

A Film Major Who Happens to Stutter

The following article about Dan Kremer ran in the Temple Times. Perhaps what's most notable about the article from a LETTING GO perspective is that Dan's stuttering doesn't get top billing. Instead, the article is about Dan's interest in film—which, since Dan is a film major in college, is great. The article addresses his stuttering as it led to his interest in film.
—Sonya Kunkle, LETTING GO Editor

Daniel Kremer is a film purist. But he gives every flick a chance, always thirsty for more.

"I respect anything that blows my hair back," Kremer said. "Anyone willing to branch-out and break the mold."

The sophomore film major said he hopes to expose people to films they haven't seen before and open up the discussion. That's why he took over the reigns of *Film Fridays* last year, a weekly screening of underground classics.

"My intention with *Film Fridays* has always been to delve into the minds of the audience right after the lights come on. That's what it's all about: getting knee-jerk reactions."

Last spring, Temple News ran a photo comment on the most sparsely attended events on campus. *Film Fridays* was one of them. Today, however, thanks to the vision and taste of the Pittsburgh native, the screenings are gaining much deserved respect.

"Before a screening of an independent film *The Holy Mountain* we actually had to turn people away," Kremer said. "There wasn't a seat to be found in the whole place."

Film Fridays was started by Temple film school alumni Lydia Paterson. While Kremer said Paterson screened many great films, they were mainly documentaries and the program itself went unpublicized.

"You could say *Film Fridays* is my baby," Kremer said. "But it is my adopted baby."

When it was finally in his hands, Kremer molded the program into a success, not only by his choice of obscure "cult-classic" films, but also by posting more flyers.

"Paterson was hanging all the posters in Annenberg Hall, but they're needed throughout campus to attract crowds," Kremer stressed.

As a child, Kremer had a stuttering problem, which invited regular teasing from his peers. A blessing in disguise, this spurred his love affair with cinema as he would watch as many movies as he could and before long amass an impressive VHS collection.

"That's why I got into films," Kremer said. "I used them to escape the ridicule, and eventually it became more than an escape."

As early as eight, he began to consider filmmaking as his calling. By 12, Kremer was shooting his own versions of the

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The Art of Success

BY JASON MERNICK



I wanted to share with LETTING GO my recent success as an artist and some of my perspectives on stuttering. I would describe my speech as "medium." It is notice-

able, but some days are worse than others. People definitely know that I stutter.

About four years ago a company of which I was a principal was sold to a publicly traded company, and I needed to look for my next business venture. I made some money, but not enough to retire on, so I needed a new way to make a living. My lovely wife was still in law school and not working, so it was all on me.

Of all things, I chose to be a metal artist (with zero background in art and zero experience with metals). I decided the most efficient way of testing the market was by doing outdoor art festivals. The festivals were easy to get into and not expensive to do. I knew that most fluent people would find dealing with strangers on the street very challenging—not to mention trying to sell them something they just saw for the first time and know little about.

I started selling my metal art on the street four years ago in Southern California outdoor art festivals. Some people tell me that I lack perspective, but I have not seen my speech to be an impediment to me at all. In fact I see it as a big asset. I see having to "overcompensate" for my speech

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Growing Evidence for Genetic Factors in Stuttering

BY DENNIS DRAYNA, PH.D.



One of the most puzzling aspects of stuttering is its cause. While scientists have discovered many factors that can make stuttering worse, the underlying causes of stuttering remain a mystery. Finding the causes of stuttering is particularly difficult because stuttering only occurs in people—it can't be observed in a test tube or in an animal such as a laboratory rat. In addition, at least part of the origins of stuttering reside in the brain, a complex and poorly understood organ whose inner workings are not easily studied.

One promising way to better understand the causes of stuttering is through genetics. Using laboratory methods, researchers are able to pinpoint the abnormal gene or genes that cause an inherited disorder. If a disorder is inherited and can be traced through a family's DNA, we can learn which gene or genes are responsible for the disorder, the gene product the gene encodes, the function of the gene product, and the location in the body where the gene product is most active, both in people who have the disorder as well as those who don't. Knowing the answers to these questions would provide a major step forward in our understanding of what causes stuttering.

