LETTINGGO
NATIONAL STUTTERING ASSOCIATION
MAY JUNE 2011

119 W. 40th Street, 14th Floor, New York, NY 10018 • 800.WeStutter (937.8888) • 212.944.4050 • email: info@WeStutter.org • www.WeStutter.org

Are you Comfortable Seeing Another Person Stutter?

TIM MACKESEY, CCC-SLP, BRSFD

The recent success of the blockbuster movie *The King's Speech* has attracted people who stutter (PWS) to the theater in droves. Many PWS are ecstatic over the portrayal of a hero who stutters- King George VI. Other PWS have confided that they don't feel they can go to the movie because seeing another person stuttering upsets them. Another group of PWS have gone and reported they felt very uncomfortable watching the actor Colin Firth stammer. What happens within us that could make us resist seeing another person stutter/stammer? It is important to solve this for our own peace of mind.

These recent conversations with PWS provoked a flashback for me. I saw *A Fish Called Wanda* in a crowded movie theater, and when I heard the audience explode into laughter as Kevin Kline tormented a stuttering Michael Palin, I slid low in my seat to hide. I remember worrying that if the audience detected my stutter, they would turn in my direction and burst out in laughter. *A Fish Called Wanda* was a low point in motion picture portrayal of stuttering. I hope we never again see such a discriminating and cruel movie again.

The King's Speech is the polar opposite from Wanda. King George VI works with speech therapist Lionel Logue (Geoffrey Rush), gains control over his stammer, and delivers a historic speech for the world to hear. King George is a hero. This can be a powerful and motivating movie if one lets it be so.

The phenomenon that makes a PWS either avoid *The King's Speech* movie or feel unease while watching it is called projecting. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines projection as: a form of defense in which unwanted feelings are displaced onto another person, where they then appear as a threat from the external world. A common form of projection occurs when an individual, threatened by his own angry feelings, accuses another of harboring hostile thoughts. Projecting, for example, could result in a PWS assuming that King George VI feels exactly the way you do about stuttering. Projecting is also called mind reading – when we presume to know exactly what another person is thinking or feeling without evidence.

Projecting leads to a mind-body state called dissociation. Your physical body is in the theater but you drift off into thoughts and feelings about stuttering. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines dissociation as: the separation of whole segments of the personality or of discrete mental processes from the mainstream of consciousness or of behavior. Your unconscious mind could be recalling a particularly tough moment of stuttering from your own past. You see another cast member's reaction and compare it to one of your stutter memories. In one scene the king's brother mimics his stutter

continued on page 8

Call Me DJ Stutter

CHASE DECRAENE

Here I am at the club with 400 people listening to me as I introduce myself over the microphone as "DJ Stutter". I am the resident DJ at the hottest club on my college campus. My business cards and promotional posters all say DJ Stutter. If someone would have told me I would have this courage back when I was in grade school, I might not have believed it. I have learned to be open about stuttering and I encourage all of you to let go, too.

My name is Chase Decraene and I am a stutterer. From elementary school to high school, my palms would get sweaty just at the thought of raising my hand in class to ask or answer a question. Imagine my palms when I had to do a presentation in front of everyone! Let's just say that I had to bring a towel to class that day. It didn't matter if the teacher called on me to speak or not. It was just me getting myself riled up because I didn't want to abnormal or be looked upon as "weird" by my peers just because I stutter.

I started deejaying in my freshman year of college and wanted to find a unique name that I could stand by and support. I decided on the name DJ Stutter because well, first off, I could stutter the music while performing as a fun technique, but more importantly, it advertised the fact that I stutter. I love it when clients call me for booking and they seem shocked when I stutter over the phone. Hello! I guess they didn't get the hint on my business

continued on page 3

WHAT'S INSIDE

Advertisement: "I Stutter." 2
Mandy Snapshot. 2
Special Seat 3
Conference Schedule 4
First Timers, Are You Ready? 5
Chapter News 5
Odds & Ends 6
Let Us Salute the Silence 7
Golf Tournament 8

Advertisement: "I Stutter."

ERIC J. GARNER

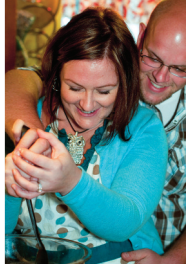
When I think of advertising, I think of big billboards, colorful commercials, and catchy slogans. Some businesses use talking ducks or geckos to help consumers recognize and remember their products. As a person who stutters (PWS), I was attending last month's NSA Los Angeles – San Fernando Valley chapter meeting, where I was introduced to the concept of *advertising my stuttering*. Although the concept was new to me, I quickly recognized that it could be an effective tool in building more awareness around stuttering.

