

# Whispers on the Web

A Monthly Online Newsletter for WebWhispers

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*January 2021*



## Contents

Column	Author	Title
From The Editor's Desk	Donna McGary	Buoyed By Our Writers
The Scuttlebutt	Tom Whitworth	A Lary State of Mind
VoicePoints	Carolyn Nguyen, MA, CCC-SLP	Tracheostomy vs. Total Laryngectomy: What's the Difference?
My Neck of The Woods	Don Renfro	Feel Better, Be Better
This Lary Life	WC Baker	Walking to Jericho and Beyond
The Agony & Ecstasy	Dr. Branton Holmberg	My Thanks and Appreciation

# From The Editor's Desk

Hello everyone,

Pat Sanders first recruited me to write for Whispers on the Web back in December of 2004. Since we were on a WW cruise and it was my first time meeting her and all the other WW members I was a prime target for her force of nature personality. I often say I was shanghaied off the coast of Mexico and never stood a chance! My first column appeared in March 2005 and I've pretty much had something to say every month since then but TBH some months it's a struggle. However, as editor now, since Pat passed the mantle onto me, I have the privilege of reading everyone else's contributions as they come in and that is always inspiring. Especially during this January, which has been particularly rugged for many of us, I imagine, I have been buoyed by what our writers have to share.

First, for sheer escapism, you can not beat the well-documented travels of WC Baker. His pictures bring the stories of his travels alive as do his historical and local perspectives as a traveler not a tourist. Armchair traveling is all the traveling most of us are doing these days and he makes an excellent guide. Thank you, Wayne and I can't wait to see where we go next month!

Then, our resident counselor and philosopher of positivity, Don Renfro always makes me think. I love his practice of leaving someone feeling better about themselves after an encounter with you. It reminded me that sometimes the littlest gesture can make a person's day. A simple compliment or a smile...yes, smiles can be detected even with a mask on can lift a mood. I was so touched the other day when one of the regular checkout ladies at my small local grocery store took the time to actually make eye contact and ask so sincerely, "How are you holding up? You doing OK?". Now, more than ever we may never know the impact of a simple act of kindness and support can have on someone, even a stranger. As I was leaving the doctor's office the other day, I noticed that one of the receptionists had really pretty hair. I walked past but then turned back, tapped on her window and told her just that. Her face just lit up...a smile was unmistakable even through a mask and protective shield. Later that day, as I crossed the street someone called out what

a great outfit I was wearing. That made my day as well. I'm going to make a practice of complimenting somebody on something everytime I go out from now on. It's actually kind of fun!

Last but not least, I'm going to miss reading Doc Holmberg's wonderfully inspiring memoir "The Agony and the Ecstasy of Finding My Voice". He writes with such honesty and humor and warmth, I feel like I know him, like an old and trusted friend or a favorite uncle who always had the best stories. He writes a bit this month about how writing has transformed his life and encourages us all to try it not just for ourselves but for our families.

