

Conference Memories



My NSA Experience

Three days. That's all it took for me to realize three important things about stuttering: 1) It's okay to stutter. 2) I'm truly not alone. I'm not

the only one who stutters. 3) I should never let my stuttering stop me from doing the things I want to do in life.

My journey began on Thursday morning when Mom and I checked into the Westin. Not knowing what to expect, I was very nervous. This was my first conference. The first session I went to was the teen icebreaker. After I introduced myself to the group, I no longer felt nervous. By lunchtime I was having a blast at the conference, and I was very glad that I came. For me, the first timers gathering was one of the best parts of the conference. I really liked how Russ Hicks had everyone introduce themselves to two people they didn't already know. It made me leave my comfort zone for a few minutes, and I really liked it. I'm normally not an outgoing person, but I soon found myself talking almost non-stop to the people I had introduced myself to.

This conference has had such a big impact on my life. I left the conference with a completely new attitude about my stuttering. It took those few days for me to realize that stuttering isn't something I should hide. It's also not something I should be embarrassed about. I didn't tell

my friends why I was going to Chicago. When I returned home from the conference, I proudly showed my friends the orange and purple "Be Heard" bracelets that I had purchased at the conference and told them everything about it. I was no longer afraid to admit that I stutter.

Since attending the conference, I no longer care if people laugh at me for stuttering. I have come to accept the fact that I do stutter. And there is absolutely nothing wrong with that!
— *Kelly McLendon*



Wow!

Wow, what a great conference! I have been going to the NSA conferences for the last three years and I have to say that this one was

by far the best yet! The connections I made and the people I met have left an everlasting impression. I have stuttered all my life and to know I now have such a huge second family makes me feel at ease when I return from the conference and go back to my everyday life.

The workshops, awards luncheon, keynote speakers, and the banquet were amazing. I was dreading the end of the conference, but I knew it had to come. It indeed arrived too soon!

Keeping in touch, E-mailing and talking to the people I have met definitely helps a lot, but when you really look at it, it's the

feeling and comfort you get from everyone in the NSA. The feeling makes you feel okay about stuttering, and as far as I am concerned there is nothing like it in the world. If you attended the conference this year in Chicago, you know what I am talking about. I will see you in Long Beach! — *Tony Romano*

Rekindling Old Friendships

I never thought I'd say this several times in my life, but stuttering has truly been a blessing to me. Not only do I get to know NSA members, attend awesome conferences, and have a great support system, stuttering paved a path to my loving husband, Andy, and now a beautiful daughter, Ava.

All three of us were lucky enough to attend, at least one day of the Chicago convention. My wonderful in-laws babysat Ava as Andy and I rekindled old friendships, met new people, and had a great time!

Andy and I pray that Ava won't stutter, although the odds are pretty high she will, since we both do. We shall cross that bridge when we get to it. But, I do get comfort in knowing that if she does, she has parents who understand and an organization like the National Stuttering Association to support her.

Thanks to all of you—you give me strength when times get rough. We hope to make to Long Beach next year and see all of you again. — *Stacey Fitzenrider (with Andy and Ava)*

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First Timers

My First Full Conference

I attended my first NSA conference in Baltimore 2004 but was only there for part of the time. I had arrived on the Friday morning and left Saturday afternoon before the banquet. At the time, I really didn't know what I missed. Then came Chicago!

This year I arrived on Wednesday and stayed until Sunday, and wow, what an amazing five days in my life. I met so many people, heard so many stories, shared so many stories; it truly was a feeling that I am not alone with my stutter. And with a crowd of more than 600 people, that "alone" feeling seemed to disappear even further.

I spoke during an open mic held in a general session, meaning I had to speak in front of all who attended the conference. I didn't realize how many people were there until I got up on stage, at which point I became truly nervous and emotional. Last year, my wife was the only person who knew I was at the conference. This year, everyone knew why I was in Chicago! I almost broke down in tears as these words were spoken, as I truly felt I was accepting my stutter like never before.

I came home Sunday physically and emotionally drained, and it was the greatest feeling. I felt such a connection with the people at the conference, a common bond not found anywhere else. Only here could I speak without being judged and heard for what I said and not how I said it. I became proud to be known as a person who stutters. A friend of mine recently asked if I would ever be cured of my stutter. I replied, without hesitation, "I hope not."
— *Vikesh Anand*

First Impression

About a week before this year's conference I started getting cold feet. Would it really be as amazing as past attendees always say it is?

I had been a member of a stuttering E-mail group for five years and the NSA for almost three years, so I knew there were other people out there like me. I had even met a few stutters in person and corresponded with many more online. Would attending workshops with a load of stutters really be that different?

I was certain the answer was "no" and that I would regret taking three days away from my family (who had put together a long list of fun things to do in my absence). But since I had already paid my registration fee and my airfare, I thought I should at least give it a try.

Past attendees were right. The conference was the most accepting, encouraging, comforting, and truly wonderful event I have ever attended. For the first time, I felt free to say whatever I wanted to say instead of just what I thought I could say fluently. I even felt comfortable going up to strangers and introducing myself. Everyone I met completely understood my struggles.

I also learned a few things. First, public speaking and Toastmasters are possible for stutters. They can even be fun. Second, it really is okay to stutter. I am ashamed to admit that before the conference I felt uncomfortable listening to someone else stutter. But during the conference, that feeling disintegrated. I realized that disfluency is nothing to be embarrassed or uneasy about. And as a result, I am finally starting to be more comfortable listening to myself stutter.

And last, but most important, I learned that I am truly not alone. Reading about other stutters' experiences in *LETTING GO*, in books, and online is not nearly as real or powerful as actually watching hundreds of other people battle the same struggles you do.

Thank you so much to everyone who was a part of this year's conference. You have given me the confidence and courage to be me. I am looking forward to vacationing with my stuttering family again next year in Long Beach, CA. — *Sophie Sacca*

Still in Chicago

I write this one week after returning from the Chicago conference. As a first timer, at this point, all I can say is, "Wow!"

The conference was the most accepting, encouraging, comforting, and truly wonderful event I have ever attended.

Upon returning to work this past week, it was very difficult to be present. My mind is still at the Chicago conference. I will never forget the faces of people I met and the faces of people who I saw and heard but didn't meet. I hope to see all of them again.

After living for years in isolation and bitterness, I am dismayed to hear myself saying that stuttering is a "beautiful mystery." Thank you to all you fellow people who stutter and to those who care on our behalf. Thank you for sharing your hope, wisdom, and humor! — *Hannah Russell*

A Freeing Feeling

Upon arriving at the conference I had no idea what to expect. I found myself already anticipating what kind of speaking situations I would be faced with and setting up worst-case scenarios of what could happen with my speech. I was feeling a lot of anxiety of the unknown. Within five minutes of walking into the conference these feelings melted away. I immediately felt accepted and was overwhelmed by the kindness shown to each and every one of us. I knew this was going to be quite a weekend.

The first timers meeting changed my attitude about being open about my speech (thanks to an inspiring talk by Russ Hicks). I realized that if there was one place I could feel totally comfortable and leave all my fear, anxiety, and doubt behind, it was here. I realized that I *could* introduce myself to others and express my opinions in more than just a phrase. By the end of the weekend you couldn't shut me up! For the first time in my life I completely concentrated on what I was saying instead of how I was saying it, and that was such a freeing feeling.