In the world of a PWS, "advertising" refers to stuttering freely in the presence of others, allowing them to recognize you as someone who stutters. After listening to others in the chapter meeting, I learned how they embrace this opportunity to advertise in front of others. I had spent my entire life attempting to hide my impediment, only to realize now that I had been hiding my true self and limiting what I had to offer to the outside world.

I was missing out on great opportunities to increase awareness about stuttering. Advertising not only allows you to feel free about stuttering in public, but also educates the listener who doesn't stutter. Beyond what is seen on television or in movies, this person may have never encountered someone who stutters. So anytime a person who stutters gets an opportunity to talk to and share with others the realities of stuttering, it is a step forward for the rest of the stuttering community. This healthy promotion paves the way for public understanding.

The success of the Academy Award winning film *The King's Speech* has created the opportunity for more public discussion regarding the lives of us who stutter, and I believe that now is the time to go even deeper and to continue to broaden society's awareness on what it means to be a person who stutters. It is time for us to be proud – as people who stutter, we are all walking billboards, commercials, and slogans.

Although I may not be as funny or colorful as a talking duck or gecko, I think I advertise just fine. ■



Snapshot: Mandy Finstad

Here's a chance to get to know Mandy Finstad, our Editor. Below she shares some information about herself.

Growing up, my Dad was in the Navy, which meant moving around and meeting new friends every few years. While some might consider this a nightmare, to me it represented seeing a new place, setting up a new bedroom, and making new friends in the local school. Perhaps it was basic survival in these situations that forced me to make a decision: get out there and thrive, or shrink away into the wallpaper.

While I had my rough times early in adolescence, the older I got the more I came into my own person. I developed an interest in music, and threw myself into it wholeheartedly, joining no less than seven performance groups throughout my four years of high school. I was a far cry from one of the 'popular girls', but I was a decent student, part of a loving family of four, and I had my hobbies and my core group of true friends, and that was all I needed to feel secure in who I was.

After high school I attended George Mason University (Go Patriots!!) in Fairfax, VA, and while I didn't continue my music studies, I still had those core people in my life, and it was a happy four years, and when I walked across that stage in May of 2000 with my B.A. in Psychology, the entire world was mine for the asking.

After a 2-week graduation gift trip with my older brother John across Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales I returned home to Northern Virginia and back to 'reality'. That reality consisted of working odd jobs as everything from a regional park and pool manager, to an Aquatics Director at a 24-hour gym, a general manager in an Italian restaurant to an admin assistant at both a private, Catholic graduate school and a Top 100 law school. The next several years rolled on and I was happy, but had no real direction.

One dream that I had over the next decade was to return to Ireland and the UK. I pursued a post-graduate diploma and a master's degree in Irish studies from the University of Ulster and The Catholic University of America respectively, and served as an active member of the Irish American Unity Conference and the Irish Northern Aid Committee. Finally, in March of 2009, that dream was realized, and I was on a plane, alone, headed to Dublin. The next two weeks were spent gallivanting across the Emerald Isle with an Irish friend, meeting the first two PWS ever to enter my life, and rediscovering who I was in the process.

Upon my return I had a renewed 'joie de vivre', and vowed to myself never to be afraid again. From here on out I would live life to the fullest and never let an opportunity pass me by. Just two short weeks later, I found myself alone again, bravely headed 45 minutes north to Baltimore to see a music performance put on by a new friend. After the show, while waiting to say goodbye to my friend Justin, I heard a stuttered voice behind me ask, "How do you know Justin?" I turned to see a gruff looking guy sitting on a brown leather couch, and since my friend was busy at the moment, I sat and chatted with this stranger whom I would soon welcome as the third PWS in my life. As they say, the rest is history…

Nearly one year later that man got down on one knee in the mud on an island off the coast of Ireland and asked me to be his wife. Since then I've left all of those odd jobs behind to come home and work full-time as a housewife and homemaker. We enjoyed our beautiful wedding day last September, a once-in-a-lifetime luxury honeymoon cruise through the Caribbean, and have since settled into our life together. We're building our 'home-first' family on a foundation of contentment, fun, love, thankfulness, generosity, and respect, and we are hoping to expand that family very soon!

