

Whispers on the Web

A Monthly Online Newsletter for WebWhispers

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December 2020

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From The Editor's Desk

Hello, my friends,

For reasons I don't even need to get into this is definitely the time to appreciate our friends we can say hello to and although I know I am late to the game, online/virtual meetings really do help. I had my first Zoom support club meeting a couple of weeks ago with Tom Olsavicky's Peninsula Lost Chord Club out of Virginia and as you probably know that is not my local club since I live in mid-coast Maine! But I don't have any local clubs and Tom invited me so I decided to be brave and join in. And I do mean brave...I have learned that lighting is crucial to these things and the first time I used the camera on my new Chromebook I was horrified! Who was that old woman looking back at me from the screen? I have since learned to NOT sit right under my extra bright reading light LOL!!

So I found a spot I liked with a nice view of my Christmas tree and not the clutter on my kitchen counter and with better (read more forgiving) light and clicked on the link (easy-peasy if you haven't done it before). It was wonderful...seeing folks I haven't since the last IAL back in 2019 and realizing how much I missed being with my "tribe". Making some new friends and at a later meeting getting some valuable information for WebWhispers and our loan closet. Exactly what support groups do so well and what I realize is all too easy to discount.

I'll be posting a list of clubs who are doing virtual meetings (not all are on Zoom but there are many easy to access sites) and even if you are hesitant like me, it's a great, safe way to not be isolated. Social isolation is a big problem for many of us even at the best of times and sometimes it is all too easy (at least for me) to just cultivate my introvert self and hibernate.

Send me your contact persons if you host virtual

meetings and we'll post them to the list and here next month. It's apt to be a difficult winter and these connections can really make a difference in our mental health and emotional well-being. The beauty of the online meetings is that we are NOT limited to our geographic group. Want to go to California and hang out with some friends there? No problem! Live in Maine and your buddy is in Arizona or Georgia or Maryland...no problem!

Caryn Melvyn, Director of the IAL Voice Institute and long-time SLP/super hero advocate for our community writes in VoicePoints this month about using mindfulness for managing stress. That reminded me of Noirin Sheahan who wrote the Mindful Lary column for several years and how she used mindfulness every step of the way on her journey. Please check out her column in the Archives this month. She is a brilliant writer.

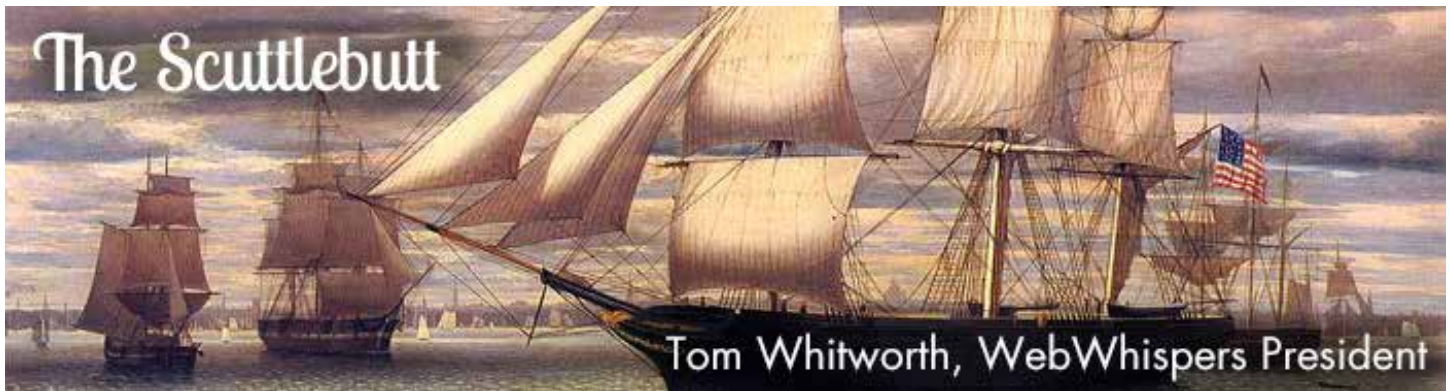
Plus so much more... Don Renfro and his awesome positivity; some more vicarious travels with WC and of course Len Hynds' annual Christmas tale.

