

## Things Really Start to Get Good

BY SARAH D'AGOSTINO



I was in first grade when my mom came to watch my Show n' Tell where I "showed" my favorite doll but I could not "tell" anything. I was stuck in a block—a feeling that

through the years I knew all too well. I experienced all the joys and sorrows of stuttering—crying myself to sleep one night and being happy the next day for not backing down from a speaking situation. Junior high and high school were filled with covert behaviors, but I found things I loved to do (and could do fluently)—acting, singing, cheerleading, and running.

I worked with many speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and therapy techniques, and I had a supportive network of family and friends who loved me. Somehow with all that support, I still felt alone with my stuttering until... I met the NSA! You might say that the rest is history, but this is when things really start to get good.

### The Power of Support

I went to my first adult support group meeting just after graduating from Michigan State University in 1999 where for the first time I sat in a room full of people who stuttered. I did not realize the impact this would have on my life. All of my negative feelings and attitudes toward my stuttering started to take a turn for the better. For the first time, my goal was not to get rid of stuttering but to be a better stutterer. What a concept! At the nagging request of my chapter leaders,

I attended my first annual NSA conference in Chicago 2000 where my NSA experience came to the next level! Now you really might say that the rest is history, but would you believe it gets better?

At the conference, I met people from all over the country and the world who stuttered and found peace and a sense of understanding, which is hard to explain. With a handshake and dysfluent introduction, I knew everything the other person was thinking and feeling and it seemed as though I had known these NSA people my entire life. Driving home from that conference I called everyone I knew to tell them about my weekend and my plans to spread the word about the NSA. I was sharing stuttering with my family and friends in a positive light for the first time in my life. I felt like I could finally be myself, and as timing is everything, I soon met the man of my dreams. Freddy asked for me to marry him while in Baltimore for the 2004 conference. Needless to say, it was my favorite conference. We now have a 10-month-old baby girl, Mea Jane, who will soon meet all my NSA friends.

With the NSA, both locally and nationally, I learned the ways stuttering has made me a better listener, more compassionate, less judgmental, and a better person. Most importantly, I learned that I can embrace stuttering as a part of me. I can honestly be proud that I am a person who stutters. I continue to go to support group meetings and was the chapter leader for a couple years. I present to Michigan universities'

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## A (Semi) Farewell



As I sit down to write this (semi) farewell message for both LETTING GO and CARE, it is the eve of Christmas Eve, and it is a great time for reflection.

The years I have spent in leadership of NSA and its family programs have been fabulous! I hope that I have been able to give as much as I have received in both my volunteer and "employment" positions.

As I walked into my very first NSA event (Denver conference, 1996), I was already a volunteer. I came to Denver at the suggestion of Ellen Bennett to volunteer behind the registration table. I remember being quite nervous to meet so many people who stutter because I was worried about how they would feel about a speech-language pathologist (SLP) (who didn't stutter) and whether I would be accepted. Well, my fears were allayed, and by the end of the opening reception, I had found a feeling of "home."

It didn't take long for me to be moving toward "giving back" to the NSA in volunteer efforts and leadership capacities within the family programs. Then, Judith Eckhart nominated me to run for the board of directors, and the rest, as they say, is history. I have been blessed to work with so many wonderful people; NSA staff, board members, and volunteers throughout the years of my time in the NSA. I also have been blessed with amazing friendships through the NSA, and the added benefit of finding a great love in the most amazing "fringe"

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## Happy New Year, Everyone!



Each New Year brings change and a time to reflect. For me, 2007 brought me back home to the NSA. It feels good, and

I am looking forward to a great year and an exciting conference in New Jersey this coming June. I can't wait to see you there!

People say 2008 is going to be a challenging year. There is one thing we can all be certain of...the NSA's motto remains consistent. "If you stutter, you're not alone." Even though I don't stutter, this motto brings me comfort and confidence. The NSA's strength is its membership. Each and every one of you! This is powerful.

As we enter this New Year and as you make your resolutions, say them out loud. Share these goals at your local chapter. Bring them to life. In fact, I challenge you to send them to me. You share yours... I'll share mine.

