

## How I Found the NSA

BY JOE MIRLY

I've told this story before – but want to tell it again.

I've been a stutterer most of my life, and have spent much of that time avoiding it. Not that I could avoid stuttering – no way could I ever do that. I had a brief stint of speech therapy in elementary school, but that ended when the speech-language pathologist (SLP) either retired or moved out of the area.

Incidentally that was a very happy moment in my life! From what I can remember of it the therapy approach was less than helpful, and provided much frustration and humiliation, and it elated me that this was coming to an end, but that is a story for another day.

Anyway, from this point on I avoided anything having to do with stuttering. As I grew up I learned to deal with stuttering in my own way. Or not deal with it; however you want to look at it. I was dealing with it by not dealing with it – that could have been my motto.

Over the years there were certain milestone events that I experienced that surreptitiously added to my own understanding of my stuttering and how it was affecting my life. These led to mini-epiphanies that in hindsight put me squarely on the road to acceptance. I still stuttered, and still do, but I was giving stuttering less power and effect on my life.

### The NSA Experience

My son started stuttering when he was around 3 years old. I can't remember exactly when, but I easily recognized the patterns of stuttering in his speech. I didn't know what to do. Sure, I was

a stutterer, but as a parent it was different. I had the responsibility to do whatever I could to help him, but I knew hardly anything about it.

I started researching on the Internet, and found out about the NSA. They had a chapter in Seattle, so I gave them a call and found out they had a meeting the following day. I went to the meeting with the intent of asking questions and finding resources to help my son. I didn't even think that I might get something out of it.

I was floored when I attended the meeting. There were 15 or so people – all stuttering – and all talking about stuttering. What what what? This was the first time I had ever heard a woman stutter, and for some reason that really struck me. It felt weird to talk about stuttering, something that I'd been avoiding for most of my life. It was uncomfortable and liberating all at the same time.

The most striking thing was that people were interested in hearing about me and my stuttering, and how I was dealing with it. I didn't talk much at that first meeting; rather I focused on my original purpose for being there. I got some contact info for a local SLP at the university who I could talk to about stuttering and how I could help my son, and came away with that. I didn't know what to think about the rest of it.

I decided to attend a couple more meetings as my curiosity was piqued. My wife didn't know why I was bothering to go, as I didn't outwardly seem to have many hang-ups about my speech. I went to a few

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## A Is for Attitude

BY STEVEN KAUFMAN

One night I was browsing online, and all of a sudden you spot a quote that immediately catches your wandering eye. Like a thunderbolt out of a clear blue sky, you suddenly read it and you're transported back to a specific time in your life—maybe good, or not.

But you're reminded that the time served a purpose in shaping who you are.

I want to share that quote, courtesy of Rabbi Joshua Heller of Congregation B'nai Torah in Atlanta, Georgia: "The greatest tests don't involve #2 pencils or bluebooks – they are the tests of life."

Author C.S. Lewis once wrote how experience is often the most brutal teachers, but there is no better way to learn. I will never forget one incident in my life involving my speech where I faced a major life test. Out of this test came a lesson that I still draw on to this day.

In February 2005, I earned a paralegal certificate from Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York. I was ready to begin my legal career and looked forward to the interviews and opportunities I might have. I was on the Long Island Railroad taking the train to Penn Station for an interview with a law firm near Grand Central Station. As I prepared for how I would phrase my answers to questions asked of me, I was waiting for the moment to have my name called so I could make the best impression possible on the associate I'd be interviewing with. After five minutes, my world crashed down on me. While trying to get the first sentence out, I completely stammered on every word.

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## Getting ready for 2009

BY TAMMY FLORES

Well, here we are again, another successful year coming to an end, and high hopes for 2009.

Throughout 2008, we successfully worked together helping people who stutter, introducing new programs and material and reaching out to families and children across the country. Congratulations on being a part of this very significant accomplishment.

I am very pleased and truly grateful to each and every one of you and for this chance to thank you for supporting the NSA this year and in the past. Your donations result in meaningful and measurable benefits to the stuttering community.