The past 33 years, and especially the past decade, have taught me not to be afraid. To jump head first into whatever it is that I love. To surround myself with positive influences and ignore the negative ones. To stand strong for what I believe in. To let go! ■

Special Seat

STEVEN KAUFMAN

Anthony Valle, 43, is a native Texan. They say everything is bigger in Texas – the scenery, the mountains, the oil fields – yet that doesn't include his story. All the challenges that he has faced were big, but at the end, he's standing the biggest.

A soft-spoken resident of Houston, Anthony is what we refer to as a "covert stutterer", who is now transitioning into being an "overt stutterer." A father of five children (three girls and two boys, ranging in age from 17 to 28) and a devoted husband to his wife, Tonie, his journey started out in the first grade when he realized that he was different. "When I was in elementary school in the first grade, the teacher put me in front of the class and gave me a special seat because I couldn't talk right, and she put me near her desk so the other kids couldn't make fun of me. "Despite this, the teasing continued and as he progressed toward fourth grade, one teacher actually told him he should not be in class. "I was reading out loud and I couldn't say the words," he said. "I was trying to read ahead and she turned the page and asked me to read it. I stuttered so badly that she told me – in front of everybody – that I shouldn't be in that class. She told me to pack up my books and see my counselor. They placed me in a special education class, and my mom came and got me out."

The first speech pathologist who tried to help Anthony was Ms. Nieto, and her approach was definitely interesting, to say the least. "I had to stick out my tongue and move it side to side and up and down, doing a thousand repetitions. I remember being hooked up to wires that were reading my heartbeat, and I heard my tongue was described as lazy." Yet as he entered junior high school and later high school, he began to evolve. "I just laughed with those who made fun of me, even though I was hurt on the inside. I didn't have my first girlfriend until I was a senior, and she never made fun of me, which is what made me like her so much. All the other girls would hit me on the side of the head and be like, "Come on and spit it out." Eventually, Valle went on to the University of Houston, home of the legendary "Phi Slama Jama" Cougars college basketball team, and he was applying his lessons in how to control his speaking through breathing and hand movements. Yet while most people know what they want to do in later college years, Valle ironically knew in ninth grade.

"There was a police officer named Victor Trevino who came to my school and talked about what it takes to be a good police officer," Valle remarked. "After his presentation, I said you have a great job and I want to do what you do. The way he spoke was great, so genuine and sincere." When he was enrolled in the police academy, Valle stated he would still hide his stutter. "We did the crime scenarios, which is where we act out via role playing, and we did it in front of the class. I became good at hiding it, and people would think I was just taking my time , thinking about what I wanted to say." But one of his biggest tests was about to come.

"I worked up in dispatch and worked the microphone (one time only) and there was a 'Code One: Assault in Progress' (lights and sirens needed). I started to sweat and say I don't want to do this, but I did it." Valle is not the only officer on the force who stutters. "I do know there are others, but no one really talks about it," he commented. These days, Anthony does the talking. As a member of the Public Affairs section of the Houston Police Department, he does presentations and he's come full circle, because Trevino is now the Harris County Precinct 6 Constable and he's walking right beside him. "I asked if he remembers when he was here a few years ago and he was shocked and very happy for me." Even though he was interviewed by the Houston Chronicle, he does admit that finding out about the NSA and learning that there are people who talk like he does are new experiences.

"My message to people who stutter is don't let it hold you back, and to be who you are!" ■

CALL ME DJ STUTTER *continued*

card or from the promotional package I sent them. Advertising is a great way to put my stuttering out there and it greatly reduces the stress that I put on myself while in conversation. It reduces the anxiety so significantly because there are no more thoughts such as "oh no, I'm about to stutter, what is my listening partner going to think". After advertising and being open with my stuttering, I no longer have a desire to hide my stutter and as a result of the decreased mental stress, I seem to do better with my speech and can enjoy the conversation that much more.

My speech is something that I deal with every minute of every day of my life. The reaction to the stereotype of stutterers in society is the thing that makes the stuttering feel uncomfortable and out of place. Walking into a coffee shop and sitting down with a random stranger and having a conversation, the first thought that has popped into my mind on countless occasions is "I'm stuttering hard so that might make him feel uncomfortable talking to me or even worse he might think I am retarded or something". That level of pressure being put on myself is unbearable! What would happen if Michael Jordan thought about every person's thoughts in the arena every time he played a basketball game? It would have driven him insane and he wouldn't have accomplished the great things that he has!

