TURNING POINTS

Inspiring Stories of Personal Change
from the
National Stuttering Association

Compiled, edited, with an introduction by
Mona Maali

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The National Stuttering Association (NSA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, founded in 1977 and dedicated to bringing hope and empowerment to children and adults who stutter, their families, and professionals through support, education, advocacy, and research.

All proceeds from sales of this book will be used to further the mission of the National Stuttering Association.

FIRST EDITION

First Printing

All my work for the National Stuttering Association has been done with love for my father, Ebrahim Behrooz Abolmaali, who passed away in Iran when I was nearly four years old, and whose voice and spirit I know fills these pages; and for my mother, Mahshid Moaddeb, who brought my brother and me to the United States the same year for a better life, and whose sacrifice I will never be able to repay. This book is for all of our fathers and mothers, to whom we would all like to speak.

—Mona Behnaz Maali

The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places.
—Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*

I would like to form a group of stutterers—or join one that already exists—in which the members want to help themselves and help other stutterers . . . it would seek to make stutterers proud—not that they stutter, for only a fool would take pride in an affliction—but that they are doing something to help themselves.
—Michael Heffron, who helped found the Council of Adult Stutterers in Washington, DC in 1966

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Acknowledgments

A GREAT NUMBER OF PEOPLE who have been with me at various times in my life made this book possible.

When I graduated college and became a chapter leader for the National Stuttering Association, I took the first step in a direction I always knew I had to go—a path that has enabled me to use the adversity of stuttering in my life as a positive force.

I felt indebted to a community that had been a part of a transformation in my life six years before. During the summer before my senior of high school, I received the help that was not available to me in my growing up in Austin and a new life at the Successful Stuttering Management Program (SSMP) at the University of Utah. I also gained a critical support network here, which included my clinicians, Dr. Dorvan Brietenfeldt and Tom Gurrister, and fellow stutterer Amey Dickson.

In 2003, Mrs. Hebert, who taught me English and creative writing when I was a high school junior, encouraged me to write about the experience of stuttering, although I was not ready to do so at the time. My friendship with Mrs. Hebert was the basis for the changes that I made in relation to my stuttering when I was seventeen years old. When I returned from my intensive

program, she wrote a terrific letter of recommendation for me for college. In that letter, she called me the "Eloquent Stutterer."

My work with the NSA has, in the end, been a way to honor the important people in my life: clinicians, mentors, and friends who came into my life during my turning point at the age of seventeen and encouraged the changes I made. Chief among these people is my mother, who has traveled through the adversities in my life with me. I begin to acknowledge these people in this book.

When I took on the awesome responsibility of leading an NSA chapter, I embarked on my own growth journey during a difficult period in my life in which I struggled mightily to find my way in my adulthood. I have lived with a severe form of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as long as I have lived with stuttering. As a result of this disorder, I had no friends as a child and struggled academically and with social relationships throughout my life. Through my work with the NSA, I realized that I actually had exceptional leadership gifts. In the NSA, I found a place to tell my own story and a community where I felt understood and appreciated for the first time in my life. As a chapter leader, I took new risks in my communication and reached a new level of mastery in managing my stuttering. All these things are ultimately a powerful testament to the essential worth of self-help groups: by helping others, we truly help ourselves.

The stories contained in this book represent the experiences of individuals who are a part of one chapter of the National Stuttering Association in Austin, Texas. Here I acknowledge those who have contributed to the success of the Austin chapter, but note that great work occurs continually at a national level. The impact of each person who participates in the NSA is immeasurable.

I would like to thank NSA executive director Tammy Flores, who runs the day to day operations of the NSA in New York City for all the support she has given the Austin chapter; as well as the NSA Board of Directors who honored me as the NSA's 2010 Adult Chapter Leader of the Year, and who welcomed me to their winter board meeting in Scottsdale to listen to my proposal for this project.

Three individuals whose histories are legendary within the Dallas NSA chapter came into my life at the right time and place to recognize my gifts and help me find my life path: Dr. Lee Reeves and Russ Hicks, who were the primary impetus for my decision to be a chapter leader; and Joseph Diaz, my regional chapter coordinator, who guided me in the task of starting an NSA chapter.

Roberto Ruiz Jr. is the person who established the Austin chapter in 2004, and I relied on his faithful guidance and encouragement when I relaunched the chapter in 2009 and reached out to its original members.

Evan Usler, whom I met at my first NSA Annual Conference in Scotts dale, Arizona, arrived in Austin two months after I relaunched the chapter and contributed greatly to the energy and dynamism of our chapter. He facilitated memorable meetings and emceed our annual open houses during the three years he lived here. Evan served as my coleader for a year before he left Austin to begin work toward a doctorate in speech-language pathology at Purdue University in Indiana.

Ryan McDermott, a natural leader, whose positive attitude about his speech and been an inspiration to me and many others, has done an exceptional job leading the Austin chapter in the three years since I stepped down as co-leader. Others leaders, including Hayden Lambert, Ben Schuler, and Jonathan McNutt, have also contributed to our chapter's continued success.

Alongside the adult chapter, the NSA Austin Kids/Family Chapter has served children who stutter in the community and their parents since 2010. The family chapter has been led at various times by Megann McGill, Colleen Cappellini, and Erin Stergiou, graduate student clinicians at the University of Texas who came to our meetings and became dedicated to the disorder of stuttering; and by Oscar Guerra and Jeff Loeb, adults who stutter. In 2014, an Austin NSA TWST (Teens Who Stutter) chapter began to meet regularly, and the first meetings have been organized by Alisa Baron, a doctoral student in UT's speech-language pathology program.

Speech-language pathologists have played an important role in the Austin NSA chapter.

A large number of the members of the Austin NSA chapter—and many

of those who contribute essays here—received speech therapy at what is now the Michael and Tami Lang Stuttering Institute at the University of Texas. Dr. Courtney Byrd, the institutes's director, has been the most important friend to the Austin chapter, an advocate for the stuttering community, and a kind and inspired presence at our meetings. Working alongside her is Elizabeth Hampton, another extraordinary clinician who has brought her empathy and professional knowledge to our meetings.

The opportunity to partner with a university speech clinic is one of the things that makes the Austin NSA chapter special. We are thankful to Dr. Byrd and the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at the University of Texas who provide our meeting space on campus; and to the All Saints' Episcopal Church who have been gracious in allowing NSA members to use their parking lot for free on meeting nights.

The Austin NSA chapter was also fortunate in 2010 to have a stuttering specialist appointed to a faculty position at Texas State University in San Marcos. We are thankful to Dr. Farzan Irani as well as his students at the nearby university for attending our meetings.

In the third year of the relaunched chapter, I asked John Moore, a professional speaker who had joined us the previous year, and in whom I immediately detected a fire to tell his story and reach out to others who stutter, to be the emcee for our annual open house, and he led with the theme "turning points." John called me the day after the open house to tell me to adapt the stories from the panel and others in our chapter into a book.

Karen Krajcer's participation in the panel was a highlight of the open house for many attendees that year. Her piece "The Problem of Passing," which was read in a shorter form at the open house; it helped to set the creative tone for this volume. Karen has taught high school English and creative writing for many years, and in addition to organized a writing workshop for contributors, advised some of the authors on their early drafts.

During the editing stage, I reached out to Noelene Clark and Patrick George, two of my past colleagues from the *Daily Texan*, the student newspaper at the University of Texas where I was a senior reporter and associate news editor. I took great pride in my work at the decorated student newspaper and

cherished the friendships I formed here. *The Texan* was, most significantly, the place where I took my most important risks as a person who stutters.

Noelene and Patrick each reviewed about eight chapters; their careful and empathetic comments improved this volume.

Mike Turner, an NSA member from Oregon, generously contributed the drawing on the cover. David Blazina, another NSA member, assisted with copyediting. Rolando Sepulveda, a member of our Austin NSA chapter, contributed a total of eleven pieces of photography and artwork. These photographers also donated photographs: Benny Abolmaali, David C. Cox, Cecily Johnson, Chris Krajcer, Kaylee Reardon, Maria Soscia, and Travis Tucker.

My uncle Jamshid Moaddeb and his wife Suzanne encouraged my work on this project during my stay with them in Phoenix at two different times over the course of this project, before the NSA's winter board meeting, and the 30th NSA Annual Conference in Scottsdale in July.

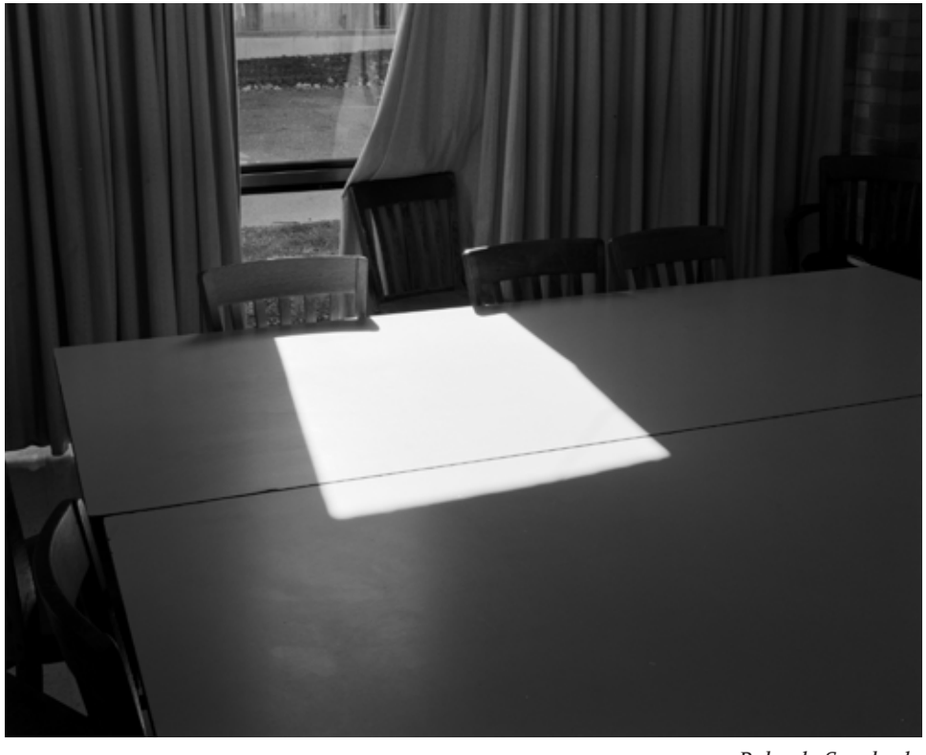
I would like to acknowledge Dr. Elisabeth Middleton and Dr. Joshou Maniscalco, who have played important roles in the most recent phase of my journey. It has been a relief to find knowledgeable and trustworthy professionals with the openness to understand how ADHD and stuttering affected me in my life; they have helped me overcome the barriers that kept me from telling my story for many years.

In the last two years, I have followed the path that was meant for me after a number of false but instructive starts. Reaching this point after overcoming many trials and hardships to pursue my lifelong dream of being an author is indescribable.

Some of the places where I have found inspiration and encouragement during this time include the Austin Public Library Friends Foundation's Badgerdog creative writing workshops and Mayor's Book Club, the Writers' League of Texas, and Austin's Sit Down, Shut Up, and Write! Meetup. I am also thankful to Professors Eileen McGinnis, Alan Friedman, and Carol Mackay who recently allowed me to audit their English courses at the University of Texas.

—Mona Behnaz Maali

TURNING POINTS



Rolando Sepulveda

On the fourth Monday of each month (except for Memorial Day and December), people who stutter, professionals, families, and friends come to the NSA Austin Chapter's meeting place at the University of Texas. Meetings begin at 7 p.m. with a reading of the "Welcoming Words."

NSA Welcoming Words*

Welcome to the Austin chapter of the National Stuttering Association.

The National Stuttering Association is a nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing hope and empowerment to children and adults who stutter, their families, and professionals through support, education, advocacy, and research.

If you are a person who stutters, or have a special interest in stuttering, you are welcome here.

For the time we meet here, this room is a very special place;

It is a place where we are accepted and supported;

It is a place where we can relax and speak freely;

It is a place where we can stutter openly without fear and embarrassment;

It is a place where we can practice whatever speaking and communicating techniques with which we may feel comfortable.

Together, we will help each other and we will help ourselves to accept and cope with our stuttering, to build our self-confidence, and to improve our verbal communication skills to the best of our abilities.

We who stutter, and those who support and help us, are not alone. Together we are strong.

* The "Welcoming Words" is by Bill Parry and was adopted by the National Stuttering Association in 1999. It is read at the beginning of chapter meetings across the United States.

Introduction

Mona Behnaz Maali

Fifteen of my friends who wrote essays for this book reveal what it is like to live with a communication disorder that is profoundly misunderstood.

Once a month, we gather at the University of Texas at Austin, in a meeting space arranged with the support of the university stuttering clinic. We have succeeded in creating a place of support and connectivity for people who stutter, our families, professionals, students, and friends. We meet to talk about the impact that stuttering has had on our lives: about the pain of misunderstanding between us and our families and how we have each felt captive because of stuttering.

When we were young, stuttering severed us from our most fundamental bonds to our families. For me, this has been an exceptionally difficult struggle. I went through all of my school years without receiving help for my stuttering and another developmental disorder, ADHD, that hindered my ability to learn and connect with others.

The theme of this book is turning points. As I reflect on my own

journey, I have had two turning points, each about ten years apart. The first time I freed my speaking voice; it has taken me until now to begin to free my writing voice.

For those like myself who grew up in Austin with stuttering, our lives were marked by a longterm sense of having no place to turn, nowhere to go for validation and understanding of what we were going through. This is what makes what we do so important. This is the commitment—to just be there each month, so that there never again is a situation where a person who stutters or a family member does not have somewhere to go.

We have made great gains in helping ourselves and advancing knowledge and understanding regarding our disorder, yet we continue to meet in an environment where the significance of what we do is not understood.

Through their eloquent and self-determined voices, these authors bring human faces to this disorder. They come from diverse backgrounds and capture the experiences of stuttering across the life span. They each bring a unique perspective and help us to understand the different ways in which stuttering manifests in each person. One author, Karen Krajcer, beautifully sheds light on the misunderstood phenomenon of "covert stuttering."

They talk about the things that went wrong on their journeys and the things that went right. The things that went right were the support of family, friends, teachers, and clinicians—people who believed more in them than they believed in themselves. Each turning point required finding the right help at the right time and place in one's life. They talk about the things that compelled them to change—the most powerful binds and obligations were to families.

They have each found a way to transcend stuttering and to utilize

their gifts, achieving success in a diverse range of careers, from public speaking to teaching to music, and a variety of other professions.

Some of the authors chose careers that also provided an outlet for introspection regarding the disorder that they have struggled with. This is the case for Evan Usler, whose essay delves into the scientific basis of stuttering; and Lindsay Hale, an anthropologist who articulates how the stigma surrounding stuttering affects us.

There is an especially compelling story from a parent, Amy Averett, who shares the lessons she learned from participation in the NSA and demonstrates how essential the support and love of families is in a child's development.

The second section of this book includes essays from three speech-language pathologists (SLPs). They talk about how their growth path as SLPs, and their educational experiences and participation in self-help groups not only helped equip them to work with this disorder, but also enriched their lives. One of these chapters is by Dr. Courtney Byrd, a clinician and researcher whose dedication to the stuttering community has led to a first-of-its-kind institute at the University of Texas that provides free specialized services for people who stutter and clinicians in training.

The essays reference the authors' links to the greater network of NSA chapters all across the United States. The authors tell stories about the communities where they grew up and lived. Many name people who were notable in their journeys: this is their way to honor these people.

In some cases, the same individuals inspired us years apart. The closing chapter to this book is by Dr. Lee Reeves, a leader who has had a significant impact on countless people who stutter and speech-language pathologists for more than four decades now.

I met him through a "chance encounter" when I was a senior in

college and working part-time in a bookstore in 2007.

Dr. Reeves shares his experiences attending meetings of the first nationally recognized self-help group for people who stutter as a teenager in 1967. His essay provides a summation of the mechanism behind self-help and the changes that are possible; finally, he provides a touching statement about his optimism regarding where we are going moving ahead if we all do our part.

Ultimately, these stories are about perseverance, about the gifts that come with adversity, and the special people in our journeys who have helped us to change. This book represents the triumph of our being able to be heard.

SECTION I

Turning Points

(Ten people who stutter and a parent tell their stories)

CHAPTER 1

Shut Up and Talk!

John Moore

LIVING LIFE AS A STUTTTERER is an exercise in failure.

Studies show the average adult male speaks about seven thousand words a day. At a minimum, that's seven thousand opportunities for a stutterer to fail every day and well over 2.5 million opportunities to fail in a year.

It's worse for women who stutter. The average adult woman speaks about twenty thousand words a day equating to 7.3 million opportunities to stutter each year.

Every stutterer has a journey, and it begins by knowing they will risk failure thousands and thousands of times each day.

At our monthly meetings of the Austin chapter of the National Stuttering Association, we talk a lot about this journey. For some of us, this journey ends in childhood when we simply grow out of stuttering.

For others, this journey is a lifelong adventure.

The journey I'm on began at age four, and it continues today.

Along my journey, I, like other stutterers, experienced a TURN-

ING POINT.

Put simply, my turning point made me realize avoidance isn't the answer; it's the problem. I realized that to stop stuttering, I had to start talking.

One thing I've noticed about my journey and the journeys of others who stutter is that a stutterer isn't aware of their turning point until after it happens. This is because a stutterer must first reach a BREAKING POINT.

Let me explain . . .

Twenty years ago I graduated from college. My stutter was wicked good then. I failed thousands and thousands of times a day when talking. I failed so much at talking that no company wanted to hire me. I interviewed with countless companies but never got the job.

My parents had long supported me on my journey. They hugged me after I endured days of hurtful teasing from thoughtless children. They spent time, money, and love to provide me professional help for my stuttering throughout my childhood and adolescence. They went out of their way to encourage me to talk when talking was the last thing I wanted to do. They had countless closed-door conversations about what they could do next to help me. Clearly, they worried for me.

By the time I was a young adult, my parents were no longer worried. They were terrified—terrified of the compromised life their overeducated and underemployed son would live when he couldn't string together three spoken words without stuttering.

So one night in 1993, my parents approached me and made me an offer they felt I couldn't refuse. The offer was to send me to a month-long intensive therapy program to fix my stuttering problem so my future life wouldn't be as compromised as my past life had been.

The offer was made, but I declined.

My parents couldn't understand why I turned down what they saw as my last chance to live a more fluent (and thereby, more affluent) life. My parents were astonished and deeply anguished over my refusal to get help.

At that time I was a boomerang child working part-time at the GAP and living in my old childhood room. I had essentially given up on finding employment worthy of a college degree. My friends all had jobs and were making waves in the real world while my life was at low tide. I was at a standstill in life. No momentum. No hope. Nothing except my stutter.

It was just my stutter and me.

My stutter hadn't abandoned me as my childhood friends did in high school. My stutter never laughed at me. My stutter was tethered to me . . . for life.

This is when my BREAKING POINT became my TURNING POINT.

It was at this moment in time when I realized I didn't want to live my life without my stutter.

Stuttering had so shaped me into being me; I couldn't imagine my life without it.

I can look back at that dark moment in my life and realize that was my turning point.

It took me twenty years to accept myself as a person who stutters. At age twenty-three, I became comfortable with the fact I was going to live my life as a person who stutters.

From then on, my perspective on living life changed forever. Accepting myself as a person who stutters brought me a newfound comfort level with my stuttering. It was time for me to get busy living.

No longer was stuttering going to manage me; I was going to man-

age my stuttering.

No longer was I going to avoid talking, because I had already learned this only compounds the problem.

From that day on, I've found the way for me to manage my stuttering.

Put simply, my turning point taught me that to stop stuttering, I had to start talking.

I made the deliberate decision to not let my stuttering discourage me from talking. Using every trick and tip I picked up from my years in speech therapy combined with my acceptance of being a stutterer, I found a more fluent voice.

I am now forty-three years old, and after a marketing career spent at Starbucks and Whole Foods Market, I make my living as a keynote conference speaker. Yes . . . I get paid to talk. (The irony is incredible, isn't it?)

I deliver presentations at conferences all over the world. It's a highly unlikely profession that never would have taken shape if I were still waiting for my turning point to happen.

But . . . my journey continues.

