

Whispers on the Web

A Monthly Online Newsletter for WebWhispers

Photo CC by HMBq.com

January 2020



Contents

Column	Author	Title
From The Editor's Desk	Donna McGary	Explore. Dream. Discover
The Scuttlebutt	Tom Whitworth	Trouble In Paradise
VoicePoints	Kim Almand	"Can You Hear My Voice?"
Between Friends	Donna McGary	Pack Your Bags
The Agony & Ecstasy	Dr. Branton Holmberg	Chapter 4: A New Face
This Lary Life	WC Baker	Esophageal In Iran - Part II
My Neck of the Woods	Don Renfro	Think It and Then Do It

From The Editor's Desk

We are off to a bit of a slow start which Tom Whitworth explains in his following column. That's okay since we have only to go up from here, right? I hope I didn't jinx anything by saying that! Seriously, we will get these tech issues resolved and for now you have another great issue to read. One problem is that all the links folks add in their columns may not be available just by a click, as usual, since we can only do a pdf version for now. You may need to use cut and paste to access them. We will get that resolved.

Still, this is a great issue to get you motivated up off the couch and out into the world. No pressure here (I am firmly in the couch contingent as I write) but should you be so inclined, our writers this month make a strong case for venturing out of our comfort zone.

You don't have to go far, actually. You just have to use fresh new eyes. As I was researching ideas for my column I discovered this:

"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. Throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."

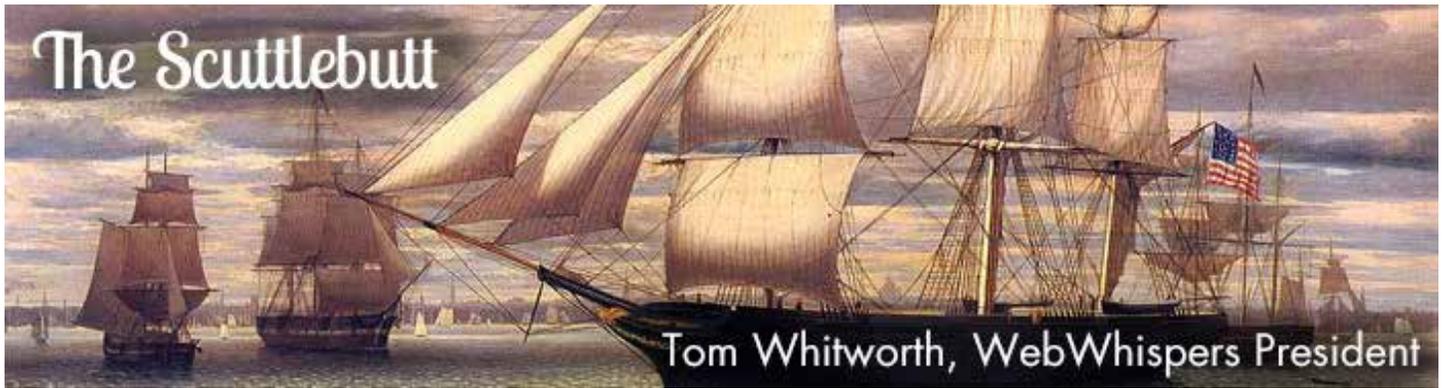
This quote, while frequently mis-attributed to Mark Twain actually belongs to H. Jackson Brown's mother. Harriett Jackson Brown Jr. is an American author best known for his inspirational book, *Life's Little Instruction Book*, which was a New York Times bestseller. Its sequel *Life's Little Instruction Book: Volume 2* also made it to the same best seller list in 1993.

Best case I ever heard for listening to your Mother.

Happy Reading and start packing...we need to get a move on!

Donna McGary





Trouble In Paradise

WebWhispers has been online for more than twenty years. We've had the Mail Digest, electrolarynx loan closet, our vast and well-known website, WebWhispers.org and in recent years we've added social media options. The most widely utilized and most important thing we offer is the website, which includes our monthly online newsletter, Whispers on the Web. Over the past twelve months, WebWhispers.org has been accessed in 121 languages from 139 countries. Our purpose "Sharing Support Worldwide" continues to be met and the WebWhispers organization continues to flourish with more than 4,200 members.

