



The British
Stammering
Association

www.stammering.org

Speaking Out

Winter 2007

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classroom, to politicians, about the lack of understanding and education about stuttering, to pre-school children about all having something we're good and not so good at, and to therapists. And to her amazement they all reacted the same: "we never knew because no one ever told us!"

We can all shed a light. "Use the butterfly effect, where one butterfly doesn't lift anyone's eyebrow, but if we all 'flap our wings', we can get people's attention." Let's change the way the media's projecting us and show them who we really are.

More challenges came when her first child was born – "Will she stutter? Will I be able to read bedtime stories? Will she feel ashamed of her mother? Will I have the guts to go to parent meetings and ask questions?" Her daughter doesn't stammer, and is now a leader on camps for stammering children. When friends ask about her mother's speech, she simply tells them she stammers. And the importance of asking questions to protect the well-being of her daughter totally outweighs the fear of stuttering in front of the other parents. "I simply tell them I stutter..."

Research might seem boring but is important to gain better understanding why we do what we do, and find peace in knowing that there are things we simply cannot be held responsible for. Stuttering is not our fault and as such, we should stop hiding and feeling ashamed of it.

Keynote speech: Michael Winkler Benefits of stammering?

Michael Winkler, a PhD student from Germany, urged participants to put stammering in perspective. We often tend to see ourselves as consisting largely of the stammer. We put aside our capabilities and characteristics, and call ourselves 'a stammerer'. We could see ourselves instead as 'a person who becomes fluent'. The change of words can show the direction we are going. Also we, and society, could learn to see stammering as only a fairly small part of the total human being.

'Healing', suggested Michael, is a degree of acceptance of the stammer. The more we accept it, the more we are healed. If you try to get the stammer out of your life, it gets stronger. Acceptance by society helps, but it is for people who stammer to undertake public relations and awareness raising work to try and change social attitudes.

His own definition of stammering is as "an evolutionary corrective for the unconscious use and conscious misuse of speaking" in society. Perhaps fluent people do not pay attention to speaking or listening. Stammering is a contrast – maybe it "makes you think how you and I speak".

Nothing on this earth is totally good or totally bad. The problem is we often think *either good or bad*, rather than *both and*. Michael has

tried to look also at positive aspects of stammering. Some possible benefits which have been put forward are:

- Can listen better? – and perhaps not so likely to make ill-considered comments.
- Sympathetic – others can show their weaknesses more openly because you do so yourself by stammering.
- Cute, charming, "sexy"(!?), as some have suggested.
- Better self-perception and analysis, and self-discovery?
- Stuttering as a sign post? - "Where the fear is, there is the way ..."

Michael saw fear as possibly the chief reason behind adult stammering. With fear, the aim is to have a balance. "There is no courage without fear." Fear is a necessity – the question is whether you are paralysed by it or whether it motivates you to do more. One way he had found it useful to work on the fear was through awareness-raising about stammering, such as doing public surveys (on stammering), radio, and information booths etc. Other very helpful methods he used were yoga exercises and meditation.

Michael's website at www.lebe-dein-stottern.de includes an article in English. His full Powerpoint presentation is available from him by email (michael_winkler@gmx.net) and on the BSA website.

Giving the lie to fear

by Anita Blom

If you're lucky, you get to find a few gurus during your lifetime. Everything this person says makes sense. Everything he or she does, you want to do. I met one guru last year. This year's guru was in the shape of Bob Adams, at the BSA Conference. I came, I saw and I conquered... the nail bed. He told us it could be done. He showed us it could be done. So we did it. And at the end I told him to let me try without the blanket and he told me about the risks of puncturing my spine, damaging my blouse and other messy stuff... But I trusted him and he trusted me. Days after I could still see the dots on my blouse and feel the nails in my back, but what a rush! He asked me if I want to walk on hot coals and eat fire next time.

My answer is: what date shall I put in my diary?

But you know what? I've always been afraid of the dentist. So when I broke my tooth some weeks after Telford, I was terrified. When I was lying in that dentist chair, waiting for him to break my spirit, I suddenly remembered Bob telling us that the fear within us is often greater than the danger outside us. And if I can lie down on a nail bed (and spend a week, as I just had, facing my fear of heights by lowering myself down a mountain on a rope), I can manage a dentist drill. So I mixed my experiences from two

workshops, positive thinking and facing my fears, and a sudden peace came over me. Afterwards I was shaking. Not from the usual anxiety adrenaline cooking in my veins, but from the adrenaline of leaving my fear behind at the dentist! That's the power of self-help! To find your gurus who help you to find your true self and bring it out in the open, to make it grow and thirst for more.

Not compulsory for our keynote speakers, but Anita Blom (with Jan Anderson, left) takes on Bob's bed of nails. Photo: Anita Blom



Well, what's the problem?

by Michael Winkler



Michael Winkler

This year's BSA conference in Telford, the 12th in all, was a very special event for me. Not only because it was my first BSA

congress, but also because it was my first foreign national congress for people who stutter (or stammer, if you like to term our "little weakness" like that).

There were a lot of interesting workshops and speeches as well as conversations with many people from

different backgrounds. In fact, it was also quite international (e.g. Croatia, Holland, Russia, Sweden, Nepal, Ireland, Germany), not forgetting all the different cultures the participants may have had (English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Guinea-Bissau, India, Malaysia, Portugal, Germany etc.). Maybe the German conferences too should be more international and colourful.

I was surprised at how easily some people approached me to chat. People would get over what they wanted to say in an easy and pleasant way. And there was the

open-mic session at the end of the congress. Wow, people singing like Pavarotti, a teenage pop star, a soul queen, an undiscovered star poet... Well, I have to say "What's the problem with stammering if you are able to do all that?" Simply amazing ...

I would like to thank all the people who made my stay in Telford and the UK such a nice one, in particular Norbert, pulling the strings in the background, helping everything and everyone find his or her place, and obstacles seemed to disappear or would not even appear at all.