Everyday I am inspired and motivated by the people in the NSA. Words alone cannot express what a life-changing experience this has been for me. I realized that these people are not sacrificing who they are because of their stuttering, so why should I? — *Molly Grochowski*

RESEARCH Q&A

Medication Study

Clinicians who treat stuttering have searched for better and better treatments for this disorder that we share with 1% of the population. In recent years, an expanding body of research suggests that stuttering has a neurologic component that may be amenable to pharmacologic treatment. This new research provides hope that medications may someday become an option in stuttering treatment perhaps in part as augmentation strategies to speech therapy. While no medication or speech therapy will likely ever be proven to be a "cure," hope for better stuttering treatments is now on the horizon. Pagoclone, a medication developed by Indevus Pharmaceuticals, is now being studied for the treatment of stuttering in adults. This agent acts in a novel manner by selectively blocking a chemical receptor in the brain (GABA-A) that may then assist in decreasing stuttering. Although no specific claims can be made regarding the efficacy of this medication in stuttering, this study will provide many answers as to its potential usefulness.

Q: What is EXPRESS?

A: **EXPRESS**, which stands for **EX**amining **P**agoclone for **peR**sistent **dE**velopmental **S**tuttering **S**tudy, is a clinical research study that will evaluate the safety and effectiveness of pagoclone, an investigational medication to treat symptoms of Persistent Developmental Stuttering (PDS). The diagnosis of PDS applies to adults who started stuttering prior to age 8 and who have not outgrown their stuttering.

Q: Why is this clinical research study being conducted?

A: While there are various approaches to treating persistent developmental stuttering—including behavior modification, speech therapy, and biofeedback devices—there is no cure for stuttering. Although psychotherapy can help people cope with PDS, it is more properly considered to be a neurological disorder.

A clinical trial for this same investigational medication was conducted previously for a different condition. These participants noted a reduction in their stuttering while receiving pagoclone, and when they stopped taking the study medication, their stuttering returned to pre-study levels. The EXPRESS study will continue the necessary testing to determine whether pagoclone is effective among a larger group of people who stutter.

Q: If I participate, what will I be asked to do?

A: Participants who successfully complete the screening procedures will be asked to take the investigational medication or a placebo (inactive substance) for 8 weeks. At the end of the 8-week treatment period, you may choose to participate in an extension of the study in which all subjects will receive the investigational medication for approximately 12 months.

Q: How might I benefit from participating in EXPRESS?

A: All study subjects will be monitored by a medical research team. Although no promises can be made that partici-

pants will benefit from the study treatment, participants will receive, at no charge, the following benefits:

- Physical examinations
- Clinical laboratory testing
- Stuttering assessments
- Study treatment

Q: Who is sponsoring EXPRESS?

A: In July, Indevus Pharmaceuticals announced the initiation of this Phase II trial, which will enroll 120 adults. If you attended NSA's annual conference this year, you may have met an EXPRESS representative who provided information about the study and answered attendees' questions.

Q: How do I know if I might be eligible to participate in EXPRESS?

A: You may be eligible to participate in this study if you:

- Are between 18 and 65 years of age
- Developed stuttering prior to age 8 years
- Meet all other eligibility criteria

For more information and to find out if you are eligible to participate in the EXPRESS trial, please call 866-289-1359 or E-mail Express@matthewsgroup.com.

Exciting Initiative: NSA Kids

We are all proud that the NSA continues to be internationally renowned for its adult programs and chapters. No other stuttering organization offers the resources and support of the NSA, and we plan on continuing, expanding, and improving these important programs for adults who stutter.

In addition to the adult programs, the NSA has also developed dozens of very important programs specifically designed for children and teens who stutter, and their families. In recognition of all the NSA does to support children and teens, the NSA has developed a new initiative called NSA Kids.

NSA Kids was launched at the Chicago conference with a beautiful new logo and brochure and focuses on the needs of kids and teens who stutter and their families.

It is comprised of many programs such as Youth Days, CARE Groups, Teens Who Stutter (TWST) chapters, Internet Yahoo groups, newsletters, and many more. We are very excited about the many more programs we are developing to help kids and teens who stutter, and their families.

If you would like a copy of the brochure or to find out how you can offer your support in this exciting new initiative, please contact the NSA office. Send an E-mail to info@WeStutter.org or call 800-We-Stutter (800-937-8888).

Much Ado about Something

BY ALAN BADMINGTON



I was one of eight finalists who competed in the recent UK Association of Speakers Clubs (ASC) national speech contest held in Leicestershire, England. The ASC has

its origins in Toastmasters International.

I qualified for the UK finals as champion of the South West District, having earlier won my club and area competitions in this progressive event. I spoke to an audience of 300 for between 6–8 minutes, using the above title as my subject.

Marks were awarded for poise, confidence, personality, volume, fluency, clear enunciation, pace, modulation, pausing, eye contact, and rapport with the audience. Account was also taken of the manner of speech construction, choice of vocabulary, word pictures, and overall impact. Contestants were aware that severe penalties would be imposed for exceeding the maximum time limit by a mere second.

Although I did not win the national title, I was thrilled to receive a trophy and certificate. It was a wonderful experience to compete against the best speakers in the country. I learned a great deal. Although competition rules do not make allowances for anyone with speaking difficulties, this is in complete contrast to club meetings, where people who stutter are made most welcome and given every encouragement.

I also undertake a program of talks to community organizations in an attempt to create greater public awareness about stuttering. In 2004, I traveled to Australia where I was a keynote speaker at the World Congress for People Who Stutter. It gave me a great thrill to win the Oratory Competition at that international event.

I always feared speaking in front of groups. Since joining the ASC, I have derived immense benefit and now feel totally at ease in such situations. I've also been able to transfer the additional confidence to other speaking environments. I thoroughly recommend membership to such an organization to anyone. ■

Alan Badmington is a former police officer and lifelong stutterer from Wales, UK.

Keynote Speaker John Melendez

BY LOU MADONNA



John Melendez spoke to us at the General Session of the NSA conference on Saturday morning. His address was engaging, earthy, candid, and authentic,

and in relatively good taste considering that he was telling us much of his life story, referring to his career in music and the media, including the Howard Stern Show and The Tonight Show with Jay Leno.

John shared that his stuttering started when he was in the second grade, and there was a great deal of trauma in his life caused by his alcoholic father, who also stutters. John has had treatment with Martin Schwartz and his passive air flow therapy for his stuttering and went to a psychologist to deal with issues relating to his dysfunctional family situation.

John told us that throughout his youth, he was teased and picked on, both for stuttering and for being Puerto Rican. He endured nicknames such as “Stutterface,” “Skip,” and “M-C Stammer.” When he was hired to work on the Howard Stern Show because he stuttered and began to go by the moniker of “Stuttering John,” he began to stutter less because this was instant and automatic advertising of his disfluency, which took the psychological pressure off him. He now had nothing to hide.

John strongly advocates advertising your stuttering because of his experience with that nickname. He finds that when he increases the volume of his voice he becomes much more fluent. You will notice that when he does his announcing on The Tonight Show, he is practically shouting out what he has to say. He will substitute words if he has to, and he advises using whatever “crutches” you need to get by.

John confides with us that beer helps him become more fluent—it takes the edge off things! In addition to increasing the volume of his voice, he finds that the use of accents and playing characters greatly enhances his fluency. For example, John provides the voices for eight characters in the Sci-Fi Channel’s mature-rated animated comedy program, “Tripping The Rift.”