I knew about the National Stuttering Association but never got deeply involved. In 2001, I attended a few chapter meetings in Seattle, but stopped going because it was too painful for me. Seeing and hearing people with wicked good stutters reminded me of myself before my turning point. I wasn't ready to deal with all the emotions that surfaced and quickly stopped attending.

It wasn't until I watched *The King's Speech* that I felt ready to deal with the emotions of seeing and hearing other stutterers talk. I was living in Austin and looked online to find the local NSA chapter. My first exposure to the Austin chapter came from watching their just-released

documentary called *Let Me Finish* on YouTube. The following week I attended my first meeting of the Austin NSA chapter.

Ten years had passed since I last attended an NSA meeting, and I was a different person. I had matured to the point that I was ready to give back and hopefully inspire a twenty-something to realize they could find career success as a stutterer. At these meetings I was vocal. While some spoke of easy onsets, I spoke of encouraging ways to navigate life as a stutterer. I led a meeting on job interview skills and shared advice on how to succeed in the workplace with a stutter.

Attending NSA chapter meetings made me realize the importance of giving back to the stuttering community. I'm by no means fluent. I still stutter. I will always stutter. But my wicked good stutter is less wicked these days as evidenced by being able to carve out a career as a keynote speaker. Perhaps someone attending an NSA meeting will be inspired to reach their turning point knowing a fellow stutterer is making a living talking as opposed to living a life avoiding talking.

My biggest joy in attending the NSA meetings has been talking with parents of stutterers. Knowing how my parents lovingly worried for me, I know these parents lovingly worry for their children. I do my best to ease their worries by telling them to continue being supportive of their child, but also to remain patient. At some point, their child will experience a turning point similar to mine, and their worries will go away.

A few years ago I gave the most difficult keynote presentation of my life. I was at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi to give a talk about business lessons learned during my days at Starbucks. I'd given hundreds of presentations before, but this one made me incredibly nervous because my father was in the audience.

My father had never seen me give a keynote presentation. I can

imagine he was also nervous. My stutter reverts back to failure-filled childhood days when I'm around my father. I can't explain it. I just know I stutter so much more around my father than I do around anyone else. I'm certain my father believed he was about to witness his son struggle through a stutter-filled sixty-minute presentation. The talk went off just fine. Like all the other talks I give these days, I hardly stuttered.

After my presentation I shook hands and chatted with the attendees. The small crowd around me left, leaving my father in full view. He was crying. As tears rolled down his face, he said, "Son, what I just witnessed was a miracle."

To my dad, it was a miracle. To me, it was just one more day in which I lived knowing that to stop stuttering, I have to keep talking.

JOHN MOORE *spent a decade as a top marketer at Starbucks and Whole Foods Market. For years he led his own consultancy, Brand Autopsy Marketing Practice, which was based in Austin. In 2013, he moved to Greenville, South Carolina and became chief operating officer at Brains of Fire, an agency that helps businesses with brand development and word-of-mouth marketing. He is also the author of books on business and marketing.*

CHAPTER 2

Severing Disconnection

Evan Usler

ONE OF MY EARLIEST MEMORIES, probably from when I was three or four years old, is sitting with my father and watching the classic BBC mini-series *I, Claudius.* In this epic story—based on the classic historical novels by the British author Robert Graves—Claudius, the future emperor, witnesses political turmoil as his family members conspire for power during the height of the Roman Empire. Throughout his life, Claudius is viewed as a stuttering "imbecile" and is the laughingstock of his royal family. Perceived as a social deviant, Claudius is not groomed to be a proper member of the royal dynasty, but instead is left unworthily disconnected from those around him.

I identified with poor Claudius. I wasn't a member of nobility, and thankfully my family treated me with nothing but affection, but I always knew I was different. I assumed that I was an imbecile, too. It was understandable for me to feel this way. Throughout my childhood, all the professionals I hoped would help me speak normally did nothing but give me wrong answers and bad advice. I apologize for being so

blunt; they were not bad people. They did try to help me. I just don't think they understood stuttering nor did they have any idea what I was going through. After years of hearing "you'll be fine," "slow down," and "just relax," I realized they did not have the expertise or empathy to help me. *But these were the "experts,"* I remember thinking. *If they didn't have answers, maybe it's because there was no problem to begin with. I could speak fluently some of the time, so there couldn't be anything physically wrong with me. Why could I speak normally until the very moment that I was under pressure? Maybe I had built this huge problem psychologically from nothing; maybe it was all in my head!* In my youth, my mind raced with such thoughts, until I felt there was no other option for me but to disconnect from the world.

A paradox of stuttering is its inconsistency: my desire to be fluent increases the risk of a breakdown of speech. However, on those occasions when I am under the least pressure to speak fluently, moments of fleeting articulation come out of hiding, as if to tease me with the enunciated sounds of normality. For a split second, I feel human. This volatile capriciousness prevents stuttering from being recognized as the neurodevelopmental disorder that it really is. Instead, stuttering is still viewed by many as a purely psychological deficit, easily overcome with the right mindset or a little bit of snake oil.

Like poor Claudius, I continue to stutter into adulthood. I don't like this fact and have never been happy about it. But to be honest with myself, it was never the lack of fluency that weighed so heavily on me—it was the spread of disconnection, which, like a virus, not only consumed my speech but everything in my life: my personality, my wellbeing, and my view of the future. I can't say I've had a "turning point." Unfortunately, no therapy program or personal triumph has dramatically improved the way I speak, and I have not resolved the

psychological distress that developed within me over all those years. Yet, with the support of others, I've been successful at slowly stemming the tide of this disconnection, and perhaps one day I will sever disconnection completely.

Now, as a scientist, I see my work not only as an attempt to enhance our scientific understanding of the disorder of stuttering, but also as a way of introspection and self-therapy. Even as a child, I always believed that there was something neurologically different about me that resulted in my moments of disfluency. Perhaps my neurological deficit is too severe for me to ever formulate the effortless and articulate speech I once prayed for. As a researcher interested in the neural bases of speech-motor control and language, the disorder of developmental stuttering presents me with a complex mystery whose neurodevelopmental correlates are only now being understood. Why do some children start stuttering? Why will most of these children naturally recover while others will continue to stutter their entire lives?

As humans, we are programmed to connect, to socialize, and to share. We have all been the recipient of a young child's curiosity and wonder, as he or she points to something, perhaps seeing an object for the first time and looks at us to see if we have seen the same thing. These early expressions of connectivity typically accompany a spurt of language ability between a child's second and third year of life. Not surprisingly, it is in this stage of development that stuttering is usually first seen. During this period, it is likely that a combination of factors unique to a child, such as a genetic predisposition, linguistic capacity, and temperament, result in a breakdown of speech that may lead to chronic stuttering. If this occurs, as it did for me, it is often not long before feelings of frustration, embarrassment, fear, and shame formulate one's identity.

Stuttering, with its loneliness and unpredictability, is above all else a disorder of disconnection. Abstract as this definition may seem, this disconnection is also physical in nature. It appears that for some children and adults who stutter, the gray matter cells that comprise the brain's speech, language, and motor control centers, along with the white matter tracts that connect these different areas together, are anatomically and physiologically different compared to people who are normally fluent. The fragile nature of this compromised speech-language system and its decreased structural and functional connectivity is disturbed further by increased cognitive function and complex language tasks.

This physical disconnection produces in time a more sinister emotional and social disconnection. For many of us, the cognitive strain and feelings of shame that often come with stuttered speech breed silence, a silence that prevents the expression of one's own story. If a person cannot tell a story, hold a conversation, explain an idea, offer a joke, or otherwise connect with others, the building of meaningful and authentic relationships cannot occur, and instead arise the walls of disconnection. The development of a personal narrative, a sense of self to share with others, is replaced by the defensive strategies of self-evasion and self-rejection. Little by little, the white lies that we tell others: the elusion of discourse, the avoidance of an introduction, the changing of our name, the pretending to not know an answer to a question, all produce disconnection that before long, disintegrate any sense of self-awareness, self-respect, and self-reliance.

Yet, this disconnection can be severed. It is here where groups like the National Stuttering Association, in my mind, play their most important role. We as people who stutter are the remedy to our own disconnection. One needs only to attend a meeting of the NSA to

see just how similar and dissimilar people who stutter are. None of us stutter, react to our stuttering, or respond to treatment (if one wants treatment) in the same way. During our meetings, some people may be silent, quietly absorbing everything around them. Others may be extremely social and initiate topics of discussion, ecstatic that they are able to converse with others without feelings of shame or judgment, perhaps for the first time. A person may consistently come to our meetings every month without fail. Another may come once, perhaps receiving all the support he or she needs, and never come again. Despite our varied experiences and needs, we are all bound together. Our common variable is not just our speech; it is our desire for connection. Fueled by the topics we discuss, the insights we share, the debates we engage in, and the risks we take, I am indebted to my fellow stutterers who, for more than a decade, have given me the encouragement and impetus to severe disconnection. I realize now that I am not on my own. As long as we connect with one another, we cannot remain disconnected from our world.

I recently re-watched *I, Claudius* and was brought back to that time with my father. Unfortunately, my four-year-old brain did not register at the time that the purpose of the story was not to make fun of Claudius' perceived disability, but to portray the hubris and narcissism of the people around him. In fact, Claudius used his stuttering to live a life under the radar of his conniving family, to foster connection, and in the end, become a noble emperor of Rome. Claudius was not an imbecile after all, and neither was I.

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CHAPTER 3

Turnings: Stigma

Lindsay Hale
PhD

THE LATE SOCIOLOGIST Dr. Erving Goffman tells the story of a young girl who writes to an advice columnist (a certain Miss Lonelyhearts), despairing of her prospects of finding love or even living a normal life. We can sense that this is a sensitive and intelligent girl; her writing is at once stylish, simple, and honest. She describes her many good qualities; surely life and love must be in the stars. But, it seems, she has a problem: where a pretty turned up nose should be, there is instead a gaping hole, a yawning wound that no one can ignore and few can see past. She closes her letter with a question, too desperate for me to repeat, as to what she should do with herself, and we are left, heartbroken, to ponder the enormous suffering, the cruel burden, that Goffman calls the stigma of a discredited identity, that is, an identity bearing marks (e.g., disfigurement, a criminal record, etc.,) that places her in the shadows, outside the city gates of normal. We wonder (knowing the question has no answer): Where can this girl turn? What path can she take to lead her out of a life of shame and embarrass-

ment—or (I won't avoid it, this is the question with which she closes) death at her own hands?

This is an essay about stuttering, discredited identity, and turning. The "turning" to which I refer is not a turning point; it is, instead, best described as a long arc, a turning that takes years and never ends, really. It is a turning away, and a turning toward: a turning away from shame and embarrassment, a turning toward freedom and dignity.

Stuttering is not a hole in the middle of one's face, but for me at some points in my life, especially in my childhood and adolescence, a hole in the face could not have been much worse. A hole in the face is very bad, but at least no one blames you for it, no one assumes that it is a marker of feeble-mindedness, a severely damaged brain, evidence that you have something to hide, sheer cussedness or grotesque weirdness, bad parenting, or even some deep Oedipal yearnings or fixations. I risked meeting up with all of those assumptions, and more, sometimes spoken, usually left unsaid, every time I opened my mouth. Stuttering, at least severe stuttering (I am not talking about the lovable Jimmy Stewart or Marilyn Monroe version, or my own stuttering as it's been for the last few decades), profoundly stigmatizes; it gave me a damaged identity, at least in the eyes of others, if not my own. Maybe (I hope) less so now that scientific research has demystified the ontology of stuttering, its bases in neurological syndromes that do not affect other aspects of the mind, but there was and still is a great deal of ignorance out there.

Unfortunately, stutterers, like the girl with the hole in her face, are blessed (or cursed) with empathy; we feel what people think, wrongly or not, about us; especially when we are young, those preconceptions and wrong-headed theories cover us with shame and starts us on a lifelong acquaintance with acute embarrassment.

Acute embarrassment is the topic I want to turn to now, and it is the condition from which I have turned away, starting many years ago and continuing in a long arc that will never end. All stutterers know that embarrassment and self-consciousness aggravate the problem, which in turn aggravates the stuttering, and so on, to the point that self-consciousness and embarrassment—or rather, the situations that generate them—morph or metastasize into fear. But psychologists know something, too, something I found useful: we can desensitize ourselves to unpleasant stimuli (including fear) by confronting them and becoming habituated (done judiciously, of course! It would not be a good idea, for example, to treat a phobia of cats by climbing down into the lion's den at the zoo). I have taken many paths in getting over embarrassment at speaking and misspeaking, but among the most rewarding has been studying languages: first Spanish, then Portuguese, now Russian. My professional work—I am an anthropologist and a professor—has been a two-and-a half-decade-long essay in desensitization, from doing fieldwork and ethnographic interviews in Brazil to lecturing four days a week.

(To be clear: I did not take up languages and lecturing and field research to desensitize myself to embarrassment and shame over stuttering, and that is not why I do these things now—I do them because I love them; they give me pleasure and meaning. But I'll take the desensitization in the bargain!)

There are two more aspects of this question of embarrassment and shame and turning away that I would like to touch upon, and they go back to the terrible situation of that lovely girl with the hole in her face. Dr. Goffman published his book on stigma and discredited identity many years ago, in the mid-sixties. We can assume the girl grew into adulthood (and perhaps already has passed on), with no possibil-

ity of a surgical remedy. Stuttering is a difficult problem, especially if it becomes severe, but there is effective therapy. It will not eliminate stuttering, but it can bring it into the realm of the manageable; in my case, I benefited tremendously from the program at the University of Colorado Boulder, under the direction of Dr. Peter Ramig when I was in my late twenties. Without that, I am sure my efforts at turning away from shame and embarrassment would have been impossible.

The other aspect I might call anthropological. As humans, we all crave—and need—acceptance, acknowledgment, and respect. We need to be held in esteem by those around us, at least those whose opinions matter. (If we don't need this, we join the ranks of the sociopaths.) Happiness depends on this. And yet, this need leaves us unprotected, paradoxically enough, at our most vulnerable spot: embarrassment and shame. We cannot be embarrassed if we don't care about how others perceive us; but as stutterers, we know the terrible price we pay for embarrassment.

What to do?

For me, the answer has been: there is no answer. There is only turning, a turning toward a mature perspective, toward a balance, a balance that never stands still. It involves not valuing overmuch the groundless prejudices of others—and not internalizing them. It involves looking closely, objectively, at my feelings, my fears, my embarrassments, putting them in perspective, discerning to what degree they are justified, to what degree they are inflated by my own anxieties and by the ghosts that haunted my childhood. It involves valuing myself, which must entail a large dose of not taking myself too seriously. It involves—very important—stepping outside my little self, out into this great big world of natural wonders, music and literature, stories and poems, living and dying, in short, stepping from time to time into the benign embarrassment that comes from awe at this universe and the humble joy of living.

It won't cure stuttering, but it adds a certain dignity to it.

DR. LINDSAY HALE *has taught anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin since 1995. His field research, described in his book* Hearing the Mermaid's Song *(2009), focuses on Afro-Brazilian religion. Professor Hale is currently writing a novel, teaching, and chairing the UT Fulbright committee. He spends his spare time learning Russian, planning a trip to Siberia, dabbling in poetry, dutifully serving his imperious old cat, enjoying life with his beloved Sara, and devoting more and more of his time to the great outdoors that he learned to love growing up in South Dakota and Colorado.*

CHAPTER 4

The Problem of Passing

Karen Krajcer

NOT TOO MANY YEARS AGO, the revered clinician Dr. Charles Van Riper issued those of us who stutter a challenge. It came at the end of his piece, “Putting It Together,” from a volume of essays by speech-language pathologists who stutter. He wrote (referring to himself): “Not until he found that it was possible to stutter easily and without struggling did he become fluent. He was born at the age of thirty years and has had a wonderful life ever since. How old are you?”

I am thirty-four years old, and I've been stuttering (in one form or another) since I was three. However, by Dr. Van Riper’s consideration of age, I’m probably closer to two and a half, roughly the same age I was when my parents first recognized my halting, repetitive speech.

Today, I am a mother, a wife, and a writer, and in some ways, I feel that I am just now growing up and becoming me. At present, I am about halfway through the first draft of a novel that I have been developing for years, but have only recently given myself time to write. I have delivered graduation addresses, emceed awards ceremonies, and

made toasts at weddings. I’ve volunteered at phone banks, hired and trained educators for a national tutoring company, and for nine years, I taught English and creative writing to high school students at elite college preparatory schools. I have two living parents, a younger brother, a husband who has known me since I was sixteen, and many good friends.

And, like I said, I've been stuttering since I was three. But it wasn't until my late twenties that anyone knew it—not my employers, not my students, not my husband, not even my brother, who has suffered a stutter his entire life (more on him later).

To be fair, my immediate family knew that I had stuttered as a child, but through some miraculous convergence of spontaneous fluency, mastery of the English language, and most significantly, an incredible, deep-rooted sense of shame and self-loathing, I eventually managed to hide it. If people did know—and I don't see how they couldn't, as it was so plainly obvious to me—they didn't let on that they did. No one discussed it, at least not with me. That mutual denial probably sounds good to a person who gets picked on, but I now wonder if people's silence worsened my situation, turning my stutter into that wolverine beast in M. Night Shyamalan's psychological thriller *The Village*, the thing "we do not speak of"—terrifying in legend, threatening enough to keep one locked indoors, yet really just a person. My stutter loomed large in its potential to destroy the identity I had created for myself, and so I shut myself in.

I am, or was, a covert stutterer—a stutterer who chooses any means necessary to suppress stuttering behaviors.

Hiding my stutter was my art.

What I once saw as strategies, and now identify as crutches, included the following (in this order):

1. Circumlocution and word-substitution:

"Excuse me, where can I find the . . . do you have a . . . you know the place where . . . sorry, I really have to pee."

And when that didn't work . . .

2. Feigned forgetfulness:

"I'm sorry, but I seem to have momentarily forgotten my name."

And when that didn't work . . .

3. Distraction and attending to immediate health needs:

"Oh, could you hang on a minute? I suddenly need to use the restroom—right in the middle of your question."

And when that didn't work . . .

4. Ignoring social conventions:

Person A: Hi, I don't believe we've met. My name is Tim.

Me: Hey.

And when that didn't work . . .

5. Downright lying:

Person A: Hi, I don't believe we've met. My name is Tim.

Me: I'm Sara.

There was also the time I very nearly got arrested for lying to a police officer about my name, all because I was afraid to stutter in front of one of my closest friends.

And finally, most tragically . . .

6. Withdrawing from society completely:

No phone calls, no social gatherings, no work, no human interaction, no hope. And this is the point that I very nearly reached because each of those crutches only lasted for a little while. I withdrew from everything and everyone and eventually found myself sitting alone, at home, on a couch, wishing for some sort of accidental death—a car jumping a curb and crashing into my living room, a tree branch falling

on my head. My anxiety had evolved into depression, and I had to get on medication.

The problem, I eventually realized, wasn't that I had a stutter. The real problem was that I hated myself.

But when you have governed your entire life by maintaining a facade of fluency, when you have believed deep down in your gut that if even one person sees the hint of a stutter, then everyone will hate you and think you're a failure, that you will lose your job, your loved ones, your very identity—and I'm not being hyperbolic; this is how it felt—with so much at stake, it's hard to begin the process of change, especially when I'd been able to pass as fluent for so long.

I think that most people outside the stuttering community identify stuttering as the behavior of repeating syllables. There is also that famous observation that "stuttering is what you do trying not to stutter" (the repetitions, the head ticks, the slaps on a thigh)—but I think that many stutterers know that stuttering can also look like a person just standing in front of you with her mouth closed. When I stutter, I don't repeat sounds. I block. I vocalize nothing. I don't do it on purpose. Trust me, I'd love to say something, but the words get stuck. For me, stuttering starts in my chest and throat.

Perhaps some people would argue that it starts in my head, but I think that's a dangerous oversimplification. My chest and throat are where I can literally feel the block, before the word even enters my mouth. Here is also where shame sat, right on top of my heart and lungs.

Though there are still moments when I feel ashamed of my speech, these feelings are now less consuming. At its greatest intensity, shame led me to two major turning points in my attitude about stuttering—more specifically, in the role that I allowed stuttering to play in my life.