We are replacing the current site with a newly designed one that we hope and truly believe will be available very soon. It is in the final stages between Kinetic, our developer and our Webmaster, Ron Matoon. Ron has devoted a great deal of time in maintenance of our current site and simultaneous development of the new one. I could not be more grateful for his effort and his diligence to both of these tasks.

Over a month ago, a problem developed with our software used to update the current website. At the same time, an issue with our site hosting company made things even worse. The site is still up and running and filled with information for the laryngectomee community. However, the scenario we are still dealing with prevents us from posting anything to the website, including our monthly issues of the newsletter.

During this time, the newsletter is available via a link posted on the Mail Digest and also on our Facebook Group. This situation has been and continues to be a nightmare for the WebWhispers team. We ask for your patience as we work through this so we can move everything to the new website, which is being

developed and will be maintained using WordPress, our new software. Again, the current site is working on your end but we simply cannot add to it at this time. Keep an eye out both on the list and on Facebook for the monthly newsletter announcement which is now to be at mid-month. Also, pray if so inclined, wish us luck, send positive karma, or whatever you choose especially until we get through this current challenge. When we do and also when the new site is up, you will hear about it. We will shout it from the mountaintops!

I look forward to the day our new website is in use. On behalf of our entire leadership team, I thank you for your continued support of WebWhispers, Inc.

Tom Whitworth





Voice Points

Written by Professionals

Coordinated by Kim Almand M.S., CCC-SLP

kbalmand@gmail.com



Can You Hear My Voice? at the International Association of Laryngectomees

There is an inspirational new film premier kicking off in 2020 that you will not want to miss. *Can You Hear My Voice?* is a “triumphant” documentary that chronicles the transition from life with a larynx to one without. Told through the personal stories of members of the Shout At Cancer choir in the UK, the production is heartfelt and a familiar story to many who have undergone a laryngectomy or have lost their voice in one way or another. “Can You Hear My Voice?”, formerly “Segue”, is produced and directed by Mr. Bill Brummel, a Peabody Award winner, five-time Emmy nominee, and winner of two International Documentary Association awards. Many of Brummel’s films have focused on civil rights and human rights issues. Bill is a laryngectomee with a compelling personal journey of his own.

There will be a unique opportunity to hear Brummel speak in person prior to the viewing of the film in its entirety in June at the International Association of Laryngectomees (IAL) meeting. For those of you not familiar with the IAL, this conference is an opportunity for persons with a laryngectomy, caregivers, speech-language pathologists, graduate students, and other professionals to gather together for education, rehabilitation, and socialization.

The IAL will take place this year on June 10-13, 2020 in Charlotte, North Carolina. The format of the conference involves two meetings, the Annual Meeting and Voice Institute (VI) which essentially run concurrently. The Voice Institute (VI) convenes Wednesday, June 10 through Saturday, June 13, 2020 and is comprised of professional lectures related to the methods of alaryngeal speech production, and issues related to rehabilitation and quality of life issues in head and neck cancer and pre- and post-operatively.

Led by experienced faculty members, the VI provides hands-on training, therapy and practice with artificial larynx training, esophageal voice, tracheoesophageal speech, augmentative communication and amplification. There are opportunities for caregiver support and a spouse/caregiver

rap session, as well as hands-on time with vendors. ASHA CEUs are offered for speech-language pathologists. The Annual Meeting is held Thursday through Saturday and is intended for those participants who may prefer to arrive on Thursday for socializing and attending just a few of the lectures held throughout the rest of the week.

In addition to the viewing of “Can You Hear My Voice?”, the IAL Voice Institute is offering many exceptional opportunities this year, all set into motion by the extraordinary VI director, Dr. Caryn Melvin. She has compiled a packed agenda of accomplished speakers. Among these include Dr. David Estores from the University of Florida, returning to lecture on GERD Following Total Laryngectomy and Esophageal Stricture Following Total Laryngectomy. Della Franklin-Mann, an SLP at Levine Cancer Center in Charlotte, NC will discuss Bodily Changes Following Total Laryngectomy and Dysphagia. Previous contributor to VoicePoints, speech-Language Pathologist Erin Guidera is delivering a new presentation on The Unique Aerodigestive Tract of the Laryngectomee and Effects of Weather on Stoma Health. She will also instruct on and demonstrate Myofascial Release and TEP Troubleshooting. The week promises to be engaging and filled with exceptional people and information.