John’s philosophy regarding stuttering is: “Stuttering is not who you are, it’s just

something that you sometimes do. You’re a person—don’t let stuttering run your life. Don’t let it interfere with your dreams. Take the power out of it. Don’t let it define you. Laugh at it. Let people know that you have a stuttering problem right up front. Don’t let it hold you back. There is no such thing as ‘can’t.’”

John shared with us the story of a young man with a severe stutter who came to him. The man was going on a job interview, and he asked John, “What should I do when I go on this job interview to be successful and make a good impression?” John told him to take a notebook and a pen with him to the interview to use to write in case he had to, to express himself. Years later, John met this man again, and the man spoke with great fluency. He is Conroy Arnold, the chief chef at the Borgata Casino in Atlantic City. He thanked John for suggesting that he use the notebook and pen at that job interview. It was a back up, a crutch, that gave him the confidence to get by.

John is down to earth and a cool guy. He gave us ample evidence of that in the question and answer session following his speech. He has compassion and has not lost “the common touch.” When I saw him with the stage manager of The Tonight Show at an outdoor sidewalk table in front of the Westin Hotel after his talk, I approached him and complimented him on a great speech. I asked him for his autograph. He was very kind and gracious and took a moment to accommodate my request for his signature.

I often tell people in my chapter to “ACE” their speech. That is, to speak in a manner that is Authentic, Comfortable, and Effective for them. I’ll say this...John Melendez is a great guy, and he “ACED” his speech! ■

Lou Madonna lives in Media, PA, and is employed in the engineering design business. He has been a member of the NSA for almost 19 years and has led the Philadelphia Chapter since 2001. His story about his stuttering and coming to terms with his life, A Quest For Wholeness, can be found in the book, “To Say What Is Ours.”

OUR VOICE

One of the Best Yet

This past conference in Chicago was my sixth and one of the best yet. Meeting so many new people and seeing all the first timers, and it was amazing to see the endless smiles on their faces. This year I'm on the Teen Advisory Council with three other amazing people, Michel Liben, Stephanie Nicolai, and Brad Sara, and the council is led by two of the most amazing people, Debbie Nicolai and Marybeth Allen as well as some backstage work by Nina Reardon.

One of the best parts of the conference for me was winning the Youth of the Year award. Stephanie presented it to me and gave the best introduction, and I will remember it forever. This conference was the busiest one yet for me, but I enjoyed every second of it, spending time with the kids and teens, speaking to the parents, listening to their stories and answering their questions. It means a lot when you know that you have helped someone or have touched their hearts.

As I look back, I can't believe how far I have come and how much my life is changed because of the NSA. When I came to my first conference I had no idea what to expect or who I'd meet. After a day I couldn't believe it—I could stutter all I want and no one would ever ridicule me. I met so many amazing people who I am still very friendly with and have changed my life forever. — *Alex Rosenbaum*

College Advice

When I was preparing to leave for college, I talked to anyone who would talk with me about their own experience. I was both nervous and excited about the new time in my life, and I felt that talking to people would give me some insight into this transitional period. I heard many descriptions of people's encounters with going off to school, and the words that would flood most conversations were ones such as "amazing," "exciting," and "freedom."

What is not shown in movies and very rarely spoken about by people is that the first few weeks of school can

be difficult. For me, these weeks were filled with uncertainty and an even loneliness. About two weeks into school I had lunch with a few acquaintances from home that were attending the same college as I. Surprisingly, I found out that they too were feeling these unexpected emotions. Where was the college experience we had heard about?

It was just around the corner. So now, when people ask me about going away to college, I say the same things that everyone said to me: nothing but glowing reports.

Still, I wanted to relay my experience. Hopefully for those whose first few days start a little rough, they are not caught as off guard as I was. And also, since you are most likely a person who stutters, here are a few tips on getting through the first few days at school while stuttering excellently.

- 1) Do not hide your stuttering. This is especially true inside your dorm. These people are going to see you every day – there is no way you're going to hide it forever. Let them know early on.
- 2) Speak in class. Professors like students who talk and don't like any excuse. Plus, people will never shut up and listen better than during a really bad block.
- 3) Take advantage of the disability services at your school. Usually they can get you some really helpful things like early registration. Your non-stuttering friends will be jealous.
- 4) Be yourself. Not just when it comes to your stuttering, but in general. Forget about the importance of first impressions. The important thing is to make a real impression.

— *Michael Liben*

The NSA Chain

The conference in Chicago was my fourth conference and by far the greatest one yet. I love going to the conferences not only because I get to talk and hang out with other people around my age who stutter, but also because it gives me a sense of pride

to help out children, teens, and even adults who stutter. The best thing about being a veteran of the conferences is the chance to help out the first timers and to make sure they have a great time and come back next year.

These conferences not only give stuttering children, teens, and adults a chance to talk to others and have fun, but they also offer emotional support. It's so weird to walk through life feeling like the only person who stutters; you think you're an outcast and you don't belong. Then you hear about this conference for people who stutter, and for once in your life you don't feel alone, but you're afraid to meet so many new people and actually stutter in front of them. That's how I felt before I went to my first NSA conference, which was in Anaheim, CA. When the conference finally started, I felt all my fears melt away when I began to talk to and meet people. When we left Anaheim, I couldn't wait for the next conference.

I came into the NSA expecting to meet a few people and then leave, but I left with a whole new outlook on life and a new sense of hope. It warms my heart to have the same effect on other people's lives and to see them do the same thing to others. The NSA is like a chain—it starts out with a few people helping out others, then those people help out even more people, and it goes down the chain. I am proud to be a member of this chain and to help out wherever and whenever I am needed, and I only have one thing left to say, "See you in Long Beach!" — *Sean Hare*

Online Discussion for Teens

Teens who stutter enjoy the friendship and support of fellow stutters just as

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"I came into the NSA just expecting to meet a few people and then leave, but I left with a whole new outlook on life and a new sense of hope."

Chicago 2005 Honors

BY JOSEPH DIAZ



This year's conference, the NSA's 22nd annual gathering, was held at the Westin Michigan Avenue Hotel in beautiful downtown Chicago and was

dedicated to the kids and teens in the NSA as an appropriate kick-off for the new NSA Kids Program. This new initiative integrates all of the services in the NSA, which provide help and support to kids and teens who stutter, from age three on up, as well as their families.

This year, Marty Jezer was honored by induction into the NSA Hall of Fame. Marty, a person who stuttered, was a long time member of the NSA who passed away in June. The plaque acknowledging his outstanding accomplishments and contributions read: "In recognition of his commitment to bring dignity and hope to persons who stutter around the world. With quiet wisdom he led by example, challenging the stuttering community to be all that we can be." The plaque was presented at the Friday General Session to Marty's nephew, who lives in the Chicago area and accepted it on his behalf. A Marty Jezer Memorial Scholarship Fund was established by the NSA board of directors, which will provide funds to allow people who are financially unable to attend NSA conferences to do so, thereby sharing the hope, encouragement, inspiration, and other benefits that can be gained from attending our annual conference.

The awards luncheon was held on Friday, with 110 people in attendance. It was a time to recognize those who devote their time, love, passion, and above all, leadership.