Please take some time to read and let us know what you think.

For now Stay Safe and Sane and Celebrate the Season any way you can!

Donna McGary

Donna and the Whispers on the Web Team



How You Can Help WebWhispers

WebWhispers is available around the world for free to members and non-members alike. We are able to keep it that way due to the generosity of those who support us with voluntary donations. Many we serve would not be able to benefit from what we do if it came with an out-of-pocket price tag. We are truly grateful for the gifts from our members and friends. The link below is to the donations section of our website, which outlines a number of ways you can help us, often without giving a dime of your own money.

Direct gifts are received via Paypal or by mail to our P.O. Box. Often employers and former employers will match your gift to us, if they are aware of it. We also receive funds through Amazon Smile and Ebay and can be included as part of your contribution through the United Way in your area.

The past couple of years, we have received funds through Facebook Birthday Fundraisers and through Facebook on Giving Tuesday. In each case, potential donors see the event on your FB page and it can be shared with others. These tend to be more successful if the standard message is replaced with something personal like how Webwhispers has helped you over the years.

It is heartwarming for me to see friends outside our lary community donating money to our cause. Many of your friends and loved ones in or outside our "family" will do the same thing. I have a few "outsiders" who have become regulars for my birthday fundraiser. There were some others during the year but we brought in \$1,195.00 through Facebook this year just because people weren't mad that I'm still around. That tasted so

good, it was right up there with the carrot cake my daughter Beth makes me every year. When your birthday rolls around, please remember WebWhispers for a Facebook fund raiser. It's easy, fun, and helps us.

Members donating \$5.00 or more are entitled to sustaining membership and are eligible to participate in our elections and changes in policy. \$15.00 or more entitles the donor to a beautiful "Neckbreather" pin, compliments of our friends at Bruce Medical Supply. WebWhispers, Inc. is a 501(c) (3) charitable organization so donations are potentially tax-deductible in the United States. It is not too late to sneak that in for 2020. For details on the many ways you can give to Webwhispers, Inc., use the link below.

<https://webwhispers.org/donate/>

Again, I thank you all for your ongoing support of what we do for others.

Season's Greetings!

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





Voice Points

Written by Professionals

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

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Caregivers: Taking Care of YOU

Caryn Melvin, PhD CCC-SLP, CPC
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Caregiving is stressful and that is an understatement. There are ways to make caregiving less stressful and it is important to take care of you. I would like to add something to your toolbox, a technique that works when nothing else does. And even better, this tool is free! You can use it anytime and anywhere. You do not need anything special to utilize this tool. You do not even need to 'set aside time' to do this. And you can use this tool, not just for alleviating caregiver stress, but for any condition that is persistent and difficult to live with.

The tool I am talking about is Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). MBSR was developed in the 1970's by Professor Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center.

It was developed to fill a specific need: helping patients cope with illness or pain that could not be helped with medicine or pharmaceuticals. It is a program that helps you learn to calm your mind and body to help cope with stress, pain and illness.

MBSR teaches you to focus only on things happening right now, in the present moment. By focusing on the present moment we can stop much of our thinking that contributes to stress.

As a caregiver you may often find yourself thinking about what you could have done differently such as not purchased cigarettes

for your loved one. You may engage in catastrophizing, thinking about the future and imagining all kinds of unpleasant scenarios. Playing the "woulda-shoulda-coulda" game does not change anything except add to your stress. Engaging in catastrophizing is also a useless and stressful activity. Most of what we worry about never comes true.

I remember seeing a sign in a doctor's office that very wisely stated, "The tomorrow you worried about yesterday is today." And likely today, none of what you imagined happening yesterday has indeed happened.

Engaging in woulda-coulda-shoulda thinking and catastrophizing only results in the loss of this moment and the stress that comes from thinking about things you cannot change and things that may never be. Mindfulness teaches you to be in charge of your thoughts and mind rather than having your thoughts control you.

