. It's over there, and I can't get there. S

am I going to kill myself? The answer is no. But do I wish I was dead? Yes.'

We sat and talked. He told me I was clinically depressed, although on the sick note he gave me said 'moderate depressive episode'. And I quite liked that, because when I read the word 'moderate', didn't think 'that's terrible', I thought 'thank fuck, there are people in a worse state'. That's always been my way, flipping things. I looked on the bright side of being moderately depressed.

The doctor explained the situation to me: 'Look, this is not going to turn around in two weeks. This is going to take a long time. It'll be a slow process, so you'll have to be patient.'

I started on medication, but after three weeks I felt just the same and still wasn't talking to anybody. At one point I didn't leave the house for six weeks – this from a man who has lived outside all his life. I can't stand being inside. I was shut down so much I couldn't even go into the back garden. I was sleeping downstairs and lived on the sofa. Sarah would go to work, the kids would go to school, I would want a cup of tea – and I couldn't get up off the settee to make it. I was almost paralysed. It was incredibly horrible. It's just bewildering to think there's nothing happening. There were no synapses at all working in my brain.

So the first pills hadn't worked. I was then faced with a fortnight of waiting for them to leave my system so I could start again. By this point I'd had five weeks, but the difference was now I was aware I was depressed. There was no reason for it. I'd got the centre of excellence at Durham University going, and had been there ten years, but all of a sudden I couldn't analyse it because my head wouldn't work and I couldn't think. I was physically immobile, but I was mentally incapable with it. Sometimes I'd get up, and Sarah would ask where I was going, and I didn't know, so I'd sit back down again. I was just not functioning at all.

They put me on Citalopram. I felt like it was starting to work, but not much. The dose increased and increased until eventually I was on about 150ml a day, which is a massive amount. It made me feel numb, like I was looking at life through five-inch-thick glass, but that was better than wanting to be dead. It was better than feeling worthless and pointless, and after a few weeks I started to function just a little bit.

It was then that I came up with 'the scale', out of 20, to describe how I was feeling. Ten is neutral and anything above that number I'm OK and can communicate. Anything below, I'm not and I'm struggling. When you've got young children – Kate was nine, Georgina was eight, and Alexa-Rae was just two (so she didn't know what was going on) – you need a way to get things across simply.

They'd ask how I was, but I couldn't talk to them or vocalise how I felt. I didn't know how to approach it with kids that age, so it was great when that flash of inspiration came along to give me the scale. I told Sarah about it, and she asked where I was. I thought for a moment and told her I was five, which was probably as bad as I've ever been. The best I've ever been is 16.

Sarah told the girls about the system, and so they'd come up to me: 'Hi Daddy, what number are you?'

'About a seven.'

Kate or George would ask: 'Do you want me to sit with you, Daddy? Or do you want to be on your own?' And whatever I said, they didn't take offence.

George told me years later that she thought at the time that I didn't like her. And that's a horrible thing, but thankfully we'd said to the girls: 'We'll always love you. We might not always like what you're doing. But we'll always love you.' She kept that close, realising: 'Daddy doesn't like me, but I know he loves me.' She always had that.

I thought of my depression as a chemical imbalance in my brain, and told myself this was not permanent, and once the chemicals were balanced again it would be OK. Once I'd worked that out, it was obvious my brain had started to work a little bit because I could start to think again. I began to realise I must have come out of the worst bit. Even though I still felt dreadful, I knew I must be

making progress.

~~I had three months off work, went back, and struggled like mad. I didn't mention it to any of the lads at the centre of excellence because I wasn't well enough to tell them. I could manage to deal with the pre-match stuff, but when the game started I needed to be on my own. A lot of the time I'd sit in my Land Rover next to the pavilion and pretend I was watching. I wasn't really. I was just staring at the ground. I was literally just existing, and I was using energy I didn't have, so every time I came home my numbers were going down, so I was actually worse when I was in the house.~~

I worked out that when I coached, I acted. When I spoke at dinners, it was acting. Broadcasting was acting. Every day I'd be acting, acting, acting, and then all of a sudden, when I'd come home, I couldn't act anymore. When it got to the end of the season, I fell in a heap again, but at least it was summer, the nights were bright. I was starting to spend more time outside and to engage with people again.

Without telling anybody, I wanted to look at life through less glass, so I started to reduce my medication. I didn't tell the doctor or Sarah – nobody. I did it very slowly, but it was going OK – I got to numbers above ten and we were starting to do things again. When the kids knew I was above ten, they understood they could ask if we could do something that day. But even that had parameters. If we went shopping and there were too many people in the shop, or it was too busy, too warm, I'd say 'I can't handle this, Sarah. I'll be outside.' Even now when we go shopping, 90 per cent of the time I don't go in the store as I can't stand being inside for too long. And that's one of the reasons I started sleeping in the garden between May and September.

One day Sarah looked at me and realised I wasn't having a good day, so she asked if I needed to up my medication. 'Sarah,' I said, 'I haven't been taking any for six months.'

'Wow! You're doing fantastic then.'

'Yes, I'm just having a wobble today.' And she almost cried.

When I was first diagnosed with depression, it was Sarah's brother, Mark, who at the time was a psycho-geriatric nurse, who gave me a wonderful piece of advice – 'Do what you must, avoid what you can.' I took that with me from day one. I also listened to what the doctor said, which was to be a patient. It meant I could allow each day to have its own pattern.

As time went on – and remember I was still wishing I was dead at this point – if I had a good ten minutes that was great. If I had a bad ten minutes, I didn't care. I just let it go. It's almost like trying to get rid of mental food poisoning – you have to let it work its way through. I was patient, took each day as it came, recognised it wasn't going to be a short thing. I came to the conclusion that, for me, this was probably going to be like being an alcoholic. Once you are, you are. Even if you're not drinking, even if you've not had a drink for years, you still are. I thought: 'Well, if that's the way it is, I'll get on and deal with it.'

