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Let's Talk About It

Having Fun With Stuttering



It was my pleasure to supervise at the 34th annual weekend workshop for people who stutter at Saint Rose College, in Albany. I have learned a lot about myself, and stuttering since my first experience with this program.

My first time attending the weekend workshop was in 1991. I was a teenager who did not want to stutter. I was unsure what lay ahead of me. Would I ever stop stuttering? Would I go to college? What kind of job could a stutterer have? Etc. I believed that in order for me to be successful with anything, I had to stop stuttering.

Well, I guess I've proven myself wrong. I am now a husband, father of 2 great boys, and a successful Speech Language Pathologist, and guess what, *I STILL STUTTER.*

In fact, sometimes I enjoy stuttering. For example, at the workshop I enjoyed participating in an activity called "Freeze It" with a 10 year-old boy who stutters. The objective of this activity was to take turns freezing each other in a stutter. This was done by clenching and un-clenching one's fist. For example, a closed fist meant you had to keep stuttering.

You could only stop stuttering when the other person opened his hand. We did this activity in order to help us become more aware of where the tension was during a moment of stuttering, take control of the stutter, and to desensitize ourselves to stuttering. At lunch my little friend thought he was pretty cool when he froze me in a stutter for almost 2 minutes in front of a large crowd. We were having fun with our stuttering. Having fun with stuttering is something I wish I had done when I was ten.

If there was one message I could say to kids who stutter and their parents, it would be don't shy away from stuttering. You see the more we try to hide from our stuttering, the more we stutter. Stuttering is a challenge but, if embraced, it can lead to great opportunities.

Steve Marchant - MS, CCC-SLP



Did You Know ?

There are a number of terrific blogs about stuttering all over the internet. You can find discussions about research at The Stuttering Brain, <http://thestutteringbrain.blogspot.com/> and Stuttering.Me, which is a micro-blog, <http://stuttering.me/>. This site also includes mini-podcasts, for those who only have time for short bites about stuttering.

You can find international discussions about stuttering, such as Hiten's The Stuttering Hub, <http://www.stutteringhub.com/> or the combination blog/podcast from Toronto called Stuttering Is Cool <http://www.stutteringiscool.com/>.

If you are looking for parent's thoughts on stuttering, check out this blog I just came across, called Pittsburg Mom, <http://pittsburghmom.com/forums/p/1993/6155.aspx>.

Or this one, by a grateful mom, <http://momsyearofgratitude.blogspot.com/2009/04/stutter.html>

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- Last night of Spring Council Monday April 27
- NYSSHLA Conference Saratoga Springs May 7-9
- National Stuttering Awareness Week May 11-16
- NSA Conference Scottsdale, Arizona July 8-12, 2009
- Friends Conference Tampa, Florida July 23-25, 2009
- International Stuttering Awareness Day Oct. 22, 09
- Stuttering Appreciation Day November 13, 2009

Parent Support Group: Co- Facilitated by Dr Charleen Bloom and Pamela Mertz, Mondays 7:40pm

Parents Rock - The Parent's Page



Dear Joe and Sr. Charleen,

I have to first thank you for one of the best weekends of my life.

Driving home this afternoon, Steven and I had a wonderful conversation. I asked him what he wants me to do when he stutters. He said, "Please, Mom just let me take my time to finish my sentence and don't remind me to use my techniques."

I told him that no one in this world is perfect. If we were perfect, we wouldn't be living on this earth. Everyone has a challenge and his challenge just happens to be stuttering.

We then spoke about my challenges as a child.

The best part of this weekend for me was that I finally felt that I came home with some real facts. I always thought that the purpose of Steven's speech therapy was absolute fluency. Now I know that he needs to manage his stuttering. I will no longer remind him, just accept and love him unconditionally.

I am calling his school tomorrow to stop his therapy. He hates being pulled from class, does not like his speech teacher because she "forces me to speak clearly and not to stutter, and gets angry with me all the time."

I would like to have him attend the Monday evening groups. Please let me know when the next semester starts.

Again, thank you so much. I feel renewed, energized and full of hope.

Regards, **Deborah Fedorczuk**

It was great to be in a place where kids were allowed and encouraged to teach parents about stuttering--and, the parents actually listened! This reversal of role at St. Rose was inspiring, and helpful in every way. - **Eric Jackson**

This was the first time I had ever facilitated a parents group at the Weekend Workshop. I previously had participated in two workshops as a client only. To be honest, when Joe asked me to run a parent group, I was very nervous. I wondered what I could offer that would have meaning. After all, I am not a SLP or professional in the field. I wasn't sure what to do, and was still grappling with my ice breaker the day before. Then it hit me - I already knew what to share with the parents. My story. Very simply, my story, the real one, that I had never told to anyone. The story of the 5 year old little girl who was stuttering and received social punishment. I wrote the story out in third person and started the group out with "Once upon a time there was a little girl", with the intention being that afterward we would discuss feelings and wishes. Well, I got choked up and emotional towards the end of the story, and I saw other people connecting with the emotion too. I felt really honored to share my story with people "who get it" and benefit from hearing true stories from an adult who stutters. - **Pam Mertz**

It's OK To Stutter



Weekend Workshop 2009



Weekend Workshop 2009

My time at the 34th annual weekend workshop for people who stutter at the College of St. Rose was an experience that I will never trade for anything in my lifetime. What I learned from such a short amount of time is that for the past twenty years I had been accepting of my stutter, but came out of this weekend embracing it.

