

LETTING GO

NATIONAL STUTTERING ASSOCIATION

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NSA 2010 Cleveland, Ohio!

NSA's Annual Conference in Cleveland, Ohio July 7-11, 2010

Register online now for the NSA's 27th annual conference at WeStutter.org or print out and complete the paper form available on our Web site or through the NSA office (e-mail info@WeStutter.org or call 800-WeStutter (937-8888)).

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

Hotel Information

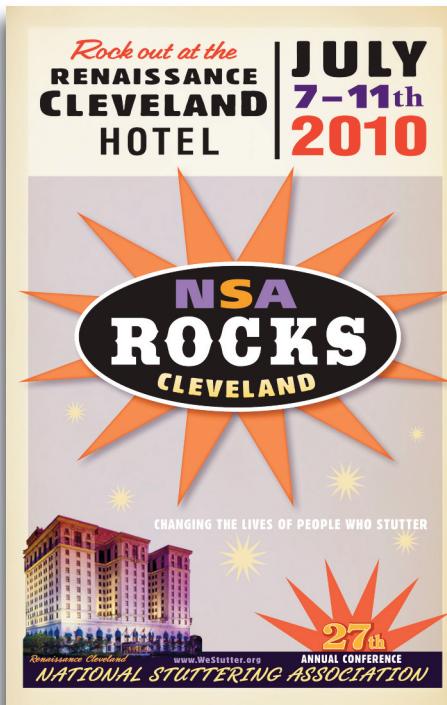
Book your room now for "the NSA hotel," the Cleveland Renaissance. Doubles (rooms for two) are always the first to go!

Room rates: \$139 Single/Double/Triple/Quad Occupancy + tax. Be sure to mention the NSA to get our great, discounted rate. Phone number: 1-800-468-3571 (Marriott worldwide) or 1-216-696-5600 Cleveland Renaissance. You also can make your reservations online at https://resweb.passkey.com/Resweb.do?mode/welcome_ei_new&eventID=2497301.

The Renaissance is located in downtown Cleveland and connected to the Tower City Center where you will find exclusive boutiques, six full-service restaurants (Hard Rock Café, Morton's Steakhouse, Tower 230 Bar & Grill, etc.) movie theater, more than 75 specialty stores and a food court featuring Subway, Dunkin' Donuts, KFC, McDonalds, etc.

Transportation Information

For those who are flying to Cleveland, Hopkins International Airport (CLE) is



the main destination.

The RTA (Regional Transit Authority) offers a very easy and direct route to our conference hotel, the Marriott Renaissance, via the Red Line Rapid Transit Rail. Upon landing at Hopkins, you can pick up the Red Line off the lower level below the middle of the baggage claim. You can only go one direction (toward Louis Stokes Station at Windermere).

Once the Red Line stops at Tower City-Public Square, hop off and our

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An Interview With Sophie Gustafson

BY DR. RAYMOND TUCKER

Sophie Gustafson is an emerging superstar in the Ladies Professional Golf Association. Born in Sweden, Sophie started playing golf at the age of 10, which is the age at which she also turned pro with very little amateur experience under her belt. Sophie attended Aranasskolan and Komvux University and earned a degree in Marketing, Economics, and Law.

Not only is Sophie quickly reaching the pinnacle of success in her golf career, she has also overcome a severe speech impediment. Sophie is just one of three million people in the United States with a speech impediment, and she did not let this obstacle hinder her from achieving her goals in life. The following is an interview conducted by the National Stuttering Association.

NSA: Are there any similarities in the way you approach your stuttering and the way you approach the game of golf?

Sophie: I don't have a special approach to my stuttering. I just try to talk; I guess that is my approach. My approach to golf is a little different, however. There is much more strategy in the game of golf.

NSA: How do people in the golf world react to the fact that you may stutter at times?

Sophie: They are fine. I have never had any problems with anyone.

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A New Year Message From the Executive Director

In this New Year we'll be looking back over the past, analyzing the present, and setting goals for the future.