More details about the IAL along with a link to register (updated agenda and presenters soon to be published) are found at: www.theial.com or on the International Association of Laryngectomees and IAL Voice Institute Facebook pages.

To learn more about Bill Brummel’s documentary and the Shout at Cancer Choir led by Dr. Thomas Moors, visit: <https://www.shoutatcancer.org/> . In case you missed it, do not forget to check out our December 2019 newsletter (PDF format) with a special article written by Dr. Moors: <https://bit.ly/34K3e02>. A fascinating and inspirational piece!

As always, please contact Kim Almand at kbalmand@gmail.com for questions and/or assistance accessing any of these resources. I look forward to hearing from you.

Between Friends

Donna McGary

"That which does not kill us makes us strong."

Pack Your Bags

So I traveled "across the pond" for the first time back in November! David Kinkead had a great write-up here last month about the UK Head and Neck Cancer conference that inspired that trip and our adventures afterwards. Available here if you missed it <https://bit.ly/34K3e02>

A little background information is in order. David, who is a board member of the IAL (International Association of Laryngectomees) and also very active within WebWhispers posted on FB that he wanted to attend the conference to learn more about how the UK met the needs of laryngectomees and bring back that knowledge to perhaps help us do a better job here. I saw his post, said way to go, wish I could join you and Jim Lauder (AKA the Servox Guru and all around hero to larys) wrote back.... Why don't you? It will be fun. I'm going and we can meet up with some other great folks. Well...it was one of those moments where you think, if not now, when? Now to be clear, I do not have much disposable income. I live on my Social Security and a very small pension. My savings are meager. I do have, however, a nice little side gig as a "Critter Sitter" and have a number of clients who like to travel. So, as it turns out I had several well-paying jobs last fall and was feeling flush. Also, as it turns out flights from Boston to London were surprisingly affordable and well...you know... if not now, when!

Both David and I got a bit of flak. After all he is a happily married man of many years and I am a happily unmarried woman of just as many years. But we made pretty compatible "travel buddies" even if we did confound some folks!

Some take-aways? You do need to upgrade your phone even if you have international calling. Tracphone sucks. Dave & I had a bit of confusion at Heathrow as a result. It can be very scary when you realize you have no way to contact anyone you know. Staff there tried to help but it was a mess and when I finally got to Brighton I was feeling anxious, to say the least. I finally checked into my hotel after a very long bus ride and a stop far enough from my hotel to require a taxi, which a very

lovely woman called for me since I was pretty frazzled by then. As I almost in tears explained to the concierge that I needed to make contact with my traveling companion but couldn't access his info since my POS phone wasn't working, she said, "I think I can help. Is your friend David? He stopped over here earlier looking for you. Here is his number. He is staying just down the street." Can you hear the hallelujah chorus I heard at that point?

It got much easier after that. Hotel rooms are much smaller than what we are used to in the states for comparable prices but often include breakfasts that are WAY better. A Full English is a meal and a half by American standards. And as a tea drinker I was in heaven. One server said, "It's a bit strong; let me know if you want some hot water." I loved it and have switched to English Breakfast here at home...but it's just not the same.

Uber made getting around Brighton and London really easy, thanks to David, although TBH I am not sure I would have felt quite so comfortable if I was alone and London has changed some Uber policies since then.

But the best part, other than seeing all the sights, was meeting the people and making new friends. The second night in Brighton David and I were out having dinner at a Middle Eastern place and as we chatted the fellow at the next table gave us a heads up and asked if he could join us later for a chat. Turns out he was a local and worked with veterans and other folks with disabilities, particularly those with strokes or injuries resulting in voicing issues. He was fascinated and impressed by our "voices" (we both use ELs). We ended up talking for hours about everything from Brexit to the healthcare system, both theirs and ours, to the controversial British Airways i360 on Brighton Beach and what to tip at restaurants.

