

Letting GO

The Monthly Publication of the National Stuttering Association

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4071 E. La Palma Ave, Suite A, Anaheim, California 92807 • 1-800-364-1677 • Fax: 714-630-7707 • email: nsastutter@aol.com • www.nsastutter.org

An Experience at the ASHA Awards Dinner

BY ROB BLOOM

A NEW MEMBER FEELS THE POWER OF THE NSA

YOU'RE A STUTTERER. THERE'S NOTHING THAT CAN BE DONE. GET USED TO IT.

I've heard these expressions my whole life. And I believed them. Until I ate dinner with a group from the NSA. Never before had I been around so many people who stuttered. That in itself was an amazing feeling. But to be surrounded by people who were all so warm, friendly and genuine was a life changing experience.

How could a simple dinner be so powerful? I am at a very unique place in my journey with stuttering. I'm taking the steps down the "path of acceptance" and getting accustomed to stuttering freely in front of others. It's taken me over twenty years to get to this stage.

One of the reasons my journey has been so slow stems from years of negative and bad advice from certain speech-language pathologists I've encountered along the way. I'd been convinced that stuttering was somewhat of a "sentence" to live out and a curse that would forever keep me from leading a normal life. Words do not properly explain the way I felt when these toxic messages, that I'd been fed for so long, dissolved before my very ears.

I was surrounded by people who stutter. And they were smiling and laughing. And talking. And talking. And talking. Sometimes they stuttered, most of the time they were fluent. But it didn't matter. They were positive and confident.

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Attitude-Changing Therapy Is the Most Effective

BY JIM MCCLURE

RESULTS OF A NEW NSA SURVEY

SPEECH THERAPY THAT CHANGES ATTITUDES TOWARD SPEAKING AND STUTTERING APPEARS TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE THAN THERAPIES THAT FOCUS ON SPEECH MECHANICS, according to a recent survey of more than 700 NSA members. The survey also showed that people who attend chapter meetings, conventions and workshops report fewer negative effects of stuttering than those who do not.

The NSA conducted the survey last year because little research has been done to document the impact of stuttering on the lives of people who stutter. It's also difficult to evaluate stuttering therapy and treatment alternatives because there's little comparative data.

Members who responded to the survey may be the largest group to be surveyed on these subjects.

Stuttering interferes with performance at work or in school for eight out of 10 of the 544 adult stutterers who took part in the survey. Nearly four out of 10 report being denied a job or promotion because of their stuttering. Stuttering interferes with the social and family life of nearly two-thirds of survey respondents. 81% say they avoid speaking situations and 69% say they feel embarrassed when people find out they stutter.

There's some good news, however. These

negative effects of stuttering are significantly reduced for people who participate in NSA chapter meetings, workshops and conventions.

Nearly nine out of 10 adult stutterers surveyed have received speech therapy for stuttering and 64% have had speech therapy three or more times. While all therapies and treatments helped at least some of the respondents, therapy that changes attitudes toward speaking and stuttering was considered more successful than therapies that focus on either speaking fluently or stuttering more easily.

Adults who had speech therapy in school considered this therapy largely unsuccessful. Survey respondents were more satisfied with the results of therapy from university speech clinics, private speech therapists and intensive or live-in programs.

Alternative treatments such as assistive devices, psychological counseling and hypnosis were significantly less successful than speech therapy.

The 98 parents of children who stutter who participated in the survey reported that university and private treatment programs were more successful than school speech therapy, but gave grade school and middle school therapy slightly

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A CELEBRATION WAS IN ORDER AFTER THE NSA WAS PRESENTED WITH THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD AT THE ASHA CONFERENCE IN NOVEMBER. TO NAME JUST A FEW WHO JOINED US: STEVE FOGARTY, PETER REITZES, LEE REEVES, LESLIE FURMANSKY, NINA REARDON, KEVIN ELDRIDGE, STEVE HOOD, LARRY MOLT, SCOTT YARUSS, TONY CARUSO, TOM GURRISTER, ELAINE SAIITA, TOM CAGGIANO, SUSAN SHORT, JUDITH ECKARDT, ANNIE BRADBERRY, TAMMY FLORES, BOB QUESAL, BARRY GUITAR, JOE DONAHER, FRANCIS COOK, KEN LOGAN, PETER DUGAN. THIS WAS A GREAT MIX OF SLPS, STUDENTS AND VISITING NSA MEMBERS!

From the Executive Director:

2002 was an extra special year for the NSA

EACH YEAR TAMMY AND I ATTEND THE AMERICAN SPEECH-LANGUAGE AND HEARING ASSOCIATION (ASHA) ANNUAL CONFERENCE where for three days we showcase our services and materials to the attending speech-language pathologists (SLPs). In 2002 the conference, whose theme was "Communication: Our Strongest Link," drew almost seven thousand SLPs.