Our economy made last year tough for many of us, but there were many high points. In an organization like the NSA, with a small staff and hundreds of volunteers working on a wide range of activities in many different parts of the country, no one can ever see the entirety of our work. This is unfortunate, because in fact, what we are able to do in support of our stuttering community is quite remarkable. I thank each and every one of you who continue to support the NSA through membership and so many of you working from your homes, schools, and remote cities around the U.S. ensuring the NSA motto continues to reach people in need.

People say 2010 is going to be a challenging year. But we also know that we have the right resources to meet those challenges. The NSA's strength is its membership. Each and every one of you!

It is a time of year to say thank you to those who have worked very hard for our children, our programs, the NSA...to express appreciation, to acknowledge growth and progress. Thank you for all your hard work.

Looking forward, I'm confident together we can make this a good year full of exciting programs, new members and an exciting conference in Cleveland, Ohio, this July. I can't wait to see you there!

I wish you all the very best for the new year ahead.

Sincerely,
Tammy Flores

Sharing the NSA

BY RICK PEROCO

Hello, NSA! I am the chapter leader in Norfolk, VA and the surrounding areas. I am just beginning the organization and recruitment for this newly formed chapter, and I want to share some ideas with everyone, especially the other chapter leaders, about what I am doing to spread the word about the NSA.

It all started with trying to find a location to hold my meetings. I am a full-time college student at a local university, and I tried to push for a location on campus because it's widely known around the area and in a prime location. However, that was going nowhere fast due to the university's not allowing groups unrelated to the university itself to use one of their buildings for an event like this.

This made me go elsewhere to try and find some place that would allow me to hold meetings for my NSA chapter and that was widely known around town. I came up with the idea to get in touch with the local library to see if I could use one of their conference rooms to hold the meetings. It didn't take much to get them to welcome me with open arms. That day I made reservations for 6 months out and was very excited about having a location.

The first slot available was a couple weeks after I made the reservations and I set that for the first meeting for "Tidewater Stutter." I brought to the library the start up kit that Tammy Flores, NSA executive director, had mailed to me. I printed out all the chapter leader information and resources from the NSA Web site at WeStutter.org and was reviewing that to get ready for the meeting when I realized that...no one knows I exist.

I had talked to one person about the NSA and the chapter meetings, and I had forgotten to call him and tell him that there was a meeting today. Embarrassing, much?

I got to talking with the librarians about what I was doing and about the NSA and they asked what was in the kit that I had. I started pulling out all the brochures and

publications, including LETTING GO and Family Voices, and the little books that were in there. As they were looking through everything I turned around and noticed that there was an entire section just for brochures and newsletters right there!

I quickly turned and asked them to display the NSA stuff! I got the name and phone number for the lady I needed to talk to in the administration's office for every library in the city to see if they would be willing to do such a thing. I called the number and talked to the point of contact that day! A few days later I met with her and gave her copy of what Tammy had sent me in that start up kit.

I received a phone call the next day after she reviewed the pieces with her boss. She loved everything that I left for them and would love to display everything the NSA has to offer. They also loved the idea of the little books and wanted to check them into their systems at all 13 libraries so people could check them out and read about stuttering and the NSA. I called Tammy that same day and told her the exciting news.

So don't be shy with spreading the word that the NSA exists and that we are accepting anyone and everyone with open arms! Do your part to make a difference in your local area. I have six other cities with 10+ libraries in each to continue on to. After that I am going to move on to the YMCAs in my area to see if they are willing to help me. Think of creative ways to spread the word! ■

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Rick Percoco is a relatively new member of the NSA and attended his first conference in Scottsdale, Arizona. He works with F/A18 Super Hornets as a government contractor with the U.S. Navy.



Brainstorming in the Cyberworld

BY AL TARRELL

Eight members of the Omaha/Lincoln, Nebraska, NSA chapter met recently to experiment with an alternative method of communication. Known as a Group Support System (GSS), this self-contained computer network and software tool is used to facilitate and enhance communication between groups of people working on a common question or problem.