The luncheon began with the Chapter Leader of the Year Award, presented to Lou Madonna, who is a long time NSA member and has been leading the Philadelphia chapter since 2001. Lou has succeeded in re-energizing and revitalizing the chapter and enhancing its relationship with the regional speech-language pathologist (SLP) community by communicating a caring, inclusive and dynamic vision for the chapter that emphasizes informing and empowering every member.

Our Special Youth Recognition was awarded to Alex Rosenbaum. He showed great poise as he accepted the award and thanked everyone for this honor. Alex is 17 years old and lives with his family in Hollywood, FL. He will soon be entering his junior year in high school. He serves on the NSA's Teen Advisory Council.

Rich Schwerdt was again the recipient of the Regional Coordinator of the Year Award! Rich co-leads the Tallahassee, FL, chapter and manages the southeast/mid-Atlantic region of the NSA, and he worked consistently during the past year to stay in contact with his other chapter leaders. He's been able to increase the number of chapters in his region and has even managed to revive chapters that were in decline.

Our 2005 Chapter of the Year Award was bestowed upon Madison, WI! Under the leadership of Gloria Klumb, Jason Pearson, and Bob Lee, Madison is active with new members, is grooming and identifying new leadership, and is further extending its relationship with SLPs and youth. It is one of the few chapters that has a contingent of active teenagers.

Our Speech-Language Pathologist of the Year Award went to none other than Nina Reardon. Nina has been a long time Chicago area SLP, who recently moved to Texas. She has served on the board of directors for seven years, where she was the chair of Family Programs. Nina is a deeply caring, devoted, committed, and all around super member of the NSA.

This year we presented the first award for a new category, Volunteer of the Year. This award went to our foremost jack-of-all-trades who breaks his back for the organization and keeps the NSA purring along... Russ Hicks! He leads the first timers gathering at every annual conference, and he's our NSA Web site master and Stutt-L E-mail list master. On the NSA Web site, everything from the What's New section to the General Information more than likely is something that Russ has had a hand in producing or setting up.

He is a national regional workshop presenter and is very active in Toastmasters. He donates many hours to the education

of SLPs and students on the subject of stuttering.

Last, we presented the 2005 Member of the Year Award to Jim McClure. The NSA board officially titled him "Media Relations Chair of the NSA."

He is a past member of the NSA board of directors and a long time member of the NSA. He founded the Chicago/Wooddale chapter. In 2003 we dedicated the Nashville conference to him. He maintains relations with the media, especially every year at our annual conference, just because he wants to and feels the need to do so.

We hope to maintain the excitement, enthusiasm, and momentum that we generated in Chicago throughout the coming year until we meet again, from June 28-July 1, 2006, at our 23rd Annual Conference in Long Beach, CA. ■

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Joseph Diaz, chair of the awards luncheon, has lived in Dallas all his life. He has worked in multiple jobs at Texas Utilities over the course of 25 years. Has been active in Toastmasters for nine years and is a Distinguished Toastmaster. He can be reached at josephdiaz@mail.com.

OUR VOICE *continued*

adults do. The limited number of NSA teen members in a given local area makes the exchange of this fellowship more difficult. NSA-Teens allows youths over 13 years of age who stutter to have similar discussions with other teens they can relate to without ever leaving their homes.

It is difficult to maintain long distance friendships when we only have one opportunity a year to see each other, if that. Visiting each other is not always feasible when we are spread throughout the country, but the information highway brings us together allowing us to uphold our friendships through our "virtual chapter." The group was established to establish and maintain relationships with teens who may have not yet attended a conference.

To learn more about NSA-Teens, visit groups.yahoo.com/group/NSA-Teens.

Reconnecting with an Old Friend

BY BERNIE WEINER

In April I had the great experience of reconnecting with a long lost friend from Shady Trails Speech Improvement Camp, which I attended way back in the summers of 1965 and 1966. My friend, Dann Balesky, found me by doing a search on the Internet. His search led him to the Shady Trails Web site, where some of the campers have posted. Many of us have written about our fond memories of that camp and the part it played in our stuttering therapy many years ago. Dann told me that he just had the urge one day to type in "Shady Trails" and see what happens. Like my long lost friend told me, he believes that everything happens for a purpose. It turns out that Dann lives and works only a little ways away from my house in Troy, MI. Like many former campers, we had gone our separate ways and lost touch.

What is so amazing is that Dann and I have not seen each other in almost 40 years. A lot of things have gone on in

our lives since that time, as you can imagine. Dann and I met for dinner and a couple of drinks and talked about our lives since we left camp. He has led a very eventful life, becoming a very successful vice president of a worldwide advertising agency called McCann Erickson. His stuttering is now pretty much under control, but he still uses some of the techniques he learned at that camp. For those of you who know me, I'm a very open person about my stuttering and still struggle sometimes to keep it under control. But the more that Dann and I talked about our lives in the past 40 years, the more comfortable it became. My fluency was the best it has been in months. Dann joked that if he had contacted me a few years ago, I would have been using fluency controls all the time by now (smile).

A lot of thoughts went through my head before I left my house to meet up with my best buddy from camp. I must admit, that for some reason, I was very nervous about

my stuttering. Would I be able to talk about all the things that have gone on in my life? Would I be able to talk about how in the last 10 years I have found peace with my stuttering through being involved with the National Stuttering Association and my great support group in Royal Oak, MI? Well, talking about that part of my life came very easy. And, I'm going to try my best to get my friend involved in the NSA. Unfortunately, Dann is getting ready to retire at the ripe old age of 55 and move to northern MI, which is about a four-hour drive from my house. But this time we have promised to keep in touch by E-mail and by phone. ■

Bernie Weiner has been a member of the NSA for the past 11 years. He has been a member of the Royal Oak, MI, NSA chapter since 1995 and is a two time co-chapter leader of the year. Bernie works at General Dynamics Land Systems as an engineering records and release specialist.

Volunteer Request

BY CATHY OLISH

The NSA is a non-profit organization, and all the work that is done within the NSA is from people who volunteer their free time to help others. As NSA volunteer coordinator, I am responsible for finding volunteers and working with them to help those who need assistance with projects, tasks, special events, and anything else that comes up during the year. I coordinate between the volunteers and those who need assistance (mostly board members and the NSA office) to ensure the tasks/projects are completed as required.

I always wanted to do more but never knew what I could do. So, I started to find things to do. That was the best thing I could do for myself because as I help others, I help myself. We have lots of talent within the NSA and could use your experience and skills. Many of you say you want to help but don't know what to do...well, it is my job to find you something to do. Don't worry, there is plenty!

Projects Needing Assistance

Help at state conventions, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) conventions, etc.; help with NSA newsletters and publications (putting together a series of "best of" issues); Youth/Family Days; Adult/Teen Mentor Program (anyone out there with experience in mentor programs?); surveys; welcome folder for new families and new members; creation of flyers and pamphlets; researching Internet and Web sites for NSA info and links; many more.

For those who attended an NSA conference this year for the first time, you probably left there with so much excitement and energy and a new-found feeling of empowerment that you don't know what to do with. To keep that energy and excitement going and stay connected, help us. Not only will you be helping others, but you will be helping yourself along the way.

If you are interested, please E-mail me at babyo20@aol.com or contact the NSA office at info@westutter.org or 800-WeStutter (800-937-8888).

