

Whispers on the Web

A Monthly Online Newsletter for WebWhispers

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From The Editor's Desk

Hello my friends,

Whispers on the Web has such a wonderful line-up of writers. I am inspired and humbled by their voices. Time and time again I am struck by the resilience and positivity within this community. No one gets thru life unscathed and most of us have had about as much scathing as we take, thank you very much! Especially these days!

Don Renfro writes honestly about how fear and vulnerability can be paralyzing but acknowledging it and its source can give us the power to rise up and move forward. In his wonderful memoir, Doc Holmberg has shared his life of challenges and successes and this month writes movingly of his family and the love that has sustained him through the years. WC Baker, our intrepid traveler reminds us that we are quite capable of going extraordinary places as long as we maintain our sense of adventure and are willing to be flexible. Although his travels are a bit too "seat of the pants" for me, I love reading about them especially since nowadays a trip to my local farmer's market and a 40 minute trip to the Maine coast for a lobster roll dockside seems daring and adventurous!

As Tom Whitworth points out in his ongoing saga of doctor visits it seems everything is fraught with controversy and anxiety producing these days. And while he uses humor to

make his point it is hard to overstate the unique challenges we as a group face as this virus continues to ravage our world. SLP Kim Almand, and Voicepoints Editor, has some excellent DIY suggestions for TEP users when getting an appointment with your SLP is problematic.

Too bad there aren't some DIY dentistry tricks....although I do have a friend (not a lary) who had a tooth just fall out one day back when there were no dentist appointments to be had in the whole state and since it was adjacent to her bridge she just super-glued the bugger to the exposed wire!! Now THAT'S ingenuity born of desperation LOL!!!

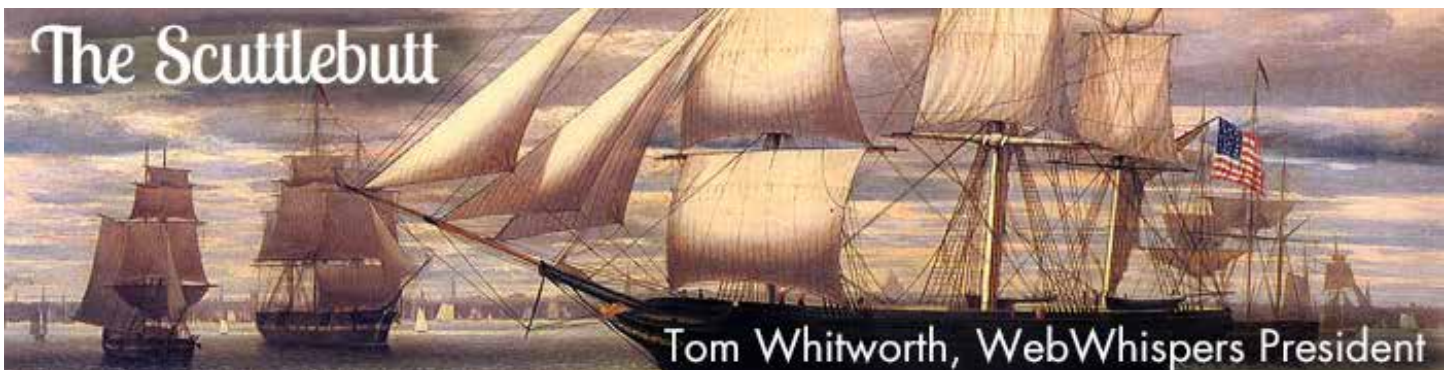
I'd love to hear your tales of Ingenuity in the Time of Corona. I'm sure you have some.

And since humor is always helpful, be sure to read through to the Archives at the end to read a couple of the late, great Len Hynds' True Tales of a London Bobby.

As always we welcome your comments, suggestions and contributions!

Stay safe, stay sane and stay kind....

Donna McGary



Does It Ever End?

(continued from last issue)

Last month, I talked about several "where to put the oxygen" episodes. They all pretty much started and ended in the same way, with the oxygen mask never getting in the right place until I (we) correct them. We've all been there, or at least, most of us have. The point of my article last month and this month is to call yet more attention to the fact that very few know what to do with us. I haven't met

one yet, except the SLPs I'm blessed to know, my primary doctor at the VA, my ENT who did the remodeling job, and my gastroenterologist. The last one might be in the dark, too, except for the fact the I was referred to him by my two oncologists and he installed my PEG tube. Even his practice should educate its staff on that minor little thing for laryngectomees-oxygen goes to the stoma!

I left off last month with the COVID tester who "saw a

hundred flying monkeys from 'The Wizard of Oz' when I told her I was supposed to be tested both in the nose and the stoma. She won that one and tested me from the nose only. That had me frustrated as the results were to take three days, this was Monday morning, and my SLP appointment to get the voice prosthesis changed was 10 am on Thursday. There would be no time for additional testing if it was ordered later. The tight timeline allowed only one extra hour for processing.