The principal factor leading up to the first turning point is terrible, in some ways, perhaps unforgivable. It involved transference of my self-loathing onto a loved one. As I mentioned, I have a younger brother who, like me, has stuttered his entire life. Where we differ, though, is that, growing up, he was not able to hide his disfluency. He was the stereotypical stutterer, as mocked in movies and TV shows. We were both born with a stutter, but I became a covert stutterer by choice.

I made that choice as a child when I watched and heard people make fun of my brother's stutter.

Throughout his childhood, he was ridiculed, bullied, and ostracized. Not me. But it felt like me—deserved punishment for the part of me that I hated—and so I looked the other way. I determined that I would never let anyone see or hear me stutter, never let anyone even connect me with stuttering, and so not only did I not reach out to my brother: I ignored him. This is the greatest regret of my life. We were both alone, but we didn't have to be.

This profound regret brought me to my first turning point. After I got on medication for anxiety, I began a slow process of accepting that I have a stutter and that, while the fact that I stutter won't likely change, my attitude about it can. Attending my first meeting of the Austin chapter of the National Stuttering Association two years ago was life-changing for me. Fifteen people seated in a circle in a room near a university speech clinic were excited to meet me, a stutterer, and share their own experiences with stuttering as they stuttered. I'd never seen anything like it before. I looked around the room, expecting to see everyone hyperventilating and having anxiety attacks, but everyone looked comfortable and relieved to be together. At that meeting, I found the courage to seek out my speech-language pathologist, Mary Johns, and to follow her advice, even though the desensitization methods I needed were initially as appealing as an unmedicated root canal. After having had a traumatic experience with a therapy program that focused only on fluency shaping, I told Mary that my biggest problem didn't seem to be the physical act of stuttering, but my emotional reaction to stuttering. She helped me set reasonable goals for myself and challenge my self-defeating perfectionism. Mary has been to me what I should have been to my brother.

Still, the transition from covert to overt is long, slow, and not for the weakhearted. My second turning point—when I finally waved the middle finger at fear—came when I found out that I was pregnant. Before the NSA, I had told people that I would probably never have children because I didn't think I'd be a good mother.

"You're crazy," they'd say, but I believed it to be true. *What if my children stutter, too, and I can't handle it? Obviously I can't handle it. What if I do to my children what I did to my brother?*

When I learned I was going to be a mother, these fears resurfaced, but with the NSA's help, I looked at them more objectively. *How can I show my children that I love them if I hate myself? How can I show my children that I accept them and their stutter, should they develop one, if I cannot accept myself because I stutter?* I determined that I would not repeat my mistakes, and I have spent every day of my life since that pregnancy test read positive desensitizing myself to stuttering openly.

This desensitization included attending an NSA conference that summer and immersing myself in stuttering and people who stutter: children who stutter, parents who stutter, non-stutterers who love and support these stutterers, and my own stuttering self. For me, most significant among these non-stuttering cheerleaders was my mother, who sat beside me during the workshops and held my hand.

I've never had a hard time being self-critical. Taking a good look

at the way I treated myself helped me to realize that the biggest jerk in this whole situation was me, not just because I was being cruel to myself but also because I was being unfair to others. At one of my first NSA meetings, a fellow stutterer said that we should give others the opportunity to be better people by letting them hear us stutter and trusting them to not react the way people like me fear they could. I'm still working on this.

Before joining the National Stuttering Association, I could never have written an essay on stuttering. Before the NSA, I didn't know that *stutterer* is a word not recognized by Microsoft Word (at least not the old version that I have) because it was something I refused to acknowledge, let alone punch out on my keyboard. Before the NSA, my days consisted of worrying about one conversation that I would have to have such as calling the phone company, pushing it later and later into the day until it was too late, and then berating myself for my failure. Now, a day will pass and I'll realize that I've stuttered in front of several people but didn't even really think about it. The worrying and ruminating is over, and good riddance. What a waste of time it all was.

I now have a one-year-old son and another baby on the way. My son hears and sees me stutter every day. He sees me become frustrated with it, and he sees me be cool with it, but he will never see me give up because of it. Whether or not my children stutter, this attitude of courage and perseverance is the greatest gift that I can give them, in addition to love. These are also the greatest gifts that I can give myself and my brother, no matter how old we are.

This is a longer version of an essay KAREN KRAJCER *read at the Austin NSA chapter's open house in 2012. Karen continues to see each of her two sons as a symbol of her daily promise to not let her stutter silence her. In 2014, she returned to her job teaching creative writing to high school students at a private school, and disclosed to her employers and students that she stutters. She also established and leads an NSA chapter in San Antonio, where she lives. Her first novel, still in progress, features two protagonists who stutter and who make vastly different choices in how they live their lives. Part dark comedy and part coming-of-age story, the novel examines how words shape consciousness and our understanding of the world, and explores what happens when words are unavailable.*

CHAPTER 5

A Reporter's Voice

Tessa Andrade

LEAD-IN: *Good morning. I'm Tessa Andrade, and welcome to Dobie News for Friday, November 15th*.

That was the opening sentence I would say at the start of each newscast that was seen on every television during homeroom on Friday mornings. Dobie News was the broadcast journalism club at my high school. It was an all student-produced and student-run program, one that was also highly respected by other schools. No other high school in our district had a journalism program as prestigious as ours. Even our newspaper couldn't compete. Dobie News was the face of J. Frank Dobie High School in Houston, Texas.

Dobie News had been on the air for about ten years by the time I joined it as a sophomore. Before I started high school, the station had already made a name for itself and was expanding by airing in the junior high schools. I was a seventh-grader at one of them, Beverly Hills Intermediate, when I saw Dobie News for the first time.

"Now it's time for your Longhorn Sports Report, hosted by Victoria Chavez." That was how the Dobie News sports reporter was introduced. Victoria Chavez was beautiful and spoke with such enthusiasm for the school, and with complete confidence. Her words flowed smoothly and her anchoring looked effortless. Victoria was someone I wanted to be once I got to high school.

But once homeroom ended, so did the slight glimmer of hope I had that I would ever be on Dobie News. I struggled to ask my teacher a question about my assignment. How could I possibly be on camera knowing all of my peers would be watching? I am a person who stutters. Talking, especially in front of a lot of people, was physically impossible.

According to my mom, I didn't start stuttering until I was six, but I do not remember a time that I did not stutter. For me, frustration has been a way of life. I spent most of my school years trying to hide the fact that I stutter. Although my parents never drew attention to it, my school contacted them concerned about my speech. After that, I was enrolled in speech therapy from second-grade up until I graduated high school.

When I was a child and then a teenager, my family moved houses a lot, but we always managed to stay in the same school district. As a child it was very challenging to make new friends. To make friends you have to talk, and talking wasn't something I was very good at. Don't get me wrong, I wanted to talk. I loved coming home and telling my parents about my day, but sometimes talking led to me stuttering, and kids had something to say about that. Children are innocent, but they're also blunt. They say what is on their minds, not realizing the damage their words might cause. I would get picked on constantly. There were times when I couldn't walk into a classroom without hearing "Hhh--ii TT-e-sss-a." I would ignore them or try to laugh with

them, but man, did their comments hurt.

I made up for my stuttering with my personality. Because I stuttered in front of my friends, I had to make sure I was a great friend. I felt bad for the people who would have to hear and watch me speak when I stuttered, so I made sure to overcompensate with something I was great at. My stutter was a huge weakness that nobody else I knew had nor understood. Talking is something that we learn to do at the age of two. Why was it so difficult for me?

My mom is a very compassionate person, but at one point she had had enough. "Tessa, you can't come home crying every day because of mean kids. You don't understand now, but in life people are mean and hurtful." My mom also told me that everybody is different, not just me, and that nobody was going to stick up for me if I didn't stick up for myself. That was the beginning of a turning point for me in how I carried myself. The fact that I stuttered also gave me drive: I had this huge struggle that nobody else had, and if I could get past that, I could get past anything.

In high school I learned a lot about myself and about my stuttering. That was where I molded myself and gained the drive and determination I needed. I had the same speech pathologist for all four years of high school. Her name was Mrs. Pena, and she told me I reminded her of her daughter. I was one of three students in my high school who stuttered and who saw Mrs. Pena regularly.

High school is also where I found my passion for journalism. I confided in Mrs. Pena my fear of going into broadcasting. I was the only one of her students that had sort of an unusual passion given my so-called disability, but I truly felt her belief in me. I had always struggled with choosing my career path, and I would vent to her about it more than anyone else. I was skeptical when Mrs. Pena told me I could go

into broadcasting, but I listened. I grew very close with her. She knew my greatest fear and kept my most precious secret.

Because I received speech therapy, I was considered a special needs student. In high school, in particular, the special attention bothered me. Each semester my teachers would receive forms that stated and documented my disability. I was also assigned to a case manager, Ms. Comfort, who would sit through a few of my classes at the beginning of the school year. I was told that if I had any conflicts or problems in class, I should go to her, and then she would talk to my teachers so I wouldn't have to go to them directly. I remember a speech therapist telling me once that, from what she knew, people who stutter tend to be shy, and that speaking up about conflicts to bosses or teachers is very difficult for them. My case manager was there to handle those difficult situations for me.

Although I knew Mrs. Comfort and Mrs. Pena had the best intentions for me, I couldn't help but think they were crippling me. *What about when I graduate and go out into the real world? When I feel that I deserve a raise at my job, will Ms. Comfort be there to defend me? No, she wouldn't.* I also remembered what my mom had told me. I would be the one to ask for that raise and state why I deserve it, and I would have to do it whether I stuttered or not. I requested that my case manager stop attending classes with me and that I be required to give presentations, work in groups, and be graded and treated like every other student in class. That was the first step in no longer allowing stuttering to control me.

I decided to apply for Dobie News, but I never expected I would be in front of the camera. Once I got into the program I had to go on story assignments, and I would always offer to be the videographer instead of a reporter. The majority of the people in the program wanted to be

on camera, so they had no problem letting me film for them. That all changed when my journalism teacher, Mr. Salinas, told me I had my first story due.

The piece was fairly simple and would involve an MOS, or "man-on-the-street" interview. Although I was extremely nervous, I felt a sense of relief. Mr. Salinas knew about my stuttering (he got the documents about it each semester). There was no way I would have had the guts to put myself out there and ask to be a reporter knowing that he knew I stuttered. I felt that would put him in an awkward situation. But Mr. Salinas gave me the assignment because he believed in me. I knew this was my chance—a chance to go out of my comfort zone and to grow as a person. I never imagined I would actually be good at it.

According to TheNewsManual.Net, "You cannot be a truly great journalist without having a deep love of language, written or spoken. You must understand the meaning and flow of words and take delight in using them. The difference between an ordinary news story and a great one is often not just the facts you include, but the way in which you tell those facts." In my two years at Dobie News, I was feature reporter, news anchor, and, my personal favorite, sports reporter. During my senior year, I became an editor. Not only was I a part of this amazing program, but I got to make editorial decisions and be a leader. I assigned and approved stories that other reporters submitted, something I never thought I could do. I never let my stutter take away the meaning behind my stories or even my interviews.

There were countless times that I stuttered during an interview, when the camera was rolling and people were watching. This was tough and embarrassing, but I loved the act of communicating. Although I may not have been the best at it, I worked at it until I was close enough.

Broadcast journalists have the power to make change happen. Journalism made me realize the power of my voice, a feeling that I never had before. For me, speaking is a daily challenge and frustration comes with that. I have to think about how to say my name. I understand the importance of communication, and I never take for granted the ability to communicate fluently and effectively.

I believe that becoming a reporter was a big factor in the successes I achieved in high school. It was the scariest thing I have ever done, but it opened many doors that would have never opened if I hadn't taken a chance. I continued to take every chance I got. On my school's debate team I put myself in situations where I would have to speak in front of crowds. It was as if my stutter and I were two different people, pitted against each other. Becoming involved with an organization where I would have to speak, knowing I would stutter, made me feel that I was the one in charge.

I was also in Future Farmers of America for three years, and on the dance team for two years. In my senior class, I was voted vice president, runner up in the Homecoming Court, and won an award for best personality at my prom. I left high school feeling confident that I could take on this "real world" everyone talked about.

When I got accepted into Texas State University, I decided to major in mass communication with an emphasis in electronic media. Broadcast journalism was what I felt I was meant to do, but I didn't want to completely settle on being an anchor or a reporter. My stuttering fluctuates, and I couldn't count on being fluent enough for that. So I figured electronic media would be perfect. I would still have the option to be a reporter, but I would also learn about behind-the-scenes production.

College was when my stuttering became the worst it had been. It was rough, and I was so confused as to why I had spent practically my

entire adolescent life in speech therapy. I thought I had learned all I needed to learn. Why wasn't I cured? I felt that my dream had been crushed.

I was now an adult. I had no speech therapist, I had no case manager. *Why was my speech breaking down now when I had nobody to help me?* I knew that if I wanted to change my major, I would have to act soon. I waited. My speech changes sometimes, so I thought maybe it would get better. I was wrong. I thought about other options for my major. In the end, I stuck it out because I just could not wrap my mind around the thought of changing my major. Another turning point was coming. I finally took steps to get help at the end of my sophomore year. I went through all sorts of departments at Texas State to find some sort of help, until I was finally led to Dr. Farzan Irani.

The following summer I attended Dr. Irani's intensive speech therapy camp. After that experience, I had a totally new understanding of my stuttering and how to face it. This is also when I was introduced to the National Stuttering Association. The support network I've acquired through the NSA has helped me realize I am no longer alone in this constant battle. I wish that I had found the NSA before my adult years. I have made friendships that are unlike the ones I made with friends from high school or my sorority sisters in college. The people I've met in the NSA empathize with me whereas my close friends can only sympathize. The NSA has given me the ability and freedom to work on my stutter and talk about it, all in an open and comfortable environment.

I am in the process of applying for internships in broadcast journalism, and there is always one sentence in the job descriptions that makes me second-guess myself: "Must be able to speak and communicate clearly and effectively." When I read that I always seem to take a step back and ask: Am I qualified? Was that sentence put there just for

people like me? Speaking is the thing that has challenged me all my life, and yet I have picked a career that frequently requires speaking under pressure. Some days, that still does not make sense to me.

And yet, I am thankful. I am thankful for what I struggle with and for the support I've received because without those things, I would not have discovered how strong a person I can be. My stutter has made me into such a dedicated and persevering person. I have to try so much harder than everyone else I am competing against because I naturally have this disadvantage. I have made sure to become skilled at every aspect of broadcasting so that if I do stutter during an interview, others will see how much I have to offer. Because of that dedication, I have found tremendous success as a journalist in college.

I am proud of how far I have come and of the person I am, even though I stutter. I know I will continue to face hurdles, but every challenge I have faced has prepared me for the next one to come.

TESSA ANDRADE *was born and raised in Houston, Texas and attends Texas State University in San Marcos. She has served as a reporter for the school's news station, KTSW 89.9, as videographer for the campus newspaper, the University Star, and as a correspondent for ESPNU Campus Connection. She has also been a public relations representative and alumnae chair for the Texas State chapter of Zeta Tau Alpha sorority. She will be studying in Spain during her senior year, and plans to pursue a career in sports media.*

CHAPTER 6

My Greatest Strength Is That I Stutter

Sam Christian Antonio

BY SENIOR YEAR I was cruising along until graduation when I would accept my diploma and head off to my university of choice. I shared smiles, laughs, and tears with my friends. My high school sweetheart had taught me what it meant to care for someone else. Among my classmates, I was known for my achievements: valedictorian, accomplished musician, future University of Texas Longhorn.

The one title I never chose to associate with was *stutterer*. In fact, no one outside my closest circle of friends had any idea that I stuttered. I hid this part of me incredibly well. I got through my school years by calculating every situation. I learned when it was okay to speak, I predicted what words I could say, and more importantly, I knew what words I couldn't say and would have to avoid. I controlled my speech with so much effort that I ended up mentally fatigued at the end of each day.

I could never allow anyone to see this part of me. To everyone else, I probably seemed successful, outgoing, and confident, about to embark

on an ideal journey to college. But no one had any idea how terrifying the idea of leaving home was. I felt grateful that my friends and my girlfriend were making the same journey to college with me. But life at the University of Texas would hit me in a way I never expected. The campus in Austin was bigger than anything I had experienced, and I felt small. It was a stutterer's dystopia.

Every day as a college freshman, my will was tested with new stresses and social situations. As a business major, I had to constantly meet new people, adjust to interactive teaching styles, and give presentations on a regular basis. I knew I was introducing myself to a completely new world by choosing a major in the business school, but I wasn't prepared for how intense the culture of the business school would be. Everyone was competing for the highest grades to set the class curves. My classmates were eager to speak their minds to impress the professors. Everyone was expected to become acquainted with the right people and make themselves known.

I clearly remember my apprehension at my first mock interview with employers, one of the many career-building activities required of the freshmen by the business school. The advisers stressed that the mock interview was only practice and that there was absolutely no pressure to perform well. But as a person who stutters, I went in gut-wrenchingly afraid.

I was proud of the credentials I had built up in high school, but I thought of my stutter as the greatest blemish against my résumé. As the interview progressed, I can remember my mouth clenching, my eyes wandering, and tension building in my throat. I knew exactly how to answer every question, but I refused to stutter in front of my interviewer. I was sometimes able to utter a couple of sentences, but I don't think I gave a single complete answer. I sensed the disappointment in

my interviewer's face, much like the disappointment and disapproval I had experienced at times in my childhood from teachers and classmates. And I felt the disappointment in myself tenfold. The business school created a hyper-competitive atmosphere, and I felt that I was starting at a huge disadvantage.

This was the time when all the strategies I developed in high school to hide my stutter failed me. I couldn't hide behind my high school glories because everyone in the business school had similar achievements. Now I felt I had to exert myself even more to be seen as a fluent speaker and thereby appear normal. Eventually my anxiety became so great that I was afraid to walk down the streets around campus. Everything around me was a possible vocal grenade ready to blow open my disfluencies. The only places I felt safe were either back at home for the holidays or locked up in my dorm during the school year.

Over my first two years of college, I allowed my social life to decay. My friends always invited me out, and I didn't want to disappoint them, but I began to make a habit of turning them down. It's not that I didn't want to hang out—I was just scared of the possibility of meeting new people and scared of the thought of embarrassing myself by stuttering on my name. Eventually my friends stopped inviting me out. My girlfriend made sure to bring up special occasions, but most of the time I turned her down, too. I absolutely hated the person I had become, but I was helpless to do anything about it.

I hit rock bottom the summer before my junior year when my girlfriend and I decided to break up. I am grateful to my friends who consoled me, but I was especially vulnerable at this time, overwhelmed by the thought of starting upper-division coursework and interviewing for internships, all without the support of someone who had been with me since high school.

It was around this time that something sparked in me that I needed to seek help. It took hitting my absolute lowest—the end of a relationship, the time when I felt the least confident in myself and my abilities, and the result of inadvertently severing my bonds with my closest friends—to reach my turning point.

As a sophomore the previous year I had done an online search and discovered that the University of Texas offered stuttering therapy. I had speech therapy as a child and had nothing against the profession, but I never mustered the will to give them a call. Somehow I felt the call would be a display of weakness, the ultimate admission I was "broken" and couldn't deal with my problem on my own. Seeking help was a resignation or acceptance of failure. I wasn't ready to face all this, and so I put off getting help for an entire school year.

When I did reach out to the clinic a year later, I can remember stuttering massively through the entire initial phone evaluation. I managed to make an appointment, and I was hopeful to find someone who would "fix" me.

I think my idea when I started speech therapy was that I would learn to speak fluently, and all my problems would be solved. My graduate student clinicians had a plan that stressed another important side of recovery: to help me realize my stuttering probably couldn't be eliminated, but that I could be okay with this. They told me I could acquire tools to manage my stuttering, achieve all my goals, and be happy.

I wasn't ready to be open about how stuttering affected the way I felt about myself, or to be honest with myself about how it was holding me back in college. My clinicians helped me in two ways: First, they made me feel comfortable to voice my apprehensions and concerns. Second, about a month into therapy, they encouraged me to become involved with the National Stuttering Association.

My first NSA meeting was the Austin chapter's annual open house, and I remember anxiously taking a seat in the back row. I recognized a few faces from the clinic, but I was still not used to openly associating with stuttering. The handful of fears and nerves I had quickly disappeared when the meeting started. I couldn't help but feel an instant connection with everyone in the room. When I attended my first regular meeting the following month, I was amazed by the opportunity we all had to share similar experiences, even though I was too reserved at my first meeting to share more than an introduction. The NSA left a hugely positive impression on me, and I remained active in the local chapter throughout the rest of college and as I progressed in speech therapy.

