

2023 Posts

Now established with a good blog service provider, posts will become more frequent. And a new wrinkle is added; a short story provided roughly once a month. They are not archived as are the posts. Some may appear in published anthologies some time in the future. Here are the year's past posts.

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Mind Over Matter

February

What does this phrase mean? The person who thinks thing through will beat the one who tries to bull his way through? Quick wit beats dumb brawn? Always thought it meant that sort of thing. Now it means something different to me.

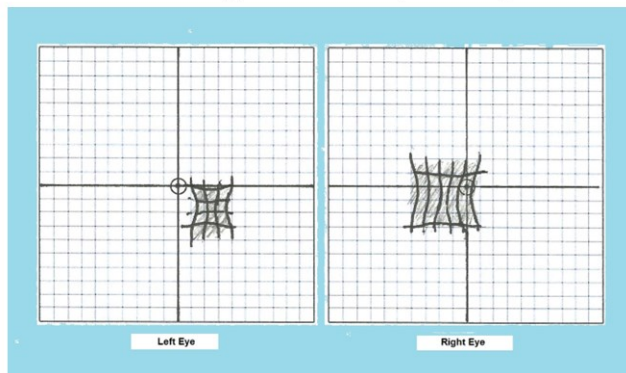
The encroaching vision loss resulting from dry macular degeneration has opened my eyes to wonders of the human brain. Sure, a high school science teacher demonstrated how our brain makes an orange look orange under all light conditions. You've probably seen the photographs taken of one in broad daylight and then under incandescent lights. While the daylight ones shows it to be the orange we know, under artificial light it looks a pasty yellowish color. Our subconscious mind knows it should look orange so that's the image it sends up to the conscious mind.

Subconscious...conscious mind? Medical researchers tend to say things like this part of the brain handles vision, that part of the brain handles speech, That part does this, this part does that. I prefer to think of the brain as two very different computing systems; a conscious mind and a subconscious one. An ocean liner or an aircraft carrier provides the best analogy. The conscious mind is like the captain on the bridge while the subconscious mind is controlling everything else on the ship. It feeds the information the captain needs to him and he provides the guidance and direction it needs.

Researchers say the conscious mind can process up to 40 events per second. Pretty impressive, don't you think? But wait a minute, they say the subconscious one processes 40 **million** events per second! It uses thousands, maybe millions, of minute computers, each communicating over nerves to every muscle and sensor in the body. Higher level processors integrate the data coming in, decide what and how information should be presented to the captain, and then translating the instructions coming down into the myriad of signals needed to carry them out. Just like on a large ship, almost everything happens out of view of the captain. For example, if the subconscious mind detects something on a course to strike an eye, it instructs the appropriate muscles to close the eyelid without waiting to run it by the captain.

When we talk of reading body language, that is actually the subconscious mind at work collecting information on its own and putting together a synopsis of what it learns for us in the form of a feeling. It may tell us we can trust this person or perhaps warn us to be skeptical, that we should like this person or hate him or her, etc. When we follow our heart, we really mean we accept the subconscious mind's recommendation. But all this merely scratches the surface of how the human brain functions.

How Macular Degeneration Impacts My Vision



It's intriguing. Fascinating to discover new features, new capabilities previously taken for granted. That's where my declining vision comes in. Each eye has a blind spot that unfortunately is gradually expanding. If I close one eye, I can see the blind spot in the other. But with both eyes open, I see a full field of vision free of blind spots. The subconscious mind is taking signals from both eyes to fill in the gaps and present a complete image. When you look at the chart, notice that the blind spot is off center on the left eye. That allows the brain to find missing data. They are now beginning to overlap and as a

result, my ability to read is declining. In fact, small print is unreadable. If I try to focus directly on an object, it becomes blurred. But if I look slightly away from it or scan across it, a clear image is presented. The brain is using my good peripheral vision to construct the image.

