

Thursday, 4 Sep 1997

LVES and ME PART V

Good Afternoon Doris,

I hope you and John had a very pleasant weekend. I certainly did. The 'mapblasts' help clear up a couple of your questions?

Here I go -

After Paul finished his Ph.D. and the necessary post-doctoral work, he sold the house in Albion and decided Southern California would be a good place to not only look for a position as a professor (there are MANY colleges and universities in So. Cal.) or perhaps work as a consultant in the field of Applied Sociology (Applied Sociologists do things like conducting polls, surveys and gather data business corporations feel they need for the conduct of their business). Paul has found work in both areas but is currently underemployed. He's an Assistant Professor at Chapman University - the pay is not even a living wage for this area of the country. He was doing research for the City of Escondido, CA, but the city council, claiming budget problems, eliminated the department that had hired Paul and he, and about 30 other employees, were eliminated from the payroll.

Such is life, right? I'm sure Paul will find another position in the near future. It may be

you'll be getting a NEW mapblast from me. If Paul gets a position which will require relocation, and if he still wants me as his tag-along 'blink', then I'll move with him.

Above, at the beginning of the first paragraph, I mentioned the sale of the Albion house...let me go to that thought for a few paragraphs. That sale enabled me to obtain a low-vision aid I had been longing for years: BTL's. Behind The Lens low-vision glasses.

The BTL functions just as the MTG's with the difference being in the size of the telescope. The BTL telescope has been MICRO-miniaturized. It is small enough so that the physical bulk of the telescope is actually mounted on the rear of the lens - that is to say 'that part of the lens directly in front of the eye. The front of the MICRO telescope is virtually in-line with the eyewear lens, not visibility extending outward AT ALL. With clip-on sun glasses, the very small round object in the lower right hand corner of the lens (as you would be seeing it) is not even visible, without close inspection.

The BTL's I obtained, thanks to the sale of the house (by the way, the price tag on BTL's is \$1200.00) were of 3X magnification. Because they were so physically small, the field of vision was (and still is; it sounds like I'm talking about something that I no longer have, but I do have BTL's) really small. This 'way too expensive' low-vision aid is the least

beneficial to me in improving my acuity. I tell folks, when they ask, that it's like walking around looking through a straw (that kind of straw you drink through, of course). (That description of the BTL's field makes me want to add, here, that the difference between using the BTL's and the 3X MTG is the difference between the diameter of the straw and the diameter of that round cardboard center piece from a roll of paper towels).

The question is, invariably and understandably so: "Why spend so much when you've got the MTG's - and they work better for you?"

The answer is in one word: vanity.

I call the BTL's my vanity glasses. When I have the occasion to go to a social event, out to supper at some cafe on the beach (of course), or just sitting around with friends enjoying a comfortable period of chat and camaraderie, I wear the BTL's. If I need to see something by using a different set of aids, they're always nearby. My friends like my BTL's in these, and many other settings, because the MTG's can be very distracting to someone not used to seeing them in use .. they sort of change the mood. When wearing the BTL's, I see what I need to see for the occasion, but to other's present, I look just like any other person wearing glasses and the distraction is eliminated.

I could write an entire story about my BTLs'. Notice, I put the apostrophe after the

s, this time. But for the purpose of what we're doing here, I think, I hope, I've explained them well enough. So now I'm back to the Beechers and WebTV. I fear I may be a bit redundant here. I've scanned through my previous LVES stories to try and avoid that, but if it happens here please bear with me.

You now know I was one of the original subscribers to WebTV. This was because I could not wait one day longer to write a letter 'all by myself'. During the past 21 years, I seldom communicated with family and friends via letters. I did, of course, occasionally write a letter, but whether I wrote them in long-hand or typed them on the standard typewrite I had access to, I would never mail them until Paul and rewritten them for me. The only person on this planet who can make anything out of my penmanship is Paul. Since I wasn't, and still can't see what I was writing with pen and paper I always had not only illegibility from the handwriting, but hundreds of typos when typing. Also, since I couldn't read what I was writing Paul often found he could cut the size of my letters down considerably: a situation might occur such as a telephone call; when returning to my letter writing I'd sometimes forget what I was writing about at the time the phone rang. What resulted were often letters where I had addressed the same subject two, or more, times. Thank God for Paul - the man who has been my eyes for 21 years.

Now you know why I wanted WebTV so very much. I had the Beechers, I had the large screen TV and now I've got Internet/e-mail access and I'll NEVER be without this trio again!