I'll start. Many of you who have attended NSA conferences know that even though I don't stutter, standing before you and speaking used to scare me close to tears. Truth be told, I think I have actually had a few tears trickle down before. But I can do it now...even though I am still a little frightened. My resolution is to do just a bit more this year.

Okay...I've told...now it's your turn. Send me your resolutions. They all don't have to be around your speech...they can be about character, or habits, or maybe it's simply "to take daily vitamins." Sharing them with me or with your local NSA chapter is one more step closer to actually making that resolution coming true. We can do it. You can do it. Let's do it!

I look forward to hearing from you soon! = Tammy

LETTING GO is a place to express many thoughts and feelings about dealing with stuttering. Below is a creative example of this type of personal expression by Madison Nicole Garcia.

—Sonya Kunkle, LETTING GO Editor



## block

BY MADISON NICOLE GARCIA

Come down like a ton of bricks,  
Like salt on an open wound,  
Snap me like a twig,  
Dig into my throat like a fishhook,  
Bind me until my flesh is blue.  
Countless times have you struck me.  
I have learned to expect your blows.

I've spat till my mouth has run dry.  
I've winced until the wrinkles have carved themselves  
into my face like a knife to wax.  
I've swallowed so many words, that they rise  
in my throat like vomit.  
Syllables dart out like bullets from a machinegun, like  
wild birds from a tiny cage.  
My lips have been bitten so that they bleed,  
and my knuckles have gone white from clutching.  
My head has bobbed up and down,  
and my body has contorted and bounced with each sound.  
I appear as if I am deflating, writhing like a dying animal, bending  
over in submission to your hands clutching my throat.  
I can't breathe and I can't stand erect.  
My words won't come forth, I shatter like glass.

I pick the pieces up.

And I shall again tomorrow,  
and the day after that.

*Madison Nicole Garcia is a second-year student at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, CA. She is a Political Science major with an emphasis on International Relations & Foreign Policy and a Philosophy minor. She is the founder of the new NSA Santa Barbara chapter. She is most grateful to the NSA for serving as means of hope to her and others who stutter and looks forward to continuing her dedication to the NSA throughout her life.*

# ODDS&ENDS

FROM DAVID BLAZINA

## Wedding Bells

Long-time NSA members **Pat Feeney** and **Judy Johnson** tied the knot! The happy couple will be living in California for a while before heading back to Minnesota. The NSA wishes Pat and Judy nothing but the best.



NSA member **Peggy Tardiff**

was married on July 6, 2007, to **Bob Ruxton** at the Ritz Carlton in St. Louis,



Missouri. They reside in Wildwood, Missouri, in suburban St. Louis. The NSA extends its congratulations!

## Say It Loud...

### and Make Yourself Proud

**Steven Kaufman**, co-chapter leader for the NSA Long Island (New York) chapter, shares his recent experience with public speaking:

"For some members of the NSA public speaking is the biggest challenge we face on a daily basis. I recently had the chance to do some public speaking, and right afterward, I had this incredible feeling of satisfaction that has continued to stay with me. I was asked to speak in front of a graduate-level class of future speech-language pathologists in Dobbs Ferry, New York.

"While I did stutter a lot, within five minutes I felt myself becoming more at ease with my speech. I made the presentation interactive and used my knowledge of pop culture and self-deprecating humor to keep an easy flow going, and I received an invitation to return anytime. There is nothing to be afraid of unless you stay in your comfort zone. Start out making small talk with someone in the local supermarket or someone walking their dog. What matters is that we stand up, be

counted, and make our voices heard!"

## Lafayette, LA February Events

The University of Louisiana at Lafayette will hold a continuing education seminar on Friday, February 15. **Joseph Donaher** will be presenting the topic "Advancing Clinical Effectiveness for Working with Children Who Stutter." The next day Joseph will work with NSA members **John Tetnowski** and **Mitch Trichon** for a youth day for children and families. For more information, please e-mail NSA Director of Operations **Tammy Flores** at [info@westutter.org](mailto:info@westutter.org).

## NY and South Carolina Events

On March 14, from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm at Hofstra University, **Marilee Fini** will present the topic "Stuttering: Effective Strategies for Treating the Physical and Emotional Components."

Mark your calendars right now—Charleston, South Carolina, April 4–5: CEU/Youth Day. Topic will be school age stuttering therapy.

