

WebWhispers

Sharing Support Worldwide
Throat Cancer and Laryngectomy Rehabilitation

Whispers on the Web

A Monthly Online Newsletter for WebWhispers

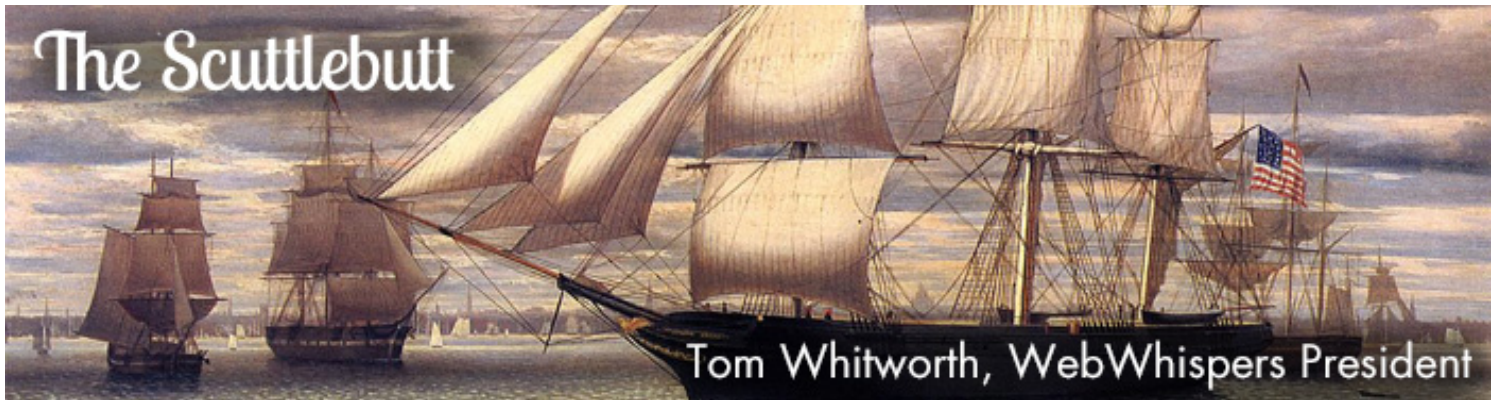
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January 2017

Name Of Column	Author	Title	Article Type
The Scuttlebutt	Tom Whitworth	Looking Forward	Commentary
VoicePoints	Kim Almand	Happy New Year Survey	Education-Med
Between Friends	Donna McGary	Looking Back, Looking Forward	Commentary
Speaking Out	Members	"How Did You Acquire Your New Voice?"	Opinion
Dear Lary	Noirin Sheahan	The Old and the New.	Commentary
Travel With Larys	Jack Henslee	Retirement In Another Country	Experiences
The Speechless Poet	Len A Hynds	THE MALE VOICE CHOIR	Prose & Poetry
Bits, Bytes & No Butts!	Frank Klett	Happy New Year - Stay Safe	Computers

INDEX AND LINKS TO EACH ISSUE MAY BE FOUND AT: <http://webwhispers.org/news/WotWIndex.asp>

COMMENT HERE
FEEDBACK



Looking Forward

Somewhere probably around fifty years ago, I remember going on a family picnic in the mountains that included my uncle's family, along with ours. For this group of four adults and seven children, the outing required both family vehicles. My aunt drove one of those early to mid 1960s land yacht station wagons, an Oldsmobile that could probably seat three professional basketball players in the front seat or the middle one. It also had an intriguing third row seat that faced backwards and could easily hold two or three children. We had to divide up the trip so that each child could sit in that seemingly magical back seat for part of the time. After a few miles, we stopped for some other reason and it was my turn to hop in the back. Though I was excited to take my turn, I remember being highly disappointed with the switch. Looking at where we were headed was much more to my liking than a review of where we had been. I'm still that way. On public transportation, I will generally choose to stand rather than face backwards.

Maybe this has something to do with my attraction to our website. It's like a dashboard to me. Almost always, I can look and learn where I'm going and where I am on this excursion. Ordinarily, I find that to be more helpful than looking back. The categories listed in our online Library include a wealth of information of value to webbies, whether new or highly seasoned. The library is helpful to patients, survivors, caregivers, SLP students, and to the professionals who take care of us.

From WebWhispers.org, select "Library" from the main menu and here is what you'll find:
(or go to these links)