How it handles color is more complex than the orange experiment indicates. The yellow sensors seem to degenerate first. Now if I'm reading a page with a word highlighted in yellow, I don't see it. Buttons on a computer screen that are turned yellow to attract attention do not attract mine. So when I look at a yellow counter or wall, why don't I see a white spot in the middle? The whole thing looks flawlessly yellow. My subconscious mind decides that's a yellow counter so it makes the whole image yellow. In summary, our brain is interpreting the data fed by our sensors and deciding what should be shared with the conscious mind. Guess the philosophers who suggest the world may simply be a figment of our imagination may have a point. at least until we walk into a wall.

Mind over matter!

Fringe View

March

About forty years ago when my ophthalmologist, friend and soccer team-mate, Bob Glaze, discovered the start of my dry macular degeneration, there was no cure or even medication to control its spread. All one could do is take pills that contain what is referred to as the ARED II formula of vitamins. I've taken two Visivites Gold Formula capsules a day ever since. They should have given me a little stock in the company by now.

The good news is that they work to a degree and any of you who have light sensitive eyes or a parent with dry MD should be taking them now. In my case, it held significant loss of vision in check until about five years ago when the very slow spread began to have more impact, Each year when a retina specialist looks at it, I ask him if anyone has come up with a cure and each year he says no. He says if it transitions from dry to wet (meaning there is some internal bleeding), he can give me a monthly injection to control that. Given my ultra-squeamish nature, the cure sounds worse than the bite.

Last Fall the string of denials was broken. A company called Apellis has developed an injection that slows the spread of dry MD by up to thirty percent. It received FDA approval in February and is now available under the name Syfovre. It's no surprise that spellchecker underlined that name. They could have called it something like HaltMD but pharmaceutical companies true to their name have resorted to the use of random letter generators. Anyway, I became faced with tradeoff of fighting vision loss versus injection horror.

The tradeoff also involves benefit versus side effects. Actually, only one possible side effect is serious. There's a one percent chance of what the doctor called a retina stroke. Have you ever heard of that medical secret before? I hadn't. It renders the eye completely blind permanently. A visual form of Russian roulette. Although there's no way to identify the one percent, there is a suspected factor and since I don't have it, I decided to pull the trigger.

So after they dropped numbing fluid into my left eye, the doctor said he would be back to give the injection when it took effect. On his way out the door, I told him to bring a sledge hammer and heard him laughing all the way down the corridor. Making doctors laugh has

always been a goal since they need a break from the incessant stream of complaints they hear. The first time, my dermatologist ordered a “blue light” treatment on my face, I wore a light blue shirt and told her it was in honor of the blue light treatment. She snickered. But in the two occasions since, she has broken out in laughter when I show up in my light blue shirt.

One’s first eye injection is a real test of character. One has to steel oneself, stare straight ahead, and resist the almost overwhelming urge to jump and run. In reality, it’s painless. There was a feeling of pressure being exerted on my eye but my now friend the doctor explained that was caused by the fairly thick medicine entering the eye. His main concern was to monitor the pressure in the eye. It shot up from 14 to 70 and if it didn’t come down within a few minutes, he would extract some fluid. It only dropped from 70 to 65 so a second injection was needed. By now I was an old hand at this and it went smoothly, terror-free.

If a stroke is going to occur, it apparently happens in the first three weeks. Two have now passed. What is amazing is that while the medicine won’t reduce the size of the blind spot, it has definitely clarified the region around it. That, working with the power of the brain, has improved my vision! Improving the fringe view has promoted Dr. Birnbach to join the other two in my medical Hall of Fame.

A Matter of Integrity

April

When I joined The Boeing Company in 1961, within months it was make clear that there was nothing more sacred than airplane safety. After that came quality, performance, and finally cost efficiency. A prioritized list of desirable personal attributes started with integrity, innovation, and industriousness. Of these, integrity was demanded. It was made clear that a lack of integrity would end one’s career with the company.