ASHA is the national professional credentialing association for more than 108,000 audiologists and speech-language pathologists. These are the professionals who assess and treat speech, language, hearing, and related disorders. Most of the SLPs who stopped by our booth are working in the trenches, treating school age children who stutter. Each year, it is our goal over the three days of the conference to educate them about the NSA, show them our age-appropriate materials for their clients, and sell books and products from our large range of offerings.

This past year was extra special for the NSA because we received ASHA's 2002 Distinguished Service Award. (Read more about the award in the October/November 2002 issue.) The award ceremony was exciting for all of us, especially for Tammy, board chairman Lee Reeves and me, since we had the honor of accepting the award for the NSA.

The relationship between the NSA and the professional community is one of vital importance to us. Our goal is helping the person who stutters, and we have a better chance of accomplishing this goal if we and the professional community work together. At this annual conference, we have the opportunity to strengthen existing relationships as well as develop new ones. It is these professionals, many of whom are NSA members, who offer their services to us, and help us create new products and services for the stuttering community.

On another note, last year we conducted a



successful fall drive campaign (see the list of contributors in this issue) and thanks to the generosity of our donors, we are creating the first in a new series of materials for the adult community. The booklet "How to Be More Successful in Interpersonal Relationships," should be completed by the spring.

I want to thank everyone working behind the scenes, and every single one of you who continue to support the NSA.

Annie Bradberry
Executive Director

Images from ASHA



• ANNIE BRADBERRY, LEE REEVES AND TAMMY FLORES RECEIVING THE ASHA DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD FOR THE NSA.



• SLP'S SCOTT YARUSS AND BOB QUESAL WORKING HARD AT ASHA



• ELAINE SAITTA, WA., HOLDING THE NSA DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD WITH SUSAN SHORT AND LYNN SHIELDS FROM MISSOURI IN THE BACKGROUND.



• ANNIE BRADBERRY, SLP AND NSA MEMBER TOM GURRISTER AND UTAH CHAPTER LEADER AND NSA BOARD MEMBER STEVE FOGARTY IN THE NSA BOOTH AT ASHA.

THE ASHA AWARD'S DINNER continued

And it showed.

It was an honor to spend an evening with the NSA. Especially on the night that the NSA was recognized by ASHA for their years of service and commitment to educating people about stuttering. So many conversations stand out from the night as special and too many inspiring words were said to retell here.

But one moment will forever stand out in my mind: a teary-eyed Annie Bradberry saying that the reason her life was so good was because she stutters. This perspective epitomizes the NSA.

Here is a group of people who refuse to buy into the philosophy of "once a stutterer, always a stutterer." Instead, they've embraced their stuttering and made significant progress. As I prepare for a career as an SLP, I will, most definitely, employ the NSA way of positive thinking in therapy with clients.

The night was magical. The people were inspiring. And the experience was, without a doubt, life changing.

••• ROB BLOOM LEFT THE WORLD OF WRITING ADS TO PURSUE A MASTER'S DEGREE IN SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY. WHEN HE'S NOT STUDYING, ROB ENJOYS DRAWING, WRITING SCREENPLAYS AND SMILING. MORE THAN ANYTHING, ROB WANTS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES AND LIVE EACH DAY TO IT'S FULLEST.



Living Up to My Own Potential

BY ISHA COOK

I WAS THE WORLD AUTHORITY ON MY OWN EXPERIENCE

I RECENTLY HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF SPEAKING TO A CLASS OF SLP GRADUATE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF REDLANDS. Last year I spoke to a class with Randy and Cari, but this year I did it alone.

The class had approximately 20 students, and I felt like a teacher, as I spoke in the front of the room for over thirty minutes. I related various experiences in my life as a person who stutters. I'd love to share some highlights of this experience with you.

I told the class how I have been a legal secretary for more than eleven years and that the attorney I worked for had retired in July. I knew I was going to have to find another job but my fear of being interviewed was enormous.

I related how one day a client thought I was high on drugs when I couldn't tell her my name on the telephone so she called the police to come and investigate. I also shared the story of how my childhood friend, who I hadn't seen in years, had his younger sister ask me if I still stuttered. That moment was an epiphany for me because I realized that other people knew I stuttered and that my "tricks" weren't fooling anyone.

I told them how useless my speech therapy from grades 7-12 was since we only played board games.

I shared how I'm currently in therapy with a wonderful therapist, Dr. Christopher Walker, who tells me what I need to hear, not want I want to hear, and how he is the one who encouraged me to contact the NSA.

