

4th of July Celebration of YOU!

Registration is now OPEN for the National Stuttering Association 31st Annual Conference! Join us July 2nd–6th in America’s capital city – Washington, DC. That’s right, we’re headed to the nation’s capital this year to celebrate not only America’s birthday on the 4th of July but the freedom of our own speech! This year’s conference hotel is the **Renaissance Washington, DC Downtown**, and serves as the ideal location for experiencing the history and culture of this historic area and for gathering together to celebrate our 31st Annual Conference.

Whether this is your first conference or your twentieth, we have something is store just for you. As you walk through the door you will immediately feel a connection like none other. During your conference stay you will have the opportunity to experience life-changing workshops, keynote speakers, events, tours, and excursions, Live and Silent Charity Auctions, as well as our Saturday Night Banquet where we dance the night away. With over 700 in attendance and more than 75 workshops, you will hear from leading researchers and industry experts as they discuss their current work, while other sessions focus on motivation, support, encouragement, new ideas, and new perspectives. We also offer an entire program of workshops specially designed for kids, tweens, teens, siblings, and parents! Interested in presenting a workshop? Visit WeStutter.org/Annual-Conference/Workshop-Information and submit a Workshop Proposal Form by March 1st, and you may just be one of our workshop leaders this year!

Just because workshops finish up at the end of the day, that doesn’t mean that the fun has to end! We are proud to offer a wide variety of tours and events at all price points that you can experience in this fascinating city, including visits to DC’s historical landmarks, monuments, and memorials. Tour space is limited so reserve your tickets now! Looking for something a little less organized? Grab a new friend or a group, or just head to the lobby to enjoy your free time interacting with others who share the same struggles, joys, and experiences with stuttering. 

Mark your calendars! Important 31st Annual Conference dates to remember:

- ★ **February 15th:** Last day to book the conference hotel at the ‘early bird’ rate
- ★ **March 1st:** Workshop Submission Forms due
- ★ **March 31st:** Early Bird Registration discounted rates end
- ★ **June 1st:** Last day to submit Scholarship Applications
- ★ **June 19th:** Last day to register online
- ★ **July 2:** 31st Annual Conference begins!



Helping Others

STEPHANIE NICOLAI



Ever since my very first words were uttered, it was obvious that I was very different from everyone else. It would take several minutes to say something that would take any other

person just a few seconds. I would jerk my head, run out of breath, even stomp my feet to try to get the words out. I stuttered severely for many years. It was difficult to find friends that would not bully or mock me, and my parents searched and searched for some type of support for me.

At 10 years old, I was introduced to The National Stuttering Association. I went into my first NSA Youth Day having no idea how much my life would change by the end of the day. I got to talk to people who spoke just like me, who waited for me, and who treasured every word I said no matter how long it took me.

We were encouraged to attend the Annual Conference across the country in Boston. Not imagining how it could possibly get any better, my family and I went to Boston that summer to see what everyone was raving about. That conference changed my life both personally and professionally, and if not for that conference and the feeling of being completely supported in whatever it was that I wanted to do, I probably would not be in graduate school right now. I will always remember what it felt like being surrounded by hundreds of people who supported me and truly understood me. It is that feeling that I strive to pass along in my professional goals.

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 #NSAinDC14
 **twitter**
 Be sure to check out 'WeStutter' on Facebook and Twitter today!

www.WeStutter.org

Volunteering at ASHA 2013

DAVID BLAZINA

When I heard that the ASHA convention was coming to Chicago in November, I asked Tammy if she needed any volunteers to help man the NSA booth. I had volunteered in a similar capacity the last time the convention came to Chicago in 2008, and had a good time answering questions and handing out materials. I also learned that if there is one thing convention-goers love, it's free stuff that will wind up in the back of a drawer in 36 hours.

After arriving at the convention center and some initial difficulty finding each other...

David: "I'm at the registration area."

Tammy: "Where? I don't see you."

David: "I'm just to the left of the escalators... um, unless you're facing the opposite direction, then I guess I'm to the right of the escalators."

Tammy: "I still don't see you."

David: "Next to the big column. I'm waving... tall guy in a black coat."

Tammy: "Turn to your left."

David: "I don't..."

Tammy: "Your other left."

David: "Oh, hey. What's up?"

Tammy met me with an ID badge and we were able to make our way to the NSA booth. I got a quick rundown of what was for sale and what was for free, and then we were ready to greet the teeming masses! The only problem was that it was still relatively early in the morning and many of the attendees were either in workshops and presentations. So, we waited. A couple of other volunteers, **Kenny Koroll** and **Katie Gore**, arrived, and shortly thereafter traffic around the booths began to pick up. Typical questions we received were about whether or not certain books were available, if the NSA has chapter meetings in various states, and if the pamphlets were available in bulk. Many of the attendees were SLP students and wanted to know if we had information about specific groups such as pre-school children, school-age children, and teens, as well as resources specifically for SLPs, parents, and listeners.