- [General Information](#)
- [Common Concerns](#)
- [Laryngectomy](#)
- [Other Treatments](#)
- [Stoma Care](#)
- [Possible Problems](#)
- [Talking Again](#)
- [How We Live](#)
- [Food-Nutrition-Recipes](#)
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- [Whispers on the Web](#)
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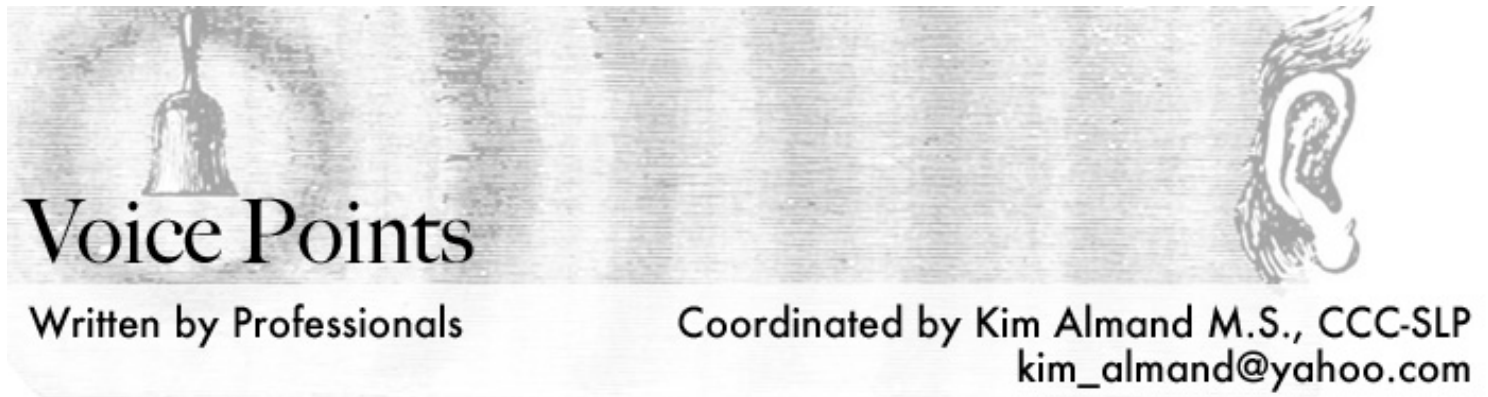
Note: We are revising our website. If you come across anything that needs updating or if you have something

we might could add, please email us at: library@webwhispers.org

If WebWhispers is the dashboard, WotW is like a road map, offering new routes, helpful information, humor, and entertainment for the journey forward.

Wishing you all a Happy New Year!

Enjoy, laugh, and live,
Tom Whitworth
WebWhispers President



Happy New Year Survey

Happy New Year to all our colleagues, patients, caregivers and friends! For 2017, we have a fantastic lineup of new topics and brilliant guest contributors all ready share with our VoicePoint readers. I think you will enjoy what is in store for this upcoming year.

Before we delve into all of that though, Voice Points want to hear directly from each of YOU.

I am asking everyone to take five minutes to complete a short, anonymous survey on Survey Monkey. This will help us better tailor our monthly newsletter column to the needs of the professionals working in our field. VoicePoints is written for professionals by professionals. How can we serve our colleagues, patients, and caregivers? What topics are most relevant to you in your clinical practice? What would you like to learn and discuss? We want to hear directly from all of you out there involved in laryngectomy and head and neck cancer.

Access the survey, using the following link:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Z9ZJ36Y>

Please consider helping out and thank you in advance! Much gratitude goes out to all those who have already contributed to WebWhispers and our monthly VoicePoints column. I could not do this without assistance from each of you.

Feel free to contact me at any time with feedback or technical questions about this month's survey at kbalmand@gmail.com.

With best wishes for a happy new year,

Kim



Looking Back, Looking Forward

January is traditionally a time for looking back in review and forward in resolution. 17 years ago, at long last, I was starting graduate school but kept waking up at night feeling like I was choking and was getting out of breath walking up the stairs. On March 20, 2000, my 47th birthday I learned that I had larynx cancer. I started keeping a journal and have found it useful to go back every once in a while and read those earlier entries. Between Friends started in February of 2005 and the first two parts are what I wrote in March of that year. The third part is today, 2017. It has been an amazing journey.

April 24, 2000 - My Journal

I am drawn to my computer nightly the same way my little brother used to watch the 4:30 horror movie in our TV room. He would moan and squirm, but refuse to turn it off as he watched, through fingers spread apart, the giant bloodsucking octopus snatching the unsuspecting lovers from the bank of the pond. I say to myself, "Put the mouse down and step away from the computer" but I cannot. I go to websites for people with my disease and I read about everything bad that can happen to me. I cannot help myself. I read about terrifying surgeries that might save my life and wonder how I can tell the people I love who love me that I would rather die than live with a hole in my neck because I could never again dive into the ocean or paddle a canoe for fear of drowning. How can I tell them that I still have nightmares of being strangled, because that is how it felt all the time before the doctors found out what was wrong with me.

The euphoria I felt when I awoke from the debulking of the tumor has long since past. That is such an inelegant term, debulking, for the remarkable procedure that transformed my breathing from heavy, wet, matted down terry cloth lungs to butterfly wings of silk that made me high in praise of oxygen. It took some time before I realized that the wonderful surgery was the good news. The bad news was much more

complicated.

Like my little brother, I want to know things I am afraid to know, but shielding my face with my fingers does not help this time. Sometimes, I cry, but I am not sure why? Is it because I am afraid or am I just really mad and confused because there isn't anyone out there who can tell me what to do? This really sucks and I would hate to be my doctor now. The good ones know they don't have all the answers and he's a good one and he wishes he could tell me something different, but he can't.

Medicine is still more of an art than the science that many practitioners want to acknowledge and that is never more evident than when you are dealing with rogue cancers. So there, I said it, CANCER CANCER CANCER. I have CANCER and I don't want to hear from one more well-meaning person who says, "If you have to have cancer this is the one you want or this is the site where you want to have it."

I don't want it here, not there, not anywhere! I don't want this cancer, not here, not now, not ever! I sound like Dr. Seuss? Make it go away!

I do not want green eggs and spam! It is ugly, I do not want this cancer, said Donna! It is not who I am.

March, 2005, Between Friends

In re-reading this, I realize that it was not my well-meaning friends and family nor my doctors, who were making the pronouncements about this cancer being better than other types of cancer. That was my own desperate attempt to convince us all that this diagnosis wasn't all that bad. And I was right, in many ways. It wasn't terminal; I had options and I had time. So I thought I could breeze through treatment, bounce right back, and in six months no one would know the difference.

