



# REACHING OUT

Publication of FRIENDS: The National Association of Young People Who Stutter

Nov/Dec 2010

## Becoming More Comfortable



My name is Gracie McMahon and this year I started the sixth grade.

Everyone gets nervous when they start school, but for me it's even worse, and that's because I stutter. In September I wrote a letter to my teachers explaining stuttering and how I handled it.

And, for the first few months of school, I had fun. I talked in class occasionally, and I made two new friends this year.

So far, school's gone pretty well.

But one day, I wasn't feeling so well. I had a bad sore throat, and my voice was raspy and quiet. So, even though I didn't want to, I went to my teacher and told her I wasn't feeling too well. She sent me to the nurse. Once I got there, I told the nurse I felt sick and wanted to go home. And, of course, I stuttered.

When I told her about how I was sick, she interrupted me and said, "Do you have asthma? You talk sort of strange." That really hurt me. Since I block, it usually isn't obvious that I stutter. But I never expected a question like that. So I said, "Oh, I don't, I just stutter."

It was really hard for me to say that, but I did, even though I felt like crying and skipping school just so she couldn't bother me. But she apologized, and thankfully, I was sent home.

After that, I became more comfortable telling people I stutter. And she even called my house to apologize again.

Even though the nurse had hurt my feelings, I was glad she said what she did. After all, I wouldn't have done what I did if she hadn't.

***Congratulations Gracie! FRIENDS is very proud of you!***

**If You Stutter, You Have FRIENDS**

### Fast Facts:

The movie "The King's Speech" is making quite a splash. Some FRIENDS have already had the chance to see it and report that it is done right and accurately portrays the stuttering experience. Make the time to see this movie when it opens in your area. Talk to people about it at school, work and in the community.

**Also, FRIENDS is excited to announce that the writer of "The King's Speech", David Seidler, a PWS, will be a keynote speaker for the 2011 Convention. See page 5 for more details!**

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# Speech Therapy Hope –A Mother's Point of View

It was such an eye-opener for me to read the story Ryan wrote for the fall issue of Reaching Out. This past year has been an amazing journey for him regarding speech. For so many years, I had given up HOPE that Ryan would ever seek speech therapy on his own. Guess he showed me!

I must say, though, that even though Ryan's speech therapy during his public school years was not successful, those school therapists did what they could, and contrary to what Ryan may think, they really did care. In fact, his elementary school therapist paid to attend a conference that was being held in Columbus out of her own money. Ryan made the decision to go on consult while he was still in high school. I thoroughly understood why he made that decision, and while I didn't necessarily agree with it, I respected his right to make it.

Finding FRIENDS when Ryan was in middle school was the beginning of HOPE for me. At first I attended convinced that a qualified fluency therapist in Columbus would magically appear. I held out HOPE for many years that this would happen. Each year I would attend the FRIENDS conference with new questions that I asked of every speech therapist I could corner. As Ryan advanced further and further in school, I became less focused on a solution that would solve his fluency and more on accepting the fact that he would probably always be a person who stuttered severely. After all, that was what FRIENDS was all about - acceptance for those who stutter and their parents,

However, when Ryan chose Bowling Green State University, I revved up the HOPE factor again because BG had an excellent speech department with two, not just one, fluency therapists. Much to my dismay, he blew me off when I shared this fact. HOPE stayed just under the surface that first year for me, until I once again realized therapy wasn't going to happen. I continued going to FRIENDS, and by this time I don't think I was the frantic mom anymore - I had accepted the fact that this was it. I was okay with Ryan's decision because Ryan was a successful, confident, happy, amazing young man. What more did I want? I helped lead parent round tables at FRIENDS, and was secure and content with where we were in Ryan's journey. When parents at the conferences would tell me how much they admired Ryan, I was reminded once again that fluency wasn't everything. However, there was still a small piece of me that HOPED each time I attended FRIENDS and even more so when Michael Caggiano would attend. Michael gave me HOPE that someday things might change for Ryan.