The hits of the NSA booth, however, were clearly our 'Keep Calm and Stutter On' t-shirts. As more people circulated around the convention floor we had an increasing

number of people inquire about the t-shirts, and they began to sell...and sell...and sell. They sold so well that soon there were people lined up three and four deep asking about additional sizes and colors, most of which we did not have in stock but cheerfully noted that all sizes as well as a veritable rainbow of colors were available on the NSA website. After many sales, and several rather awkward minutes when I attempted to remove the shirt that was on the display mannequin, we were completely sold out.

One woman that I had been talking to about some of the NSA materials began asking questions about my background and experiences as a PWS. Her young son stutters, and like many parents she was concerned about how it would impact his education, career, etc. She seemed relieved when I told her that I, as well as many of the PWS I have met through the NSA, have successful careers and do what we need to do to live our lives as best as we can. When her questions about developmental issues became more involved I switched places with Katie Gore, who was in the midst of completing a sale, so she



could talk to an SLP. I didn't think that my anecdotal experience was especially valuable at that point and decided that "Qualified Professional" was better suited to answer her questions than "Random Man at Booth."

It was a fun afternoon, and I would encourage anyone who has the opportunity to volunteer at an NSA event near you to do so. It's a good excuse to step out of your comfort zone a bit while talking about stuttering and the NSA, and a way to lend a hand to an organization that has helped a lot of people without asking for a whole lot in return. 

Welcome, 2014!

KENNY KOROLL :: CHAIRMAN, NSA BOARD OF DIRECTORS



I hope that this issue of LETTING GO finds all of you happy and healthy to begin 2014! Let me begin by saying how extremely excited and honored I am to be serving you as

Chairman of the NSA Board of Directors. Let's all thank Sheryl Hunter for her leadership in serving as Chair for the past two years, and for remaining on our Board as continued support. A big thank you also goes to **Bill Smith**, **Cathy Olish Maciejewski**, and **Jim McClure** for their hard work as they step down after serving on the board over the past several years. We would also like to officially welcome two new board members, **Cameron Francek**, who now serves as our Volunteer Coordinator, and **Ben North**, our newly-elected Teen Advisory Committee Representative.

A new year often starts with resolutions of some sort, and whether it is exercising more, eating better, or being more frugal, the list can go on and on. I'm wondering how many of you made a resolution related to *stuttering*? Examples of stuttering resolutions include challenging yourself to use better eye contact, advertising the fact that you stutter, or finally making it to an NSA Annual Conference! All these are positive steps that we can take to promote not only self-acceptance, but the social acceptance of stuttering as well. I realize that these things are easy to suggest, but not necessarily easy to do. This is why the NSA exists; we can do these things together, and that is why our mantra is and always will be, "You're not alone!"

Words can't explain how excited we are for this year. We hope to see each and every one of you at the 31st Annual NSA Conference in Washington, D.C. July 2-6! 

Disability Discrimination

KEN PARSON

My name is Ken Parson, and I am a life-long stutterer. I have stuttered since I could talk. My stuttering was relatively mild as a child and young adult and I never made it an excuse for failure. On December 31st, 2012 my employer, the Monroe, Ohio Police Department fired me for my stuttering disability, and I have since filed a federal lawsuit to get my detective job back.

In July of 2000 I became a police officer. I was able to minimize and conceal my stuttering with tricks I found that worked for me. For example I would pause in mid-sentence as if in thought, if I had a dysfluency. Or if possible I would exchange a word I couldn't say at that time to a word I could say. By 2006 my stuttering had become noticeably worse. My old "tricks" stopped working. I didn't let it discourage me though, and I was promoted to detective in 2007.

In the fall of 2007 I was investigating a robbery suspect, and I had tracked him to a house in a high crime area of Hamilton, Ohio. This investigation was complicated by the fact that the suspect already had a warrant for his arrest for a previous robbery in another jurisdiction. Typically, in a high-risk situation such as this, I would have been backed up by road patrol officers. However, my boss and I thought that we could handle it.

My boss went to the suspect's front door while I went around the back through an alleyway. The suspect's neighbor happened to be in his back yard, but because it was nighttime the neighbor could hear me, but couldn't see me. The neighbor demanded to know who I was and what I was doing. My throat froze up and I couldn't make a sound. The neighbor went into his house and came back outside holding a handgun. He again demanded to know who I was, and threatened to shoot me. I still couldn't utter a sound. Luckily for both of us he didn't really have the nerve to use the gun, and eventually walked to the front of the house and spoke with my boss. Had he raised the gun at me I would have shot him.

This incident had a profound effect on the perception of my stuttering. Someone shouldn't have to die because I can't talk. I told my boss what happened and explained that I had to take a short leave of absence to seek help before someone got hurt. Manage-

ment was less than supportive, immediately threatening to fire me for being AWOL, because according to them stuttering is just "in my head" and not a real disability.

I came back to work and the Chief pulled me into his office. He thoroughly schooled me on his policy regarding disabilities; he said, "I don't like that. I won't have it." After that conversation my work environment began souring at an accelerated pace. The Chief is known for saying that he gives those on his "involuntary early retirement plan" enough rope to hang themselves. In practice this means overloading the employee with more work than they can handle, and intentionally setting them up to fail. Specifically in my case, it meant that all of the big cases and projects went to me.