For more information on either of these upcoming workshops, please check the NSA Web site at [WeStutter.org](http://WeStutter.org) or e-mail NSA Director of Operations **Tammy Flores** at [info@westutter.org](mailto:info@westutter.org).



## Baby Brigade

Long-time NSA member **Gregg Benedikt**, wife **Andrea**, and big sister **Brooklyn** welcomed the newest member

of their family, **Quinn Estelle** (weighing 7 lbs., 10 oz. and measuring 20.5 inches long), on November 20. Congratulations to the Benedikts and their growing family!

**Vikesh and Christine Anand** announce that daughter **Isabelle Anderson** was born at 8:20 Christmas morning, weighing in at 8 lbs. Everyone is doing great!

## Houston Holiday Party

The Houston chapter of the NSA had its annual holiday party, hosted by **Stephen and Jennifer Kirk**, on Sunday afternoon, December 16. Guests were



treated to a pot of homemade chili, chili con queso and chips, homemade Christmas cookies, lime sherbet punch, and wine. It was a wonderful afternoon, and the attendees greatly appreciate the Kirks' allowing them to get together in their lovely home.

## Thank You!

A special thank you to the **Lluella Morey Murphey Foundation** for their generous donation to help sponsor the continuing education seminar held in Corona, California. Their assistance makes it possible for the NSA to continue to provide advocacy and support for people who stutter.

## START TO GET GOOD *continued*

SLP programs. I have conducted adult and children's workshops at the conferences.

## Giving Back

I continue to want to give back to this organization, which gave so much to me. A few months ago, Mea and I were on our way home from a stuttering presentation at Eastern Michigan University. I was daydreaming about what more I could do for and with stuttering. I called the NSA office, and the universe answered my request. I am pleased and honored to have been given the opportunity to serve the NSA as the new Family Programs administrator. I hope to carry on the great work and to fill the shoes of Nina Reardon-Reeves. (Don't worry—she will still be involved.)

Please do not hesitate to contact me—I am here to serve. ■

*Sarah D'Agostino has been a member of the NSA since 1999 and is a former chapter leader of the Michigan Royal Oak NSA adult support group. Sarah has worked in teaching, marketing, sales, and commercial real estate. She grew up the oldest of six children and is now a work-at-home mom. Feel free to e-mail her at [sdowgiallo@yahoo.com](mailto:sdowgiallo@yahoo.com).*

# NSA 2008 New York City Pre-conference Hoopla!

**NSA's Annual Conference in New Jersey (New York City area)  
June 25–29, 2008**

Register online now for the NSA's 25th annual conference at [WeStutter.org](http://WeStutter.org) or print out and complete the paper form available on our Web site or through the NSA office (e-mail [info@WeStutter.org](mailto:info@WeStutter.org) or call 800-WeStutter (800-937-8888)).

Don't miss the reduced, early registration price...register now!

## Want to Present a Workshop?

Fill out the proposal form now for the best chance to have your workshop approved. Forms are available online at [WeStutter.org](http://WeStutter.org) or e-mail Tammy Flores, director of operations, [info@WeStutter.org](mailto:info@WeStutter.org).

## Hotel Information

Book your room now for "the NSA hotel," the Sheraton Parsippany. Doubles (rooms for two) are always the first to go!

**Mailing address:** Sheraton Parsippany, 199 Smith Road, Parsippany NJ 07054.

**Room rates:** \$134  
Single/Double/Triple/Quad Occupancy + tax. Be sure to mention the NSA to get our great, discounted rate. Phone number: 973-515-2000 or (toll-free) 800-833-8624. You also can make your reservations online at [starwoodmeeting.com/Book/nationalstut](http://starwoodmeeting.com/Book/nationalstut).

## \$\$\$ for NSA Members

We understand the monetary commitment our members make to attend our annual conference. We've done all we can to help keep the costs as low as possible, but sometimes we feel that is not enough. That's why we're thrilled to tell you about a solution that is beneficial both to the NSA and to members.