That meant I had to modify my behaviour. I've never had a good memory – things in the distant past, yes, what happened yesterday, no. If someone tells me something, in two hours I won't know what they've said as I'll forget it. I know a lot of people say that, but I genuinely will, so I started writing things down. I also began to talk about what was happening to me, although not in counselling. When I first went to see the GP, he'd asked if I wanted to go to a therapy group or talk with a psychiatrist, but it was the last thing I wanted to do.

That's just me, everybody's different; some people need that sort of interaction, desire it, and it helps them enormously, but I'd always made all my own decisions in my life by going inside my own head. I never wanted to talk to people about my depression when I was depressed; I would internalise it, but as time went on I found that by talking about it other people would gain comfort and reassurance, and that's when I realised being open about it was actually helping some people. I didn't need to know why, but decided to keep on doing it. Once I was well enough, and found I was able

talk about it, I'd tell people my story and see if they could make any sense of it, because no one's the same. I'm more than happy talking about my mental health. I've never felt it's something I should keep back. It doesn't define me, but it's part of who I am.

I've also found humour is very important in that conversation. At home, for instance, I'm the 'house lunatic' – that's what my family call me. Some people might think that's a bit bizarre, but they actually think it helps break down the nastiness and seriousness of it. If you can take the piss sometimes, it's therapeutic. But perhaps that's because humour has always been very therapeutic for me. The same way as David Lloyd and I used humour to discuss serious points, I do the same with mental health. If I talk to somebody about my mental-health issues and make them laugh, initially they feel uncomfortable, but I encourage them to laugh if they find it funny. Because although it's a serious topic, finding humour in it is, to me, essential. It's a 'fuck you'.

Talking to others, I'd find some people could attribute a direct trigger to the onset of the depression, but for me it came totally out of the blue. I've no idea why it happened and I've given up trying to work out why. I can only think I'd been a dynamo for 40 years and my head has said: 'I've had enough, I'm going on holiday. You've mistreated me for all these years. Some of the stuff you've done you should never have got away with. I've had enough. Bollocks. I'm off. Going. Bye!'

Maybe I was predisposed to it, but if I was it took a long time to kick in. I mean, I've been on tour as happened in New Zealand, when I was not getting picked, pig sick of being there for weeks on end wishing I was at home. But that's not depression – that's emotionally down, not mentally down. There's a massive difference between emotions and mental health. Emotions happen for a reason, they ebb and flow, there's a cause. Mental health isn't like that. There doesn't have to be a cause. There doesn't have to be a trigger.

The only possible indication was during my playing career when, at the end of the season, I'd go home, draw the curtains, unplug the phone, and lie on the settee for a week, not talk to anyone and just watch videos. You could call that the blues. Alternatively, you could look at it as a way of mentally recharging the batteries after playing non-stop all season. I needed that, no matter how I was feeling physically or mentally, as my reserves of mental energy were depleted by September. Similarly, when I talk about my depression, I pay an emotional price, not a depressive price. I need to recharge, but that's OK because it's only emotions.

I'm not sure the same thing would happen now, as the game is different. Players these days might see a specialist for help. There may very well be one available at their club, or in the set-up, as with the England team. But it wasn't like that during my career. If I'd asked my club if I could see a sports psychologist, first of all they'd almost certainly not have known what one was, and second they'd have wanted to know why I'd wanted to see one and wondered what was wrong with me. These days it's different, as attitudes have changed. Players will often see one simply to make them better at the sport, not because they have an issue.

That's not to say the acknowledgement of mental-health issues isn't lagging behind in sport – as it is in society as a whole. It's only in the last five years or so that people have started to acknowledge it as a problem in our game. With Marcus Trescothick, people didn't think it was a widespread issue and he was the most iconic sufferer. They thought 'that's just him'. But it's not just the odd person, such as Trescothick and Michael Yardy; it's far more of a problem.

The good news is the game is learning to cope. The Professional Cricketers' Association (PCA) has been excellent and very proactive with mental illness. They asked me to put together a checklist to help players keep a note on their mental health, which is useful, but I think what's more important is to provide a checklist of indicators for team-mates. It's more likely they'll notice something's wrong just as Sarah did with me – I wasn't aware.

If I was in a dressing room with someone who was a fun, lively bloke and a good cricketer, and a

of a sudden he decided he was not coming out at night and he'd gone really quiet in the dressing room. I might start thinking 'hang on, something's not right here'. It could be a domestic issue, his child being ill, all sorts of reasons, but if I was the coach I'd gently take him into the office, tell him what I'd observed and ask him: 'Are you aware of this? Is there anything you want to discuss with me? Anything I can do to help?'

If he didn't want to engage, all you can do is make it clear that you are not happy to see him like that, and remind him that you are there if he changes his mind and decides he needs to talk. Sometimes, two days later, he'll be back and admit that he'd not been feeling great, which gives you a chance to offer him someone to talk to or some time off.

I don't know why it's taken so long for there to be a discussion about mental health in cricket. I've played with three people who killed themselves, but few people have a concept of what it's like. Ian Botham has little idea about depression, which is fine, because he doesn't know. Why would he? He never had it, and probably never will, and I'm thrilled to bits for him. I'm not angry; I'm pleased that he doesn't understand, just as I didn't when it came to David Bairstow, Mark Saxelby and Danny Kelleher, players who all committed suicide.

I'm fortunate in that I don't have the 'suicide gene'. I simply wanted the pain to end: I didn't want to be in the situation I was in and feel that bad, and recognised that if I was dead it would end. If people have the suicide gene, it's my suspicion it's at that point they do it. But I didn't want to be out of it through killing myself, as I knew somehow, somewhere, I had a good life, and all that came with it.

In the deepest darkest moments it's almost like I'm wading through a river of crap, but at the far shore, down the river, everything will become clear and it will be lovely – but I've got to go through all that to get there. I have got to go through a process and, once I've worked that out, I have no option but to go through it, because I'm not going to kill myself. Even if I didn't have all I have around me I wouldn't commit suicide, because I have a memory of how good life can be. It's not just about my wife and three kids – it's the whole of life.