For the rest of the week, I wondered if they would get the results in time. I wasn't about to cross the city without knowing I could be seen by my SLP. I would have to leave my house by 8:00 Thursday morning to make it to the appointment. Of course, I also wondered if the COVID test was a waste of time since I was not tested at the stoma.

What if the test is negative but I actually have the virus, I pondered? I could actually transmit the virus to Jenny, the SLP I was to see, and not even know it.

On Thursday morning, I was up and raring to go, as I was really tired of having the voice prosthesis plugged most of the time, since the valve had outlived its usefulness kind of suddenly. I had not heard about the test yet but at 7:10 that morning, I received a message saying that the test was negative. We were good to go, but I was still concerned for Jenny since my stoma had not been tested.

When I arrived at the medical center for my appointment, the crowd in front of the entrance looked like there was a fire drill in progress. Nope. That was the line to gain admission to the building. The first stage was the interview with questions like had I been out of the country or within the past two weeks been with someone who had traveled abroad. I remember thinking that who I had "been with" was none of her dangd business.

The second stage was the line to stand still and be checked for a fever with a hands free system. At every step in this process, a distance of at least six feet was being maintained. I kept thinking how seriously cautious they were being to protect staff, yet I had not been tested at the stoma. For all anyone knew, including me, I could have been infecting them all.

Obviously, I had some kind of mask on, probably a N95 at that point, but had not yet covered the HME or replaced it with a Micron. In Atlanta, a gaiter was too hot on me for that day and they wouldn't know why I had my neck covered anyway. I had no desire to further confuse the already clueless. I had been focused on finding a place to park so had lots of things in my hands, including my Provox Trutone Emote and lanyard. I had used it a lot the past few days as I was better off with the valve

plugged. The Blom-Singer Dual Valve had served me well for twelve months.

Through all this, I thought of Jenny and hoped I wasn't going to make her ill, and I wished everyone in the whole world knew that we breathe through our neck stoma.

As I entered the Speech and Audiology waiting area, the room was starkly different. All the chairs were gone and I was the only person present. It hit me like a brick wall how serious the virus was and I was glad such precautions were being observed. Jenny came to escort me back to the clinical room, covered in disposable attire over her scrubs and, of course was wearing a mask.

When we got me seated I mentioned that I had not been tested at the stoma, as I had been told. She just sighed and said "I know. They're not doing it". By now she was in full PPE, including a face shield. I chuckled and said she looked like an astronaut. My voice prosthesis would soon be replaced by the first SLP-Astronaut. How cool was that?

I felt better that she was so well protected. The old valve came out fairly easily and the new one inserted easier than ever. If I coughed at all, it was maybe once. All's well that ends well, I guess, as that was a month ago and we're both still around.

When I sneeze, I have to remove the HME, then cover my nose, mouth, and stoma because moisture comes from all three. That suggests to me that I should be tested at the stoma as well as nose for a respiratory virus. I am convinced that the only way to address the "I breathe here" matter is to have an infant mask on me for any planned procedure that will require oxygen or other inhalants. Yes, they will look at me as if I just turned into a unicorn right before their eyes, but it will get the job done.

*Enjoy, laugh, and learn,
Tom Whitworth
WebWhispers President*

TEP Troubleshooting

Getting a same-day or even same-week appointment to the speech-language pathologist (SLP) or ENT clinic may not be an option these days, even for typical problems such as decreased voice quality or a leaking voice prosthesis. Fortunately, there are things to do at home to begin to problem solve. Keep in mind that these suggestions may not be appropriate in all cases; however, they may be helpful to consider on a routine basis and especially in instances of unforeseen difficulties. Do not hesitate to contact your care provider who should be able to talk through many of these steps over the phone or via a telehealth appointment. Above all, stay calm and reach out for support!

When issues arise with the voice prosthesis, they are often related to the sound of the voice and/or leaking. When a one-way prosthetic valve begins to deteriorate, more effort may be required to maintain smooth quality or fluency. The voice may begin to gradually lose volume or consistency. Likewise, leaking of liquids may occur and often does so gradually, with a slight dripping through the voice prosthesis and into the stoma intermittently on and off over the course of a few days or weeks. Thin liquids such as coffee, tea, and water are most apt to leak first and may cause aspiration and pneumonia. Prior to rushing into the clinic for a replacement, consider taking these steps at home first.

Cleaning: Ensure that you have cleaned the barrel of the prosthesis with a brush and flushing device. Dried encrusted mucus or thick secretions may prevent the prosthetic valve from opening/closing or remaining completely sealed. Consider a few sips of carbonated liquid to cut the mucus in the throat. Past WebWhispers president Pat Sanders used to swear by club soda with a squeeze of lemon or lime. Once cleaned, take a hard swallow and produce a loud “aaaa” sound which might clear any remaining secretions affecting the sound of the voice or leaking.