This plan backfired because I didn't fail; I thrived. I successfully investigated rapes, child abuse, even murder. I became known as a confession machine because I developed the ability to use my stuttering to psychologically disarm suspects. I learned that when a suspect is being interviewed by a detective, he has already gone over his story a thousand times in his head. When a suspect sits down with me and he hears my stuttering he is immediately thrown off of his game plan. The look on the criminal's face is priceless.

I began to gain recognition from judges and prosecutors. Twice I was given written commendations by a grand jury. The Grand Jury clerk told me that no officer had ever received such high marks. I became a regular on the local T.V. and in print news. Other officers and detectives would have me interview the suspects in their cases for them. I also became the de facto spokesman for the department in the local T.V. news broadcasts because of the rapport I had built with the reporters.

Monroe is unique because it hosts two of largest flea markets in the state. When I first became a detective, counterfeit merchandise such as fake Coach purses, fake Nike shoes, and fake (rash-inducing!) designer perfumes were being sold out in the open by countless vendors. This was the status quo for years, and when management tasked me with cleaning up the markets, they were sure that I would fail.

I took the task very seriously because, as a law enforcement professional, I took offense

that these vendors were committing crimes out in the open without fear of reprisal. While it's true that law enforcement can never completely eliminate criminal activity such as drugs and counterfeiting, what we can do is make the criminals at least have to act like criminals. In other words, disallow them to brazenly commit crimes out in the open and force them to hide their counterfeit product and try to sell them on the sly, one at a time.

This task was made more urgent when it was announced that a large outlet mall would be built directly across the street from the flea markets. This meant that the stores in the outlet mall who would be selling the legitimate product would have to compete with criminals selling knock-offs practically right outside their doors. After I planned and led numerous, large scale raids at the flea market over the course of a couple of years, Monroe became known to counterfeiters as "that place where we get arrested" so they stopped coming.

My career in anti-counterfeiting reached it's peak in 2008 when I led the largest single seizure of counterfeit products in the history of the State of Ohio: \$20 million worth of counterfeit product held in a giant warehouse in Youngstown. That case began in Monroe with the arrest of a single counterfeit vendor. I traced that vendor through the supply chain to Youngstown.

After the Youngstown seizure I began to get some national recognition for my work. That year I was even invited to be a guest of honor at the Annual Conference of the International Anti-Counterfeiting Coalition. The Coalition is a non-profit organization made up of federal law enforcement officials and the executives of numerous multi-national corporations. The annual conference is held in Los Angeles and consists of seminars and training in the latest trends in anti-counterfeit techniques. The speakers include federal officials such as the Attorney General of United States. Even though I was an invited guest at the conference and therefore the monetary cost to Monroe would be negligible, I was not allowed to go. I was supposed to fail and when I didn't, Monroe management were in no mood to allow me enjoy to my success.

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ODDS&ENDS

MANDY FINSTAD



Seymour 'Robby' Robbins, father of former NSA Executive Director **Annie Bradberry**, passed away in October. Known throughout the stuttering community as Robbie, Dad, Annie's Dad, Grandpa, and The Guy Who Sold Raffle Rickets, Seymour put his heart and soul into the organization that changed the life of his daughter.

After the passing of her father, Annie cared for her ailing mother, **Shirley**, and helped her cope with the loss they both shared. A few short weeks later Annie received the devastating news that her mother had been given only a short time to live. Shirley's condition inevitably worsened, and on the way to the ER she said to her daughter "I keep hearing silly things." When Annie asked what she had heard, her mother told her "Your dad asked me to come and keep him company." Shirley passed peacefully on the morning of January 11th, surely after a visit from her beloved, Seymour.

For those of us who believe that there is a life after death, that the spirits of those who have passed on remain around us, and that our loved ones don't truly leave us, those words were of great comfort.

Seymour and Shirley were both 88, and were married for 68 years.

Please keep Annie and her family in your thoughts and prayers.

Huge congratulations are also in order for NSA'er **David Lieblich** on his recent engagement to **Rachel Wiener**. We wish you both the best for a long, happy life together!

The NSA sends out a huge thank you to **Michelle Geiger**, daughter of long-time member **Brad Madsen**, graphic designer for Wild Blue Technologies, and creative mind behind all of our newly-designed brochures and many of the graphics and logos we've been using over the past several months. Michelle currently lives in Tampa, FL with her husband, Derrick, and two golden retrievers, Rusty and Sadie. Michelle obtained a Bachelor of Science degree from Carroll College and graduated in 2003 with a graphic communication major and business and communication minors. In her free time, she loves doing volunteer work with her dogs, playing sports (especially basketball), cooking, and playing drums and the ukulele. Thank you, Michelle, for volunteering your time and talents to the NSA!



The NSA also sends it heartfelt condolences to **Lee Reeves** after the recent passing of his mother, **Marilyn Reeves**. Lee has worked tirelessly for the NSA for decades, and we are sending him our prayers, love, and good thoughts.

