

DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

Keynote Speech for CSA Conference

OCTOBER 20.18

by Mary Wood

I named this presentation Different Strokes for Different Folks This is my story and these are my thoughts and experiences that have changed my life - and I share them with you not because I think this is the way for you. Take out what you think might work for you

I think I started to stutter when I was 2 or 3. My Dad also stuttered but we never talked about it – this big elephant in the room. I had a good role model to follow. I can remember taking “speech therapy” – standing in a big room reading Shakespeare from a big book - Mrs. Hill.... (thank you god therapy has changed).

And then fast forward many years and a few therapies later. On January 21, 1989 I attended a Bob Proctor seminar in Toronto entitled “Born Rich” – thought it had to do with earning money – but found it was about the mind – conscious, subconscious, superconscious - and what effect my thoughts have on my life. And as I listened, I knew that I knew the information even though I had never heard it before.

Then on the 401 on the way home from the seminar, these five words came into my mind: I heard them - my mind controls my body. That what I think about I bring about. And then this thought followed right after: I don't have to

stutter any more. At first, I thought my whole journey was about becoming fluent, but that isn't it at all. It's about so much more than that.

In January 1990, three months after my marriage had ended, my Dad had died, and my house was sold. I went to see my brother in the Keys, and was reading Louise Hay's book "You can heal your life." The third sentence in the first chapter said something like, I am 100% responsible for who I am, what I am and where I am.. I threw the book on the ground because I didn't want to take responsibility for my part in the breakup or for who I was. However, the next morning, I picked the book up again and started to consider those words that changed my life.

In July 1990, I attended a workshop presented by Mark Victor Hansen, one of the Chicken Soup for the Soul originators, and when he was speaking I got the feeling that I was to be a speaker. I remember jabbing my friend's arm – oh my god, I'm supposed to be a speaker when I grow up... but I stutter. So in September I joined Toastmasters – a wonderful caring organization where you feel supported and also have the opportunity to support others. And was there for 5 years, never realizing it would lead me to what I am doing today. What are you holding back from doing?

In 1992 I met Jaan Pill at the premiere of Vladimir Bondarenko's film on stuttering. Carolina is a big part of that.... Jaan told me about a self-help meeting where I sat beside Norm McEwen who gave me a flyer for the 1993

CAPS conference in Ottawa that just happened to have an invitation to submit a proposal for a workshop – that turned out to be the first of many. It was entitled I Love Myself – Especially When I Stutter.

I was a covert stutterer, I didn't let it out too often – there were many ways and much energy to hide it - when I thought I might stutter, I would just stop speaking right in the middle of a sentence, perhaps start another sentence or say what I thought I could say even if it didn't relate. I slowly began to realize there were feelings and a pattern in my speech when I spoke – it was very choppy.

And so to work on both these things, I read Napoleon Hill's book "Think and Grow Rich" for 20 minutes every morning out loud to myself in my room, and my speech started to smooth out... and I realized I didn't stutter when I read all by myself.

I found out I was reading the book for another reason - The book lists the 6 basic fears we have in our lives – I started to read them: poverty, criticism, ill health, loss of love, old age, death – bingo! Wow – the fear of criticism. I'd found the biggie in my life —now I had an awareness to work from!!

Napoleon Hill also said that before we can master an enemy – and fear sure wasn't my friend – we must know its name, its habits and place of abode. So I started to look at fear – a large part of why I stuttered – wanting to

understand why it was there and acknowledge how it affected my speech and my life.

From this information,, I realized that stuttering was a self-fulfilling prophecy – every time I spoke I expected to stutter – on the phone, asking for what I wanted to eat in a restaurant.... Anywhere. I remember I used to drink Molson's because I could say it without stuttering.

I found out that FEAR stands for Fantasized experience appearing real – faith that the wrong thing is going to happen. It can also stand for “F” everything and run,,,,, which I did many times. Ran away from the situation. One thing I think we can agree on is that fear controls us rather us controlling it. Fear in my life and your life shows up in our mental, emotional, spiritual and physical life.