Perhaps it helps that I'm a complete and utter atheist. I have no belief in a higher power. I don't think I'm going to go to heaven, I'm just going to go. Being an atheist means there's nothing after this, there's no 'I can do it in the next life'. I don't believe that. For me, you've got to make the most of this life, because you're here only once. So even though you're going through all this turmoil you've got to keep going because this is your only chance, this isn't a dress rehearsal. I'm not going to go to heaven and have another life or be reincarnated as a budgie that talks. Thinking like this almost frees you up to have a little bit of strength, because this is it – make the most of it. Nowadays, I can also look at it and be pragmatic and know it will go away. Experience does count for something.

I've always had two reactions when people have found out I suffer from depression. The first is 'How can you have mental-health issues? You've always been bright and bubbly.' And the other one is: 'I've always known you were a lunatic.' But the reality is it's just a thing, a chemical imbalance. It doesn't make me a bad person. I haven't thrown a brick through your window or nicked your car.

But most of all, I'm still here. I'll live my life to the full. That, after all, is what I've always tried to do.

THIS IS A HIGH

Cricket is a game based on failure. Statistically, the best batsman was Don Bradman, who scored a hundred every three innings, therefore two-thirds of his career was a failure. As a batsman, you always have to deal with not being the player you want to be and find a way of coping with that. You have to find a way to ensure that when you do get in, you make runs and capitalise on it. You also have to deal with the fact that nine times out of ten you never do your job. Even if you get 140, you should have gotten 180. It never ends. This being the case, if you can't switch off, cricket is a game that can consume you. You need an escape or else it can eat you up inside. You can't let it define you as a person.

I was quite good at switching off. I was very good at switching off! But I did that by telling myself 'cricket is what I do, it's not who I am'. That's not to say I wasn't totally committed to the game because I was. It's more of a reflection of the fact I was more than willing to embrace other areas of life that came with it. I knew that being good at cricket took me into areas I'd never have got near in a million years – meeting musicians, going to brilliant places, parties, all sorts of stuff. So while getting hit in the box by Joel Garner is the downside of playing international cricket, the upside is you meet some very interesting people, some of whom are famous.

The first time that really kicked in for me was during the Ashes tour of 1982-83. We were in Sydney and Ian Botham asked me what I was doing that night. I didn't have any plans, so he said 'You're with me.' It was Beefy; you didn't question anything. A bit later, Vic Marks chirped up 'Foxy, are you coming tonight?'

'Yeah. Where are we going?'

'We're having dinner with Elton John.'

'Fuck off.'

I had loads of Elton John records, loved his music right from the start. So off we went, Bob Williams, Beefy, Vic Marks and me. We met Elton in a restaurant. Naturally, he had an entourage. Beefy, who knew Elton, said hello and then we filed off into a private room, cricketers down one side of the table, Elton's group the other. Directly opposite me was the man himself. Inside I was churning: 'Oh my God!'

He was wearing an earring, a big hoop with a jewelled parrot sitting on the bottom. All I could do was sit there thinking: 'That's Elton John! That's Elton John!' But I was also wondering what I was going to say to him. Obviously, I was nervous. I'd not really been in this situation before. If anything, I was socially clumsy. I was trying to come up with something to say when, all of a sudden, Elton leant across to me. 'Do you know,' he confided, 'I've been nervous about this all day.'

'Why?'

'Meeting you lot. You're international cricketers.'

It instantly dawned on me. You're only famous if someone thinks you are. He thinks we're famous because we're sportsmen, I think he's famous because he's a musician. But the truth is he's just a bloke and I'm just a bloke. We both wore nappies when we were kids. Yes, he's had a slightly more

extravagant life, made a little bit more money, and he's a bit more famous – well, more than a bit but essentially all he wants to do is talk about sport, about cricket.

I couldn't believe how warm and funny he was. I had a brilliant night, and after that I realised: 'doesn't matter who they are, they're just people; they're just the same.' I say this now to my kids 'What a person can do may be extraordinary, but it doesn't make them extraordinary.'

The following winter was the 1983-84 tour of Fiji, New Zealand and Pakistan. Again Elton was around. He'd become big friends with the England team and we with him. We had a party with him in Auckland, and it is here that to say I misbehaved would be an understatement.

During that tour I made friends with quite a few locals and we had a great time. One particular occasion, I'd been out with them during the day to a music festival. You weren't allowed to take an alcohol drink, but we took Tequila and orange in a Fanta bottle. That night, Elton was having a party at the hotel. By the time I got there it's safe to say I was plastered. At one point I saw a glass of water. I was thirsty, so I just downed it, and it was only as I finished I realised it was gin. It didn't improve my situation, something which became clear when I fell backwards through a glass-topped coffee table which was smashed to pieces, including the framework.

As everybody was cleaning up, I found myself positioned between Elton and his then wife Renate. I don't know why, but I just turned sideways and bit her on her upper arm. I've no idea why I did it – until that point, the only person I'd routinely bitten was Paul Allott – but she wasn't very happy. 'Get him out of here!' she screamed as she ran off. Everyone turned to look. There was all sorts of kerfuffle going on. John Reid, Elton's manager, tried to push me out the way, so I took a swing at him, missed and hit the wall. Next thing I know, Beefy was dragging me out of the room.

He put me to bed, but I didn't want to go to bed. So I got up, went back to the party, and took another swing at John Reid. It was down to Beefy once again to drag me off. 'Make sure he stays in his room,' he ordered a nurse at the party. I didn't want to stay in my room. So off I went outside. I was so furious I couldn't go back and join the fun. There was a derelict building next door. I was so angry that, like a lunatic, I put my hand straight through a window. Backhand – the scar on my knuckle is still there. The nurse had a little white car – white body, wheels, mirrors, bumpers – and I was leaning against it. She was trying to talk sense into me, but I wasn't having any of it. When I looked down, the blood from my hand had run down the wing and filled up the alloy wheel. I was, put simply, bleeding like a stuck pig. Being a nurse, she could see I needed stitches. She went upstairs and fetched Beefy. He came down, put me in a headlock, and took me to hospital.

'Do you want anaesthetic?' It was a reasonable question, but I just came out with a mouthful. Beefy put his forearm across my throat and started squeezing. 'Foxy,' he whispered, 'keep quiet, or I'll break your neck.' So the doctor stitched me up, I went back to the hotel, and next thing I knew I was waking up in the morning with a bandage on my arm down to my hand. I was feeling terrible, but starting to put things together. I noticed that my face was sore. It was then it came back to me: I'd bitten Elton, John's missus and I'd taken a swing at John Reid – and I was a man who'd never had a fight in his life.