Right now, your generosity is hard at work. Day in and day out, your support plays a part in helping us reach children, teens, and adults who stutter everywhere as well as helping us to continue publishing our newsletters and brochures. It is very gratifying to me to know that just as the NSA is always ready to care for the stuttering community, the community is willing to help the NSA. This is team work at its finest. This is an accomplishment that we can all share in and be proud of.

To each of the many supporters of the NSA who are committed to helping us meet such a significant goal, I say "Thank you." Thank you for your time, your donations and your commitment to helping people who stutter. Your support has ensured that the National Stuttering Association will continue to be the home for the leading support organization for people who stutter and their families.

Happy Holidays to you and your family.

# ODDS&ENDS

FROM DAVID BLAZINA

## An Inspirational Student

The following letter was sent to the NSA by an elementary school teacher who, after 35 years of teaching, had his first experience with a PWS of this nature in his classroom. The student to whom he is referring can serve as an inspiration to us all.

*Dear NSA,  
I am, in the next three school days, completing my 35th year of Middle School teaching – my last year of teaching before retirement! Last school year provided my sole experience with a student whose stuttering problem would be considered debilitating ...and what a wonderful experience it was! Through her patience and persistence, her kindness and understanding, we created a classroom environment in which this wonderfully bright and caring young lady thrived.*

*She was with me for two classes each day, two different subjects, and two different groups of students. She was a leader in each class, contributing daily, even to the point of conducting whole-class activities and never noticeably "getting stuck" even once! She set a standard of courage and confidence which I know I'll never achieve. I was so blessed to have her in my life, even if only briefly!*

*Thank you so much for all the magnificent work that you do.*

*Gratefully,  
Tim Baumgart  
Bay View Middle School  
Green Bay, WI*

## Memorable Trip to Boston

NSA Long Island chapter leader **Steven Kaufman** checks in to tell us about a recent get together:

I had the pleasure of meeting up with members of various NSA chapters for a day in downtown Boston. Among the members who attended were myself, **Cynthia Scace** (Connecticut River Valley chapter leader), **Alex**

**Kuzmenkoa & Yoko** (NYC-Manhattan), **Fatima, Mike Hurwitz, Monika Johnson, Alicia & Brian, Andre Balogh,** and **Pete McKay** (my chapter).

The day began at the Boston Common Freedom Trail Visitors Center that spotlights sixteen of our revolutionary sites, from the Old State House to the Bunker Hill Monument. Afterward we walked around Faneuil Hall, which is an outdoor mall, to do some shopping and just watch the world go by. I tried to get a Derek Jeter T-shirt, but had no luck...hahaha.

"**Big Dave**" **Babin** from Manchester, **Giza** from Rhode Island, and the **Melnicks (Ken, Laura, and Caroline)** from Worcester joined us for dinner at Stephanie's on Newbury in Copley Square. As we dined together and shared our experiences with stuttering and life in general, I realized that now more than ever, I belong; and it's the greatest feeling in the world.

After I was done making a toast to everyone in attendance, "Big Dave," as he's known in NSA circles, said that I had a tremendous passion for working in the NSA, and that meant so much to me.

It is my intention to organize another event in the spring and to get other chapters involved. I know it takes time and a good deal of commitment, but the rewards are worth it for everyone involved. We can all come together to learn, laugh, and cry with one another.

This glow is going to stay with me quite a while.

## Interview with Staten Island NSA Member

NSA member **Tony Troiano** was interviewed for a cover health story about stuttering which appears in the October 6, 2008 Staten Island Advance. The article can be read online by going to [silive.com/healthfit/](http://silive.com/healthfit/), and scrolling down to "Getting the words out."

Tony wrote to LETTING GO to give us a little background on the story:

*I was pleased that the reporter accurately covered all the points I was trying to get across, mainly a plug for NSA and FRIENDS.*

All too often print and TV news focuses on the spectacle of a cure, i.e., miraculous before-and-after footage, Speech Easy devices, and emotion laden breakthroughs while the self-help movement is never mentioned as a viable option! There is even a description of my favorite therapy, voluntary stuttering. Imagine, someone actually stuttering on purpose!