Leaking prosthesis: Take sip of liquid in front of a mirror with a bright light on your prosthesis. Is liquid oozing, dripping or pouring through the middle of the prosthesis or around the outside? Attempt cleaning the prosthesis, repeating the steps above. Take another sip to determine if leaking persists. If the leaking is through the middle of the prosthesis, a plug may help if you have one and can insert it. Many types of prostheses will accommodate a plug: check with your SLP who will guide you through the process of obtaining one specifically designed for your prosthesis, and learning to use it. Bear in mind that the plug may be used when you eat or drink to prevent leaking through because it closes off the one-way valve of the prosthesis. Voicing is not possible with the plug in place, but it can be removed after eating/drinking and replaced again later when it is time to take a sip/bite.

Thickened liquids are an excellent way to prevent leaking for a few days or weeks or even longer until a prosthesis may be replaced, especially in cases where a plug is not the answer, such as when leaking occurs around the prosthesis. Consistencies such as nectar-thick liquids and foods such as applesauce, yogurt, oatmeal are thicker and may be less likely to leak through/around the prosthesis. Several types of thickeners are commercially available in stores such as CVS and Walmart and online (e.g., “Thick-It” and “Simply Thick”). Consider having these on hand at home to add to your regular liquids in the case of unanticipated leaking.

Another issue that occasionally occurs is extrusion, or dislodgement, of the indwelling prosthesis. This situation requires your immediate attention and a call to your SLP or care provider. Without a prosthesis in place, voicing is still possible, BUT liquids and food will have nothing to stop them from entering into the stoma. If the prosthesis is no longer in place, the tract must be occluded to prevent aspiration as well as closure. Until the puncture site is fitted with a new prosthesis, a red rubber catheter may be temporarily placed through the tracheoesophageal tract using the following steps and/or with the guidance of an SLP: 1. Tie a knot at the wider end of the catheter. 2. Feed the catheter through the tract, beginning with the narrow end. 3. Tape the remaining 2-3 inches to the neck outside the stoma. 4. Call your SLP, if you have not already done so. 5. Consider thickened liquids since the catheter may not prevent all leaking. If the prosthesis is extruded, attempt to determine where the prosthesis went. Did it get coughed out and is across the room? Pushed backward into the esophagus? Did it fall into the stoma? If so and the prosthesis is lodged in the airway and unable to be expelled with strong coughing, or it is unclear what happened to the prosthesis, you may need to have a chest x-ray to confirm if the prosthesis is in your lungs.

Prostheses will eventually leak, tracheoesophageal voice may not always be predictable, and sometimes accidents do happen. However, one of the best ways to manage unforeseen and unwanted problems related to the TEP is to be as prepared as possible ahead of time. Especially when traveling anywhere away from your home, it helps to take care and anticipate. Pay attention to changes in voice quality and swallowing. Learn how to clean the area around the stoma and prosthesis. Try to obtain a proper sized plug and catheter, and learn how to use them too. Keep some extra thickener around the house. Know the size and type of prosthesis you use (better yet, consider having a backup prosthesis), and have the name and phone numbers for your SLP and MD easily accessible. Bear in mind that you also have the support of this WebWhispers community if you have questions or concerns. Remember.... do not go at it alone! Through your successes and difficulties, we want to hear from each of you.



To See The Light

By Don Renfro

Life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent of how I react to it.
-Charles Swindoll

This month I am very late with my article. Most in part because I have been agonizing over a painful experience I have recently experienced and allowed myself to become immobilized.

That brings me to this month's quote which reminds me that the smallest part of any experience is what happens to me. The big part is what I do in response to what happens to me. The multitudes of experiences I have had in my life, looking back on them, have been minute in comparison to my reactions towards them. Thinking of things that scared me as a child, looking back on them, turned out to be nothing, my reaction in many cases was over the top.

Going through adolescence and living through the drama of a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship, which was always the end of the world, also turned out to be nothing.

And as an adult, having my air conditioning go out in the middle of 100° heat, having a kid pull out in front of me in a car to make a left hand turn and get in an accident with me and then have the driver try to flee the scene or sitting in a long line at a drive up teller window at the bank (before ATMs) and have someone get in line in front of me as if I was not there.

In all the above circumstances in reflection it was always more about my reaction than it was about the event. It is comforting to find that as I have grown and my reactions have matured that my life has gotten much easier as my reaction to the circumstance isn't adding to the problem but now in many cases facilitates a solution to the problem.

This does not mean I have perfected the process as there are still times I need to immerse myself in the problem instead of the solution. I am happy to say this happens much less if almost never nowadays.

This also does not mean that there is no time for grief or pain. If someone dies, mourning is a very normal part of the process of recovering from the loss. I do not mean to say I should never allow myself to feel "bad". Sometimes time to feel "bad" is needed. It is OK to not feel good all of the time and to be

allowed to feel bad and experience the feelings of a painful or hurting event.

As long as I am not "stuck" in that place and unable to move past that painful experience, I am in a good place. If I do become stuck and unable to move forward from the event then it is time to seek help beyond what I can do for myself.