I would like to acknowledge those who have assisted the NSA on various projects this past year: Annie Bradbury, Joseph Diaz, Leslie Furmansky, Maria Garza, Zan Green, Ronnie Johnson, Sonya Kunkle, Brad Madsen, Joe Mirly, Lee Reeves, Bob Rochefort, Vicki Schutter, Anthony Romano, Junior Tereva, Tracey Wallace, Bernie Weiner, and Bonnie Weiss. Thank you all for a your time and a job well done!

Cathy Olish is from Michigan. She has been an active member of the Royal Oak NSA Chapter for six years, is co-chapter leader of the Royal Oak Teen Support Group (TWIST), editor and publisher of the chapter's bi-monthly newsletter, the chapter's Web site developer, assistant editor of LETTING GO, and was recipient of NSA's Member of the Year award in 2004.



Were you one of the most
attended this year's NSA
These people were! We
Beach, CA, next year!





More than 600 people who
attended a conference in Chicago?
We hope to see you in Long



A Day to Remember

BY BOB ROCHEFORT

A few months ago, a speech-language pathologist (SLP) called and asked if I knew anyone who could come to the school of a client of hers. As the only member of our chapter who works part time, I volunteered to go. I assured her that I had some experience in talking to groups but have never talked to a fifth grade class.

The SLP, Gail Hachenburg, set it up with the principal and the classroom teacher to schedule the talk for May 23. I met the parents of the child who stutters before going to the class, and the mother said she knew me. This surprised me as I did not recognize her or her husband, but she said we met at a Family Day that the Boston NSA chapters had sponsored three years ago. I met Nick, the son, and we all walked into the classroom together.

The SLP spoke first, then Nick interviewed me by asking me questions about my stuttering. I then talked about stuttering in general and how it had affected me when I was young. When I asked the class if they knew other people who stuttered, six of them did, this surprised me. I did not meet my first person who stuttered (PWS) until I was 15.

We had everyone in the room try voluntary stuttering and then asked them to try it outside the classroom. Their questions were terrific: Does stuttering come from our genes? How did I react to Porky Pig? Do I think he's funny?

I talked about famous people who are PWS. I read Alan Badmington's poem about "Everyone's Different." I then talked about teasing and went into the iceberg example of what you see and what you don't see when a person stutters.

This was a wonderful experience for Nick and me. ■

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Bob, 70 years old, is a retired quality manager. He is a husband of 47 years, father of two, and grandfather of three. Bob has been a member of the NSA for 15 years, and Chicago was his ninth conference in a row. He has been the Boston chapter co-leader for two years and leader for three.

Discussing Stuttering with Others

BY MARIA GARZA



Ever been in a situation where you have to talk about your stuttering? In a situation where you either want to share your story or you know your listener wants to

know more? On rare occasion people will just come out and ask. For the most part, though, people wait for the stutterm to "bring it up." Unfortunately, when it is not addressed and not understood, the listener forms opinions that may or may not be true.

It's strange; I've noticed there's actually a look people give me that lets me know they want to learn more. I can't deny that sometimes I ignore their look, but I'm happy to say that's not my norm. It all depends on the situation and the person. To me, talking about my stuttering is extremely personal and not something I just openly discuss with anyone. As with all of us, my pain runs deep and my compassion for those with a more severe stutter than my own runs even deeper.

As I get older, I find myself wanting to educate the "fluent" people of the world. I want to help them understand our struggle, and understand what strong, intelligent, and motivated people we really are despite this disability. So when I sense that look, get that question or am just overwhelmed with the feeling to share my story, I will. When I do though, there are a few things I make sure to always mention:

- The fact that I've dealt with this impediment my entire life – it isn't going away, it is a life-long challenge that I am prepared to face head on.
- The fact that my speech impediment is only a speech impediment – my mind is just as sharp as the next person, it just may take me a bit longer to verbalize what's going on in my head.
- The fact that I am not afraid of my future, not afraid to push myself to that next level – yes, it has been a challenge, but who hasn't faced some kind of challenge in their life?
- The fact that I hated my stutter as a child and wished it would go away – but today, as much pain as it has caused and still causes, it also brings joy to my life. I feel I have been blessed with this challenge.

It's evoked a sense of compassion and understanding within me that I don't think I'd have unless I had this challenge. I think it has made me a strong, motivated person.

- The fact that after thinking of all the disabilities I could have had, this one isn't so bad – I can't speak for all stutters, but I can speak for myself.
- The fact that I am not ashamed of my stutter – I didn't ask for this impediment; I was given it. As a result, I must deal with it the best I can. We only have one shot at life, and I'm not going to watch it pass me by. Life is too much of a gift to do that.

There are of course other things I mention related to my personal and professional choices in life, but the statements I listed here are among my favorite and most important messages. With that said, I'd like to leave everyone reading this article with one challenge:

The next time you get that look, get that question, or are just overwhelmed to share your story, please do. We as stutters have so much to offer this world. Yes, stuttering does affect the way we are heard, but that doesn't mean we don't have the right to be heard. Whether it's sharing your story with a family member, a close friend or a perfect stranger, be rest assured that you have a whole lot of people behind you that are supporting you. The only way to change the perception of stutters is to educate the masses, one person at a time.

Our fluent friends and family members are also welcome to take the challenge. The next time a person makes a joke about stuttering or looks strangely at your friend or family member who stutters, take the time to educate them. Please know that I am not saying everyone who reads this has to take this challenge; it isn't easy at all and doesn't have the same impact on everyone. If you feel motivated to do it though, please do. The more we can share with and support one another, the stronger we will be. ■

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Maria Garza is the co-leader of the Michigan Royal Oak-Beaumont Hospital Adult Support Group. She has been employed at Ford Motor Company for more than eight years where she works as a human resources associate.

How My Golf Game Developed a Stammer

BY HELEN VYNER



Three years or so after going through the McGuire Program, I considered myself pretty much recovered. Then I took up golf.

I booked lessons with a pro and found to my surprise that the game was much more difficult and frustrating than I could imagine. At this point, something strange happened.

My stammer (stutter), which I had worked so hard and so successfully to overcome, had re-emerged. Not dramatically – there were no major blocks, no outward signs of a struggle – but on occasions, my speech wasn't as smooth as it had been. The confidence with which I was able to go into any speaking situation began to erode.

I began to analyze what was happening. Although I had successfully changed my hexagon* in relation to how I felt about myself and my speech, when faced with this entirely new challenge (golf) – a challenge that seemed unrelated to speech – all the characteristics I had displayed as a person who stuttered had resurfaced in another area.

How I performed at golf became very

important to me. Just like I didn't want to show myself up when I stammered, I now didn't want to show myself up on the golf course. Just like I worried what others would think of me when I stammered, I now worried what others would think of me when they saw me hacking my way round the golf course.

Although rationally I knew my stammer was of no import to others, emotionally I couldn't accept that. Likewise, although I *knew* no one cared how I played golf, I couldn't accept that. I was overcome with the same feelings of imperfection I had wrestled with around stammering. I felt exactly the same way.

Just as I would get angry and berate myself when I stammered, so I would get angry and beat myself up when I played a bad round of golf. I concentrated solely on performance. I placed all my emphasis on not hitting a bad shot. Because I was so afraid of "failure," I didn't allow myself free expression. I didn't give myself a free rein. In short, I held back. As a consequence, I developed a "golf stammer"! I had golf blocks instead of speech blocks!!