We're in the process of developing a corporate sponsorship initiative for this year's conference. In short, we'll be selling advertising space in the conference program. Best of all, we'll accomplish this with a very passionate sales force—the members of the NSA. That's right, you! Here's what we mean:

As an active member of the NSA (hint: time to send in that membership fee), you can earn approximately 25% of every ad you sell as a credit. And that credit can be used to help pay for some of the costs at the conference, such as your registration fee and your hotel stay. Your credit can also be used at the auction.

For example, if you sell a full-page ad, which might cost the buyer \$500, if you attend the conference you would get a \$125 credit for selling that ad. Smaller ads, like half-page and quarter-page ads, will cost less. The more ads you sell, the more it will benefit you—sell 10 full-page ads and you could have a \$1,250 credit! Please note, these numbers are NOT set in stone,

but are just meant to give you a general idea. More details will follow.

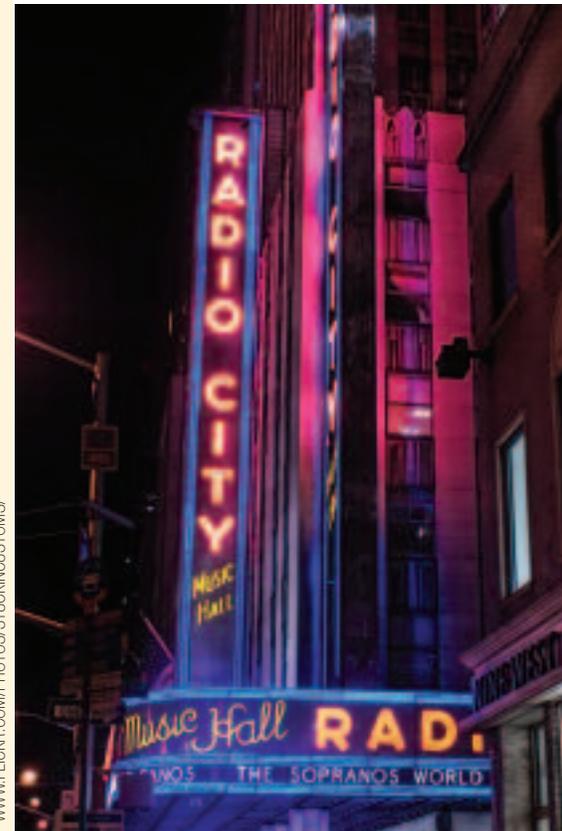
Can't make the conference this year? No problem. You can still benefit from this program. Non-attendees who sell an ad will be sent an appreciation gift.

Excited? It gets better. Approaching your employer or simply soliciting a business to participate can help in many ways. 1) It can help you "advertise" yourself as person who stutters. You could say something like, "I stutter, and I'm involved with a non-profit group called the National Stuttering Association. I'm attending their annual conference, and I was wondering if this company would like to be a corporate sponsor and place an ad in their program." (Be sure to mention that the IRS sees these ads as charitable donations, which are tax breaks for the company.) 2) It can help your family members talk about the NSA at their work or school. 3) It can help get the word out about the NSA, allowing the NSA to help more people who stutter and to educate the public about stuttering.

Please look for more information in the next issue of *LETTING GO*. In the meantime, what companies can you ask to advertise in the conference program?

## Conference Planning 101

*Planning to attend the conference?  
Here's some information to help with your planning...*



WWW.FLICR.COM/PHOTOS/STUCKINCUSTOMS/

## Stay in the City Before the Conference!

Have you ever been to New York City? Would you love to experience all that Manhattan has to offer and then head off to the NSA conference in Parsippany? We have secured some great rates at the Blakely Hotel in the heart of Manhattan. Contact the NSA office at [info@WeStutter.org](mailto:info@WeStutter.org) or 800-WeStutter (800-937-8888).

## Conference Activities

Beginning Wednesday, June 25, there will be a continuing education opportunity for speech-language pathologists (SLPs) from 6:00–9:00 pm with Uri and Phil Schneider at the Sheraton Parsippany, where the conference workshops and hotel events will be held. Then head off to a night in New York City.

What a great way to get re-acquainted with old friends and make some new ones! We'll bring you into NYC, and then you'll be on your own to experience the excitement of Manhattan. Catch a Broadway show, head to Little Italy, check out Central Park...the night is yours. The bus will leave the hotel at 4:30 pm and will drop you off in Times Square. Pick up will be at 12 midnight where you were dropped off. Roundtrip transportation costs just \$21—reserve your seat now!