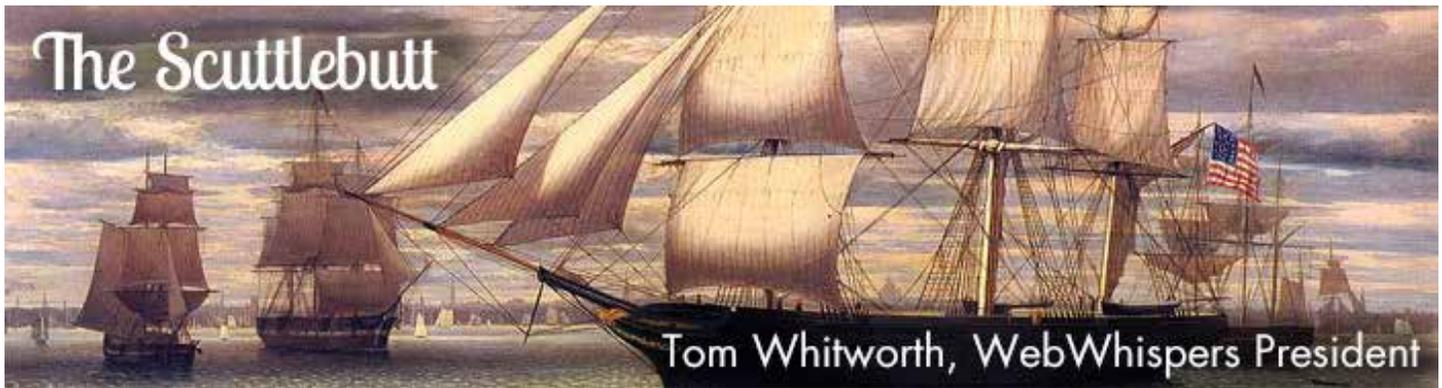
If you didn't read him from the beginning, it's all there in our archives on our website starting back in May 2019. And if any of you have stories you'd like to share we'd love to read them! Like the good doctor says, writing it down and sharing with family and friends changed his life!

So pour yourself a cuppa and settle in for some good reading. Then let us know what you think and maybe start working on your own tales of life's adventures.

Stay safe and sane!

*Donna McGary*





## A Lary State of Mind

*This is a repeat from June 2017, roughly three years post-laryngectomy. I thought a little levity was in order.*

Who Knew?

Laughter really is the best medicine and has no adverse side effects that I am aware of. I have found that adversity is easier to handle when I can laugh about it or at least smile in the midst of it.

The following is a collection of things that I either didn't know pre-laryngectomy, I know them better now, or they have taken on an entirely new meaning. Only Larys would get any of this. One of the reasons our larger gatherings and local groups are so important is that there we are understood.

Spellcheck doesn't recognize "Laryngectomee" as a word. The same applies to most people.

Mucus can make you laugh. My ENT cracked up the day I told him about me unexpectedly coughing while driving only to look up and see the expelled culprit sliding down the inside of my windshield. At first, all I could think of was "how gross". Then I began to laugh so hard, I started looking for a place to pull over to avoid wrecking my truck and taking out a McDonald's.

My wife's grandfather retired from Kimberly-Clark, makers of Kleenex. Damn, I should have bought stock in that company!

In junior high, I thought cooties were fictional. They really do exist! They sometimes hang out in my stoma and must be removed with tweezers.

Cleanliness is.....well, cleanliness!

Removing my larynx did not change who I am, though it may have made me a better person.

I can sing without a voice box, only fewer notes. You might call it my joyful noise.

Silence really can be golden, like when my comments would add fire to a heated discussion and my voice prosthesis gets stuck. By the time I get it fixed, the subject has changed. This sometimes keeps me out of trouble. Some things really are better left unsaid, anyway.

"Can't get a word in edgewise" has a totally different meaning.

So does "it's not what you say; it's how you say it".

It is now a little easier to keep a secret.

More often now, I say something "under my breath".

People who never cared what you had to say, still don't and never will.

Sometimes I choose to remain silent. The difference is that now it doesn't bother anybody.

By now, they're used to it.

Even the most highly experienced hospital personnel can be clueless about where to put my oxygen mask. All those years in the Navy and I never had the slightest interest in getting a tattoo. Now I want one that includes an arrow in the center of my chest pointing to my stoma with these words underneath: "OXYGEN GOES HERE!".

Laryngectomees can make the best of friends. We appreciate one another more.

Navy Boot Camp was NOT challenging.

We can laugh without making a sound. Laughter is laughter. It doesn't have to be audible; it is involuntary and comes from the soul.

When I "spoke" with a marker and dry erase board, a picture really was worth a thousand words.

I may call someone a pain in the butt but I will never again call anyone a pain in the neck.

Never feed the cat right after your dinner. When Pat Sanders asked me on the phone if I'd ever done that, I laughed because yes, I had! Poor little cat.