Now that I realize what was going on,

two things have happened. First...hallelujah! My golf has improved. Letting go and having fun on the golf course, not concentrating solely on performance, have improved my game. I don't think Tiger Woods has anything to worry about just yet!

The second thing is that my speech is back to where it was. Although of course, it isn't my speech that is back to where it was, it's my hexagon that is once again well balanced.

I knew the theory. I knew the concept of the hexagon, but the reality was much harder to grasp – that my performance is a reflection of my entire self: how I think, perceive, feel, and believe. I would never have thought there was any correlation between the game of golf and my speech. Now I know differently. ■

* This refers to John Harrison's holistic model of stuttering—the Stuttering Hexagon. The six points of the hexagon are emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions, physiological responses, and physical behavior. To make permanent changes, all the points of the system have to be addressed.

Helen Vyner lives in London, UK. She joined the McGuire Program in June 2000 and is now its administrator. She enjoys among other things, music, drama, current affairs, and now golf.

The Motivational Lyrics of Frankie Jones

BY MARIA GARZA

If you've attended an NSA annual conference over the last couple years, the lyrical rhymes of Frankie Jones may still ring in your head. If not, you may be interested to know that we as stutterers now have a voice in the music world. Frankie Jones isn't just another hip-hop music artist; he's a voice for all those who stutter – regardless of age, race, or gender.

He tells our stories in his first-ever CD entitled "Rightfully Spoken." He speaks of the obstacles we've faced, the challenges we've overcome, and the blessings we've received as a result of this impediment. He talks of the NSA kids and teens who've touched him deeply and the ways in which he hopes he influenced their lives. He discusses his religious beliefs and how he believes his stuttering is a gift of God – his gift is to help others continue to overcome their own obstacles and reach their

own dreams and desires. He doesn't hide the fact that he is still overcoming his own fears and pain. Instead he openly addresses and hopes that anyone listening to the lyrics will be able to do the same.

Frankie attended his first conference in 2003 and brought tears of what I'd call "joyful pain" to the audience with his self-written song "Man in the Mirror." He came back in 2004 with yet another powerful song entitled "Days of Our Lives." Both songs speak to the very heart of who we are as people with a stutter. He captures the feelings of shame, embarrassment, and regret, but in the same breath he captures the essence of what motivates each of us to keep striving each day. He reinforces the fact that we are all special, and we all have a gift to share with the world.

"Rightfully Spoken" is available for purchase at www.WeStutter.org under the

NSA Store section of the site. Of all the CDs I own, I consider this to be one of the best. Not only do I know the artist who wrote and performs the songs, but I also identify with the lyrics at a very personal level. Anyone who stutters or knows someone who does should invest in this CD. You won't be disappointed!

Maria Garza is the co-leader of the Michigan Royal Oak-Beaumont Hospital Adult Support Group. She has been employed at Ford Motor Company for more than eight years where she works as a human resources associate. Maria received formal speech therapy from kindergarten through 8th grade. She has learned to accept her speech and continuously seeks ways to challenge herself, as she is determined to not let it stop her from pursuing her dreams.

After Slaying the Monster

BY MATTHEW RICHARDSON

If there's something you really want to do but think you can't because of stuttering, I can show you how to make it happen.

Think of something you really want to do. Anything. You know there are potentially great rewards, but you're just not sure if you could cope with the initial risks. You just need that final push to take action!

Whenever I feel this way, I use my "Risks versus Rewards" chart. This is a specific tool for getting over the initial fear of stuttering (stuttering) in a new venture, and one I find very useful.

I've found that two of the most common risks are: 1) Stammering in front of somebody and 2) A slight feeling of discomfort at first.

For example: You might be putting off going for that job interview because you don't want to stammer in front of your interviewers. You would feel slightly uncomfortable at first.

But just imagine if you decided to go for it. Perhaps you stammer at the interview. But you get the job!

What will be the rewards of going for it? What are the benefits of your new life? How will you have changed have a person? What new exciting rewards will be a part of your life?

About a year ago I really wanted to start martial arts. But at first I was afraid of going to the club in case I stammered in front of the instructor! (Getting physically hurt was actually way down on the list!) But I went for it, and let me tell you – the rewards were immense. Here's how my individual chart would have looked.

Risks

- Possible stuttering
- Slight discomfort at first

Rewards

- New friends
- A life changing experience
- A feeling of confidence and assurance
- I have courage to pursue new challenges!
- I am physically and mentally stronger than at any other time in my life
- I am learning about Eastern/oriental culture and spirituality!
- A tremendous sense of peace, happiness, and fulfillment

Making small positive changes has a massive benefit on effect. Rather than saying, "I'll wait till I've stopped stammering and then join the Karate club" I joined the Karate club. This helped improve my discipline and character, and thus I was better equipped to address my stammering!

During my workshop at a conference I asked people to think about what they really wanted to do. The answers included things like "start my own business," "move into management," and "join a public speaking club." Here are just some of the rewards they came back with.

Risks

- Possible stuttering
- Slight discomfort at first

Rewards

- Freedom of expression
- The control of my own destiny
- Massive self-confidence
- High self-esteem
- Confidence to expand my comfort zones

- A feeling of success, fulfillment, and accomplishment
- The confidence to accept new challenges
- Happiness
- Richer in character and monetary terms!

Just look at the fantastic rewards out there waiting for you! Can you imagine those feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and confidence? Also note that the feeling of discomfort (risks) are only temporary. Yet the rewards are long term improvements to the quality of your life! Look at the rewards. Now look at the risks.

A final question – Are you prepared to risk a little bit of stammering and a little bit of temporary discomfort for all those fantastic rewards? ■

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George is 28 years old and lives in Hull, UK. He is currently working as freelance writer and training in counseling. George has been a member of the British Stammering Association for the past four years.

CHAIRMENINSIGHT

BY NSA CO-CHAIRMEN MICHAEL MCDUFFIE AND JOSEPH DIAZ

New NSA Spokesperson

The National Stuttering Association is pleased to present Lee Reeves as national spokesperson for the organization. Lee has been a long-time member of the NSA and a former chairman of the board of the NSA. In addition, he was inducted into the NSA Hall of Fame in 2003. His constant devotion to the stuttering community has been well supported by his everpresent passion and enthusiasm. He has exhibited a lifelong commitment to improving the lives of people who stutter.

We also offer our sincere appreciation for the efforts of Annie Bradberry, the past spokesperson for the NSA. She worked to increase the exposure of the NSA and to brighten the world for people who stutter.

The recent NSA annual conference in Chicago was one of our most

successful conferences ever with more than 600 people in attendance. The positive momentum continues. Moreover, we look forward to continuing our mission of bringing hope, dignity, education, support, and empowerment to the children, teens, adults, families, and speech-language pathologists who are such integral part of the organization we proudly call the NSA.



Bob Spradley Receives Award

BY DIANE COLLINS, M.A., CCC-SLP

Robert "Bob" Spradley has been voted Adult Consumer of the Year for 2005 by the California Speech-Language-Hearing Association (CSHA). He was acknowledged at the CSHA Convention Association Dinner at the Westin Hotel in Santa Clara on the evening of April 17, 2005. Bob has been a member of the NSA for the last 13 years and currently resides in Upland, CA.

Bob is receiving the Consumer of the Year Award because of all he has done to help himself and others. The following story tells why Bob is so special.