## Adult Information

Adult workshops begin Thursday morning, June 26. The **first timer's** workshop will be Thursday morning (9:00 am) to get you ready for the **weekend that will change your life**. You will learn what to expect from the weekend and how to get the most out of the conference.

No one can explain how powerful it is to meet so many people who stutter. It's something you need to experience for yourself. Experience a whole weekend around people who "get it," people who have a deep understanding of what it is like to live with a stutter everyday. Meet successful people who stutter of all ages. Attendees often say that once you come to your first conference you will never miss one again. Take the risk and join us this year in New Jersey; you will be glad you did.

There are so many exciting things happening throughout the weekend. Many workshops to choose from, great keynote speakers, awards luncheon (come see your friends win awards), great tours planned, and we are so excited to bring the Silent Auction back. The highlight of this weekend is the live auction/dinner/dance on Saturday night.

## Chapter Leaders

Chapter leader training begins Thursday morning, June 26. If you are a chapter leader or want to be a chapter leader for an adult, TWST, or NSA Kids chapter this workshop is a must. Leadership development, chapter growth, leader support, and more will be addressed.

## Three-day Family/Youth Program!

We are excited to bring you three days of activities during the conference beginning at 8:30 am on Thursday, June 26. The **Family Orientation** Workshop will familiarize you with the conference schedule while giving you a chance to become acquainted with the Family Programs staff, the **Teen Advisory Council**, and other families. This three-day program will provide you with the opportunity to network with leading experts who specialize in working with children and adolescents who stutter, as well as with other families.

Parents are encouraged to bring children who stutter (ages 8 and older). Parents who have experienced the NSA conference have said they wish they had known about us years before. This is a rare chance to meet with some of the outstanding stuttering specialists (such as speech-language pathologists) in the world and share your stories and hear stories from others families!

Your questions will be answered, and parents will meet other parents while their children explore their stuttering in a fun and safe environment. Activities include pool parties, parent and youth roundtable discussions, a scavenger hunt for the kids, and much more!

These are three days you don't want to miss!

## Speech-language Pathologists

Stuttering is a complex disorder, and there is so much to learn and understand—who better to learn from than professionals who specialize in fluency disorders and individuals who stutter themselves? This conference will be attended by more than 500 people who stutter, their families, and the professionals who help them.

Not only is this an invaluable experience for all those interested in stuttering, but we will also be offering up to 13 hours of ASHA-approved Continuing Education (1.3 CEUs). CEUs begin on Wednesday evening, June 25, with Uri & Phil Schneider presenting a workshop from 6:00–9:00 pm.

There will be a variety of opportunities for SLPs to attend workshops designed with their needs in mind. Roundtable discussions with teens and adults who stutter as well as the parents of children who stutter will allow the SLP to hear the personal stories of individuals who stutter and their families in a setting that encourages SLPs to ask questions. Many workshops led by leading SLPs will be offered throughout the conference. There will be a number of not to be missed adult workshops offered including "Covert Stuttering" and other informative, educational, and enlightening seminars.

There are some opportunities to help with the youth program (please contact the national office if you are interested in helping; e-mail [info@WeStutter.org](mailto:info@WeStutter.org)), or

you can submit a workshop proposal to facilitate your own workshop.

## Scholarships Available!

Need help getting to the conference this year? Thanks to the generosity of corporate sponsors and our members, we are pleased to announce that scholarships are available to provide financial assistance for people who stutter who would like to attend our annual conference.

Our goal is that families who cannot afford to join us will now be able to attend. If you would like more information regarding scholarships please tell us by e-mailing Tammy Flores, NSA director of operations, at [info@WeStutter.org](mailto:info@WeStutter.org).

We also ask that SLPs e-mail us to help identify families who would benefit from this assistance.

NSA is very grateful for the generosity of many individuals and companies, which allows us to offer this financial help. If you or your company would like to make a donation, please e-mail us at [info@WeStutter.org](mailto:info@WeStutter.org) for more information.