For many years, the biggest roadblock to this approach was the fact that most stuttering isn't inherited in a noticeable pattern that we can trace in families. Over the past 25 years, however, evidence in favor of genetic factors in stuttering has been slowly building.

Family Studies

Three main types of evidence point to a genetic cause for stuttering, with the study of twins being one of the more powerful research tools. Twin studies are especially useful for untangling the traits that are caused by genes from the traits that are brought about by a child's environment, helping to settle the age-old question: is the trait caused by nature or nurture?

A number of twin studies have already been conducted on stuttering, with studies differing by size, country, and evaluation method. While results have varied from study to study, they consistently find that identical twins are much more alike than

fraternal twins when it comes to stuttering. Studies using sophisticated statistical analyses estimate the amount of stuttering due to genetic factors to be quite high—as much as 70%. These studies together give us very strong evidence for the role of genetic factors in stuttering.

A second type of evidence that supports a genetic cause for stuttering is called segregation analysis. Studies of this type have concluded that stuttering is often found in repeated patterns, or "clusters," within some families, with the pattern of occurrence resembling the pattern that is often associated with "dominant inheritance." If a trait has dominant inheritance, only one parent needs to pass the responsible gene to a child for the trait to be expressed. Traits that show dominant inheritance occur in every generation, and roughly half of all the people in the family are affected.

The third type of evidence involves studying large families in which a very high percentage of family members stutter. One such family lives in UT and southern ID and comprises more than 150 members, roughly one-third of whom stutter. In addition, we have been studying several large families in Cameroon in equatorial West Africa who also exhibit a high degree of stuttering. One of these large families has just over 100 members, 45 of whom stutter, while another family has 83 members, 36 of whom stutter. We have been assisted in this effort by the Speak Clear Association of Cameroon, an outstanding stuttering support organization that is one of the first such national organizations in Africa.

Hurdles Remain

Although no single study has proven that a specific genetic factor causes stuttering, the total body of evidence leaves no doubt that inherited factors play an important role in this disorder. However, several major hurdles remain before we can identify these genes.

First, not all stuttering is genetic. Some stuttering, perhaps as much as half, does not seem to cluster in families and is probably due to non-genetic causes. At the moment, we don't know what these non-genetic causes might be. In addition, there are other complicating factors, such as the uneven ratio of males to females with stuttering and

the fact that individuals often spontaneously recover from stuttering, which can make diagnosis in families difficult.

To help overcome these difficulties, my laboratory studies stuttering in several special populations. For example, we studied a group of 44 highly inbred families in Pakistan. Inbred populations provide an advantage for researchers because there is less genetic diversity in the family, making it easier to locate a responsible gene or genes.

Our first effort in this population was to conduct something called a genetic linkage study, which tells us the approximate location of a gene that causes a disorder. In our linkage study in the Pakistani families, we found strong linkage between stuttering and markers on chromosome 12. This means that in these families, there is a gene somewhere on chromosome 12 that causes stuttering. We are now engaged in a "door-to-door search" of all the genes in this region in an effort to pinpoint the specific gene that is responsible.

Our efforts in the Cameroon families are not far behind. In linkage studies, we have identified a region on chromosome 1 that appears to contain a gene that plays a strong role in stuttering in that family. Additional studies are underway to pinpoint the location of this gene and perhaps find other genes at work in this population.

Overall, genetic approaches to understanding the causes of stuttering have moved beyond proving that genetic factors are involved—the evidence for such factors is indisputable. Despite the uncertainties and challenges to geneticists, progress is being made. While genetic factors cannot explain all of stuttering, they give us the possibility of understanding at least some causes of this disorder. At this point, absolute proof of even one of the underlying causes of stuttering would be an exciting advance indeed. ■

Dennis Drayna received his bachelor's degree in Biology at the University of Wisconsin in 1976 and his Ph.D. in Genetics at Harvard University in 1981. He currently serves as the Chief of the Section on Systems Biology of Communication Disorders at the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders in Bethesda, MD.