The more I advertise my stuttering the faster it loses any negative energy. It reminds me of voluntary stuttering in that way. If you can fake stutter with eye contact, it is really empowering. I have learned that "mind reading" and "projecting" are presuming to know what others think about my stuttering. Advertising rids me of the anxiety caused by mind reading.

Learning to be open about my speech was a tough task. The National Stuttering Association Atlanta chapter really helps me through times when my confidence is tested in hard speaking situations. Calling myself DJ Stutter is a way for me to be open about my stuttering and advertise to people that I am truly not afraid to stutter. ■

This is just a taste of what's to come in Fort Worth, and as you can see there's something for everyone, from families with young children to career-driven professionals! The complete list of workshops will be available by mid-June, and workshop presenters will be notified by May 1st.

FACILITATOR	WORKSHOP/EVENT
Diane Games	CEU Seminar (1:00–5:00 Wednesday) Facilitating Change in the Attitudes
(NSA)	Meet n Greet (Wednesday)
Cathy Olish	First Timer's Workshop (Thursday Morning)
Mike Retzinger/Kevin Eldridge	Nurture Freedom and Eliminate Fear in Stuttering
Amber Snyder	New technologies for Stuttering
Andrew Bowers	Introduction to 20 Something
(NSA)	Opening Reception (Thursday Night)
Joel Korte	The Why and the How of Voluntary Stuttering
Family Programs	Family Orientation (Thursday Morning)
Evan Sherman	20 Something Open Mic
Family Programs	Transitioning to Middle School
Dennis Drayna	Research Symposium, Discovery of the Genetic Causes of Stuttering
Andrew Ainsworth/Madison Garcia	Perceptions of Stuttering: Looking Through the Eyes of People Who Don't Stutter
Lee Reeves	Stuttering Self-Help: The Process of Change
Andy Bowers	The Iceberg Analogy of Stuttering
Mara Schlimm Ormond	Leading Your Life
Kids	Kids Open Mic
Mark Irwin	Stuttered Speech Syndrome: What is it, how to treat it?
Panel of 20 Somethings	Problems Being a 20-Something
Panel	Covert Stuttering Exposed!
Justin Matley	Starting your career with Empowerment
Randall Berg	Interview Skills… Help, Guidance and Motivation
Hannah Laday	When a Covert and a Over Marry: A learning Experience
Judith Eckardt	You Make the Difference: Avoid Avoiding
Kids	Roping Session, Letter Writing, Juggling – Texan style
Dale Sander	Exploring Success Rates for both traditional and Alternative Stuttering Therapies
Hanan Hurwitz	Key Concepts for Managing Stuttering
Vivian Sisskin and panel	"You Are Changed by What you Do: 'Shame-busting' through Avoidance Reduction Therapy"
Ed Carroll	Living with stuttering - by choice! A discussion opportunity for partners and spouses
Maria Pemsl-Dowling	Falling in Love with a person who stutters: The Joys and Challenges
Joseph Klein	Bringing up Stuttering
Samantha Gennuso/Joel Korte	Fearless Stuttering
Pam Mertz	I Stutter! How in the World Can I Join Toastmasters?
Judith Newman	Laughter Yoga, the Fun Part of Every Day
Nobby Lewandowski	Building Self-Confidence
TBA	Open Microphones
Morgan Drutchas	The Art of Assertive Speaking
Saturday Evening	Banquet/Dinner/Auction
Kids	Cooking (with the hotel)
Kids	Scavenger hunt/Obstacle course
Becca Liben	Sibiling's Roundtable
Shawn Czerwinski	Teens: "Successful Stuttering"
Dr. Irani	"Chasing the Fluency Ghost: Importance of Attitude Change and Patience"

First Timers, Are You Ready?

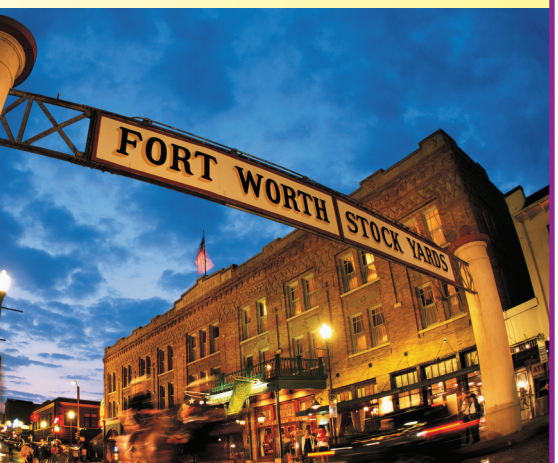
If this is your first conference, we have lots of cool things in store for you to make sure that your experience will be unforgettable!