The NSA wishes congratulations to our resident videographer **Mike Bauer**, who is on his way to grad school at UCF to become a speech-language pathologist! Mike has been a staple at NSA conferences for years, always ready and willing to put together outstanding videos for us. Thank you Mike, and best of luck in school. We know you will be a great SLP!



BOOK REVIEW

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Eric Garner's *Stutter Boy* recounts the journey of Aaron Thomas, a young boy about to start second grade, who comes to the jarring realization that his stuttering may define him. Until that time he had thought himself to be a bright and friendly boy with a lot to say, but a single comment from a callous classmate has caused part of him to fill with doubt and fear. He feels as though he has been betrayed and held prisoner by his own voice, which leads to a struggle for self-acceptance as he realizes the talent he possesses lies beneath the superficial.

Confined to a small, dark room in his mind, Aaron sees small ghosts about the size of fireflies flying back and forth in the vacant space. Their little bodies shine forth actual images of own thoughts and he recognizes these little ghosts – his "nalas", as he calls them – as a part of himself. From this dark room he can see the outside world and the people in it. A comedian, a thespian, and a radio host whose voices are the catalysts of their success.

Aaron has several experiences that any PWS can relate to, including reading aloud in class, awkward social interaction, calling a potential employer, and having to give a speech in front of a large crowd. As all of these situations transpire in real life, we follow the parallel story of Aaron's inner struggle as he gradually becomes more comfortable in his own skin. He develops a clearer focus of what he wants to do with his life and sees how both his failures and successes allow him to develop into a mature young man who is fully capable of accomplishing his goals.

Many PWS will be able to identify with the highs and lows Eric writes about in *Stutter Boy*, and non-PWS will find this book to be an honest, revealing look into the hurdles (self-imposed and otherwise) and the little victories that are part of the daily lives of every PWS. This book would be a valuable resource for friends, family, educators, and SLPs. ★

iStutter Project

DAVID FRIEDMAN

I found the NSA about five years ago and have attended the last five conferences. As a PWS who is covert, I had made it my mission over the years to hide stuttering from anyone and everyone. My crafty use of word substitution and situation avoidance came to a point where I was anxious all the time about meeting people, introducing myself, and being found out as a PWS. I envied people who could openly stutter and advertise; it scared me to death. Since finding the NSA, I started to let these stuttering strategies go, but I wasn't quite at that place yet where I could openly and confidently let the world know that, "I am a person who stutters AND I am totally okay with it." I wanted to get there so badly, and have felt myself moving to that place slowly over the past 5 years.

At work I have experienced anxiety and discomfort for years when making the regular boardroom-style introductions. I meet lots of new people and have to say my name, title, and company often, all of which contain words that I tend to block on. I was at a place in my life where I just wanted my stuttering to be out there and not have the fear of being found out anymore. I just wanted an easy way to let everyone know.

Something happened while I was at the National Stuttering Association 2013 Annual Conference in Scottsdale, Arizona. I started thinking about ways that I, as a person who stutters, could create conversation starters about stuttering in a professional setting while raising awareness of my stuttering. As a businessperson, I believed that having something like a lapel pin would help me become more vocal about my stuttering and able to communicate more easily and openly with others.

I began my search looking for a lapel pin from the NSA or other organizations supporting those who stutter. After I realized there were no lapel pins available I immediately recognized a need I could help meet. The *iStutter* Project began. After bouncing the idea around with several others in the stuttering community, the "*iStutter*" lapel pin was created. Using the sales of the *iStutter* lapel pin as a vehicle, I hope to open communication, raise awareness, and raise funds for the NSA, who serve a diverse



community and are a tremendous support to people who stutter.

As a co-chapter leader of the San Fernando Valley/Los Angeles Chapter of the NSA, I am always discussing new methods for raising awareness about stuttering and this pin should help make those conversations much easier. I am so proud to be a part of the NSA and I have renewed passion to raise awareness about my own stuttering and make it easier for those who stutter to openly advertise and truly embrace who they are.

For more information about the *iStutter* Project and David Friedman, visit www.istutterproject.com. 

HELPING OTHERS *continued*

Today, I still stutter and am still very involved in the National Stuttering Association. Through my 13 years of involvement, I have grown within the NSA. It all started when I was recognized as Youth of the Year; it was then that I realized that they recognized me for who I was and for my potential to help this organization grow. My mother and I created a Family Programs section within the NSA, which had been lacking for many years. The NSA was primarily an adult organization with few family activities when I joined.

The Teen Advisory Council (TAC) was also assembled, which was composed of about five teens that functioned in leadership and mentor roles. I served as a member, then leader for five years. As the leader of the Teen Advisory Council, I held a position on the Board of Directors of the NSA to serve as the voice of all young members. After growing out of the position, I was asked to continue to serve on the Board as the young adult representative. I carried out my term on the Board until my maximum serving time was reached. Although I am no longer on the Board of Directors today, I continue to attend the Annual Conferences as a volunteer, hosting workshops and helping with whatever I am asked.