I knew that day Elton was having a barbecue on his hotel balcony. He'd sent out, bought half a lamb, the works. I, however, wasn't really in the barbecue mood. I was feeling terrible, embarrassed and ashamed. I thought I had to go and apologise, not least because the following day we were leaving for Pakistan. Eventually, I wandered up to Elton's room and knocked on the door. Fair to say I wasn't expecting the best of receptions. Elton's PA answered: 'Hey, Foxy!' He beckoned me in. I was feeling a bit put it mildly, a little sheepish. Then something unexpected happened. Everyone got up, cheered, and gave me a round of applause. I got a standing ovation. Elton was sitting on the bed in a pair of faux zebra-skin boots and white towelling dressing gown. All I could do was apologise. 'Foxy, come on,' he said. 'It's all right. Stay! Stay!' But I couldn't, I was just too embarrassed.

I didn't see Elton again until 1986 when I had possibly the best winter any England cricketer had.

ever had. I was working for a company in Perth which made scissor lifts, owned by two Scout brothers. They offered me a salary to play for North Perth, and they told me they wanted to buy Lancashire County Cricket Club, but as it's a private members' club that was never going to be possible. So they gave me a good wage and a nice little car. Together we lived in a four-bed detached house with its own swimming pool, gardener and cleaner – it was absolutely stunning.

'Whatever you buy, wherever you go,' I was told, 'get a receipt.'

'Whatever I do? Whatever I buy? Case of beer? Champagne? You're just going to give me the money back?'

They had an executive box at the WACA, the cricket ground in Perth, to entertain clients, through which I took the England team, the Australia team, and Elton John and his band. And they had a 44 yacht on which to watch the America's Cup, which was taking place off the Fremantle coast at the time. Now that's not a bad job is it? And that's how it was. The whole winter was an extravagance. We used to drink champagne out by the pool and throw the corks on the roof. Before I came home, I thought I should clean out the gutter. I filled two cardboard boxes.

I was out of the England team by then, but in Perth I'd gone to watch them net and they were going to an Elton John concert. They offered to take me along, and I was eventually persuaded that it would be all right to go with them. When I got there, Elton spotted me. 'Foxeye [that's what he used to call me], what are you doing here?'

'I'm living in Perth, in Scarborough, near the beach.'

'Come and see me tomorrow,' he said.

I met him at his penthouse suite. He asked if my house had a barbecue, and when I told him it didn't he suggested having a barbecue there that afternoon. A few hours later, two gold stretch limousines drew up outside my house, with me behind them in my little Ford Fiesta. His people got out, checked everything was secure and that the garden was walled so no one could see in. Then he said we should go and get some food. There was a supermarket nearby so he jumped in my Fiesta, stretch limo following behind, and I took him inside. There was this promotional woman selling chipolatas and sausages, and she had no idea who Elton John was. 'Excuse me, sir, would you care to try . . . Before she could get any further, this huge bodyguard picked the whole lot up and ate them.

Elton filled three shopping trolleys. He was like a kid. Well, when was the last time he'd been in a supermarket? He was running around, just chucking stuff in. When we got to the till, I told him we wouldn't need it all. 'Yes,' he looked at me, 'but darling, you won't need to go shopping for a few days, will you?'

That Christmastime, Elton rang me up: 'Foxeye, what are you doing for New Year's Eve?'

'I don't know, why?'

'Can I have a party at your house?'

It was the usual subtle little affair. Elton got his hotel to decorate the property, had lobsters, oysters and champagne flown in, there was a DJ, two chefs, three waiters, three bouncers – the whole thing must have cost tens of thousands. The England team came, as well as some of the Aussies. Work unsurprisingly, got out. All of a sudden there were 150 people outside queuing to get in. The whole thing was just phenomenal. You didn't have a chance to step back and think 'this is ridiculous' because it all was.

Elton called me up a couple of days later: 'I wanted to say thank you for letting me have a party at your house.' He flew me first class to Adelaide where, naturally, I was picked up by a bloke with a peaked cap in a stretch limousine. I was taken to a hotel, put up in a suite, same again in Sydney where we went on to the harbour on a yacht he'd hired. So there I was, on this beautiful boat, single-handedly having the time of my life, an absolute hoot. But I ran out of Taittinger Rosé. Disaster, I know.

It was like a military operation, as messages were sent out left, right and centre, and next thing you

saw was a courier, driving round the foreshore on a motorbike with a huge case of Taittinger on the back. ~~He got in a little boat, came out to ours, and there it was, chilled Taittinger. All I could think was: 'This is a different life.'~~

We moved on to Melbourne. He wanted to go clothes shopping, so we went to this incredibly trendy shop, which they opened just for him. He tried on all these clothes – and they were turning the arms and legs up to make them fit. After a while I went to get a coffee, and when I came back Elton threw a package at me. It was a \$300 shirt, shall we say distinctive. In total he spent way over \$10,000. I looked at his mound of purchases.

'You can't possibly wear all that.'

'I know, but my fun is in buying them. If I never wear them it doesn't matter, I've had a great morning.' I thought that as he'd earned the money, he deserved to spend it how he wanted.

Later we went to the MCG where we bumped into the former England fast bowler Frank Tyson. He said something Elton didn't like and a massive argument erupted. It was a sporting matter. Elton was on the side of the sportsman, how much he has to give, how little he earns, and Frank was saying they should earn far too much. Elton was really passionate about this kind of thing. He looked at Patti Mostyn, his tour manager. 'Pateye,' he said, 'let's buy Foxeye out of his contract. How much will it cost us?'

I was on one of the best contracts anyone has ever had to play club cricket, in the region of \$10,000. Elton considered this: 'I wouldn't sing two bars of fucking "Rocket Man" for ten thousand dollars.' He genuinely thought that people like Ian Botham – and he was probably right with Beefy – should earn as much money as him. He actually viewed his talent as just being able to write little songs. Real talent was what Beefy did, or George Best and Ivan Lendl. In his mind, he simply wrote happy little tunes.