We are offering our annual **First Timers workshop** on Thursday to help acquaint you with the conference, how it works, tips to make the best of your time there and other fun stuff! **Daily Speed Talking workshops** will allow First Timers to meet 20–30 new people each day in a relaxed and fun environment. During these workshops we place two rows of chairs facing each other and ask participants on one side will rotate every three minutes so you are talking to someone new (just like speed dating but without the dating!). There will be topics for discussion at each chair to get things going and the conversations tend to take on a life of their own!

After the **Opening Ceremony** on Thursday evening, we will offer a **designated area in the bar** for First Timers to mingle with conference regulars as well as places **in the lobby** for those who prefer a quieter place to talk. There will also be a **First Timers Lunch** on site on Friday, which will allow First Timers an opportunity to continue socializing with friends and make a few more new ones.

We GUARANTEE that when you attend your first conference, you will not only have a great time, but also learn new things about yourself and stuttering, and make lifelong friends! So, what are you waiting for? As the saying goes… attending an NSA conference will change your life! Register, reserve your room, and finalize those travel plans!

© Fort Worth Convention & Visitor's Bureau



CHAPTER**NEWS**

FROM BONNIE WEISS

Dallas, Texas
The Dallas Chapter celebrated their 29th anniversary as a chapter at their April meeting. The meeting started an hour early to provide enough time for discussion of *The King's Speech*. Lee Reeves, who was unable to attend the meeting, shared his appreciation to the hundreds of people affected by stuttering (adults, kids, teens, family members, friends, student and professionals) who have attended meetings to learn, to teach, to take risks on their own behalf, to empower and most of all to support each other along the path of their common journey. Congratulations to the Dallas Chapter!!

Los Angeles, CA
The Downtown Los Angeles Chapter met on Wednesday, April 20th at Cal State University. They had 17 people in attendance, two of which were first timers. The theme of the meeting was "Find Your Voice." Josh Marcus, who led the meeting, had gotten a copy of *The King's Speech* on DVD from TWC Home Entertainment for a lucky member to win. As Colin Firth portrayed King George VI in the beginning of the movie, we saw some of the various speech techniques used by therapists in that time that seemed quite extreme. The group decided that the member present who shared the most interesting or extreme form of therapy/technique they used to be fluent would win the DVD. Many members talked about being hypnotized, using the SpeechEasy or The Fluency Master. Someone even mentioned putting marbles in their mouth! Others shared ways they avoided speaking situations. The person who won the DVD shared that he had locked himself in a dark room for hours to see if he would stutter while in that situation!

Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Barb Wimpee writes that the Milwaukee Chapter invited Pamela Mertz from Albany, New York to give a presentation at UW-Milwaukee entitled, "A Hidden Journey of Stuttering." The group packed a lecture hall that seats 125 people. After Pamela's speech, the group had a question and answer session with a panel of participants, including an SLP and her husband, who is a person who stutters. The Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel wrote an article about this event.

Normal, Illinois
Jean Sawyer, Chapter Leader, writes that at the April 21 meeting of the group, there were three people in attendance. They had a discussion about the upcoming Annual Conference, followed by a discussion on avoidance. They all had a good laugh when Heather, one of their members, said that if her parents would have known she would stutter on the "h" sound so much, they never would have named her Heather! It was a good meeting, and they will keep working to get the word out about their chapter.

Seattle, Washington
The Seattle Chapter had a King's Speech event on the University of Washington campus on April 21st. There were an estimated 225 people in attendance. They enjoyed a lecture on stuttering research by Dr. Ludo Max who described some of his current research in the field, as well as his own research. Following the lecture, they watched *The King's Speech*, gave away copies of the DVD that were given to them by the studio, and then participated in a question and answer time with a panel of experts. Tom Scharstein of the Seattle Chapter writes that the feedback from individuals was all very positive.

Be sure to check out 'National Stuttering Association' on **Facebook** and 'WeStutterNSA' on **Twitter** today!