The University of Massachusetts Medical School offers a self-paced, on-line, FREE course in MBSR. You can find more information at www.palousemindfulness.com. The course is 8 weeks long but again, it is self-paced. There is also a very good, nine-minute YouTube video that is a solid introduction to MBSR. The video can be found at this link:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBSO41ZimNs

"The more time and energy you put into taking care of yourself, the more you will be able to care for those around you." -Jane Vock



Dear Lary

Noirin Sheahan

After reading Caryn Melvin's VoicePoints piece on Mindfulness I was reminded of our own "Mindful Lary", Noirin Sheahan and her unique perspective. I thought this column from May 2018 was particularly meaningful under our current circumstances. Like the old "AT&T Reach Out and Touch Someone" commercials.... I know I am dating myself, but seriously, Noirin is right. It is better when we stay connected.

With A Little Help From My Friends...

How come I'm a so much more accepting of laryngectomy when visitors are around? I smile, I'm happy to listen, I willingly forego my share of cake and bikkies (taking a bite would keep my tongue fully occupied and prevent me from talking). I'm often tempted to override my body's plea for silence to let acid reflux drain back into the stomach where it belongs. I'm not put off when I notice my visitor frowning as they attempt to concentrate, to decipher speech from noise as I talk. I'm just grateful to them for making the effort. Basically I become more outgoing, more sociable, more agreeable, less defined by the limitations of laryngectomy.

But sometime after the door closes behind them I slip back into 'the old me'. Irritated by the harsh sound of my voice ("Why bother making small-talk with a voice like this?"), annoyed if I'm asked a question as I munch the leftovers ("Do they not know I can't eat and talk?"), depressed by requests for help ("Do they not know how hard it is living with laryngectomy?"), looking askance if someone offers a compliment ("They obviously don't know the real me!").

Then again that 'old me' evaporates with the

next ring of the doorbell! Some joyful part of me gets reborn. It's all quite unconscious. I don't set out to be nice to visitors. It just happens. The visitor wakes up 'nice Noirin' and tucks her up again as they close the door, leaving 'the old Noirin' to brood by her bedside.

The pattern predates laryngectomy. I remember – perhaps it was 20 years ago – driving to a conference to do with work. I was in foul humour, hating my job, finding it stupid and hopeless, hating everyone related to work, hating the obligation to waste an evening with all this pretence and folly. Then I got to the function and met a colleague. My troubles evaporated in an instant! I got genuinely interested in whatever we chatted

about, glad to be part of the team, inspired, and quite hopeful that it would all work out.

On my way home afterwards I was amazed to reflect on such a transformation. Especially as I wouldn't really think of myself as a 'people person'. I'm more cerebral. I studied science and engineering and had always been happy to spend long hours tinkering away at an electrical circuit or a computer program or any technical project. Though I enjoyed working with others, it never bothered me to work alone.

What was I to make of myself? Was the 'real me' the foul-thinking one who had driven to the function? Or was it the smiling happy one who attended the function? Or the reflective one who drove home? Did I need friends more than I thought? Was I not actually the independent, scientifically minded, self-motivated person I had believed myself to be? And even nowadays

– is the ‘real me’ the good-natured one who welcomes visitors and loves to chat despite the limitations of laryngectomy? Or is it the grumpy one who hates these limitations, is bored by small talk, groans inwardly at requests for help?

My best hypothesis to date is that there’s no ‘real me’. Who or whatever I detect inside is as variable as the Irish weather, bright and breezy in the morning, rain spreading from the west in the afternoon, icy cold at night.

But the wonderful thing is the detector. It’s not defined by the weather. Mindfulness has been my detector for the inner world of moods, thoughts and feelings, seeing how these are affected by the outer world of doorbells ringing, people chatting and laryngectomy. Slowly, imperceptibly, the detector takes the turbulence out of ferocious weather, nurtures a sunnier climate.