I was wrong this time. Six months later, my favorite doctor told my brother that if the tumor had been a few centimeters lower, I'd be out water skiing instead of back in the ICU struggling to breathe. I still have a hard time saying I had cancer when I meet new people. I prefer to cushion the blow by saying, when I got sick. They always recoil in such horror and sympathy if I say the 'c-word', it makes me uncomfortable. Then I'm right back to telling them everything is alright, when it really isn't, but who wants to keep talking about it?

Everybody deals with change differently. Some of us are able, through a combination of background and personality, to pick up the pieces and keep on marching. Others may find change damn near overwhelming. When we find ourselves in these opposing camps, it is easy to become critical and defensive. A diagnosis of cancer is life altering - no matter how you look at it. One of the real benefits of a group like WebWhispers is that it gives us all a chance to "meet" people who are struggling and others who are thriving.

If we are struggling, those who are thriving give us hope. If we are thriving, those who are struggling keep us humble. We, more than most, understand, "There but for the grace of God, go I."

In closing, one of my favorite quotes from Mark Twain *"Only he who has seen better days and lives to see better days again, knows their value"*

January, 2017, Between Friends

Sometimes I look back on what I have written in the past and cringe but this time I think I was on to

something. In the interest of full disclosure I did do just a bit of editing (I had a very bad habit of run on sentences and excessive uses of dashes in those days) but the content is the same. I remember well the days of fearfully reading everything I could find while still being absolutely positive that none of that would happen to me. I suspect most of us can attest to the fact that it is possible to hold two opposing thoughts in your brain at the same time without going insane. It can take quite some time to fully realize that while your world has been turned upside down you are actually going to be okay. Very different, perhaps, but still okay. **I have done just fine with a hole in my neck even if I can't dive into the ocean.** And WebWhispers is, more than ever, the place where the thriving and the struggling can join hands. Mark Twain was SO right.



“How Did You Acquire Your New Voice?”

**Marian Cure - Cedar Creek Lake, TX
2009**

My Chondro Sarcoma of the thyroid cartilage was discovered in January of 2009, with difficulty breathing being the cue. Most of us aren't prepared for this type of diagnosis, with no idea of what to do or where to go from the ER.

Living in a small town on a lake didn't render a specialist in the field of laryngectomy. My assigned doctor was an older ENT surgeon with the bedside manner of a rattlesnake and old school surgery. Skip on to hospital recovery and the realization that there were actually specialists in this field in Dallas, TX.

My first Laryngectomy Conference in Dallas five weeks after surgery provided all the information that I needed to go a new route and take charge and possession of my loss of voice. I met the most wonderful SLP, Janis Deane at UTSW, along with a qualified surgeon. I got my puncture and TEP done that Spring. Taking charge and ownership of being a lary changed my life. My adult children were relentless in their research to help me. I hope the new larys will research their new life and never stop asking questions. We

are all different in our types of cancer, treatment and recovery.

**Martin Mc Dermott – Pearl River, NY
Jan, 2015**

Hi all from here in snowy NY!! I Haven't posted on " Speaking Out 'before but here is what I want to say. I had my surgery on Jan 28th. 2015 and developed a leak (fistula) shortly after and had 4 more surgeries and still had small leak at TEP site until 2 weeks ago. I had what I call a "falling out " with my SLP at MT SINAI and was no longer seeing anyone, and just not using TEP. I decided to contact Rita Burfitt, a fellow Lary, and she gave me the name of a SLP, Patti Shanes, at JFK hospital in Edison NJ. My whole life changed for the better from the moment I met her.

I spent 2 hours with her the first day. She went over and beyond her call of duty. Not only did she fix my leak and I'm talking since (leak free), but she also got on the phone and found a supplier that takes my insurance. I had been paying for all supplies from Atos up to now with my own money. Not anymore! I couldn't be happier. A huge shout out to Rita and Patti Martin.

Happy Christmas to all larys worldwide or whatever Holiday you celebrate. God bless us all.

**Marilou Percival – Ontario, CA
8/2013**

I got my TEP three months after my surgery in 8/2013. The prosthesis was too long, so voicing did not happen. I had a couple changed and finally in May my voicing started.

I owe the success of my voicing to my SLP. He worked with me twice a week and with his teaching and support I am now speaking well.

**Scott Sysum - Concord, CA
Lary Aug 2008**

During my two week George Town University hospital stay, I had to write out my thoughts, usually please more painkillers! Morphine, I liked that, great dreams. Towards the end of my stay, the staff thought I should be getting ready to leave. So they assigned me a, I forget, transition person? to arrange home health care, supplies, etc. Also I saw an SLP, who approached me with the thought of alternative speech. My neck was still pretty messed up and stiff.

She had multiple EL devices. I tried them but they didn't work well. Then she said to try the Cooper Rand intra oral device. Well that worked and I started speaking right away. She cautioned me to speak slowly and to announce each word carefully, which I soon forgot.

Well that is it, I started speaking again, oh I sound like a robot, but so be it. I still use the cooper rand, ancient technology, but it works.