ODDS&ENDS

FROM DAVID BLAZINA

The NSA congratulates **Christine Dits** on her upcoming graduation from Saint Mary's College, located in Notre Dame, Indiana. Christine was a first-time attendee at our conference in Cleveland and will be receiving her B.A. in Communicative Disorders this summer. She will be working as a speech language assistant in the public school system and plans to attend graduate school in her home state. ✏ *Christine Dits*

The NSA would like to congratulate **Madison Nicole Garcia** on her upcoming doctorate degree studies. Not only is Madison a great friend to the NSA, but she also serves as coordinator of the Applied Psychometrics Lab in the Department of Psychology at California State University Northridge. The lab focuses on the exploration of the psychological aspects of stuttering. In addition to her numerous awards in undergraduate studies, Madison has earned her B.A. in Research-Oriented Psychology, was a former chapter leader, and the recipient of the 2008 Member of the Year Award at the NSA's conference in Parsippany, N.J. ✏ *Madison Garcia*

The National Stuttering Association would like to congratulate Stephanie Lyn Nicolai on her acceptance into the Doctorate Psychology Program at Alliant International University! Stephanie is a very active representative in the NSA, including having served on the Teen Advisory Council. She is currently serving as the chapter leader for the San Diego, CA region. She and her family are long-time supporters of the NSA, and her mom, Debbie Nicolai, has served on the NSA's Board of Directors. She is a proud sister to Amanda Lara, who is an SLP. Stephanie has stated that her stuttering is one reason she would like to be a therapist. We wish her all the very best and look forward to seeing "Dr. Nicolai" help others in need!

The King's Speech PG-13

The Weinstein Company (TWC) announced today that *The King's Speech* PG-13, the family-friendly version of its Academy Award-winning historical drama about King George VI, will open on 1,000 screens nationwide on April 1 and will be the only version available in theatres. One of the year's most celebrated, successful and beloved films, *The King's Speech* was honored at the 83rd Academy Awards® with Oscars® for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, and Best Original Screenplay. The announcement was made by TWC's President of Theatrical Distribution and Home Entertainment, **Eric Lomis**.

The emotional impact of stuttering that was illuminated by the movie continues to be a topic of conversation with the recent statements by Vice President **Joseph Biden** about his struggles with stuttering. The release of the PG-13 version offers families nationwide access to a positive story about stuttering and overcoming obstacles and social stigmas.

Birth Announcements

NSA volunteer Mike Bauer and his wife, Liz, welcomed their new 8 pound 5 ounce bundle of joy Nathan William Bauer on March 18, 2011 at 3:53am. Big sister and brother Gabriela and Wesley are very excited about the family's newest addition. Congratulations to the both of you!

The NSA would also like to congratulate **Aaron and Erica Perez** on their new bundle of joy, LilyAnn, born at 10:50 pm on Wednesday, April 27 and coming in at 7 lb 7 oz and 20 inches.

The NSA is thrilled to congratulate **Holly Hubbard Nover**, and her husband **Phil**, on the upcoming arrival of their first child, a boy. Holly is an SLP who not only stutters, but was also recognized as a former SLP of the Year in Florida. They currently reside in Jacksonville, Fla., where Holly is an active member of her chapter. Both are very excited about becoming proud parents!

The NSA would also like to congratulate **Tom Gibbons**, chapter leader for the Orlando NSAKids & TWST chapter, and his wife, **Jennifer**, on the upcoming birth of their daughter. Tom is the director of the Orlando Stuttering Center, and his wife works in real estate.

Engagements

Congratulations also to member **Kenyatta Butler** on his recent engagement to Elizabeth Dearth.

Also celebrating a recent engagement is NSA member **Justin Matley** to Erin Fitting. Justin has been creating, producing, and editing videos for the NSA for the past 2 years. He and Erin are planning a September 2012 wedding.

The NSA also congratulates member **Rebecca Tasker** on her recent engagement to Daniel Solanki. The couple met at the York University campus where they both worked at The Great Canadian Bagel.

Thank You, Volunteers!

A big thank you goes out to all of those who helped at various local state conferences within the past couple of months. Your efforts are invaluable and the NSA would be lost without each and every one of you.

Cathy Olish, Sarah D'Agostino, Hannah & George Laday, Becky Peters, Marshall Mathers, Tom Scharstein, Miranda Smith, Jason Faust, Pam Wokenberg, Adrian McAdory, Gloria Klumb, Dan Koblitz, Anthony Valle, Andrew Bowers, Lee & Nina Reeves, Annette Rak, Allisa Blackburn, Desirree Hidalgo, Melissa Del-Rosario, Cari Jamison, Eva Peguero, Marc Anthony, Jerome Mortman, Elo Oji, James Brinton, Noel Baichoo, Eric Salgueiro, and Sonya Worosz.