Eventually, we got past the partying and used to sit down and have a chat. One day he took the whole Australia team to a seafront restaurant in Perth. He had one stretch limousine, I had another, and afterwards we went to the White Horse Yacht Club, the British America's Cup challenge headquarters. But before all that we had a couple of hours to kill and just hung around, two blokes like any others, having a chat. It was at that point I asked him, 'How come I'm here?'

He pondered this. 'I thought cricketers were quite boring until I came across you in Auckland. You were the best entertainment we've ever had.' He'd never wanted me to leave that party. He loved the chaos I was creating.

I also found out years later the true reason behind my sore jaw in Auckland. I was messing about with Beefy, the usual knockabout stuff. 'Pack it in!' I said to him.

'You pack it in,' he replied, 'or I'll knock you out.'

'You wouldn't knock me out.'

'I've done it before.' The penny dropped. 'You bastard! Did you knock me out in Auckland?'

'How do you think I got you to sleep?'

Looking back, I should be grateful.

THE WAY UP

‘You need to calm down.’ That’s what people used to say to me when I played for Lancashire. And I’d say, ‘Hang on a minute. Do you think I’d jeopardise my career by being an idiot? I might be daft but I’m not stupid. I don’t do half the things you think I’m doing.’

Lancashire manager Jack Bond once pushed me against a wall and told me to stop sleeping with a committee member’s wife. I got him round the throat: ‘Two things, Bondy. One, I’m not. And two, that sort of gossip could get me the sack. So pack it in.’

People underestimated the kind of person I was. In fact, it was only when I started writing for the *Sunday Telegraph* and working on *Test Match Special* they realised I had a brain. ‘He’s jack the lad, the joker in the dressing room.’ It even says that on Wikipedia. And I was, a bit, but it doesn’t mean that all there was to me.

It was partly what barred me from being considered for captaincy, even though I was more than capable of doing the on-field stuff. In fact, I captained eight matches and won three, bearing in mind that for me to be doing it meant that neither captain Clive Lloyd nor vice-captain Jack Simmons were playing, so we obviously had a depleted team. These days I’d have been a good captain, but back then you had to organise all the transport, all the admin side of things, and I couldn’t have done that as I’m not sure I had the organisational skills. And I’d probably have spoken my mind too much when it came to the powers that be, a group of people who rarely appeared to occupy the same planet, though they were somehow in the same pavilion.

This is how ridiculous it was. I was picked for my first Test match and got called into a meeting in the Lancashire committee room with former international Cyril Washbrook. He was a committee member, but I’d never spoken to him. I’d been playing since 1973, a pro since 1978, and this was 1982, and in all that time we’d never said a word. Bear in mind this was a guy who gave me a contract. I did the right thing, put my blazer and tie on, and went and sat down – no tea, no coffee, just two chairs.

‘I’ve been speaking to Peter May [the chairman of selectors],’ he told me. ‘The selectors are more than happy with your ability to open the batting, but they are a little bit concerned about your fielding.’ I didn’t know what he was on about. ‘I don’t know whether it’s because you’re slow to throw the ball or your arm isn’t very good, but I just want to tell you to commit one hundred per cent to your fielding. Best of luck. Thank you very much for coming in.’

What? What just happened there? Richie Benaud once described me as the greatest cover fielder in the world, and I could run 100m in under 11 seconds. Cyril used to sit right at the top of the pavilion, we used to call it the pigeons’ loft, where all the committee perched – and watch me, and yet he didn’t know I could field. But that’s how it was. There was a massive ‘us and them’. The committee didn’t like us, and we didn’t like them. I overheard two committee members once – it was the end of the season and we’d finished in the bottom four. ‘Well, at least we didn’t lose to Yorkshire,’ said one. ‘That’s all that matters.’ And he meant it.

Lancashire was like a private members' club with a cricket field at the side. The committee was just a gentlemen's drinking club where they could take friends – 'I'm on the committee, would you care to come and watch?' They didn't appear to care about the members or about the results. It was simply a jolly little place to take their pals and have a glass of wine on Sunday.

When Cedric Rhoades was chairman, I got 120-odd and that night went into the committee room. It was a stinking hot day so we were allowed to take our blazers off. I had on a pair of silver trousers, white shoes, white belt, green checked shirt and a white leather tie (it was the 1980s). Nobody said anything. The following day, Peter Lever, the coach, came up to me: 'The chairman wants me to tell you that you're not to come dressed like that again.'

'If the chairman wants to talk to me about my dress, tell him to come to see me, not send a monkey.'

'I'll have to fine you if you do it again.'

'Tell him, if he doesn't like how I dress, I don't particularly like how he dresses, but I'm not going to say anything. And if he wants to say anything, tell him to come to talk to me.'

Next Saturday, we were at home again. Five minutes before stumps, I chipped one to long-on. I should have had the biggest bollocking of my career for getting out at such a time in such a way. I went to the committee room again, only this time in my England tour uniform. The jacket was miles too small, the trousers way too big around the waist and too short, my shirt collar was all over the place and I had my touring tie on and my tour shoes. I looked a shambles, like a tramp, but the reaction of the committee was totally different. The chairman came over, shook my hand, 'How lovely to see you.'

And it's at that point you just go: 'Fuck off. You're not in it for the right reasons. You're not in it for the cricket, you're concerned about your image, your little club, and how you want to run things.'

They didn't know what they were doing. Joel Garner played for Milnrow in the Central Lancashire League before he played for Somerset. He had a couple of games for Lancashire's second team, but the view came back from the committee that he was too tall to be a fast bowler, so they didn't sign him. Every time he came back, how fast do you think he bowled then? They told Clive Rice he was just an average league professional and didn't sign him either, so every time he came back it was the same. I began to wonder how many people they could get wrong?

When they did bring in a quality player, it was more by luck than judgement. They signed Col Croft thinking he was left-arm over. He was right. And these people were actually voting for whether to get a job or not? It was just preposterous. So later, when I turned to coaching, would I want to have gone and coached Lancashire's first team? You must be joking.