I am a very self-motivated person, and I worked hard when I was outside of speech therapy to master my techniques and speaking assignments. But the harder work was realizing that I would never be comfortable in everyday life if I didn't come to accept myself as a person who stutters first. I realized that the root of my pain didn't come from the physical action of being caught in a block, but rather my lifelong fears that people would judge my character based on my stutter.

I knew from past speech therapy that I could learn fluency techniques and master them inside the clinic, but transferring those skills out into the real world where I was under pressure was a different story. In speech therapy my sessions were split between learning fluency shaping techniques and practicing speaking exercises that seemed less conventional and pushed me out of my comfort zone. For example, I was told to "voluntary stutter" to random people I met on the street. These interactions would vary from asking for directions to discussions about current events, all while purposely blocking. Sometimes I would also "advertise" that I am a person who stutters to these same strangers.

The more I came out of my comfort zone in speech therapy, the more I became okay with the label *stutterer.* When I confronted speaking situations I had avoided before, I noticed that people weren't laughing or mocking me; they were patient, and they gave me the opportunity to say what I wanted to say.

At NSA meetings I shared my gains and took encouragement from other members. Interactions with my fellow stutterers in the NSA reinforced the point that acceptance of stuttering is more important than fluency.

Acceptance of my stutter allowed me to reconnect with the great group of friends I had made in college. I had damaged these relationships, but as a result of therapy, I began the process of restoring broken connections. I was finally able to enjoy my college experience and my life in general. I'll never forget one of my closest friends pointing out the changes I made. "Everyone was worried about you, and we didn't know how to help you. But now you seem a lot more like yourself." This was a reminder to me of how amazing my friends are, and also helped me realize how my seclusion was hurting those around me.

I attended the Austin NSA chapter's open house exactly a year after my first meeting, and this time I volunteered to be a panelist. I shared my journey and the changes that I had made during the last year with about eighty-five people in attendance. I also facilitated a special meeting of the adult chapter in which I offered advice to other stutterers on job interviews and achieving career success.

I shared with fellow stutterers my experience interviewing for an internship I landed with a financial services firm. This role had me assisting with the financial statements of the firm's four largest clients, and gave me the opportunity to interact and travel with company executives. It also led to an offer for my first full-time job after college.

I knew interviews were not to be taken lightly, but when I went in to interview for this position, I was poised, eager to show my knowledge and abilities to my employers and confident I could communicate what I wanted to say with my stutter. One of the interviewers asked me a question I had been asked before and knew to expect, but didn't know how to answer when I was a college freshman. I was asked to describe my greatest strength.

I told him that my greatest strength is that I stutter.

"Can you elaborate a little bit more?"

His look was slightly perplexed, but he was interested in what I had to say.

"Sure." I said. "Living with a stutter is a daily struggle. Activities that others don't think about, such as ordering food at a restaurant, talking on the phone, and speaking up in class are all things that have been a challenge for me throughout my life. This means that every single day I am overcoming challenges, and I believe that I am a stronger person because of it."

Originally from the Philippines, SAM CHRISTIAN ANTONIO *grew up in Texas and graduated as valedictorian of McAllen High School in the Rio Grande Valley in 2009. He completed the five-year integrated business and accounting masters program at the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas at Austin in 2014, and received an offer for his first full-time job out of college at the Austin office of BDO USA, LLP, a financial services firm where he interned in college.*

CHAPTER 7

Get Ready to Be Regaled

Armaan Babai-Pirouz

HAVE YOU EVER MET A WITTY, gregarious person who just cannot speak sometimes? No? Does such a person sound fictional? Allow me to introduce myself. I can be charming, clever, and know very funny jokes that wow my listeners, but sometimes my stutter stops me from getting a word out.

Admitting I stutter means that I identify with a condition that affects my ability to communicate and affects my self-confidence, that I've accepted stuttering as a part of who I am, and feel secure enough to admit it. I had to reach a turning point to be emotionally and mentally prepared to type and say those words. Accepting my stutter is only one step in the right direction because stuttering is not the only challenge I contend with in my life.

As far back as I can remember, I have lived with cerebral palsy, a neuromuscular disorder that affects my balance, my gait, and my fine motor skills. It is the reason I cannot tie my shoelaces, why I type and write slowly, and why I use arm crutches and a wheelchair to move.

Living with this disease makes me aware I am different from other people, and that, rightly or wrongly, the ways in which the world perceives me are very important. A big part of that perception has been my voice: and unlike other authors in this collection, I did not always stutter.

As a boy growing up in the 1980s, I once gave a speech to my class about life in East Germany. I spoke so well that later that day in the cafeteria, the principal congratulated me, saying I could be a radio announcer. In my elementary school classes, I would tell stories that were so entertaining and popular that eventually teachers of other classes would ask my teachers to excuse me to visit their classes and tell stories *I made up on the spot.* The message was clear: my voice could make me popular, could make people like me, could make me less of an outsider. My voice was the only normal thing about me, or so I thought.

Living with cerebral palsy also meant that hospitals became my second homes for long periods throughout my childhood as I required corrective surgeries on my legs and feet. This—in addition to my family relocating to different states as my father got new jobs—translated to missing much of the school year; I missed enough that my father and mother chose to remove me from the school system and homeschool me. The homeschooling lasted until I was fifteen; at that age, my family and I decided that there would be no more corrective surgeries and that I needed to return to public school. My family was living in northern California at the time, and I enrolled in high school there.

Popularity is currency in high school, and I did not have much of it. I always felt excluded because I used forearm crutches and a wheelchair, and most other high school students I knew or saw did not, so I became the class comedian. If I could make people laugh with my words, I did so whenever possible. If I could impress my teachers with them, I would.

Then, for reasons I do not understand, I began to stutter during my senior year of high school. Sometimes I would stutter in such a way that nothing would come out of my mouth except raspy sounds as I struggled to form the syllables of the words I wanted to say. This would not occur all the time, but still with enough frequency that my teachers recognized a problem. I began to stutter over the telephone. My high school special education teachers put me in a speech therapy class.

In speech class I was exposed to therapy techniques such as the easy onset, in which I let the syllables flow easily out of my mouth on currents of air exhaled from my lungs. I use the word *exposed* and not *learned* because at the time, I did not take the techniques or the stutter seriously. Sure, I stuttered over the telephone, but not all the time. And I did not stutter when speaking face-to-face with anyone. Besides, as a teenager who had no extracurricular activities, no friends beyond the walls of school, and who could not afford a cell phone or pager, how often would I really need to speak to someone over the phone? If a teacher needed to speak to me, my mom usually was the spokesperson.

At this time, I was in denial that the stutter was even a problem. Then one day while talking on the telephone with my grandfather, my speech blocked so intensely that it became painful to say anything, and after a short while I handed the telephone to my dad and went to my room, my throat burning from the strain of trying to push the words out. In that moment I feared I would not be able to communicate with my closest family members. That depressed me: as a former lawyer, former military general in the Iranian monarchy, and current amateur artist, my grandfather is one of the most accomplished people I know, and his opinion of me has always been important in my mind.

The pain of that episode mentally prepared me for what would become a turning point: it impressed upon me that this stutter was not

something I could just live with; either I had to do something about it, or it would do something about me—namely, gradually change my personality into a painfully shy and awkward introvert who purposely avoids social interactions and situations (and the employment opportunities requiring them). And in fact I was so depressed after that phone call with my grandfather that I did not want to talk to anyone.

As I entered college my stuttering worsened considerably. In English (my favorites class), I would be sharing my opinion about a topic, and suddenly my voice would stop. The times during class when I stuttered, especially mid-sentence or phrase, were dreadful. The room would go mute, with everyone waiting for me to complete my thought and not wanting to interrupt while I sat hoping and praying someone would interrupt to take the attention away from me.

I began to feel that my stutter changed my peers' perception of me. This sense is part of being a person with disabilities in a world made by and for people without them. You are always reminded, in ways large and small, that your disabilities make you an outsider.

To overcome the awkwardness in class I enrolled in a course on public speaking as an elective. My thinking was that the professor might know something about stuttering and might be able to point me in the direction of fluency resources, or even give me speech and language aid during office hours. It turned out that the professor had in fact taken courses in speech-language pathology to earn her degree, and that no, she could not give me any help with my stutter. So at that moment I became a person who stutters (often severely when I became nervous) who was also enrolled in a course that required standing before thirty or more of my peers to speak. During one speech I stood before the class and became so nervous that midway through it no words left my mouth—just noise: I had entered a BLOCK. The other students said

nothing, waiting patiently for me to continue.

All I wanted in that moment was for someone to say something, anything! *Finish a sentence for me, ask a question; break the awkward, patient silence. Please.* This block lasted for so long that my professor asked a male student to go up behind me and massage my shoulders to relax my muscles enough for sound to come out. I wanted to scream my objection to this plan but couldn't. The plan went on: I finished my speech. The content of the speech has escaped me; the embarrassment I felt that day has not.

By the time I had graduated college, my stutter was a barrier to many of my aspirations, particularly passing a job interview. My stutter had worsened to the point that speaking for long stretches physically exhausted me. I had to choose between work that required talking most of the time or work that required as little talking as possible. Guess which choice I made to my employment counselor.

Two jobs that the counselor researched fit the bill: I could be a proofreader and communicate with a red-felt pen instead of my mouth; or I could be a technical writer and spend all day typing out instructions for manuals. The only thing my mind heard when he described those two jobs was *boredom, tedious, soul-crushing boredom*. The eight-year-old radio announcer who reported on East Germany would've burst into tears if he heard me say yes to either choice, stutter be damned. The class clown I was in high school would've given me a wedgie. Therefore I felt relieved when he said the first thing I needed to do before making an employment decision was to bring my stutter under control.

When I met my speech-language pathologist, Jamie Putnam, in the waiting room of Capital Area Speech in Austin, I spent almost a minute trying to say one word: *Hello.*

"If you can communicate with a block or a stutter, it isn't a prob-

lem," she said. That blew my mind. Everyone expects fluent speech, don't they? I surely did. And fluency means no stutter, doesn't it? It always had in my mind. Jamie taught me a different meaning of fluency: if words are uttered and understood, even through blocks or lisps or stutters, then the speaker is communicating effectively. I will forever be grateful for that lesson: it prepared me to think differently about my stutter, to see it not as something to be erased, but managed.

That change in perception was a turning point for me—not a big one, but a small one that would change my life as a ripple changes still water. Jamie and her staff taught me management techniques like using an easy onset or a cancellation, but thinking differently about stuttering is, in my opinion, the greatest lesson they taught me. In the years since they imparted that wisdom to me, remembering it has given me the comfort to disclose to total strangers that I stutter, usually as the first thing I say—it has been liberating.

The other thing for which I am grateful to Jamie Putnam—my next turning point—was getting me out of my comfort zone by encouraging me to join a support group in Austin called the National Stuttering Association. When Jamie suggested I attend an NSA meeting, I was terrified. Me, speaking to a room full of strangers when I hated talking on the telephone? I especially hated go-around-in-a-circle introductions; they always made me stutter. No way. Jamie insisted it would be a good thing for me to attend. She must have expected that I would resist actually going to a meeting, because she suggested the chapter leader, Mona Behnaz Maali, also reach out to me.

Behnaz sent me an e-mail message, but I did not respond right away. Then she added me as a Facebook friend. In subsequent e-mails she even offered to pick me up and drive me to the meeting if I had no ride. Her persistence paid off, and I am thankful for it. Behnaz's

friendship puts me at ease about my stutter. It doesn't matter whether I stutter around Behnaz because she also stutters, and every emotion that has ever raced through my head when I stutter—anger, anxiety, embarrassment, fear, frustration—has raced through hers; she understands what I experience in ways that someone who does not stutter simply cannot.

The NSA, and my friendships with Jamie and Behnaz inspired me to continue speech therapy during graduate school, this time at UT under the compassionate and dedicated leadership of Dr. Courtney Byrd; and that inspired me to take a job where I speak all day long on the telephone and in person to providers of group homes for people with disabilities. Accepting that not being 100 percent fluent is okay definitely gives me the confidence and the courage to continue with those difficult conversations that all people who stutter experience sooner or later: the ones that so embarrass and frustrate me that I feel like never answering a ringing telephone ever again.

I cannot thank all of my friends within the NSA enough for the changes they have made in my outlook about my stutter. The best example I can provide comes from fellow NSA member and volume contributor John Moore (Chapter 1). At chapter meetings John shared something that life taught him as a person who stutters—that sometimes you just have to shut up and talk. A paradox, yes, but also a profound truth: no matter how self-conscious I feel about my stutter, no matter how much it makes me want to avoid telephones, I have to shut up those doubts and insecurities in my head and talk, even though I will stutter. My job impresses upon me the truth of John's words every day.

Our shared experiences unite the NSA's members. We do not all stutter in the same way, and we don't manage our stutters using the

same techniques, or even at all; but here is the most beautiful thing about the NSA: it's okay. All of it: stuttering, not stuttering, hiding your stutter, switching words whenever you feel a stutter or block about to happen in your speech.

The NSA provides a space for more than just talking about which techniques helped us get through sentences that day, or talking about what it means to be a person who stutters in a world full of people who do not. These meetings allow all of us to be free from criticism and judgment and misconceptions about why we stutter, and that is awesome. Joining the NSA was my most significant turning point because I finally have found a place where my stutter may be the most normal thing about me. As it says in the NSA's opening statement: " . . . you are not alone."

ARMAAN BABAI-PIROUZ *was born in Austin, but grew up in Georgia, North Carolina, Missouri, Minnesota, Kansas, and California. In 2002, he returned to Austin with his family to begin college. Armaan graduated summa cum laude from Huston-Tillotson University, where he studied English. He earned a master's degree in education with a specialization in rehabilitation counseling from the University of Texas at Austin in 2012. He is now a relief service coordinator for Austin Travis County Integral Care, a nonprofit organization that provides houses and community care for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities.*

Benny Abolmaali

Top, At the NSA Austin Chapter's third annual open house, panel members *left to right*: Sam Antonio, Karen Krajcer, Dr. Geoff Coalson, and Ryan McDermott. *Bottom,* Mona Maali leads a regular chapter meeting.

Rolando Sepulveda

Rolando Sepulveda

For those like myself who grew up in Austin with stuttering, our lives were marked by a longterm sense of having no place to turn, nowhere to go for validation and understanding of what we were going through. This is what makes what we do so important. This is the commitment—to just be there each month, so that there never again is a situation where a person who stutters or a family member does not have somewhere to go.

MONA MAALI, writer and NSA leader

Benny Abolmaali

Speaking is the thing that has challenged me all my life, and yet I have picked a career that frequently requires speaking under pressure . . . I have made sure to become skilled at every aspect of broadcasting, so that if I do stutter during an interview, others will see how much I have to offer.

TESSA ANDRADE, student journalist

Maureen Megan

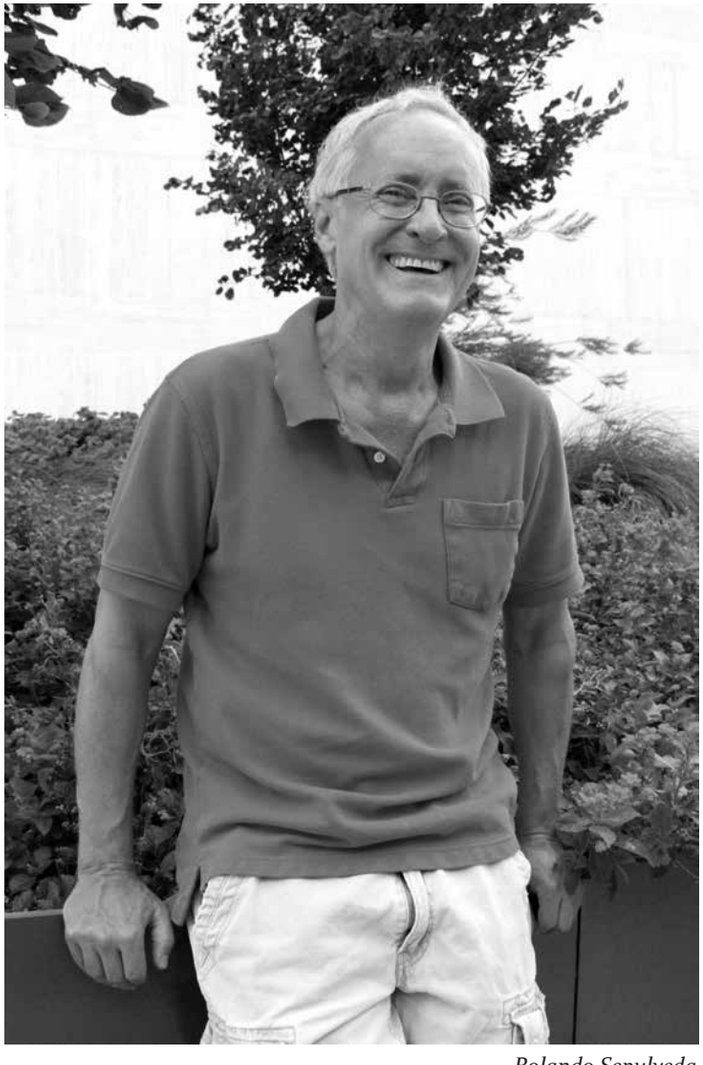
Along my journey, I, like other stutterers, experienced a turning point. Put simply, my turning point made me realize avoidance isn't the answer; it's the problem. I realized that to stop stuttering, I had to start talking.

JOHN MOORE, professional speaker and marketer

Maria Soscia

Stuttering, with its loneliness and unpredictability, is above all else a disorder of disconnection . . . the physiological disconnection produces in time a more sinister emotional and social disconnection.

EVAN USLER, scientist, student, and person who stutters



Rolando Sepulveda

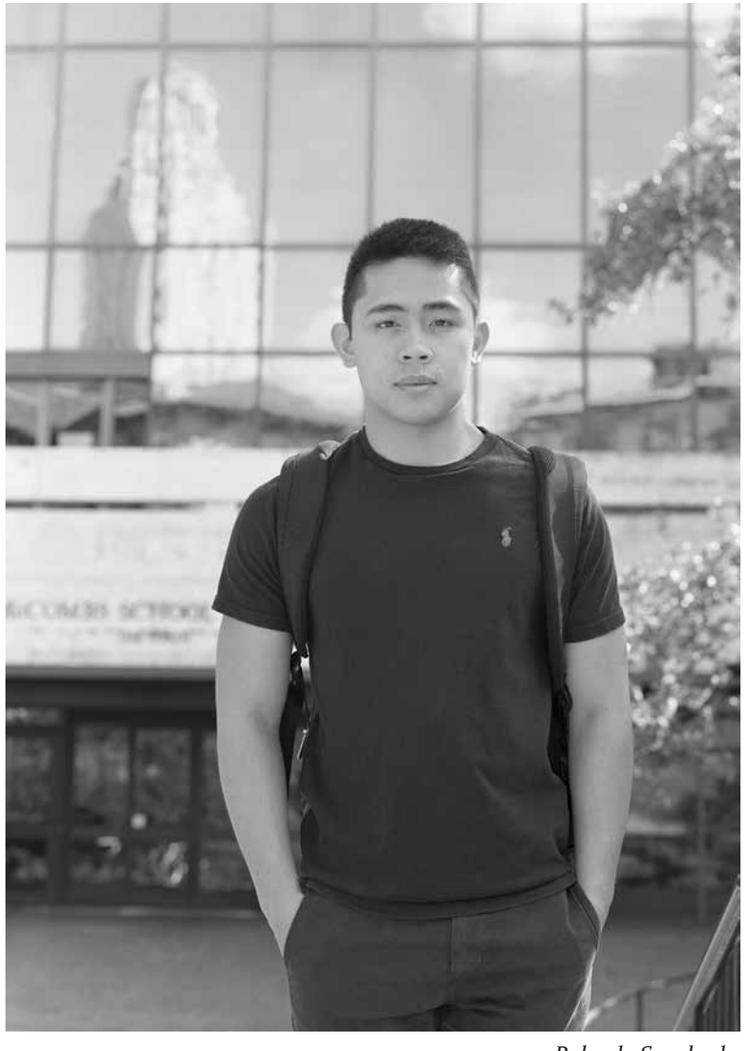
Stuttering, at least severe stuttering (I am not talking about the lovable Jimmy Stewart or Marilyn Monroe version, or my own stuttering as it's been for the last few decades) profoundly stigmatizes; it gave me a damaged identity, at least in the eyes of others, if not my own.

