

Calendar

Babble Like the Bard

A Midsummer Night's Speech

Every time you're in front of an audience you should treat it as a performance opportunity. Audiences appreciate some ham in a speaker, even if they don't acknowledge it. A little show biz is not a bad thing."

Thomas Leech says he received this wisdom from a friend years ago. Now it's something he tells his clients. A public-speaking consultant, Leech coaches sales teams, scientists, and others who must give speeches or presentations. The Clairemont Mesa resident has had little actual drama experience, but he's a drama fan. And his new book, *Say It Like Shakespeare: How to Give a Speech Like Hamlet, Persuade Like Henry V, and Other Secrets From the World's Greatest*

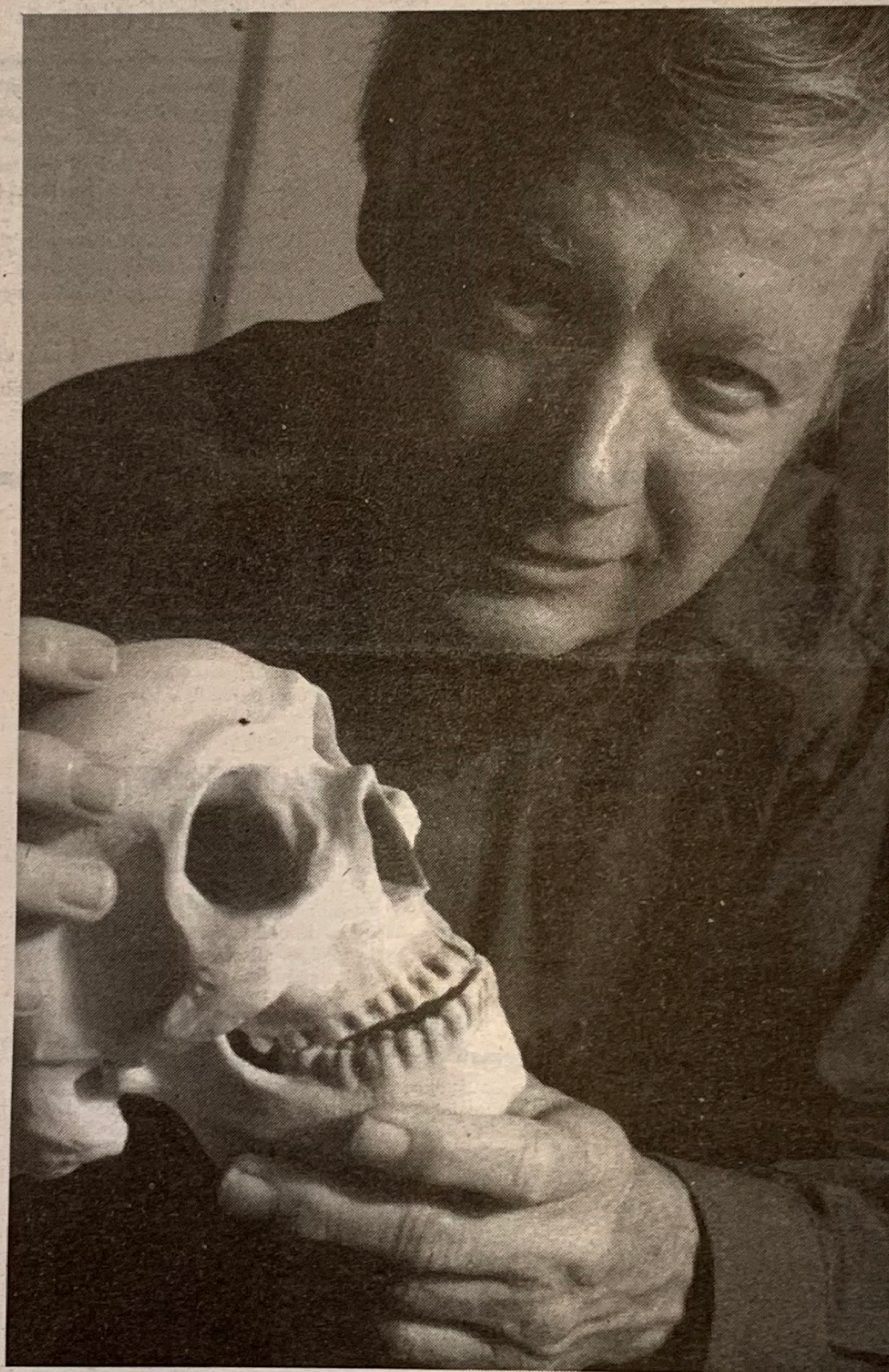
LOCAL EVENTS

Communicator, features illustrative lines from the bard. For example, in a section called "Can Anxiety Work for You?" Leech quotes Cressida in *Troilus and Cressida*: "To fear the worst oft cures the worse." In other words — Leech's own words: "Think of the worst thing that can happen. How bad is that?"