Let Us Salute the Silence

A line from John O'Donohue's *In Praise of the Earth*

STEPHEN GOLD

"Salute the silence," are you kidding me? It has always been my mortal enemy, a dagger to my heart. Silence has never been my friend. Friends don't smash you down.

They don't scream at you, "Get out of here! Don't you know you don't belong?"

That's what it feels like to a boy in the middle of a jagged stutter when sound gets stuck in his throat and the jerking takes over. The harder the words are pushed the tighter the neck muscles squeeze against the vocal chords, choking off all air. In those moments, which felt like eons, silence was not silent, at least not in my head. It blared in my ears and slammed against my brain. It begged, please, please…

Reading was the worst. When called upon, there was no place to hide. A sentence tortured, questions filled me with dread. Standing in front of a class was like death to my whole being, a never-ending nightmare. An audience of even one or two would shatter my worth into a million jagged shards of glass.

Some people would stare while others turned away, hoping their gesture would loosen the grip around my neck. Others glanced to the side as if to protect themselves from their own embarrassment at having to watch this torturous sideshow. So I stood alone enduring my silence. And silence is what I'm supposed to salute?

Children, less sophisticated in the art of disguise, would look at each other and sometimes chuckle. That's what kids do, they tease and mimic; the pecking order starts early. Find a fault and pounce on it. Shorty, fatty, dummy…I recognized the call. Being fodder for humor was not my first choice, being different was not my goal. Silence for me was a killer of spirit, an enemy of the soul.

Girls? Forget it, no way. The humiliation was unbearable, and a risk not worth taking. It felt like punishment – God's wrath at my wanting. Yet I endured. Self-mocking became my mantra, and a way to protect. It worked, at least on the outside. "It doesn't seem to bother him," I'd hear in whispers behind my back. "He seems okay with it," they'd say. Really? Is that what they thought?

Surprise, surprise, my mask worked like Captain America's shield to ward off the obvious signs of distress. The key word being "obvious". "It's just a flesh wound," I'd joke to a friend's concern. "Don't worry, I'll be fine." I'd use all of the tricks of the trade, especially silence. If you don't open your mouth there's no fear of nothing coming out. Brilliant, absolutely brilliant. Avert your eyes, fade into the woodwork, and act as if you didn't hear the question.

But we don't live in a silent world. Sound is a necessity and it demands a response, so I'd need another trick. I started to think about the two types of bayonet's men, the quick and the dead. That's it! I'd just have to be quick, and jettison out as much as possible between jerks. It became a race against time, but alas, I was never quite quick enough. A grotesque stutter would always catch in my throat and beat me to the finish line.

But as we know, age and experience have ways of mellowing crises and softening blows. Corners round and edges blunt; wars don't seem as relevant. Shields become burdens too heavy to lift. Peace becomes the objective, naps and relaxation a way of life.

Is it gone, the stuttering? No, not completely. There're still vestiges of its ugly head that pop up from time to time, perhaps as a reminder of who I am or more likely, who I'm not. Though, the reminder is not what you might think. It's no longer a club to my head but a tap on my shoulder that reminds me that I don't need to be perfect to be loved.

Looking back, it seems so childish and immature to fight a natural instinct. A gap in time – a silence - is not the world's end, nor a need to slash at one's self-worth. Silence itself is a word, not a plague or an enemy of life. It belongs in the line that stretches from birth to death. It has a place; much the same as a period ends a sentence, as day follows night, or as love belongs to a broken heart. Silence is no more a disease than blushing is a crime. True friends, I would learn, can see beneath the flush of imperfection.

Silence is not a hole
It has meaning; it gives pause
It links words; connects man,
It offers time to heal.
Silence tells the truth;
It provides a time to praise the earth.

Silence is a breath of fresh air, and if I can remember to breathe I'll be okay. ■

P.S. You'll all never know the pleasure, peace and contentment I feel reading out loud in class. Thank you for that gift.

Once again NSA is Named Special Recipient for Celebrity Golf Tournament

Gary Benjoya, Vice President of Special Kids Network in Chicago, selects the NSA as a "Special Recipient" for their 11th Annual Celebrity Golf Tournament, being held July 25, 2011. The charity organization raises funds for children with special needs.