DR. LINDSAY HALE, anthropologist and professor

Chris Krajcer

My chest and throat are where I can literally feel the block, before the word even enters my mouth. Here is also where shame sat, right on top of my heart and lungs.

KAREN KRAJCER, writer and teacher



Rolando Sepulveda

I am a very self-motivated person, and I worked hard when I was outside of speech therapy to master my techniques and speaking assignments. But the harder work was realizing that I would never be comfortable in everyday life if I didn't come to accept myself as a person who stutters first.

SAM ANTONIO, valedictorian and accountant

Rolando Sepulveda

When I started college, I began to feel my stutter changed my peers' perception of me. This sense is part of being a person with disabilities in a world made by and for people without them. You are always reminded, in ways large and small, that your disabilities make you an outsider.

ARMAAN BABAI-PIROUZ, graduate of the UT master's program in rehabilitation counseling

Cecily Johnson

If Walter wants to use his speech tools, then that's great, but the way he talks is fine. The people around him, especially in our fast-paced society, can benefit from taking a minute to slow down and listen to him finish what he wants to say. It's an opportunity for patience and compassion.

AMY AVERETT, parent

Rolando Sepulveda

Before, my stutter had been my own personal burden, but now I had reached out and received help. I was not alone, and I knew I was in the right place to receive the assistance I so desperately wanted and needed.

HAYDEN LAMBERT, graduate student SLP

Rolando Sepulveda

Being around other people who stutter has helped me realize that it is okay that I stutter. I have accepted that it is a disability like the ones so many other people deal with.

JOY CHANDLER, musician

Rolando Sepulveda

As I attended NSA meetings and worked with clients who stutter, I learned more about stuttering, but I also learned more about myself. I started to realize the importance of listening to each client. What is his or her story? These experiences also taught me to suspend judgment.

DR. FARZAN IRANI, professor and SLP

Rolando Sepulveda

I believe the most crucial component to providing effective therapy is revealed only by interacting and learning from people who stutter—and this is the aspect of stuttering many of my colleagues have missed out on.

MEGANN MCGILL, clinician and researcher

David C. Cox/ the University of Texas

Every clinician who has worked along with me has reported this sentiment: "Working with people who stutter has made me a better person." The gift of helping someone overcome adversity is indescribable. By giving people who stutter a chance to live their lives to the fullest, clinicians, in return, are inspired to live their own lives to the fullest.

DR. COURTNEY BYRD, professor, SLP, and researcher

Travis Tucker

Sometimes I do wonder what my life would be like if I did not have the stutter . . . Would I have my current drive to succeed and willingness and determination to continue to try despite fail after fail? . . . I would not be who I am if I did not stutter. Even though stuttering has not always been easy, I can see that good that has come from it. It has helped make me the woman I am today.

SARA STANLEY, advocate

Kaylee Reardon

We cannot change the way we speak for any appreciable period of time until we become comfortable with the idea that we are more than our stuttering, and that we alone have the power to determine what to do about it. Accepting stuttering does not mean giving up. It is not the end, but rather, the beginning!

DR. LEE REEVES, veterinarian and NSA leader

CHAPTER 8

Playing Through Life: What I Learned As A Parent

Amy Averett

FOR SOME OF THE PARENTS and loved ones of people who stutter who read this book, stuttering is their primary concern. However, for our family, it is only one issue that affects our now twelve-year-old son, Walter. Along our journey in helping our son thrive with his challenges, we have been fortunate to find compassionate support in the form of traditional speech therapy and medical interventions. We have grown as a family and learned to build on our son's natural strengths—his energy, confidence, and sense of humor—even if this led us to an unorthodox approach to dealing with his stuttering. We've learned simply that one of the most important things in life is to play and have fun.

When Walter was two years old, his best friend was a bright, precocious child named Amelia. We noticed that Amelia started having a pronounced stutter when she talked. I pitied the family and thought about how sad it was for them that their bright little girl struggled so much to express herself. Soon, Amelia's stutter resolved itself and she

continued on her way.

Fast-forward a year. Walter began having strange, spaced-out laughing spells. When he had one of these spells during a visit to his pediatrician, the doctor immediately sent us to a hospital for testing. Walter's spells turned out to be seizures, and he was diagnosed with epilepsy. After several harrowing months, we got his seizures under control with medication.

When Walter was four, we noticed that our bright child was starting to show disfluent speech patterns. A friend who is a speech therapist suggested we take him in for a speech and language evaluation. We took him to a private speech therapy practice, and he was diagnosed with stuttering. Walter started speech therapy on a weekly basis. In therapy Walter was introduced to techniques such as using gentle onsets, breath control, and muscle relaxation through games and age-appropriate activities. We were advised to adjust our parenting style to give him more quiet time, to decrease pressure on him to speak, and to slow down our own rate-of-speech. We expected that these techniques would gradually help smooth out his speech and correct the stutter. Walter was a good sport about therapy and seemed to enjoy the sessions, but he often had to be redirected to stay on task. And his stuttering persisted despite the interventions we had taken.

We also wondered what relationship there might be between his stuttering and his epilepsy, and did some research to try to find connections. To be honest though, we took his stuttering in stride. Managing Walter's seizures was our first priority, because these could be life-threatening. We would go long periods with no seizures, and then suddenly they would return—it was a stressful, scary cycle. At the same time, his stutter ebbed and flowed with no predictable pattern.

Walter had a rough transition to kindergarten and was constantly

in trouble for not being able to control his impulses and not following the school program. It was hard to understand how all of his issues might be tied together. We wondered if his challenges were caused by one underlying brain disorder, the side effects of medication, or the cumulative effect of his seizures. It was also possible we were dealing with three unrelated disorders. We constantly worried about our son's long-term prognosis. At the same time, we loved being parents to a very funny, smart, and lively little boy.

Walter was five years old when he began to see a new speech therapist. Lauren McKee is a lovely, sweet young woman who is also a lifelong stutterer. We knew at the time that Lauren is kind and compassionate and highly knowledgeable, but it is only in hindsight that I realize all of the ways she was a godsend for our family. Lauren shared many of her own experiences and frustrations as a stutterer and shared the ways her parents had supported her throughout her years. Walter formed a strong bond with Lauren, which made the weekly commitment to speech therapy easier for all of us. It was valuable to have someone on our team with a singular focus on Walter's speech as we dealt with his other diagnoses. Despite the positive experiences with speech therapy, we didn't see much improvement in Walter's speech. He mastered the speech therapy tools in sessions, but didn't apply them in everyday situations. Walter's stutter ebbed and flowed with very few noticeable patterns or predictors. We knew he was more likely to stutter when he was tired and during major transitions such as the end of the school year, but beyond that, his speech fluctuated widely. Walter was accepted well by his classmates, friends, and teachers, but as he got older, he was more easily embarrassed when other children remarked on his stutter.

When Walter was in third-grade, his seizures came back with a ven-

geance, and it was clear that medication was not going to fully control them. We began to discuss our options with his neurologist and traveled for extensive testing and consultations at hospitals around the country. We ultimately decided on brain surgery to remove the area of Walter's brain that was the focal point of his seizures. Every time we discussed his epilepsy, we also raised the question of his stutter. How were these two things related? What impact would surgery have on his stutter? I secretly crossed my fingers that he would wake up from surgery with smooth, relaxed speech. We shared our concerns with Lauren who suggested that we contact Dr. Courtney Byrd at the University of Texas at Austin, where Lauren had done her graduate work. I wrote Courtney and received the kindest response—that her heart went out to us and that she would do a review of the research to see what she could find. Our own research had always been inconclusive, and unfortunately, so was hers.

Walter's surgery and recovery went great, and we were very happy to find that surgery had the desired impact on his seizures. In the years since his surgery, Walter has only had one or two small seizures, down from ten to twenty episodes a day. Unfortunately, the surgery did not change his stuttering. Parenting Walter has always taken somewhat of a triage approach—seizures were always the highest priority, self-management and behavior came second, and stuttering came third. Now that his seizures were under control and his behavior had improved, we started focusing more on his stuttering and how that might be affecting his quality of life.

One approach that we found very helpful in addressing Walter's stuttering may seem unconventional. A few years ago, a friend and I spontaneously decided to sign up for improvisation classes as a hobby. Improv requires one to create characters and stories on the spot,

with no preconceived ideas or restrictions. It demands full focus on the present moment, and builds the skills of getting out of one's head and focusing on what is going on in one's surroundings. It also encourages risk-taking and feeling comfortable with failure. As one of my improv teachers said, "If you're not failing, you're not taking enough risks." I fell in love with this art form and with the great people within the Austin improv community, and began performing regularly.

Walter has always had a great sense of humor and a love of music. Throughout his childhood, we have spent many hours putting on plays and musicals around the house. He had fun watching my improv shows, so I decided to enroll him in improv and theater classes. Sometimes I second-guessed myself though. I wondered if it would be traumatic for a kid who stutters to have the pressure to speak and perform in front of others. One day I picked Walter up after theater camp, and his stutter was so bad that he could barely get a word out. I asked him if there was a lot of talking at theater camp, and he said, "Mom, there is like two hundred pounds of talking at theater camp." We kept going back. Although he had some stage fright to overcome, he always had fun. We talked about what would happen if he stuttered during a performance, and Walter shrugged and said, "Well, then I stutter during a performance."

During this time, Lauren moved to another city. Dr. Byrd accepted Walter into the stuttering program at the University of Texas, and this is when we learned about the local chapter of the National Stuttering Association. The first time we attended an NSA meeting it happened to be the Austin chapter's annual open house. The evening included a panel discussion with five adults who stutter. It was the first time that I had heard adults who stutter (other than Lauren) talk about their experiences. To be honest, it was an eye-opener for me, and that evening

marked a turning point for our family. I heard from the adults about their negative experiences with speech therapy, how they agonized in class as children while waiting to be called on, and the challenges of interviewing for a job. Walter had been pretty sheltered up to this point, and many of the issues the adults addressed were things that had never occurred to me. I also realized we had dodged some bullets—many people talked about "shutting down" and giving up on trying to express themselves. Walter talked all the time. Even when his stutter was most severe, it never occurred to him to not finish his thought, no matter how long it took.

I left my first NSA meeting amazed by the perseverance and courage of the people I met. I also reflected on why Walter's experiences in his young life were different from those of many of the people we met. The early support of a positive and empathetic speech therapist was huge. The fact that Walter's clinician was also a stutterer gave us tremendous insight as parents. I also realized that the culture of improv in our family had made a big difference. Walter understood that failure was no big deal and that being present and going with his instincts would win the day. The playfulness of our family meant that we didn't take things terribly seriously, and we didn't agonize over being perfect. The fact that we had to deal with Walter's epilepsy early on meant that stuttering was not the end of the world—we were pretty relaxed about it, and I think that took some pressure off.

As I began to make these connections, I wanted to share the lessons of improv with others. When I contacted the leaders of the Austin NSA chapter, I learned that a member of the adult group had already recognized the value of improv and organized a workshop the previous year, which was a huge hit for the chapter. I offered to organize another workshop and planned games and exercises to illustrate the key lessons

of improv. On the day of the workshop, Walter, who was only ten years old at the time, enthusiastically helped me lead a great workshop for the adults. That day was the culmination of the many insights we had gained over the years. The fact that we were ready to reach out to others with what we had learned marked another important turning point for us.

During the time Walter was enrolled in speech therapy at UT, we attended meetings of the Austin NSA family chapter. Walter made friends who stutter, and I found it helpful to share experiences with parents who coped in one way or another with their children's stuttering. The biggest take away from our participation in the NSA has been this—Walter is a stutterer. It's not something that is going to go away, even if he masters his speech tools. I learned from the NSA members how difficult and tiring it is to always use speech techniques, and I realized that it is *his choice* whether he wants to use them or not. This was a big shift for me. I decided that it is not his job to conform his speech to make the people around him more comfortable. If Walter wants to use his speech tools, then that's great, but the way he talks is fine. The people around him, especially in our fast-paced society, can benefit from taking a minute to slow down and listen to him finish what he wants to say. It's an opportunity for patience and compassion. And frankly, Walter doesn't seem to care very much that he stutters.

To be clear, I know that things are harder for Walter because he stutters. He just finished sixth-grade at a new middle school. Around his peers, he alternates between goofiness and keeping to himself and being on the outskirts of a group. I know that he is sometimes intimidated in big social situations and that he occasionally feels anxious. But he also sings "Don't Stop Believin'" in front of his whole school (to thunderous applause!), and he recently stepped up to a microphone to

make an impromptu speech in front of one hundred people.

I know that I won't always be able to protect Walter and control his experiences as he goes out into the world. But I do believe that he feels fine about his stutter and that he understands his choices about how he deals with his speech. For now, we'll keep playing through life and enjoying the fun.

AMY AVERETT *directs events for the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema, an Austin-based chain of movie theaters. She describes her son Walter as a video game-loving, pun-cracking seventh-grader who enjoys playing flag football and building awesome LEGO spaceships. They have two goats, Lenny and Squiggy, and a very crabby dog named Dexter. Amy performs with the award-winning Girls Girls Girls Improvised Musicals, an all-female improv troupe, creating spontaneous full-length, Broadway-style musicals from a single audience suggestion. Amy and Walter can be seen onstage at the Institution Theater in Austin, where Amy's partner, Tom, is artistic director.*

CHAPTER 9

A Place Where I Wasn't Afraid to Speak

Hayden Lambert

TOWARD THE END of my first semester of college, feeling at once surrounded by hordes of people and hopelessly isolated, I decided to call my mom. Of course, I had consistently called home at least once a week since moving into my dorm room at the University of Texas, but I always hid how I truly felt. I hid these feelings behind descriptions of my classes, complaints about lengthy assignments, and sometimes exaggerated tales of what I thought were expected college experiences. In reality, however, I had withdrawn to my room, only venturing out to go to class and occasionally to get something to eat. At the time, I thought my stutter was isolating me, but in reality, I was isolating myself.

When faced with any speaking situation, I was afraid. I was afraid that I would come off as unintelligent because of my stutter; I was afraid that people would wonder how I would ever make it through college if I couldn't even introduce myself; and, most of all, I was afraid of the looks in other people's eyes—first confused, then full of pity—

when I couldn't get my name out.

"My name is . . . My name is . . . My name is . . . " I would repeat this, sometimes five or six times, before I could finally move on to "Hayden," though that too took several attempts to say. Because I dreaded introducing myself to others, I avoided situations where I had to meet new people. Of course, every party, meeting, or orientation required at least some form of introduction, so I stayed home, a captive to my own fear and anxiety.

However, after several months of watching others make friends and have fun, I decided to do something about my disintegrating social life. I decided to come out of hiding and start pursuing the college experience—and the life—I wanted.

So, I did what any mature college freshman faced with the difficulties of semi-adult life would do: I called my mom. I explained how lonely I was feeling and how I felt my stutter had been holding me back. I told her how hard it was to make new friends and how much I missed my close friends from high school, none of whom came with me to university. She offered her support, as most moms would, and outlined my options: I could either stick it out at the University of Texas or transfer to a college closer to my home and friends. Either way, I would have the support of my friends and family. In the end, I decided to stay at UT because I was too stubborn to face the thought of failing at college life, and I didn't want to waste the opportunities for which I had worked so hard.

I had avoided stressful speaking situations in the past, with perfectly timed trips to the bathroom or carefully selected restaurant orders, but this situation seemed larger than anything I had been able to avoid in the past. This decision would determine my future success, and, in my mind, set the precedent for how I would approach my speech from

that moment on. I decided to stay at UT. I decided to confront my fear of stuttering. I decided not to avoid my life. However, I knew if I was going to be successful, I needed help addressing my stutter, so I began looking into therapy options in the Austin area.

Before entering college, I had two previous experiences with speech therapy. The first occurred around the age of five, when my parents began taking me to weekly therapy sessions with a well-respected (and therefore rather pricey) speech-language pathologist (SLP) in our area. While I remember only scattered details of my time there, mainly playing Candy Land and Guess Who? with the SLP, my parents recount feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction with the whole experience. The SLP, probably with the best intentions, focused mainly on my mispronunciation of certain sounds and ignored my stuttering altogether. It was her opinion that my fluency issue would resolve itself over time, and that my articulation problems required more urgent attention. With therapy my articulation did improve, but my stuttering went unaddressed. In the end, after many months of therapy, my parents decided to stop sending me to the SLP and see how my speech developed on its own.

My second experience with speech therapy occurred in the sixth-grade when I began working with an SLP at my school. We worked on fluency shaping techniques, which involved changing my overall speech patterns to reduce the number of disfluencies, but I was very unmotivated to work on my speech at the time. At that point, I had experienced very few negative reactions to my stuttering from my peers and did not see the point of working on my speech. Eventually, I stopped seeing the SLP and moved rather seamlessly into junior high and high school. While these experiences did not provide the "cure" that my parents and I were probably hoping for, they also did not leave

me with any overtly negative feelings toward speech therapy, as some people who stutter (PWS) express. Therefore, in college, when I felt that I might finally benefit from an SLP's assistance, I scheduled an appointment at UT's stuttering clinic with a relatively open mind.

While my first session was a truly daunting experience, having to talk about my stutter with strangers before completing various activities meant to assess my speech, I also felt an extreme sense of relief. Before, my stutter had been my own personal burden, but now I had reached out and received help. I was not alone, and I knew I was in the right place to receive the assistance I so desperately wanted and needed.

Over the course of therapy, my attitude toward my stutter changed significantly. Whereas before I tried everything I could to avoid speaking situations, now I was encouraged to stutter openly. My clinicians showed me that being a person who stutters is nothing to be ashamed of. I even began implementing the technique of "voluntary stuttering" in which I stuttered on purpose in stressful situations to desensitize myself to moments of disfluency. I found this technique especially freeing because it gave me control of my stuttering, something I never could have imagined before therapy.

I thoroughly enjoyed voluntary stuttering at Starbucks, once one of my most dreaded speaking situations. Ordering my soy latte with as many stutters as possible, the smile on the barista's face replaced at first by a look of panic, then a more controlled neutral expression, proved both satisfying and therapeutic. I also appreciated the approach of the student SLPs I worked with. Whereas my previous experiences with SLPs proved unsatisfying and unproductive, the graduate student clinicians working under Dr. Courtney Byrd and Elizabeth Hampton listened to my concerns and addressed the issues I wished to confront. They taught me the value of a qualified and respectful SLP to a person

who stutters and gave me a deep appreciation for the profession.

Empowered by my initial foray into speech therapy and acceptance of my stuttering, I attended my first National Stuttering Association meeting that fall at the urging of my graduate clinicians. My first NSA meeting was the Austin chapter's annual open house. Luckily, once I entered the classroom in which the meeting was held, I spotted some familiar faces from the speech clinic. To my surprise the room was full, mostly with SLPs and student SLPs interested in stuttering, and I was overwhelmed by the show of support and interest. The meeting was a panel discussion, meaning four people who stutter sat up front and answered questions asked by the emcee of the evening, also a person who stutters. I was amazed to see so many people stuttering openly, but I was more interested in the reactions of the audience. Nobody seemed to care how long or how often anyone stuttered, with their full attention always on the speaker. That night, I heard so many different stories, from people of various backgrounds and experiences, and each and every one of them had an impact on me. The most exciting aspect of the open house was that I had finally found a place, out of all the other student organizations I had participated in on campus, where I wasn't afraid to speak. I stuttered openly, and nobody seemed to mind.

I attended my first NSA Annual Conference in Fort Worth, Texas. While the local chapter meetings made me feel at home in Austin, the national conference made me part of an international community of people who stutter. At the conference, I made many great friends, stayed up late drinking free Shirley Temples (I was only nineteen at the time, so I had to stick to virgin drinks!), ordered whatever I wanted the whole trip, and even had a very interesting clubbing experience, which I won't go into here. While the workshops and planned events at the conference were extremely interesting and rewarding, I found the un-

planned interactions with others to be the most meaningful part of my trip. I remember staying up late the last night of the conference. The dance party after the banquet had just ended, and everyone was just hanging out in the hotel. Some people were sitting in groups sharing funny stories, others were wandering around looking for something to eat or drink, and an intrepid few were busy competing in various sporting activities using balloons left over from the night's festivities. It was this night, before the emotional goodbyes of the next morning, when I felt the most camaraderie with everyone at the conference. We had spent almost a week together and had formed bonds different from any we ever had before. Our stuttering had brought us together, but our shared experiences at the NSA conference bound us into a network of support we could rely on from that moment on. I think this network of support is the most valuable benefit the NSA offers. My experiences at the conference changed my life for the better, and I wouldn't trade those four days for anything.