I think I should modify that last statement. I'll NEVER be without the things I need, and know are available, in order to write and read my OWN mail! This modification is because any of the three requirements listed above could certainly be replaced with new and improved 'state of the art' equipment.

When I view the TV screen, with my Beechers (recall that I have a 35 inch TV) I can see less than one third of the screen. This is actually necessary in order for me to read my words as I print them. I just need move my head to glance up at the various and previous lines.

When I watch commercial TV, the usual cable programming found everywhere, I wear my BTL's if I'm with company, or the 3X MTG's. With these I can see the whole of the screen at once..can't read much so I reckon I miss out on a lot of the commercials :-).

So, the Beechers are dedicated for reading and writing. You know what? There's something new coming out that the Lion's Clubs of America have 'gotten off the ground'. I'll have this new device someday. When I wear it, I'll be able to look at the entire screen (of probably any TV size), I'll be able to read and write, and I'll

probably even go to a movie theater once again (it's been a long time). This new low-vision aid is called the Low Vision Enhancement System - LVES. (pronounce the acronym 'Elvis').

LVES can virtually replace, with one system, all the other low-vision aids I use as eyewear. LVES is a video system. There is a helmet, on which a miniature, movable video camera is mounted. This camera is placed so that it's just above the bridge on the wearer's nose on the forehead.

Mounted on the side/s (LVES is available as a monocular or binocular system) is most easily described (by me) as a 'rear-screen' TV projection system. What is being viewed is projected, via a series of mirrors, you want left to remain left when looking at stuff, so the mirrors take care of the mirror-image problem. Onto a screen/s which is/are located directly in front of the wearer's eye. It's sort of akin to looking through the viewfinder of a camcorder, I would guess. I've received a demonstration of LVES, during a two-day period in July of this year. I had gone to The La Mesa Vision Center (La Mesa, CA) in order to discuss a problem with my low-vision specialist, Dr. Thomas M. Hixson, O.D., regarding my BTL's. During this visit, Dr. Hixson made me aware of LVES and told me a VISIONICS representative would be at the La Mesa Vision Center on the 28th (Jul) and asked if I would like for him to recommend me as a possible candidate for LVES use. I told him it was way

out of my price range, but it sounded too intriguing to pass up - I made the appointment.

I went to the Dr. Hixson's Vision Center at the appointed hour - 6:00 P.M. I was the last of Dr. Hixson's low-vision patients to be evaluated. Normally, the demonstration and evaluation of 'capability to use' only takes an hour or so. Since I was the last, my demo/eval lasted more than just a little bit longer.

Visionics Representative, Kevin Nicholson, had been at the Low Vision Center all day, having arrived there that morning from Minnesota. He was obviously in need of some rest, so I finally relinquished LVES back to him. He asked us (Paul, who is also my chauffeur, of course, was present) if we could recommend a motel or hotel near some beach - any beach, anywhere. Being just in from Minnesota, he wanted to be by the ocean, even though it was to be a short stay for him.

We told him of a motel in Leucadia. That's where he chose to spend that night. Kevin, I should say Mr. Nicholson, but we became such good friends ... as a result of his knowledgeable, generous and genuine caring nature ... he's Kevin, to me. I did write Visionics and tell them how grateful I was for MR. Nicholson's assistance to me. We asked if he would like to stop over in our apartment and relax for a bit before going to the motel (he had room by this time). He accepted our invitation, saying that he was tired but liked

the idea of being in a social setting for a change. He had been on the road for awhile, solo, demonstrating LVES around the county.

He stopped in...we got acquainted...he said, after a while, "My buddy, Elvis, is sitting out in the car. Just sort of biding his time. How about if I go invite him in?" You know what I said.

With LVES firmly situated on my head and its controls at my fingertips I proceed to explore the possibilities of having and using LVES in my home environment.

With the zoom lens, I could see the entire TV screen at once or by pushing a button I could zoom in well enough to be able to write. I did. I wrote a letter to my sister, Leslie.

With the zoom set for reading and writing I was seeing about as much of the TV as I did with the Beechers - the difference now was that not only could I see the print with greater clarity, I could use the zoom mode to view the entire screen rather than having to move my head around. And, I didn't have to have four sets of eye wear at hand, constantly changing from one to another in order to see different things. LVES took care of all my visual needs. It was a wonderful experience.

I have an electronic piano (Yamaha Clavinova). The LCD readout was impossible for me to use with anything other than my CCTV -

that system's camera had to be left directly over the LCD at all times; with LVES I was not only able to read the LCD, but because of its wide field of view, I could see the entire keyboard/electronic controls and LCD at the same time. The CCTV had to remain stationary and if I wanted to look for buttons to push I'd have to put on my MTG's for that - LVES allowed me to play the piano without the awkward ness of the CCTV and without the need to change eye wear.