This morning I had a dream. It was rather unusual as I dreamt of myself as a lary which is something I rarely do. In the dream I was riding my bicycle and became very lost. I ended up at the ocean where there were cliffs. I went down the cliffs and found buildings. I went into the buildings and left my bike for just moments. When I came back to my bike it had been vandalized and things stolen off it. I tried to find my way back up to land from the buildings. I looked out the window of a building and I could see the water level was rising rapidly above the buildings. I got up higher but the land that could be crossed to safety was underwater. One of the people with me jumped into the water and swam to safety over to the land. I did not think I could do that being a lary but I did it anyway as the water level was rising. I made it to safety with no problem.

That dream was very interesting to me for many reasons. For one reason I remembered it and I usually cannot remember the details of my dreams after I wake up. Also I almost never dream of myself as a lary. In most all my dreams I have a voice and can speak.

I got from this dream that it was about violation and vulnerability. I felt violated by the theft of my bike parts and vulnerable to the rising water level knowing I was a lary.

I started this article out explaining why I was so late with writing it this month. I found the experience that left me agonizing was from feeling I had been violated and had been vulnerable. What a revelation now time to move on.

It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light.
~Aristotle



This Lary Life

TEP Travels In Spain

W. C. Baker

It was a relief to look down from the Seville bus terminal and see Patricia's caravan waiting below. Ten days before, we had parted in Essaouira, Morocco, when Patricia learned that she had to leave her apartment and would not be able to drive us up to Tangiers as planned. When travelling without any but the roughest of plans, some improvisation has to be expected. I would miss Casablanca and Fez. I would not be able to cross the Strait of Gibraltar nor see the Alhambra and Granada. Instead I flew up to Lisbon while she found a new home in Morocco. Having gotten a late start, she took two days to drive the 600 miles and cross the Strait. She was tired.

To me the best travel is the least structured travel; making up the trip as you go along. I have done organized tours; once in SE Asia (Thailand Laos, Viet Nam, Cambodia) and again in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran). In 2009, one could travel in Iran only with an organized tour. The trip with Patricia in 2017 was unstructured within a general framework: After a couple of weeks driving around southern Morocco we would take a week or two to drive north to Gibraltar and cross to Spain. But, even the loosest of plans may see changes.

A lingering disappointment at not being able to visit the Alhambra was quickly and thoroughly erased when I entered the Real Alcázar, (Royal Palace) in Sevilla. As is so often the case in Iberia the site was variously under the control of Romans, Visigoths Christians, Moors and Christians again. The Alcázar and gardens seen today have been revamped many times over the 11 centuries of its existence, most spectacularly in the 14th century when King Pedro added the sumptuous Palacio de Don Pedro, still today the Alcázar's crowning glory. The adjacent Seville Cathedral is the largest gothic cathedral in the world. Its 35 story Giralda tower was started by the Moors for the Mosque that formerly occupied the site. Also of interest in Sevilla is the Plaza de España, site of the 1929 worlds fair that closed with the crash of the economy that led to the Fascist takeover of the government by Franco.

Cordoba, like Sevilla, shows its age in the winding streets, too narrow for any but two wheeled vehicles, and an abundance of pedestrians' limits even them. It was in Cordoba that I learned a bit about being a TEP user. While enjoying a nice cold beer in one of the plazas, I again experienced liquid in the trachea. Unlike my experiences in Portugal, I had some tapas to help. I learned that eating while drinking prevents leakage. This new knowledge let me enjoy the sprawling Mesquita mosque where the Calif had prayed when Cordoba was the capitol of Sunni Islam.

Sensing the possible need for a change of my TEP our first stop in Madrid was at the American Embassy to determine if my veteran benefits could be used outside of the U.S. After a quarter century of travel as an esophageal speaker this TEP business was new

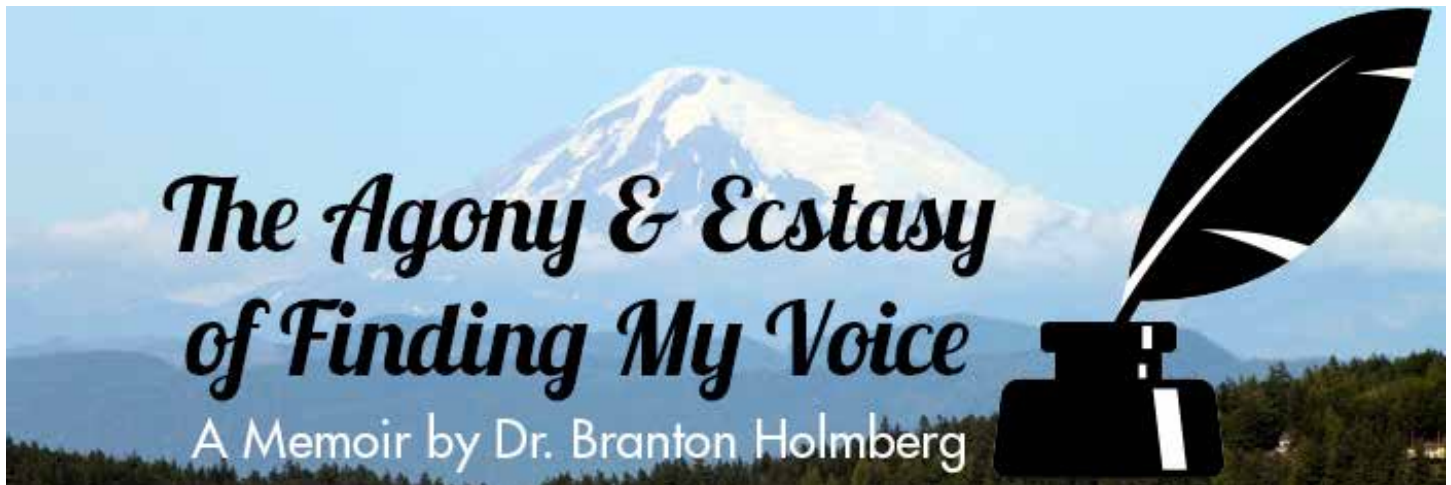
to me. I had never attended an IAL or CAL Voice Institute as a TEP user, and went on this trip being sorely uneducated. Not having a satisfactory response from the embassy, we carried on, spending that first day just walking. We benefitted from Madrid's preparation for the 2016 Olympics which ended up going to Rio. Madrid had created walk ways in the heart of the city, that had previously been saturated with motor traffic. On a walk from the Prado Museum to the Royal Palace we joined a demonstration of Republicans (opponents of Franco and the Fascists in the Spanish Civil War) in the Plaza Mayor.