Many thanks to **Cynthia Scace** for suggesting we write in to our local papers and to my good buddy **Joe Biden** who was the "hook" for the piece! The print article has photos of him, and also of myself during the interview including and a photo of me working in my studio. Online is text only, no photographs.



### New Booklet Available

A new 16 page booklet called *More Friends for Jackson*, written by **Nina Reeves** and illustrated by **Pam Kurtz**, will be available through the NSA Web

site. The booklet is about a young boy named Jackson who attends a meeting for kids who stutter. As the story progresses we learn about Jackson's initial apprehension over attending the meeting, his experience during the course of event, and the resulting friendships made by those in attendance. Special thanks to Ellen Blasena & Associates for the production of this booklet.

### NSA Member Presented with Professional Award

The entire NSA family would like to congratulate **Norbert J. Lewandowski**, CPA, who was chosen by a committee of his peers as one of "Ohio's Most Influential CPAs." This honor is reflective of his significant, positive influence on the growth, development, and evolution of The Ohio Society of CPAs and the CPA profession as a whole in Ohio.

Please look for Norbert's award announcement in an issue of *Catalyst*

magazine as "Ohio's Most Influential CPAs" will be profiled throughout the year. As the award is announced in *Catalyst*, the Society will issue a news release to local media outlets and post the announcement on their Web site.



### New Coloring Book

A new coloring book called *Rucus Talks and Talks*, written by **Nina Reeves** and illustrated by **Brit Kohls**, is now

available though the NSA Web site. From the inside cover: "This book is written for and can be used by young children who are experiencing difficulties with stuttering in their speech, are demonstrating an expression or awareness of those difficulties, or are ready for this type of direct discussion as determined by the child's parents and a qualified speech-language pathologist."

### A Role Reversal

People get tired of hearing me say I got to go there and I did this and that, all because I stutter...but these words ring true.

Last year I was asked to meet with **Gary Fleder**, the director of a new film, called *The Express, the Ernie Davis Story*, scheduled to hit the movie theaters October 2008. As a young boy **Ernie Davis** stuttered, and the director wanted to make sure the young actor **Justin Martin** gave an honest and real portrayal of stuttering.

My first visit was to view the footage already done to give my opinion. Though the young actor did a great job, I did think it could be a bit more real. The funny part was I was being interviewed to see if I understood stuttering and if I could teach Justin how to stutter as if he truly did. What a role reversal! Again I find myself in a situation that never would be if I didn't stutter.

Two weeks later I find myself driving up to the gate of Universal Pictures in Los Angeles and find my name on the guard's guest list! I am introduced as the "stuttering coach" to the film's star **Rob Brown**, who was working in the building and minutes later I am in the

sound room with the actual footage on the screen doing voiceovers with the actor Justin Martin, the director Gary Fleder, **Renee Tondelli**, supervising dialogue editor, and a full crew. It was amazing to see our work transpire immediately to the screen. I had a blast, and I got paid for the day too!

I remember standing there and feeling proud to stutter and feeling powerful that I understood my stuttering and how far I have come in my journey. I didn't see the entire film or the results of stuttering on the character's life, but I hope and think that since the director was so concerned the stuttering be authentic, it will be sensitive too. I'm not sure if my name will make the credits. They said it might...but if so...most likely at the bottom of the list when the lights go on and all the people have left the movie theater...leaving behind a trail of popcorn. — *Annie Bradberry is the former NSA executive director and long time supporter.*

### Phoenix CEU Day

In February 2009 the Arizona chapter of the NSA will be hosting a one day CEU in the Phoenix area. This will be a great opportunity to whet your appetite for the 2009 NSA conference in Scottsdale! Please be sure to check the Web site for more detailed information about this event.

### Tampa CEU and Youth Day January 16 & 17

Join **Nina Reeves**, **Nathan Maxfield** and the **NSA Tampa chapter** on January 16, 2009 in Tampa, Florida for a Continuing Education Seminar. This workshop is open to speech-language pathologists, teachers, speech pathology students, special educators, and families of children who stutter. The topic will be "School Age Stuttering Therapy: A Prescription for Success."

Tampa, Florida Youth Day, January 17, 2009: Children will meet other children who stutter and participate in activities such as how to handle teasing.