But the weather can get worse before it gets better! It’s easier to forget about ‘bad-tempered Noirin’ as soon as a sunnier mood comes along. To remember her in the full light of day is a challenge. The habit of self-judgement locks in hard. Bad-tempered Noirin is very bad indeed. She has to be quelled, defeated, squashed out of existence.

But this strategy has its limits. If Noirin is all bad, who is squashing her? Although the question can’t be answered in words, I can explore it mindfully, dropping it into my psyche like a stone drops into a pool of water. The stone disappears, but you can feel the ripples. So too my body might tense and shudder as my mind contemplates the mystery of this human nature, with its impulses to anger and selfishness and its contrary impulses to friendliness and generosity.

More and more often, nowadays, I can detect a middle ground, the potential for both extremes, If mindfulness switches off I go about my daily business without noticing that every moment has this incredible potential for ‘good Noirin who accepts laryngectomy and still finds the world beautiful’, ‘bad Noirin who hates laryngectomy and can’t cope with life like this’

and all the many shades in between.

Just noticing the potential gives me courage. ‘Bad Noirin’ loses her ‘bad’ label and becomes more like an ache. A quiet kindness tiptoes towards the ache, suggesting forgiveness and care. It’s scary to trust my aching bits to human kindness which can so easily turn to anger or selfishness. But what choice have I? As the body relaxes, thoughts register the underlying problem: the fear of moving on. Who will I be without my heartache, my loyal attachment to the fluent-talking Noirin of five years ago? How can I say goodbye to this beloved version of myself?

I don’t have the answer yet, but am confident that mindfulness will help me carve a path through the aches and grumbles of a not-fully-accepting-laryngectomee, help me smile again when the doorbell rings. In the meantime, I’ll get by with a little help from my friends!





Gratitude for Life Being Life

By Don Renfro

Clouds come floating into my life, no longer to carry rain or usher storm, but to add color to my sunset sky. ~ Rabindranath Tagore

If only I could remember this quote when life is truly “in session”. It is so hard to remember there is a purpose for what is happening in my life even when it is not what I want to deal with. Somewhere in life I developed the belief that life is supposed to be “fun” and “enjoyable” and when it is not there is something wrong. As I have matured, I have gotten a better sense of reality that life is not always “fun” and “enjoyable”.

I know when I first found out I had cancer there was nothing “fun” and “enjoyable” about getting that news. I remember waking up after my surgery and not feeling anything “fun” or “enjoyable” about that.

I remember fighting to manage a fistula that had developed about a year after my surgery. And feeling like there was nothing “fun” or “enjoyable” about that.

For me to get to a point where I could appreciate all those problems of the time to be the agents that would add color to my sky, I had to learn to look at them in perspective and see them for what they were, the past, and see how they have shaped my present.

In my life today I truly experience so much appreciation and gratitude. Much of my time in my daily life I feel as though the “Grim Reaper” has come to my door and I answered the door, saw who it was and slammed the door in his face and went on about my day.

Before my surgery I used to ride my bicycle as much as 35 miles a week. The night before my hospitalization, when I received my trach, I had gone for a 10-mile ride. The next day I rode to the hospital in an ambulance because I was unable to breath. In the days and months that followed I could only see the clouds and no way was I capable of seeing how in any way those clouds could of possibly added any color to my sunset sky.

Today I ride my bicycle about 25-miles per week (I had to cut it down a bit). But after coming from a place where life-sustaining breaths of air were unobtainable and knowing that death was much closer than I had ever imagined it would be, I am able to be

truly grateful for the ability to ride again even if it is a shorter distance.

After all that has happened to me in the past few years, I have been provided the opportunity to see the “color to my sunset sky”. Because of my experiences I have a heightened appreciation for things I used to take for granted. I have never really taken life itself for granted but I have taken things like breathing, eating, swallowing even talking as things that were just givens and would always be available.

After reading on the Facebook web page of other’s experiences, unable to eat solid foods, on feeding tubes for years, limited capacity to communicate. I know I am very blessed to have what I do have today even if it was not exactly what I may have wanted before this all happened.

Since I joined this community, I have heard that we are all the same (we are all larys) and at the same time we are all different. I have learned to embrace my differences while also embracing what I have.