CHAPTERNEWS

FROM BONNIE WEISS

Chicago, IL

Art Struss writes that the Metro-North Chapter had visitors from Northwestern University and St. Xavier University recently. Thirteen enthusiastic chapter members shared a number of topics, including advertising their stuttering and good days and bad days with regard to fluency and also shared what they found helps them. Some members also shared non-verbal activities that help speech fluency, including adequate sleep, exercise, yoga, and diaphragmatic breathing.

Dallas, TX

Joseph Diaz reported that the Dallas folks have a new chapter leader, Chris Egan. Joseph writes that Chris is eager to take the reins. He attended his first convention last summer in Chicago and came out with a super newsletter for the group in Dallas.

Houston, TX

The Houston chapter celebrated their 21st anniversary on February 28. The group got together on February 28 to celebrate at the Taj Mehal, an Indian restaurant just south of Houston. Vicki Schutter says that they had a good group there, and that, of course, "any group of NSA people is a good group!"

Philadelphia, PA

The Philadelphia chapter has started a TWST group for teenagers in the area. This is a new chapter for teens who stutter. The group leadership consists of Chapter Leader John McDermott, who has given teen workshops in the Philadelphia area. Co-leaders are Joe Donaher, speech-language pathologist (SLP) from Children's Hospital in Philadelphia; Rob Bloom, who is a well known creative writer, humorist, and National Public Radio interviewee;

and Jennifer Scharf, who is a person who stutters. Jennifer works with kids in Cherry Hill, NJ

Tampa, FL

There is a new group in South Tampa Bay. The chapter leader is Delroy McPherson, and there were six people at their first meeting. At that meeting, those in attendance discussed their stuttering, what brought them to the meeting, and what they wanted to get out of the group. One of the members, Vino, talked about the World Stuttering Conference in Sweden several years ago, and everyone thought that sounded fantastic. The group decided that they were all there for the same reason, to talk opening about their stuttering and to learn that others are experiencing the same feelings and emotions regarding their stuttering.

OUR VOICE

A SECTION FOR TEENS WHO STUTTER

What Speech Therapy Did for Me

Before speech therapy, I had many difficulties with speaking. Well, it was more than just speaking, it was communicating. See, before I started taking speech therapy, I was afraid to be heard. I had such a low self-esteem because I thought people wouldn't like me because I stuttered. My stuttering was not severe, but this was because I barely talked. To me stuttering was like a big bully, it sneaked up on me when I least expected it to, stealing whatever little confidence I had. I had so much anxiety; I couldn't say what I wanted when I wanted to say it. For example, I saw my friend that I haven't seen in years, and I was so excited to see her; we used to be best friends! I went to call her name, but I couldn't get the words out. I tried again but I was deathly afraid, so I just turned around and went my way. Then I felt mad at myself for being the way I am. I felt so alone in the world...

Then my mother signed me up for speech therapy. At first, I had that teenage attitude that therapy sounds lame. I was very apprehensive; I didn't know what to expect. I had speech therapy years before, for about three days, and I hated it. The speech pathologist had no clue what I was going through, and I had no idea how to express myself. That's why I was so afraid of speech therapy. I just knew this new therapy wouldn't be much better. Boy, was I wrong.

My therapist, Marilee Fini, knows exactly what I'm going through. In fact, she stutters, so she teaches from experience. She teaches with a unique, effective style of teaching. I have been in therapy for about nine months and have noticed a great deal of improvement. I have not only improved in my amount of stuttering, but my whole view of life. I love talking now. I may not be 100% fluent, but I say what I

want and when I'm ready to say it. I have learned that nothing, especially not stuttering, can stop me from reaching my goals. — *Christopher Williams*

Being Comfortable with Speaking

I work at a local water park in the area and deal with people all day. Stuttering makes this tough at times. But I use my skills and techniques that my speech pathologist, Mrs. Diane Collins, has taught me. Some people don't even notice when it happens, but some people just laugh at me when I stutter. Working in this environment and putting myself in these situations has helped me by making me more comfortable when talking to strangers and coworkers. I enjoy my job and also enjoy talking to people now. If someone asks me a question, all they want is the right answer. People just don't care how long it takes for me to say it. — *Eric Ketchum*

The NSA's 2006 annual conference is fast approaching! Join us in Long Beach, CA, June 28–July 2!