Although I have overcome these emotional and psychological difficulties, financial struggles continue to be an issue. I come from a family who did not attend college, and therefore never expected me to go to all the way through to a doctorate program. When I first made my decision to apply to a doctorate program, my parents asked a lot of questions and immediately questioned my decision when they saw the price tag. Because they are so supportive of me, they told me that they felt guilty for not saving more money so I could comfortably attend graduate school. Reassuring them of my decision and downplaying my anxiety regarding the amount of loans I would have to take out, I began graduate school focused solely on the reason why I came in the first place: to help others when they are in need, as others have done for me. 

Stuttering Ballistics

NOEL SHAFI

These two-timing trembling lips
forcefully release
atypical sound-waves
and bits
of twice broken words,
syllables, and sentences
(as if language is blocked by
linguistic firearm suppressors)
in essence, my stuttering is a silencer,
and my mouth is like a trigger jam,
where speech becomes
an acoustical conundrum
of rapid phonemic bullets
trapped by
oratory safety locks
PRESSED AGAIN AND AGAIN
by fully loaded cheeks, lungs, and throat
with air stuck and out of luck
having eardrums struck
with offbeat rhythms of
articulatory speaker systems
blown out
in point blank range
by two halves of the brain
screaming at one another!

CHAPTER NEWS

DAVID BLAZINA

East Maine, ME

Chris Marshall reports on the latest meeting of the East Maine chapter at Dysart's. After catching up, the group talked about giving up on trying not to stutter, stating, "It's there, it lives with us, and it's not useful to hope we'll get rid of it or have it removed. What we can do is get more skillful in using techniques to speak easier. Also we can be mindful while we're speaking about how it feels, instead of being swept up in a negative experience we can watch the stutter arise and watch our feelings arise too, without completely giving in to them." Chapter members also spoke about seeing through all those 'secondary behaviors' and emotional reactions – shame, frustration, muscle tensing – and developing a little more choice whether to go with them or not. They all agreed that sometimes it's OK to just stutter!

Denver, CO

Jeremiah Kitchen reports that the most recent meeting welcomed three participants: Jeremiah, a 24-year-old first-timer named **Derek**, and an SLP PWS named **Andy**. It was Derek's first time ever meeting another PWS. Both Derek and Andy had a lot to talk about, including their current and past challenges, and different ways of coping and living with stuttering. The conversation was informative, fun, and beneficial to all, and they both plan on attending again next month.

It's been about a year since Jeremiah restarted the group out in Denver, and knows firsthand that having no one show up month after month can be very frustrating and disappointing. After the meeting, Derek sent Jeremiah an email saying, "...for the first time I feel comfortable talking about my stutter, thanks so much!" To see the mission and purpose of the NSA fulfilled in action is a wonderful thing!

St. Cloud, MN

Sarah Smits-Bandstra from the St. Cloud Chapter reports that the chapter met most recently with eight people in attendance (three PWS) and discussed family relationships and communication about stuttering.

All attendees participated in a discussion concerning family relationships and communication surrounding stuttering. Attendees

reported how often they spoke to their families about stuttering as young children and as adults. They identified the party that most often initiated communication about stuttering and how that has changed over the years. Attendees also discussed if their family members informed unfamiliar listeners of their stuttering prior to meeting them, and how often they communicate with their friends about stuttering. We had a special attendee, the author **Doreen Lenz**, who has published a book about raising a child who stutters, "Voice Unearthed". She provided lots of interesting insight into the experience of being a parent of a school-age child who stutters.

Columbia, SC

Charley Adams reported on the most recent meeting of the Columbia, SC chapter, letting us know that their most recent meeting had a record 30 people in attendance! This included 11 PWS, 6 family members of PWS, 3 SLPs, 9 or 10 first-timers, and 12 graduate students.

After the Welcoming Words, Introductions, and Good News, the group took a few minutes to recognize the large turnout, and so many first-timers, then took turns reading from **Dr. Peter Ramig's** article on the eight factors to which he attributes his recovery from stuttering.

Veronica, attending only her second meeting, updated everyone on her situation as an officer in the Marines. At the suggestion of the group, she decided to speak with her superior officers specifically about her stuttering, and was glad that she had. A couple of other group members reported benefits of advertising their stuttering, and it was great to see the reactions of others in the group who had not yet travelled as far on their own journeys, who could never imagine doing that. Another wife of a PWS relayed her experiences as her husband began and progressed through speech therapy, and how she recognized her role. Finally, the students shared some insightful observations about the courage that they recognized in each of the PWS in the room. As is often the case, it wasn't until 20–25 minutes after the Closing Words that Charley finally locked the door.

During the meeting there was a mother and her 13 year-old daughter in attendance who chose not to speak at all during the

meeting. They left just before the meeting ended, so no one had any idea what the experience was like for them; until the mom phoned Charley the next day. Her daughter could not stop talking all the way home about how much she had enjoyed the meeting! In fact, it turns out that she liked the 'KEEP CALM AND STUTTER ON' t-shirts so much that as soon as they got home, they got online and ordered one!