Choose your words wisely, you may have trouble swallowing them.

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

# Voice Points

Written by Professionals

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## Tracheostomy vs. Total Laryngectomy: What's the Difference?

Carolyn Nguyen, MA, CCC-SLP

The upper aerodigestive tract is a complex and fascinating system, requiring certain tasks to facilitate breathing and voicing. This can certainly change through procedures such as a tracheotomy or a laryngectomy. While these surgeries allow airflow from an opening in the neck, there are other differences we must be aware of.

In a tracheostomy, the procedure involves making an incision into the trachea or "breathing pipe." A tracheostomy tube is then placed, which often looks like a white tube secured with a collar. There is no removal of organs. The larynx or "voice box" is still intact and is connected to the trachea. Since these systems are still linked, air from the lungs can still be rerouted up into the person's nose and mouth. A tracheostomy may be short term or long term depending on the medical condition. With regard to voicing, depending on the obstruction and level of narrowing, the person may be able to use their voice by occluding their trach with their finger or using a speaking valve. In the case of severe injury to the vocal cords and airway, such as radiation-induced necrosis, swelling, scarring, or trauma, a permanent trach may be placed. In these instances, the larynx may be present but the vocal folds no longer able to function and voice may still be achieved via alternate sound source as in a laryngectomy.

In a total laryngectomy, the larynx is removed. The pharynx or "swallowing pipe" is often reconstructed with tissue from another part of the body such as the forearm, chest or back. The trachea is then rerouted to the stoma. Now if you occlude a laryngectomy stoma, there is no way for air from the lungs to enter the mouth and lips, as that pathway is now disconnected. This is important as delivering oxygen can only be done through the stoma. This is a permanent change. Since the larynx has been removed, a laryngectomy requires a different sound source. This could be via electrolarynx, esophageal speech, or with a tracheoesophageal voice prosthesis. This is DIFFERENT from a speaking valve for a trach. If a tracheostomy speaking valve is used on a laryngectomy, this can be very dangerous, as it will occlude the person's only way of breathing.

I have created charts of what you may see on a tracheostomy versus a laryngectomy. It's important for all of us to identify the differences in order to provide optimum care.

Pre-surgical



Tracheostomy



Laryngectomy





WHAT YOU MAY SEE

# Laryngectomy



ELECTROLARYNX



TRACHEOESOPHAGEAL  
VOICE PROSTHESIS  
(TEP)



LARYNGECTOMY  
TUBE



BASEPLATE



WHAT YOU MAY SEE

# Tracheostomy



PMV



FREEVENT DUAL  
CARE



HME  
CASSETTE



TRACHPHONE





## Feel Better, Be Better

By Don Renfro

*"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."*

*~Maya Angelou*

I learned a long time ago when I was still married to always try to leave a conversation with the other person feeling better about themselves having spoken to you. I have always felt this was a very tall order.

Today I see it as a way of life or survival. I want people to come away after a conversation with me feeling better. I began my career in 1989 at an in-patient residential facility for individuals with mental illness. Back then I had not completed my education, I was continuing to work on my bachelor's degree in behavioral sciences. I had completed my general education and was working on my upper division classes of my degree. I had secured a job as a vocational counselor at the facility where I was employed. Part of my job duties included counseling or talking with the residents in the facility to assist them dealing with issues that prevented them from successful participation in the world of work. For most of the people I worked with this meant overcoming the negative messages they had been receiving their entire life from parents, siblings, and others regarding their self-worth.

Although I did not realize it at the time my primary purpose was to motivate these people past their fears caused by the negative messages received throughout their lives. I believe I did a good job at it as many if not most of the people I worked with later came back to me to tell me I was the reason they accomplished that goal. Looking back in hindsight I can now see that what I was doing was assisting them to feel better about themselves primarily by sharing with them the good things I could see about them that they could not see about themselves. Once they felt more positiveness about themselves, they could then get past the fear that was holding them back from accomplishing the things in life that before felt insurmountable to them. Unknowingly this was one of my first experiences having people feel better about themselves after having interacted with me.