Then, junior year, Ryan called angry with the professor who told him to go seek therapy or fail his class. HOPE poked its head up again, for one semester. When Ryan stopped attending therapy at BGSU, I finally resigned myself to the fact that this was as good as it was going to get. I even had conversations with Lee about his decision because I was discouraged. Both Lee and Patty talked to Ryan every year about getting some quality therapy. HOPE would appear briefly when they shared this with me and then disappear just as quickly as soon as we left the conference - when Ryan would restate his lack of interest or desire. As far as he was concerned, his speech was okay, he was okay, and I had better be okay.

Then the real world brought Ryan to a different place. He was about to do an internship in Boulder, Colorado, and at the same time was accepted by the Austin, Texas Police Department to attend their academy after he graduated. Austin required that he do speech therapy in order to improve his ability to communicate. They told him that stuttering wasn't a problem - closing his eyes was. HOPE crept back for me - he was going to be in Patty Walton's world and complete strangers were telling him to do therapy. I didn't dare say anything, just HOPED. To my relief and surprise, I discovered that Ryan had contacted Patty about working with her while he was in the Denver area.

That was the beginning of the beginning for Ryan. He worked diligently with Patty for the few months he was in Colorado. Patty was his mentor, his trustworthy friend, who believed in him and slowly changed his mind about speech therapy. I began to get that glimmer of HOPE back when he would call home or Patty would share successes with me.

Ryan arrived home late one night just before Thanksgiving last year. As he and I sat in the kitchen I couldn't keep my eyes off of him. Finally, he complained I wasn't listening. He was right - I wasn't. I was watching. During the entire conversation he had complete eye contact with me, and I was able to see his smile because he no longer struggled to get words out. A miracle had truly happened - HOPE was sitting in the kitchen with us. Maybe it had never left; maybe I had just pushed it away.

So, for those of you who may have given up HOPE that your child will begin or return to therapy - the right therapy - don't. Keep attending FRIENDS, keep hoping, keep believing that when the time is right, the right therapist will be there, and HOPE will return for all of you.

**Written by Ruth McDermott - proud mother of Ryan and grateful friend of Patty Walton and Lee Caggiano**

# Our Story of Finding FRIENDS - by Melanie Haiken



My daughter Linnea was three years old when she began to stutter.

By five, she stuttered so severely her face, head, and neck would contort as she tried to get her words out. When she was six, she crawled under the table during speech therapy and refused to come out.

A year later we joined FRIENDS, an organization that brings together kids who stutter from all over the country for a yearly summer conference.

The year Linnea was nine, two boys followed her around the playground every recess, cruelly mimicking the tics she made with her head when trying to talk while other kids laughed.

By 10, Linnea had seen, by her count, 14 different speech therapists. We'd spent \$8,000 for a SpeechEasy, a high-tech inner ear device intended to trick her brain out of stuttering. (It didn't work, though she did two years of specialized therapy to learn to use it.) We'd tried an intensive program of supplementation with vitamins and nutrients. During these years, Linnea had almost stopped talking. She spoke only when absolutely necessary, answering in short syllables.

When she was 12, during a support session at FRIENDS, Linnea wrote me a letter and read it out loud to me. It said, in part, "I love you Mama. I know you're trying to help me with my stuttering when you take me to speech therapy and try all these solutions. But it makes me feel like you're trying to "fix" me. And that makes me feel like there's something wrong with me. I stutter and I'm okay with that. It's part of what makes me who I am."

The revelation I experienced that day has stayed with me ever since. I cried for hours, and then I glowed with joy and pride. My 12-year-old daughter had attained a level of self-acceptance that I, like most adults, had never reached. It was my turn to learn from her.

When she graduated from eighth grade, my daughter who'd once refused to speak secretly entered the competition to give the graduation speech for her class. She didn't tell me until she knew she was among the winners. She stood at the podium in front of several thousand people and gave a moving speech. And yes, she stuttered. And she was okay with it.

