### ettine FALL 2019 FT. LAUDERDALE MEMORIES TUTTERING A FATHER & SON JOURNEY 2019 Annual Awards **2020 Annual Conference Preview Upcoming Events** Fred Talks

NATIONAL STUTTERING ASSOCIATION

CHANGING THE LIVES OF PEOPLE WHO STUTTER

# **AWARD WINNERS**

SLP of the Year: **DEBORAH BOSWELL** 

2019 Hall of Fame Inductee: **DR. J. SCOTT YARUSS** 

Conference Dedication: DR. FRED MURRAY



2019 Annual Conference Staff & Volunteers (Not Pictured: Christy Pomaro)

It is no secret that I consider it an honor to work with one of the most selfless, kind, and inspiring communities, people who stutter (PWS). As the Executive Director of the NSA, I wear a lot of hats and carry great responsibility, but if I'm completely honest, there is no way that I would be able to accomplish something as great as our Annual Conference without such a strong support system standing beside me.

While the faces on my team might vary slightly from year to year, if you've been around for a little while, you will definitely recognize some familiar smiles here. Once again, this incredibly tight team is pulled together from all over the country and from all walks of life - executives, family members, artists, long-time NSA staff members, and beloved volunteers, and for each one of them. I am so thankful.

My core staff works year-round to put details into place from the very beginning planning stages, right through to printing name badges and welcoming attendees onsite. During the event, each and every team member is up bright and early and working late into the night each and every day to make sure that you have the absolute best conference experience possible (even if it might have been a little warm this year!).

Words cannot express how deep my appreciation is for every one of these individuals. I consider each of them family, and wouldn't be able to pull this off without them.

OCTOBER 22, 2019:

International Stuttering Awareness Day

OCTOBER 22, 2019:

NSA Chapter 25th Anniversary - Royal Oak, MI

OCTOBER 25, 2019: PayPal & NSA 1-Day Conference - San Jose, CA OCTOBER 26, 2019:

Don't Tell Me to Slow Down 5k - Cary, NC

**NOVEMBER 9. 2019:** 

Stuttering Fun Day - Columbia, SC

NOVEMBER 21, 2019:

ASHA Conven. NSA Booth #647 - Orlando, FL

JANUARY 10, 2020:

2020 MSHA Annual Conference - Detroit, MI

FEBRUARY 8, 2020:

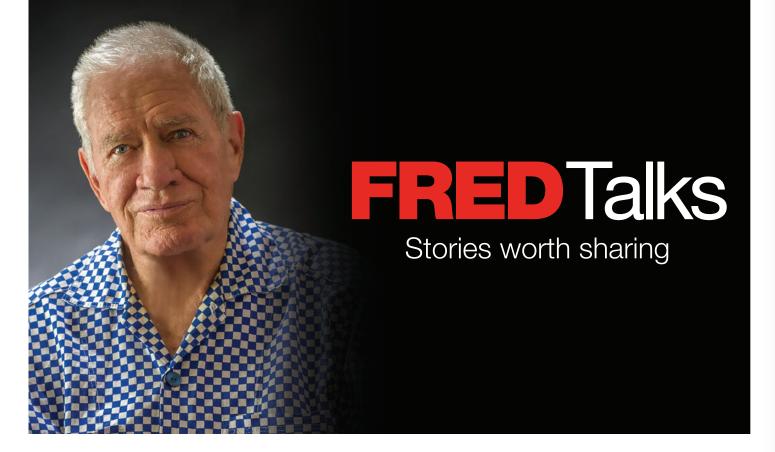
Stuttering Fun Day - San Diego, CA

MARCH 19-21, 2020:

2020 MSHA Annual Conference - Detroit, MI

For complete details visit westutter.org





his year our Annual Conference included a general session, **Fred Talks**, a tribute to the late Dr. Fred Murray, to whom our conference was dedicated. Fred Murray was one of the pioneers of our stuttering family, writing a memoir called "A Stutterer's Story" in 1980, and later becoming a speech-language pathologist himself.

Fred believed that it is important for people who stutter to develop a willingness to experience stuttering, rather than suppress it. As Fred would explain, this ability takes years of self study, practice and patience in order to understand how to stutter in a new way, but, Fred believed, it is important for people who stutter to work on developing themselves, completely, as people, instead of agonizing about speech forever.