Register Now for the Conference and Hotel

You can now register online for the 2006 Long Beach conference—
www.WeStutter.org.

To be held at the Westin Long Beach
333 East Ocean Blvd.
Long Beach, CA 90802
Room rates: \$129 single/double/
triple/quad occupancy + tax

Make your hotel reservations with Westin now! Call the hotel at 800-937-8461 or 562-436-3000 (be sure to mention the NSA to get our greatly reduced rate), or you can reserve your room online at www.starwoodmeeting.com/StarGroupsWeb/res?id=0506246120&key=82CCC



Something New for SLPs!

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) can now earn more CEUs than ever for attending the entire conference. This year we will be offering up to 1.5 CEUs for attending the conference, so you will be able to earn more CEUs than ever before. In addition, we will provide a CEU-specific seminar that highlights successful treatment strategies presented by a nationally recognized expert in stuttering therapy.

CEU Information

June 28, 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

“Now, Later or Never? Strategies for Preschool Stuttering Therapy”

Presented by Nina Reardon, M.A., SLP-CCC

Three Day Family/Youth Programs

We are excited to bring you three days of activities during the conference beginning at 10:00 am on Thursday. The Family Orientation Workshop will familiarize you with the conference schedule while giving you a chance to become acquainted with other families. This three-day program will provide you with the opportunity to network with leading experts who specialize in working with children and adolescents who stutter, as well as with other families.

Your questions will be answered and parents will meet other parents while their children explore their stuttering in a fun and safe environment. Other activities include pool parties, parent and youth round table discussions, a scavenger hunt for the kids, and a teen social (see below).

Parents are encouraged to bring children who stutter (ages 8 and older). Parents who have experienced the NSA conference have said they wish they had known about us years before. This is a rare chance to meet with some of the outstanding stuttering specialists in the world and get acquainted with the Family Programs leaders, the Teen Advisory Council, and other families! These are three days you don't want to miss!

Teen Social

Our Teen Advisory Council has planned a teen social! Everyone between the ages of 13-21 is encouraged to attend this special event. This is a great opportunity to meet our Teen Advisory Council members and NSA teens from around the country!

Scholarships Available!

Need help getting to the conference this year? Thanks to a one-time donation we can now offer more scholarships than ever. Contact Tammy for info at tflores@WeStutter.org.

Explore Long Beach

NSA 2006 is an opportunity to see an exciting city while attending a memorable conference. Long Beach, centrally located

in the heart of Southern CA, is approximately 25 miles south of Los Angeles, on the Pacific Ocean. Long Beach is home to more than 450,000 people, making it the 5th largest city in CA.

From the hotel you can catch the convenient red Passport shuttle, which runs approximately every 5–10 minutes. It's free in the downtown area and can transport you to all of the must-see Long Beach attractions, including the Queen Mary, Aquarium of the Pacific, Shoreline Village, and Pine Avenue.

Look for the purple Passport on Pine Avenue, which is also a free service from downtown to the convention center, Shoreline Village, and the Aquarium of the Pacific. For only 90 cents, the red Passport continues your journey to the attractions of Belmont Shore, Alamitos Bay, and Cal State Long Beach. The Aquabus is also available to transport you between selected sites in Rainbow Harbor. Or hop aboard the new Aqualink catamaran for a swift journey to Alamitos Bay.

In addition to the scheduled tours for conference attendees, it's easy to explore Long Beach on your own. The conference team is compiling information to help you get around the city and locate off-the-beaten-track restaurants.

If you drive to Long Beach, the most economical and hassle-free way to see the city is to park your car and get around on foot or by cab or bus. We have secured great parking rates at the hotel. Overnight guest parking rates per car are \$7 for self-parking and \$15 for valet parking. ■



Pink Panther starring his cousin as Detective Clouseau and by the time he was in the eighth grade he had attempted (but understandably failed) to tackle a three-hour epic comedy.

His speech problem not only caused Kremer to take an interest in the medium, it also opened new doors for him in the field.

When he was 13, he attended an annual National Stuttering Convention. A documentary maker, Peter Nicks, was so impressed by Kremer's knowledge of films that he offered him a starring role in a documentary alongside platinum selling recording artist "Scatman" John Larkin, who also has a stuttering problem.