*Celebrating over 30 years of changing the lives of people who stutter!*

## Going Once. Going Twice. Sold.

Those simple words can mean only one thing—it's time to talk about the NSA auction. The LIVE auction is one our largest fundraisers as well as a conference ritual. And at this year's conference in New Jersey June 25–29, we expect it to be bigger and better than ever. So when you pack, don't forget your credit cards. (Just a little NSA humor.)

Even better, we're pleased to tell you that our Silent Auction, for smaller items, will return to the conference. It's another chance to bid on exciting treasures and help the NSA at the same time. Talk about a win-win situation.

**Want to help?** We thought so. The NSA is now collecting items for both auctions. Items of interest include: sports memorabilia, electronics, art, jewelry, and more. If you have any questions about the auction, items, or anything else, feel free to e-mail us at [info@WeStutter.org](mailto:info@WeStutter.org) or call us at 800-WeStutter (800-937-8888). ■

# OUR VOICE

A SECTION FOR TEENS WHO STUTTER

## Poem: So I Stutter...

My lips begin to tense  
Spit dribbles down my chin  
My teeth bang hard together  
As if the atomic bomb had fallen again  
My eyes begin to close  
I stop and try again  
Maybe it will be better this time  
I say it fluently now  
When I say it perfectly  
I'm not even trying  
— Philip Temme

## The Stuttering R.A.

Every freshman in college has the same fears: meeting new people, being away from home for too long, classes. Well, I'm not a freshman in college, I'm a sophomore. But I am a resident assistant (R.A.), and it's my job to make sure the freshman have the greatest first year possible. But I don't think Stetson University ever dreamt of having a stuttering R.A. Not only do I face the problems any other R.A. does, I face new problems including socializing with the people on my hall and helping them solve problems. I new trying to be in charge of 24 freshmen and being a stutterer wouldn't be easy, but I knew I would work it out somehow.

I love helping people and being a leader. That's why I became a member of the NSA Teen Advisory Council and the reason why I'm an R.A. There isn't a feeling greater in the world than the feeling you get after you help someone, and that's why I keep finding new ways to do it.

During my freshman year, my R.A. became one of my best friends and really helped me through my first year. He told me about the position, and it sounded like something I would like to do. Come on, helping people and getting paid to do it, what's not to love? When I applied for the job, I totally forgot about my stuttering. It wasn't until the interview that I remembered "Oh yeah, I stutter." During the interview I got stuck on the very first question, so I thought it was a good time to "advertise" as we call it. I told my interviewers I stuttered, but that it

never stopped me from holding any kind of leadership position. I guess I made a good impression because I got the job.

During the last week of this past summer, it dawned on me that I was going to be in charge of 24 freshman. I had flashbacks of being teased as a kid and the basic stuff stutterers go through growing up, and I got nervous. It just took snorkeling on the beautiful coral reefs of south Florida to take my mind off of things. It's amazing how much nature can soothe one's troubles. The day before I left home to start training for my new job, I wasn't nervous, I was excited. I was looking forward to meeting everyone and to seeing old friends. I couldn't wait to write my first person up for disobeying quiet hours.

Since school started, I've gone through all kinds of things I expected and didn't expect. Once a week I hold "hall meetings." Basically I tell all my residents about events that are happening, expectations I have, etc. Every time I hold one of these meetings, I have 24 pairs of eyes staring right at me. This could be daunting for anyone, but imagine it when you've grown up stuttering. It just takes a few seconds to realize that these guys look up to me, and they're interested in what I have to say, and thinking this really puts me at ease.

After these meetings I always feel a little better inside because I'm not letting anything get in the way of my duties, not even my speech. I think back to when I got accepted for the job and I had the sheet in front of me that said "Check here if you accept the job or check here if you deny the job." I can't tell you how much I wanted to click the "deny" box. But seeing how

I always feel a little better inside because I'm not letting anything get in the way of my duties, not even my speech.

I can help people enjoy their first year of college and maybe even help them enjoy life better, I shudder at the thought of me almost checking that box. I am Sean Hare, the stuttering R.A. and I wouldn't change it for the world.  
— Sean Hare

## Book Review: "Tending to Grace"

I recently read "Tending to Grace," an amazing book by Kimberly Newton Fusco, after several classmates told me that it was a must read. They didn't lie. This is one the best books I've ever read.