Fred Talks was kicked off in an impressive manner by Dr. Tracey Wallace's talk, titled The Other Side of Fear, in which she talked about her desire to be an ER doctor. She knew that an emergency room is a place where seconds matter and she feared her stutter might end up being fatal for somebody else. "Is my stutter going to kill people?" was the question on her mind. Those are real fears that a person who stutters worries about.

But now she has a "Dr." added to her name, and she learned that with perseverance and a commitment to the journey, not the outcome, you can succeed. Her speech was powerful.

Luckily, just as we share fears, we also share strengths. During We Really Need to Talk, Mitchell Trichon talked about the real problem with stuttering: The words never spoken. He talked about the importance of sharing our stories, good or bad, because they can be the words that end up changing someone else's life down the road.

Mitchell shared with us the story behind a poem titled The Bridge Builder by Will Allen Dromgoole. In said poem, a man on a journey comes to a deep, wide river. The man was old and experienced, so the river didn't present much of a challenge, but as soon as he reached the other side he decides to turn back and start building a bridge. A fellow pilgrim sees him and ask why is he doing that, since it is unlikely that he will have to pass that way again, and the old man raises his head and replies "Good friend, I am just trying to make it a bit easier for the next person in the same journey." Mitchell nailed the power of the NSA with that story.

Next up was Holly Nover with her talk, called Fear is Greater Than the Consequences. Holly, a person who stutters and an SLP, talked about something many of us have thought about: having kids who stutter. Going through life as a person who stutters is hard enough, but what happens when one of your kids starts stuttering and you feel it's your fault? How do you deal with that? "Being a parent of a kid who stutters is harder than being a person who stutters," she said, and it really put me to think about how would I handle such scenario.

Video recordings of the **Fred Talks** are available on our NSA YouTube channel, and we hope that you enjoy watching them!

Thank you to David Alpuche for this excerpt recap!



# REMEMBERING JEAN BENSON, A STUTTERER'S MOTHER

By Vicki Schutter

n 1994 I was visiting my mother, and we were in the car going somewhere, and she told me something she had never told me before. She said when I was a little girl and would come home from school sad and depressed because of my stuttering that she would go into the bathroom (where no one could see her) and cry and pray to God to help my speech so that my life would be better. By that time I had been involved with the NSA for almost 10 years, and my life was already much better. In fact, at the end of the year I would marry the man who is still my husband. But I thought about what she said a lot, and I asked her to come to that year's NSA conference. It was in Cleveland, and the keynote speaker was Annie Glenn. At the end of her first day there I asked her what she thought of it, and she replied, "If only there had been something like this when you were a little girl!" The next day there was a General Session Open Mike, and I got up to speak. I told the audience about what my mother said in the car that day, and then I said, "Mama, I just want you to know that your prayers were answered."

I can't tell you how much response that one sentence got. People came up to me crying, hugging me. Even now, 25 years later, people still tell me how much that meant to them. It meant a lot to my mother, too.

On April 24th of this year Mama joined Daddy in heaven. I am glad that she is now free of her pain and breathing difficulties, but I also thank God for giving me Jean Harris Benson as my mother. I was her first child, and she had no clue what to do when I started stuttering at the age of 3-1/2. But she did the best she could, and she always, ALWAYS supported me in everything I attempted. I never doubted her unconditional love and support, and I know that many of my PWS brothers and sisters can't say that about their parents. I am so lucky!

So I am writing this as a tribute not just to my mother, but to all the parents of children who stutter. I've been to every NSA conference since 1986. I've watched your children grow up with the support that my parents and I didn't have. Every year I see their strength and confidence and feel that my heart might burst from pride. This year Mama will be watching from that heavenly garden, and her heart will be bursting with pride also. We are not alone!

"MAMA, I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT YOUR PRAYERS WERE ANSWERED."





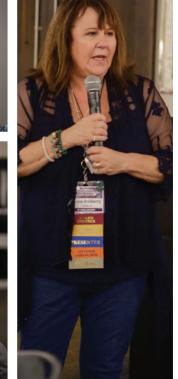






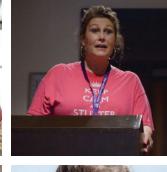
















### 777 PEOPLE

92 ONSITE REGISTRANTS

186 FURSTITIMERS

8 FAMILIES IN THE FAMILY OLYMPICS

103 RESEARCH PEEPS & SLPS

## \*104K























# A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING

By Ross Horton, Conference First-Timer

here's a first time for everything, right? The first step you take as a child, your first day of school, first pet, first job, first paycheck. So many different firsts, but, as we all know, they're not always easy.