"I am very excited to have the NSA be a part of our charity this year as [its mission] touches me personally," Gary says. "Our family became aware of NSA through Nina Reeves when Corey used to go to Nina for speech therapy. Nina initially directed us to the NSA website to review materials and then to the National Convention in Chicago. It was at the convention where we really gained an understanding as to how stuttering impacts families in different ways. While Corey is a very outgoing 16-year old boy, stuttering still impacts his day-to-day life. I am very thankful that Nina introduced my family to the NSA and that I have been able to give something back financially through the Special Kids Network (www.specialkidsnetwork.org). I am also thankful for the help that the Special Kids Network gets from Tammy and Nina every summer at our Annual Celebrity Golf and Tennis Outing. Their hard work and tremendous dedication does not go unnoticed."

If you would like to be a part of this golf tournament, please contact Tammy Flores at 800-364-1677 or info@westutter.org.

and in another scene the king's father reprimands him for his speech problem. These two scenes are examples of moments that might provoke projection.

If you are a PWS, I encourage you to see the movie. The movie is a vehicle for you to explore any negative thoughts and realize that they are irrational – Colin Firth is pretending. The winner of four Academy Awards, *The King's Speech* is a triumphant movie in which a PWS faces his fear, goes to speech therapy, and becomes a great leader with strong oratorical skills.

I have participated in adult group therapy sessions and National Stuttering Association support groups on and off for the last 20 years. Countless people have confided that they could not come back to a second meeting because of their discomfort watching another person stutter (projection). I speak to them confidentially after the meeting and invite them to come back, explaining that it is in their best interest to return and try again. Their refusal to face – and conquer – projecting is toxic for them. One person who attended our support meeting admitted to the group that he was projecting. We applauded his candidness and everyone reassured him that we accept him, fluent or not. We cannot presume all adolescents or teens are ready for group meetings without preparation. Several children have confided that they felt great unease due to projecting.

De-mystifying and resolving the feelings of projecting, mind reading, and dissociation can allow a person who stutters to experience empathy and compassion but not displace unwanted feelings onto another person. Attending support meetings and establishing a tolerance for watching a movie character that stutters are steps in the recovery process. In the case of a movie character faking a stutter a PWS wants to be able to completely separate himself from that actor and see that it is not real. Put frankly, if you have a strong visceral reaction to watching another person stutter, you want to fix that.

Projection must be mighty powerful if a PWS cannot watch another person stutter. Because group therapy and support groups can be so beneficial the implications of projection deserve careful consideration. I encourage SLPs and group leaders to foresee the risk of projection driving away people and doing their best to make all PWS comfortable. Ideas to help increase the comfort level of new attendees might include:

- A good description of what to expect before the meeting
- A warm thank you after the meeting by the group leader
- A group mentor or confidant assigned to each new attendee
- Emails or a call from member(s) to thank new members for attendance
- Complimentary materials from the NSA and Stuttering Foundation of America

As David Seidler said when he accepted the Best Original Screenplay: "This is for all the stutterers around the world. We have a voice. We have been heard." Seidler, a PWS himself, must have resolved his own projection in order to create this masterpiece. His movie presents an opportunity for pws to rally together in support and advocacy for stuttering. The nsa's mission slogan is "If you stutter, you are not alone." Let's utilize the momentum from *The King's Speech* to attract more PWS into a truly safe environment – a group of fellow PWS. ■

Email: Tim.Mackesey@stuttering-specialist.com

Editor
Mandy Finstad, mandy@westutter.org

Art Director
Janna Carter

Assistant Editors
Bonnie Weiss
David Blazina

Proofreader
Eric Ketchum

Phone
212.944.4050
800.WeStutter (937.8888)

Fax
212.944.8244

E-mail
info@WeStutter.org

Home Page
www.WeStutter.org

LETTING GO is a forum for views and information about stuttering. The opinions expressed are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily the opinion of the National Stuttering Association. The NSA accepts no responsibility for the accuracy of any opinion or information provided by any contributor, nor do we endorse or reject any therapeutic strategies, programs, or devices mentioned in these pages.

©2011 National Stuttering Association.
All rights reserved.

National Stuttering Association
Changing the lives of people who stutter

119 W. 40th Street, 14th Floor
New York, NY 10018
800.937.8888 (WeStutter)
212.944.4050 • 212.944.8244 fax
email: info@WeStutter.org