As my career grew and I grew, furthering my education to complete my bachelor's degree and then my master's degree. I began my career at the Department of Rehabilitation for the state of California. I started there as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. What the department did was assist people with disabilities to gain meaningful employment. Most people

think when they hear department of rehabilitation that it is part of the prison system or for those people in drug rehabilitation. No, it was for anybody with a disability, maybe from on-set at birth or acquired later in life and now they want to work. The department is there to assist them to accomplish that goal of employment.

It was quite interesting that for many people their disability presented some barriers to their being successfully employed but for many more it was the baggage they had accumulated in their life leaving them feeling less than capable to accomplish gainful employment which created an even greater barrier to that goal. I found myself one more time in my career being in a position of assisting people to feel better about themselves to accomplish their goals of meaningful work.

Having someone feel better because of having interacted with you is not as easy as it may sound. It requires a real connection with that person and being in tune to where they are at as well as being in tune to where you are at. After all I cannot transmit something, I do not have, so that means I must also keep myself in a positive place.

This may sound a lot like I am responsible to "make" this person feel good about themselves. I do not control nor am I responsible for how another person feels. I can, though, create an environment which facilitates positiveness where they can then feel better about their self.

Now I am a "lary". I read a lot on Facebook about other people with laryngectomies that experience depression, crying, grief. I know for me when I feel better about myself, I can do more. I refer to myself as not having a voice. Yesterday my neighbor told me "you do have a voice". That day my voice was stronger, and I was still relating to the day before when I went to the store to deal with a problem I had with a purchase and the manager was having an exceedingly difficult time understanding me. So, I find I tend to see myself in those difficult situations and forget that I make phone calls that go very well, and I can take care of my business with the person on the other end understanding me very well. When I do not feel good about something I am doing, I do it less. That can lead me into isolation and missing out on experiences that can really benefit me. People tell me how well they can understand me, and I feed off that to motivate me to do it more. So now after a career of working to create a positive environment where others can feel better about themselves, I find myself seeking people in my life that allow me to feel better about myself. Today I know the importance of treating people in a way that will allow them to see the good in them and I know anybody can facilitate that, a friend, a spouse, a caretaker. My SLP does that for me. She tells me how well I speak and then I am empowered to go out and do it more.

I guess that is what is meant by "I get by with a little help from my friends".



# This Lary Life

## Walking to Jericho and Beyond

W. C. Baker

We interrupted our time in Jerusalem with a walk to Jericho. The path through Wadi Qelt descends 800 feet through a gorge from just east of Jerusalem to the Jordan river near the ancient city of Jericho. There is a stark beauty to the wadi. The walls are dotted with caves some still occupied by Bedouin and their goat herds. Early on we watched a young Bedouin woman singing as she pushed and pulled a suspended skin of goat milk to make cheese. Farther along, we had to stand aside as a herder drove his goats along the path. St. George monastery houses a bevy of Greek Orthodox monks who welcomed and refreshed us with cold lemon water after a couple of hours hiking in the 105-degree heat of the gorge. They showed us a cave, alleging it to have been home for the prophet Elijah, where he was fed by the ravens.

Jericho, one of the oldest continuously occupied cities in the world, is considered to be the oldest walled city. The legend of Joshua blowing down the walls seems to have been propaganda put forward by Hebrew kings some 700 years after, to support the legitimacy of their reigns. Collapsed walls have been excavated, but they date to 1600-1700 BCE, 300-400 years before the time of Joshua. It seems more likely that they collapsed due to earthquakes. One of Herod's palaces from Roman times is viewable with its mosaic floors, Further evidence of ancient Jericho is about a mile outside of town at tel Sultan with the remains of the world's second oldest tower, c8000 BCE.

