

# A Day in the Life of a Stutterer: Trauma in the Drive-Thru

**L**IKE THOUSANDS OF OTHER COLLEGE STUDENTS, ON MOST DAYS I have to grab a quick lunch between classes. Traffic is too bad to travel back to my apartment, and thirty minutes doesn't allow time to make anything anyway, so I choose my lunch from one of the many fast food destinations near campus.

I remember one of these lunchtime incidences clearly. I pulled into the parking lot at McDonald's and searched for a spot. I caught a glimpse of the line inside; people were impatiently lined up from the counter to the trash cans at each register. Glancing at my watch, I realized that I didn't have time to park, wait in line, and arrive at my gym class on time.

Unfortunately, I retreated to the drive-thru. I probably would have risked the embarrassment of being late for class and waited inside if I could have found a parking place. Instead, I steered my car between the curbs lining the drive-thru and prepared to order. There were no cars in front of me, and I felt myself becoming nervous as I inched toward the order screen. "Welcome to McDonald's, may I take your order?" Her words seemed to bounce at me like a snarling dog. I had to think quickly. I would have really liked to order the chef's salad. I knew that I couldn't get



Jennifer dressed, not as a clown, but as high school valedictorian.



As I took my brown paper bag of greasy fare, I mumbled, “Thanks,” and sped away to my gym class a little late. It was paradoxical that I punished myself by taking a gym class, yet, on the way ate a chicken sandwich and fries. That day, I remember wishing that my parents and sister were still with me everywhere that I went. They used to order for me so that I got what I wanted when I wanted it, despite the situation. I would have liked a chef’s salad that day, but sometimes I make sacrifices to save myself from embarrassment because of my stuttering.

After eating my sandwich in four bites and sitting through three red lights, I made it to my gym class a little late. I quickly shut my car door and ran to meet my classmates who were already walking around the track. As I joined their steps in unison, one of them said that she thought she knew my roommate and asked me who I lived with. I tried to answer her, but no sound left my lips. I looked away, as if trying to think of her name, and prepared myself to form the words. I then said her name. My classmate asked, “Did your mind go blank or what?” I jokingly replied, “Yeah, it’s been one of those days.” I just let them think that I couldn’t remember her name.

I finished the gym class still scolding myself for seeming absentminded in front of my classmates. As I got into my car to drive home, I thanked God that the day was almost over.

Driving home, I began thinking about looking for a part-time job. I was limited in places of employment because of the speaking requirements of certain jobs. Most of the jobs available were cashier jobs at fast food restaurants. I couldn’t work at one of them because I was afraid I couldn’t ask someone what he or she wanted in the drive-thru line. I couldn’t work at a place and answer telephones. That ruled out a nice desk position. I’d probably look for a job where I wouldn’t have to speak much; grunt work was more up my alley or something where I could work face to face with people.

I pulled into the parking lot at my apartment complex, parked the car, and went inside. Replaying the messages, I discovered that my best friend from back home had called. She seemed irritated that I hadn’t called her in a while. I didn’t call her as much

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Jennifer  
and  
Snuggles  
at home  
in North  
Spring.



as I used to in fear that her mother would answer the phone. I stuttered while asking for her daughter one time in high school over the telephone. Her mother asked me why I was so nervous and I didn't know how to answer her. Therefore, I tried to avoid calling her, always hoping she would call me instead. That evening, though, I really wanted to return her call and talk to her about jobs that she'd think I would be good at.

She would probably jokingly recommend that I become a professional clown. She knew I never stuttered in a clown suit. Despite the blue curly hair, red nose, and baggy polka-dot pants, my voice always remained smooth and free flowing while in the clown troupe in our high school. I could perform in front of small or large groups, use my high pitch clown voice, become another person for a few hours, and speak with ease. That type of job wasn't practical in college since a circus wasn't coming to town any time soon.

I sat the phone back down on the receiver and decided to call her later. She knew me; I hoped that she would call back instead. I had had a rough day and wasn't ready to deal with talking on the telephone.

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