He first made the suggestion over ten years ago, but I was not ready at that point in my life. I ceased my therapy for about seven years, but when he recommended that I write Annie a letter in the fall of 2000, I was ready and willing.

I'll never forget how special I felt when I received Annie's phone call the very next day after I sent her the letter. She told me about the local Orange County chapter and encouraged me to attend the next meeting the following week. I did and have been a member of the chapter ever since. The members welcomed me with open arms, and I felt comfortable from the beginning.

I related my incredible conference experiences of how I was a First Timer in Boston and chaired a committee this year in Anaheim. I spoke about how the NSA empowered me and gave me confidence. I never knew that I loved to talk so much. I went from being shy Isha to "can't shut her up" Isha. I described how thankful I was to have met great people in the NSA that I wouldn't have met any other way.

I feel so blessed to have incredible people such as Debbie and Stephanie Nicolai, Megan Fujiwara, Jason and Richard Peterson, Ryan Bassett, Luis Patino, David Brandau, Al Thomas,

and Sebastian Scala as my friends. They have each added something so special to my life that if I could give them the cash equivalent of what they have given me, they'd all be millionaires.

It was great telling the SLPs of tomorrow how I've changed so dramatically due to my active participation in the NSA and how I'm a walking billboard for the organization. I'm doing things now that I would have never done before such as running for chapter president, public speaking, giving regular financial reports at staff meetings, being interviewed by staff, and mentioning my speech during the interview.

For me, that is the beauty of the NSA – realizing my full potential and blossoming like a flower.

The students asked me questions, and I did my best to answer them. I also passed around the latest issue of *Letting GO*. After class was dismissed about half the class stayed to talk to me. It was an amazing experience, and I would do it again in a heartbeat. It's a win-win situation since I was able to practice my public speaking and the students got to meet an actual stutterer.

My personal growth would not have been possible without my amazing supportive friends and family. I would like to thank Try, Molly, Blake, Mik, Mom, Bill, Dr. Walker, and my number one supporter, Sebastian.

I'll see you all next summer in Nashville.



... ISHA COOK IS THE OFFICE MANAGER OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE AT DOHENY EYE INSTITUTE IN LOS ANGELES AND HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF THE NSA FOR TWO YEARS.

My Commitment Changed Everything

BY UMBERTO BELLINI

YOU ARE WHAT YOU THINK YOU ARE.

IT ALL STARTED IN DECEMBER OF 1984. By that time I had reflected at length on the experiences, of Dr. Frankel, who, in his book *In Search of Meaning*, relates his agonies as a Jew in a Nazi concentration camp. There, by controlling his thoughts, and therefore his feelings, he was able to feel, "as free as a bird" in a situation where dependency was the rule.

At that time, I made the commitment that I would never, never, but never be either embarrassed, discouraged or devastated any time I stuttered. These feelings had ruled my fifty-plus years of stuttering and already had become an automatic response, which led me into self-pity and despair.

By doing so, I assumed that, as a child of God, and therefore a worthwhile person, I had the right to stutter, the same way that other people were not ashamed of their disabilities.

Almost immediately, my speech pattern changed. My head twitching, which was interpreted by some as an epilepsy attack, almost disappeared, and I was even able to establish occasional eye contact with my listeners. I still stuttered, but I felt more relaxed and at ease.

Amazingly enough, to change my thinking pattern was not as arduous as I thought. Occasionally I had relapses, but my commitment was 95% successful!

Then, in August of 1985, I made another commitment. I decided that I would speak to at least one stranger every single day. To keep my promise, I approached fishermen, passersby, farmers, salespeople, sanitation workers, and from them I learned, among other things, how to fish for snappers, how to grow tomatoes, and how to preserve beach plums!

I realized that most people are unaffected by my stuttering, and that the few who were uncomfortable, probably had never experienced speaking to a stutterer. At that point, I realized that all my lifetime feelings of inadequacy were strictly self-imposed.

I also realized that people are understanding, and compassionate, and that they judge us, by what we say, rather than how we say it. I further realized that our life is a mirror, and, if we expect rejection, we see rejection in other people's eyes.

Finally, I realized that we can change our lives if we change our attitudes toward life.

Yes, the result of my commitments is that I have broken out of my self-made prison and finally conquered the fear that had ruled all my life — the fear of stuttering!



... UMBERTO BELLINI, A RETIRED ENGINEER, HAS BEEN AN NSA MEMBER SINCE THE EARLY 80s. HE WROTE US THAT "RECENTLY WHILE CLEANING MY CLOSET, I FOUND THIS LETTER WRITTEN IN THE LATE 80s THAT I HAD INTENDED TO SEND TO LETTING GO." BETTER LATE THAN NEVER, UMBERTO. WE'RE GLAD TO FINALLY RECEIVE IT.