Things weren't always better in the dressing room. When I started playing in the first team we had a poor side. There was this inevitability, especially in the Sunday League, that batsmen couldn't get enough runs and bowlers couldn't keep it tight enough. So we decided to have a team meeting over a meal, which you should never do, because if it goes wrong you're stuck there. Whereas if you have a normal meeting and it goes wrong, you can all separate.

Jack Simmons kicked off the meeting. Now I love Jack, but God he enjoyed an argument. People thought of him as everyone's friend, but someone once described him as a street fighter with a friendly smile, and I think that summed him up. He and I fell out every day, and then we'd go home and start again the next. It was never serious, but it was how he operated. Some people didn't bother but I answered him back.

On this occasion, Jack complained that we'd often be 30 without loss after ten overs, and that that wasn't a good enough start. David Lloyd felt he was having a go at the openers, him and me, and ended up by telling him to do it – and Jack said he would. The following week we were at Old Trafford, with Simmo opening the batting. At the end of 40 overs, he was 60-odd not out. 'Well?' Bumble asked. Simmo thought about it: 'It's not that easy, you know!' And that was it. Bumble just

looked at me, incredulous.

~~Dressing-room culture isn't something you slip into. It takes time, especially as a youngster, to get used to it and the various different characters, the set ways of doing things, the hierarchies, both real and imagined, and other people's conceptions of you and where you fit into their world.~~

At that time in the 1970s and 1980s, dressing rooms were hard. This was the era when you got told off. Early on, I had to whiten senior pro Barry Wood's pads and clean his boots. Similarly, when I started out, the second team used to change in a separate dressing room downstairs. It was referred to by various names – the dogs' home, the stiffs. To start with, when I got a game in the first team, I still had to use that dressing room. After fielding practice, the next time I'd see the rest of the side was when I heard them coming down the stairs, and then I'd follow them out. At lunchtime, all the first teamers would go upstairs, I'd go into my dressing room, wait for the sound of them coming downstairs, and follow them out again. If there had been a team meeting in the break, I certainly hadn't been party to it. But half the time there weren't any team meetings anyway. 'Right, come on. Everybody ready? Simmo, put your jumper on!' That was it.

One day after I was out, I thought I'd better go upstairs and sit with the rest of the side. I walked into the dressing room and Barry Wood, who wasn't even playing, was sitting there. 'Did you knock?' he asked.

'I'm playing in the game!'

'I didn't ask that. Did you knock?'

'No.'

'Well, fuck off out then.' And he threw me out. I had to come back and knock. That was the culture at that time.

For a senior player to have a massive go at you was not unusual. If it came from someone like Bumble, who I respected so much, I took it. He didn't do it for nothing or for a laugh; he did it because he felt he needed to. And if I learnt from it, which I did, it worked. But what did I learn from someone telling me to knock on the door?

A lot of the juniors hated Barry Wood because he had a go at them so often, and he used to have a go at me as well. One day he was tearing a strip off me and I decided to answer him back: 'I'm a better player than you.'

As soon as I said it I thought: 'Oh my god, what are you saying? He's an England player, and you're saying this?' It didn't stop me, though. 'I've more talent than you,' I continued. 'You're manmade, you are. You're just clockwork.' I looked at him and thought: 'Christ, I'm going to get sacked.'

'Brilliant!' he shouted. 'That's the spirit!' All along, all he'd wanted me to do was stand up to him. After I confronted him that day, we became really good mates. It was a bit of a weird way to do it, but that was the culture, the way that things were done.

People like Paul Allott and I tried to change that petty culture of knocking on doors, which is why we felt the committee didn't like us. We even managed to persuade them to change the sweaters. At that time, if you were an uncapped second XI player, you'd wear a plain white sweater; if you were a capped second XI player, you'd have a plain white sweater with a rosebud in the middle; and the first team players had one with green, red and blue stripes with no rose. It didn't make any sense, so we asked that everyone could take to the field in a sweater with stripes. Uncapped second XI players would have stripes only; second XI capped would have stripes with a rosebud on the left breast, and first XI capped would have stripes with a rose in the same place. At least we then looked similar, like we were a team.

We sorted out the dressing-room situation as well. We pointed out that it was bloody stupid having one dressing room downstairs and one upstairs, while the opposition were upstairs as well. It made much more sense to put them downstairs and for us to have both rooms upstairs. Despite what a lot

people have said, I don't kick against establishments. I only rebel against nonsense. If a tradition is worth keeping, I'm happy to be traditional. But if it doesn't make sense, I'll challenge it and I'll question it. And if it's nonsense, I'll rail against it.

As my career progressed, I tried to make sure I didn't become one of those people I'd encountered along my way. I can't say there were never some of the young lads that my tongue didn't lash out at, but not to the same extent as happened to me, or Paul Allott for that matter. I remember one senior batsman saying to him when he was only 19: 'You'll never be a bowler as long as you have a hole in your arse.' How was that supposed to help a young team-mate to develop? Also, I'd never ask anybody to whiten my pads, or do other menial tasks. I remembered how, when I was twelfth man, the senior players used to tell me to wash their car, but I told them I wouldn't do that.

In any team, there will always be an element of senior speaking to junior, and 99 times out of 100 they are trying to help them be a better player, but it doesn't always come across in a positive way. Occasionally, when I became a senior pro, I know that I overstepped the mark. All you need to do afterwards is say: 'Sorry, I shouldn't have said that. I know you were trying your best.' And if they're a decent man enough, they'll reply: 'Yes, OK. I know you were frustrated.'

Inevitably, in any dressing room, there are some people you get on with better than others, even if it's something as simple as wanting to do the same thing in the evening. Some people like Chinese, some people like Indian, some people like a pint before eating, some like to eat early. So you fit in with people who like to do the same as you, which is why I've never understood this talk of cliques. I'm not sure what a clique is. I think it's something that's only noticed by someone who thinks they're outside, but if they made an effort to get to know those people they'd quickly realise they're just friends, not a clique. The best thing to do is go along and join in.