My name is Ross Horton. I'm 28 years old and have stuttered since about the age of three. Back in February, my mom approached me about attending the NSA Annual Conference in Ft. Lauderdale; she even offered to go along with me! I wasn't sure what to think. Having never even gone to a support group meeting, a part of me thought: There's no way I'm going to something like that. The other side of me thought: Ross, it's time, you need to do this; it will be worth it. I went back and forth, but then it was decided. I was going to my first NSA conference -- and with my mom at that!

After an uneventful flight and an interesting first Uber experience, we excitedly stepped into the very HOT, un-air conditioned doors of the incredible Marriot Harbor Beach Resort. With our suitcases still being dragged behind us, we were instantly greeted by our first conference attendee, Tom. Tom introduced himself to us, then asked me my name.

Nuts! I thought. I just walked in the door and I'm being asked this question already. I was hoping to avoid this one until at least after check-in!

So, naturally, this time I struggled more than usual and got a bit emotional. The reaction to my struggle by those nearby was seemingly overwhelming. It was as if an emergency response team had just gathered around me to reassure me that everything was going to be OK, and that they all knew exactly how I felt. Pats

on the back and words of encouragement came in from all sides. "Stutter like a rock star, Ross!", "It doesn't matter here, we're all the same". I'd been through this situation before, but never have I had the support of so many people surrounding me who truly understood how I felt about the universal difficulty among people who stutter - saying your name. For the first time ever, I didn't feel alone.

One of the most memorable trials of the first day for all the attendees was the fact that we were in southern Florida in July and the air conditioning and electricity were not fully functioning. We all sweat together, complained together, and generally bonded over free hamburgers, hot dogs, and icy drinks, courtesy of the hotel. I took a shower that night by the light of my phone. That was a first for me (and hopefully a last)!

On day two I experienced another first. Mom convinced me to go along with her to try yoga on the beach. Whoa! I felt like a twisted pretzel, but I got through it. Back at the hotel, the air conditioning and power were back on, and I was ready to make the most of my day. I was getting to know some people my age, gaining confidence in myself, and was actually enjoying gradually stepping out of my comfort zone. Mom was finding her group, and so was I.

A few other firsts that stand out in my mind were in some of the workshops. 'Speed-Friending' was one such workshop. We sat across from one another and were given a topic to discuss within a three-minute time frame. Then we moved on to the next person and a new topic. This was a fun, fast-talking opportunity to get to know some new people. Another workshop experience that was a first for me was hitting the streets of Ft. Lauderdale to "advertise" our stuttering. As a group we talked to the locals about the conference, and stuttering in general. In a public setting like that, it felt reassuring to have the support of other people around me who also stutter.

Outside of the workshops, some of my personal favorite firsts were going to a karaoke bar and having the courage to belt out a tune with my new buddy, playing giant-sized corn hole and ladder ball at 2:00AM, enjoying the amazing fireworks display on the beach, and dancing for three hours straight at the Saturday Night Banquet while trying to squeeze the most out of our last night together!

The first few minutes of the conference were hard for me. I wasn't so sure I'd made the right decision to come to this event. But everyone who gathered around in a circle to comfort and reassure me told me that my life would change after this experience and I wouldn't want to leave when it was all over. At the time, I found their well-meaning words difficult to believe, but do you know what, they were right!

### IT WAS AN INCREDIBLE FEELING TO FINALLY BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY WITH OTHERS WHO COMPLETELY ACCEPTED AND UNDERSTOOD ME AND MY STUTTER.

I experienced so many memorable firsts in the few short days I was at the conference and I can't wait until next year when I can compile a brand new list of firsts - and seconds, too!

hen I received the National Stuttering Association's email requesting workshop submissions for the Annual Conference in Fort Lauderdale, I almost deleted it.

I don't give workshops, I thought to myself.

After a cup of tea or two, I clicked on the email again. Naturally there was a submission procedure and word limit but the biggest hurdle for me was what would I talk about? I had spoken about having a stutter before and was frankly tired of telling the same old story. Then it hit me, I could do something with my father. He has always been a great provider and role model but we had never really talked about my stutter and I was curious to hear his perspective on it as a man and a father. I sent him a quick text message (as he lives in Ireland and I am living in Canada) to see if he was up for doing it. Part of me hoped he would say no and I would be off the hook!