The deal is if I buy the adage everything happens for a reason then when rain and clouds move into my life it is easier to see the color they bring to my life at the time I experience the rain and the clouds.

I have come to accept that there will always be things and situations that come into my life that I will not always welcome. But enduring them and living through them will be easier if I can see them at the time as being in my life to create an opportunity for me to experience and appreciate something I may not have grown to appreciate had I not experienced the situation.



This Lary Life

Middle East Israel

W. C. Baker

In Sunday School, deep in the bowels of Zion Lutheran Church in Sandusky, Ohio, I became fascinated with stories of Palestine at the time of the Romans. Before I knew that Zion was the site of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, I had dreams of palm trees and olive orchards, mangers and temples, Galilea and the Jordan. These fantasies faded as I grew older and were replaced with images of Jews trying to establish a homeland after the war and fighting for that homeland in the Six Day War of 1967. I never really thought of going there until Rachel suggested a trip to visit her daughter who had recently graduated from UC Berkeley and was completing a project to establish a dialogue between Jewish and Palestinian women. This was my first crossing of the Atlantic since becoming a laryngectomee four years earlier.

When we landed at Ben Gurion our passports were not stamped with an Israeli visa, but instead we were given a paper visa to facilitate our entry into Syria later. They don't like passports that show evidence of visits to Israel. It was still dark when Rachel's cousin Avrem, took us to his Tel Aviv apartment. After refreshing ourselves, we began a leisurely recovery from jet lag, wandering through bustling, modern Tel Aviv and into Jafa where the images from Sunday school became reality. Jafa was also where I first heard of the condemnation and razing of Palestinian homes and buildings; a practice roundly condemned by Rachel and Devra but supported by Rachel's Israeli cousin.

Our recovery completed, we rented a car and drove to Jerusalem, passing the hulks of disabled military tanks in the woods just to the west of the city, presumably from the Six Day War. My initial impression had no resemblance to the boyhood image of the City of David. It was more like a European city than I would have thought.

Jerusalem could be considered the capital of monotheism. In any postcard photo of Jerusalem,

one's eye is immediately drawn to the golden Dome of the Rock, where it is believed Mohamed ascended into heaven, surpassed in Islam only by Mecca and Medina. Judaism and Islam revere the site as where God created the earth, and in Islam where Mohamed departed for his night journey to heaven. The Mihrab, a niche in every mosque which indicates the direction of Mecca, was originally directed to Jerusalem when Islam was first established by Mohamed. The Dome of the Rock stands on Mt Moriah where Abraham was directed to sacrifice his son Isaac and later established by David to be the future site of the Temple of Solomon, built to house the Ark of the Covenant. All that remains of the Temple is the Western Wall, or Wailing Wall, perhaps the most sacred site in Judaism. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher is arguably the most sacred of any in Christendom. Calvary or Golgotha, where Jesus was crucified and the Tomb from which he ascended to heaven are both found in this sprawling structure as are the last four Stations of the Cross. We were given a tour by a Coptic priest whom Devra had met at an Israeli checkpoint, facilitating his return from travels in Palestine.

We entered at the Damascus Gate in the walls of old Jerusalem on the Eid al Abad, the Islamic celebration either of the ordered sacrifice of Ishmael, born of Hagar, by his father, Abraham, or the birth of Mohamud, or the end of the Hajj, I'm not sure which. For Jews and Christians, it was Ishmael's younger half-brother, Isaac, born to Sara, who was to be sacrificed. It is a festive celebration, with the age-old narrow stone street, part of which consists of the Via Dolorosa, Stations of the Cross, filled with fresh washed children. Some carrying newly hatched chicks, much like the Easter celebrations I knew as a child, but our chicks were marshmallow. In some places, the stone streets ran with blood from sheep that had been sacrificed like the sheep that took the place of Ishmael, or Isaac, depending on one's perspective.