Check [WeStutter.org](http://WeStutter.org) for more detailed information about these events.



## Go West, Young Man (Young Lady, Too)

BY TAMMY FLORES AND LONGTIME NSA MEMBER GREGG BENEDIKT

### NSA Conference 2009: Scottsdale, Arizona

### Mark your calendar now for July 8–12, 2009!

Plans are underway for the 27th NSA annual conference and first-ever NSA Conference Golf Tournament.

Scottsdale, Arizona, here we come! I know what you're thinking – Arizona in the middle of July – Tammy has lost her mind. But let me assure all of you, I really haven't.

We've done our homework, checked the numbers and never before have we been able to offer our members the opportunity to stay at a world-famous 4-diamond resort at such an incredible rate – only \$139 per night.

So just don't come just for the conference, make this a (family) vacation. The amazing resort has something for everyone including a floating river pool, a mini water slide, a luxurious spa, elite shopping, incredible bars and restaurants on site, and other various restaurants within a 2–3 minute walk (or better yet let the hotel take you over in their air conditioned golf cart).

Speaking of golf, the NSA will hold its first-ever golf tournament. So be sure to pack your clubs (you can also rent clubs there). Knowing members the way I do, I have a feeling we're all going to be hearing the word "fore!" quite a lot.

Whether this is your first conference or your tenth or your twentieth, there

truly is something for everyone. For three unforgettable days, the Westin Kierland Resort & Spa will be a special place where stuttering is the native language. It will be a place to learn more about stuttering treatment and research, a place to share experiences, and a place to build self-confidence.

During the conference program, you will witness inspiring interactive workshops, hear motivational speakers, and have countless opportunities to meet and network with fellow people who stutter, their families, and speech-language pathologists.

Of course, no NSA conference would be the same without our annual awards luncheon, live and silent auction, and the closing banquet complete with dinner and dancing. And if you missed karaoke during this year's conference, never fear, you'll have a chance at the next one!

Sounds exciting? It is. Even better, we have organized some tours that will make your trip to Arizona more memorable. You can choose from an Arizona Diamondback baseball game, Starry Night Safari at Phoenix Zoo, or get a glimpse of the night lights from Frank Lloyd Wright's desert masterpiece and take a tour, and more. And if you like to shop, well the Kierland Commons shopping experience speaks for itself.

Registration materials and tour information will be mailed in late January, but you can book your hotel room now.

Hotel rates for the conference are \$139/night. At this incredible rate, rooms will go quickly. So be sure to reserve yours early. The NSA has its own special Web site from the Westin Kierland where you can book your room and check your reservation. Visit [starwoodmeeting.com/Book/nsastutter](http://starwoodmeeting.com/Book/nsastutter) or log onto the NSA Web site at [WeStutter.org](http://WeStutter.org).

### Want to Present A Workshop?

Workshop proposals are now being accepted for next year's conference in Scottsdale, Arizona. You can request a Workshop Submission form from the national office via telephone at 800-WeStutter (800-937-8888) or e-mail at [tflores@WeStutter.org](mailto:tflores@WeStutter.org). The form is also available on the NSA's Web site, [WeStutter.org](http://WeStutter.org).

The deadline for us to receive proposals is April 1, 2009. We'll let the "primary" contact person know by May 30, 2009, whether his or her proposal was accepted.

### 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 individuals and 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 executive director, at [tflores@WeStutter.org](mailto:tflores@WeStutter.org).

We also ask that speech-language pathologists e-mail us to help identify people who stutter and their 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!*

# Feeling the Fear

BY JOHN HARRISON



Most people, fluent or not, are frightened about public speaking. In fact, public speaking is listed as the number one fear – even ahead of dying!

A fluent person's fear of speaking can be overwhelming. However, in my workshops, if I can convince the individual to go *with* the fear, rather than to hold it back, the choice to be fully present in the moment usually lessens the fear and may even disappear it. If you *choose* to do what you're afraid of doing, you're back in control. You become empowered because you're doing what *you* want.

I first saw this principle in action when I was facilitating an NSA chapter meeting. On this particular evening one of our members was having considerable difficulty with blocks and other struggle behavior.

