

WebWhispers Nu-Voice Club

October, 1998

The Internet Laryngectomee Support Group

New Members

The following new members joined WebWhispers in September.

Please welcome them to our group.

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There Is a Good Life After a Laryngectomy!

By: Dutch Helms

There is life — in fact, a good life — after a laryngectomy. But you have to reach out for that life. It will not necessarily come to you.

Here are a few rules which helped me and which will help you.

Rule No. 1. Force yourself to become active and involved in life again, doing as much as physically possible of what you did before. You will feel self-conscious about whatever type of new voice you have — but only at first. That feeling will pass with time and will pass sooner if you get out and use your new voice in all situations.

Nothing will happen if you just choose to sit at home and hide from people and life. You may think you are not ready. Hell, no one is ever ready to face things like this. But waiting to be ready is not an alternative. Getting out is something you need to do, ready or not — and you don't GET ready until you start to DO something.

Launch yourself back into life. Surround yourself with all the support you can. You will soon discover that it ain't all that bad!

Rule No. 2. Make sure, if possible, that you have something you can do and enjoy doing. Resurrect an old hobby, create a new one, set up a project to occupy your time, energy, brain power, and spirit. Ideally, find something that requires interaction with other people. Try to help yourself find a good reason to get up every morning — other than to simply watch TV, read, and eat.

Rule No. 3 See a doctor (not necessarily just your ENT who is, after all, a specialist in his field) about possible physical problems. For example, I had thyroid problems but did not know it for a full year after surgery. Many laryngectomees, particularly those who have had radiation, suffer from underperforming thyroids and do not know it. Once placed on daily Synthroid tablets, my attitude improved greatly.

Good Life (Continued)

Rule No. 4. If all else fails and you find that you are depressed about the changes in your life, seek professional psychological help with individual or group therapy.

When I was told a laryngectomy would be necessary, I became severely depressed.

I could not stand the thought of going through the rest of my life with no voice and a hole in my neck. To that point, my entire life had been about talking and singing. My "jobs" had been military jet pilot, negotiator, teacher, instructor, coach, emcee for events, narrator, briefer, discussion leader, etc. I sang in choirs, barbershop quartets and choruses. I simply could not imagine going through life without a VOICE.

The situation was made worse by a number of personal factors. The early 1990's were my not best years, to put it mildly. I had separated from my wife in 1990 and the divorce took a year before it was final. During this time, I had met another woman and fallen madly in love with her. We planned to tie the knot in September of 1992 — but, three weeks prior to the wedding, she called it off and reconciled with her ex-husband instead. I was devastated!

To make matters even worse, I had been stationed overseas at the time all of this happened. I was flown by Medivac to the U. S. Air Force's Cancer Treatment Center, Wilford Hall, at Lackland, TX. Wilford Hall is a great facility, but none of my friends or family were near. It was just me and doctors and nurses. No one ever told me about the IAL (International Association of Laryngectomees) or the existence of any laryngectomy support groups, so I had no outside help at that time.

Thus, being told that a laryngectomy would be necessary while I was still suffering from going through a divorce and a canceled wedding really shocked my whole system. Lacking the support of family and friends or any other group, I went into deep depression and to near suicide. I simply couldn't think of a reason to live.

Luckily I got professional help and spent over a month in an Air Force mental health facility "getting a grip on life" again.

New Members (Continued)

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Welcome to all!

Yahoo and Excite

Our Web site which has been visited by over 28,000 persons is now listed by both Yahoo and Excite, two of the largest search engines on the Internet.

Both show us as the first site for Laryngeal Cancer! Excite's description is:

"This patient page is a wonderful resource, with information from terminology to treatments, all with a personal touch."

If you have not done so recently, revisit the Cancer of the Larynx site at

[http://members.aol.com/
FantumTwo/cancer1.htm](http://members.aol.com/FantumTwo/cancer1.htm)

and see all the improvements which Dutch has been making on a regular basis.

DEFEND YOUR TERRITORY!

By Pat Sanders

A cat will protect its territory and we must beware of a mother cat who thinks we might hurt her kittens.

We as cancer patients and survivors must be just as diligent in protecting our territory by letting everyone know what bothers our breathing.