I contacted the Red Star, the symbol of which is a red Mogen David, the Jewish version of the Red Cross

(the Moslem equivalent is the Red Crescent). After some searching, they informed me of the meeting time and place for the Laryngectomee group in Givatayim, a town east of Tel Aviv. I wasn't able to contribute much since I spoke no Hebrew, but we did have two people from that meeting attend the San Francisco IAL later in the year.

I missed a day in Jerusalem when I drove back to Givatayim, but it was a day well spent. I got back in time to Join Rachel and Devra at the Israel Museum and see the Dead Sea Scrolls. The following day was one of the most emotional of any in my various travels. The morning was made cheery by the Chagall windows at Al Hadassah Hospital while an afternoon visit to Yad Vashem, Israel's memorial to the victims of the holocaust was quite sobering, especially to Rachel, my Jewish partner. At that time I had been to Dachau, the first concentration camp. I developed a greater awareness of the holocaust at a class at Berkeley, but Yad Vashem left a lasting impression of humanity's potential for cruelty. I later had a similar feeling when visiting the Killing Fields in Cambodia, but the scope of the Holocaust pales all other genocides

There is more to Jerusalem than the walled Old City, some of it of historical interest with battle sites in the wars leading to Israel becoming a nation. But it is Old Jerusalem that captures the heart and imagination of anyone brought up in any of the Abrahamic religions.









The Agony & Ecstasy of Finding My Voice

A Memoir by Dr. Branton Holmberg

This is the last installment of Doc Holmberg's wonderful account of "The Agony and the Ecstasy of Finding My Voice" If you haven't been following him I recommend you go back to the beginning. It's the humorous and uplifting story of a remarkable man and just a great read. We started the serialization of it back in May 2018 and as we finish his tale I think it fitting we return to his introduction that month:

This memoir will take you from the agony of my childhood as a kid with a harelip, cleft palate and speech impediment to the marvelous ecstasy of finding a dental device when I was 26 years old that would change my voice, and my life forever. Then you will plunge with me once again into the agony of completely losing the voice I'd so lovingly found when I was starting my master's degree in School Psychology. I became a laryngectomee at the age of 74.

The journey takes you through many transformations in my life each leading to dimensions of self-awareness and personal capabilities far beyond the disfigured and below average kid I thought others saw me as throughout the childhood years I spent with my mother, father and brother. It lays the foundation for the creation of this book and many others I began writing two years after I lost my voice to thyroid cancer in 2010.

My writing is the ecstasy of the voice I've found

again. Until the time I became a graduate student I harbored the belief people heard me with the speech impediment of a cleft palate. Then one of the most amazing transformations of my life happened and my professional career expanded exponentially.

You'll see my life as a child, teenager, Air Force medical corpsman and college student, Graduate Teaching Assistant (when I got my new voice), Associate Professor of psychology, college/university administrator, Adjunct Professor, business and organization development consultant, entrepreneur and author. It's been an amazing journey and one I never expected to take because of my physical disfigurement and speech impediment.

The last part of my journey deals with my present experience which in my wildest dreams I never imagined would haunt me again. My voice was taken from me and once more I've had to deal with trying to get people to understand me when I'm trying to talk to them, this time with an artificial voice.

It's a story not only of moments of dark despair, but of wondrous transformations through which I was able transition into rewarding personal triumphs. You'll see how significant the beliefs I've held about myself have been in creating the world I've lived in. In the end it's a story about using my love for writing fiction as the voice I've lost to cancer. I'll show you glimpses of things I've written.

Even though I love to write, I find it difficult to

describe how meaningful it's been to me to be loved and supported by my wife Margaret, my children James, Ann, and John, my grandchildren and great grandchildren and all others who've touched my life with love.

I regret not telling those who are now gone how much their support during my struggles to save myself from my own despair meant to me. The love and support of all of them has been my salvation and given me more happiness than I thought could exist for me in this lifetime. That happiness has gained depth as I've acquired the wisdom to see how family, relatives and friends have made my life what it is. I love each and every one of them far more than I can find ways to express with the written word.

As my journey continues I hope you'll follow me in my writings as I share what I call the second voice of my life. It too has lifted me from great despair and given me the opportunity to communicate worlds of imagination that have brought me far more pleasure than I thought I would ever find again.