Houston, TX

Attendees: **Vicki Schutter, Rosie Brown, Mike Martin, Ming Zhong, Wes Moore, Donaldson Osei, Malia Burgess**, and **Gerald Haley**
First Timers: **Ian Jarrett, Marissa Moschetta**, and **Christoph Buetfering**

The most recent meeting was a great mix of first timers, new members, and veterans of the NSA. The group started off with introductions and was pleased to welcome Ian, Marissa and all the way from Germany, Christoph, to their first NSA meeting.

Following was a discussion that **Lee Reeves** had proposed about having the meetings video recorded for research. Many who e-mailed and who were at the meeting had the same feelings about it – that it would go against what our monthly meetings are about which is creating a safe place for PWS to speak freely in a non-judgmental atmosphere. If cameras are present members might hesitate to attend or participate during the meeting. With all this feedback the groups has decided not to participate in this research project.

The chapter's discussion topic was "How We Have Overcome Our Stutter". Wes shared on how attending the McGuire Program helped him tremendously with overcoming with his fear of stuttering. That not only was his stuttering a problem but getting over the fear was another struggle. There are times when that fear comes back but he is now better prepared to deal with it. Also expressed was the weariness after searching for a cure for about 20 years and finally growing tired of the fear, the shame, and the hiding, and the joy and relief that came after finally attended an NSA chapter being able to meet other PWS who had so much courage to conquer their fear every day and live fulfilled lives. Every member of the group is in a different place with their stuttering and it's been great to hear those different

perspectives on what has helped us get to the place each of us is at.

We ended our meeting with Ming reading the Closing Words.

Birmingham, AL

Deborah Boswell reports that the Birmingham, AL chapter of the NSA met recently with one SLP, one student in CSD at University of Montevallo, one girlfriend of a PWS, and six PWS in attendance – one of which was a first-timer. The group used the *The Question Web* that Paul Tucci provided along with introductions, and everyone enjoyed laughter and insight into each others' life experiences.

Everyone was provided a copy of **Dr. Peter Ramig's** seminar info presented at the 2nd World Congress on Fluency Disorders, entitled, "Various Paths to Long-Term Recovery From Stuttering". Dr. Ramig lists eight factors that he considered most responsible for his changes in stuttering. Many of our regular chapter attendees had good updates on how they are managing their dysfluency differently than they had in the past. Several shared how the support group has encouraged them in their journey to becoming a more confident person. The first-timer is attending a local junior college and stated that he was very comfortable with this fabulous group of PWS, and that he had never been around that many people who stutter. At the end of their time together, he said that he looked forward to returning to the next meeting. It took a great deal of courage for this young man to attend, just like it does for every person who finally decides to take a risk and see what the NSA is all about.

Chicago West, IL

Paul Roumeliotis checked in with a report on the most recent meeting of the Chicago West NSA Chapter, which was also their one-year anniversary (Big thanks to **Kenny Koroll** for getting this chapter underway last year)! There were a total of 11 people in attendance, including eight PWS, one parent, one friend, and one sibling. All of the regular attendees were there, which was great because normally the day doesn't work out for everybody.

As usual, conversations took up the entire time. The group enjoyed discussions about past experiences, voluntary stuttering,

desensitization, feared situations, time pressure (like drive thru windows and any situation in which one might feel rushed), and positivity. Toward the end of the meeting, one regular attendee said, 'I've had therapy, but coming to my first NSA meeting was the best thing ever. It was like a fire went off in my head.' It is awesome to hear that this chapter is making an impact on people.

Southern NJ

Lucy Reed let us know that the Southern New Jersey Chapter (AKA Stratford) had its annual bowling outing, starting with lunch at Bertucci's in Morristoen, NJ, and followed by three games at Laurel Lanes in Maple Shade, NJ. In attendance were **Katherine Filer, Dom Olivastro, Jerry Higgins, Anthony Delmar, Jim Petrowitz,** and Lucy. A good time was had by all!

Austin, TX

Hayden Lambert reported that the NSA Austin Chapter recently met on the UT campus with five people who stutter and three SLPs / student SLPs in attendance.

Ryan opened the meeting by reading the Welcoming Words, then announced the details for this year's annual holiday party, which was held at **Dr. Courtney Byrd's** home, and also shared information regarding the upcoming Annual NSA Conference in Washington, D.C., which will be held July 2–6, 2014.

The meeting was facilitated by Ryan, with a discussion on what keeps a person who stutters positive, even on a difficult day. Joy opened the topic by sharing her experiences with speech therapy, which she finished this past spring. She specifically discussed an inspirational speech by a PWS about acceptance and looking at one's overall accomplishments. Hayden shared personal experiences in coming to terms with stuttering by looking at all the things accomplished in spite of it. **Farzan** asked a follow up question to these shared experiences, inquiring if stuttering needed to be considered at all or if our accomplishments should stand on their own. **Mona** responded by sharing her journey of overcoming negative feelings about stuttering through self-acceptance, which has allowed her to pursue her goals. She also discussed the

importance of desensitizing yourself to stuttering and tapping into a support system of people who understand, saying that once you accept yourself, others will accept you, too.

Alisa shared her own struggles with opening up to others, discussing how during difficult times meeting new people can be much more difficult than just being with old friends. Lastly, **Amber**, a student SLP who attended her first NSA meeting this month, shared some of her own life experiences, which mirrored many of the experiences PWS have growing up. Finally, Hayden concluded the meeting by reading the Closing Words.

Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo, MI

Kristen Thornton reported that after a short hiatus, the Kalamazoo chapter started again, meeting most recently at Western Michigan University. This was planned to be a joint meeting with people from Grand Rapids.

The Grand Rapids chapter met with two in attendance and discussed stuttering and how it affects each of them during the holidays. A good question was posed: How do one's self-perceptions play into this, since we live so much of our lives 'in our minds'? Also, if we are in speech therapy, what would a PWS want their therapist to help them with? Two very good, thought provoking questions!

Tampa, FL

The Tampa Chapter was thrilled recently to host their 75th self-help group for people who stutter at USE. The chapter moved its location to the University of South Florida in September 2007, and has since met religiously and grown substantially. The group co-hosts an annual outreach event for young people who stutter with USE, and each semester since Fall 2007, members of the group have visited classes to share their experiences with stuttering with students.

The group has been on television news twice, featured in newspaper articles, and participated in other outreach events such as the 'Cinema Chat' events at Tampa Theater – all aimed at raising awareness about stuttering. The chapter also earned NSA's Chapter of the Year award. Thanks **Delroy, Brad,** and **Kenny** for bringing the group to USE and thanks Tammy and national NSA crew for working with us!

Through all of this success I kept thinking that if I worked hard and showed management my intrinsic value, I could win them over. I realized that I was wrong, and that when setting me up to fail had itself failed, management, undeterred, changed tactics. They began to look over my shoulder to try to find a reason to terminate me.

An example of this is when my daughter was born and I took two weeks off work. She was my first baby and I unprepared for the up-all-night-and-day part of having a newborn. After a week or so I didn't know whether I was coming or going. I called worked to ask what day I was to return, and the dispatcher checked the schedule and told me that Saturday was my first day back. Either the schedule itself was wrong, or the dispatcher read it wrong, because my first day back was Friday. My boss called Friday morning and told that me that I was AWOL and facing termination. I explained to my boss that the dispatcher must have made a mistake and told me the wrong day. Furthermore since all incoming calls to the police department are recorded this is easily verifiable. I thought that the matter was settled, but I was wrong. A week later my boss told me that after listening to the audio recording of my conversation with the dispatcher they were convinced that I somehow tricked her into giving me the wrong day.

Burying me in work backfired. Trying to find or manufacture cause to fire me wasn't working. So they decided to force me back onto road patrol and in so doing, placed me in a position where my disability would become enough of a safety issue that they could justify getting rid of me. I immediately expressed my concern, both for my disability and for this unjustified demotion. Management informed me that they have a policy that they demote detectives after four years back to road patrol. I asked where this policy is written. They said it wasn't written. I asked if any other detectives had been forced back to the road. They said no, I would be the first. So I am the first and the last person to whom this "policy" applies.

I submitted a doctor's report stating that I would be a danger to others and myself on the road due to my inability to give voice

commands in an emergency or call for help on the radio. The City then sent me to a doctor of their choosing, apparently to disprove my concerns. It had backfired; their doctor also said I could not work the road. They were undeterred and I was placed back on the road on June 15th, 2011.

Since that time, management has repeatedly refused me an opportunity to work any type of desk job. There are many desk jobs that already exist and that I am more than qualified for and capable of doing. Management insisted that I only work road patrol. However, they did agree, in writing, to only have me work road patrol on day shift, which in their words limited my exposure to danger based on my disability.

Over the next year of being on road patrol I was the subjected to mistreatment. Other officers and supervisors would mock my disability at roll call. Officers would throw pens at the back of my head to amuse supervisors. I was openly insulted both in and out of my presence by supervisor and officers alike. It even went so far as officers creating home made posters, in one way or another mocking me and my disability. I went to supervision to complain multiple times, but since the supervisors were often part of the "fun," no one was ever disciplined, though some officers did not participate in the abuse and many came to me privately to express their support. A few even went so far to defend me when others mocked or insulted me and in doing so put their own careers at risk.

The abuse I suffered was ancillary to the danger I faced working road patrol. Officers would be reluctant to back me up on high-risk calls. Sometimes an officer would be dispatched to back me up but they never arrived. In the short time I was on back the road, on two occasions, my speech resulted life-threatening situations. Luck had been on my side in these incidents, but I knew it would eventually run out, and I only had to be unlucky once. The only action that management took after these incidents was to remove me from day shift and put me on night shift. In doing so they violated their own written promise to keep me on day shift. The only reasonable explanation is that

they expected these incidents to cause me to resign. So when I didn't, they decided to kick up the pressure another notch by increasing my exposure to danger.

At this point a reasonable question to ask me is why I didn't quit. The reason is that I had a family that needed health insurance and income. At the time my wife was still working on her Registered Nurse license and caring for a one year old. Pride also kept me from quitting; it seemed that if I quit it meant that they broke me.