One day, about four years ago, one of my fellow employees came to me and said that she had an adult neighbor (Bob) who stuttered and who wanted to speak to me. Little did I know that this was going to be the beginning of a very nice relationship that was going to have an impact on so many people, and in particular on my students.

When I told my colleague that it was fine for Bob to call, he came right over to Upland High School, and he asked if I knew of the fluency workshops that Gail Wilson Lew conducted at Pasadena City College. I told him I did and that I had tried to get my high school students to attend. The problem was that the activity was on a Saturday, and many parents either worked weekends or they had other commitments, and the kids could not get to the workshops.

Helping Children

Bob told me that he had gone to the *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin* and surrounding schools to advertise these workshops because they had been of such value to him, and he really wanted my students to attend. Because of the hardships he had endured as a stutterer, he wanted to help others who stuttered. He wanted them to realize that "stuttering is a challenge, not a disability."

I told Bob that I would see what I could do about getting the students to one of the workshops. After speaking with my site principal and the parents of my students who had disfluencies, I received permission to take five students to a workshop, and Bob graciously paid their registration fees. This workshop had a tremendous impact

on the students who went. These students did not realize that there are many others like them who stutter. Bob worked with the teenagers during that workshop.

Bob facilitates the teen groups at each workshop held by Gail as well as at the ones sponsored by CSHA District 10. The students have developed a very high regard for Bob. He has been a major force behind building their self-esteem.

After attending the first workshop, my students asked if we could attend future workshops. They also wanted to bring other family members who stuttered. They wanted to bring relatives and friends to promote awareness of stuttering. We did attend other workshops and the National Stuttering Association conference held in Anaheim, CA, about three years ago. Once again, Bob interacted with the students and took pictures of them throughout the convention. After the convention, Bob made copies of his pictures to give to all the students who attended. To this day, students who graduated still stay in touch and call to ask if more disfluency workshops are being held. They always make sure to ask if Bob will be there, and he is.

Bob has been such an advocate for people who stutter, and he has provided a tremendous amount of public awareness. Through his contact with Diane Sholley, a reporter with the *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin*, his story has been told. Also, prior to the first workshop attended by the Upland High School students, Diane Sholley came to the high school to interview the students about their thoughts on stuttering. Then, she interviewed them again after the workshop. She wrote a newspaper article on the before and after of this event, and it was a real eye opener. Diane also sat in on a CSHA One-Day Workshop for Students Who Stutter, then

Bob has been such an advocate for people who stutter, and he has provided a tremendous amount of public awareness.

wrote a third article. Without Bob, this connection would never have been made.

Bob, who has been a stutterer all of his life, has received speech therapy over the years. He was a client of Vivian Sheehan's, and he has been a long time member of Gail Wilson Lew's Stuttering Support Groups. He has also worked closely with Annie Bradberry and the National Stuttering Association. His struggles to improve his speech and accept his stuttering, along with all of his efforts to help others, truly earns Bob the title of CSHA Consumer of the Year for 2005. Congratulations! ■

Diane Collins has been a speech-language pathologist for 30 years and is the California Speech-Language-Hearing Director for District 10, which covers San Bernardino, Riverside, and Inyo Counties in CA. She has been a very active member of the NSA for four years.

Helping Katrina Survivors

Many of our members live in the area devastated by Katrina and have been drastically affected by the hurricane. If you live in the affected areas, please know that our hearts and prayers go out to you and your family. Also know that the NSA is extending to you free membership for 3 years as a small gesture to help ease your financial burden.

Save the Date! 2006 NSA Conference

Next year's conference will be held in Long Beach, CA, June 28-July 1, 2006, at the Westin Long Beach. As for this year's conference in Chicago, for Long Beach we have secured the same great hotel rate of \$129 per night single/double/triple/quad. Information will be sent out in February.

CHAPTERNEWS

FROM BONNIE WEISS

A Garden of Positive Thoughts

BY GEORGIANA AVRAM



No, I am not being sarcastic. And I am not taking stuttering jokingly, although I'm not being too serious either.

Stuttering can be funny. But stuttering is usually

embarrassing, especially for those who stutter.

Imagine if someone came up to you and said, "You stutter! Wow, that is cool. Can you teach me how to do it?" And you actually felt good about your stuttering. It made you feel cool. Then stuttering would be great, right?

Usually a fluent person will not make any such statement but instead may make only a certain facial expression that in the mind of a stutterer triggers feelings of shame.

We people who stutter imagine some of the worst things that a person can say or think.

That is the way the human mind works, and it takes effort to change it. Imagine if every day you inserted a positive thought about your stuttering among the millions of thoughts that come up in your mind. Just one. Everyday. One thought breeds more thoughts, and soon you'll have a garden of vibrant, positive thoughts.

For example, start with saying to yourself, "Stuttering is okay. I allow myself to stutter." Then move to even deeper thoughts such as, "I love my stuttering. I am free to stutter all I want!" Something miraculous can happen.

Just as other people who stutter, I have way too many thoughts of shame about my stuttering. And when the positive thoughts about stuttering creep in, my life is much better. Just like anything in life, your attitude about it, whatever "it" may be, is what really matters.

Today, celebrate your uniqueness. The fact that you stutter is part of who you are. Be proud of who you are, and think one happy thought a day about your stuttering. ■

Georgiana is 22 years old. She graduated from the University of Maryland and has been living in New York. She was born in Romania and has been living in the United States with her family for eight years.

Bangor, ME

The June meeting of the Eastern Maine chapter took place in Ross Manor. First, they talked about letting go of the pain of the past and embracing the potential for the future. Second, they discussed outcomes of approaching strangers that they've heard stuttering in public and informing them that you yourself stutter and that there is a local support group. The third topic was to share information about famous people who stutter. Marybeth Allen spoke of Alan Rabinowitz's moving story as a person who stutters. Hannah shared information about the writer W. Somerset Maugham. In the near future, the group may attempt to meet in Belfast, hoping to bring together several NSA members who live in that area.

Beaumont, TX

Four people attended the 2nd meeting of the Beaumont chapter including a senior professor of the Chemistry Department at Lamar University. Members of the group shared their "journeys" as people who stutter and how they each coped with their stuttering. They also discussed ways to get the word out so that they can expand their membership. Everyone promised to take responsibility for getting the word out about their new chapter!

Buffalo, NY

Members of the Buffalo chapter met at Erie Basin Marina, which is located in Buffalo on the shores of Lake Erie on Saturday, July 30. Those who attended the Chicago conference shared their thoughts and memories while the members ate hotdogs! After getting ice cream cones (the biggest in Buffalo!) they walked along the path to see the beautiful flower gardens, the boats and yachts parked there, and the Naval and Serviceman's Park. Chapter members stayed to watch the beautiful sunset across the lake.

Houston-Southwest, TX

Vicki Schutter reports that their small (but earnest) chapter met at her house

recently. They had a new person join them so each person there introduced themselves and told about their past experiences with therapy and the NSA. Three of their members attended the convention. They had their July meeting at the Taj Mahal Indian Restaurant in Houston.

Mobile, AL

The Mobile chapter leader, Billy McLean, brainstormed some worthwhile goals about stuttering at their July meeting. They came up with some goals about stuttering. They listed several things about their own stuttering: 1) their goals about stuttering, 2) positive things about stuttering, 3) negative things that might prevent or make it difficult for them to reach their goals, 4) items on the "negative" list that they could do something about, and 5) brainstormed what they could do about fear/anxiety. Billy called this activity a "force filed analysis."