Our main territory is our home and we have the right to have clean air to breathe. Our car should be treated as our home away from home.

In your home, turn on exhaust fans in the kitchen to remove strong cooking odors and smoke.

You must not allow your spouse, your children or your friends to smoke or wear perfumes and shaving lotions in your home.

Deodorizers, sprays or powders are hard on us. Hairspray is especially offensive. Consider how it stiffens hair. Imagine what it does to the tender tissues of your lungs.

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Good Life (Continued)

Then I pressed ahead with the laryngectomy. After the surgery, my best friend since junior high school, with whom I had remained in contact over all the years, offered me the opportunity to live with him, his wife and family while I recovered.

This experience really saved my life and finally got me out of most of the depression. It forced me to be with people (in this case, two adults and three teenage girls) every day. It forced me to talk, to get accustomed to using my new voice in all sorts of social situations — shopping at the Mall, ordering pizza's over the phone, and being present when the family entertained other friends. In essence, living with them forced me to become engaged in living again.

At first, I felt like a freak with a computer voice and a funny hole in my neck. But this feeling gradually passed as I became more involved with living a normal life. I was thrilled when I traded in my electrolarynx for a TEP/prosthesis voice — that boosted my confidence in myself and my ability to communicate. All this time, I was learning that being a laryngectomee was NOT the end of the world and that leading a good, interesting, and rewarding life was still possible. I've been on my own and in my own place now for over two years, living as normal a life as possible and I love it!

Another thing that helped me cope was the computer! Having the computer with its Internet capability has been a Godsend. This machine not only provided entertainment and education possibilities but also the tools to learn new skills. Yes, old dogs can learn new tricks. I quickly established a Home Page on the Internet and then attempted to create a Larynx Cancer Information site, primarily to help poor folks like me who, when initially diagnosed, needed help getting reliable information, assistance, support and guidance. This Information site gradually blossomed into the WebWhispers Club that we have today. My association with the site, both creatively in building it and socially/psychologically in participating with everyone in it, has been extremely helpful in coping and living — and that is a gross understatement. Indeed, it was also through the computer that I met, came to know, and fell in love with the wonderful woman I soon intend to marry.

I came through. Many, many others have come through. So can you!

God bless.

Thank You!

To those members who have made a voluntary financial contribution in 1998 to help defray the costs of maintaining our WebWhispers site.

Wayne Baker
Mary Bergquist
Ellen Byrne
Walter Canney
Joe Casey
Phillip Clemmons
Jon Del Ben
Terry Duga
Paul Galioni
J.J. Gaston
Bob Hazell
Dutch Helms
Bob Hoover
Bob Hopkins
Len Librizzi
Ken Morris
Darlene Parker
Marianne Peereboom-Kooijman
Janet Pounds
Red Rose Nu Voice Club
Mary Alice Renison
Scott Lowery
Al Weitzel

Any member wishing to make a voluntary contribution for 1998/99 may do so by mailing it to WebWhispers' Treasurer:

Terry G. Duga
6115 North Park
Indianapolis, IN 46220

Chat Room

We invite all members of WebWhispers to join our Chat Room on Sunday afternoons at 4:00 PM Eastern Time. Directions to the site are on our WebWhispers page.

First time users should go a little early and register (free of charge) with LiveUniverse. Next to "Quote", type in your name — it will show up in a panel to the left of the Chat Room summary and make it easier for others to know who is talking.

DEFEND YOUR TERRITORY (Continued)

Some people will think that because you don't have an acute sense of smell, these things won't bother you.

You may not smell the problem but you will have a throat dryness or an elevated production of mucous as your body tries to adapt to breathing these pollutants.

We have a good deal of that already as we deal with changes in air conditioning and humidity. We don't need more problems.

Do the best you can to stay out of homes, cars and public places where smoking is allowed.

Try to stay away from gasoline fumes or areas where you see cleaning chemicals being used. You'll breathe better.

Be vigilant! Defend your territory!

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Pat Sanders is the Editor of HEADLINES, a monthly newsletter of the Head and Neck Cancer Support Group of the Kirklin Clinic located in Birmingham, AL. The newsletter, distributed by the American Cancer Society, reaches over 280 laryngectomees.