It's like all this talk about bullying cultures. Have these people never been in a dressing room? Even the best in the world can be acidic. At Lancashire we had a dressing room full of people who liked arguing and shouting at each other, but that's part of what the whole experience is about. People get shouted at and have strips torn off them, then you get up next day and start again.

The weird thing was, while there'd be occasional flare-ups, when we were playing badly we generally get on like a house on fire; we had a good social life and great meals at night. However, the more successful we became – we won the Benson & Hedges Cup in 1984, were runners-up in the NatWest Trophy in 1986 and runners-up in the Championship in 1987 – playing really well and becoming a good team, the more arguments we had. We would even argue about how we could have won better than we did, or we'd have batsmen v bowlers rows; none of it was productive at all.

When we were rubbish, we had to rely on each other. We rallied round on the social side with friendships and camaraderie, but when we became a good team we rallied round on the pitch and we went our separate ways off it. When we were winning, at night I'd just want a couple of pints, something to eat, and then I was keen to get back on the field. My life was on that pitch. When I walked on to the grass, the rest of my life didn't exist – it was all I lived for, all I wanted.

But that's what I'd always taken from cricket, right from the start. Life at home wasn't easy. My mum and I never spoke civilly to one another, ever. She was always having a go at me and I had a go back. At home my mum would hit me, then at school I'd get hit by the teachers. It seemed as though there was no escape from it – except at the cricket club where I got blokes telling me I'd done well.

What happened with my mum gave me resilience; I learned to bounce back. Whatever she did to me, I just got up again. I did a psychology test once, developed for the Swedish air force, which straight away identified that the situation with my mum was at the centre of my personality. It gave me the ability to focus on what was important, ignore the rest of it, and to do what I want. I developed that through combat with her. It gave me a skill to look after myself and deal with things. Between the age of 15 until I left home, I went out every night – to a friend's, for a walk, to the pub in later years

because I couldn't sit in the house. I was pestered relentlessly. I had to go out just to get away. I am pleased to say that in recent times we have made our peace.

That's not to say everything was straightforward at cricket. I soon learned you can't just wander into a dressing room at 16, like I did at Lancashire, and start saying things. But sometimes it just comes out. I've got the ability to answer back quickly and have a sharp mouth, and I haven't met many people who can out-respond me, so there were times when people said something to me in the dressing room and I'd answer straight back. My mouth could get me in trouble, the same as it could get me out of it.

I also found out that in second XI cricket the atmosphere is often, though not always, horrible. When I was 16, I'd made three 60s in three days, and in the dressing room somebody wanted shampoo. I offered him mine. Andrew Kennedy, who usually opened in the first team, piped up: 'It's a good job the ammy [amateur] has turned up.'

'It is this week,' I said. That went round the first-team dressing room very quickly. Andrew hadn't liked what I'd said, and he let everybody know I'd said it. Perhaps he felt a little bit threatened seeing a young kid coming up through the ranks, scoring runs, and he was down in the second team not getting many.

When I was young, I played with a lot of cricketers who had come down to the seconds and obviously wanted to get back into the first team. They saw you as competition and didn't want you to do well. There were others who knew they were going to get sacked at the end of the year, so they didn't care and were out every night; and there were some who just weren't good enough for first team cricket. Unsurprisingly, it was an awful atmosphere at times. I learned to keep my head down and do my job. The only thing you want to do with second XI cricket is get out of it. And the best way to get out of it is to learn, to deliver, and not look sideways. Don't compare yourself to anybody else. Forget all that, it's about you, how you perform, and if you perform well enough for long enough you'll get picked for the senior side.

The first time I played for the second XI was against Northamptonshire in June 1973. Colin Milburn, the ex-England opener, was making a comeback with one eye after a road accident. It was just five years since I'd first picked up a bat. We'd gone to Westward Ho! on holiday and the beach there had miles of rock-hard sand. Dad and I played football, got fed up, and so went to a little seaside shop where we bought a set of stumps and a bat. 'Put it on the sand,' he told me. I laid it flat. 'Pick it up as if you're chopping down a tree.' I picked it up. 'Where's the tree?' he asked. I motioned to my right. 'OK. You're left-handed.' And that was how it was decided. As usual, he was right, although I'm completely right-handed otherwise – the only other thing I do left-handed is use chopsticks.

Every summer holiday he'd give me some money to buy myself a present. The next year I decided I wanted to buy a new cricket bat. I didn't know that my dad was secretly thrilled to bits, as he never said anything. The one I wanted was 150 shillings, which was a lot of money, so instead we got a little Wisden bat, size three, no stickers, just branded with a hot iron. That was my first bat, and I've still got it in the attic. My dad gave it to one of his friends who knew Garry Sobers so it could be signed by the touring West Indies team. This is how weird cricket can be; among the signatures are Michael Holding, Clive Lloyd and Viv Richards. I played with two of them and against the other. Clive would have been in his mid-20s at the time, while Mikey and Viv weren't much more than kids.

When we got home, Dad asked: 'Right, what do you want to do? Do you want to just play and enjoy yourself, mess about with your mates? You'll get to a certain level and then you'll never get any better. Or do you want to learn to play properly? It'll take a long time, but eventually you'll be as good as you can be.'

I knew it was the second option. My dad taught me the basics in the back garden. He never played the game, but he loved it and he knew what to do. There were some nights he just used to show

commands; 'Forward defence offside! Forward defence straight!' There was no ball so I had shadow play, but I didn't mind. I remember one night my mum came out and had a go at my dad to such an extent I ended up crying. I realised how much I was enjoying this, and I didn't want it to stop.

By this time I was running home from school to watch the Test match on the BBC. Often it was Boycott and Edrich opening, and I loved watching Edrich because he was left-handed. When Boycott was on strike, I'd look at the screen through the mirror above the sideboard to make him left-handed. It didn't work, as it made the angles all wrong, but I never sat in front of the Test match on TV and thought I want to play for England. It never entered my head. I was never this stereotypical kid with posters on my walls. I didn't have cricketing heroes. I liked Garry Sobers and John Edrich, but nothing beyond that. For me, it was more about doing it, living life, getting involved. I used to spend hours throwing a ball at the wall, making up little games, catching one-handed or whatever. I didn't realise it, but riding a bike meant I was learning timing, when things are going to intersect; playing football was learning movement; badminton helped my fielding, learning to change direction. I was picking up all sorts of transferrable skills.