Pete Meuleveld - Salem, Oregon
June 2010

I had already decided on the TEP system before my surgery, but didn't know what to expect for speaking. I had not been able to speak at all for almost two months, making do with tablet notes and phone apps. Then the day came, after my recovery from surgery, for the actual TEP prosthesis to be inserted. My wife Linda was with me and was sitting right behind me when my SLP stuck it in. She then occluded the stoma and told me: "Say One-Two-Three." I did as instructed and Linda almost shrieked in surprise. My voice was quite clear right away and that was it. There was a bit of learning with some vowels - making the "H" sound was the hardest. But it all really came pretty easily. As far as accepting the 'New Normal' - sure, there wasn't much choice in that. And, I was more concerned with learning the care and maintenance involved, HME system, etc. The acceptance of family, friends, neighbors and people out in the community was most gratifying.

Ed Kuszajewski – Pittsburgh, PA
Class of 2014

Hi everyone and Happy Holidays! during the time of my diagnosis I was given options to consider. With the idea of being able to voice right after surgery was the clincher for me. But after a setback with my stoma shrinking it was an extra 6 weeks for me to get my TEP. My voicing therapist was extremely helpful with the process and I haven't looked back. Stay well everyone.

Terry Duga – Indianapolis, IN
1995, 1997

I had my total in 1997. I had a partial in 1995. After the partial, I went to Eric Blom for speech therapy. When the cancer returned, Dr. Haymaker performed the total. Given that the practice had initiated the Blom Singer voice restoration prosthesis, I had my puncture performed as part of the total laryngectomy. It took a little while for me to become proficient with my new voice, but I became good enough to continue going to court and arguing cases. (I was an attorney and went to court regularly.)

I have continued using the Blom Singer voice restoration since my total.

Lillian Parra - Havasu Lake, CA
2011

I had my surgery in November 2001. What a year huh? They removed my voice box and my thyroid. When I was released from the hospital I did not know about covering the stoma or the care of the stoma. I did not know about speech therapy or anything about talking in a new way.

I went back to work in Human Resources where one really needs their voice. I wrote notes like crazy to

everybody...crazy! Our community health representative (CHR) here on the reservation had done some research and told me about a speech therapist across the lake (I live on the California side of Lake Havasu). Her name is Gloria Jacques and I must say this lady wears her feelings on her sleeve She was weeping when she came to visit me when I got back home (my hospital was six hours away at USC in Los Angeles) This friend was actually mourning my voice. She said I can still hear your laugh Lil! Another wonderful lady introduced me to the electronic larynx device. She gave me a loaner and educated me quite a bit on the whole "laryngectomy" lifestyle. God Bless her!

Then somebody told me about WebWhispers and I do not remember who it was but I joined right away and learned a lot. My new friends were Dutch and David Blevins. They helped me a lot and always were kind and patient with my questions. I've kept it pretty simple all these years. I use the electronic larynx to this day and just use the little foam covers that I order from LAUDER's.

In 2006 I was diagnosed with lung cancer during one of my checkups at USC so back I went again and had it removed along with some of my lung. I got along fine until 2012 when during one of my checkups they found that the lung cancer had returned, so I'm just living my life the best I can.

I have a wonderful husband, Gilbert, who has stuck with me thru all of this. I think he suffered more than I did. He is a saint, God blessed me beyond words with this man and now my heart is so glad when I see him happy out in our backyard with the lake and the mountains as a backdrop, working in his garden, or roasting chili's on the fire. We're both retired now and loving it! All my best to each and every one of you!

**Mike Warren - Spalding, UK
2001**

Hi , I live in the UK, and had my op 15 years ago. It took nearly 7 years to get an electro larynx and when I did receive it I could use it within a week! I had seen and heard someone give a talk about Larys (he was Chairman of NALC_ the National Association of laryngectomy Clubs) and thought, " I could do that," so I did!! The only tip I had from the speech therapist was, "You find your sweet spot and you are away!" Nobody has managed to shut me up since.

Practice, practice, practice. Like a good wine it improves with age!!! Keep trying. Best of luck.

**Helen Grathwohl - Chesapeake, VA
2002**

I had my surgery in January of 2002. My doctor at the time did not believe in doing a puncture. I had several months of not being able to use an EL on my neck and had to use the inter-oral adaptor. I did become fairly proficient with my speech but I sure hated it. I finally went to another doctor and had the puncture done.

When the prosthesis was inserted I was told I had to force the air through the TEP. I was unable to speak for the first few minutes and the anxiety going with it, I told the SLP I would work with it and come back to show her. By the time I drove the 10 miles home I was speaking like a pro. I got home and called my husband who was a long distance truck driver and asked him, "How do you like my new voice?" He was totally blown away

and I've very happy to say I still have a great voice.

Ron Mattoon - Seattle, WA
Lary 2010

I got my gift of speech thanks to some very special people in WebWhispers. I was given an EL and my SLP helped me all she could, but my speech made a big improvement after attending a WebWhispers cruise about 10 months after my surgery. I had not seen an EL used, or meet another Laryngectomee until the cruise. Cliff Griffin of Griffin Labs, Tony Talmich and Ed Chapman worked with me on the cruise and my voice improved better in that week, than I had accomplished in the 10 months of trying before then. They were so helpful and they all became my friends for life. WebWhispers has always been there when I needed anything and I have meet so many friends through WebWhispers. Thank you all and Merry Christmas!!!

Karol Beaufore – Apena, MI

Acquiring my voice was really easy. That is the first time....

Even though I had T-4 cancer I breezed through the surgery. My throat healed and they put in my puncture and I did my first 30 radiation treatments. No problem.

Then came the last Seven which were the important intense radiation treatments. At first my neck got a little red and they gave me some cream and said maybe I should wait for the last four. I said oh no, I wanted it over with and my husband was going hunting in the next town with my son and I was going to spend time with my daughter in law and 2 year old grandson. So I went on with the treatments.