Perhaps you will find my fiction stories as enjoyable to read as I've found them enjoyable to write. If that's true I'll feel endlessly blessed.

Chapter 17 "The Future"

I will continue, God willing, to probe my imagination to bring to life more adventures for my loved ones and others who find my writings entertaining. Time will tell whether my imaginary adventures with the yesteryear characters of Sam, Gramps and others captures the interest of a larger audience. Then there are the more recent adventures of the Archeos whose exploits are in a much nearer generation, and the Quantas who face the treachery of today's world.

Perhaps there will be those of you who read this that will want to read more of the books I've written. I'd be very gratified if that were to happen. I've self-published my writings so you

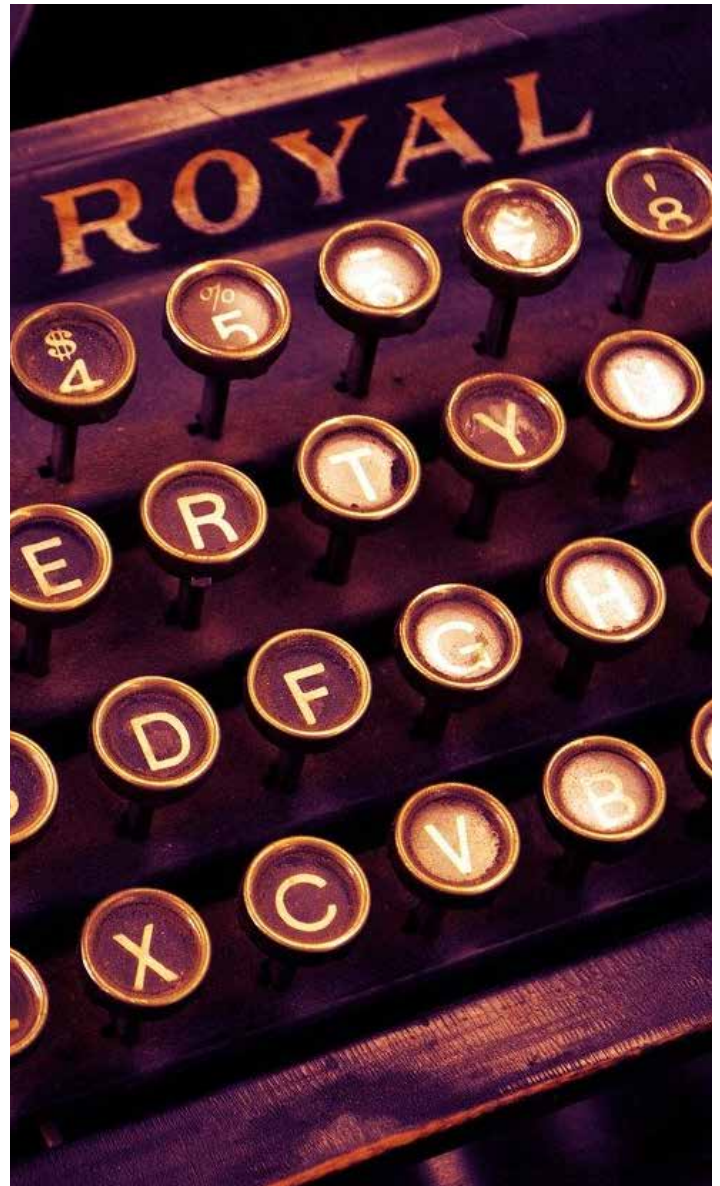
will have to forgive what I hope will be very few errors in them. I know I'm terrible when it comes to trying to find errors I've made.

The books are published through an Amazon company and are available at Amazon.com.. I've selected the lowest prices they will let me select since the books are print on demand sales. I've tried to keep them as inexpensive as possible as I'm certainly not doing this as an effort to earn a livelihood. That's all behind me.

My email address is: docholm36@gmail.com

With blessings to all who touch my life through my writings.