"Nicks paralleled our lives and showed how someone with this affliction can turn it into a success as the Scatman did," Kremer explained. "We filmed some in Pittsburgh then he flew us out to LA to shoot the rest. It was truly an eye-opener."

Today, the film student's stuttering problem still lingers, but Kremer is truly unashamed of his speech, even leading discussions on how those who stutter are portrayed in movies before huge audiences at the conventions.

"Stuttering made me who I am today," the filmmaker explained. "It's a motivator. I work much harder. I have to go above and beyond the rest to prove myself."

"I really don't mind public speaking at all," Kremer said. "I would love to fall back on teaching in the future."

As for the upcoming semester of *Film Fridays*, there is a lot in store.

"Every term we try to get at least one filmmaker to come in and speak to the group," Kremer explained. "This semester we have four planned!"

Filmmakers John Gross, Portuguese filmmaker Claudia Tomaz, University of California at Santa Cruz filmmaker and full professor Eli Hollander and 91-year-old Academy Award winning veteran Paul Sylbert all fill this semester's bill—all thanks to Kremer.

Today, the film student's stuttering problem still lingers, but Kremer is truly unashamed of his speech, even leading discussions on how those who stutter are portrayed in movies before huge audiences at the conventions.

A more diverse range of movies can also be expected. In the past, Kremer has chosen about five of the weeks' selections, the rest requested by other film buffs.

"This semester, I only chose one of the weeks' films," said Kremer.

"So many people approach me and drop me emails requesting to present selections that there just isn't enough room. I love their interest in the program."

What's next for the up and coming

film student? Well...it's hard to say.

"No clue," Kremer joked. "Life can be an adventure if you just let it. I don't want to structure my life to the point where I don't have any freedom."

Trying to forge his own path with the art form, Kremer stressed that he would prefer to distance himself from the glitz and glamour of LA.

"Hollywood is an expensive cathouse," the film major said. "It's unfortunate, but the reality is most people in the industry sell out too easily to cheap, undignified throwaway movies, remakes, rehashes and sequels of remakes of rehashes."

"I was driving down the highway and saw a billboard of Halle Berry dressed like 'Catwoman'," Kremer explained.

"And I thought to myself, 'wow, she just won an Oscar and this is what she chose to do next?!'"

Among Kremer's influences are American independent icons John Cassavetes, Henry Jaglom, Woody Allen, as well as Andrei Tarkovsky, Federico

Fellini, Wim Wenders and Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

You might ask yourself, when can I see a Daniel Kremer production? Right now, Kremer is working on his second major production with a full crew and a substantial budget entitled *Crumbs from a Hard-Boiled Egg*. It follows an "exceptionally bright" couple of 18-year old high school graduates as they go against everyone's advice and decide to get married, and how they cope with their own divorce a year later at the age of 19.

His advisor for the piece is Sundance Film Festival Award-winner Paul Harrill.

"Dan is a promising young filmmaker and I'm impressed with his organization of *Film Fridays*—he's both passionate and knowledgeable about cinema, and his upcoming project is amazingly rich and complex, especially for someone of his age. Students like Dan are part of what makes Temple's Film and Media Arts program so strong," Harrill praised. Not bad complements from an accomplished filmmaker.

"Dan is one of the brightest students I have ever taught in my many years of teaching," says Roderick Coover, another professor in the Film and Media Arts Department.

"He's definitely passionate," says film school dean Warren Bass.

Kremer may not have his future set in stone. But that's a good thing. One thing Kremer is sure of though, "There haven't been big enough questions asked yet. I want to ask those questions with my films."

"I am absolutely serious when I say I won't rest until I see him win big at a major film festival," continues Paul Harrill. ■

If you'd like to request a film or just want to shoot the breeze with Dan his email address is daniel.kremer@temple.edu.

Film Fridays are every Friday at 4:30 p.m. in Annenberg Hall Room 3. Don't miss it!