Throughout the story you see through the eyes of Cornelia, a shy, stuttering teenager. She goes through life with a troubled mother and her mother's boyfriend, who decide to leave for Las Vegas in search of a better life. Her mother leaves her in the care of her great-aunt Agatha, a strange woman Cornelia has never met. Transferring from urban New York to a rural town turns around Cornelia's life; her crates of books comfort her as she maintains high hopes that her mother will return.

"Tending to Grace" tells a truly touching story of a teenage girl searching to find the voice that screams inside her. Here you find that the strangest people in your life can bring out your best. This novel is adventurous yet heart warming, and it evolves into a tearjerker by the end. It's a must-read for middle school kids who stutter.

— A. K.

# Persistence Pays Off

BY LORI MELNITSKY, MA CCC-SLP



It's nice to be back! I just recently renewed my membership in the National Stuttering Association and am really enjoying receiving the newsletters and excited

about attending a convention in the future. I am a speech-language pathologist (SLP) and a person who stutters. I would like to relate an experience that occurred early in my career.

Many years ago I had relocated to upstate NY from Long Island. The stress of being out of my comfort zone, an unexpected death in the family, and moving away from my family was tremendous. I left a secure job at a school where I was surrounded by a supportive staff and worked with wonderful parents and children. I stuttered badly in graduate school but was able to regain control when I started working. After I moved, my stuttering came back with a vengeance, blocking, head jerking, prolongations, and interjections. I was honest when I interviewed with both bosses and told them I stuttered. Interestingly, during the job interview on Long Island I was fairly dysfluent, but I looked my interviewers in the eye and communicated effectively. I said what I needed to say and they responded with respect and patience. They said they were happy to hire me as many parents needed education about stuttering, and they thought I would be a good role model for people who stutter. The interview upstate was led by a speech pathologist, and I was fairly fluent. Looking back on it now, I should have voluntarily stuttered more since I was fairly fluent during the interview. Of course, I had no idea my stress level would increase so dramatically in such a short time.

When my boss at my upstate job heard me stutter first at a meeting, she was infuriated that I actually stuttered. She said that a few parents asked about my speech (which I later found out was 1 parent out of 20). I told her that I would educate them and put them at ease. I had done it before with much success. She refused to let me do this and told me I had to practice my previously learned fluency shaping techniques and be fluent. She had believed

that I had been "cured" and couldn't understand why I would still be dysfluent. I felt harassed and embarrassed. I let the shame and stress get to me and my stuttering became more severe. My self-esteem followed the same path. My boss would monitor me at meetings and berate me afterwards for being dysfluent. When I was fluent at a meeting, I felt like I was a "good" person for not stuttering. It no longer became about what kind of therapist I was, but how fluent I was. Interestingly, I had several parents thank me for my understanding of their child's communication difficulties, especially the ones who stuttered. Needless to say, my speech became worse and I wanted to give up.

Then one day when I had enough and the stress diminished slightly in my life, a little voice inside of me said "no, I will not give up." I will not let ignorant people control my actions and ruin what I had worked so hard for. To make a long story short I went to work after that with a smile on my face. I tried to speak with confidence and continued to practice what I had learned. I said what I wanted to say. I still stuttered somewhat, but spoke with confidence and became a stronger therapist as a result. This gave me the confidence to look for a new job where I was viewed with respect and admiration, whether I stuttered or not. I wasn't judged. I was actually respected for working so hard to overcome a communication difficulty that was so difficult to control at times.

It is now almost 15 years later, but I will never forget that experience. Although it wasn't a situation I would wish on anyone, it taught me to toughen up. Fortunately, the professionals I have met since then have been for the most part open-minded. If they're not, I ignore it or at least try to. It is so important to educate people about stuttering. It has given me a sense of freedom. I love what I do and am so glad I persisted and persevered. Sometimes the path is not easy, but the end result is worth it. ■

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*Lori Melnitsky has been a speech-language pathologist for over 14 years. She lives and works in Plainview, NY, with her husband and two daughters. She can be reached at [Lori@allislandspeech.com](mailto:Lori@allislandspeech.com).*

## A (SEMI) FAREWELL *continued*

benefit" of my years with the NSA, my husband Lee Reeves.