So sometimes I act like who I am not, I don't say what I want to say, do what I want to do, be who I really am? That still shows up now and then. The fear is there because we think who we are is not good enough. We are not who somebody else says we should be, expects us to be. They tell us it's not OK to stutter, and we believe them. If someone is laughing at me, how can they love me? I can't remember anybody telling me it was OK to stutter – until I got to the CSA, NSA, ISA. Can anyone else relate to this fear of rejection – and how does it shows up in your life, not only around stuttering?

I felt I was different – it wasn't a good kind of different. And because I listened to them, I was always trying to fix

me. I felt I had to speak better so I would be better. My whole existence seemed to focus on that.

I was looking for someone else to affirm who I am – rather than me doing it for me. And yet I've heard that most people who stutter are very intelligent – and I choose to believe that. (just thought I'd throw that one in...)

Wendell Johnson, formerly a professor of speech pathology at the University of Iowa said, there is no stuttering where there is no fear of stuttering. I'll just throw that one out for your consideration..... Different strokes for different folks.

Fear is a negative thought, and we have negative thoughts *about who we are when our self-esteem is not healthy*. I knew there was hope for me because I knew I could change my thoughts – about anything that I thought about. It was time to be aware of what I was thinking about – listening to my self talk.

Our thoughts are never going to stop. “They” say we have between 50,000-70,000 thoughts a day. And so much of the time they are somebody else's thoughts anyway. And it's when we become attached to them, it's when we believe them that we suffer.

Our problem is not that we stutter. It's how we feel about “it” and how we feel about ourselves. So I asked myself - how do I feel about stuttering? Notice I didn't say “MY” stuttering.

When I worked at the Conservation Authority, I was talking with one of the women about “my” stuttering. She asked me if I wanted to own it – I said NO – and so now I say “the stuttering.” So, back to the question – how do you feel about stuttering? Do you feel it’s the worst thing that’s happened to you. Are you scared of it? How do we feel about ourselves when we stutter?

Don’t feel guilty because fear is there. Hug yourself. We’ve been laughed at, made fun of, the recipient of stupid jokes and comments. Acknowledge that it matters and is important – acknowledge the fear.

I believe it’s important to have therapy for our feelings of rejection – our low self-esteem. And many times that’s up to you and I to do that. Jack Canfield, a self-esteem coach, from the U.S. was my mentor for many years. And Bob Proctor gave me an affirmation that I said every morning as I looked at myself in the mirror....“I am so grateful now that I am relaxed and my speech is fluent.” I was reprogramming my thoughts, changing my story. I had just left a marriage and here I was talking to myself in the mirror every morning – my kids thought I was losing it. And I was losing it –starting to lose the fear of rejection.

I can remember standing in church one day, noticing that when I spoke with my husband who was standing beside me there was no fear and I was fluent – my son Paul had an imaginary friend – so I made up one too- a tall good-looking man who would speak with me – a

nd I wouldn't stutter. Our mind is a marvelous part of you and I – I invite you to use it. Listen to the **good** things it is telling you.

The only way to get through our fear is to face it. For years, I didn't face it, I didn't do anything about it because I didn't know what my fear was. So, how can we face the fear, be aware of the feelings, learn from them and accept them. Here are just a few ideas... and there are many more.

Many moons ago I met Linda Matthews at a workshop in New Jersey, and remember what she said. "anxiety is not an emotion you can think your way out of, but an emotion you can do your way out of." In n other words, do something about it. Different strokes for different folks. The first step is to eliminate avoidances.

- Take a small risk every day –Make one phone call every day – write down what you want to say first.
- If you don't like meeting new people, stand beside a stranger on the elevator, waiting for the cross walk, and just say Hello.
- Read "Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway"
- Join Toastmasters
- Talk to your fear – Dr. Carl Scott – Set your fear down at the table, ask it why it is in your life. Ask it what you do to keep it alive. Journal about this..... Do this at your next self-help meeting "Self" help

- Do something for somebody – this takes the focus off you and I....