When I went up north with my husband my neck started oozing, and by time we came home and I went to the doctor it had opened up again. I went in the hospital to have skin grafts, and when it wouldn't close they did my first free flap surgery. It was taken from my fore arm.

It didn't look too good. They gave me a ultra sound and I remember laying on the stretcher with my husband holding my hand and hoping it was alive, like it was our baby. Anyway it was not alive.

All together it took 35 under anesthesia surgeries, including two more free flap surgeries, and many procedures to get my throat to close. Then I got gangrene of the gall bladder so all that put getting my voice back for a couple of months.

Then my husband got cancer but he wasn't as lucky as me and passed away 5 months later. The person who was by my side for all of this. I couldn't do anything for.

My son asked me to move closer to where he lived so I did, and a few months later my daughter in law accompanied me to get my second puncture and I got my voice. So I went on quite a journey to get the voice I have now and I thank God for it, although it isn't the voice I once had... at least I had one.

Let's start the new year with a question about a pretty hot issue lately that I hope will generate some interesting replies:

If your insurance stops reimbursing for your supplies such as HME's and associated accessories, or maybe even your prosthesis, would you continue to use them, or maybe switch to a patient changeable, if you had to pay out of pocket?"

Thank you for your submissions. Edits are used for length, clarity and to keep comments on subject of the month.

Staff of Speaking Out



The Old and the New

I had been looking forward to reflecting on this month's Speaking Out question and letting that be the basis for this column. But as soon as I started thinking about being given my first electrolarynx and getting trained, a heavy feeling started to envelop me and I realised how reluctant I still am to think about the electrolarynx as my new voice. I wondered how I could be honest about this, while still writing an article that wasn't just loaded with aversion and self-pity. After all there are times when I forget altogether that I'm using an electrolarynx, and when I'm enjoying a conversation as much as I ever did with my old voice. So I don't want to get the negativity out of proportion. But yet I want to acknowledge it.

Isn't it a bit like bereavement? Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, who studied adults and children grieving for the death of a loved one, identified five stages to the grieving process. It starts with shock and denial, moves into anger where we are consumed by the question of who to blame for our misery; then we start bargaining (if I'm good God will bring them back again), but when that doesn't work we move into depression before we finally come to an acceptance of our loss and the possibility of moving on. But it's not a neat linear process – you can go

back and forth between stages and go through the full cycle again and again.

That's how I'm experiencing the loss of my old voice. Those 'good times' when I'm functioning well with my electrolarynx represent acceptance. And reading Randy Wienke's 'Christmas Story' in the Daily Digest on Dec 19th, I was inspired by his sense that this Lary life is what we make of it. But the heavy feeling I got when I started writing this piece was depression.

The 'bargaining' phase sounds a bit crazy, but I certainly went through it – praying for a miracle-cure and believing it was going to happen any day! Completely irrational I know, but that's the path my emotions took. And looking back I can see the benefit of those crazy days. Hope gave me energy. It lifted my spirits and helped me focus on the positive after months spinning in anxiety. But rationally I knew I was deluding myself and every now and again I had to give myself a stern talking to – *come on Noirin, get a grip!* Eventually I got fed up with my own delusions. Being driven home from radiotherapy one afternoon, I got curious and started looking into my experience a bit deeper. There was the joyous surge of energy accompanying my dream of the just-around-the-corner miracle-cure. Simultaneously there was the knowledge that this was just a dream. As my attention settled, the thoughts about a miracle-cure dissolved and I realised that what I really desired was the joy. Deep down I was dreaming, not of a miracle-cure, but of prolonging my surge of joy.

As soon as I acknowledged the joy, it turned to grief. Sounds like a downer, but I actually felt better inside. The joy had been based on delusion, whereas the grief was coming from truth. At last I could just think the thought "I've lost my voice and it isn't coming back". With that thought I gained a lot more self-respect. I was able to see how I was coping well with a very undesirable life-change.

It's not as if that foolish 'bargaining' stage is gone forever. Every now and again something happens to revive it – just now I can't resist the idea of a Christmas miracle! But it's easier to recognise the joy as ephemeral and be grateful for this imaginative human mind which can find daft excuses to give itself shots of pleasure. And each time I come to that grounded, rational stage of acceptance, I find myself thinking more positively of life as a laryngectomee. So far, my energies have been going into finding ways around the problems caused by my weird voice, but recently I've started thinking along the lines of – can I make this weird voice work in positive ways? After all it certainly gets you noticed so that's a start! And as Randy Wienke's story describes so well, it can mean a lot to other people when they see that we still have characteristics like courage, optimism & humour despite our loss.

So this is my attempt to reflect on Jack's Speaking Out question for this month. And by coincidence, it's fitting for New Year to be considering the old and the new. I wonder how many others also started off trying to put a comment together for this S.O. but found themselves getting depressed as they reflected on getting their new voice? Perhaps we're all circling back and forth through the stages of grief. At times, like Randy, we inspire others with our optimism. At times we're snappy and mean as the thought 'Why me?' binds us in its knot. What keeps me going is the belief that the process is leading deeper within, to a presence that cannot be damaged by laryngectomy or any of life's vicissitudes. For that great prize I'm willing to put up with self-pity, depression and whatever other emotions get thrown up by my new voice.

But then again, if the Christmas fairy wants to bring me a perfectly functional larynx, I won't say no!