What was the turning point? It came the minute Linnea found FRIENDS, a scrappy nonprofit run entirely by volunteers (most, parents of kids who stutter) that brings kids who stutter together from all over the U.S. and beyond. Most kids who stutter have never met another child who stutters, much less hundreds of them.

For a seven year old silenced by her fear of stuttering, nothing could be more freeing than hearing a 15-year-old boy talk openly about how scary it is to call a girl and ask for a date, or a college-bound senior talk about navigating her first job interview - and getting the job.

It wasn't just Linnea, though, whose life changed through meeting other stutterers and their families.

In my first workshop I learned that stuttering is a neurological disorder, that nothing I did had caused it, and nothing could cure it.

More importantly, though, I discovered the paradoxical nature of stuttering: the more a stutterer tries not to stutter, the worse it gets.

As in many areas of life, fear is the crux, acceptance the release that unlatches the door.

Ask any adult who stutters what helped free their speech, and the answer is simple. "When I stopped being so afraid of stuttering, I stopped stuttering as much."

Is there a lesson there for all of us? I think so. Many lessons, perhaps. Here's what I've learned through eight summers of watching my daughter laugh and chatter with a gaggle of kids who stutter, while we parents marvel to each other, "Gee, I haven't heard him talk this much all year." (continued on next page)

## Our Story of Finding Friends (cont'd from page 3)

True empowerment comes through self-acceptance, and there's no more powerful route than finding the collective support of others who are suffering in the same way, with the same issue. Those struggling with alcoholism and addiction know this, as do cancer survivors who find a support group. There's a deep inner release that can only come when we can finally share our thoughts, fears, and sorrow in the company of those who've been there, who've dealt with whatever impediment is holding us back, who "get" it on a deep level.

But for parents of children who stutter, it's particularly profound because our problem is so rare, so overlooked, so misunderstood. No one but another parent of a child who stutters knows the particular pain of watching a child who knows the answer sit silently in class with her hand down, the anguish of watching a child sit alone on the sidelines while other kids huddle together, gushing to each other about the latest TV celeb, the latest fashion trend.

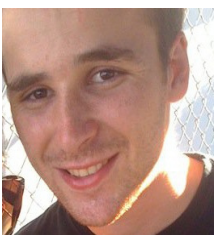
I spent years trying to help my daughter talk the way other people talk, with a deep hard rock of pain inside me because she couldn't. Because I feared that the world wouldn't accept her as she was, I took it as my job to protect her from that pain by finding a cure, a fix.

Through Friends, I realized I was looking at it all backwards. Linnea will always struggle to speak; she will always need more time to say what she has to say. If she can't change, shouldn't it be the world that changes?

This isn't my own original idea, I have to admit. It was presented by stuttering expert Kristin Chmela at a FRIENDS panel a few years ago. "Stuttering teaches the world to listen," Chmela said. And I stood in a room full of children, parents, speech therapists, and adults who stutter as we gave her a standing ovation, tears streaming down many of our cheeks.

**Editors Note: Melanie submitted this for publication for e-RO in July. When I (Pam, your humble e-RO editor) read this, I shared it with Lee right away. Melanie was asked to read this at the FRIENDS conference in July. Which she did, and brought many of us to tears. We wanted to be sure to publish this for those readers who weren't there to hear heartfelt words one mom had for daughter Linnea.**

### Spreading The Word About FRIENDS



This year I got to go to the ASHA convention in Philadelphia thanks to FRIENDS. This was not my first ASHA, but every convention I have been to has always offered something new, and this year's convention was no different. ASHA is a conference for those who are involved in the speech and audiology professional field and while I am not majoring in neither, getting to volunteer at the FRIENDS table has always been great. Thousands of people attend and you can walk around the exhibit hall exploring other booths, attend presentations or view poster boards from students and teachers.