This was taking place during the evening and it was dark out by now. We decided to go to the driveway behind my apartment to see how well LVES would let me see in a limited lighting situation. I could see nothing. I told Kevin that LVES needs to have a head-lamp for night time use. Kevin's response was one that I would hear again several more times - "Lves is not for mobility purposes. You shouldn't be walking around while wearing it, much too dangerous." Kevin didn't know me very well, as of then.

Paul solved the lighting problem by turning on the spotlight provided with the camcorder. LVES has a video output jack, so we hooked a cable from that to the input of a camcorder in order that others present could later view what I had been viewing.

Once Paul got a handle on how to use the spot for my benefit, I was able to see with the same GREAT clarity I had experienced inside my apartment. My neighbor, Kim, whom I have

known for three years, now, came out to say hello and see what was going on. Wow! Did I get a surprise. Kim was standing in front of me sporting a beard and mustache. "Kim, just how long have you had facial hair?".

Kim was a bit taken aback. "What?", he asked. I paused and repeated my questions. "Hey Dude, I've always had this...you seriously didn't know"? No, I seriously hadn't known. This is a demo on how clear I can see with LVES. I should add that Kim has blonde hair and that he keeps his beard and mustache close to the face (not bushy, so to speak). With my MTG's and BTL's I can't remember ever actually know Kim had facial hair. I do recall wondering from time to time if he might be in need of a shave; just never clicked in because the clarity hadn't been available up until that evening.

I was having a great time, but it was getting late and Kevin, having an appointment in the morning at UCSD had to go to his motel and get some sleep. He had mentioned earlier that he was bound and determined to get to the beach before he left San Diego area (which would be the next afternoon). He said he would stop by when finished with his LVES demo at the University before he continued on his trip. He returned around noon the following day.

"Been to the beach yet, Kevin?" Was my first real question. His answer was negative. He told me he had about an hour and a half before

he had to 'hit the road'. "Let's go to the beach NOW", said I. We did.

Kevin, I, Paul and a friend of ours who happens to be a free-lance press photographer/reporter, Prof. Theo Benson (he's a colleague of Paul's in the world of academia) were off to my favorite local beach - Beacon's Beach, City of Encinitas, Leucadia, California.

Upon arrival at the beach, Kevin fitted me with LVES and reviewed with me the instructions for the various controls. There's a bench there ... at Beacon's ... Kevin wanted me to sit and, well, just sit. Look around. See what I could see.

Shouldn't be walking with LVES - no depth perception. Even people with binocular vision would have no depth perception because LVES is not a stereo video system, it has only one camera. Additionally, no peripheral vision which added to the dangers of walking while wearing LVES.

Well. I sat there. About five minutes (probably less) and looked around. I could see everything I wanted except for the beach. Beacon's beach has to be accessed via switchback trail down the side of a rather high bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. I thought to myself "I've been getting around without depth perception for 21 years. Nothing new here to change that. I can't see more than about

three feet off to my left anyway, so the peripheral stuff shouldn't be a problem."

I stood up, walked over to the fence and started 'really' looking around - as I wanted to. Kevin, startled, because I just stood up and walked away, jumped up from where he had been sitting next to me and followed alongside. Cautioning me, obviously a bit concerned a mishap would occur. It didn't.

I was able to stand at the top of the bluff, watch the surf-riders, the people lounging on the beach and all the cars and other people that were in this car-park area. With LVES's wide field of vision (I'm not sure what it actually is, but it's at least 50 degrees) this was the first time I had ever been to Beacon's and been able to see, all at one time, more than just one person, one car or one surf-rider at a time. It was so incredibly GREAT to be able to see what amounted to the 'current on-going beach activities' due to the zoom in/out and clarity of LVES.

Doris, I'm sure you've seen the movie by now, and you understand what I've been describing. Kevin had to leave. He had an appointment in about two hours time which would take him about a half an hour more than that to get there. I reluctantly relinquished LVES, once again.

I couldn't buy LVES. It's just not affordable to me at this time. Perhaps, once Dr. Paul gets

into another good job situation, he'll buy me one; my daughter said she'd buy a lotto ticket, so wish her luck and maybe I'll have my buddy Elvis even sooner.

That's LVES and Me, so far. I reckon I can't really write any more stories about LVES until I've got my own - and no one around to tell me what I can or cannot do with it!

Thanks for listening and tell John I said "Howdy". Your friend and Fan NUMERO UNO! JIM!