Editor's Note: This is Randy Wienke's Christmas Story that Noirin is referencing]

This happened to me a few years ago & has become my X-Mas story. Some one asked if I was sharing again this year so I'm guessing it's a new yearly tradition as part of my Lary Christmas. Merry Christmas and a

Happy, Healthy New Year! Enjoy!!

This year I did 12 days Christmas gifting to Vic & she asked what got into me this year! Well tonight it hit me ... something happened a couple weeks ago and I'll call it my 2013 X-Mas story. I'd like to share and I apologize up front since I'm told when I write I get carried away. I recently started my healthcare at the VA and met with my new Doctor, an ENT & Speech therapist. After my exam and being told all looked well she said she'd like some time to speak about my cancer & surgery becoming a laryngectomy (one whose larynx is removed).

We spoke about my lary (short for laryngectomy) stories or events that would have never happened to me if not for my unique, strange electronic sounding voice. She started using words like aspiring, motivational, inspired; certainly not the first words I'd think of to describe me. She said while many struggle with their new voice you have gone to another extreme ... crediting your new voice for things in your life. She said I think your stories have very little to do with your unique voice but all to do with the man behind the voice. That was enough for me, so off to get a chest x-ray.

Now what happened next, if I did not know better, I would have thought was staged. But everything happens for a reason. As the elevator was closing a voice asked, "Can you hold the door?" In comes a young nurse's aid with a vet in a wheel chair, a double amputee. I must have spoken and he started asking questions. Then said, "No offense to you sir, but sure glad all I lost was my legs as I'm not sure I could talk like that rest of my life". All I could do was laugh, put my hand on his shoulder and say, "Young man, you are about to get a lesson in Randy 101 philosophy. The morning after my surgery I had something happen that changed my life forever and made me realize I sure was glad all I lost was my voice & I could still get around!" Now he could laugh.

I said your lesson for the day is" All in the eyes of the beholder!" All he said was wow! I could see young gal was getting emotional (my unique voice?) so I became quiet. The young man grabbed my wrist, looked up and said, "At least we're alive & going to have a GREAT Christmas, right man?" The poor young lady lost it and began to weep, plus an older couple in back was fighting over a hankie to their wipe eyes. The elevator stopped and the older couple said we need to squeeze out and as they left the wife said, "For gosh sakes our tickers at our age can't take much more of this emotional bonding." As they got off they stopped, looked back and said, "You two have a great X-Mas and know you've given us one we will never forget."

Gee, I don't know Doc, I'm writing this that a few people might see a sliver of inspiration in it? Just maybe? But for now we'll just credit it to my unique voice? That day totally put me in the Christmas spirit like never before. Merry Christmas & Happy, Healthy New Year all!

*As always Eternally optimistic
Randy Wienke, = Brooklyn Wisc
Lary Class 2004*



Travel WITH Larys

Retirement In Another Country ~ Jack Henslee

While this column is primarily about “Travel” we receive very few submissions about YOUR travels, and I can only travel so much by myself...but not for a lack of effort. So I decided to expand the scope a little bit and talk about retirement in another country, which by its nature does entail some travel because first you need to visit, and if that works out you need to move. So this the first of what I hope is a series about possible retirement destinations; be they for climate, health, financial, personal, adventure, or political... LOL!

Costa Rica, Central America:

Population – 4.8 Million, Size- About the same as West Virginia

Democracy since 1948 – Medical and Education – Free for residents and citizens

I have considered retirement in another country for some time and I’ve spent a lot of time researching various options. International Living (<http://www.internationalliving.com>) has a website and monthly magazine for subscription that I highly recommend. I have read it for years, and you might want to check it out as a starting place. Costa Rica first came to my attention about 35-40 years ago when I met an American that lived there. He had a two-bedroom house on the beach he had bought for \$30,000, a small fishing boat, garden, and a house keeper/cook for \$100 a month. He worked in the states 3-4 months a year as a construction lineman and lived the good life in CR the rest of the time – Pure Vida as they say there. (The good life). That got my interest

It took me about 20 years to finally get there via a one-day stop while on a cruise. I took an all-day bus tour and fell in love with the country except it only had one 18 hole golf course which was a deal breaker for me. I finally got back about 12 years ago (after another 5-6 golf courses were built), have made a total of 10 trips there in all and made some good friends.

I have been to about 34 countries in my life and Costa Rica rates right up there at the top. It is probably the most environmental conscious, and friendly country in the world, with a fantastic climate. In fact, one of its towns (Atenas) has been rated the most perfect climate in the world by National Geographic. It’s located in the central valley at about 4,000 feet, has 5,000 residents, and the temp ranges between 80 in the day and 60 at night. Plus, it’s less than an hour from San Jose.

Most of the central valley (which is really a high plain) averages about 4,000 feet and has the most

comfortable climate, with morning and evening rain showers during the wet (green) season. The coastal areas can run 5-10 degrees higher with the northern Pacific coast being drier than the rest of the country.

Most of the population lives in the central valley and about a third lives in or around San Jose, the capitol. The rest of the country is fairly rural with various tourist and ex-pat destinations and hotels scattered along the coast lines, and in the mountains that feature several still active volcanos. The Caribbean coast is the least populated with lots of mangroves, swamps and some nice beaches. It's primarily banana country and is a thriving eco destination. The mountain areas are rich with coffee farms and rain forests. Land can still be bought cheap there but there isn't a lot of infrastructure, or things to do unless you just love nature, solitude, or want to go real native. In my case I prefer the northern Pacific coast. It gets a little warm but I like warm, and somewhat humid (think Florida), but it also rains less than in the southern Pacific regions. Plus, it has more golf courses.