Communications using the GSS are enhanced by allowing participants to contribute simultaneously and anonymously. These enhancements have been shown to improve communications within essentially any group, since everyone can "talk" at once (electronically), and the anonymity provided removes or lessens many traditional barriers to effective communication. All comments and entries are also captured electronically, ensuring that no idea is missed and allowing for more in-depth analysis after the fact.

I organized this session with Travis Sitter (a student at the University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO)), acting under the supervision of Professor G. J. de Vreede, director of the Center for Collaboration Science at UNO. I had learned of the positive effects that use of a GSS presented even for groups without significant communication difficulties and thought it would be interesting to see how the system worked for persons who stutter (PWS). The Omaha/Lincoln chapter had recently been debating some internal questions as well, thereby presenting an excellent opportunity to use the GSS and several of Professor de Vreede's techniques for facilitating group collaboration activities to help guide the group toward a solution.

Imagining an Ideal World

The group's task was first to examine where they saw the group in an ideal world, and then to electronically brainstorm ideas on how to best reach that state. The group used a structured process based on Professor de Vreede's patterns of collaboration, starting with generation of a broad-based list of ideas and comments. Participants then refined those ideas and sorted them into categories, and then decided which ideas were most attractive to them.

Participants quickly homed in on a few fairly specific goals for the group:

1. To grow in size, roughly two to three times current size
2. To provide the ability to help ourselves/ each other
3. To provide a mechanism to help other PWS
4. To provide a means to help educate the public about stuttering

The group then electronically brainstormed ideas on how to best meet these objectives. Results were very good, with nearly 100 separate ideas quickly generated – all in only 15 minutes by eight people working in parallel using the GSS. Participants then quickly combined similar ideas and clarified those which were unclear to any member, resulting in a clearly defined list of roughly 60 items spread across the four categories above.

A Great Success

The final phase of the session focused on evaluating the ideas generated. Members were asked to vote for the top one-third of the ideas in each category in terms of which items they thought were most worthy of further consideration – basically how viable and valuable they thought each idea was. The output of this portion provided a prioritized list in each category. Individual results are too extensive to include here, but several key ideas – such as establishing a chapter Web site and providing assistance to any speech-language pathologists who request help – were shown to be areas the membership identified as key needs.

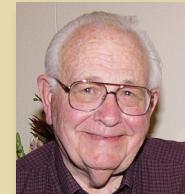
Use of the GSS and Professor de Vreede's collaboration techniques were deemed to be a great success by all involved. The entire process took less than two hours to complete, and the output provides the Omaha/Lincoln chapter with a good indication of how members see their group in an ideal world, as well as some great ideas on how to get there from where the chapter is today.

Nearly all of this communication/collaboration was done electronically, with little need for verbal communication and the pressures that creates for PWS. The Omaha/Lincoln chapter looks forward to further refining these ideas – perhaps again

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After 77 Years of Stuttering

BY MEL HOFFMAN



I'm 80 years old – so after 77 years of stuttering, what do I have to say about it?

Well, more than I can write in a couple of paragraphs.

Here's #1 on my list.

In 1957 I took a leave of absence from my job and went to Dr. Charles Van Riper in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and learned about preparatory sets, pullouts, cancellations, and desensitization (among other things). All this is important. However, as I think back about it, the words of John Ahlbach (former executive director of the National Stuttering Project and a co-founder of the International Stuttering Association along with Thomas Krall and Shinji Ito), come to mind:

"...I am going to publish my complete theory of how to overcome stuttering. ... I am going to sum up all of my experience in one lucid, compact, profound prescription for conquering the problem we all share. Ready? I've been saving it. Here it comes. In order to conquer stuttering, just live with it as best you can and you're there, my friend."