As I am writing this article, it is obvious that he said yes, and I think we were both equally surprised and slightly nervous when our workshop was accepted. It was titled, "A Father & Son Journey", and just getting to Florida was a bit of a journey! I had planned the workshop with a good friend and had a good idea of how I hoped it would go. I brought pictures as visual aids, whiteboard pens, pencils and paper for the audience. Dad was the wild card element though. I felt a lot of pressure on one hand as I was dragging him across the globe to attend, and I also worried as he hadn't been around so many people who stutter before. I arrived a day before him (when the hotel was hot, due to a power outage) and prepared as best I could. When he did arrive, I had to lure him to the bar to go over the outline. How do I make sure he knows what he is going to say without making too big a deal of this? A few beers later we appeared to be on the same page, and all there was to do was to wait for Friday at 1:30pm to arrive.

The night before, I didn't sleep a wink and visited the washroom more than once. In stark contrast, Dad was a cool as a cucumber. We got to the room early and set up the pictures. People began to slowly arrive. We had mainly parents of children who stutter in attendance, along with other adults. Our workshop was divided into three main sections. The first twenty minutes was talking about my early childhood and how my stutter developed and Dad answered questions about his fears and concerns before we opened

STUTTERING - SON JOURNEY A FATHER & SON JOURNEY

By Robert O'Brien

it up to the audience. The second part was looking at the fear and shame associated with stuttering and how I ran away from a job at 26 when I had to use the phone. The final part was for Dad to share about cars and how we bonded over them. We wrapped up the session with a Q&A session.

Overall, I just hoped we had pulled it off, but the feedback we received was more than positive. I know Dad was struck by the sheer number of people affected by stuttering. For me, I got really clear that fathers, and men in general, really want to "fix" their children's stutter. That can only lead to frustration, as it can't be fixed. And that was the ultimate message of our workshop.

### PARENTS DON'T NEED TO FIX THEIR CHILDREN.

Just supporting and being there for them is the key. I see that now for myself with my own father. It was an amazing experience for both of us and I would like to think it has brought us closer together as a result.

A huge thank you to the National Stuttering Association for giving us this opportunity.





By David Alpuche, NSA Chapter Leader

hasn't been the same since. Back then I was a very different person. I always felt out of place, like something was wrong with me. I knew I was smart but it is very difficult to prove it when you can't ever say your name on the first try.

"Ddddd....ddddaaaa.....dddd-d-d-d-daaaAAAVID!"

A short name that would take me anywhere from 5 seconds to an entire lifetime to get out.

By the time I would finish saying my name I could see the effects of my speech on people. When you stutter people look at you differently right away. You see confusion in their eyes, and confusion is a terrible place to start a conversation. Stuttering is weird and I hated talking.

Because of my stutter I would try to be quiet most of the time. On the school bus I would wear my headphones or read a book. In between classes? Headphones or a book. Heading back home? Headphones or a book. Always headphones or a book. People And you choose to speak less. don't try to talk to you when you have headphones or a book.

In class I would play dumb. I would not raise my hand even when I knew the answers, and I probably knew them 96.2% of the time. (Why? Because I read the book!)

I would make decisions based on "would I have to talk if I do that?" And that's a terrible way to live.

For the people that know me today it's very hard to picture me like the quiet guy, or not having something witty or sarcastic to say at all times, but I was that person. And it's not that I was an introvert, I totally wanted to talk. I wanted to tell jokes, share

attended my first NSA Conference in 2011 and my life stories, and talk to that cute girl over there, but I never knew if anything would come out when I opened my mouth. Stuttering is incredibly frustrating!

Imagine waking up and your brain is like:

"Ok, today you are going to take 3 seconds to say every M. Every M, no exceptions, so get those synonyms ready. You are also going to have trouble saying the D in David but not the D in delivery, and it won't make sense to you. The presentation you worked on all night is going to start with a mega-block on the very first sentence... it's going to suck, and you'll think about that moment for the next 6 hours. You also might spit on somebody's face trying to say an ST sound, so keep an eye on those. Have a good day!"

Stuttering is so taxing, mentally and physically, that it makes speaking a very demanding task. The rules change every day, and might or might not be affected by who are you talking to, the time of the day or even the place.