A cab ride through an Israeli checkpoint put us back in Jerusalem for a rather subdued day in the New City before picking up the car for a trip about 55 miles north to Haifa home, of Baha'i. We paid a short visit to another Cave of Elijah on Mt. Carmel. I'm not enough of a biblical scholar to know how the Mt. Carmel Cave of Elijah differs from the Wadi Qelt Cave of Elijah. We stopped by Isha L'Isha, an Israeli feminist organization where Devra had been working on her project with a young Palestinian woman, and continued on to the Crusader city of Acre.

Being an important port as long as there have been

ships, Akko, as the natives call it, has a history as rich as any place in the western world. Being an economically and militarily strategic hub, it has seen many conquests and reconstructions through history. It may be best known as the last site held by the Crusaders, before their defeat in 1291. The walls that stand today are the last of a series that had been built and destroyed since the bronze age. To walk through its gates is to walk into 5000 years of history.

After a visit to the white chalk cliffs and grottos of Rosh HaNikra, hollowed out by the Mediterranean at the border with Lebanon, we continued inland and north to Kiryat Shimona. Checking into the motel our attention was directed to the sign indicating the entrance to the underground shelters to which we should repair in the event of rocket attacks from Lebanon, which is to the west at this point. Travelling to Mt. Hermon signs indicating mine fields reminded us that we were in a contentious area. Mt Hermon the 6700 foot mountain tucked in a nook of the Golan at the nexus of Israel, Lebanon and Syria sports what is said to be the most militarized ski resort in the world. But we were not there in the ski season. Further along on the top of Hermon is Nimrod's Castle once believed to have built by the crusaders was actually built to preempt attacks on nearby Damascus by the 6th Crusade.

We refreshed ourselves at Dan Springs, the source of the Jordan River before driving on to Tiberias next to the Galilee, where Jesus walked on the water and directed Peter to cast his nets on the other side. I found myself thinking of the fish at dinner there being related, albeit distantly, to those that fed the multitude at the sermon on the Mount.

Tarub, Devra's colleague on the Isha l'Isha project, was a young Bedouin woman who lived on Mt. Tabor. Although she and her family lived in houses, they had a nomad tent set up nearby. A most pleasant evening of dinner with the family, was a prelude to a night spent in the tent. High on the Mountain is the Church of the Transfiguration possibly the site where Jesus is said to have been transfigured and spoke with Moses and Elijah.

We passed through Nazareth on our way back to the Jordan and followed down river to the Dead Sea

and Qumran caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. On down the western shore of the Dead Sea we walked back to the Ein Geti water falls that provided welcome relief from the heat of the Dead Sea desert ,the world's lowest body of water. Standing under the falls with an open stoma was not much different the taking a shower. It probably would have been better to go to Ein Geti after taking a dip in the Dead Sea. The water of the Dead Sea is so full of minerals that I could float in it with hand and feet mostly out of the water, without fear of drowning. Those same minerals leave one feeling encrusted and welcoming the shower at the Ein Geti kibbutz.

In an area with a history of monumental events, one of the most notable is Masada. After the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and took over the city, almost a thousand men, women and children fled to this mesa in the desert toward the south end of the Dead Sea. The Romans followed them and laid siege to Masada from 73 to 74 CE, during which they built a ramp up the western side from which they could attack directly. Upon entering the fortress, the Romans found 960 men, women and children who had committed suicide rather than submitting to the Roman sword. The emotion that welled was much like that at the Holocaust Museum at Yad Vashem. These memorials remember the defeated and the victims, not the heroic victors celebrated in most monuments to strife.