My experiences within the NSA and speech therapy also inspired a change in career paths. Although I started college as an English major, I changed my major to speech-language pathology almost immediately after returning from my first NSA conference. At first, I, like many other PWS who take this path, felt some trepidation about pursuing a career in this field because I have a speech impediment myself. While I knew that many others who stutter become SLPs, I always assumed it required achieving a certain level of almost-perfect fluency. Therefore, I was afraid that my stuttering would somehow undermine my ability to perform in the field. *Would a person who stutters doubt my ability to help them achieve their speech goals? Would parents of a child who stutters question my ability to help their child? Would others expect me to have near-perfect fluency as an SLP?* I assumed the answer to each of these

questions was almost certainly yes.

Faced with these insecurities about my new career path, I made this a discussion topic at one of our Austin NSA chapter meetings. I received some of the best advice I have heard on this issue from Dr. Geoff Coalson, a fellow stutterer who is now an SLP and professor. Geoff recounted a moment early in his career when he began working with a child who stuttered. Initially the child's father did not react positively to Geoff's own stutter, but he came to greatly respect Geoff's work as an SLP after seeing the positive impact of therapy on his daughter. Through this and other similar examples, Geoff helped me to understand how the personal experience of stuttering (something I surely have!) can translate into becoming a more effective and understanding SLP.

The national NSA community has also been a continuous source of reassurance and support on my journey to become an SLP. At my second NSA conference in Scottsdale, Arizona, I spoke with several PWS who work as SLPs and student SLPs in a variety of placements, including Rivky Susskind, an SLP working at a Brooklyn charter school, which currently includes grades six through twelve; Josh Anderson, a student SLP who works mainly with bilingual students in need of articulation, language, and fluency therapy; and many more SLPs and student SLPs who stutter. Their stories, advice, and support renewed my enthusiasm for the field and quelled any remaining doubts I had about my career path.

I am excited to attend graduate school and pursue a career working with people who stutter and other individuals in need of speech and language therapy. I feel strongly called to work in the field, and I hope I can have the same effect on the lives of others that both the NSA and UT's stuttering program have had on mine.

While my turning point was an extremely difficult part of my life—hitting rock bottom at the beginning of my college career and isolating myself from everything and everyone because of my stutter—it eventually set me on the path to receive the help I needed to change my life. My advice to others in similar situations is to seek out any help you can find. Whether it comes in the form of an organization like the NSA, speech therapy, or advice from a counselor or friend, seeking help is the first step you can take to actively improve your quality of life. Because of my decision to reach out to others, I have gained confidence as a speaker, met many new friends, and found a meaningful career path.

Admitting you need help is extremely difficult, but it is an essential component to overcoming your negative attitude toward your stutter and gaining the skills necessary to be *a successful, happy, and confident person, who just so happens to stutter sometimes.*

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CHAPTER 10

My Talent of Stuttering

Sara Stanley

MY VIEWS ABOUT STUTTERING have changed throughout my life. I began stuttering at the age of nine, and it honestly wasn't a big deal to me. The repetitions, blocks, hard onsets, and secondary behaviors were just the norm for me. However, those around me had different views about my speech: to them, stuttering was a problem that needed to be fixed.

The need to have perfect speech and the idea that stuttering was a deficit hung over my head and caused me to stutter even more. It was hard for my family to see me struggle to communicate when they felt powerless to help me. Now when I look back, I realize my family and I were targeting the wrong thing. My parents, like many parents, did not completely understand the factors that affected my speech. They saw the overt deficiency and tried to fix it. As a child, I did not understand these factors either. As I have grown up, I have developed a much better understanding of my stutter. Now, I can see my speech issue from a more objective point of view and am able to advocate for myself.

Sometimes I do wonder what my life would be like if I did not have the stutter. Would I be a different person and, if so, how? Would I have my current drive to succeed and willingness and determination to continue to try despite failure after failure? Would I be as compassionate and empathetic toward others who have a disability? Would I still be creative and imaginative? I would not be who I am if I did not stutter. Even though stuttering has not been easy, I can see the good that has come from it. It has helped make me the woman I am today.

Throughout my life, I have always been told by family, teachers, and supervisors that I have a lot to offer the world. I have a caring heart, am empathetic, creative, and have a strong drive to succeed. I am also patient and able to forgive people. When I entered college, I chose to study psychology. However, I have faced obstacles because of my stuttering. At the end of one of my internships in undergrad, my supervisor told me that because I stutter I might have a hard time communicating with colleagues and clients. In graduate school, these same concerns were brought to my attention again. As a result, my family became nervous and worried that people would not move past my stutter and see my potential.

I have been in speech therapy throughout my life. As a child, I was in therapy to address my problems with phonological awareness related to dyslexia, which became apparent when I was six. I didn't begin therapy for my stuttering until I was a teenager. For about a year, I worked with a speech pathologist who was contracted by my high school. She knew some fluency techniques and shared those with me, but stuttering was not her area of specialization. Nevertheless, I connected with her, and I really did feel that she cared and wanted to help.

I have gone through two intensive speech therapy programs for my stutter. I went to the first one when I was in college. The program was

two weeks long, and that was how my fish Genevieve and I spent our spring break. My mom and dad each came for a week so I wouldn't be in a strange place by myself.

I was always resistant to go to therapy for my stuttering, so it is hard to say if I wanted to go to the first intensive program, or if I went to make my family happy. I was nervous about this program, and didn't know what I should expect. During the program I sat at a computer for ten days and learned to slow down, to re-speak, and to monitor my vocal folds when I talked. I learned fluency techniques, including using a full-breath and stretched-syllables and exaggerating my sounds. I remember a lot of frustrating interactions with my computer. I spent many more hours in a cubicle with a computer than I spent with other therapy participants or my clinicians. However, the therapy did turn out to be a success: after two weeks, I was stutter-free.

Everyone in my family was amazed by my speech. Even my grandma who never gives compliments told my mom how much my speech had improved. My professors also gave me compliments about my speech. Everyone thought that this program was the cure, and I did, too. For the first time in my life, I had fluent speech.

I was stutter-free for a long time. However, I did not keep up with practicing the techniques that I learned at the therapy program. School, work, and other pressures began to overwhelm me, and unfortunately, my speech techniques went on the back burner. When I would call to check in with my clinician from the program, it was as if my speech knew to shape up and sound right. All my techniques came back to me in those conversations. My clinician would give me valuable advice about how to remember to use my techniques out in the real world.

When I started graduate school I still had struggles with my speech, and as I progressed in my studies, various pressures caused my stutter

to worsen. I had lots of repetitions and many secondary behaviors. In graduate school, my classmates and I were given the option to attend therapy sessions so we could gain the perspective of our clients. During one of the sessions, my counselor suggested to me that my stutter could actually be an asset and help create a working relationship with clients. I hope, however, that I have sufficient rapport-building skills that allow my clients to feel comfortable talking to me without needing to use my stuttering as a bridge. I also hope that my stuttering will not be off-putting or make clients feel that I would be an inadequate counselor.

I attended my second intensive program five years after the first program. Again, I was apprehensive about what was in store for me with this program. The first program had been intensive, and I did not gain a firm grasp of the techniques. I did not want that to happen again. I knew from talking to the director of the program that we would work as a group in the morning, and then I would go on speaking assignments out in public. There would be no computer work, and I would work primarily with the clinician assigned to me. This program was customized for each participant based on our individual needs. I began working with my clinician about a month before the program started so we could get to know each other.

What was unique about this program is that during the entire first week we focused on attitudes, beliefs, and feelings, and acceptance of our stuttering. It was not until the second week that we began to use the techniques we had learned out in public. The days went by fast. There were times I struggled with going up to people and asking them questions and voluntarily stuttering. This speech program was very different from my first intensive program. At the very first session, we were told that we should neither expect nor hope that the goal of therapy is to become stutter-free communicators. This type of reinforcement was very beneficial because it freed me of the pressures to have perfect speech.

Looking back at the two intensive therapy programs that I have attended, I can say that both have been beneficial, but my turning point came with the second program. This was when learned to accept my stuttering. I also learned how to talk to my family so they would not feel that my speech was something that needed to be fixed. I was able to rebuild the sense of self-worth that was damaged during my time in graduate school. At the end of school, I was able to respond when a potential employer questioned my ability to communicate with clients. I talked to her about stuttering by being informative rather than defensive.

In the first program I gained an awareness of what happens when I talk, and I did improve my speech. I was able to identify and monitor my speech, and I learned valuable techniques that built on what I learned in high school. However, the one important element that the second program had was an emphasis on acceptance of my stuttering. I learned that I can stutter and still be a productive and successful individual.

When I returned from the second therapy program there was a change in me, and my family could see that change. I think they now have a better understanding of my stuttering and how I'm affected by it. It did take them some warming up to my newfound acceptance of stuttering; my whole life they have wanted to be the healers and have tried to fix my stuttering. When the diagnosis came back that my stuttering would not be cured, it was hard for them to understand. I have had to hold my ground and stand up for myself, but most of the time I see their words as caring statements from people who are only trying to help.

One of the techniques that is still difficult for me to use is voluntary stuttering. I know friends and family are trying to encourage me when they tell me that my speech has improved or that I am talking well, but really the opposite effect occurs. I feel disappointed in myself and feel that I am not accepted when I do stutter.

My mom once told me that when I was a child it was very difficult for her to watch me talk and see people's reactions. As a way to protect me, she would start to talk for me so I would not get strange looks or negative reactions from listeners. The strange looks stopped; however, as I grew up I didn't have opportunities to speak for myself. When I became an adult and people would ask me questions, my mom would still answer for me, and I would be in the background smiling. Friends and strangers would limit their questions. I am glad that when I became an adult, my mom told me about the struggles she had with my speech, and we have been able to work on it; she now holds back, so when people ask me questions, I answer them myself.

To conclude, one Sunday the priest gave a sermon on Mathew 25:15, The Parable of the Talents. The Parable in an abbreviated version can best be explained this way: one servant is given five talents, the next servant is given two talents, and the last servant is given one talent. The first two servants go out and multiply their talents; this makes the master happy and pleased. The third servant buries his talent and then gives it back to his master; this angers the master, because the servant was lazy and did not try to multiply his talent. I consider my stuttering a talent that I was given by God. I can be unhappy and discouraged by this talent, or even view it as a hassle, or I can see my talent as an opportunity. Coping with my talent of stuttering is not going to be easy; however, with persistence, trial and error, and determination to defeat obstacles, I hope to multiply my talent of stuttering. I hope to

use this talent to help educate, advocate, and ensure just practices for those who stutter or have another disability.

My faith in God has helped me get through struggles I've faced because of my stuttering. If God had not given my mom a caring heart and made her persistent about me going to my second intensive program, I would not have learned about acceptance. I would not have known how to stand up for myself when a past interviewer made comments regarding my stutter and questioned whether I could be an effective employee. I also would not have found the support of the NSA if clinicians from my second intensive program had not told me about it. They say God works in mysterious ways, and He does. I did not want to go to my second intensive program, but it turned out to be one of the most beneficial things I have done.

SARA STANLEY *lives in Lorena, Texas. She graduated from University of the Ozarks in Clarksville, Arkansas, where she obtained her BS in psychology with a minor in early childhood education. She obtained her master's in academic specialization in counseling psychology from University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton, Texas. She has had various clinical experiences with diverse clientele from children and adolescents to adults. She volunteers with various organizations, including Care Net Pregnancy Center for Women, and through her church, St. Louis Catholic. She enjoys traveling and spending time with friends, family, and her pets.*

CHAPTER 11

Joy's Song

Joy Chandler

AS I LOOK BACK over my seventy-six years, there have been many factors that have helped me to accept and cope with my stuttering. I have been through a number of periods of change that have brought me to the place I am at now. Some of the choices I made in my life were my reaction to the emotional pain of stuttering; other changes simply came with growing older.

I thank God all the time that He gave me the gift of music. I began stuttering when I was knee-high, but I also sang from the time I was knee-high. And of course, I could sing without stuttering. I usually did not have to introduce myself to people, because they knew me as a singer. Both of my parents were musicians, and I have many good childhood memories of my mother organizing my siblings and me as a traveling singing trio. Our family even had a radio show on which the trio sang often.

My father was a minister, and when I was six we moved from Peoria, Illinois to Pensacola, Florida, where he accepted a church position; that

is where I grew up. I have been married to a musician for fifty-three years, and together we moved around the country quite a bit to study, make music, establish our careers, and have a family. We raised three fine children, and now we are enjoying our grandchildren.

In my growing up, my father was always very hard on me because of my stuttering. He would most always get on me when I stuttered. I remember that every time I tried to talk to him and stuttered, he would say, "Stop that." Of course that did not help; in fact, it made it even harder for me to speak, and as a result, I avoided my father as much as possible. He was actually hard on all of us, including our mother, but perhaps because of my stuttering it had a more devastating effect on me.

My mother and sisters and brother were very patient and understanding with me. I remember that someone in my family would always order for me in restaurants. I avoided the phone entirely, never answering calls or making calls, and also avoided making all oral reports in school.

There was no speech therapy available when I was a child, so my speech never improved. My stuttering affected my self-confidence throughout my childhood, but that didn't stop me from smiling. I was voted "Friendliest Girl" in high school. I would smile and say, "Hi. How are you?" to everyone; in fact, I still do. I was also voted "Most Talented Girl." Because I had such a difficult time talking, I compensated by working harder in other areas such as school and made higher grades than any of my siblings. I graduated third in my high school class.

I attended a two-year college in Pensacola where I was voted "Most Talented Girl" again, was one of five "Beauty Queens," believe it or not, and then was voted "Miss Christmas." I imagine this was because

I sang a lot in front of large audiences. I transferred to Samford University in Birmingham for my last two years of study where I majored in voice and minored in piano. That is where I met my husband, Glenn, who was also a music major.

I think Glenn and I helped each other. He accepted me for who I am. He has a great sense of humor and made me laugh, which I needed because I tended to take everything too seriously. I studied hard, whereas he tended to study just enough to get by, and so I was able to encourage him to study more and improve his grades. We were married the summer before our senior year, and our first child arrived the year after we graduated.

Many of my friends in college went on to become music teachers. Because I stuttered I never thought I could be a teacher. Stuttering did hold me back from doing a lot of things, but I persevered and finished a degree in sacred music. As I look back, I don't think I was ever really interested in teaching anyway.

My stuttering became worse around the time our second son was born. I think it was because of the stress of having two young boys just two years apart in age, and for me, stress tends to make my speech worse. However, I fondly recall lying down with my boys every afternoon at naptime and reading books to them. This was good for them, and very good for me. We had our third child, our daughter, as Glenn was finishing his doctorate at Indiana University. (I guess my influence on getting him to concentrate on his studies worked very well.) I stuttered with my children of course, but they were always very patient with me.

Our oldest son started stuttering at the age of two right after our second son was born. Because of my childhood experiences, my husband and I were very patient and understanding with him. He stopped

stuttering in two or three months and has had no other incidents of stuttering since. (Today he is the spokesman and concertmaster for the Royal Scottish National Orchestra in Glasgow. He is also on TV and radio for the orchestra and is a great speaker.)

As I mentioned, I did not have speech therapy as a child because it was not available. When Glenn was a doctoral student at Indiana University, I worked in the music library, and the speech and hearing clinic was in the building next door. That is where I had speech therapy for the first time at the age of thirty-four. I was enrolled for a couple of years and did find the techniques I learned helpful. Perhaps because I was older I was more receptive to therapy than I would have been earlier in life.

After Glenn completed his doctorate, we moved to Connecticut, and he began his college teaching career. Because I had some experience working in an insurance agency while in high school and college, I was able to get a job as an analyst at the home office of the Hartford Insurance Company. After having studied organ a number of years since finishing college, I served as organist in churches where my husband was choir director. We stayed in Connecticut for more than twenty years.

A few years after moving to Connecticut, I read about a speech therapist in New York who claimed incredible results through intensive therapy. I signed up and spent a week in his clinic but found it did not work for me. I felt the therapy was so intense and stressful and the expectations for fluency so great that I did not improve much at all. Furthermore, I felt the follow-up was insufficient to be helpful. After that experience, I did not have speech therapy for many years.

A real turning point in my life came in my mid-fifties. At this time, my husband became director of the music school at the University of

Memphis, where I learned there was a terrific stuttering program. I enrolled in therapy with Dr. Walter Manning, an internationally renowned speech-language pathologist who used to stutter himself. In my sessions with Dr. Manning, I learned acceptance as well as techniques that were very helpful to me. His methodology was not at all stressful, and it was at this time that I began to improve my fluency. I met other stutterers in group therapy, which I also found to be very helpful. These experiences helped me develop a more positive attitude about my stuttering. As a result of my therapy with Dr. Manning, I reached a milestone in the improvement of my stuttering.

I continued to have ups and downs in my speech over the years, of course. We moved to Austin in 2001 when Glenn was named director of the Butler School of Music at the University of Texas. I soon began speech therapy with a private therapist and attended these sessions for a short time. At this same time, I heard about a medication that helped some people who stutter. I tried it and it improved my fluency significantly. It also helped with my depression and anxiety, which runs in my family. I was president of my ladies club for two years while I was on the medication, and I was also in Toastmasters for several years, which was a great experience for me.

About ten years ago, I began attending meetings of the National Stuttering Association when a young man named Roberto Ruiz started a group in Austin. My experiences in our NSA chapter have been very helpful. Being around other people who stutter has helped me realize that it is okay that I stutter. I have accepted that it is a disability like the ones so many other people deal with. It is very comforting and encouraging to hear other stutterers talk about their experiences and how they handle their speech. Everyone is so supportive of one another. The chapter became inactive for a few years, but fortunately it was

reactivated again by Mona Maali after she graduated college. Under her leadership, we have had many wonderful experiences.

A few years ago I decided to go off the medication that had helped me. Although the medication improved my speech, it had negative side effects on my body and in my life. I gained a lot of weight, and my family members indicated that my personality had changed and that I seemed like a "zombie." I think the support of the NSA members helped me significantly during this time as I became more accepting of my stuttering.

I also returned to speech therapy a few years ago, this time with Dr. Courtney Byrd and Elizabeth Hampton and their graduate clinicians at the University of Texas. I learned so much from them that has helped my stuttering. One of the primary techniques I have learned is the easy onset in which I take a relaxed breath and start to talk as soon as I begin letting out air. I stop if I begin to block, and then resume talking with an easy onset. Another technique is voluntary stuttering, which is quite relaxing and makes me realize that it is okay to stutter. I still have some days when I stutter more than others, but I know this is a normal thing.

I ended speech therapy after a few semesters as was recommended by Dr. Byrd. Near the end of my therapy, I was given a copy of a speech by a man who has stuttered all his life and realized that he always will. But the man realized the things he has accomplished in life far outweigh the fact that he stutters. That speech inspired me but also made me realize that I, too, will probably stutter for the rest of my life. I remind myself that I have learned so much about my stuttering, and I am more comfortable with being a person who stutters than ever before.

I talk on the phone all the time now. I even make some calls for my husband, which is a big change for me. I stay socially active through

my ladies club, where I am a member of a book club and chairperson of a Bunco group where we play at different homes each month. I am responsible for calling each of the members every month to confirm their availability to play Bunco, and calling subs when necessary. In addition to practicing my speech techniques, I exercise every day, which not only helps my body, but also relaxes my mind, and this helps my stuttering.

I would advise those adults who stutter but have never had the opportunity to have speech therapy to start therapy. It is never too late and it does help, as it did in my case. I am quite motivated and still work hard with my speech techniques. I also advise those who stutter to check out the NSA as it is such a wonderful support network.

I talk with fellow stutterers at the NSA meetings about some of the issues that I still struggle with. As I said at the beginning, my father was always very hard on me because of my stuttering. It still hurts.