While at the booth, you get to talk to speech pathologists and graduate students about the organization, share stories about past FRIENDS conferences and explain what the organization is all about. It is a great opportunity to spread more awareness, and it feels great to hear speech-pathologists say they are going to bring information back to their clients.

Also, volunteering at the booth gives me a different perspective of what it is like in the professional field, and makes me appreciate it more. Aside from the conference, you get to spend a couple days in a different city, and it being Philadelphia this year, every day I had an authentic Philly Cheese Steak that I can't get in San Diego!

Overall, this year's ASHA was a great experience in meeting new people, looking at some of the presentations when I had the chance and talking about FRIENDS to others!

**Written by: Dmitriy Bernasovskiy**

# Breaking News: 2011 Keynote Speakers

FRIENDS has not one, but two, exciting, visible, very successful people who stutter lined up as 2011 keynote speakers. Don't miss the 2011 Convention!



**David Seidler**, the screen-writer for the movie "The King's Speech" will be one of the featured keynote speakers for the 2011 Friends Convention in Washington D.C. This will be an exciting opportunity for kids, teens and adults who stutter, as well as parents, family members, and speech professionals to hear Mr. Seidler's story in person.

Seidler himself stuttered severely as a child, and as he was born in London, he always "had a soft spot" for King George VI, as Seidler knew that he stammered (as it is called in England and many other countries).

Seidler always had an interest in the story of King George, because of the fact that the King had improved to the point where he could give these very eloquent, moving, stirring wartime speeches.

Seidler was also very interested in telling this story because, after researching and talking to a son of the King's speech therapist, Lionel Logue (played by Geoffrey Rush in the movie), Seidler also found out that the royal family didn't like talking about the "royal stutter" at

all, as it was viewed as an embarrassment, something to be swept under the carpet. Seidler knew this was a story that one day would need to be told.

How lucky we are to have this story being told, as it will dramatically increase public awareness of stuttering. And how fitting is it that the first person to ask Seidler to speak at a stuttering convention, and first person he said yes to, was a teen who stutters.

Read more: [http://theenvelope.latimes.com/news/la-en-seidler-20101209\\_0\\_5432273.story](http://theenvelope.latimes.com/news/la-en-seidler-20101209_0_5432273.story)



**Marc Vetri** will be the other featured keynote speaker. He is a person who stutters who is also the 2010 Iron Chef winner, and the most influential chef today in Philadelphia. His wildly popular restaurant is aptly named Vetri, the intimate townhouse gem he opened 12 years ago with maitre d' and co-owner Jeff Benjamin.

To see Vetri these days, striding in his chef whites through the dining room to pull a shot from one of his beloved vintage espresso machines, or tooling around town on a Vulcan motorcycle is to see a man at one with his world, basting in the juices of his unique style.

But he wasn't always the picture of confidence. His lifelong struggle with a stutter was particularly challenging to him as a child.

He was the opposite of a confident kid. His speech problems were very difficult, and some kids were not particularly nice. But he learned to stand up for himself. . . .

"But what he went through as a kid was the real building block for what he's become. It's also made him very compassionate and understanding with other people." (a quote from his sister, Risa Vetri Furman).

Read more: [http://www.philly.com/philly/restaurants/20080925\\_Marc\\_Vetri.html#ixzz17eyuRxZ6](http://www.philly.com/philly/restaurants/20080925_Marc_Vetri.html#ixzz17eyuRxZ6)

# Kids Who Stutter Are Just Like Anyone Else!

Imagine being an 11-year-old, in sixth grade. There are 30 kids in the class. The teacher takes attendance at the beginning of the period, and does it in a fairly traditional way. She calls each student's last name alphabetically, and each kid has to say "here" or "present." No big deal, right? This is played out in classrooms all across the country.

The 11-year-old's last name begins with "S", so he has to wait while the other kids' names are called. It's always done the same way too, starting with the "A"s, never with "Z."