Sure, it's important to reduce your fears. Sure, you need to find a way to control your really bad blocks. Sure, you need to find the best way for you to communicate effectively, even though you stutter. But, most important – you've got to live your life, and realize that (just maybe) you are putting too much emphasis on trying to cure your stuttering and not enough emphasis on just handling your stuttering the best way that you can and comfortably living with it. ■

Mel Hoffman has been a member of the NSA since 1982 and has served on the NSA board of directors as treasurer. He's the only person who has attended all NSA conferences, beginning in 1984 where 30 people attended. Mel has been married to Ruth for 50 years, and they reside in Sunnyvale, California.

The Eloquent Stutterer

BY MEERA BHATT

I am sometimes afraid to say my name, and I am an attorney. Sometimes, when I mouth the sounds, the knot in my stomach tightens and thoughts of what others think of me threaten to trip me up in my race against words. You'd think in law school that I didn't realize I stuttered, despite the obvious. I imagined I was David waging war against Goliath. I taunted my "stuttering giant," took part in trial competitions, honors boards, and advocacy courses. In that all-encompassing cocoon, separated from the "real word," stuttering didn't seem to be a big deal.

But I should have known that it was. My cross-examination of the witness should have been the obvious clue that maybe I ought to "rethink" my choice of profession. But I didn't. I imagined I would fire a steady barrage of questions at the witness, hypnotizing the witness to answer "yes" or "no" in mind-numbing automaticity, a Perry Mason style.

That was not what happened. On the surface, I seemed calm and controlled. I battled my "stuttering giant" while imperiously piecing together my own version of the story, as the witness answered "yes" in steady streams. I learned the questions so well that the onlooker would never have guessed that my mind was less on the case and more on the judge's reaction, the jury's faces, and the thoughts of colleagues and clients.

But as I questioned the witness, I aggressively questioned myself. What was I doing? What if they think I stutter because I'm insecure or nervous, what an attorney should never be? What if they feel sorry for me, and see me as a person with "limitations," to be indulged, but not fit for the "big jobs?" What if they think I'm incompetent or "slow?" What if they think I'm inarticulate and can't "do my job?" Most painfully, what if they were right?

With every "what if," I swallowed my words as easily as razor blades and fought for breath, dancing around words I knew I would stutter on, casting my eyes to the ground every time I felt the knot in my throat eat up my words and confidence. No one would have known it. And I forgot it when I gave the closing argument a few feet away from the jury, feeling a little like

James Earl Jones and Atticus Finch. Our two-person team successfully advanced through preliminaries, to semi-finals and then finally to the championship round.

And then the judge reminded me. His black robe seemed to fill the room as he peered down at counsel's table and skimmed the onlookers. "Do you stutter because of a mental disability?" I don't remember what I said, but I'm told I muttered something about the brain and genes. My colleague's admonition, that litigation firms "wouldn't accept it" and that perhaps public interest or disability law would be more "tolerant of my problem" echoed through a pin-drop silent courtroom, and only I could hear it.

So I decided I would "hide." Avoidance, shame, and secrecy were costs of career success I willingly paid. In time, I became "so creative" that even a trial competition afforded ample opportunity to skirt away from my giant, to assume an alternate role. Interruptions and comments intended to be helpful, such as "you hardly stutter," "use a sing-song voice," "I had an uncle who stuttered and was cured," and "you're very articulate," fueled my fear of being "caught in a stutter" or exposed for what I was – unfit for litigation. I was walking on thin ice.

And Then the Ice Broke

Finally and inevitably, the ice chipped. As a young attorney, I watched opposing counsel, one of those partners at a big-wig law firm, crowned with tinges of gray hair, aggressively and artfully fire objections during a deposition. I smiled because I had anticipated every objection he would make, such as "calls for speculation," "assumes facts not in evidence," and "fails to lay a foundation." But I feared, could I say them? I determined to become a protégé of the seasoned "greats," but knew I could never skirt my way around every feared word.

And that was when the ice broke. I resolved I would depose a witness, with the same confidence and eloquence as opposing counsel. And that was where she came in.

"She" was a cornerstone of a speech pathology department, prolific researcher,

seasoned expert witness, and knew her way around a deposition more than some experienced attorneys. She was also a no-nonsense speech-language pathologist – just what I needed, and just what I feared. I could not creatively skirt around the customary instructions. I could not avoid eye contact or feign an aggressive tone. Unlike most attorneys, she knew the game.

