

The Nose Knows

by [Peter Glassman](#) (April 2021)



Red Nose, James Reilly, 2015

After being in the Navy during the Afghanistan War, Anesthesiologist Dr. Michael Waxman began raising a family. His children were born close together, a little more than a

year apart—two boys and a girl. Now, in civilian practice, Waxman still had little time for a fair balance of work, family, and self.

His wife Barbara always pointed out that shortcoming, “We’re the only family in the neighborhood that has to take two cars to the movies or out to eat. And you always seem to get called out leaving me alone with the kids. You’re becoming a non-participant in our lives.”

His youngest, Tracy, was in the third grade. She came home one day with an assignment from the teacher. Teachers were always trying to link school with the family, which is important according to Barbara. She read the request from Tracy’s third grade teacher, Miss Poonie Ziglitz. “Tracy, your teacher wants fathers to talk about some area of their work. For your dad, she wants it to be something related to health and a part of the body.”

Waxman put his medical journal down, “If that means during the day, it’s not doable. I have to be in the OR giving anesthesia or in my pain clinic, or . . . ”

Barbara gave the time out signal with her hands, “If you don’t make time for Tracy with this, our marriage is in big trouble.”

Tracy added, “Yeah Dad, I’ll tell my class you don’t like them enough to talk to us.”

Waxman did indeed love his family, “All right, the marriage thing scares me, but Tracy, I don’t want you or the kids in school to think I don’t care, because I do. So what body part should I talk about.”

Tracy and her mother had a whisper conference. After a few minutes Tracy spoke, “Dad, since we have to wear masks in class, I think you should talk to us about how important the nose is and what it does.”

Waxman smiled, "Okay, when do I have to speak. I mean I have to prepare my talk."

Tracy sidled up to her father and hugged him, "Tomorrow, at eleven o'clock."

"Oh my God, that's so unfair of your teacher, not giving me enough time to think about my presentation."

"Actually dear, Tracy forgot to give this to you. It's dated three days ago." Barbara reached out a hand to Tracy.

Tracy touched to her mom's lap, "I'm sorry Dad, I just have so much to do for school. I forget about some things. All the kids do. You do too some time. Right mom?"

Waxman threw up his hands in surrender. "I'll be in the computer room working on it."

Waxman left the hospital with ample time to arrive at the elementary school. He was surprised that his colleagues—even the surgeons—understood the importance of his domestic commitment. He was escorted to Tracy's third grade classroom by a fifth grader. Fifth grade was the highest level in elementary school these days.

Miss Poonie Ziglitz in no way fit the image Waxman imagined with her unusual name. She was in her late twenties, had a perfect anatomical figure, no wedding ring, and a winning smile that she flashed for a second to pull her mask down and back up.

"Thank you so much for coming to speak to us, Dr. Waxman. Class, let's clap for Dr. Waxman, Tracy's dad. He's a doctor."

Waxman waved back at Tracy who was wildly waving her right arm. All the children wore Covid19-protective masks.

Miss Ziglitz continued, "Dr. Waxman, this will be a student interaction conference. You may begin your talk and call on students who have questions. Also, Dr. Waxman, it's preferred that you use leading sentences to stimulate queries. Each student respondent will tell you their name and show their face for one-second. Please begin."

Waxman stood facing the class. His mask was white with pink flamingoes on it, a gift from Tracy. He had no notes.

He was amazed at the different masks the children wore. His daughter's was deep blue with a tan and brown siamese cat across the middle.

"Well, boys and girls, today I'm going to talk about the nose. I chose the nose because for the last year it's been covered. It needs attention. Don't you all think so?"

The class applauded. A few "yays" were prompted by Tracy.

"Good, let's begin by thinking about the position of the nose on the body. Why should the nose be on the face, between the eyes, and above the mouth? Anyone have a thought?"

Four students raised their hands. Waxman called on a boy with glasses and a Spider Man mask.

"I'm Alvin and I'm glad the nose is on my face because if it was in the back of my head, my glasses would be useless. They'd just fall in front of my mouth. And how could I blow my nose if it was on my foot or my ear."

The class laughed.

"Very good points." He called on a girl with a standard blue paper surgical mask.

“I’m Rhonda and if my nose was anywhere but on my face, I wouldn’t be able to find a Covid19 mask to fit it. I mean, what if it was at my belly button?”

More laughter.

A boy with a crucifix in the middle of his mask was selected, “My name is Velbin. My father says we don’t have to ask such questions, because God put us together in his image. If God has his nose on his face then that’s a good enough reason.”

“Okay, let me allow some of you to ask me stuff about the nose.”

A flurry of hands reached eagerly toward the ceiling. Waxman had pre-decided to alternate boy-girl for equality reasons. He pointed to a girl with a white dog bone on her dark pink mask.