When I was in my early fifties, I learned from my father's third wife that he used to stutter when he was a child. He never told me before. I'm not sure whether my father outgrew his stuttering or overcame it on his own, but I began to understand why he reacted to my stuttering the way he did. He must have thought that I should be able to overcome my stuttering as he did. But as we know, not all stutterers are able to overcome their stuttering. At least that helped me understand why he was so hard on me. Late in his life, he brought it up. He apologized for passing the stuttering on to me, but he never apologized for the way he treated me. I have forgiven him—as much I can—because I know he was unaware of what he was doing.

The greatest gift my family gave me was the beginning of a lifetime of music. I still keep up voice, piano, and the organ. A few years ago I retired as the organist at my church, but I continue to serve as a substitute in churches as needed. I am fortunate to have a small practice pipe organ in my home and enjoy playing it very much.

Glenn and I passed the gift of music to our children, and they have passed it on to their children. Our house is always the scene of a big happy party during the summer when everyone comes to visit us. Glenn and I travel quite a bit on our own when Glenn is not teaching college and we are not hosting or visiting family—this past summer, we went to Thailand and Singapore after our daughter's wedding.

I still attend NSA meetings every month; in fact, I have seldom missed a meeting over the last several years. I have found something I could never have imagined during the painful years of stuttering throughout my earlier life. The NSA has made me part of a lasting network of support and friendship. I thank God every day for all He has given me.

JOY CHANDLER *was born in Peoria, Illinois in 1938. She lives in Austin with her husband, Glenn Chandler, who served as director of the Butler School of Music at the University of Texas at Austin for eleven years. The couple have two sons and one daughter, all of whom pursued music careers and are married to musicians, and six grandchildren. Joy and Glenn have been married for fifty-three years. "We think it's going to work out," says Glenn.*

SECTION II

Voices of Professionals

CHAPTER 12

Learning From My Clients, The Experts

Megann McGill
MA, CCC-SLP

DURING MY FIRST YEARS as a practicing speech-language pathologist (SLP), my experiences continually remind me how fortunate I have been to be exposed to people who stutter early in my career. When I finished graduate school and began to work in the field, I encountered many colleagues who were reluctant to work with people who stutter because they know so little about the disorder. I recall a coworker telling me once that she did not enjoy treating people who stutter because they are not "fixable."

When I was in school I was lucky to receive classroom instruction on fluency disorders and to attend meetings of the National Stuttering Association—experiences that made me confident in my ability to provide evidence-based therapy to clients who stutter. I consider one of the most vital components of my education to have come from listening to the experts—people who stutter.

Unfortunately, many SLPs leave graduate school without this knowledge, and, in many cases, without meeting a person who stutters.

Since 1993 when the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) removed clinical work in stuttering from its list of requirements for certification, the number of clinicians with knowledge and training in stuttering has continued to decline. Some of my classmates in graduate school may be surprised to learn that many of their colleagues graduated from programs that did not offer a comprehensive course on stuttering.

I have been on a continuing journey to learn about the complex nature of the disorder of stuttering. I have discovered that the true nature of stuttering goes beyond the observable disfluencies and struggles. I believe the most crucial component to providing effective therapy is revealed only by interacting and learning from people who stutter—and this is the aspect of stuttering many of my colleagues have missed out on.

My journey began when I was an undergraduate student in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at the University of Texas at Austin. I stumbled into working at the Dr. Jennifer and Emanuel Bodner Developmental Stuttering Laboratory when Dr. Courtney Byrd was recruiting volunteers to serve as data collectors and student clinicians. I began observing therapy sessions of children and adults who stutter and calculating their speech-rates and disfluencies. At this time, I viewed stuttering through a one-dimensional, data-oriented, black-and-white lens, with headphones and a calculator close-by. I was responsible for speech analysis and asked the following types of questions: How many times did the client stutter in a hundred-word sample? How long were the client's blocks? How many times did the client repeat a sound or syllable? What was the breakdown of stuttering-like disfluencies versus non-stuttering-like disfluencies? My conception of stuttering was a collection of papers with an impersonal set

of numbers attached to the initials of a particular client who had come in for an evaluation. It is this type of perspective that many SLPs are limited to, but fortunately, that's not my relationship with stuttering anymore.

My understanding of stuttering shifted when I became a graduate clinician at the University of Texas. This is when I began to see the whole picture. I was privileged to enroll in a course on fluency disorders taught by Dr. Courtney Byrd, who became my doctoral program mentor. In my graduate coursework, I learned the theoretical models of stuttering, fine-tuned my ability to complete a disfluency analysis, and discovered that stuttering is really, really complex. I became equipped to answer the tough questions that frequently come from adults who stutter, and from parents of children who stutter, questions such as "Did I cause my son's stuttering?" and "Is this happening because he's nervous?"

Dr. Byrd devoted part of class time to her clients as well as NSA members whom she invited to share their personal experiences. She stressed the importance of student clinicians acquiring counseling skills to interact with clients and their families. I learned that people who stutter and their family members may feel apprehensive when they come to see me for an initial evaluation. I also learned that I would be responsible for monitoring how they felt about the therapy process and helping them to be invested in the therapy.

My graduate fluency disorders class was invited to the Austin NSA chapter's inaugural open house, which has become the chapter's largest annual meeting. I remember sitting quietly as a panel of NSA members answered questions from the audience about growing up as people who stutter, treatments that had worked or failed them, and listened to them offer advice to us as clinicians in training. One panelist was

candid about the skepticism and disregard he felt toward the field of speech-language pathology because of negative experiences with uniformed SLPs throughout his childhood. The mood shifted in the room when another panelist discussed his history of depression and anxiety, which he linked directly to his feelings about his speech. I was overwhelmed by the spontaneous nature of the discussions that took place, the willingness of the self-help members to share, and the open and non-judgmental atmosphere fostered by the group leaders. I've been hooked on the NSA ever since.

I was honored to be asked to jump-start the Austin kids/family chapter after becoming involved with the adult chapter. It was a big commitment during my second year of graduate school as I worked to organize games and activities for the kids and discussion topics for the parents each month. My work with the NSA left me with my first impressions of the immense personal rewards that come with working with people who stutter.

After attending meetings of the kids chapter for a year, one parent was teary-eyed as he recounted that his son had been required to give an oral presentation to his class the previous week. The father and son had, with the teacher's support, arranged for the presentation to be videotaped and played to the class so the child would not be required to give an oral presentation. But on the day of the presentation, our young NSA member told the teacher that he would like to give his presentation in front of the class like the other students. The NSA, this father said, had given his son self-confidence that was missing before.

I became motivated to pursue a career with an emphasis on stuttering. When I took my first job as an SLP in a private clinic where children and adults who stutter were a part of my caseload, I applied my graduate school lessons and what I learned from NSA members.

One of my clients was a middle-aged man who came to speech therapy after being rejected for a management position. His supervisor told him he would have to improve his communication before being considered for such a position. My client was devastated because he felt his years of experience and supervisory roles made him the most qualified applicant. He was a person who stutters, but this was something he was not comfortable disclosing to anyone other than his wife. And like most people who stutter, his disfluencies worsened during high-stress, high-anxiety situations—like job interviews.

During his initial speech therapy evaluation, we discussed his history of stuttering and what had brought him to therapy. His last experience with speech therapy was in high school, thirty-five years before. An SLP whom he met with weekly would sit across from him and place an auditory feedback device on his head for thirty minutes in order to improve his fluency. The approach that I introduced him to was drastically different. We implemented a combination of fluency shaping and stuttering modification techniques. When I discovered that he was using avoidance strategies, such as switching words that he thought he might stutter on, I encouraged him to use voluntary stuttering during the session. He was completely baffled by the idea that I wanted him to stutter *more* in therapy. The next session he confided that he didn't realize he was sabotaging his communication by substituting words, changing what he really wanted to say for the sake of being fluent.

My therapy sessions with this client involved teaching fluency techniques about 30 percent of the time. During the rest of the time, I relied on counseling techniques as we discussed his comfort level with using the techniques, and the changes he was making in his life. We both learned that stuttering therapy isn't easy; it can be stressful, intense, and emotional work, but it's worth it in the end.

Six months after beginning therapy, my client e-mailed me to inform me that he was selected for a management position with a new company. He self-disclosed his stuttering during his job interview and was met with friendly questions about the cause and treatment of stuttering. His self-disclosure also opened a dialogue with his new employers about his speech that he had been avoiding for years.

So, to my colleagues who would rather not work with people who stutter because they are not "fixable," I say: sure, there's no magic pill, no shot, or absolute cure for stuttering, but there's definitely treatment. And it works. I've seen it. My clients do not leave therapy completely fluent, but that is not our goal. Our goals in therapy are to improve how they feel about their ability to communicate, and most importantly, for my clients to feel able to say whatever they want to say, when they want to say it.

The most important thing that NSA members and my clients who stutter have taught me is that stuttering is much more than a problem of overt disfluencies—what I learned to measure by taking a count of syllables stuttered in a hundred-syllable speech sample. Stuttering is a complex problem, and clinicians treating stuttering should seek to understand the person who is affected by stuttering. Stuttering therapy shouldn't just treat disfluencies; it should treat the whole person.

After a few years working with children and adults who presented with a variety of speech and language disorders, I decided to return to school to earn a doctorate with a specialization in stuttering. My ongoing participation in the NSA continues to shape how I think about fluency disorders, my research aspirations, and what I share with colleagues.

My ambition to add research-based evidence to our understanding of the etiology of stuttering and our treatment literature is an endeavor

that I know will pay off in lives changed. As a future professor, I know one lesson I will impress upon my student clinicians is the importance of learning from the experts—people who stutter.

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CHAPTER 13

Words From My Heart

Courtney Byrd
PhD, CCC-SLP

JAMES EARL JONES ONCE SAID, "One of the hardest things in life is having words in your heart that you cannot utter." Twenty years ago, as an undergraduate student in speech-language pathology at Louisiana State University in Shreveport, I had the rare opportunity to provide therapy to clients. Most programs do not allow participation in clinical practice until graduate school. The first client who was assigned to me was a thirteen-year-old named Kevin who was unable to say his name without stuttering severely, and who disclosed that he often changed his name when meeting new people in hopes of avoiding what he described as the most painful embarrassment of his life. I helped this young man to say his name, and he helped me to find my life path.

Kevin was fighting against all the typical struggles of adolescence, but, in addition to the typical, he had to endure the atypical—living with the unfortunate and unfair stigma of stuttering. After months of intensive therapy, Kevin grew in his understanding of stuttering and was able to advocate for himself in a manner that diminished the social

penalty of stuttering. Kevin's stuttering decreased significantly, but it did not disappear. Yet, the frequency no longer mattered to Kevin or to his listeners as Kevin was able to speak freely, and to engage in struggle-free communication. He no longer avoided situations or words, and he even sought out opportunities to help other teenagers who stutter to break the vicious cycle in which he was previously stuck.

During my sessions with Kevin, we laughed, and a few times he cried. When he wasn't looking, I cried as well. Some tears were sad, some angry, but ultimately, all tears were filled with acceptance, understanding, gratitude, and excitement for the future. In having the privilege to work with Kevin at an early point in my career, I grew in my understanding of what it means to be courageous, what it means to fight until you overcome any obstacles you may face, and what it means to transcend stuttering. Before working with Kevin, I honestly wasn't sure what I wanted to do with my life; through my work with him, I learned that helping others to fulfill their dreams was the one and only way I could fulfill my own dreams.

About a year after I provided therapy to Kevin, I entered graduate school at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth with a vision for myself that I would one day become a stuttering specialist. To further my knowledge, my professor encouraged me to attend a local meeting of the Dallas chapter of the National Stuttering Association. Little did I know I would be attending the chapter in which some of the most prolific and notable contributors to the NSA were members. The speakers on that first night I attended an NSA meeting were Dr. Lee Reeves, Russ Hicks, and Joseph Diaz. The genuine passion I witnessed among these three men confirmed my career path. I could see in each of them an intimate understanding of the impact of stuttering on a person's life and an overwhelming desire to help people who stutter to

speak from their hearts, with no hesitation.

I vividly remember that Lee, Russ, and Joseph each took time to talk with me and each thank me for attending their meeting; their sincere respect and appreciation for me as a speech-language pathologist in training was evident. It was also clear to me that these men shared the principle instilled in me from my work with Kevin: the only life worth living is one in which you dedicate yourself to helping others. They each told me in their own way that one person can make a difference, and I believed them. That evening was so powerful that the exchanges continue to motivate me when I have moments of self-doubt about whether or not I can actually help another person. For anyone who reads this essay, I hope that you know that they were right: one person can make a difference.

In addition to my early involvement with the NSA, I had the exceptional opportunity to continue to learn about the nature, assessment, and treatment of stuttering from Dr. Jennifer Watson as her master's student at Texas Christian University, and from Dr. Edward Conture as his doctoral student at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. I feel a similar debt of gratitude to these extraordinary mentors as I do to Lee, Russ, and Joseph; I will never be able to thank any of them sufficiently for what they taught me, or for how their dedication to people who stutter further solidified my own. Through their unyielding support, I was able to receive my master's, my doctoral degree, and a National Institutes of Health postdoctoral fellowship with a specialization in stuttering. I joined the faculty at the University of Texas at Austin in 2006 and gave all that I could to establish a center for excellence in stuttering intervention and research. In 2012, my Developmental Stuttering Laboratory was awarded a private endowment and became the Dr. Jennifer and Emanuel Bodner Developmental Stuttering Laboratory.

Since I have been at UT, I have read several data-based articles outside of the stuttering literature that demonstrate that the earlier students are exposed to research in an academic setting *and* the earlier they are exposed to clinical cases, the more likely they are to become respected experts in their area of study. Unfortunately, among the communication disorders considered to be fundamental to the scope of practice for SLPs, stuttering has historically been and continues to be the disorder for which most SLPs report minimal to no clinical or academic exposure. In fact, in 2014 my former doctoral student Dr. Geoff Coalson and I reviewed membership rosters from the three main professional organizations related to stuttering and found that only about 1,250 clinicians—fewer than 1 percent of SLPs practicing in the United States—consider themselves to be willing and competent service providers for the approximately 15 million children and 3 million adults in the country who stutter. It is not surprising that speech-language pathologists report stuttering as the disorder they feel least comfortable assessing and treating. With this in mind, I can't help but think back to Kevin and what would have happened had he worked with someone who had not been adequately trained. The hard, painful truth is that within the field of speech-language pathology, people who stutter continue to be the population most likely to be exposed to assessment and treatment practices that are not evidence-based.

Another significant roadblock for people who stutter is the struggle to achieve third-party reimbursement. Many people who stutter are unable to receive services because the cost is too steep and their requests and appeals for insurance support are repeatedly denied. As would be expected, people who stutter often report anger, frustration, and disappointment regarding the deficient—and expensive—services that they have received. This substandard cycle of poor training, com-

promised, costly services, and low client satisfaction has undoubtedly contributed to the low number of SLPs who specialize in stuttering.

All these factors further emphasize the need for a means to expose students to the principles of evidence-based practice for stuttering at the earliest possible stage in their academic careers. Unfortunately, given the fact that there are relatively few professionals at universities who specialize in stuttering, most students will not assess and treat people who stutter until they are licensed clinicians; thus, the substandard cycle of clinical practice continues.

In 2014, after almost a decade of building our research and clinical program, we were able to establish the Michael and Tami Lang Stuttering Institute. Our institute provides our students with the early academic and clinical exposure needed to make significant, lasting contributions to their field. These evidence-based services are now provided to clients at our institute at no charge; thus, here at UT, the struggle to secure reimbursement is no longer a roadblock.

Through my work at UT, I hope that I will be able to influence others to dedicate their lives to furthering our understanding of stuttering in the same way that I have been inspired. It is my sincere hope that my work will ensure that my early work with Kevin, the life's work of Lee, Russ, and Joseph, and the guidance of my mentors, Jennifer Watson and Ed Conture, will never be taken for granted.

If you are reading this and you haven't had personal experience interacting and working with a person who stutters, imagine someone saying to you, "Thank you so much for helping me to say my name." Or "I went out and bought four new suits so my outside could reflect the change in my inside." Or "Yesterday I had the first conversation about my stuttering that I have ever had with my dad—thank you for helping me to reach a place where I was able to do that." Imagine the

parent of a child saying to you, "I was so very scared for him at first, but now I feel inspired, empowered, and, most of all, proud of him for continuing to try to talk even when it seems like it takes every part of him to produce his words." Imagine a preschool child who at one time stuttered severely, but at the end of her course of treatment was able to stand up in front of a filled auditorium and give a spontaneous speech about unicorns, ice cream, butterflies, and her love of all things made of sugar. Or a school-age child shifting his perspective on his stuttering as something he was embarrassed of and tried to hide at all costs to something that made him—and I quote—*pretty cool.* Or a former client coming to you to tell you he is changing his career plans so that he could go on to make a significant impact on the lives of people who stutter and our understanding of this complex disorder.

My interactions with Kevin and every single client whom I have been fortunate to work with since him, have helped me to grow as a clinician, a researcher, a teacher, a wife, a mother, a daughter, and a friend. I know I am not alone in this belief. Every clinician who has worked along with me has reported this sentiment: "Working with people who stutter has made me a better person." The gift of helping someone overcome adversity is indescribable. By giving people who stutter a chance to live their lives to the fullest, clinicians, in return, are inspired to live their own lives to the fullest. And when these clinicians express their feelings of gratitude toward a client to me, I think first of Kevin, and then of the hundreds of clients I have had the opportunity to work with since him.

The thirteen-year-old boy that I worked with so long ago is now a grown man. Kevin and I have stayed in touch over the years, and one e-mail I received from him will forever remain in my memory. He wrote me to say he had asked his longtime girlfriend to marry him.

He wrote, "I remember when I first met her and how I worked up the courage to introduce myself. That moment changed my life forever. And I wanted to thank you for helping me to say my name because in doing that, you helped me to accept and embrace who I am. I said my name to her, and from that small, but monumental step forward, I was able to share my heart."

I would like to close by repeating my life philosophy: it is only in helping others fulfill their dreams that you are fully able to achieve yours. I will spend the rest of my life thanking each and every person who has helped me to have a job where my sole focus is to help others. I will also spend my life thanking each and every person who stutters and their family members for allowing me the opportunity to work with them. All of these experiences have brought me closer to achieving my dreams regarding the advancement of our understanding of the nature and treatment of stuttering. In return, I hope that somehow I have been able to help fulfill the dreams of people who stutter by helping them to speak freely, from their hearts.

DR. COURTNEY BYRD *is an associate professor in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at the University of Texas at Austin, where she directs the Michael and Tami Lang Stuttering Institute. The nonprofit institute provides specialized treatment services to people who stutter at no cost. Dr. Byrd's ongoing research efforts include the investigation of the cognitive and linguistic development of people who stutter, and the effectiveness of innovative treatment strategies and clinical training tools. Dr. Byrd has been involved with the NSA since 1998 and has been a member of the Dallas, Nashville, and Austin chapters. She lives in Austin with her husband and three boys.*

CHAPTER 14

Lab Lessons

Farzan Irani
PhD, CCC-SLP

I WAS BORN AND RAISED in Mumbai, India where I completed my undergraduate studies in speech-language pathology at Maharashtra University of Health Sciences. In India, I had the good fortune of beginning to work with clients during the second year of my undergraduate program. Of all the communication disorders I encountered, stuttering was the disorder that most intrigued me.

I was both excited and nervous to begin working with my first client who stutters. My first client was a man in his early twenties who stuttered severely. Within a few sessions, he was able to become fluent in therapy; however, he remained fluent only during the sessions. This left me baffled. *If he can be fluent with me in the therapy room, why can't he always be fluent?*

I decided to apply to graduate schools in the United States; at the top of my list was Bowling Green State University (BGSU) in Ohio. Not only did I gain admission to BGSU, but I was also fortunate to be assigned as a research assistant to Dr. Rodney Gabel, a board recog-

nized stuttering specialist and director of the Intensive Stuttering Clinic for Adolescents and Adults at BGSU. This is where I had my first experience with intensive therapy for stuttering. The intensive program gave me the opportunity to interact with clients for eight-hour days. As I listened to their stories, I learned about how stuttering affected each client differently. The changes that were experienced—both by clients and clinicians—within a three-week period were greater than the changes that were possible within a year of weekly one-hour therapy sessions. As a result, I gained a keen interest in intensive therapy programs.