A long time ago, I read these words by Dr. Charles Van Riper. A PWS and SLP – he wrote them in an NSA newsletter just before he died. Learn to Stutter! Once we face a fear, it starts to disappear.” Then at the next NSA conference, I spoke with his wife and started voluntary stuttering. I still do that today....

When we acknowledge our feelings, start to understand them, eventually we let go of what doesn't serve us, what doesn't work for us any more. The anger may have served us yesterday, but doesn't serve us any more. Most of us have stuttered for a long time – there are many beliefs and thoughts to change. And it all begins with one small step, maybe today, no matter where you are in your journey. Not over by lunch time tomorrow...

I believe we have the answers for us. And it's important to say “Yes” to opportunities that show up, opportunities to face that fear and do it any way. Here's a verse from 1 Timothy 1:7 that was on my cupboard for years: For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and a sound mind.

This fluency we want – do we think we'll be happier when it shows up? Is our lack of fluency holding us back from being happy, leading the life we want to live? I always thought fluency would make me happy – total bliss – but exactly the opposite turned out to be true. My happiness

and acceptance of me as a person who stutters allowed the fluency that was always there to show up.

Change can be scary. And change is inevitable – it's happening whether we want it or not. And when we change one little letter in the word change, we get the word "chance." And that's what change is – a chance to grow, to learn, to be who you really are.

I used to hide behind the fear – it was my excuse and reason for not doing many things because I stuttered. I can remember when I was in school – and yes I've got a good memory – I spent a lot of time in the bathroom. Every time I thought I might be asked to speak, I would raise my hand, ask to leave the room to go to the bathroom. That was just one of the many many ways I had to avoid speaking.

I spoke at a conference in Chicago in 1993, the theme for the day was "The Gift of Stuttering." That's a stretch isn't it!! It had taken a long time for me to start to realize this. It's a gift that comes wrapped in many layers of plain brown wrapping – there's no shiny paper or big red bow. And when we start to peel away the layers, then we find the gift. For me, this journey is not about fluency – that was the beginning.

On the plane coming home from an NSA conference in San Francisco, these words were there: This is a journey about knowing who I am. It's not about stuttering. The

only person who has to love me when I stutter is me. I knew this was a required ride for me.

One of the major teachings that has helped me during this time is taken from the book entitled “The Four Agreements” by Don Miguel Ruiz. It is a practical guide to personal freedom and it asks us look at the source of our self-limiting beliefs that create needless suffering. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to suffer any more. The second agreement is “Don’t Take Anything Personally” – and I still keep going back to this because of the freedom it brings.

Nothing other people do or say is about me, me, me or you, you, you. It is about who they are, what their beliefs are. This also refers to us in our conversations with others. Everybody is in a completely different world – your world isn’t the same as mine and mine’s not the same as yours - even though we may all stutter. Our stories are all different – and our stories change. When we take something personally, we assume they know what is in our world and who we are.

When we take something personally, we can feel hurt, offended, rejected, not loved. We actually set ourselves up to suffer. We react, many times inside, defending our beliefs, angry because they don’t agree with us, haven’t accepted us as we are. And the question here is – have we accepted us as we are? This is not their responsibility – it is ours. When we don’t have this need to be accepted, then whether they laugh with us or at us,

we know it has nothing to do with us. It's where they are in their journey. And we understand this without blame, without judgement. We love them and bless them

Others will always have their own opinions and belief systems. And what they think or believe or feel, is not about you and I – it is about them. And at the same time, I realize that I am responsible for who I am, what I am, and where I am.

As we make the decision not to take anything personally, then we can look at the anger, the shame, the guilt that may have served us in the past. We learn from them, we let them go, one little bit at a time perhaps, and allow the agreements and beliefs that **support us** to take their place. Everything is here to learn and grow from. And it might not happen by lunch time tomorrow.....

A few years ago, the book "Forgiveness: the Greatest Healer of all" by Jerry Jampolsky jumped off the shelf and into my hands. I realized we judge others, ourselves and the experiences so many times during a day. I'm still working with this judgment on the highway where I think people should be driving how I think they should be driving is still an awareness for me....