He was only the first of many Britons who made this trip so memorable. From the folks at Swallows, the Head and Neck Cancer support group who sponsored the conference to all the speakers and attendees, I realized how fortunate I was to be there. These folks rock!! They are funny and engaged and cool. Plus, I know it is sexist and inappropriate but if I had dentists and ENTs who were that funny and good-looking and dressed that well and were just...you know - that cool...I

might be more inclined to keep my appointments! It wasn't just them; maybe it's London but I must say those Brit Boys do scrub up nicely.

Sooo, on to the culture LOL!!! I was struck during our tour through the Sussex Downs on the way to the Seven Sisters Cliffs that it all looked so familiar and yet so new. I think that is the beauty of traveling. I had seen all of this before but never IRL and it is simply not the same. I have had the same experience seeing the Colorado Rockies and the Grand Canyon. You simply are not prepared for the grandeur and I use that word deliberately. I have heard folks say the same thing upon viewing an ocean for the first time. The English country-side didn't have that feeling of awe but it was still spectacular and strangely moving. Driving through 15th century villages and on to Windsor Castle and Stonehenge you begin to realize just how young we [colonial] Americans are.

I felt a kinship with this landscape. It felt familiar in my bones. When we were driving to Stonehenge and the tour guide explained how all the mounds we were seeing were actual ancient burial grounds I began to feel the power. Not just Stonehenge, although it is impressive, especially upon the approach, but the power of the imagination and mystery of an ancient people. You can't go to Stonehenge these days without a pass on a bus tour and it's crowded and commercialized. Nevertheless as I walked back to my bus and saw all of my fellow tourists wandering around those monoliths I thought how they still hold the power. We are still pilgrims seeking answers.

Travel changes you. As Mark Twain famously said, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."

However I realize travel is not an option for everyone as I wrote in a column back in 2017 when our Speaking Out question concerned traveling as a laryngectomy.

Reading all the wonderful responses to our Speaking Out question about post-lary travel reminded me once again how true it is that we are all different. Adventurous types remain adventurous, sometimes even defiantly so regardless of the physical challenges post-laryngectomy and those among us who weren't much for venturing past their back door before rarely set off for new worlds now.

I am a huge fan of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings and love this quote: "It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no

knowing where you might be swept off to."

But, as we learned in LOTR and SO some folk are quite willing to step out onto the road. Others of us, not so much. Some of us are constrained not by the hole in our neck so much as the hole in our pocket. Travel, even modest road trips can be expensive and simply out of the question for that reason. Let's be honest, travel is a luxury even if it is one we would enjoy, and not everyone does. Some folks just prefer the comforts of home and that is fine. I get that. I come from a long line of Maine Yankees whose idea of adventure was the Sunday drive predictably back in their own backyard before dark and in plenty of time for an early supper. A trip up to "The County (AKA Aroostook)" to visit the old family cemeteries was their equivalent of a world tour.