ODDS&ENDS

COMPILED BY CATHY OLISH

College of St. Rose Workshop

On April 1–2, the **College of St. Rose (CSR)** is holding its 31st weekend workshop for children, teens, and adults who stutter at the college in Albany, NY. To welcome participants of the workshop, the CSR NSA Chapter will be hosting a social get-together on Friday, March 31, in honor and memory of **Ruth Cohn**, a former member of both the Fluency Council at the college and the NSA. The workshop is under the direction of **Sister Charleen Bloom, Ph.D.**, and **Donna Cooperman, D.A.**, working with supervisors and students in the graduate course on stuttering.

Besides having an opportunity to meet and share time with others who share the experience of stuttering, students and participants will work on a synergistic approach to fluency therapy, which combines direct work on fluency targets with attitudinal and environmental components to create a holistic program. For more information or to participate, please contact **Sister Charleen** (bloomc@mail.strose.edu), **Joe Klein, Ph.D.** (Kleinj@strose.edu), or **Donna Cooperman** (coopermd@mail.strose.edu).

First Issue of JSTAR Available

The inaugural issue of the *Journal of Stuttering Therapy, Advocacy and Research (JSTAR)* is now available at www.JournalOfStuttering.com. *JSTAR* is a free online publication that offers practical therapy ideas as well as information on the latest developments in stuttering advocacy and research. The first issue of *JSTAR* includes the following articles: Counseling People Who Stutter and Their Families, by **Patricia Zebrowski, Ph.D.**, speech-language pathologist (SLP); Using Essays in Therapy, by **Dale Williams, Ph.D.**, SLP; Mentors, Role Models, and Peer Support for Children Who Stutter by **Peter Reitzes, MA, SLP**; Stuttering Celebration, by **Jill Smollen, MA, SLP**; and Our Time Provides Kids Their Time, by **Taro Alexander**.

Future issues will include manuscripts by stuttering specialists such as **Phillip Schneider** and articles on topics such as

treatment outcomes of the Successful Stuttering Management Program (SSMP), integrating yoga practices into therapy, using stuttering modification with children, and much more.

Annie Bradberry Speaks to University Class

Former NSA Director **Annie Bradberry** spoke at Loma Linda University for the class of **Dr. Jean Lowry**. Annie has been talking to her classes for more than 10 years. Annie's mother, **Shirley**, joined Annie and gave insight into being a parent of a child who stutters.

Feel the Burn ... and Be Fluent?

Some people exercise to lose weight, some to enhance cardiovascular health, and others to relieve stress. But is it possible that regular exercise may reduce the frequency and severity of stuttering? It may not be too farfetched.

Multiple neurotransmitters are released in the brain when a person exercises regularly. One of these is the endorphins. Endorphins are a natural painkiller and are released when the body is under stress or in pain. Another neurotransmitter released is serotonin. The release of serotonin during exercise may have an effect on stuttering because increases in serotonin levels are associated with decreases in dopamine levels. Why is that important?

Some scientists believe that certain stutterers have an excessive amount of dopamine, another neurotransmitter, or are hypersensitive to dopamine (Wu et al., 1997; Goberman & Blomberg, 2003). Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that is associated with movement control (Alm, 2004). There is experimental evidence that lowering levels of dopamine results in a decrease in stuttering (Maguire et al., 2000).

In sum, excess dopamine has been linked to stuttering behavior, there is an inverse relationship between levels of serotonin and levels of dopamine (increased serotonin is associated with decreased dopamine), and serotonin (as well as endorphins) is released during sustained exercise.

Back to our question, is it possible that regular exercise may reduce the frequency and severity of stuttering? We need your help to begin to answer this question. We want to know if daily, moderate-to-intense exercise is associated with a period of improved fluency in persons who stutter. To find out, we developed a survey to investigate the relation between exercise habits and stuttering. The survey is accessible via a link on the NSA homepage (www.WeStutter.org).

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- Rebecca Glass and Ben C. Watson, Ph.D.

Survey: The Impact of Stuttering in the Workplace

My name is **Marshall Rice**, and I am a professor at York University in Toronto, Canada. I am also a person who stutters.

I am conducting a survey of the impact of stuttering at work. The study will enable me to better understand the issues and challenges that people who stutter may face on the job. My research may help identify policies that will help to prevent discrimination against people who stutter. Your opinion is important!