In the spring of 2012 after being on the road for several months I began to develop health problems. I went to see my doctor and he referred me to a psychiatrist, who evaluated me over the course of several months. After my psychiatrist told me that he was taking me off of work, I resisted because I didn't want Monroe management to think that they had broken me. The psychiatrist suggested that my life and health are more important to my family and should be more important to me, and still will not approve a return to work until the current discriminatory practices of my employer cease.

It was then that I began the process of filing a lawsuit. One week after it was filed (in December 2012), I was terminated without cause. Most recently, on September 27th, 2013 the federal judge on my case issued a ruling on the validity of my complaint. The judge wrote that the actions of the City of Monroe and its employees were "outrageous" and that I have met the standard of proof required to proceed. Not only did the judge rule in my favor on the overall lawsuit, but he kept all of the defendants in the lawsuit, something very rare for a discrimination case.

The case now moves on to the 'discovery phase', where my attorney will request documents and information from the City of Monroe to begin fortifying our case. My attorney and I have already submitted the first round of discovery requests. After discovery comes the trial, tentatively set for the summer of 2015. The law doesn't move quickly and my family has been through so much already. I'm hoping it doesn't take a trial for the City of Monroe to take a more enlightened stance and acquiesce. 🙏

Interview with Davon Grayson

At the National Stuttering Association, we are always inspired by our stuttering community, and every once in a while a story comes along that strikes awe in our hearts. Recently, we were able to sit down with Davon Grayson, a freshman wide receiver for the East Carolina University Pirates who stutters. Davon started his college football career with a bang, catching four passes for three touchdowns in his season opener win. He continued his success through many games until suffering a season ending injury October 12th versus Tulane. It was during this rest that our own Steve Ernst had the chance to catch up with Davon to discuss his football, stuttering, and life.

Steve Ernst: What was your childhood like as a kid that stutters?

Davon Grayson: I first began stuttering at the age of 11, when I moved to Virginia from Ohio. I left all of my family behind and my mother, sister, aunt and I moved to Virginia so my mother could be with my future stepfather. My childhood was pretty rough dealing with my speech impediment. I was teased and got into many fights.

SE: How did you get to the comfort level you have now while speaking in tough situations?

DG: I just accepted who I was, and the fact that God gave me this stutter for a reason. I simply try my best to stay calm and keep the flow of my words continuous and fairly soft.

SE: What is it like being a college football player and a person who stutters? Have you talked to your teammates about stuttering?

DG: It's amazing knowing that when I'm on the field on Saturdays, no one knows me as Davon Grayson (the one that stutters). They know me as Davon Grayson, number 85 that plays his heart out every single play. Lots of my teammates ask me how I deal with it and I just tell them that it's become a part of my personality, and I'm very confident in who I am.

SE: What is it like talking to the media?

DG: I am blessed to even be in the position to talk to the media. It makes me happy to have another opportunity to give God the glory. It is very easy for me. I just make the interviewer aware of my speech impediment prior to the interview.

SE: Do random students say hi to you on campus? How do you handle that?

DG: Yes, many of the Pirates football fans know my face, and the majority of the time it catches me off guard. I thought they would only know me with my uniform on, but they know me by my face as well. It makes my day every time we speak. Many times I'll begin a conversation with someone new before they are aware of my speech problem, and they'll start laughing at me thinking that I'm joking. Then I'll tell them that I really do stutter and they'll feel really bad and apologize. Right after that they'll always say "I used to have a little stutter too. It still comes back from time to time." I know that they are trying to make me feel better, but they don't understand that I'm already comfortable with myself and whether they laugh at me or not.

SE: How has Coach McNeill supported you with your speech?

DG: Coach Ruff has been an instrumental part of me getting comfortable with my speech problem in the college environment. From the first time he met me he let me know that he stutters as well, he loves me, and that there is never a need to hide or change myself here at ECU.

SE: What would you say to a kid who stutters who wants to follow in your footsteps?

DG: There will be many bumps in the road, lots of long, lonely days, and many times where you'll want to turn to God and ask "why me?" Never forget that God gives his toughest battles to his strongest warriors.



It is hearing from inspiring persons who stutter such as Davon that keep us moving, keep us doing what we do for the stuttering community 365 days a year. You don't have to be a star athlete, a top-of-the-charts musician, or the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. The NSA is here to support YOU being YOU! 📧

CHAPTER NEWS *continued*

Albany, NY

Grace Gregory reports that the most recent meeting at the College of St. Rose hosted three people and consisted of a lively discussion. The group went around the table and introduced themselves for practice, each having something to share, and also discussed their holiday experiences. The next discussion topic was anxiety and fear. Grace shared her experience with anxiety and how it interacted with her stuttering, as did the others, followed by a discussion on family interactions and communicating.

Grace also recently spoke with the undergraduate class on stuttering, and reports that her students were appreciative to hear from a person who stutters who had gone thru the Council for Effective Communication (CEC) at the College and who participates in NSA and NSA Chapter meetings.

The College is hosting a Weekend Workshop March 28 – 30, during which the Albany NSA Chapter will co-hosts the Friday night social before the weekend with the CEC. Filmmaker **Michael Turner** will join the group and give an interactive keynote address and introduce his upcoming documentary "The Way We Talk".