Being able to hear the stories of so many strong and wonderful people gave me a sense of empowerment and pride for being able to overcome adversity for such a long time without realizing how much of an impact stuttering was playing in my life. I've never been around so many genuinely great people at the same time which doesn't only include people who stutter, but all of the graduate student clinicians, the supervisors, Dr. Joe Klein, Dr. Donna Cooperman, and Dr. Tricia Zebrowski. It was truly a great time for me and I look forward to continuing to take part in the annual workshops. - **Alex Burday**

As a first-time member of both the Fluency Council and the Annual Weekend Workshop for People Who Stutter at The College of St. Rose, I have been so very grateful and thankful to be a part of everything. The weekend workshop far exceeded my expectations. My wonderful, and patient, clinicians worked with me to turn many challenges into opportunities. What struck me the most about the entire event was the absolutely risk-free/judgment-free environment, in which I was not afraid to tackle my speech blocks and work on decreasing my word changing. I met some really insightful, intelligent, and interesting individuals. Thank you to everyone who attended and was a part of the workshop! -**Jason Northrup**

I had a ball at this past Weekend Workshop. I had so much fun with those I knew, those I met for the first time, and my clinicians-Lauren and Kate---but the biggest bang of all was being drawn as one of 3 "Famous People Who Stutter" alongside Marilyn Monroe and Joe Biden by a very clever 4th grader from the Artist Stars. I left the weekend renewed. - **Joy Emery**

Dear Joe and Sr. Char,

I just wanted to quickly thank you for a wonderful weekend. What you two had put on this weekend was THE best learning experience I have ever had. The clients were the most real and honest people I have ever met and the stories they had told were so touching. I began my journey in this field due to my interest in stuttering and after this weekend know for sure that this is what I want to do. At some points during school you loose the "true" sense of the field and get so caught up in the school work and this weekend brought it all back to reality for me. As soon as I get my C's I can promise you I will be back for Weekend Workshop and most likely Monday night's as a supervisor. Thank you again, this has been an experience I will never forget.

Thank you, **Erica, SLP Graduate Student**

I had a great experience at the weekend workshop! I feel as though I was really able to make a difference with my client, but she also taught me a lot. I think the weekend helped me become a better clinician by understanding and respecting the process of change within clients.

Megan, **SLP Graduate Student**



Of My Own Volition (or Why I Love Taz)

I remember the first time I heard anyone suggest I try voluntary stuttering, I remember thinking, "what a ridiculous thought". I couldn't imagine purposely doing something I had tried to cover up for years. It just didn't make sense.

But it did make sense. When I learned that voluntary stuttering actually gives you some control over your stuttering, that made sense to me. Because control has always been an issue with me.

I had very little control over what happened as a child growing up in chaos. I had no control when my mom drank. I had no control when my dad was constantly critical or ruling the house with a physical fist. I had no control over my speech. I was yearning for something to be in control of, even as a scared little girl.

Years later, as an adult, I would have stuttering moments where I felt such a lack of control that it felt like I was that terrified child all over again. Sometimes I drag my words, and my jaw and lips seem to go with the drag. It is like a tremor in my lips - where I have absolutely no control, a feeling of helplessness. I never knew that this was actually referred to as "blocking", because when I was covert I also denied that I stuttered. This almost always happens in my workplace or at home—almost never in the clinic setting. Another reason to feel helpless, because it happens on it's own schedule, not when I would like to be able to show somebody!



Now that I am being open, overt and accepting, having a tool for control was intriguing in a way. I could choose where and when to stutter purposefully, and I could control how it would sound. Except of course when the voluntary stutter turns into a real stuttering moment. That happens sometimes, and the control changes.

I have found voluntary stuttering to be most useful when I actually talk about stuttering. Either one-on-one or in a group. If I am "not stuttering enough" I will throw some purposeful stutters in, for good measure and to lend credibility. Yeah, that's right. I sometimes feel I am not stuttering enough. That is a thought perhaps unique to covert stutterers. That feeling of being caught between both worlds. Oh, what a bittersweet feeling.

Being able to stutter on purpose gives me a sense of control, even if only for a millisecond. I have initiated the stuttering and I am in charge of that space. Even if it turns real, which is OK too.

Now I know why I am so enthralled with my Tasmanian Devil car air freshener. It has long lost any scent, and is faded from the sun. But it hangs with honor from the rearview mirror. I also have a favorite Looney Tunes character shirt with Taz proclaiming to be a "control freak". So Taz and me have something in common. We share that "feel-good" feeling that comes with having a little control over a small piece of our world. So there!

Written by: Pamela Mertz (visit my blog at <http://make-room-for-the-stuttering.blogspot.com/>)

How to Contribute to our Newsletter

The College of St Rose Fluency Council newsletter was started in October 2007 by members of the Adult Fluency council. The target audience is People Who Stutter (PWS), family and friends of PWS – especially parents - and anybody interested in the stuttering community, including Speech Language Pathologists and SLP students.

The intention of this newsletter is to encourage connection and communication with all persons who stutter, and those that care about persons who stutter.

The articles submitted to this newsletter reflect the opinions of the authors, and are not necessarily the ideas or opinions of the staff of The College of St Rose or all council members. All submissions will be reviewed and may be edited to fit the space allotted .

All are welcome and encouraged to submit contributions to our newsletter. The newsletter is published monthly during the college year. If you would like more information, or wish to contribute an original story or article, please contact the newsletter editor Pamela Mertz at pmertz2@yahoo.com. All articles should be submitted in MS Word, as email attachments. Submissions for "Did You Know?" will be reviewed for authenticity.