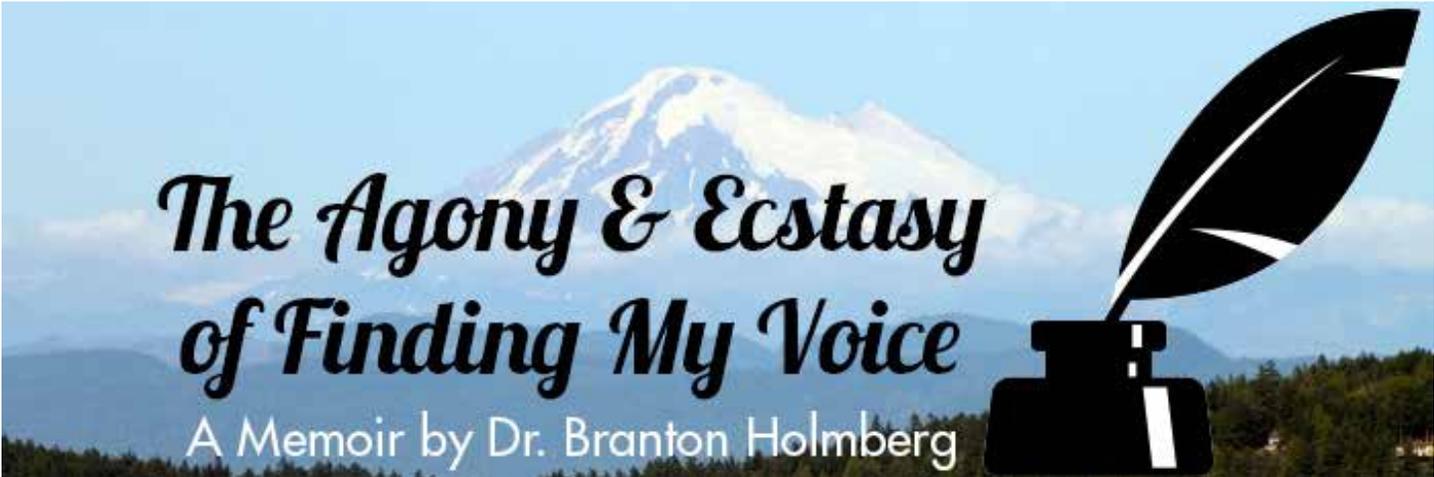
I must have been born under a wandering star because I have always suffered from wanderlust but unfortunately it has gone largely unfulfilled – kids and mortgages kind of got in the way over the years.

Now I have neither but am still on a limited budget/income. Although my grand-daughters are a powerful motivator to stay close to home just so I don't miss anything, I would love to travel but simply can't afford it. I have no problem traveling by myself to the LAL, for example, or taking modest road trips from time to time. But for a lot of us, especially women of a certain age, traveling alone is scary and sometimes downright impossible. Trying to use the courtesy phone for your taxi in a noisy airport with an EL can reduce even a strong woman to tears and that does not make for a pleasant travel experience. However, even those mis-adventures can turn into something wonderful when we discover that we can "rely on the kindness of strangers". And no doubt Blanche DuBois (Streetcar Named Desire) would agree that the fact that said helpful stranger using the courtesy phone next to you is a tall and handsome young man only sweetens the experience!

So, if you want to be an armchair traveler and prefer the adventures you find in your own back yard to those you find "stepping on to the road" that is fine. I have great tales to tell just from my own limited travels and I bet you do too.

Three years ago, traveling to England was just a dream for me. Now I am planning a trip to Scotland and Ireland in the fall (I already have enough "Critter Sitter" jobs booked to cover most of it) and I plan to do at least part of that trip solo. And my new credo for travel, "Pack half as many clothes and twice as much money (and batteries, in my case) as you think you will need".

Now I need to renew my passport....



The Agony & Ecstasy of Finding My Voice

A Memoir by Dr. Branton Holmberg

Chapter 4 "A New Face"

When I was transferred from Ladd I was assigned to Paine AFB just outside Everett. It was a Fighter Command Air Defense base for the Seattle area while it was in operation. It had a small medical clinic and dispensary on base and I was assigned to the clinic. Part of my duty was to take the ambulance and sit on the flight line during take offs and landings in case of an emergency. It was while I was at Paine I met my wife Margaret. She was the first woman I'd dated I really felt comfortable around for any length of time. Believe me I had my, "Do you see me as a harelip" radar going full blast and she passed through it with no indications she was the least bit concerned about it.

On our first date I was going to show her how macho I was and took her bowling. We still laugh over that date. I was determined to show her my manly skills in what I considered a man's game, and the end result was she won the bowling match between us. I got a lesson in humility, fell totally in love and set my sights on marrying her. She was studying to become an RN, was five feet ten inches tall and absolutely beautiful. She was only mid-way through her training, and I was getting ready to take an "Early Out" from the Air Force to go to college. Our courtship lasted more than 2 years. I only asked her to marry me after a lengthy discussion of the likelihood of having a child, or children, born with cleft lips and palates because I was sure it was a hereditary trait. She was a lot less convinced of that than I was, and said she wasn't worried and I shouldn't be either. This lightened my concerns considerably but still left me with a dread of what I would submit her life to if we did have a disfigured child, as I'd been disfigured at birth. To have our child, or children, go through the agonies of childhood I'd gone through haunted me.