Half-way into her talk I interrupted her. "What are you feeling?" I said.

"I'm feeling embarrassed," she replied. "I'm feeling scared and blocked and frustrated."

"Great!" I said. "At least you *know* what you're feeling. Can you make a conscious choice to actually *have* those feelings?" She gave me a strange look, nodded yes, and started to talk again. Interestingly, she instantly had less difficulty.

Once again I stopped her. "Very good. Now, can you *double* the fear? Can you actually choose to be *twice* as embarrassed and fearful?" She looked at me as if I'd completely lost it. But she said she'd try, and when she did, she stopped fighting herself. She just spoke. And suddenly she was speaking without any blocks. (This doesn't

happen so dramatically with everybody, but it does prove a point.)

Fear has a purpose. The emotion is generated by the primitive brain, and it's there to make sure you do what's necessary to physically survive. Although the higher learning centers of your cerebral cortex are highly evolved, the primitive brain has remained more or less constant for 200 million to 300 million years. Consequently, it has never learned to distinguish between physical threats and social threats. Every threat is seen in terms of life or death and becomes a potential trigger for a fight or flight response. That's true whether you're talking to your boss or something as simple as ordering a cup of tea.

The only way to change that drastic response is to teach your primitive brain that when you order a cup of tea, you don't need to marshal the same defenses necessary to fight off a mugger.

How do you do this? In addition to the work you may be doing in speech and/or cognitive therapy, it's helpful to find a safe place where you can experience any fears associated with free expression and learn that they won't kill you.

Having risky/safe real-life experiences through active participation in Toastmasters or similar organizations can go a long way toward turning speaking—to 1 person or 100—into a fun activity.

Remember, having fun is the best antidote to performance fears. And the path to fun starts with being honest about what you're feeling and giving yourself the freedom to be yourself. ■

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*John is the former editor of LETTING GO.*

HOW I FOUND THE NSA *continued*

meetings and started to get to know a few of the attendees. I still kept a lot to myself though, as I didn't know what to say. I'd not talked about stuttering before, especially not my stuttering, so I didn't know where to begin.

Shortly thereafter the call went out for volunteers to help at the regional NSA workshop/family day in Tacoma. People were needed to help set up tables and chairs, and do whatever else that needed to be done. There was also an adult workshop that was happening, so I decided to check it out. Annie Bradberry was there, and the adult workshop was led by a man named Bob Quesal.

I listened to what Annie said during the opening remarks, and found that I actually learned something and had fun at the adult workshop. I think I was starting to understand what the NSA was about. At the closing ceremony I watched as the kids lined up to talk at the open mic. That is when it struck me. As I looked out over the room of about 100 people and listened to kids eager to talk (and stutter) on a microphone, on a stage! I thought back to when I was their age – I wouldn't dream of ever doing this. I would have run screaming the other way, not lined up eager to talk. It struck me that this organization was doing remarkable things with kids, families, and adults – and needed to continue. And I wanted to be a part of it. After the event ended I made a beeline to Annie (then the executive director for the NSA) and wrote her a check for my membership right there on the spot. My thoughts were not about what I was going to get out of it but rather what I could do to help others.

Fast forward to now, I can say that I cannot put a value on what I've got back from my involvement in this organization. I've made life-long friends, learned so much about myself and stuttering, and hopefully helped other people in the process. That's how I found the NSA. ■

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*Joe Mirly lives in Marysville, Washington, with wife Theresa and kids Spencer & Emma. He works at Microsoft as a software engineer. Joe has been involved in the NSA for about 7 years and was leader of Seattle chapter for 5 years, regional coordinator for the Northwest for 4 years, and is a past director of Adult Programs for NSA. He enjoys home improvement projects, spending time with family, and golf.*

## Support the NSA at Your Workplace!

You and your family members and friends can contribute to the NSA at your workplace. The NSA participates annually in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). Federal employees can designate #10853 on their CFC form to support the NSA.

However, you don't have to be a federal employee to contribute. Each year many employees make donations to the NSA through matching gifts, stocks, and many other ways. For more information call us at 800-WeStutter (800-937-8888). You can also e-mail Tammy Flores, NSA executive director, at [tflores@WeStutter.org](mailto:tflores@WeStutter.org).