In Gordon Leach I had a great PE teacher, too. He was only little, but he wouldn't stand for any nonsense if you got out of hand. When I look back, he was an incredibly good teacher. Hard but fair, he was dedicated to his students and to teaching. His love of sport was infectious; he broke down techniques and explained them. I loved him. I can still remember things he taught me about basketball and volleyball after all these years. It was the first time I'd encountered someone explaining sports techniques to me, which was the seed of me breaking things down myself.

We also had an English teacher, who was a ginger-haired, artistic lunatic of a bloke. He loved racking up sports and took me under his wing and taught me how to play squash. 'Everything you do,' he told me, 'you do it your way. I call it Fowler-esque.' Fowler-esque – I've always liked that.

The day I got my O-level results, they were put up on a board. Everyone was standing around looking nervous; Gordon Leach was at the back. He wasn't a bloke who displayed any affection, but he got mine, turned round, and he was there in front of me. 'How many have you got?' He threw his arm around me when I told him I'd got seven. I found out that a lot of members of staff had been giving him a hard time because of me playing so much sport. By getting seven O-levels, I'd made his life a bit easier.

At the same time I started going down to Accrington Cricket Club. I had two mates and we used to play out down there. The third XI were short one day, and needed two players and a scorer. Two of us played and the other lad ended up with the scoring book. We didn't realise it at the time, but all three of us would end up playing for Lancashire seconds. We had no idea we were good for our age, but we must have been.

By the time I was 15, I was opening the batting for the Accrington first team in the Lancashire League. The format was 32 eight-ball overs, and the plan was to let me bat the first ten as I wanted. I was scoring runs and getting on with it, fine. If I wasn't, I either had to get a move on or get out.

Early on, I played against Neil Hawke, an Australian Test match opening bowler – I couldn't lay my bat on it. At the start of the next season, I played against a bloke called Bob Leatherbarrow, who was Colne's professional. He started shouting and cursing at me, sledging me. I was only a kid, and it was the first time I'd ever come across this kind of thing. I got really upset while I was still batting, but he carried on. Afterwards, I was in the little bar, having a lime and lemonade as I always did, and in he walked. He came straight up to me. I was quivering. He stuck his hand out. 'Well played, son. Would you like a drink? Listen, all that on the pitch, it was because I couldn't get you out and I was just trying to wind you up a little bit. But always remember, that doesn't mean I don't like you. What happens on the pitch is one thing, what happens off the pitch is another. Off the pitch, we're friends.'

As I progressed, I never thought I didn't want to go to training, or that I'd rather do something else.

or go to a party. I never felt any peer pressure to do other things, I just decided that cricket was what I wanted to do. It didn't matter who for or what level a game, it always took priority. I missed loads of stuff as a result. People would tell me there was a wedding I needed to go to, and that surely that took priority over a club game – but it didn't. I don't think I understood when they said, 'It's only a club game,' and I don't think they understood when I said, 'I've got a game.' To me, I didn't need to say anything more to explain things.

That's why I say cricket found me, rather than the other way round. I had no ambition as a young kid, I simply fell into it. Initially, I liked it because I got compliments off people I didn't know, and I enjoyed it. When I got asked to play for Lancashire's second XI, I didn't even know you could be a professional cricketer. I didn't think Lancashire even had a second team. I'd never thought about it. I'd never thought beyond playing for Accrington.

When I realised there was an opportunity to do this for a living, I merely noted the fact; there wasn't a light that went on and I didn't decide I was going to be a cricketer. I just carried on playing. I went to school, ended up playing quite a lot for Lancashire, and loved it to pieces. But I didn't have a goal in mind, I just wanted to play. Even when Lancashire asked me what I was doing the following year, I told them I was going to university. They explained they were going to offer me a contract, but I still went off to university anyway.

When I did eventually start my full-time professional career at Lancashire, my wage was £500 a week. The money really didn't matter. People of my era never went into cricket because of the money. There was none. OK, playing for England against the West Indies in 1984 we got £175 for a one-day game, which I suppose is all right – but I could have got killed. You did it because you wanted to play cricket, and you loved playing cricket. And let's face it, if you get to do that for a living, you're a lucky bloke.

My dad died in 2009. He didn't know it, but he had a beautiful philosophy. He taught me virtually everything, but when I played for Lancashire seconds, I said to him: 'This isn't how you do it at this level. You do things differently.' And he backed off. Most dads wouldn't have done that.

'Can I come and watch?' he asked. 'Not really, Dad. No parents come and watch.' When I got picked for the first team, it was different and I told him he could come along.

The first time I made a hundred for Lancashire was against Nottinghamshire, and I got it at about 6.25. I drove home thrilled to bits, and my mum was standing there grinning. I was baffled how she already knew, as I was pretty sure it wouldn't have made *Look North*. 'Your dad's been there all day,' she told me. I had no idea. The smile on his face was amazing. But that's what he did, he'd turn up and watch, and then when I was out he'd go back to work.

As a kid I remember once asking my dad to carry my bag, but he replied: 'I'll carry your bag when you're playing for England.' When I got picked for my first Test match, my bedroom was so small I had to keep my cricket coffin in the hallway outside. I was in my room filling a bag with clothes and went outside and the coffin had gone. He was carrying it to the car: 'I told you I would.'

My dad would come to watch me at Test matches, but he missed the two hundreds I got in England because he and my mum were on holiday. He always complained to my mum about that. I knew he was proud of me, even if there was never going to be gushing emotion. He'd say stuff like: 'You've not done badly, have you?'

He was a farmer's son, but the family had a meeting and decided there was no future in farming for him. His auntie suggested he worked in cars, so he had to become a motor mechanic. He didn't really have a say in the matter, and he also used to drive taxis on Saturdays and Sundays, so he never had time to play cricket himself.

Because of that experience, one of the things he used to say to me was: 'No son of mine is ever getting his hands dirty for a living.' So he was pleased that it worked out for me, though I could

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