This survey is for people who stutter who have worked for pay outside of the home. If you fall into this category, I would appreciate if you could complete the survey at the following Web site: www.survey-city.com/stutter

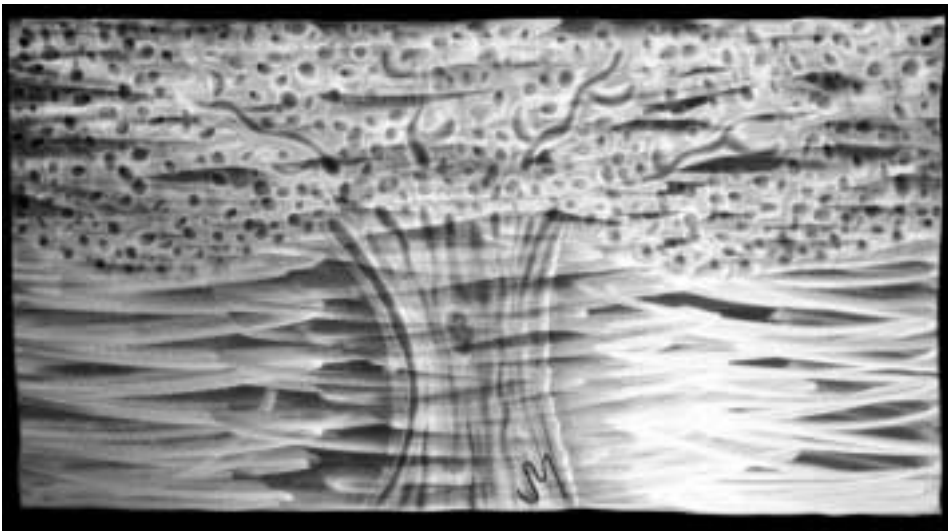
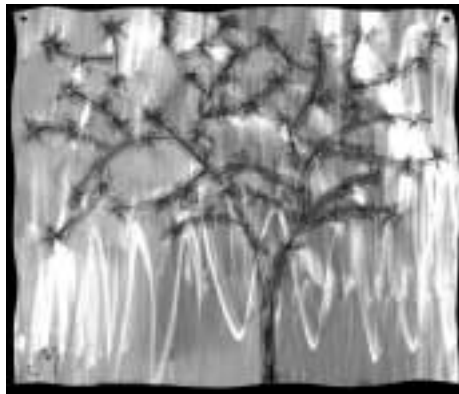
Your answers to this survey are strictly confidential, and the final results will only be reported in aggregate form. If you would like further information on the study or confidentiality, please contact me at mrice@schulich.yorku.ca or at 416-736-2100 (ext. 58241). Thank you for your help. — *Marshall Rice*

to be one of the things that has helped me build success in many areas of my life. I have been told that I am an unflappable extrovert, very confident and loving of attention. If I did not stutter I am not sure I would be so confident. It is the stuttering in and of itself that made me try harder and be bolder. I married a woman for whom there was tons of competition and loved the challenge. In fact, my wife of 10 years now says she was intrigued with my confidence even though I had a stutter.

Now back to the art business. I have done more than 200 art shows now and have been picked up by more than 50 galleries nationally that purchase my line from me for resale. I regularly work on sizable commissions for both residential and commercial clients. I recently inked a licensing/manufacturing/distribution deal with Intercontinental Art (ICA), the largest distributor of wall décor in the U.S. ICA manufactures elements of my work offshore (which will not compete with the originals sold by me or in the galleries) and supplies major retailers like Z-Gallerie, Bed Bath & Beyond, and Target with wall décor for the public to buy. All of the work is fully branded with my name and Web site. This ICA deal has the potential to make me one of the most widely distributed artists in the country. My lawyer wife currently runs the business full time. All of this was done by starting on the street with a speech impediment.

From my perspective, one can do just about anything one wants. I am not trying to be an air traffic controller or an auctioneer; in those professions I can see how stuttering might be a setback. I see it like this: it is not what happens to us, it is the way we deal with it. I am convinced that some stutterers hide behind their speech impediment and use it as a crutch and victimize themselves with it. Just like fluent people have issues and crutches, so do we stutterers. Many times it is not our stutter that is the problem. I have been shocked at what I have been able to accomplish simply because I was not afraid to try—stutter or no stutter. ■

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Jason Mernick is 38 years old. For more on Jason, see www.jasonmernick.com or do a www.google.com search on Jason Mernick.