I'd always felt my mother saw me as a burden. She often told stories of the trouble she had with hospital about bringing me home because of the difficulties they had trying to feed me and keep me alive. Then she'd talk

about all she had to do to keep me alive, and about the surgery I needed to repair my cleft lip. About my speech therapy sessions and the expensive braces her, and dad had put on my teeth.

I was young enough to exaggerate those stories in my mind and they've stayed with me throughout my life as hardships my parents, especially my mother, had to endure with me. I've always been thankful our children were born without a blemish.

When I got out of the Air Force in the fall of 1958, I set out to study medicine and enrolled at Pacific Lutheran College (PLC) with great hopes and aspirations. I'd loved everything I'd done as a medic in the Air Force. The years in Fairbanks had been priceless and I had every intention of becoming an MD.

My lack of ability to master the undergraduate curriculum came as a jarring reality and I struggled mightily to stay above a 2.0 GPA. I married Margaret in September 1960 and transferred to The University of Washington (UW), where I really ran into problems. The pre-med student advisor I was assigned to was determined to make, or break, me and signed me up for eighteen credits my first quarter, where a normal class load was fifteen credits. I wound up taking Introduction to Physics, Algebra I, Organic Chemistry and the first quarter of first year German. I got a D in Organic Chemistry and C's in the rest of the courses. The second quarter was as bad as the first and it dropped the grades I'd transferred from PLC below a 2.0 GPA. I had to maintain a 2.0 to keep getting the GI Bill.

In order to get my next quarter's tuition I had to see a military benefits counselor. After a morning long session of testing, and talking with a man with a PhD in psychology I was told flat out I wasn't cut out for college. He said he'd OK me for one more quarter of benefits but I needed to make plans to find a career that didn't require a college education.

He made me madder than hell telling me that. I knew I'd gotten in over my head in pre-med and if I switched majors, I was sure I'd do better. I'd taken Introduction to Psychology my second quarter at UW and gotten an A in it, but it was an evening course and for whatever reason it didn't count in my regular GPA and didn't help boost it a 2.0. That's why I wound up in front of that good for nothing benefits counselor.

During my third quarter at UW I signed up for another psychology course, a course in philosophy and an English literature course. I got two A's and a B. That raised my GPA over a 2.0 and I never had trouble getting my GI Bill benefits from then on. My experiences at UW soured me on taking more classes there and I transferred to Central Washington State College (CWSC) in Ellensburg to work on a major in Psychology. Being married by the time I started Central, I knew I was stepping into a whole new world not only in education, but in family life.

The next step to what I'd always wanted to be, someone who wasn't seen as a harelip with speech problems, came soon after our marriage. During the year I spent at UW, Margaret went to work for a plastic surgeon in Seattle named Dr. Walter Brown. She'd talked with him about my lip and nose disfigurement resulting from the surgery I'd had as an infant. He asked her to have me come in and see him.

After talking with me and examining my lip and nose he asked if we'd be interested in having him correct my lip line and make my left nostril more of a match to my right one. He was certain he could correct a lot of the disfigurement.

There wasn't a moment's hesitation in my wanting to have him do it and Margaret was delighted too. Then came the

question of how we'd pay for it because I knew it would be an expensive procedure and we had very little income.

His response to our lack of ability to pay for it was one that will live with me forever. He said he wouldn't charge us anything and simply asked that whenever we had an opportunity to help others in our future he'd appreciate us doing so. He's gone now but I hope in the infinite wisdom of our Creator, Dr. Brown sees what we did owning our nursing home, and other lives Margaret and I've touched in helpful ways as part of the pay it forward request he made of us.

The surgery turned out better than even I'd hoped for, and believe me my expectations were high. My upper lip became a normal lip line and the scar running into my left nostril was such that it could have resulted from anything, not just a harelip. My left nostril came as close to matching my right one as I could have ever hoped for and I felt transformed, at least on the outside. I had a new face.

This happened before I transferred to CWSC and changed my major to psychology. The final quarters of my bachelor's degree, were like night and day to me. Majoring in psychology proved to be right down my alley and I took every psychology course I could squeeze into my class load.