Being on the News

BY MARILEE L. FINI

THE MORE YOU DO, THE EASIER IT GETS.

IT WAS A COOL, CRISP MORNING, AND I WAS GETTING READY TO BE ON THE NEWS. What was I thinking? How did I allow myself to agree to this? Had I lost my mind?

These were some of the questions going through my mind that morning. I had been on T.V. two other times when we were preparing

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What's Happening?

the latest news • hot items • who's doing what • who went where • upcoming events • etc.

COMPILED BY CATHY OLISH



NSA members recently described their experience as people who stutter to students at San Francisco State University's Communicative Disorders Graduate Program. **Nora O'Connor, Philip Catalan, Todd Morse** and **Robin Ottesen** provided the students an opportunity to put down their textbooks and actually see the many colors of stuttering. Professor **Minnie Graham** was delighted with the presentation and invited the group back again next school year.

After the presentation, the group was flooded with e-mails of appreciation. One e-mail stated, "Each of you has a compelling story to tell... sometimes humorous, sometimes agonizing, sometimes sad...but always inspiring in that each of you has a story of survival and endurance. You captured our minds and our hearts." The group is excited to go back to SFSU next year, allowing students to see and interact with the many faces of stuttering as they prepare to become speech-language pathologists.

At a recent **Kevin Kline** Film Retrospective at a theater in Hollywood, CA, the box office gave every ticket purchaser to a screening of "A Fish Called Wanda" the following signed statement from Mr. Kline: "It was never my intent to offend or cause any pain to any person or group of persons who stutter through my por-



• PAST NSA BOARD CHAIRMAN PAUL YOUNG CELEBRATED A HAPPY HOLIDAY WITH WIFE MARIETTE AND THEIR DAUGHTERS MARY CLARE, THREE AND CATHERINE, ONE.

trayal in *A Fish Called Wanda* or through public comments of mine reported in the media concerning the National Stuttering Project's public protest against the film. The character I portrayed in *A Fish Called Wanda* was not meant to be taken as a role model for any civilized person when talking to a stutterer. I apologize for any pain I might have inadvertently caused persons who stutter. Thank you." NSA member and former Advocacy Committee Chairperson **Ira Zimmerman** provided the theater with Mr. Kline's public statement which he helped Mr. Kline prepare back in 1990. Mr. Kline won the Best Supporting Actor Oscar for his portrayal in the *Wanda* film.

The NSA is sponsoring an Hispanic Family Day in collaboration with the Boston Public Schools Spanish bilingual speech therapists and the two Boston chapters. The workshop will be conducted in Spanish with English translations as needed and will be held on April 5, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 pm at the Campbell Resource Center in Dorchester. For information, contact **Lourdes Ramos-Heirnichs** at lramos2659@aol.com, **Bob Rochefort** at rrochefort@aol.com or **Holly Brown** at hollyj332@aol.com.

The **Speak Easy Symposium** (A Conference for People who Stutter) will be held in May, 2003 in Saddle Brook, NJ. Mark your calendars now for this event. Anyone who stutters should attend, and speech-language professionals are also welcome. A highlight of the weekend will be the Sunday morning **Speak Easy Comedy Club**, hosted by George Laday. Sign up to do your 5 or 10 minute stand-up shtick! For more information and to be included on their mailing list, please visit their website at: <www.speak-easy.org> or e-mail them at <steveallen@speakeasy.org>.

The NSA held a Continuing Education Day for SLPs and students in Salt Lake City, Utah on November 8th. The event was organized by NSA Executive Director **Annie Bradberry** along with longtime local NSA member and SLP **Tom Gurrister** at the University of Utah. More than 50 local SLPs and students came to hear speaker **Bill Murphy**, from Purdue University, speak about *Working With School Aged Children Who Stutter: Modifying Feelings and Attitudes and Increasing Self Esteem* and receive continuing education credits. A big thanks to Tom and the university for providing the meeting room and to local NSA board member **Steve Fogarty**, who coordinated the amazing amount of donations to help bring the event to life as well as adver-



tising for it. Also thanks to long time NSA member **Katina Skedros-Temme** who helped with just about everything!