My Words

BY ANDREA SHANKS

Words have always been important to me. I love to read. I love lyrics from songs. I love poetry. But especially, I love quotes. I guess I view quotes as little windows into life. It is ironic then, that I find myself sometimes afraid to share my words.

Fear, I have learned, is a tangible thing. I have just recently been able to admit to myself, and now to you, how fear has motivated many of my decisions in life. I'm able to admit, now, that I never finished my degree because I know I will have to take foreign language and communication classes. I can also admit, now, that I avoid or sometimes stop going to places where I have to read aloud or speak in front of a group.

Fear has also motivated my decision to write this article, but this fear is different. This fear is a fear that I will pass on and not have shared my words, not have helped one person. I have decided to turn this fear into words.

My words are meant to encourage you to acknowledge your fears. This is the first step in conquering your fears. For me, the acknowledging was hard, and I suspect the conquering will be harder still. But the hardest thing of all would be not to try at all.

Remember, our words may be broken, but our hearts are whole. ■

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Andrea Shanks has been married for 23 years and has two sons, ages 21 and 19. She works for the Tennessee Department of Health, Oral Health Services. She has stuttered all her life. Both of her children are fluent.

The Power of Friendship

BY TONY GUILLOT



Recently, I've been able to get back in touch with friends that I have not seen and have not spoke to in quite a few years. We often become wrapped up in life's day-to-day activities and lose touch with the ones we share so much with.

My stuttering and how I viewed my stuttering took a turn that I haven't experienced in quite sometime. There were things in my life that were affecting my speech. The challenges of surviving the loss of a job due to layoffs; having my daughter move out of state, which proved to bring us closer than we have ever been; my son choosing to stay in Ohio and attend college. Life can bring us so many challenges, and my stuttering was one I thought I had been able to control. I was always able to handle life changes and my stuttering. I would often laugh at myself and not take it too seriously. I could often let things happen and keep going on with life.

I became distant, and didn't want anything to do with stuttering anymore even though I was a stutterer. Although I tried hard not to let it show, my stuttering was getting out of control and falling apart. I thought I was able to handle all of the changes in my life, but what I was doing was not working.

In October, about nine of us got together for the weekend to celebrate International Stuttering Awareness Day

(ISAD) at Scott Yeager's house in Cleveland, OH. The drive was filled with mixed emotion. I had butterflies in my stomach and was very nervous. I had not seen some of these people in a few years. I walked in and there was an instant relief—the same feeling that I get when I go to my fluency shaping meeting. No matter what I experience though out the week, when I get to these meetings I forget about my troubles. That's what gives us the chance to just let go.

We shared laughs and wonderful conversation. There was time to catch up with old friends and even make new ones. It reminded me of a mini convention and what I had lost in those years that I missed so much. I didn't want to say goodbye. We connect instantly when we meet someone who stutters, but when friends get back in touch the connection is even more powerful. We are all so close even though we live great distances from one another.

Cathy Olish encouraged me to come back and rekindle some of those lost friendships. She inspired and motivated me to get back involved with the NSA and reminded me that even though I had been out of touch, there were still people who cared.

There is a quote on friendship that means a lot to me: "A Person Who Has Many Friends, Has No Fear." The friends that I have made through the NSA are friends that I will keep forever. We are never more than a phone call away. Sometimes

Editor
Sonya Kunkle, sonya@maxinter.net

Art Director
Janet Lenzer

Assistant Editors
Cathy Olish
Bonnie Weiss

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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all we need to hear is that friendly voice, that person that just listens to us when we need to talk or that little inspiration that drives us forward. My close friends that I have made through the NSA will always hold a special place in my heart. ■

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Tony Guillot is a surveyor with URS Corporation in Akron, OH. He has an 18-year-old son, Matt, and a 14-year-old daughter Melory. He is near completion of his bachelors degree in Surveying and Mapping from the University of Akron.



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Association**
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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

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