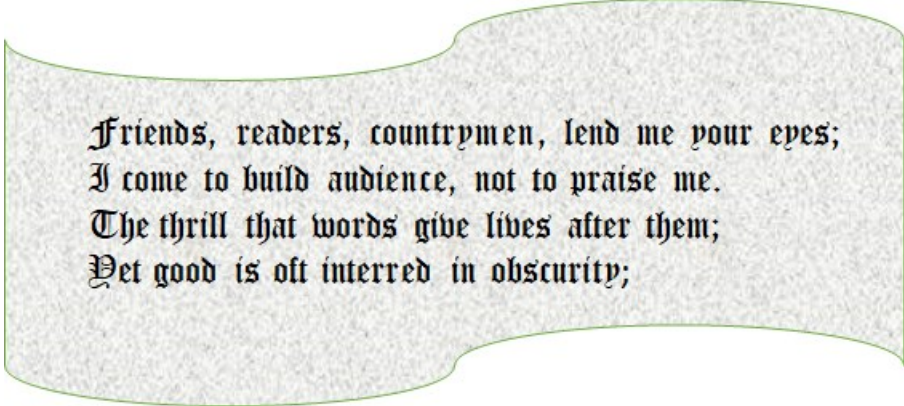
This was the culture that built a world leader and made airline travel so safe people used it without concern. As an engineer and manager, I always felt that I could and should raise any safety concern, no matter how trivial, to the level of management needed to resolve it. In fact, the surest way to introduce a new feature was to identify any positive effect it might have on flight safety. And the cost to eliminate a suspected safety issue was immaterial.

Many companies back then had variations on this theme. In general, the goal was to build better products, knowing this would be ultimately rewarding financially. In the 1990’s General Electric leadership changed the company culture from creating and building better products to building stock value. Investor progress became its most important product. For a number of years, the reward to investors was enormous. Seeing that success prompted other companies to trend in the same direction. Then the bubble burst. General Electric found many of their products had been scrapped and many remaining were no longer competitive. In the end, a company that had been an industry leader for a century was unceremoniously dumped from the Dow Jones Index.

The heavy focus on making an immediate profit adversely affected product quality and occasionally safe use of the product. As the 737 MAX tragedies revealed, the culture shift even infected a company one would expect to be most immune. It certainly provided a wake-up call and hopefully it has reinstated integrity at the top of the list of company attributes. The current short story, *A Matter of Integrity*, was written years before the 737 MAX saga unfolded. It was inspired by the industry shift I could see happening at that time.

Lend Me Your Eyes

May



Friends, readers, countrymen, lend me your eyes;
I come to build audience, not to praise me.
The thrill that words give lives after them;
But good is oft interred in obscurity;

My friends, lend me your eyes. Not physically, though I could sure use them. (For those of you who read about my eye injection, three weeks have gone by now and all is well.) I need your help with some books stalled by a lack of initial purchases. It seems like one of two things are needed: the pull of a celebrity or a perception that others are buying the book. For four key books, I have neither.

I hope those of you who have read any of my novels will agree they are entertaining. Feedback and reviews are usually very positive. A larger audience needs to be enticed into discovering that. You can help make it happen if you have not already read some of these books. Please take a look at them on www.SandysPen.com and spend a few dollars on one from Barnes & Noble or Amazon. Better still, if you frequent a nearby Barnes & Noble bookstore, ask them to get you a copy. Either way, please rate the book and if you include a review, however short, that would be wonderful.

Perhaps the most important of these, and most entertaining, is *You Speak for Me Now* because it has a strong bearing on society today. While it is set in America, its message could apply to a number of nations in the world. Readers find it a captivating novel, an emotional rollercoaster that sets you down on the last page with a feeling of having lived with the characters.

The other three books form the Pillage trilogy. You may well be a member of the modest audience who read them as *Two Loves Lost*, *Sought*, and *Challenged*. For a questionable reason, I retitled them *Life Shattered*, *Rescued*, and *Threatened*. Questionable because they have not received a kick start under their new titles. Of course you shouldn't invest in a story already read but if you've missed any of the trilogy, perhaps you might consider trying one.

This plea for help goes against my grain. I love to create and am quietly proud of these novels. Yet, I shy away from the effort of marketing them, generally satisfied to let them wallow in obscurity. They deserve better.