# CHAPTER NEWS

FROM BONNIE WEISS

## **Albany, New York**

On August 4, a beautiful summer evening, members of the College of St. Rose Albany chapter gathered at a picnic area in an area park, The Crossings, in Colonie, for the August meeting/picnic. Seven members attended, and the wife of one of member and five children of members joined in for a gathering where people brought a picnic meal or snacks to eat while the group spent some very enjoyable time together, sharing in an informal setting. Rousing games of whiffle ball were also played by the children which the “big” kids – adult group NSA members – joined in.

## **Lafayette, Louisiana**

Derek Johnson and Al Thomas recently took over as co-chapter leaders. The former leader, Mitch Trichon, has moved to Brooklyn, New York. They had to postpone their meeting one week due to Hurricane Gustav passing over the city the week before. There were seven attendees at the meeting. Most of the discussion was centered around perceptions of stuttering by non-stutterers as well as their own perceptions of their stuttering. They also talked about International Stuttering Awareness Day on October 22. Two ideas discussed were setting up a table on the university campus and going to public schools to discuss stuttering with teachers and/or elementary school children. It was decided that the group needs to discuss this further.

## **Minneapolis, Minnesota**

The Twin Cities chapter met at Memory Lanes for their September meeting. They try to start and end their meeting year with a purely social event. There were nine people in attendance. It was the first chapter meeting for two attendees, and a couple of people they hadn't seen in a long time were also there. Some of the members who stutter got good practice in a speaking situation when their waitress tried to fill in words for them! One of the

students who attended is studying to be a speech-language pathologist and said that it was an invaluable experience to meet people who stutter and to hear them tell their stories.

## **Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**

Caryn Herring is the new chapter leader of the Pittsburgh group. She is currently a student in Speech Pathology at the University of Pittsburgh. She will be assisted by Cathy Wilson. The group talked about increasing group attendance and also about getting some new members. They decided that the first meeting of each month will continue to meet at the Children's Institute in Squirrel Hill. The second meeting of each month would be at Panera's Restaurant which will be more lively and fun! The group then decided to call some restaurants in the area to advertise their stuttering. Caryn writes that she thought everyone was extremely brave and did a great job making these calls!

## **Rockville, Maryland**

Jerome Mortman, co-leader of the NSA Rockville, writes that they had their monthly meeting on October 8. Six people were in attendance, including two new attendees. At the meeting, they talked about covert stuttering. Some people who are covert talked about how hard it is to hide their stuttering. One of the members, who is no longer a covert stutterer, said that it's great to be liberated and not have to hide her stutter anymore. They also played a word game. Each person wrote down their most feared words, and they went around the room saying the word and into three sentences to help remove the fear. There were a variety of words that gave them trouble. For example: trinity, mister, statistical. On October 17, Tracey Wallace, the co-chapter leader, hosted a Happy Hour on her boat docked at a marina in Chesapeake Beach, Maryland. Eleven people from the Northern Virginia, DC, and Rockville chapters attended. Everyone had a great time.

## **Syracuse, New York**

Evan Sherman writes that the Central New York chapter had its inaugural meeting on September 2 with five people in attendance. The meeting was held at the Liverpool Public Library, with four people who stutter and a speech-language pathologist. They had a very interesting conversation about the advantages of advertising their stuttering and the difficulty in doing so. One of the group members mentioned that she had finally come to accept her stuttering. She said that rather than focusing on not stuttering at all, she focuses on “stuttering well.” All in all it was a great first meeting. Vince Markowsky is the co-chapter leader of this new group.

## **Union, New Jersey**

An enthusiastic crowd of 14, including NSA Executive Director Tammy Flores, attended the first meeting of the Central New Jersey chapter. The meeting was held on October 3 at the Center for Communication Disorders at Keane University in Union, New Jersey. The group is led by Hannah Laday and Serge Vaval. Hannah started by meeting with reading the Welcoming Words. The rest of the meeting dealt with introductions as the new group needed to get to know one another. For some of the people there, it was the first time they had shared in a group setting. Hannah pointed out that the group was starting out just before International Stuttering Awareness Day on October 22 and encouraged everyone there to do something to make the public more aware of stuttering.