And so I stuttered. "P-p-p-please state your n-n-n-name for the r-r-r-record." With every word, the stuttering bubbled over, breaking through the ramparts, greedy to be acknowledged, studied about, rather than confronted and beaten down. I never finished the deposition, between tears. The silent "what-ifs" I had fired at myself broke to the surface, and for once, my "performance" could not drown out my doubts. I had to face them, head on like David against the giant Goliath. And I did.

And when the stuttering finally felt free to surface, the giant turned tame. I became the giant Goliath. I dissected my stuttering, studied it anatomically, began to know it and feel the tension, shortness of breath, the panic and racing pulse. Then, I took it by the hand and let it out of its cage. On release, it did not steal my breath or tighten knots, but glided through repetitions and light contacts. When it felt free to roam around, I subdued it with a gentle hand, "advertising" and applying my speech management techniques only when I felt that I was "okay with stuttering."

I had found the courage to be an "eloquent stutterer." ■

Meera H. Bhatt lives in the Los Angeles area in California. She earned her law degree from the University of California at Davis and concentrates her practice in civil litigation. She welcomes comments and may be reached at meerahbhatt@gmail.com.

CHAPTER NEWS

FROM BONNIE WEISS

Birmingham, Alabama

Deborah Boswell writes that the Birmingham chapter had a great meeting in November. There were 11 in attendance including one new person who stutters. They also had one person who hadn't attended in six months. They had a great time introducing themselves to each other. Deborah had planned a fun activity for the group based on suggestions from NSACHAP but they never got to it because they had so much great interaction. Several members talked about their change in attitude regarding acceptance of their stuttering. They talked about how children are being born everyday who will start talking and that stuttering might emerge. Many times people who stutter don't realize that children show up in speech clinics every day and they are there because they stutter. The group agreed that it is so important for people who stutter to educate and share with others who will listen about what it means to stutter!

Dallas, Texas

The Dallas chapter recently had a "Friends and Family" meeting. They had 11 people in attendance including six regular members and five family members. They kept the meeting pretty casual. Jeff Kote offered the following questions for discussion: How has stuttering affected your life? How can people who do not stutter help those who do? What fears do you experience when bring up stuttering in conversation? What have you learned about stuttering (or people who stutter) in the last year? What other fears or complications do people experience when speaking or communicating? Is fluency absolutely necessary for effective communication? Since the group was small, they went around the room discussing the questions. Everyone participated and brought interesting perspectives to the meeting. It was a great way to end their regular meetings for 2009!

Northwest Ohio

At their November 9th meeting, members discussed what "responsibilities"

they have toward informing the public about stuttering or that they stutter. There seemed to be a consensus that it is important to provide people with information about stuttering in a "case by case" or situational manner. One topic discussed was the right time and place to educate family and others about stuttering. From this topic came a great question: "How much of stuttering is standing up for your rights?" They then had a discussion about support and their own personal "strength" as an individual and a person who stutters. They determined that strength is individualized and relative to each person. It can come from others around them giving positive words of encouragement and also can come from "internal" encouragement. Both are good and both can be ways to increase the strength when it comes to coping with stuttering. Strength was also determined to be situational. Their closing thought for the night was to incorporate themselves into stuttering as much as possible. Charlie Hughs and Scott Palasik are co-chapter leaders of this group which meets in Bowling Green, Ohio.

Raleigh, North Carolina

Rita Thurman writes that at their meeting in November, the Raleigh chapter had nine people in attendance. Interestingly enough, for the first 20 minutes or so the group was completely women! The only male arrived a little later. Luckily he is a regular participant, so there was no concern that the women would scare him off! The group consisted of five persons who stutter, three speech-language pathologists and a guest speaker from Toastmasters. The most touching part occurred when a young woman talked about her class presentation that was to be presented in the next week. Everyone immediately provided support and encouraged her to talk about her stuttering ahead of time, focus on her strategies, and to try to "connect" with the audience by using eye contact. There was also a

new member at the meeting who had attended the NSA conference last summer. She gave a stirring speech about the importance of acceptance and how the conference was a life changing experience for her. The Toastmasters representative talked about his local group and led the group through Table Topics "strategy" for public speaking. It was great fun and everyone thought this should be a part of each meeting. The main theme of the evening was acceptance. Several talked about the importance of self acceptance and ways to teach others to be accepting of them. It was a very successful evening for all of them!