I have laughed with the adults of the NSA. I have cried with parents in opening roundtables. I have stuttered with teens as we "advertised" to strangers. I have stood next to an 8-year-old Jackson as he spoke (impromptu) to the convention attendees in Anaheim, resulting in a standing ovation and a moment for him that I will never forget. I have felt the full range of emotions that life has to offer while working and growing with the people of the NSA. I hope that I can continue to live life with the courage and grace I see in the Family Programs' children and teens as they walk in the world and navigate society's misconceptions of the disorder of stuttering.

I could **never** leave the NSA, as the adults, children, teens, and families I have been privileged to meet have been an inspiration to me. I will continue to serve the NSA on the Family Programs Committee, with youth days and continuing education unit presentations, at the conference each year, and as a co-chair for the Dallas TWST chapter.

I will also be embarking on a new vision of fundraising for the NSA. I remember when Judith Eckhart asked me to run for the board of directors, I told her "as long as I never have to help raise money, because I am not good at that." But, I have learned to never say "never" and have come to understand that the future of the NSA and its financial viability rest squarely upon the shoulders of those of us who benefit from its services and care about the stuttering community. While the NSA is currently doing well financially, we cannot become complacent and "hope" or "expect" the NSA to always be there; growing and helping to change the lives of people who stutter. So, watch for more about these fund development ideas in the year to come!

We have done much and there is much left to do! I can't wait to see what the future has in store for the NSA! Thank you all so much for letting me be a part of this wonderful organization.

With sincere gratitude,  
Nina Reeves

# CHAPTERNEWS

FROM BONNIE WEISS

## **Cleveland, Ohio**

Glenn Schafer, who is the Cleveland chapter leader, writes that the Cleveland chapter had their annual year end Holiday Party in December. He writes that it was good to see the friendly and missed faces of some members who are not able to attend meetings on a regular basis, but they also got to see the family of member Joe Peralti. Cleveland chapter founder Doug Havighurst presented a poignant soliloquy aimed at getting more of the chapter members more involved in the NSA. The festivities concluded with a rousing game of Name That Tune hosted by Todd Gerziz.

## **Chicago/Metro North, Illinois**

The Chicago/Metro North chapter had a good meeting in November. They had a guest, Jeremy, who introduced the group to the McGuire Stuttering Program, which included conducting some conference calls to do some phone practice. They also discussed the papers on the International Stuttering Association Day Web site, which members felt were absolutely great. Members of the three Chicago-area chapters (Naperville, Metro North, and Wood Dale) had a holiday party at Bahama Breeze in Naperville. There were 25 people in attendance.

## **Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota**

The Twin Cities chapter had a great meeting in late November. In spite of

the frigid weather, they had 13 people in attendance. It was Judy Johnson's last meeting as she will be moving to California after her wedding! They spent most of the meeting watching and discuss the recent MTV True Life episode regarding people who stutter. They thought it was good to get the word out about stuttering. Linda Hinderscheit, who has stepped into Judy's shoes as chapter leader, also writes that when they weren't watching the show or talking about it, they ate chocolate cake in honor of all that Judy has done for the Twin Cities chapter.

## **Royal Oak, Michigan**

Bernie Weiner writes that the Royal Oak chapter had 8 people at their December meeting. They got into a very lively discussion about how much people who don't stutter can "empathize" with people who do stutter. Can they really feel what we feel? Tim Gardner, the new chapter leader, had a great handout sheet for those present to write down things about their stuttering in the past year. Questions were about goals for 2008 as well as their worst and best stuttering experiences. The Royal Oak chapter had some very interesting moments in 2007. They changed leadership in the middle of the year, and that's worked out great.

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## **Northern Virginia**

The Northern Virginia chapter hosted a picnic on September 23 for chapters in the area, including Washington, DC, and Maryland. The picnic was held at the home of Matt and Michele Zenkovich in Vienna, Virginia. It was a picture perfect day, and 25 people attended. The farthest distance "award" went to Gary Auker who traveled from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to attend. Other distinguished guests included leaders of the Rockville, Maryland, group and Vivian Sisskin. By all reports the event was a rousing success.



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*Changing the lives of people who stutter*

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