Every. Speaking. Situation. Feels. Out. Of. Your. Control.

And less, Less.

You feel alone.

And then I found my stamily.

The National Stuttering Association is the largest non-profit organization dedicated to bring support to people who stutter, and every year they have a conference in a random city in the United States. I attended my first one in Ft. Worth, Texas in 2011, and I just came back from my 8th in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

### "THE ONES THAT LOVE US **NEVER REALLY LEAVE US."**

I know Disney has copyrighted "The Most Magical Place on Earth" and they'll probably sue me just for typing that.... but the NSA Conferences are THE most magical place on Earth! (Fight me, Mickey Mouse.)

First of all: YOU ARE NOT ALONE!!

If you are a first timer it's completely mind-blowing. Walking into an NSA Conference is like entering a parallel universe: You grow up believing you are alone, that nobody gets you, and suddenly you discover that there others like you. Like, A LOT of them. You meet people who stutter from all ages, races and backgrounds. You discover that we are in every city, in every country and in every language, and for one magical weekend you are in a beautiful hotel, in a beautiful new city, surrounded by around eight hundred of the most beautiful people you will ever meet.

At the conference you hear speeches and attend workshops. You share stories and make each other laugh with terrifying tales of phone calls and drive-thrus. You are constantly inspired and brought to tears by stories of bravery, persistence, and success. You go to have dinner in big groups and confuse the hell out of unsuspecting servers. You start your day talking and go to sleep at 4:00AM, still talking. You talk about things that scare you, and everybody gets it.

The NSA is the place where I Stutter becomes We Stutter, and it's amazing!

And to make it even better, if it's not your first time, it feels like the best family reunion ever. That's where the name stamily comes from, stuttering + family = stamily!

The 2019 NSA Conference started in an odd way...

The hotel didn't have electricity for almost 14 hours on Wednesday, which meant no lights and no air conditioning anywhere in the hotel.

I was scheduled to lead a workshop on Wednesday, and the lack of power put a wrench on my plans... and my confidence. I had prepared what I thought would be nice presentation, with a beautiful PowerPoint, and even a song, only to get to the hotel and find out that I was going to present in a dark room, with no A/C and no projector. You can prepare all you want, but every now and then life throws you a curve ball, and if that's not a metaphor for stuttering, I don't know what is!

I did what I could, and presented a sweaty workshop in front of a sweaty and uncomfortable audience. If you ask me, my workshop went terrible, but all throughout the weekend I was approached by many of the people that were present saying that I had done the best out of a really bad situation, and that even with all the drawbacks, my talk had inspired them.

In any other occasion I would've dwelt on that for days, and have a pity party for planning months for this and then have a sucky presentation, but when you are surrounded by so many people that love and encourage you, it still sucks, but a lot less.

One of my favorite things about my stamily is that we come from every place you can imagine. I remember at some point I was talking to a group of people and I stopped to point out that we were seven people from six different countries: USA (2), Kuwait, Canada, Egypt, Bolivia, and Mexico. I love that.

Stuttering is why my Facebook today looks like the United Nations (hej Danmark!) and why even though I've never been to Canada, this year I was named "Honorary Québecois". Hearing people stuttering in different accents and languages is fun, and hearing your exact same experiences coming from the mouth of somebody that lives a thousand miles away is unexpected, but incredibly heartwarming. It also makes me feel that no matter what city or country I visit, all I need is to post the Stutter Signal on social media and within minutes I will have a local come to my rescue with recommendations, advice or even a place to stay. It's pretty freaking magical.

Before the NSAI was terrified of the idea of having my hypothetical kid go through the same things I went through, but to be honest, I think that now I wouldn't mind as much. I know they would not have it easy, but the NSA and I would be there from the beginning. My kid would never feel alone, or so I hope. But still, something to think about.

And that was my 2019 NSA Conference in a nutshell. A weekend in paradise with people that would even make Hell feel cozy, welcoming, and fun. The workshops and keynotes are incredible every year, but to me, the best of the whole weekend are the conversations and the stories you hear. Inspiration comes in all shapes and sizes, and now that you know that you are not alone, go on and talk fearlessly. Share your story, do it for the 14 year

See you (somewhere) in 2020!

And remember that as the J.K. Rowling said "The ones that love us never really leave us."

Love you, Stamily! ©