Royal Oak, Michigan

Co-Chapter Leader Cathy Olish writes that the Royal Oak chapter held their annual Friends and Family meeting with 17 people in attendance including two speech-language pathologists, one son, one sibling and one spouse. Friends and family members are allowed at all meetings but this meeting usually is a great opportunity for people to bring someone with them as the focus is more on answering questions, sharing stories and also gives the guests an idea to see what goes on at the meetings. Another member shared his concern that his son has been stuttering on and off for a year and his wife had a lot of questions regarding how to deal with their son's speech. For a majority of the meeting, members shared their experiences with childhood as one of the mothers had questions on how to deal with her son's speech. Group members discussed their own childhood experiences with their stuttering, relatives who stutter and even those who have children who stutter. She really found it helpful and plans to come back every month! They had lots of snacks at the meeting and also have a lot of new "energy" for the group.

ODDS&ENDS

FROM DAVID BLAZINA

Poem: I am

I am
I am a man
I am a person who stutters.
I am a collage of all my experiences
I am loved and loved others
I am father and grandfather
I am friend to few and foe to less
I am defined by who and what I am
I am not ashamed of my stuttering
I am not afraid to stutter openly
I am not my stutter
I am so much more
I am a man
I am me.

✉ *Bobby L. Childers II*

International Stuttering Awareness Day

Derek Marley Johnson wrote to tell us about goings on in Louisiana:

"The Lafayette, Louisiana chapter of the NSA scheduled an information table on the University of Louisiana campus on International Stuttering Awareness Day, October 22. Unfortunately, the weather didn't cooperate so we were forced to reschedule to November 12, but the event was a huge success nonetheless."

"**Jill Douglass** and **Lauren Randazza** created wonderful posters with facts and myths about stuttering. **Lizzy Mayer**, a first time attendee of the NSA national conference in 2008, couldn't attend the table, but she did bake delicious cookies to attract the attention of starving students. Participants at the table included five people who stutter (**Lauren, Landon Murray, Al Thomas, Eric Robinson**, and me), two speech-language pathologists (**John Tetnowski** and **Jill**), and **Hope Taylor**, a graduate student in the Communication Disorders Department.

"This was our third time setting up the information table in the last 13 months, and while the other two were very worthwhile this time was particularly rewarding. This was the first time that we included props and food and it made a big difference. I think we were much more comfortable



Congratulations, Lynn and Randy Black

Lynn Black has been a long-time member of the NSA, is a former leader of the Phoenix, Arizona chapter, and is currently regional chapter coordinator. When Lynn and her husband **Randy** found out they were expecting they couldn't have been more thrilled; that is, until they found out there were three of them. Yes, you read right, triplets. We are happy to report that Mom, Dad, and all three babies, **Kim, Jack, and Kate**, are doing great.

in approaching people when we clearly had something to offer and they were more likely to allow us to engage them in conversation.

"The posters were interactive, with a myth such as 'Stuttering is caused by nervousness' written on a folded sheet of paper. The person could then lift the paper and see the fact, 'Nervousness does not cause stuttering, but it can aggravate it.' We were very effective this time around at educating the students. In addition, a person who stutters approached us and is very keen to attend our next support group meeting.

"I highly recommend this activity for other support groups. In addition to being a great way to reach others who stutter and educate the public, it is a great way for us to get out of our comfort zones, advertise, and find a purpose in our stutter."