Dr. Jack Crawford taught experimental psychology and I took every course he offered. Up to that point I'd never found anyone as dynamic at imparting knowledge as he was. I've never found anyone since as good as he was.

Although my GPA improved it was nothing to write home about and I had absolutely no thought of going on to graduate school because I didn't think I'd get accepted.





Esophageal In Iran - Part II

Our day had started at 4am in Mashad, continued to Tehran and finally arrived in Shiraz at about 6:30pm. The oenophiles among us will recognize Shiraz as a full-bodied red wine. There is an irony here. Shiraz (or Siryah) was imported and favored by Europe going back to the 800s, Shiraz is now illegal in Shiraz because alcohol is prohibited in Iran.

We visited the shrines of Sadi, the first of Persia's great poets, and Hafez, regarded by Iranians as the greatest of all poets. It is said that two books are found in every home, the Quran and a volume of Hafez. No matter how you feel about the political situation, you have to admire people who honor their poets as highly as they do their saints. Iranians visiting the shrines put their fingers on the tombs and recite their poetry.

Persepolis is thought to have been conceived around 550 BCE by Cyrus (the guy who honored the customs and religions of the peoples he conquered, who wrote of human rights and who permitted the Hebrews to return to the land from which Nebuchadnezzar had taken them) was the seat of Persian power during the reigns of Darius and Xerxes and beyond. A bit of imagination has to be used when visiting Persepolis, because Alexander "the Great" did such a thorough job of razing the place in 330 BCE, after it had stood for 200 years. Still, it is a fascinating place, dating back to the time of the prophets.

The week spent returning from Persepolis to Tehran took us to the village of Abadeh. If you visit Abyaneh I recommend that you try not to get there on a Thursday or Friday. Friday is the Islamic holy day and families like to escape smoggy Tehran for the cool of the country. It was crowded.

The course of our journey took us past successive concentric arcs of anti-aircraft emplacements stretching to the horizon, announcing our approach to Natanz, the uranium enrichment facility.

Esfahan deserves special attention. Esfahan has been referred to as "Half of the world", and "Iran's masterpiece, the jewel of ancient Persia" The Seljuks made Esfahan the capitol of Persia in 1047 and constructed beautiful palaces and blue-domed mosques. If Javad had not visited our laryngectomy gathering in San Rafael when he did, I never would have seen it.

A day or two after we finally got to Tehran, I found Javad waiting for me outside of the hotel. Although he seemed as happy to see me as I was to see him, he seemed to be uncomfortable meeting in the hotel. I'm not sure why, but this was shortly after they had demonstrations in Tehran, and he is Bahia, and he had been to America, and I am an

American. Maybe it was a political thing, like we would be watched in the hotel. I don't think it was a cultural thing.

The tour ended on a Sunday, but the train to Turkey didn't leave until Thursday. This gave me time on my own that was not restricted in any way. Well, almost. The Former American embassy sits behind a brick wall that is covered with anti American and anti Israel murals. When I was walking to the guard house which was some distance down the drive from the gate, I stopped about 15 yards inside the gate and took a couple of photos of a miniature statue of liberty with prison bars spanning her open belly, at the entrance to the embassy building. This brought the guard flying out of the guard house. He got to me just as A large Mercedes, filled with bearded, angry men pulled into the driveway. I was quickly ushered off the grounds. Other than that, I got to visit the Shah's White Palace and the National Jewels Museum and wandered the city without restriction.

On my last day in Tehran, Javad took me to meet the surgeon who had done his laryngectomy. That same night, Javad took me to dinner at the home of his brother-in-law in the hills of the city. The four children of this family included two physicians, one male and one female, a film maker and a student in physics at the local university. The 9 of us sat down to a dinner, the highlight of which was a wonderful chicken in pomegranate sauce. All four of the children spoke excellent English and our ongoing after-dinner conversations were lubricated with some contraband Vodka.

Again I want to emphasize how wonderfully I was treated everywhere in Iran. Never have I been more warmly received as a stranger. The government is bellicose and the rights of the people are restricted ,by American standards. But the people are proud of their country, if not universally pleased with their government; much as we were under president Bush.