Branton Holmberg





~This column first appeared here in 2010. We've re-printed it in previous years and a number of you wrote in saying how much you enjoyed Len's holiday story, so it is now a tradition- maybe our own "It's A Wonderful Life". ~

A Christmas Story

The onset of these darker evenings, and the thoughts of Christmas which is now only a few weeks away, remind me of those halcyon days of childhood which are so strong in my memory. I was seven and could only dream of wonderful presents. I knew that mum and dad could not afford what I so dearly wanted, that wooden fort in the toyshop window. For two years I had stood outside, just gazing at it, and those marvellous Scots soldiers in their kilts, red coats and white helmets lining the ramparts. The youngest of seven children, with very little money coming into the household, you soon realise that your own personal wants are not even mentioned, so I never told anyone of my heart's desire.

Let me convey you to our darkened bedroom on the evening of that Christmas Day. My two brothers were asleep. I lay between them in our large bed, and being the youngest, I had to sleep at the opposite end between their feet. Charlie was always on my left, and with him being shorter than Alf, I could get a clear vision over the top of his covered feet, so I always slept on my left side. What a day it had been. I loved Christmas; it was always so exciting. And this had been one of the most thrilling days of my life, and as it was drawing to a close, we had been sent to bed.

I lay there, looking over Charlie's covered feet, at the

faint glow at the window which was coming from the gas lamp outside. Even Jack Frost knew it was Christmas. He had made his own decorations on the inside of the glass window panes, as our breath froze into the most wonderful shapes. They were like sparkling diamonds, and I wondered what part of that pattern was my own frozen breath, and if it was forming those intricate close knit patterns because we were brothers.

Before falling asleep, Charlie had blown out our candle, but I could still see my present in the faint glow from the window. It was the wooden fort, with its ramparts lined with those Scottish soldiers. I could not believe it when I had been given it earlier that day. I used to stand outside that toyshop for such long periods just gazing in, that nearby stall holders, wearing mistletoe in their woollen hats, and faces glowing from their acetylene lamps, would nudge each other, and say to me, " You'll get it if you're a good boy".

Well I was good, or so I thought, but would miserably say to myself, ' I can't even tell them what I want.' The man from the toy shop came out and spoke to me on a few occasions, and I asked him what regiment it was, and after peering in, he said, " Why, they're the Camerons, a Scottish Regiment and they're fighting in a country called Afghanistan right now."

My sister Kit had read us several stories written by a man called Kipling, and one story was about those Afghans sweeping down the Khyber Pass to ravage and ransack India, and they had been doing this for hundreds of years. As he spoke, I was with that regiment marching up the pass, kilts swirling,

bagpipes playing, returning the fire from the mountainsides.

When Dad had carried that fort into the parlour with the soldiers lining the walls, I could not believe my eyes. They were the Camerons. I was so filled with emotion that I felt tears coming into my eyes, but brushed them away, knowing that boys don't cry like girls, but wondered how on earth did they know what I had wanted. Mum said, "The shopkeeper told us what you wanted, and how you had been so good for business just gazing in. He sent you these as a present." She produced another box with a further 12 Camerons inside.

Dad said, "There was this one who had a leg broken in the shop, and was going to be thrown away. I told the shopkeeper that you might like him." As I took this one, the one with the leg missing, I realised that here was a hero. He had lost his leg fighting those Afghans. I looked at my fort in the faint light and there he was, in a position of honour standing to attention in the uppermost tower.

British troops are still fighting those Afghans all these years later, and now they have their American colleagues with greater fire power to stand beside them.

It was the following summer, the exact circumstances elude me, but during a visit to our home by some relation, I was given a whole sixpence to spend, and I went to the market to buy something I had long coveted. As I crossed the road to enter the market, I saw a man sitting on the pavement with his back resting against the wall. A crutch leant against the wall beside him.

The poor man only had one leg, which was stretched out in front of him, and beside it a soldier's Glengarry cap which had a few coins in it. The poor man was begging.

As I was passing, he picked up the cap to take out the few coins, and I saw the most beautiful silver badge on it. I read the word Camerons. I put my sixpence in his cap.



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