I have been to most of the areas except the Caribbean, and I've only touched the tip of the southern Pacific area which is now the hot, get rich development area. Buy now and triple your money in 10 years they say, and they may be right. The largest national park is there and they say the further south you go the better the beaches get. Still lots of cheap land there and business opportunities if you're not really ready for just a rocking chair on the beach.

The important thing is that CR is a friendly, beautiful, low crime, great climate, affordable destination for a visit or to live. Certainly not the bargain it was 40 years ago as far as property goes, but that aside it is still very affordable as far as health care, food, and utilities goes. Property in small villages can still be had at a bargain compared to the US, but if you want something comparable to home in a tourist/ex-pat area you may pay the same price or more if you're not careful since asking prices can be inflated. Plus, like everywhere, the closer to the beach the higher the price. But a quarter mile away can be half that price.

Now some facts:

Visiting - All you need for a visit is a passport and you can stay for 90 days at a time. It used to be if you left for one day you could return for another 90 days endlessly but I hear they may have changed that because people were just crossing the border into Nicaragua or Panama for lunch and returning the same day or the next. So now it may require a 3 day departure. After your visit, and if you decide you want to stay, you have 3 options for temporary residency which must be renewed every 2 years and then after 3 years you can apply for permanent residency. Or you can just leave for a few days every 3 months!

- **Pensionado Program:** It requires proof that you have at least \$1,000 a month in income from a Social Security, disability, a pension, or other retirement plan that is guaranteed for life. You won't be able to work as an employee in Costa Rica, but you can own a company and receive dividends from it, as well as work online or as a freelancer with clients and/or customers outside of the country. One spouse applies and must prove that income; the other spouse is the dependent.
- The **Rentista Program** is for people without a fixed retirement income. It requires proof of \$2,500 monthly income for at least two years or a \$60,000 deposit in a Costa Rican bank approved by immigration authorities.
- If you want to invest at least \$200,000 in Costa Rica, you can become a resident under the **Inversionista Program**, which applies only to investors, not their families

Real Estate – Anyone can buy property in Costa Rica. As with anywhere be careful. Never buy without seeing, only buy what you see and not what is promised, be aware of coast restrictions that limit how close to the water you can buy and what you can build. Property taxes are a dream come true at only 25% of the assessed value. A \$150,000 house only costs \$350 a year for taxes.

Income Taxes – You only pay taxes on income you earn in Costa Rica through a 15% progressive employment tax or a 10-25% self-employment tax. You pay nothing on your retirement or other US based income to include investment income.

Medical – All medical, to include prescriptions, is free to citizens and residents. Temporary residents are required to purchase the government insurance known as “Caja” which is based on income. Most pay between \$100-150 a month per couple. Some of you may already pay more than that just for prescriptions.

Rentals - There are many rental opportunities in CR depending on where you want to stay and for how long. Short term rents are of course more expensive and many long term rentals come unfurnished but at very good prices. If you just want to explore for a month or two, then expect to pay anywhere from \$500 to \$2,500. Remember...the closer to the water the higher the price. Good long term rentals in good areas can be had from \$500 for an apartment to \$1,500 for a nice 2-3 bedroom unless you want to stay in a ex-pat golf community or equivalent. In that case the sky could be the limit ranging from \$2,000 -\$10,000+. If you're not 110% sure about staying, then definitely rent. Most of the bargains that are for sale are from people that bought and then decided they didn't want to stay. They are the ones renting and selling cheap. Don't become one yourself! Plus as a long term renter you are in position to make a better deal on a purchase if you decide to do that.

House Keeper or Gardener - \$3.00 per hr. What's not to like!

Since the average annual income in CR is only \$7,000-\$8,000 there are many ways to live a lot cheaper regardless of the life style you desire. Anything comparable to what you now enjoy can be had for a lot less and in most cases you can actually up your lifestyle by quite a bit. Throw in the fact that their literacy rate is higher than the US, the healthcare system is rated higher, it's easy to get to, and English is widely spoken, it's something to think about.

{In the coming months I will try to give you more destinations (mostly Latin America) to consider. But, if you already live abroad, own property abroad, take long vacations abroad, or maybe you're just a Florida snow bird, please share your story with "Travel With Larys" at editor@webwhispers.org.



The SLP of one of the three support groups I belong to and write for in the County of Kent in England, told us that her friend in the Choristers Society at Canterbury Cathedral was quite adamant that with practice all of us Laryngectomees could learn to sing again. We laughed at the idea! I subsequently wrote this poem and dedicated it to that SLP and that support group's chairlady, who I think had been convinced by her.

As an aside how-ever, I recently went to a grand-son's birthday party and ate well, but took my True Tone, as I cannot speak when eating or for a short time afterwards. However, I used it to join the crowd in singing Happy Birthday and was amazed at the tone and variation in pitch, entirely different from the normal robotic voice. Maybe I should use the True Tone more often and sing all my words?

THE MALE VOICE CHOIR

Oh, such confidence she gave us,
 "There is nothing you cannot do.
 Aim real high, with so little fuss,
 and watch it all come true."

So we formed the "Larys' Male-Voice Choir"
 though each octave we sang was flat.
 To the Albert Hall, we did aspire,
 and we had the words off pat.

Alas, only one song seemed to suit,
 and that wouldn't take us far,
 but of course, we don't give a hoot,
 it was, " Born Under a Wandering Star."