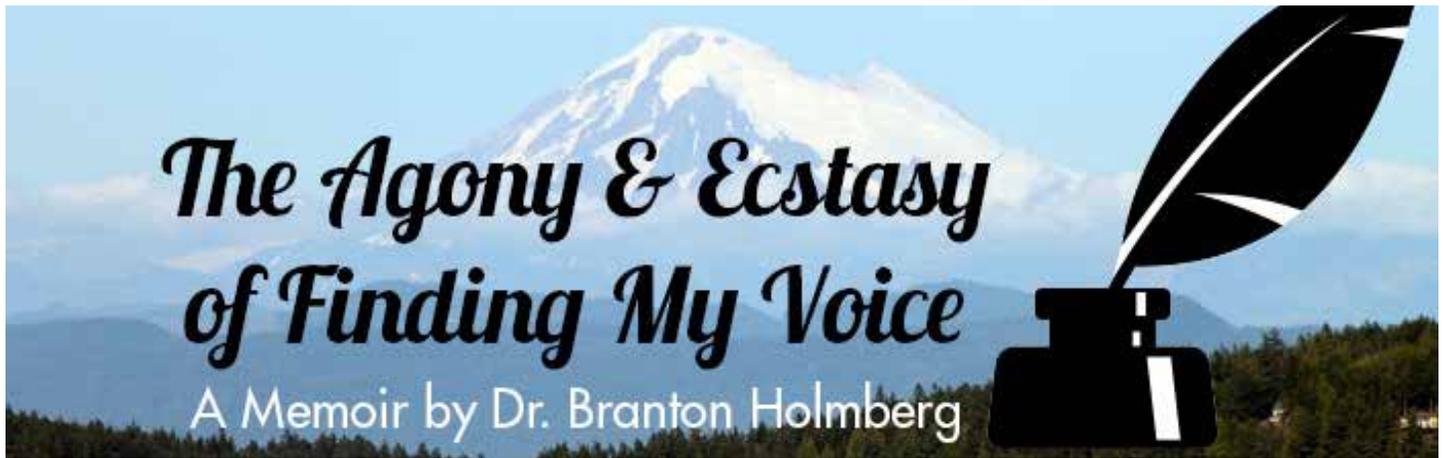












*Last month we finished Dr. Holmberg's wonderful memoir "The Agony and Ecstasy of Finding My Voice" and I wrote to him asking what else he had percolating that he would like to share. This was his reply:*

Thanks for your kind words and a special thanks for serializing my book in the newsletter. It was and is a big boost to my ego. As I shared with the readers of my book, my fiction stories have been my salvation in overcoming the depression that was setting in after the loss of my voice. I know that is self-serving and I have no illusions that the world at large would have any interest in them but they are my solace and I still find great pleasure in writing them. My hope is that future generations of my family will find them entertaining and will understand their purpose in allowing me to keep my head above water.

My latest series of books (I'm just finishing the 2nd one in the series) are written around our newest grandson Bennett August Holmberg (18 months old) and I've really let my imagination soar as I create a life for him as an archaeologist. As always I include other members of my family in the creation of the adventures they involve themselves in as Artifact Hunters.

It's been my hope that others in our world of laryngectomees might pick up on the strategy I've used to reinvent my life after losing my voice and think about creating writings they can leave for future generations to enjoy as a way of getting to know a little something about their ancestors. The printed word is the one of the only lasting footprints we can leave

and I think it's well worth the effort for each of us to give it our best shot and leave one. It certainly doesn't have to be a best seller caliber effort, it simply needs to be an effort. I don't know about you but I would have loved to have anything my ancestors wrote no matter what it was they made the effort to write.

The world of technology has simplified the process of self-publication to the point that anyone can do it and I hope that will prompt people to let their memories and ideas find permanence in the printed word.

I don't recall if I sent you a copy of the first book I wrote in the Ben Waller series. I think it captures what I've been trying to say: <https://brantonholmbergbooks.wordpress.com/home/the-artifact-hunters-adventures/the-secrets-of-aug-2/>

Donna, your interest in my writing has been a blessing to me and I want to express my deepest appreciation for you bringing it to the attention of our Web Whispers family.

I wish you the very best in all you do and will let you know if I write something more that might appeal to the Web Whisperers.

Brant

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