Seattle, WA

Joe Mirly and Elaine Saitta led a good meeting in Seattle. They talked about the "stuttering tax" – based on one of the workshops at the Chicago conference given by the Nashville, TN, chapter. Joe writes that this is a great topic that leads to some good conversations and insights. He suggests that other chapters consider using this topic as well.

Tallahassee, FL

Rich Schwerdt and Faron Boggs co-lead this chapter, which meets once a month. Rich says the group is very small, and he is having the other members help recruit additional members. They do advertise in the *Tallahassee Democrat* newspaper. Rich says the meetings are pretty typical as each member recaps his speech since their last meeting and then chooses a topic of discussion. Note: Rich is also the regional coordinator taking care of the needs of 20 chapters across the southeast and mid-Atlantic states.

Self Acceptance

I absolutely love being with people who stutter. Being a stutterer was my whole life. It ruled me, it affected everything I did, it hurt me, it made me feel ashamed, embarrassed, made me a big time people pleaser (except towards myself), and I didn't want to accept it for anything in the world. I was in denial.

Now, after accepting myself as a stutterer and for who I really am, I can say now my life is so complete and fulfilled. I know now that I am worthwhile and a strong person. I love the friends I made through the NSA and truly love being with people who stutter. Thank you all for accepting me for who I am.

Thanks for all the good laughs and the great time. I love you all in a special way...Can't wait till next year...I miss you all already. — *Bob Koste*

'Til Next Year

Today is Sunday, July 17, and I am sitting in the Weston Hotel lobby. I am filled with both happiness and sadness. Part of me is sad because I am now ready to check out of the hotel and just waiting for the time that the train will leave. I know it will be another year till I see all my friends again.

The days of the conference were filled with laughter and lots of visiting with old friends and making new friends. The best place to continue with those friendships was right in the hotel lobby. To those of you who thought Erin and I had our names on those lobby chairs well, we did!

Those early morning nonscheduled "workshops" with who ever went by were the greatest. Just being in the lobby we saw so many people we would have not seen. We were also able to form some new friendships. I also learned some Erin's magic tricks. Always exciting to learn something fun.

We also had so many great workshops to attend. One that sticks in my mind is Brad's and Elaine's "Advertise Your Stuttering." At the time it was something I did not think was funny, but now I can laugh about it. Another very special

memory for me was to see one of our group's teens at the convention. Phillip and his parents were only able to come for a very short time. But in that time it was great to see him with that convention smile. I went to lunch with them, and hearing Phillip talk in a crowded restaurant was fantastic! His parents also informed me that Phillip asked if they could go again next year. — *Gloria Klumb*

Talking without Fear

As a person who stutters (PWS), the conference is more than an opportunity to see old friends and make new ones. It is more than the chance to take risks, talk, and have fun. It is more than that because it is the one time during the year that we can talk and be absolutely certain that no matter what we say, or how we say it, or however long it takes, or to whom we are speaking—that the other person will not laugh, will not look bewildered, will not lose interest, will not walk away, will not patronize, will not do anything other than listen. It is the one time when we can talk without fear.

The conference gives PWS a chance to open up with each other and talk about what they go through every day. I heard a story from a young man who bought size 10 shoes because the word "eleven" was too difficult to say. I heard from a woman who refers to her brother as her mother's son to avoid the word "brother." Another person told me how when someone asked for his age, he would answer "I'll be 53 next May," even though May was 10 months away – "fifty-two" was too hard for him to say, and he did not want to bother with it.

The irony for many PWS is that when they come out of the stuttering closet and talk freely about their disorder they become more fluent. "Stuttering John" Melendez, a keynote speaker at the NSA conference, made an interesting point – when Howard Stern referred to him as Stuttering John, he did not have to hide anymore. Everyone knew he stuttered, and they were expecting it from him. For John, it was freedom.

And that is the point of the NSA annual conference – freedom. A speaker at one of the workshops suggested that we as PWS have not done a good job in educating the public about stuttering. She suggested that when we get home from the conference we talk to our families, our friends, and our coworkers, and that by doing so, we would earn our own freedom, one step at a time. And so I will make a down payment on mine. — *David Levitan*



Family Magic

I can't tell you how much you all mean to me. It seems that I think of you all more than any other people in my life. When I need to talk, it is one of you I turn to...when I need advice, a hug, or just an ear...one of you is always there. When I need to laugh, share, or just need a friend...you again. Even when I am feeling alone, you are all there with me.

We truly are a family, and there isn't anything I wouldn't do for any of you. I am reminded of you every time I look at my NSA bracelet and in every word I speak. I smile knowing how lucky I am to have so many great people in my life who are there for me, care about me, and accept me for who I am and all I bring to this family.

Not a day goes by where I am not in touch with at least one person from my NSA family—I wouldn't have it any other way. We carry each other through good times and bad, in both our speech and other aspects of our life. There is this instant connection that just happens between people who stutter, and it doesn't matter what background we come from, how old we are, how many conferences we have been to, what we do for a living, etc. It just happens. It amazes me how fast people connect in the short time we are together. I would call this pure "magic."

Thank you all for being the best part of my life. And remember, you are never alone. I am here...and so is the rest of your NSA family. — *Cathy Olish*

ODDS&ENDS

COMPILED BY CATHY OLISH

Special Fund Honors Marty

The NSA board of directors established a memorial fund in memory of **Marty Jezer**, who passed away in June.

Marty was a long time member of the NSA and very active in the stuttering community. Marty, a person who stuttered, like so many found solace in the comfort an NSA conference can provide. Making sure others experience the same support as Marty, this fund will provide financial support to help people to attend NSA conferences as the memory of Marty continues and provides hope to others.

NSA Service Award

The NSA has once again been honored by having two of our own receive 2005 American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) awards. As many of you recall, the NSA received the Distinguished Service Award in 2002. This award is given in recognition of significant contributions by a non-member or non-member organization or corporation.

Last year, **Michael Sugarman**, co-founder of our organization, very deservedly was honored with this award. This year **Lee Reeves** has been selected in recognition



for all of his dedication and effort on behalf of those who stutter.

Also this year, **J. Scott Yaruss** was selected to receive the ASHA Fellows Award, which is one of their highest accolades and is retained for life. Scott has joined the "giants" in his field. Of course, we have always known how blessed the NSA has been to have these two helping to guide our organization to becoming all it can be so that we ourselves can reach and grow as people who stutter.

With that, I send much congratulatory recognition and noise to Lee and Scott.
— *Terry Davis*

Note from Nobby

What a great experience attending your convention in Chicago. To see the parents there to learn more for their own self-education and to help their child grow and get the self-confidence needed to live with a stutter.

You do not have to be fluent to be successful. If you have the drive and desire, the "demon" can be conquered.
— *Nobby Lewandowski, NSA 2005 conference keynote speaker*

"Weekend America"

Rob Bloom, an NSA member from Philadelphia, was recently interviewed on the nationally syndicated radio program "Weekend America." Rob

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discussed his lifelong struggle with stuttering and some of the things he's doing to overcome his fears of stuttering. You can listen to the interview on the Weekend America Web site at www.weekendamerica.org.

Rob is a humor writer. He writes a regular humor column, which is available on his Web site. You can read his humor work as well as articles about stuttering at www.robbloom.com.



**National
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