A skill that I never acquired but always admired is a facility with languages other than one's own. Among polyglots I have known, Marisa delGado delGado is the most accomplished and revered. Marisa is a long-time friend of Patricia who had recently retired from her job as a simultaneous translator for the Parliament of the European Union. Her languages were Spanish, French, German, Italian and English and she could simultaneously translate from any one to any of the others. The conversation between Patricia and Marisa in her beautiful Madrid apartment was fascinating. Patricia's native language was French, but Spanish ran a close second. Their conversation was an animated stream flowing effortlessly between Spanish and French, occasionally condescending into English for my poor monolingual benefit.

After a few delightful days in Madrid we continued to a mountain village on the advice of Marisa to a concert sung by Las Jóvenes, a Madrid chorus of young people. On the way, I spent a few hours at Escorial, the palace built by Philip II of Spanish Armada fame. My interest in the palace derived from a one act play titled Escorial, about a crazy king and his very sane jester, that I performed 35 years earlier. When we finally got to the village, the name of which I can't recall, I had the very distinct feeling that I was the only foreign visitor. The concert, sung a capella in the local church, was wonderful. Following the afternoon concert, chorus performed again in the cool of the evening in the village square for an appreciative audience including diners in the surrounding cafes. Saying our good byes after breakfast with Marisa and her friend Marta the next morning, Patricia drove us to Cuenca.

Cuenca hangs precariously between the cliffs of two gorges formed by Huécar and Júcar rivers. The town was founded as a natural fortress in ancient times and has stood solidly through the wars between Christians and Moors and on through the Spanish Civil war where it was in the Republican zone. It fell easily to the Franco army in 1939. It is quite spectacular and a good place to end this part of our travels.





Chapter 11 “My Wife and Children”

The truest and deepest loves of my life are my wife, our son Jim, our daughter Ann and our son John. I can't begin to describe the complex and beautiful tapestry of life the 5 of us have created both for ourselves and for each other. I find myself in awe as I begin to try to describe the meaning of them to me from the pinnacle of looking back more 62 years to when I first met Margaret. As a youngster with a very poor self-image and a huge case of shyness I never developed a sense of confidence about what to say or do around girls. As a teenager I was certainly attracted to them but was convinced they'd laugh at a guy with a hare lip and a speech impediment asking them for a date. Although I did have a few dates and had a crush on one girl in particular I considered myself a total flop trying to develop what they called a steady date when I was in high school.

Shortly after high school I went into the Airforce as I said earlier. After a 26 month tour of duty at Ladd Air Force Base Hospital in Fairbanks, Alaska where my exposure to women my age was minimal, my next duty assignment was to Paine Airforce Base near Everett, Washington.

A couple of buddies of mine were dating women who were going through the nurses training program at Everett General Hospital and I met Margaret on a blind date arranged by one of them. The moment I met her I knew I'd met the most precious gift that'd ever been granted to me. She was a tall beautiful unpretentious woman who wore no makeup and was totally at ease around me. She seemed to find me nice to be around and I found her to be the same.

Very early in our relationship we found we wanted to be in each other's company as often as possible so every chance we had, we planned something to do together. The love I've had for her from the moment we met can only be describe as the planting of a seed that has flourished into a love of indescribably beautiful proportions that I'm convinced will reach beyond our lives into whatever lies beyond.

We were both intent on completing our plans for getting started in our individual careers. Margaret was finishing her program to become a Registered Nurse and I had applied for what they called the “Early Out” program from military service for those who wanted to go to college. I wanted to get start working toward a pre-med program and enrolled at Pacific Lutheran College (PLC) just outside of Tacoma, Washington.