On November 9, the NSA along with Wasatch Speech and Language Center and the University of Utah, hosted their first family day for kids and parents in the local area. Presenters and facilitators were **Bill Murphy, Tom Gurrister, Maria Gurrister** and **Dr. Michael Blomgren**. Volunteers who helped before and during the event were: **Bob Smith, Michelle Lewis, Merridy Ayer, Mike Tallon, Roger Eggett, Katina Skedros-Temme, Brett Larsen, Susan Whitney, Brook Adams, Dan Nailen, Valentine** and **Stephen Brown. Steve Fogarty** secured donations for food, beverage and snacks for both events from PF Changs, Red Rock Brewery, Market St. Grill, Gastronomy, Litzas Pizza, The Coffee Garden, and Squatters who topped the day off with Ben & Jerry's ice cream. Executive Director **Annie Bradberry** was there to assist with this event as well as the one on November 8th.



I'm Still in the Game

BY DANIEL RADCLIFF

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN MY LIFE WAS SO SIMPLE.

I made the rules as I went along, and my worries were few. I have learned many lessons. Some mistakes can be corrected and some can only be forgiven. To just exist from day to day is basic survival. To really live and seize life's lessons is the greatest gift you give to yourself and to others.

Your strengths and weaknesses will be constantly tested. The tests you give yourself are the hardest, yet you will feel the most rewarded in passing them. Compassion and a sense of fairness should govern your life. Without either quality, you cannot grow in mind or in spirit.

My life is no longer simple. There is much that I still have to learn, but regardless of the rules, I am still in the game!!

The above passage is from a speech I wrote to present to SLP students. I can really relate to the passage in a realistic way. I used to live like that. I made the rules as I went, and yeah, my worries were few.

Although I came from a family famous for people dying young, I figured nothing could happen to me, the worst being I would drop dead. I broke family tradition by surviving a heart attack at age 36. Then I had a sudden onset of stuttering at age 40. Only one cousin had ever stuttered, that was as a child and mildly at that. Since then I have learned many lessons.

Many of the lessons I have learned were reinforced through my speech therapy. My attitude was not exactly positive, and I didn't expect to stay with speech therapy. I had seen others who had gone to programs, and they didn't seem much better to me. I didn't like my stutter, but had few expectations for improvement. My life had not made me a trusting person, and I was a pretty cynical puppy.

As the passage said, "My life was no longer simple. There was much I still had to learn." Although my life is no longer simple, it is more fulfilling, and my attitude is much more positive. I have my dysfluency to thank for many, if not all of my improvements. It provided me with the opportunity to have met people I may not have met otherwise, and friendships developed. It provided the chance to learn about different topics that I would have otherwise not have had any reason or desire to. Although I have always been sensitive to the needs of the disabled, my dysfluency gave me a deeper understanding of the problems disabled people go through. It taught me that I had to learn how to accept help, and that I had to start trusting people again, starting with my speech therapist.

Trusting my speech therapist was one of the best things I ever did to improve not only my

speech, but my attitude as well. She was easy to trust because of her caring attitude. It helps to know that someone actually cares. Although she was firm and I didn't get away with too much, she was always kind, never cruel. It was good that she was firm, I needed firmness, because nothing else would have worked.

As we worked together, I soon learned to trust her and worked hard to do as she said. Other friends were refreshing me as to how important proper grammar was. My therapist had her work cut out. She worked on stopping some of my favorite expressions and stopped me from coining new words when I couldn't find one to fit my needs, such as "differentier."

Some of the most important things my therapist taught me came after we learned the basics and my fluency was improving, mainly my attitude. She kept reminding me I had a choice — I could make a difficult situation into a positive one, or a negative one, "Which were we going to do?"

She worked hard in assisting me in all the aspects of stuttering, the physical, psychological, and emotional aspects and how they tied in with other areas of life as well as speech. She was with me assisting every step of the way.

It seems that my speech therapy has prepared me for what I have to face now. I have an inflammation in my brain, possibly due to a stroke. I have been diagnosed with "possible mild Cerebral Palsy." I was recently told that according to two different EKGs I have probably suffered another heart attack in the last year and a half. And last but not least, after a few months of testing which included thirty blood tests, MRIs, CT scans, and all but an autopsy, I find that I have a motor neuron disease—Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis—commonly called Lou Gehrigs Disease. I can no longer write. It is my left hand that is affected, and I am left handed. I have no strength left in it, and it will spread through my whole body doing the same damage.

Without the encouragement and concern of my therapists I would not have the positive attitude I do towards my problems. I do have a choice. I can make it a positive situation, or a negative one. This semester we have worked on pace and lung volume. It will be very important to know this as my muscles weaken and my speech fails.

Because of this semester I will be able to outlast a little longer by knowing how lung volume affects speech and how to better utilize my lung volume. I now have the confidence to take advantage of speaking situations I used to avoid. I can speak confidently in stressful and emotional situations.