Northeastern Workshop in Albany, NY

Grace Gregory and **Mary Archambault**, co-leaders of the College of St. Rose NSA chapter, wrote to let us know that the college will be having their 35th Northeastern Regional Weekend Workshop for People Who Stutter on March 20 and 21 in Albany, NY with an informal social get-together on the evening of March 19.

This workshop serves children, teens, and adults. Therapy will target individual goals and will utilize both fluency shaping and stuttering modification strategies. Participants will be able to meet other PWS of all ages during structured group therapy and unstructured time. Therapy will be provided by

graduate students in the Communication Sciences and Disorders Program under the direct supervision of certified speech-language pathologists.

Manhattan Chapter Holiday Party

The NSA's Manhattan chapter hosted an inter-chapter holiday gathering on Saturday, December 5, at the Dallas BBQ restaurant in the heart of Times Square. Fourteen members attended, including those from Long Island: **Andrew Kerai, Jin Park, and Jonathan Sackman**; Manhattan co-leaders **Mike Cohn** and **David Friedman**, **Jeff Shames**, and **Jacek Stefankowski**; Central New Jersey: **Larry Lindstrom** and **Jim Josevski**; and Queens: **Kodjo Dorkenoo** and **Anthony Romano**. Other members in attendance included **Maniesh Sailoz** and **Deb Asztalos**.

ISA World Congress

The Ninth World Congress for People Who Stutter will be held in May 2011 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The ISA Board of Directors voted to hold the Tenth World Congress in 2013.

Update on Voices Across Borders

For information on the Voices Across Borders project please visit bayarea-ansa.com/Site/VAB.html.

In addition, the following sites offer information on Organizing a Workshop and Peer Counseling: mnsu.edu/comdis/kuster/workshop/intro.html and mnsu.edu/comdis/kuster/SupportOrganizations/peercounseling.html.

Speechless

BY AMY ROBIN

Have you ever had so much to say but couldn't speak at all because you were scared of how it would come out? That's what I've felt every day. As a person who stutters, I realize how important communication and speech really are. Stuttering has been a major part of my life but has helped me grow also.

I first realized I stuttered when I was 10 years old. I was a pretty quiet 5th grader, and my music teacher wanted me to make an announcement at the weekly assembly. I didn't really have much of a choice so I said "yes."

As I was walking up to the front of the auditorium, my stomach had a huge boulder sized knot in it, and I knew something was about to go wrong. As I started to say the announcements, I stumbled on the word "the" at least 15 times. After I finally got out the sentence, I ran to my seat and cried because I was so embarrassed. I hate having everyone stare at me and make fun of me for something I can't control. That moment has definitely scarred me a lot; it hurt me emotionally and mentally. Over the years, my stuttering got worse, and that was when my life changed completely.

Stuttering varies for each person, I, for example, have a moderate stutter. For others though, it's even worse. At one time in my life, I stuttered so badly that I was scared to talk. I feared raising my hand in class, greeting new people, even talking to my parents. I looked forward to sleeping because that was

the only time I wouldn't be nervous about having to speak. Stuttering lowers your self esteem, self-confidence, and ruins your communication skills. There is no way to completely get rid of stuttering, but if you love yourself and accept you as who you are as a person who stutters, then your communication skills grow and you become comfortable with difficult speaking situations.

When I finally got over the fact that I was different because I stuttered, I actually stuttered less. It still makes me nervous when I come across a difficult speaking situation, but I've learned to calm down. Now I'm much more outgoing and actually introduce myself to people and always talk to new people. I also take speech therapy, it helps a lot. When I do stutter, most people don't notice and I've learned that it's just like another freckle on my face, it's nothing to really be ashamed of.

I believe stuttering has really helped me find the true me, and has allowed me to open up more to people and accept myself for who I am. Stuttering is definitely a huge step in my life, and I'm glad I climbed over it and that I grew so much from it. ■

Amy Robin is 17 years old and writes from Bellmore, New York. She's a high school senior. In her free time she makes her own dresses and other clothes; she wants to be a fashion designer.