There were fewer than 10 people in the train station when I got there 5 hours before the train was to leave. A very pretty young woman with her hijab worn very loosely over her hair came over to speak to some older men and then came to ask me in English, if I was English. I confessed that I was American. She smiled brightly and said that if I needed any help to please ask her. This was Aida a Bahia from Shiraz. Aida and her father were on their way to to visit her brother who has to spend another year in Turkey before emigrating to Phoenix. Aida had never heard of the opera bearing her name. As a Bahia her father is limited by the government in the kind of job he can get. Aida completed elementary and high school but cannot attend university because of her religion.



Think It and Then Do It

By Don Renfro

"Inspiration comes from within yourself. One has to be positive. When you're positive, good things happen." – Deep Roy.

I spent so much of my life, when I was younger, living the opposite of the quote above. I truly believed the world was responsible for what I was. Have you ever said "he made me do it" or "she made me do it". That is how I lived my life when I was younger. I was constantly waiting for someone to fix me. My girlfriend or spouse. If they would just do what I need them to do I would be fine.

When I came to the realization that the very thinking I relied on was in fact the root of all my problems, I was then able to have a revelation which followed with new insight leading to new thinking and thus new action. It was at this junction my life made a change for the better. I was no longer imprisoned by my own thinking.

When I first began my college education I had a class. I do not remember what the class was but one night the teacher shared with the class the words from an Eagles song "so often time it happens that we live our life in chains and never even know we have the key". Eagles were a group I listened to so I was familiar with the words from the songs but it was funny because that night when the teacher shared the lyrics they took on a meaning for me which they had never had before then. Freedom has always been the ultimate level of existence for me but now I was able to see where I, in my own thinking, had imprisoned myself in walls that only existed for me.

What an awakening! Now I could begin to live my own life without the limitations imposed by people that had no investment in my life or my happiness. Freedom was now becoming a reality. Because the problem was created within the confines of my mind that meant the solution was in the same place. I now had the choice to change my thinking and thus my experiences.

If I take responsibility for how I think of my own circumstances then my experiences can be numerous and not dictated by one or two negative scenarios. I then have the power and the choice to create inspiration from within.

I read an article recently about stars or celebrities we lost in 2019. So many of them were younger than myself, they were celebrities and had fame and money. But they are gone. All the fame and money cannot change that. Internal inspiration is what gives me the ability to see my life as fulfilled as any celebrity. And I am here. Not with everything there is, but the truth is that I have everything I need and most everything I want.

Sometimes my way of thinking leads to my situation being minimized, mostly by non-lary's. Old friends that I come in contact with that know that "something" happened to me but are not overly familiar with what actually happened to me. If we have not communicated in a while they might ask me if I got my voice back, expecting that someday I will be just like before. When they hear me say how well I am doing they assume everything is just like before.

I am inspired today to live the life I have now to the best of my ability. I truly believe I am doing great. Yes I have challenges, a fistula, swallowing issues, no voice, swelling from radiation and unable to use my Electro Larynx. I have heard stories of other people in my situation, one that has not eaten solid food in about eight years. People that have had to have multiple surgeries, to correct multiple problems. Others that are left bankrupt, after their surgery and on-going treatment and supplies. I am very grateful for my challenges. I work to remain positive about my situation and more times than not I feel pretty good about my circumstances. I believe that if I can remain positive that my outcomes will also be positive. That for me is my internal inspiration and not the result of waiting for someone to "fix" me.

WebWhispers is an Internet based support group. Please check our home page for information about the WebWhispers group, our email lists, membership, or officers. For newsletter questions, comments or contributions, please write to editor@webwhispers.org

Donna McGary Managing Editor • Kim Almand VoicePoints Editor

Disclaimer: The information offered via WebWhispers is not intended as a substitute for professional medical help or advice but is to be used only as an aid in understanding current medical knowledge. A physician should always be consulted for any health problem or medical condition. The statements, comments, and/or opinions expressed in the articles in Whispers on the Web are those of the authors only and are not to be construed as those of the WebWhispers management, its general membership, or this newsletter's editorial staff.