# Freedom

BY GLORIA KLUMB



My first NSA conference was Boston 2001. I am a person who stutters, and I had been around kids who stutter, but never adults. I always thought

stuttering was a kid problem, and I was just an odd duck out of water.

The conference was all very overwhelming at first. I got to the hotel at a time when most people are out with friends for dinner, and I only knew the names of a few people I had never met in person. (I'd seen pictures of these people, but that was it.) Walking into the hotel lobby I felt lost. I wanted to go home; this was just too much for a person from a small Midwest town.

I did manage to stick it out, and that was because I did not know how to get back to the airport and get home. (Going to the Boston conference was also my first time being on a plane.)

After about two hours I found the patio area and just sat in a corner. I must have really looked lost because two ladies, and then a third lady, came over and sat with me. One of the ladies knew my name from the *Stutt\_L* e-mail list, and we started talking, or should I say she started talking. It did not take long before Mario, Bernie, and a few others from *Stutt\_L* found me. So that was the start of an awesome weekend. All these people from the NSA were very friendly, and it was like meeting old friends. They included me, and they listened to me if I had something to say.

Going to workshops and just seeing other adults who stutter was an awesome adventure. Seeing Alex Rosenbaum as a pre-teen talking with his dad in a busy lobby and stuttering was something I thought I would never see or hear. Seeing other kids who stutter and just saying what they wanted to say, stutter and all. Seeing everyone who stutters just talking, who cared that they stutter? It seemed like no one cared! So much freedom going on in that hotel lobby.

## Nothing "Ho-Hum"

After all that you would think that everything else that happen would be just ho-hum stuff. Well, it was not! Needing a break from people and just needing to be with my thoughts and seeing if I would be OK to speak to strangers on my own and live to talk about

# Exciting New Book

## Without Hesitation: Medication Breakthroughs for the Treatment of Stuttering



Get ready for some warm-weather reading that's sure to generate talk: NSA member Gerald Maguire, MD, Director of the Kirkup Center for the Medical

Treatment of Stuttering at the University of California-Irvine School of Medicine who is rapidly gaining international acclaim for his scientific investigations into the mystery and challenges of disordered speech, is working on a book (due in spring '09) that explores the connection between the human brain and stuttering, and how breakthrough medical advances in pharmacologic intervention can profoundly affect speech.

*Without Hesitation*, which is being published in partnership with the NSA, isn't written for physicians or other medical

professionals but for people who stutter and their loved ones. Maguire, himself a person with a lifelong stutter, doesn't shy away from the sensitive issues people with speech disorders face: He shares his own sometimes-painful journey, discusses the history of and science behind stuttering, and offers an enlightening view into how medication can be used to dramatically reduce stuttering symptoms. You'll also read first-person testimonials from some of his patients for whom pharmacologic intervention has been a life-altering experience. ■

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*Watch the NSA Web site [WeStutter.org](http://WeStutter.org) for updates on *Without Hesitation's* availability. All proceeds from the book will go to the NSA and the Kirkup Center for the Medical Treatment of Stuttering to provide ongoing education and research.*

it, I went for a walk. I went looking for the Freedom Trail, the trail that Paul Revere took when he shouted, "The British are coming!" which was the beginning of freedom for people living in America and breaking away from Britain. Well, I did force myself to ask for directions. I remember wanting to find out if it really was safe to speak in Boston. I found that the people in Boston were very friendly, and even though I stuttered I made it to the Freedom Trail. I stuttered and no one made a comment. Would strangers back home in Wisconsin be as nice?

Once on the trail I really started to realize that it was OK to stutter. Walking the trail and seeing the Old North Church and other sites and just thinking, "Why is stuttering controlling me? People in the Internet chat rooms and *Stutt\_L* talk about how it is OK to stutter. Are they crazy, or is it really OK to stutter? I have been told that in time everything will come together and I will see that it is OK. Why can't it happen all at once? Why does it have to take so long? Will my feelings toward stuttering ever become positive? Will the hurt ever go away? How does this all happen?" So many questions, and no solid answers.