When you consider, that's perfectly true,
 we Larys do aim for the stars.
 It's that SLPs fault, when she gave hope anew,
 saying, " Ignore the stoma and scars."

Bits, Bytes and No Butts!



Frank Klett

Yahoo is Getting Bigger...in Bad News! Keep your PC Cool! Stay Safe online and Off...Happy New Year!!

If you are a **Yahoo** user for email, news or any of the **Yahoo services** that require you to sign into your account then you need to know that your password and info may have been compromised. Yahoo finally released the news that they had been the target of a humongous hack which resulted in over 500 million passwords being captured. Change your passwords now if you have not done so in the last 2-3 weeks. Well, that was last month. Since then the number of hacked accounts has exceeded 1 Billion and may still be growing.

What does that mean to you and me? There is a chance that your password for Yahoo has been compromised along with your profile info since with your login name and password someone can access your account information. The hacker could also use your login and password to access other accounts you may have so if you do nothing else change your passwords NOW! Do not wait for bad things to happen. Make your Yahoo password unique to Yahoo. If you don't you are opening all accounts with the same password to the world of hackers. Bob Rankin has some excellent perspectives on this situation and what things you can do to reduce your chances of suffering the agonies of a hacked account. Take the time to click the link that follows and start your new year right.

[http://askbobrankin.com/ouch_one_billion_yahoo_accounts_hacked.html?
awt_l=CasIU&awt_m=J63YRyYQneP6SL](http://askbobrankin.com/ouch_one_billion_yahoo_accounts_hacked.html?awt_l=CasIU&awt_m=J63YRyYQneP6SL)

Your computer is just like any other machine requiring some routine maintenance to keep it running smooth and out of the shop. One of the biggest things that can trash your computer is heat caused by the passing of electricity through your computer's components. The heat that is generated can be dramatically increased as dust and pet hair builds up inside the PC cabinet and even blocking the fans used to exhaust the heat. There are signs of overheating you can watch for including your computer unexpectedly shutting down **AKA: The Blue Screen of Death**. Your PC is reacting to the rising heat by shutting itself down to protect its components. Maintenance on your computer is relatively easy, as long as you keep it simple. To clean the exhaust fans start by powering down the PC, unplug it from the electrical outlet and place it in an area with good lighting and room to work. Remove the side cover (which is what most cases have to access the interior) and locate the exhaust fans. With a can of compressed air blow the dust from the fan and fan blades. There should be no reason to remove any components. Just be sure to clean the fan and the vent

covers to allow for as much free air flow as possible.

Once you have completed these steps simply reverse the order, replace the side panel and return your newly cleaned PC to its usual place. Plug it in and power it up. You should notice a difference in the PC's heat and even the speed may be improved. An excellent way to be safe and alerted to the changes in heat is to install a free and simple to install utility such as **SpeedFan, Open Hardware Monitor or Core Temp**. The download links for these utilities and more information on them can be found by following this Bob Rankin link.

http://askbobrankin.com/your_computers_worst_enemy.html?awt_l=CasIU&awt_m=Jt_SD0fiDeP6SL

Improving your system speed (actually INTERNET searching) is through the use of an Alternate DNS. Your INTERNET provider already provides you with a DNS, however there are other DNS's available which have streamlined the search functions and are more efficient in finding your information. Most are free and install with little effort. Again Bob Rankin has an article to steer you through the process if you feel the change is what you would like to try.

http://askbobrankin.com/you_want_faster_and_safer_internet.html

Stay secure by updating insecure programs on your computer with the Secunia PSI

“The Secunia Personal Software Inspector (PSI) is a free computer security solution that identifies vulnerabilities in non-Microsoft (third-party) programs which can leave your PC open to attacks. Simply put, it scans software on your system and identifies programs in need of security updates to safeguard your PC against cybercriminals. It then supplies your computer with the necessary software security updates to keep it safe. The Secunia PSI even automates the updates for your insecure programs, making it a lot easier for you to maintain a secure PC.”

Using a scanner like Secunia PSI 3.0 is complementary to antivirus software, and as a free computer security program, is essential for every home computer. One of my favorite free for home users' security programs is Secunia's PSI, which ensures your critical programs are up to date. This is essential to a safe system since most program updates are released to plug holes in the software that have been found to be a way for hackers to gain access to your system. You can download and install PSI by going to :

http://secunia.com/vulnerability_scanning/personal/

The **WebWhispers Facebook Group** is our meeting area along with the Webwhispers Forum. Many of our members are on Facebook, so we knew it was time to have a Facebook home. We invite all our members to join us in our Facebook Group and the Forum.

If you are not a Facebook user then you might enjoy a visit to our **Forum**. Hosted on Delphi, the Forum is a Members only group which limits access to only those of our hole in the neck group. You can read over the questions and insights of other Larys as well as ask questions and get answers from our knowledgeable members. The Forum is our open area to ask questions and exchange thoughts. There are many categories of interest and you'll find the answers to many of your questions. If you haven't already joined the forum you can simply contact one of the form managers for any questions you may have. You will be asked to join the Forum if it is your first visit and before you know it you'll be in the Forum. If you have any question contact the Forum managers Bill Cross or Mike Rosenkrantz: <http://forums.delphiforums.com/webwhispers/start>

And for our newest members remember to visit our library for answers to many of your questions.

<http://www.webwhispers.org/library/general-information.asp> is one of the most complete collections of information aimed specifically at the Laryngectomy Community...in fact it may be the only one. Taking the time to browse the library and become familiar with the contents will make it even more useful for when you

do need to find out a piece of information.

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