CONFERENCE *continued*

hotel is literally connected to the station. One-way cash fare on RTA is \$2.25. All-day passes and discounted senior passes are available. It can't get any better than this. For more information, log on to riderta.com.

If rapid transit isn't your cup of tea, we will also be offering Super Shuttle.

Scholarships Available!

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

Our goal is that families who cannot afford to join us will now be able to attend. If you would like more information regarding scholarships please tell us by e-mailing Tammy Flores, NSA executive director, at tflores@WeStutter.org.

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

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

A Special Thanks to Our Donors

Thank you for helping the National Stuttering Association expand its outreach to children and adults who stutter during the past year.

Unlike many nonprofit organizations, the NSA relies primarily on its members for financial support. We have become the largest stuttering support organization anywhere because the people we touch give back as volunteers and contributors.

In today's uncertain economy, giving back is more important than ever. If you have attended our national conference or local support meetings, participated

in a youth day or workshop, or are simply reassured that you are not alone when you read this newsletter, we hope you will help us help others who stutter.

There are many ways to contribute at a level that is comfortable to you, including one-time donations, monthly donations, stock donations, matching gifts or through your job and the Combined Federal Campaign.

We would like to thank those who contributed to the NSA in 2009. Your support is making a difference for thousands of children and adults who stutter.

Twenty Somethings

New focus for 2010: making the transition from teen to adult involves all sorts of new challenges. We now offer workshops and activities planned specifically for our "Twenty Somethings" and their parents.

INTERVIEW *continued*

NSA: Do you think that being a person who stutters has given you qualities that you wouldn't otherwise have?

Sophie: I don't think so. It's not like I have a heightened sense of smell or anything like that. (*NSA's comments: Funny response – I love it! A great many people who stutter recognize that often they have other heightened characteristics, for example, they are more sensitive to others who are challenged, or they have more patience with people, or are more humble and modest. I've heard some say that they make a particular effort to be more prepared or focused than the average person so that they can avoid follow-up questions. At any rate, if I can find a positive spin on the whole thing, I always like to.*)

NSA: What are some of the ways you think the game of golf relates to stuttering?

Sophie: I can't see any similarities, but then again, I don't think of my stuttering much. I know I have an issue, but I don't sit down and think about it.

NSA: Do you try to avoid speaking situations the way you try to avoid a sand trap?

Sophie: If I can, and if I think I can get away with it, yes.

NSA: What kind of support do you have with your speech?

Sophie: Right now, I only have my friends as support. My family, who lives in Sweden, is too far away to help me in any concrete way.

NSA: Are there any other passions in your life or things that really make you smile?

Sophie: I enjoy music. Bruce Springsteen is my absolute favorite, and going to his shows is like going to heaven for me.

NSA: If you had one message you could send to people who stutter, what would it be?

Sophie: Don't let it define who you are. If you don't think you can help it, just try to do what you want anyway. The way someone talks should not be the only definition of that person. Keep plugging away at what you want to accomplish, and eventually you will get there. ■

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Dr. Raymond Tucker says, "Sophie Gustafson is an inspiration that shows us that people who have speech impediments can still achieve their life's goals if they do not quit. Sophie's a great example of someone who keeps pushing forward and continues to run the race to accomplish her goals in life regardless of her speech impediment."

Editor

Sonya Kunkle, kunkles22@comcast.net

Art Director

Janet Lenzer

Assistant Editors

Bonnie Weiss

David Blazina

Proofreader

Eric Ketchum

Phone

212.944.4050

800.WeStutter (937.8888)

Fax

212.944.8244

E-mail

info@WeStutter.org

Home Page

www.WeStutter.org

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BRAINSTORMING *continued*

by using the GSS – and to working to put some of these ideas into practice. ■

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Al Tarrell is co-leader of a new TWST chapter in Omaha, Nebraska. He's the father of four daughters, one of whom also stutters. Al works as a defense contractor in the software development field. The article above describes part of Al's coursework for a Ph.D. program in Information Technology at the University of Nebraska Omaha.



National Stuttering Association

Changing the lives of people who stutter

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