We met in 1957 and were married in the fall of 1960. During that period we were totally devoted to each other when our time was our own and didn't belong to her career work or my pre-med ambitions. When she graduated from nursing school she went to work at Seattle General Hospital and I started PLC. When we began dating I had a 1950 Mercury Coupe that had been modified and lovingly cared for prior to my buying it. It was Midnight Black and had 11 coats of lacquer that made it sparkle like a diamond. It was lowered in the back and had twin exhaust pipes. Fender skirts on the back with broad white sidewall tires all around completed the looks of that black beauty.

I'm sure it helped me win the heart of my bride. The highway between Tacoma and Seattle saw a lot of me and my car while I was going to PLC and dating Margaret who was living with her parents in Seattle.

I spent every moment I could with her and loved going to the movies and visiting various relatives of her family and mine to have picnics with them and celebrate the holidays which were very festive occasions. We'd go roller skating and ice skating and take trips to the wonderful scenic areas around us. She'd go with me when I went fishing and hunting and scuba diving and I'd go with her to the plays, musicals and museums she loved going to.

I've never felt adequate in my efforts to express to her what she truly means to me. Her strength of character, sensitivity and sensibility have been my anchor from the moment we met. She's tolerated my failures and weaknesses with a grace and acceptance that defy my ability to articulate to her my profound love and appreciation of all she means to me. Her wisdom, steadfastness and ability to cope with things when we've been confronted with challenges that perplex me is profound.

She is and always has been marvelously independent and very capable of standing her ground in any situation. She's easily fulfilled leadership responsibilities throughout her life and many of those who've worked for her have adored her so much they've stayed in touch for many years after they worked for her. Her work in every aspect of her nursing career was not only rewarding to her but prospered greatly from her presence whether it was through patient care, surgical assistance, hospital and nursing home administrative work or home care for the elderly. I've never seen her overly concerned about her ability to handle any situation she's ever been confronted with. It seems natural for her to do whatever is necessary without ever losing her temper, being aggressive or express doubts about getting it done.

My dearest Margaret, I love you so.

James Michael was born August 1st 1962. He was 8 lbs. 4 ounces at birth and grew into a sizeable man. By the time he was a senior in high school he was nearly 6' 5" tall and an avid basketball player. He and his fellow teammates at Enumclaw High School were invited to tour Australia playing various basketball teams there during the summer between their junior and senior year. It was the trip of a lifetime for him.

Margaret and I bought Shuksan Convalescent Center that same summer and moved the family to Bellingham, Washington where he went to Sehome High and played on the basketball team there.

He was good in all sports and his mother and I used to cringe a bit when he was a pitcher on the baseball team. He was so big he could throw the baseball like it was being shot out of a cannon but had trouble locating it all the time and had more than one batter shaking in their cleats when he was pitching. We were doing a bit of shaking too as we watched.

When he graduated high school we hired him and a high school buddy of his named Mike to do the laundry for our nursing home. We rented a local laundromat after it closed for the day and had them doing the laundry from 10:00 pm until they were done which was usually about 3 or 4 am.

Jim enrolled in the community college in Bellingham but he let his mother and I know that college wasn't his thing and he was going to enlist in the Air Force. It wasn't long after he enlisted that he married the girl he'd been dating before going into the service and they lived in Spokane near the air base he was stationed at. It was there our granddaughter Ashley was born.

After he finished his enlistment they moved back to Bellingham and within months decided to get divorced with Ashley going into the care of her mother and Jim moving to Olympia to take a job as a car salesman which was an excellent match for his gregarious personality.

When Ashley was in her early teens she went to live with her father who'd remarried Tina Lovett who had a son Mark and a daughter Amanda. Ashley was between Mark and Amanda in age. The world became infinitely better for all of them.

Jim and Tina were both in the car business and stayed in it doing exceptionally well in their careers. When Jim was in his late 40's he decided to go back and try his hand at college again and found he loved it. He graduated with a bachelor's degree from the University of Washington with exceptionally good grades which both his mother and I knew he was capable of and were glad he proved to himself he could do it.

He's went back into the car business after he graduated and in all likelihood will finish his career there. Testing the waters in other occupations after graduation he found nothing that compared financially to what he could make as a finance manager at a car dealership and also found most

occupations offered rather routine work compared to the dynamic interactions he was used to in the car business.

Our daughter Ann Marie was born January 5th, 1966 and we were head over heels happy she was a girl which is exactly what we'd hoped for. She was little miss independence and left none of us in doubt about that. We called her our little princess and she lived up to the grand title.

To our chagrin she inherited all of her mother's allergies, just as Jim had and we were constantly challenged as to what was causing her to have upset stomachs and a whole host of other problems that irritated her. Despite the episodes of irritation she was always on the go and loved to create make-believe worlds. Her mother and I enjoyed plays she created with the assistance of her younger brother John when he was old enough to be her co-star.

She was determined to make her way in the world even during high school found various part-time jobs. She enrolled at Western Washington State College after she graduated from high school and held a part-time job while going there. She and her best friend Maggie were roommates.