I still remember our first meeting in the stuttering lab. It was the first time that I realized Dr. Gabel is a person who stutters (PWS). Also at the lab orientation meeting was the only other male student in my graduate class, Charlie Hughes. It turned out that I was outnumbered in the room as a fluent speaker, as both Charlie and Dr. Gabel stutter. As I continued to work alongside Charlie and Dr. Gabel, my interest in stuttering became more personal. I wanted to learn more about stuttering as an academic subject, but most importantly, I wanted to learn how to be an effective clinician. Learning from a professor and a colleague who had experience on "both sides of the table"—as clients and as clinicians—was, in my opinion, an optimal learning experience.

My discussions with Dr. Gabel and Charlie, as well as the graduate course in stuttering taught by Dr. Roger Colcord, also a board recognized stuttering specialist, helped me realize that stuttering is much more than a breakdown in speech. It is important to help clients learn to produce more fluent speech, but as clinicians we need to find ways to reduce the impact stuttering has on a client's life and choices. I began to work with the clients to help them identify how stuttering was holding them back and devise strategies to reduce their avoidance of

particular words and situations. This approach became more important than ever as I was preparing to work as a student clinician for the summer intensive clinic. That was when I met Eric Swartz, a supervisor at the clinic who would become a doctoral colleague as well as a close friend. Eric also happens to be a person who stutters and is now a professor like myself. The summer clinic in 2006 was an experience that is hard to forget and a defining period in my professional growth.

That summer I worked one-on-one with two clients. The first client was a young man who presented with severe stuttering, and the other client was a middle-aged woman whose stuttering was extremely mild. The woman, whom I'll call Kelly, stuttered so mildly that it made me nervous. *How can I help this lady? She barely even stutters!* I thought.

Over the course of the three-week program, I gained a practical perspective on what my professors were trying to teach me about stuttering. It became clear that stuttering involved more than just disfluencies. Kelly had more stuttering at the end of the program than she did when she started the program. *What have I done!* I thought. *She was better off before she received therapy from me!* She reassured me that she had benefited from the sessions, much more than she expected when she entered therapy. Kelly and I stayed in touch, and sometime after the program she informed me that she had decided to pursue a career as a speech-language pathologist (SLP). When we met at an annual convention of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), she told me how thankful she was to have attended the program at BGSU and to finally be able to speak her mind without the fear of stuttering.

After the first summer clinic, I started my doctoral work with Dr. Gabel as my mentor. That fall I was joined in the doctoral program by Eric and another clinician named Scott Palasik. I could not believe

that, again, I was the only person in the lab who did not stutter. Again, I knew I would have much to learn from my colleagues. I talked to Eric and Scott about stuttering every day, and the two of them also breathe life into the Northwest Ohio chapter of the National Stuttering Association. Our chapter met each month at a local coffee shop. Each meeting was unique, and I always would look forward to the next one. This was a safe place where PWS shared their stories and experiences, but also where I felt welcome as an SLP in training. The group members also invited their family and friends to attend and hear about their experiences. In this open environment, I began to think about my own experiences and struggles transitioning to the United States. I began to empathize with my clients based on a characteristic that distinguished my own speech.

During one of our chapter meetings, one member shared that when he went to restaurants, he would only order certain items from the menu that he could say fluently. This made me think about how I do the exact same thing because I have an accent. If a person does not understand my request due to my accent (that's usually apparent when they respond with *WHAT??*), I usually change my request or point to the menu item instead of speaking. It suddenly occurred to me that these are all very natural reactions.

With this realization, it also dawned on me that I had been a hypocrite by asking clients not to avoid words and situations. This caused me to do some introspection about whether I had asked clients to do something they were not willing to do. As I attended NSA meetings and worked with clients who stutter, I learned more about stuttering, but I also learned more about myself. I started to realize the importance of listening to each client. What is his or her story? These experiences also taught me to suspend judgment. If I notice a client is avoiding

certain words or situations, I now talk to them about my observations and ask them how they feel about a situation instead of asking them to stop avoiding. What if they did not realize they were avoiding in the same way that I did not realize my own avoidance behaviors?

This quest for self-introspection, personal change, and learning is ongoing. After completing my doctorate I began an assistant professorship at Texas State University in San Marcos. This was an exciting new change in my life, and soon after moving I began the work of developing an intensive program for adolescents and adults who stutter. I also sought out and started attending monthly meetings of the Austin chapter of the NSA.

I now encourage all of my students to attend at least one NSA meeting because I believe the NSA has something to offer everyone. I can say with confidence that my students benefit from the NSA in the same way I have. Over the years, I have come to realize and appreciate the wealth of knowledge I have gained from listening to the stories of people who stutter. No single instructor or textbook has taught me as much as I have learned from the many people who stutter who have touched my life as clients, colleagues, and friends.

DR. FARZAN IRANI *is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication Disorders at Texas State University in San Marcos, where he established the Comprehensive Stuttering Therapy Program in 2011. The treatment program involves a ten-day intensive therapy camp for adolescents and adults who stutter, and maintenance sessions via tele-practice. A primary research focus for Dr. Irani involves evaluating treatment outcomes for adolescents and adults who stutter; this includes investigating the long-term outcomes of intensive therapy programs. He lives in Austin with his wife, Anne.*

The Ties That Bind

Lee Reeves
DVM

THROUGHOUT THE PAGES of this book, you have read honest, heartfelt, real life stories of people affected by stuttering. I use the phrase *people affected by stuttering* purposefully because stuttering does not only affect the person who stutters. It affects family, friends, teachers, speech-language pathologists, and others. In fact, stuttering has the potential to affect virtually everyone the person who stutters comes in contact with. Each story contained in this book is unique, and yet there are common threads that bind both the stories and the people who tell them.

Many of the authors described what it was like to grow up with stuttering. I related to those stories personally because I too am a member of what the famed speech-language pathologist Dr. Charles Van Riper once called "the clan of the tangled tongue." I attended my first self-help meeting for people who stutter in February of 1967 when I was a senior in high school. The group that I was a part of, the Council of Adult Stutterers, became the first nationally recognized self-help

group for people who stutter. For a seventeen-year-old kid who struggled mercilessly just to say his name, that group at Catholic University in Washington, DC was a place filled with kindness, understanding, encouragement, and hope. Those meetings and the support I received from total strangers who shared my struggles planted a seed that would help shape my involvement with the stuttering community for the rest of my life.

In 2007, when I met the editor of this book in a bookstore in Austin, I did not think much of it at first. But sometimes chance encounters have unexpected outcomes. That brief exchange eventually led her to help revive and energize the Austin chapter of the National Stuttering Association. As a result, many of the chapter members have not only moved beyond some of their own challenges, but have made a significant difference in the lives of many in their community. This extraordinary book is a testament to their efforts and to the power of self-help and support systems. Their stories are not only similar to my own story, but to the stories of people who participate in self-help meetings all over the world.

Most of us who stutter began receiving cues early in our lives that there was something wrong with us, with the way we talked. Even in the most loving and caring households both verbal and non-verbal messages were sent. Attempts at helpful advice from those closest to us came in the form of the "Big Six"—*stop, slow down, start over, think about what you're going to say, take a deep breath,* or *just relax**—and spoke volumes about the fact that we did not talk right. The worried looks on our parents' faces and the whispers to others about their concern only added to a deeply-rooted sense that we were somehow

*Dr. Reeves' wife, Nina Reardon-Reeves, is a speech-language pathologist who specializes in the treatment of stuttering. In a personal communication she referred to these recommendations as the "Big Six" of things NOT to say to a person who stutters.

flawed. So we became fearful each in our own way. We were fearful of disappointing our parents, fearful of being laughed at, fearful of being embarrassed or embarrassing our friends, *fearful of talking*. For some, that fear became so powerful that it affected choices about daily living, social interactions, and career decisions. For others, it became socially paralyzing. Confronting that fear is not easy, but it is necessary if one is to move forward. The authors described some of those confrontations as *turning points.*

For people who stutter, meeting together regularly with others who understand firsthand the struggles they have faced can be life-changing. Everyone has a personal story of pain, frustration, and fear that needs to be voiced. The support group provides a safe environment to tell these stories. More importantly, hearing how others have coped with and overcome many of the same issues can be liberating. More seasoned participants become role models by sharing their experiential knowledge about how they learned to manage a variety of challenges associated with their stuttering. As negative ways of thinking about themselves fade, newer members find opportunities for change emerging. With the group as a consistent source of support and encouragement, members begin to reframe their previously-held beliefs about such things as interpersonal relationships, career opportunities, and speech therapy. Gradually, as long-held feelings of anger, denial, and self-hatred diminish, they are replaced with a new belief system. That system has as its cornerstone the concept of self-acceptance. Accepting the fact that we stutter is critical, but equally important is accepting that we alone have the power to do something about our stuttering and the circumstances that surround it.

Some of the authors wrote about their parents and the care, concern, and support they received. Amy Averett, a parent herself, remind-

ed us that stuttering, particularly when other issues are in play, must be kept in perspective. Certainly this is true as nature can produce a variety of complications. Both Mona Maali and Armaan Babai-Pirouz wrote about concomitant disorders and how those affected their stuttering. Still, whether a child faces a variety of challenges or stuttering is the primary problem, the inability to speak fluently creates a special kind of concern for most parents.

Over the years, I have heard hundreds of parents express these concerns at round table discussions, workshops, or conferences sponsored by the National Stuttering Association. Parents talk about their surprise and disbelief as they hear their child begin to have unusual difficulty speaking. Typically, their first reaction is denial, as they want to believe that this is just a phase their child will quickly move past. When that doesn't happen, the disbelief turns to a sense of urgency as they seek information about how to help "fix" this problem. Commonly, parents talk about the fact that almost everyone they spoke with, including their pediatrician and perhaps even an SLP, advised them to just ignore the stuttering, not to bring attention to it, or that their child will "probably outgrow it." (Even though there is currently no reliable way to predict which cases of childhood stuttering will resolve on their own and which cases will not, we know that this casual and uniformed advice will turn out to be true approximately 75 to 80 percent of the time.) Imagine being one of the parents who follow this advice but whose child does not develop through stuttering.

Parents speak about how their concern turns to panic as they watch helplessly as their child struggles to get words out. They are often embarrassed to admit that they begin to envision every negative stereotype imaginable for those who stutter. Feelings of guilt arise when they think that perhaps they may have caused their child to stutter or at the

very least contributed to it by not doing something sooner. Parents openly share with one another how fear sets in that their child might be teased or bullied because of stuttering, and they are horrified to hear other parents state that for their children, this has already occurred. Frequently the discussions turn to the disappointment, frustration, and anger many feel as they discover that no one—not even licensed SLPs in their area—knows what to do for their child. Still, they enroll their child in therapy at school with the hope and the expectation that the therapist there will "fix" their child. And finally, with tears rolling down their faces, parents talk about their feelings of despair as the reality finally sinks in that their child is not going to grow out of stuttering and they feel helpless to fix it.

We often fail to recognize that it's not only the child who may feel isolated and alone. Parents too have no other peers to turn to and talk with about their questions, fears, and concerns about their children's stuttering. Self-help meetings and workshops provide parents and those who stutter a safe place to gather and share their own stories. Not only do they receive understanding and support from other parents who are or have been in their shoes, but they also benefit from learning about how to access resources necessary to help their children and themselves. Most importantly, they learn that their children do not need to be fixed because they are not broken. They stutter and that is okay. These support experiences can be life-changing for parents as well as for those who stutter.

What about the speech-language pathologists assigned to treat the children described above? They too become directly affected by stuttering. Almost every SLP whom I have spoken with was drawn to the profession because of a genuine desire to help people with communication issues. Having said that, many readily admit that they are at a

loss when it comes to helping those who stutter. Both Dr. Courtney Byrd and Megann McGill expressed their frustration with the lack of training among many of their colleagues. Many dedicated professionals are faced with the realization that their deficiencies in education and training render them unqualified to treat the child sitting in front of them. They know that as licensed speech-language pathologists it is a violation of their professional code of ethics to accept a child for treatment for whom they do not possess the knowledge and skills to treat. Yet, they are placed in a difficult position because the schools and many private sector practices not only discourage, but often deny them the ability to exercise professional judgment by referring these children to someone more knowledgeable and experienced. Imagine the conflict they must face when having to choose between doing what is ethical and responsible or losing their job.

The NSA is here for these professionals as well as for those in other practice settings or engaged in research. Both Dr. Byrd and Megann along with Dr. Farzan Irani shared their experiences with participation in self-help for stuttering and how those experiences helped shape their passion for this fascinating communication disorder. Attending NSA meetings is one way for professionals to learn about and understand the entirety of the stuttering phenomenon. The NSA also sponsors numerous continuing education seminars presented by experts in the field to help practicing SLPs expand their clinical knowledge and skills. For a number of years now, research symposiums have been sponsored by the NSA to bring scientists together with clinicians and consumers.

Much progress has been made since those who stutter began gathering together to help themselves and to help others. But we have only scratched the surface of what needs to be done to improve the lives of those affected by stuttering. The National Stuttering Association can

and must take the lead to ensure that adequate treatment is available for all children and adults who stutter. It will take all of us: people who stutter, parents, grandparents, clinicians, researchers, and everyone else whose life is touched in some way by the disorder of stuttering. We must also work together to find ways to help support and fund future research directed at looking for new ways to prevent, treat, and even cure stuttering.

These are big challenges that will require big ideas and big actions. However, not every action has to be monumental. Sometimes small gestures are all it takes to make a big difference in someone's life because you never know whom you will touch.

I have crossed paths with many people who stutter over the years, and if the circumstances allow, I usually try to say something to them. Sometimes it's just "Hello" and "How are you doing today?" with a calm tone and warm smile of acknowledgment. Other times I might mention that I too stutter. I might even inquire, as I did with Mona, if they have heard of the National Stuttering Association. I don't engage them to expose or embarrass them. I am just trying to reach out in some small way to let them know they are not alone.

DR. LEE REEVES *is a veterinarian in Plano, Texas. In 1982, he cofounded the Dallas chapter of the NSA. He served as chairman of the NSA board of directors from 1998 until 2004, when he was honored with the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) Distinguished Service Award. His other awards include the NSA Hall of Fame Award, the National Council of Communicative Disorders Charles Van Riper Award, the International Fluency Association Consumer Award of Distinction, and the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine Distinguished Alumni Award for Companion Animal Medicine.*

NSA Closing Words*

May the spirit we have shared tonight help our speech in the coming weeks, until we meet again.

May we go forth gladly into speaking situations, without force or struggle, accepting ourselves regardless of our fluency, and listening always to the music of our voices.

We are not alone. Together we are strong.

*The "Closing Words" is by Bill Parry and was adopted by the National Stuttering Association in 1999. It is read at the close of chapter meetings across the United States.

Rolando Sepulveda

The NSA Austin Chapter's meetings are scheduled to end at 8:30 p.m.

Notes

Epigraphs

- The first epigraph to open this book is from *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) by Ernest Hemingway, Chapter 34.
- The second epigraph by Michael Heffron ("I would like to form a group of stutterers . . . ") appeared in a publication of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) in 1966. It was found in *The Treatment of Stuttering* (1973) by Charles Van Riper, page 169. The group Heffron help found, the Council of Adult Stutterers, met at Catholic University in Washington, DC and became the first nationally recognized self-help group for people who stutter.

CHAPTER 1: John Moore

7 The fun facts that open this essay were found in an article ("Do Women Really Talk More?") in the online version of the British newspaper the Guardian, November 27, 2006. The article cites statistics on how many words men and women speak each day from a 2006 book entitled *The Female Brain,* by the American neuropsychiatrist Louann Brizendine.

11 *Let Me Finish* (2011) is a short documentary (fourteen minutes) featuring four members of the Austin NSA chapter who also authored chapters for *Turning Points*: Evan Usler, Courtney Byrd, Mona Behnaz Maali, and Joy Chandler. It was directed by Alex Murphy, who studied film at the University of Texas. Murphy was inspired to make the film while he was enrolled in speech therapy for his stuttering at UT. In its first four years, the documentary received about seventy thousand views on YouTube, where it is still available for streaming.

CHAPTER 2: Evan Usler

13 In the opening paragraph, Usler refers to *I, Claudius*, a 1976 television series by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The series was

written by Jack Pulman and adapted from the British author Robert Graves' novels, *I, Claudius* (1934) and *Claudius the God* (1935). The novels were written in the form of autobiographies of Claudius, the fourth emperor of Rome.

CHAPTER 3: Lindsay Hale

19 Hale refers to a 1963 book, S*tigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, by the late sociologist Erving Goffman. The work has also been cited by scholars in the field of stuttering.

CHAPTER 4: Karen Krajcer

24 In the opening paragraph, Krajcer refers to an essay entitled "Putting It Together," by the late speech-language pathologist Charles Van Riper. The essay is the closing chapter of *Advice to Those Who Stutter* (1998), a volume of essays by speech-language pathologists who stutter, published by the Stuttering Foundation of America (http://www.stutteringhelp.org/); the first edition of this book was *To The Stutterer* (1972).

27 The "famous observation" that Krajcer refers to ("Stuttering is what you do trying not to stutter again.") is from Wendall Johnson, a pioneering speech-language pathologist, and can be found in a chapter Johnson wrote ("Desirable Objectives and Procedures For an Adult Stutterer") for the first edition of *To the Stutterer* (1972), page 21.

CHAPTER 13: Courtney Byrd

114 The author opens her essay with a quote ("One of the hardest things in life is having words in your heart that you cannot utter.") by the actor James Earl Jones. The quote can be found in Jones' autobiography, *Voices and Silences* (1993), written with Penelope Niven, page 137. In this book, Jones describes his lifelong struggles with stuttering.

117 Byrd and her former doctoral student Geoff Coalson conducted a review of the membership rosters for three prominent professional organizations related to stuttering: ASHA Special Interest Group 4, Fluency and Fluency Disorders (SIG-4); the Stuttering Foundation of America (SFA); and the Specialty Board on Fluency Disorders (SBFD) in 2014.

AFTERWORD: Lee Reeves

127 The title of this chapter, "The Ties That Bind," not only encapsulates the themes in Reeves' essay, but it is also the title of a song Bruce Springsteen wrote and recorded for his 1980 album, *The River*. Springsteen has been one of Mona Maali's greatest loves since she was sixteen.

127 On November 20, 1966, Charles Van Riper spoke to the Council of Adult Stutterers (COAS) in Washington, DC. He opened by saying that he is a member of "the clan of the tangled tongue." An audio recording of Van Riper's talk can be found on the Stuttering Homepage via this link: http://www.mnsu.edu/comdis/voices/voices.html.

130 Reeves cites statistics on the percentage of cases of stuttering in young children that resolve without intervention. Brochures containing helpful information and recommendations for early intervention are available through the NSA, and can be accessed via this link: http://www.westutter.org/about-the-nsa/nsa-printables/. The NSA Website has a plethora of useful information for people who stutter, parents, SLPs, pediatricians, educators, and others. A full list of NSA resources and information about how to support the organization can also be found on the Website.

Artwork, Photography, and Design

- The cover drawing is by Michael Turner, a person who stutters and director of the documentary *The Way We Talk* (2015).
- The orange-and-purple graphic preceding the essays for this book was designed by Rolando Sepulveda and is a spin-off on the NSA's emblem.
- Two black-and-white photographs that appear beside the NSA "Welcoming Words" and "Closing Words" at the beginning and close of this book were originally a part of *Revealing Places*, a traveling exhibit for which the photographer, Rolando Sepulveda, submitted a documentary project. The project, "I Am Not Inarticulate," was part of Sepulveda's coursework at St. Edwards University in Austin. Sepulveda was inspired to use NSA members as the focus of his class project because of his own experiences as a person who stutters. Additional photographs from his project can be found at http://rolandosepulveda.com.
- The quotes that accompany photographs of each of the authors are all excerpts of essays in this book, except for the quote below Lee Reeves' photo. Reeves' quote ("We cannot change the way we speak . . .") is from an article entitled "Acceptance," which he wrote for the May/June 2010 issue of *Letting Go*, the NSA's newsletter.
- Mona Maali designed the book.

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ABOUT THE EDITOR

MONA BEHNAZ MAALI grew up in Austin and has a BA from the University of Texas, where she was a senior reporter and associate news editor for the award-winning *Daily Texan*. After graduation, she led the Austin chapter of the National Stuttering Association for four years and was recognized nationally for her leadership within the stuttering community. She compiled and edited the essays for *Turning Points* over a period of two years, extending her volunteer efforts for the NSA while establishing a basis for her writing career. To learn more about her writing and to support her, visit **http://monamaali.com**.