That simple walk on the Freedom Trail and doing the most simple thing like asking a stranger for directions was a start to

understanding that little phase, "It is OK to stutter!" I look at that walk as my freedom from stuttering.

## The Freedom to Stutter

Today I can say I have the freedom to stutter. My stuttering does not have a hold on me. Yes, there are days I get frustrated with it, yes there are days I wonder, "Why me?" But I can turn around and look at a picture of the Old North Church on my wall and then say...freedom, and yes, "It IS OK to stutter!"

Many people who emigrated to the U.S. though New York and saw the Statue of Liberty thought of that statue as their freedom to a new start to life. For us who stutter we can take that Grand Lady and realize we can use her for a symbol to say, "Don't let your stutter control you." You can find that Freedom in Scottsdale, Arizona, during next year's NSA conference and start to realize you have the freedom to think/say, "Yes, it is OK to stutter!"

Come join us in Scottsdale! ■

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*Gloria Klumb lives in Madison, Wisconsin. She has been the Madison chapter leader for going on three years and at the 2007 conference was named Chapter Leader of the Year. Her e-mail signature is "Remember, "It IS OK To Stutter.""*

**A IS FOR ATTITUDE** *continued*

The associate apologized and point blank said the job was not for me. Despite my attempts to convince her otherwise, there was no way to reach her.

After that interview, I decided to change my approach whenever an employer called me for an interview—I decided to ask upfront if my speech was a problem for them. One time a firm from Alexandria, Virginia, called me, and I explained to the administrative assistant that I would be happy to come down there, but because of the distance I was traveling, wanted to be honest and let them know that I had a speech impediment, and if this was a concern, we could both save ourselves time and move on. All of a sudden her voice changed: “Well...gee...I don’t know...,” and needless to say, she never called me back. This went on for a few months with other firms who called me.

After months of feeling helpless, I went out to a dinner with a close friend whose counsel I trust. I explained the situation to him, and he mentioned something I never thought of. He bluntly asked me, “Has it ever occurred to you maybe you have an attitude problem? You are justified in feeling angry and frustrated, but you are so convinced that no one wants to talk to you because of your speech. There may be other positions available, but you’re so wrapped up in calling them out. To be honest, if I were a human resources professional, I would not want to hire you either.”

There are often times when people do not want to say anything because it would hurt

someone’s feelings, even if it is the truth. I have always been outspoken, because that’s who I am, and I would respect a person for being brutally honest if they have to. Although I was dumbfounded by this comment, it was 100% right. I went home and did some serious soul-searching. What had my frustrations gotten me?

I do not know whether or not I will even be a paralegal. What I do know though is I learned a valuable lesson—your attitude is everything. Life is all about how you carry yourself, how you relate to the others, and your outlook on life. I know it can be so tempting to let yourself succumb to the pessimists.

It would be much better if we could close the door to our rooms, throw away the keys, and let the chips fall where they may. But the where we go in life is up to us and us alone. We can let one of two things happen – we can let our stuttering define us as a person, or we can accept that stuttering is only one part of our total package. We’ve all heard no one likes a negative person—they just bring down everyone else, and they convince others their plight is helpless. It’s only helpless if you make it so. I don’t know where my future will take me, but I firmly believe that A is for Attitude—so let yours shine! ■

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*Steven Kaufman is a co-leader of the Long Island, New York, NSA chapter. He holds a journalism degree magna cum laude as well as a paralegal certificate with honors. Among his favorite hobbies are supporting the Yankees and New Jersey Devils, freelance writing, 80s music, karaoke, charity galas, and traveling.*

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## Happy Holidays!

On behalf of the board of directors, Michael McDuffie, Bill Smith, Barry Liben, Lee Reeves, Cathy Olish, Marybeth Allen, Debbie Nicolai, Ernie Canadeo, Marc Rosenbaum, Brad Madsen, Jim, McClure, Tracey Wallace, John Tetnowski, and our staff, Tammy Flores, Melissa Lopez, and Sarah D’Agostino, we wish you and your loved ones a healthy and happy holiday season!



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