She was married at the end of her freshman year and she and her husband moved to the Seattle area where he had a job working for Oracle which was just getting started and became a hugely successful computer software company. Sadly their relationship failed and they were divorced early in their marriage.

She'd been working as a paralegal for Vulcan, Inc. a company Paul Allen owned and loved the work she was doing. After her divorce she entered law school and that was the beginning of a magical career choice for her. She excelled (through blood, sweat and tears) in everything she touched in the world of law and has risen to become a partner in Perkins Coie one of the most prestigious law firms in the country.

Her second marriage and the birth of their son Sam is a charming storybook tale and one I will leave in their hands hoping someday they will reach beyond family and friends to tell it. It's far more powerful than I'm able to convey.

Our son Nelson John was born the 6th of August 1970 and we swear he was an old soul when he was born. We'd anticipated that having our children 3 + years apart in age there wouldn't be much sibling

rivalry between them. Boy were we wrong. They had plenty and surprisingly Jim got his share of unexpected outcomes even though he was the oldest and biggest.

John was always able to entertain himself if left alone. He seems to have been born being very philosophical about life and takes whatever happens to himself or those around him in stride and sets about understanding it for himself and then helping others to understand it too. As soon as he graduated from high school he struck out on his own. He went to work in a cannery in Alaska as a fish slimer. When he came home from that experience he told us he'd learned something he never wanted to be involved in again. Then he went to work as waiter in the a major restaurant overlooking Friday Harbor in the San Juan Islands where he became acquainted with the young woman who was to become his wife.

When the tourist season ended in the San Juan Islands he was offered a job in a restaurant in Hawaii and delightfully took the offer. Tara, the young woman he became acquainted with in Friday Harbor followed him there and they decided to get married and came back to the states. They both realized their marriage was not working and divorced.

He finished his Bachelor's degree at the University of Washington and followed his older brother into the car business where he worked as a salesman for a Volkswagen dealership in Seattle. After trying other jobs he went back to get a Master's degree in Family Therapy and that has been his love from the moment he graduated.

After a couple of long relationships with other women he met the woman who was to become his second wife and established a family therapy practice in Mr. Vernon, Washington. He and his wife Carmel are expecting a baby boy far before this book will go to print.

Throughout his life he's proven to us what we knew from the moment his personality began to emerge, he was born an old soul and has proven it time after time.

How can parents adequately express the panorama of emotional ups and downs they experience with their children as they live out their lives except to say thank God they were everything we ever hoped they'd be and more? No one is capable of seeing how their children will deal with the traumas and triumphs they experience? Our children have exceeded our dreams for their success and happiness

and I can think of no other accolade than to say they've made us the happiest parents, grandparents and great grandparents in the world which is the greatest gift possible.

I've found that trying to be an adequate father to three outstanding children has been a journey of awesome responsibilities and to find that I've come through the many ramifications of them in the state of pride and happiness I find myself in is absolutely remarkable to me. My mother was such an overpowering force in my life until I went to live with my Uncle Jim and his family I didn't realize the significance of a loving family of origin until Margaret and I married and created one of our own. Mom was a matriarch and absolutely dominant in all things and my father, brother and I found solace only at her will.

Margaret is the polar opposite of the image of motherhood I grew up with. She never scolded our children without understanding the source of their behavior and she was amazingly astute in her considerations of how to best handle what was troubling them. She'd suffered allergies all her life and when our children were irritable and misbehaving she'd analyze what was going on in their environment, or with what they were eating, to see if she could figure out if that was what was bothering them so we could see what we could do to prevent it from causing the misbehavior.

I'd never been bothered by allergies that I knew of and I would attribute the behavior of our kids as just plain orneriness, but I learned to watch carefully how she unraveled the sources of their behavior and deal with them in ways far more compassionate than I'd ever experienced with my mother. After we discovered the extent of their allergies through an allergist we created a "Clean Room" for them to sleep in. It was kept free of as many environmental allergy causing elements as we could manage and that plus watching what they ate made a difference for them. In the early part of our family life we moved several times in order for me to take advantage of the education and career opportunities that were presenting themselves to me. When we finally moved to Bellingham, Washington where we bought our nursing home we'd moved our belongings nearly two dozen times in the 19 years we'd been married.

I find my children are very stable in the homes they've purchased and have moved nowhere nearly as often as we moved during their childhood. I'm very happy their lives have allowed them that luxury.

How do I as a husband, father, grandfather and great grandfather express to those dearest to me a love that reaches every fiber of my being yet eludes me in attempting to capture it in words. Margaret has helped me create a world of love and pride about myself and her and our children I never dreamed was possible. I've often wondered how I was fortunate enough to find her and the conclusion I come to is she too is a gift of the guardian angel, or angels, who've so often blessed me with transformations that make me realize I'm truly among the most fortunate of men.

She's absolutely unique among all those I've ever met or have otherwise learned about, male or female. Our lives together has filled me with more love and happiness than I can describe the dimensions of. It exceeds every other factor in my life.