“I’m Lily, how come all noses look different? That’s what I want to know.” She pulled her mask down and up revealing a turned up nose.

“That one’s easy, if everyone had the same-looking nose we’d be boring. Some people have turned up noses, turned down noses, hook noses, eagle beak noses, big ones, small ones, and other shapes. It makes us individuals so we don’t all look the same. See mine, it’s like a ski-slope.”

Applause, laughter, and yays.

Next was an overweight boy with a McDonalds Hamburger mask. “So what’s the nose really good for besides bein’ somthin’ to pick.”

More laughter and much applause.

Waxman clapped and smiled with them. “To answer that one, let me tell you a few things about breathing. Has anyone

ever run very fast and instead of breathing through your nose, breathed through your mouth? The middle of your chest gets achy when you do that. He paused to count the hands in the air. "Eight people. I'll tell you why that happens. The air we breathe is usually colder than our body temperature. In order for our lungs to get the right amount of oxygen the air has to be warm. Inside the nose is a system of folds with a lot of blood vessels that warm the air. The nose is a very important heater for the air we breathe. If we breathe through the mouth, like with scuba gear, breathing gets uncomfortable."

A girl's hand shot up. She wore a green mask with a set of skeletal teeth across the center. "I'm Doreen, and my mom breathes on her glasses to clean them. What's the stuff that fogs them up?"

Waxman beamed. "What a great question? Anyone know the answer?"

"I'm George, and if Doreen breathes on glasses the stuff that comes out is bad breath."

Laughter and a few boos. Miss Ziglitz interrupted.

"That was uncalled for George. Please continue Dr. Waxman."

"Because the nose has mucous glands it can humidify the air. The nose adds water to the air and this is also needed to get oxygen. Doreen's mom puffs on her glasses with her mouth with air made wet by the nose."

Laughter and applause.

"Okay, here's a question for you all. How many of you ever noticed that food tastes different when you have a cold?"

All hands were raised.

"The nose is also responsible for the sense of taste

and the sense of . . . c'mon now you all know this . . . the sense of . . . ?”

A loud communal shout came from the class, “SMELL!”

Yays, laughter, and applause.

“Yes, class, the nose has nerves in it that help us taste food. When you get a stuffy nose food sometimes tastes different or has no taste at all. So what animal some of you might have as a pet has a better nose for smelling that we do?”

Again a loud collective, “A Dog! A Cat!”

Waxman waited for them to calm down. “Now I have two pictures to show you. Pass them around and when they get back to me, we’ll talk about them.”

When the photos returned, he handed copies to Miss Ziglitz. Waxman held up a picture of a lady wearing a mask with her nose hanging over the upper edge. “Now look at this picture. See the nurse putting a long Q-tip swab into this man’s nose. She’s going to test the man for Covid19 infection. The reason she’s using the nose is the Covid virus lives mostly in the nose and somewhat in the mouth. So what’s wrong with this picture?” Waxman raised the photo of the woman whose nose was hanging over her mask.

Tracy waved her hand around, “I think I know. That lady could be infecting us because the virus is coming out of her nose.”

“How many of you agree?” Waxman waved his arms in the air.

All the students and Miss Ziglitz complied.

“Yes, Covid-19 masks must cover the nose.” He smiled, “You’ve all been attentive and smart. I leave you with

one final comment on the nose. Inside the nose and way in back is a large amount of lymphatic tissue, which makes antibodies against viruses and bacteria. Antibodies kill the germs. In the nose it's a form of tonsil called the adenoids. When the adenoids get swollen with infection your voice changes—like when you hold your nose and speak. There are many of these lymph nodes all around the body. They make antibodies against all germs, especially when you get a vaccine. So, boys and girls, it's very important that everyone in our country gets the Covid19 shots.

“Our time is up, and maybe we can do this again with some other part of the body. Miss Ziglitz, thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the children's education.”

Miss Ziglitz walked Waxman to the door. “I really liked the way the presentation went, Dr. Waxman. Many parents don't know how important it is for children to get such support in school. Tracy is a very lucky daughter.”

At home that evening Barbara greeted him with, “Well, how did it go?”

“Tracy said I was big hit.”

“Did you enjoy it? And please tell me what a woman with a name like Poonie Ziglitz looks like.”

Waxman maintained a staid face. “It was a fun thing. As for Miss Ziglitz, she was actually a stooped older woman, with a cane, very smart, gray hair, and wrinkles around her mask.”

“Tracy took a picture of you two with her cell phone when you first came into her classroom,” Barbara smiled. “An old lady, huh, I suppose you're going to give another anatomy/physiology class before the year is up.”

“Maybe, I mean, with your approval.” Waxman walked quietly to the computer room.

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Peter Glassman is a retired physician living in Texas, who devotes his time to writing novels and memoir-based fiction. He is the author of 14 novels including the medical thrillers *Cotter*; *The Helios Rain*