I guess what I am trying to say is, as speech therapists you have the opportunity to make big differences in your clients lives. Unless you have been dysfluent, you cannot imagine how difficult it is to be unable to communicate even the basics, especially if you suddenly become dysfluent after several years of fluency. Or the

feelings of embarrassment, fear, and sometimes helplessness that accompanies it. You may not believe the feeling one has when they know that their therapist really cares, or the strength they draw from it.

My neurologist said that I probably did not live by the rules, and the way my symptoms presented I do not get sick by the rules either. I have a lot of things wrong with me, major things. Two progressive diseases, one has the potential to be fatal, the other is invariably fatal. With all the problems I have had, one would think the dysfluency would have been the least of my worries, and the easiest to deal with. I am still the same person whether I stutter or not, yet the stutter is the hardest thing I have ever had to deal with, it really is.

I cannot complain though, I have come out ahead and gotten a lot of personal growth from it. Although I would rather have learned it other ways, I would rather stutter as I do now and keep what I have learned, than to never have stuttered and be the way I was before.

I hope you all enjoy the work you will be doing, and I also hope you know how much difference you can make in a stutterer's life and even if the improvement seems little, it is a lot to a stutterer.

In my case, I will eventually not only lose the basic functions, but my speech as well, and ultimately, the battle. I have been in speech therapy for a year and a half now. If I am still alive in a year and a half, I may well be totally speechless.

The last year and a half was not a waste of time, however. It helped me to be better able to deal with my present situation as well as to communicate smoothly. Of all the doctors and specialists I have seen in the last two years, it was the speech therapists who have done the most for me, and I really appreciate all they did. I have a lot of problems, and as the passage I quoted at the beginning said, my life is no longer simple. There is much that I still have to learn.

But regardless of the rules...thanks to speech therapists like yourselves...I am still in the game!!

... DANIEL CAN BE REACHED AT DANIEL.RADCLIFF@VERISON.NET

Donate to the NSA through United Way

Do you traditionally make donations to United Way through your company? If so, Direct Designation allows you to specify which non-profit organization you want your funds directed to. If you choose the NSA, we can provide your employer by fax or mail with the NSA's proof of non-profit status.

OUR VOICE

NSA young people and parents speak out



My Own Peace

BY BRAD BARBER

TELLING YOUR STORY
IN A CLASS PAPER

Classmates can give you a hard time when they don't understand about your speech. Many of our teens have had great success—and sometimes, extraordinary success—in changing those attitudes simply by telling the other kids what's really going on. One effective approach is to tell your story in a class paper. That's what Brad Barber did. This paper, which was written for his literature class, describes his journey thus far in dealing with his stuttering. Maybe writing a paper or giving a speech is something you'd like to do to help others in your class learn about stuttering.

My Promise

BY MEERA BHATT

*I promise You have a Nnnname -
it is Yours whether You ssstumble upon it,
mmmmispronounce it,
or pretend You ddddon't own it.
I promise You have a Vvoice
whether it cccracks, breaks, or rrrrattles
or dwindles down in silent, mmmournful
groans
I promise it mmmatters what You ssay,
whether your words ttrickle in symphony
or halt like mine
But my promises are in vain -
if you have a name and don't shout it,
if you have a voice and don't own it,
if you have a say, and don't say it,
you ddddon't have a name,
you ddddon't have a voice,
you ddddon't have a say
and all my promises,
they are in vain.*

... MEERA BHATT IS A STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA IN LOS ANGELES MAJORING IN PSYCHOLOGY.

IN THE BOOK, A SEPARATE PEACE, THE MAIN CHARACTER, GENE FORRESTER, EVENTUALLY FINDS PEACE WITH HIMSELF. It is a frustrating and painful experience for Gene. He struggles to understand his relationship with his best friend, Finny. I have a personal situation, which I have had to come to peace with. It has been a long journey for me.

When I was in second grade, I began to talk differently than I had before. I began to have speech disfluency. In other words, I stuttered. This was very difficult for me. It made me feel different from the other kids. I couldn't figure out what was happening to my speech. Some of the other kids started to make fun of me. This was hard to deal with!

As time passed, it seemed like my speech was gradually getting worse. There were times when I couldn't say a sentence without stuttering. Since I was having so much trouble speaking, I didn't even want to raise my hand or speak in class. Sometimes I couldn't even talk to my friends. I remember when it was time to do the lunch count, I couldn't even say "hot" or "cold."

I really wanted to get my speech better, but going to the school speech teacher wasn't help-

ing. Also, it made me feel embarrassed to be taken out of class to see her. My parents found a private speech pathologist who thought she could possibly help me. At first, I was nervous to see her and talk to her. After a while, I become comfortable working with her and talking about my problems with her.