Waiting, this kid does what he always does. He focuses on what he is going to say and what will happen when he says it. His palms start to get sweaty and his heart starts to pound. He can feel his face grow really hot and realizes he is squirming in his seat.

He is thinking, "Please, not today, please not today, please let it be OK today." But he knows that the same thing is going to happen. He wishes he was sick and could go to the nurse's office.

Then he hears the teacher say "Stasick." He decides to say "here," which might go easier than it did yesterday. He opens his mouth, says "hu-hu-hu-hhhh- here" and his eyes squeeze shut. He hears the teacher call the next kid's name.

Maybe it won't happen today. Nah, he hears it, the snickers from the kids sitting behind him. Then the skinny kid with big ears whispers loudly, "Spastic Stasick, he can't t-t-t-talk."

The kid tries to shrink down in his seat as he hears the kids laughing at him, just quietly enough so that the teacher doesn't hear it. She never does. He has thought about telling her, but knows that will just make things worse.

It's bad enough that he is pulled out of his classroom twice a week to go to speech. When he is pulled out, (and it's always during math or science, the classes he likes) he hears the kids whisper, "There goes spastic Stasick with the b-b-b-babies learning how to talk".

He can't talk to his speech teacher about the teasing either; he only gets 20 minutes with her and there is usually another speech kid in the room.

There is no way the kid can tell his mom, because she always tells him to slow down and think about what he is trying to say before he talks. The kid keeps thinking, "No one understands me."

Lunch time is the worst. No one sits with him, and when kids walk by, they snicker and laugh. A couple of times, the skinny kid with big ears bumped into him on purpose, knocking him into the wall and making him drop his stuff. The kid and his friends start yelling, "Spastic can't walk either." That gets other kids laughing, including girls.

This kid stutters. He dreads being called on in class. He never raises his hand, even when he knows an answer, and is teased a lot. He is called names, left out socially and sometimes pushed. He does not know anyone else who talks like him and is really starting to hate school.

Kids who stutter get teased and bullied. Kids can be cruel, especially in middle school. Most people do not understand stuttering, because they have never met someone who stutters. Only about 1 percent of the population stutters and it's usually boys.

If you know a kid who stutters, know this: It's not his fault. Stuttering is an involuntary stoppage of normal speech flow. It can be hereditary and some research suggests that it is a neurological disorder. There is no cure yet for stuttering, but therapy with someone who understands stuttering can help, especially with feelings of shame, embarrassment and isolation.

Kids who stutter are just like anyone else, they just talk differently. It is not OK to tease or bully a kid who stutters. I felt like this when I was in school. Organizations like Friends help to ensure that kids today won't have to go through this.

**Written by: Pam Mertz (first published in the Times Union, Albany NY local newspaper on Oct 21, 2010)**

A great gift for that special SLP!

Let your speech therapist see first-hand what really happens at a FRIENDS convention. This manual is compilation of successful and fun workshops that have been presented at FRIENDS conventions.

What a wonderful holiday gift for anyone who works with young people who stutter!



Manual \$25

Onesie \$20



Other great gift ideas!



T-shirt \$ 12

To Place an order contact

**Friends**

at [LCaggiano@aol.com](mailto:LCaggiano@aol.com) to receive your order before the holidays.

Other items available at : [www.friendswhostutter.org](http://www.friendswhostutter.org)

\*All prices include shipping and handling



# stepping Up

## Mentoring Program

### Teens and Children who stutter...we need your help!

**Friends**, *The National Association of Young People Who Stutter*, is a national organization created to provide a network of support and education for children and teenagers who stutter, their families, and the professionals who work with them.

**Friends** is excited to introduce a teen mentoring program, giving teens who stutter the opportunity to support children who stutter. This pilot program is a volunteer experience, involving a commitment of time. Each teen develops mentoring relationships, ultimately benefiting both volunteer and child.