Sometimes Leech enjoys taking the lines out of context. For example, the hallucinatory apostrophe of Lady Macbeth, "Out, damned spot!" is the epigraph he uses for a section on what to do with one's hands while speaking. Those who fail to "let their hands into the communication process" often clutch them in front of their genitals ("the well-known fig leaf position"), hang them at their sides ("like Frankenstein"), or "apply a two-handed death grip to the lectern."

He cites Al Gore's wooden style, before his makeover during the 2000 presidential campaign. "Liven up the body language," is Leech's suggestion. "Ungrip those hands and let them into the action. Then we'll see a more forceful, natural communicator, and we probably won't even notice whether the hands are involved or not."

Most public presentations have either "selling or telling" as their purpose, according to Leech. Even so, it's instructive in itself that Leech's book has nearly as much to say about listening as about speaking. Leech confirms in a conversation with a reporter that he believes "a large part" of any communication happens at the ear end of the exchange. A speech-giver must be attuned to noisy fidgets and amend accordingly. Someone speaking to just one other person needs "to stop



Thomas Leech

once in a while and ask the listener, 'Are we on course?' Maybe your listener isn't tuned in or you're not giving them an opportunity to speak. You need to ask yourself, 'Is it a 50-50 or a soliloquy?'"

If you are subjected to a windbag, polite interruption is not an oxymoron, in Leech's opinion. "I see nothing wrong with the listener conveying that the speaker is monopolizing, as long as it's done tactfully. You can say, 'Hold that thought for a minute.' Or 'Okay, I think I've heard enough about that. Let's move on to another topic.' People don't particularly like to be boring; they just may not realize that they are."

"O, he is tedious/ As a tired horse,

a railing wife,/ Worse than a smoky house," is the exemplary phrase Leech plucks from *Henry IV, Part I*.

It may be taken poorly by the citizens of Indiana, but the 65-year-old Leech, who was born, raised, and attended Purdue University in that state, claims to have seen no "quality" Shakespeare until he came to San Diego 40 years ago and started going to the Old Globe Theatre.

The former aerospace engineer who had a first career with General Dynamics began to study public speaking after he ran for a California state senate seat in 1972 and lost. "I came close in the primary, but my communication skills were not good

enough." After that, he joined Toastmasters International and learned to count his own and other people's "ums" and "y'knows."

You can regularly hear those distracting repetitions on radio, Leech says. Talk-show hosts are particularly guilty. "I'm thinking of some right here in San Diego who could use a little Toastmaster treatment. Sometimes instead of counting, Toastmasters clang a bell. I do that in my own training program. The trouble with 'y'know, y'know, y'know,' is that I'm not hearing what you're saying anymore."

Leech doesn't work much with clients' accents, whether regional or foreign, unless listeners have difficulty understanding them. Many of us could use improvement in the enunciation department, he observes. Try tongue twisters, he suggests. Here is one he uses, from *Love's Labour's Lost*: "The preylful princess pierced and pricked a pretty pleasing pricket."

Currently Leech is preparing a series of presentations to promote *Say It Like Shakespeare* at area bookstores. Perhaps above all he stresses preparedness in business speakers and is nonplussed by those who skip this step in a misguided desire to avoid seeming slick. "The readiness is all," Leech says, quoting *Hamlet*.

Thorough rehearsing is part of that preparation. As Leech notes, Bottom, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, recommends as much to the motley cast who performs the play-within-the-play: "We will meet; and there we may rehearse most obscenely and courageously. Take pains; be perfect: adieu."

— Jeanne Schinto

Author appearance and book signing with Thomas Leech, Thursday, July 12, 6:30 p.m. Bay Books, 1029 Orange Ave., Coronado 619-435-0070

Sunday, July 15, 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Waldenbooks Parkway Plaza 639 Fletcher Parkway El Cajon 619-593-9933

Wednesday, July 18, 7:00 p.m. Earthsong Books 1440 Camino Del Mar Del Mar 858-755-4254

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