For a long time, I didn't want to admit or accept that I stuttered. I thought that one day I would wake up and no longer stutter. In the meantime, I tried to hide my stuttering as much as possible. I tried to do this by not volunteering in class, or not talking to my friends when I was having a lot of trouble speaking. As it turns out, this was not the best way to handle my problem.

Over the years, I have learned different ways of managing my speech. These are techniques known as "speech tools." I have also learned to face my fears, such as calling people on the phone and giving presentations. Over the past eight years, I have seen dramatic improvement in managing my speech and overcoming my anxiety. There have been many ups and downs along the way, but I am heading in the right direction.

It is a long journey for me. I have learned to accept that I will always stutter. I also know that I should talk whenever I want to communicate. I am slowly learning that stuttering should not control my life. I must control my own life. Maybe some day the medical world will come up with something to help those who stutter, but for now I must be able to accept and live with my stuttering.

I will not let stuttering define my life.

... BRAD IS A FRESHMAN AT VERNON HILLS HIGH SCHOOL IN ILLINOIS.

BEING ON THE NEWS continued

for the NSA Cleveland convention in 1994. Both experiences were very stressful and embarrassing for me. At that time, I vowed that I would never do this again.

And then came this great opportunity that I couldn't resist.

The T.V. station wanted to do a segment on stuttering and feature my private practice. The production began in my office, where the cameraman filmed me doing stuttering therapy with an adult client. Amazingly, I was able to forget about the cameraman and was able to carry on therapy like I normally do.

The reporter interviewed two of my clients and then me. When it was time for my interview, I was feeling extremely relaxed and good about the whole experience. During the interview, I stuttered openly and was focused on the content of what I was saying. It was funny, my own stuttering was the farthest thing from my mind. I was much more concerned about reaching out to others who stutter and letting them know that there is hope and they were not alone.

In this experience, the focus was off of me

and on what I could do for others. When I was done, I was on Cloud 9. Being on T.V had been a very feared speaking situation, but now I had conquered it and survived!

Earlier that month I had contacted Russ Hicks via e-mail for some words of wisdom because I was very apprehensive and scared about doing this. Russ told me to present an honest self. As I looked back at the videotape, I did that. I presented myself honestly, and I did not cover up my stuttering but openly showed it. Once again, I learned "the truth will set you free."

It had been fear that caused me to be apprehensive and doubt that I could do this. When I set aside my fear and did it anyway, I was able to reach out to others to bring them awareness and hope.

The next time, you are faced with a feared speaking situation, seek support and just do it!

... MARILEE L. FINI IS CHAPTER LEADER OF THE CLEVELAND-EAST GROUP AS WELL AS A PRACTICING SPEECH-PATHOLOGIST. SHE CURRENTLY HAS HER OWN PRIVATE PRACTICE IN CLEVELAND, OHIO. SHE HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF NSA FOR 10 YEARS. SHE CAN BE CONTACTED AT MLF_SPEECH@YAHOO.COM

ATTITUDE-CHANGING THERAPY *continued*

higher marks than did adult stutterers. This suggests the possibility that today's children who stutter may be receiving slightly better therapy in school than adult stutterers received when they were kids.

One-quarter of parents got bad advice about stuttering from physicians and other professionals: They were advised to postpone speech therapy even though most experts recommend early intervention for children who stutter.

Access to treatment is an issue for some survey respondents. Nearly three out of ten adult stutterers said the cost of speech therapy was prohibitive, and a few parents said their children had been denied access to school speech therapy.

Although all survey respondents were NSA members, less than half have ever attended a national convention, regional workshop or local chapter meeting. Those who had attended reported significantly less interference with work and social life, avoided speaking situations less, and were less likely to feel embarrassed about their stuttering.

When asked which NSA programs they consider most important, educating the public about stuttering topped the list, followed by resources for speech-language pathologists and the *Letting GO* newsletter.

Survey questionnaires were mailed to 1372 NSA members and 710 responded. The full report of the survey will be available soon on the NSA's web site, <http://www.WeStutter.org>.



... JIM MCCLURE IS A BOARD MEMBER OF THE NSA AND AN INDEPENDENT PUBLIC RELATIONS CONSULTANT.

FALL DRIVE DONORS

SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL OF YOU BELOW WHO SUPPORTED OUR FALL DRIVE CAMPAIGN. Because of you, our booklet "How to Be More Successful in Interpersonal Relationships" is being created right now! Your contributions continue to allow us to expand programs and develop new materials. Together we are making a difference.