*If you are a teen or a child who stutters, this great new program might be for you!*

#### Requirements:

##### Teens -

Each *teen* volunteer commits to:

- guiding at least two children throughout the year.
- providing support through weekly e-mails, monthly phone calls (optional), sending birthday wishes/card on each child's birthday, and if attending the annual convention, participating with your mentoring partners.
- participating for a minimum of one year.

##### Children -

Each *child* commits to:

- responding to weekly emails and monthly phone calls.
- (if attending the annual convention) - participating with their mentoring partner.
- participating for a minimum of one year.

If you are interested, please fill out the form below and return it to:

Lee Caggiano, c/o Friends  
38 South Oyster Bay Road  
Syosset, NY 11791

This pilot program is the first of its kind. Changes to the project will be ongoing. We welcome any comments and suggestions. Specific requirements will be determined on an individual need basis.

---

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Birthday: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Parent Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

*I was a little scared . . .*

*and I did it anyway*



We will introduce these young people in our newsletter and let others know that there are many cool kids who are doing what they want to do ...and stuttering.

If you would like to send in a photograph with your submission, please do so. We would love to print it.

Mail to:  
Lee Caggiano  
38 South Oyster Bay Rd.  
Syosset, NY 11791

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Where do you live? \_\_\_\_\_

Three things you want us to know about you

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

I was a little scared and

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**My name is Zachary**

I am 7 years old and live in Iowa.

I really love football. My favorite player is . . .

I stutter and talked to my class about stuttering so they would know why it takes me a longer time to talk sometimes.

I was a little scared and I did it anyway!

**My name is Kristen.**

I am 11 years old and live in Tampa.

I have two sisters

I love acting.

I stutter and wrote a letter to all my teachers telling them about my stuttering.

I was a little scared and I did it anyway!

**My name is Michael.**

I am 9 years old and live on Long Island.

I love baseball. My favorite player is . . .

I stutter and I ran for student council at my school. I won!

I was a little scared and I did it anyway!

**My name is Ashlee.**

I am 13 years old and live in St. Louis.

I love playing soccer.

My favorite band is . . .

I stutter and volunteered for a part in my class play.

I was a little scared and I did it anyway!

FRIENDS, The Association of Young People who Stutter  
[www.friendswhostutter.org](http://www.friendswhostutter.org) Toll Free: 866-866-8335

## FRIENDS News & Notes:

If you go to see the movie "The King's Speech" and would like to write up a review, or what you thought, for the next issue of RO, let Lee know.

We would love to hear your reactions, especially what your friends and family think!

If you know someone who could benefit from Friends, make an extra copy of the newsletter for them, or give them a copy of the Mentor program application form.

Parents—leave newsletters in your doctors or dentist's office and at your child's school. Good old fashioned word-of-mouth really does work. Spread the news!

\*\*\*\*\*



The National Association of Young People Who Stutter

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The annual subscription rate is \$35. You can subscribe or order our books, posters, and other materials online at:

Website: [www.friendswhostutter.org](http://www.friendswhostutter.org)

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## Find FRIENDS On Facebook

Hey Kids, Teens, Adults, Parents, Professionals and Anyone who cares about people who stutter, FRIENDS has their own [Facebook](#) page! Check it out, see what everybody's up to, post messages, tell us how your doing, share pictures, stay connected throughout the year.

[www.facebook.com/youngpeoplewhostutter](http://www.facebook.com/youngpeoplewhostutter)

## 14th FRIENDS Convention 2011



Thursday, July 21 - Saturday, July 23, 2011

Embassy Suites Washington, DC—Convention Center

900 10th Street NW

(202) 739-2001

Located between the White House and the US Capitol

**CEUs offered for Speech Language Pathologists \* Educational Grants Available \* Discounts for Speech Language Pathologists who attend with a client.**

For more information: Online: [www.friendswhostutter.org](http://www.friendswhostutter.org) or Toll-free: 866-866-8335