When we make judgements, it has nothing to do with the other person. It's the space we're in – not where they are. And what we need to forgive in others just may be something in ourselves that we don't know or don't want to accept is part of who we are. My son Paul procrastinates

and I get mad when he doesn't do something he said he'd do. I'm finally realizing that his procrastination sure doesn't fall far from my tree. It's about time – he's 45 years old.

When we don't forgive, this keeps us attached to incidents to people, to experiences that have happened in the past. So I would ask you to consider and think about incidents that you are still attached to. At the NSA conference in Chicago, I offered a workshop on forgiveness, and a person shared about the anger he had felt with his brother for 25 years. The good news is now he is aware of where it was coming from....

Forgiveness stops our inner battles with ourselves. It allows us to stop recycling anger and blame. **To not forgive is a decision to suffer.** Forgiveness is letting go of all hopes for a better past. We will have more peaceful and loving relationships when we stop telling others how to live, wanting to be in control. For peace of mind, resign as general manager of the universe.... Anyone have any issues around that control?

One of the most important people we have to forgive is ourselves – letting go of our guilt and shame. We can hide our anger, and that often is what makes it difficult to forgive. When we start to become aware and acknowledge the anger, the shame, the guilt in the past, then we change the past. We change our story.

It becomes easier to forgive when we choose to no longer believe we are the victims. When we know we have a choice.... And we always have a choice as to what to think, what to say, how we feel. Forgiveness is a continuous process – not something we do just once or twice. (well now that's all done with)

Not long ago I was at a meditation retreat where I heard the words “sit up straight.” Then I heard the words “stay strong” and went into my inner child Little Mary – she’s still there – and she was angry because she felt she had to stay strong when people laughed at her. No matter how old we are, there are still experiences to heal and forgive from, if we so choose.

Fear has brought me faith, anger has brought me patience, judgment has brought me forgiveness and compassion. We have so much to be grateful for. Stuttering was and still is the gateway to so many things in my life. Gratitude plays a major role in my life. Every morning – thank you God – another day above the grass. I would invite you to do a Gratitude journal - 5 things at the end of the day you are grateful for. This starts us to focus on the good that's in our lives every day. Doesn't have to be anything big..... It's also a record of all the good things that have happened during the year.

An attitude of gratitude allows us to develop an awareness of ourselves as a recipient rather than a victim. Everything you possess in your life is because of the efforts of others

– thousands and thousands of people working to provide us with furniture, a car, a home, clothes, our phones.....

Say thank you when someone offers you a compliment. Say thank you to the checkout person in the supermarket. Say thank you to anyone who serves you..... Return your shopping cart to the store with the quarter still in it. Get up in the morning, look out the window and say Good Morning Lord” instead of O Good Lord It’s morning. These are just a few ideas.... I’m sure you have many of your own.

I went back to school in 2003 to become a minister and was ordained in 2005. Graduated at 68 years old. I’m still doing church, and am amazed and grateful that I earn my money by speaking. It’s brought me to know that all things are possible...

Here are a few folks that I’m grateful for and want to say thank you to –

The Canadian Association for People Who Stutter and the Canadian Stuttering Association that has nurtured me, loved me and supported me since 1992. A lot of miles travelled, words spoken, laughter shared. Grateful for the NSA – Annie Bradberry and John Harrison – major influences.

And to all of you who are part of a self-help group, who support the CSA through your financial contributions,

your volunteer time, and are a system of love and support for people who stutter.

Thanks to speech language pathologists and to Carla – we've been hanging out for many moons, and I am grateful for your support, for the ideas and the laughter we still share.

- And to the Barbershoppers who through their “Harmonize for Speech Fund” have raised thousands and thousands of dollars to support those who stutter, and other numerous speech-related projects. Personally, for their financial support that has helped me to travel and present workshops world-wide.

If anyone would like a copy of this presentation, let me know.

And so, I wish you well. From a workshop many years ago I leave with you these words that still ring true today “I Love Me, Especially When I stutter.”