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DO YOU WANT TO START AN NSA SUPPORT GROUP/CHAPTER IN YOUR AREA?
 Contact the National Office for more information
1-800-364-1677

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 Editor: John C. Harrison
 Associate Editor: Annie Bradberry
 Assistant Editor: Cathy Olish
 Art Director: Doris B. Harrison
 Our Voice Coordinator: Nina Reardon
 Phone: (714) 630-7600 / (800) 364-1677
 Fax: (714) 630-7707
 e-mail: nsastutter@aol.com
 Home Page: www.nsastutter.org
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Chapter News

from Bonnie Weiss

N E W C H A P T E R

ALBANY, NY

Grace Gregory and Mary Archbault have formed an NSA chapter in Albany. They meet on the first Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. at the College of St. Rose. Their first meeting was in October. Grace writes that both she and Mary were at the Anaheim convention last summer and decided to take action and start a chapter in their area. They're excited about the chapter, and have six to eight people attending. Sister Charleen Bloom and Donna Cooperman at the College of St. Rose have also actively supported the new chapter.

BOSTON, MA

Boston chapter leader Bob Rochefort writes that they have a new member, Bren, who moved to Boston and was previously involved with the San Francisco chapter. At two recent meetings, they used table topics for both their three and five minute speeches. Some topics were based on Chinese proverbs—a real challenge! The Boston folks will be helping to sponsor an NSA Hispanic Family Day in the spring.

BOSTON-NORTH, MA

In December, the Boston-North chapter met at the 99 Restaurant, a local dining place, rather than in their usual hospital conference room. Holly Brown reported there were eight members present. Ed Giordano told the waitress who they were, and she responded that her 40-year-old brother stutters, so she was familiar with it. The group reviewed the year just concluded and where they want to be at the end of 2003. They also talked about future group outings.

DALLAS, TX

The Dallas group has recently concluded a four-part series of meetings entitled "My Story." Lee Reeves came up with the idea. However, what he thought could be accomplished in one meeting ended up taking four. At the August meeting, members discussed their early childhood and the influence of their parents. September's discussion centered around elementary school and their first exposure (if any) to speech therapy. In October, members shared their high school experiences and also their first jobs, discussing such questions as "How did we cope?" and "What therapy (if any) worked or did not work?" In November, the meeting topic was on both looking back and toward the future. Russ Hicks writes that this was one of the most interesting and fascinating topics they have used. They averaged 15 to 20 people at each meeting.

GRAND RAPIDS, MI

Kristin Thornton writes that the Grand Rapids group had a meeting recently at the Outback Steakhouse. They brainstormed about how to publicize their chapter meetings, including placing announcements in church newsletters and sending flyers to local schools. They also plan to call previous contacts. The group discussed job interviews and the difficulties faced in doing phone and face-to-face interviews. In December they held a holiday get-together in December at a local restaurant.

LOS ANGELES, CA

The L.A. chapter had 16 people at their last meeting of 2002, which was the NSA Christmas Party! It was good to see some members they had not seen in a long, long time. Three who came were not people who stuttered, but speech-language pathology students. They had been to a couple of the regular meetings and enjoyed it so much that they decided to attend the party as well. Gail Wilson-Lew is the leader of this group.

MOBILE, AL

Steve Hood writes that their recent meetings have included discussions on speech mechan-

ics and attitudes and feelings. Both topics are important, since people need to work in one or both areas. They also talked about the need for positive awareness of behaviors. Other topics discussed were speech techniques and voluntary stuttering. One member said that what helped him most was working on particular issues, such as being called upon unexpectedly. They agreed that when under stress, it is better to work on a few speech techniques, rather than concentrating on too many things.

ROYAL OAK, MI

The Royal Oak group targeted a meeting specifically as "teen night." There is a teen group called "Twist" that meets quarterly, and they were invited to a meeting where teens and adults could share experiences. Some of the parents also attended. Bernie Weiner writes that the teens received a good taste of what it is like to be an adult stutterer and still lead productive lives. One teen shared his experiences in an acting class and received tips and suggestions about how he could incorporate his stuttering into the scene. Bernie observed that these kids know much more about stuttering and how to handle it than most of the adults did at his age.

Want to Present A Workshop at the Nashville Conference?

Workshop proposals are now being accepted for this year's conference in Nashville, Tennessee! You can request a Workshop Submission Form from the national office at 1-800-364-1677 or email us at: nsastutter@aol.com. The form is also available on our conference website at: www.nsastutter.org.

The deadline to receive proposals is: April 1, 2003. The "primary" contact individual will be notified by April 15, 2003. Schedules are subject to change.



4071 E. La Palma Ave., Suite A
Anaheim, CA 92807

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