My love for my children must be expressed collectively because it's impossible for me to separate how much I love them even though they each hold a truly special place in my heart. They've presented their mother and me with unique challenges through their years of maturation and adulthood some heart rending with anxiety and sadness, most swelling our hearts with happiness and pride.

They are all well-educated and have found their niche in life both with their loved ones and their careers that bring them the love and satisfactions their mother and I have always dreamed for them. I can think of no greater reward for a parent than that. What I find most exhilarating is they have so much happiness and greater rewards ahead of them both from the fruits of their own labors and those of their children, grand and great grandchildren like their mother and I've found. I find the true joy of it all being each of us is a unique survivor and each of us has grown remarkably in that survival, myself included.

I wish to share with them and with you the reader a quotation by R. Sexton that I find grows more fitting with each passing moment of my life.

"This I will remember when the rest of my life is through: The finest thing I've ever done is simply loving you".

I'd like to leave this thought with you the reader,

"The finest thing you'll ever do is to learn to love yourself".

It's taken me a lifetime to learn that about myself.

From the Archives

–The following column originally appeared in our February 2014 issue–



Two light-hearted true stories from the old police days, when I was a uniformed officer in South London. ~Len

THE YO-YO

I had promised my small daughter, Pat, that I would take her and Tilly, my wife, to the seaside at Little Hampton in Sussex the following day. But I had the whole night in front of me on duty, walking the beat along the Old Kent Road.

I knew that I would have to avoid if possible making any arrests that night, to avoid having to go to court in the morning, and not being able to keep my promise to young Pat, who already had her sand bucket and spade ready. We were going to the coast in my ancient, battered old car.

Quite early on in the night, I had waved to the PC on the other side of the Old Kent Road, who was from Tower Bridge Police Station, that main road being our boundary. It was about midnight when I saw a drunk staggering along on the other side of the road, and he collapsed in a shop doorway. I went across the road, to make sure he was alright, and left him there, knowing that the Tower Bridge PC would be along shortly, and would have to arrest him for his own safety, as being “Drunk and Incapable”. I continued my patrol, and shortly afterwards found the same drunk, but in a shop doorway on my side of the road. That crafty PC had carried him across the road and deposited him on my beat. I promptly lifted him up and carried him back again.

I later found the same drunk on my second beat, further along the Old Kent Road, and that PC could not possibly know that I was covering two beats. I got the poor chap to his feet again, and half carried him to the canal bridge, which was the boundary with yet another police station at Peckham. After carefully looking round for any inquisitive Sergeants or Inspectors I carried him over the boundary onto Peckham’s Manor, and gently lowered him into yet another shop doorway.

As I did so, he looked up at me despairingly, saying, “I wish you two would make up your mind. I feel like a bleedin’ yo-yo.”

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“DONT GO TILL YOU’VE HAD A CUP OF TEA”

I was patrolling my beat along Kennington Park Road, when an elderly lady told me that she had heard calls for help coming from the basement flat of the house next door. I went with her to the premises and could myself hear those plaintive cries for help. Looking through the letterbox, I could see a key on a string, and pulling it through I let myself in.

There was a middle aged lady lying full length on a sofa type bed, moaning pitiably, and rubbing the area near her heart.

She was absolutely obese, and it would not be untrue to say that she was bordering on the mountainous. I

asked her what was wrong, and she told me that she had pains around the heart and she was convinced that she was on the verge of dying. Almost constantly, she kept saying, “ooh -ooh - I’m going”. I felt her pulse and her heart beats were regular and normal. She was not clammy, and had a fairly healthy colour. I told her not to worry as she appeared to have a strong heart and the pain must be due to something else. The other elderly lady went to phone her doctor, and I made the obese lady and myself a cup of tea. This constant, “Ooh - ooh - oh, I’m going” was being shrieked out, and she was obviously in pain in spasms. I had seen too many people who were about to expire, to know that she wasn’t at that time.

The doctor was some time in coming, and that constant shrieking was beginning to get on my nerves. Passing her tea cup for her to drink, I said in sheer frustration, “Don’t go until you’ve had a cup of tea.” It was a ludicrous thing to say, and she looked at me in amazement. The funny side of the comment suddenly struck her and she started laughing, until

her whole huge body shook, and then suddenly she passed wind, and it was so loud that I swear the furniture vibrated. She then said, still with that smile on her face, “The pain has completely gone,”

I stood in the open doorway, and when the doctor arrived, I saw his nose twitch, and he looked at me accusingly. I shook my head vigorously.

I was foolish enough to mention this incident at the station, and for a long time afterwards, some wag would call out, on seeing me about to leave the station, “Don’t go yet Len, not till you’ve had a cup of tea.”

The Sergeants were no better, and I entered the front office one day, to see one of our Sergeants on the other side of the counter, bandaging up the knee of an elderly lady who had fallen down outside. I heard him say, “We can deal with anything here, love,” and looking up and seeing me, “Why that officer there has special training in heart complaints.”



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