

I Chose to Swim

CONVERSATION ALWAYS PRESENTED A PROBLEM FOR ME. It was difficult to get into and participate in a conversation because my stuttering occurred more often at the beginning of a sentence. I couldn't spit out the first word. I would rehearse the first two or three sentences in my brain before I said anything.

I would take as long as thirty seconds before I could join in. My need for a pause prohibited me from getting a word in edgewise in normal conversation. You just can't pause for that amount of time in impromptu conversation. After I did get started, people could not understand me and often stopped paying attention to what I was saying because the words seemed to rush out, and I slurred them all together.

My self-confidence suffered for the longest time because I felt like all the other kids were talking and having fun while I couldn't jump into the conversation. My quietness made me appear shy and further hurt my self-image. I sometimes poked fun at myself because of my stuttering. I would try to begin a sentence and jumble up the words or start stuttering. I would whack myself and say, "Spit it out, Jay," to make the person that I was talking to feel less pressured and awkward about the stuttering.

Stuttering really didn't seem like a big deal to me until high school. I started getting into situations in which I needed to speak



Jay Hanna
today.



Here's Jay choosing to float. He already knows how to swim!

in front of different civic and school organizations. However, I feared trying to speak in front of a group and beginning to stutter. This fear made my stuttering worse.

At this time, I decided to bite the bullet and start speaking in front of people despite my fear. I accepted a few opportunities where I had to speak in front of people at school functions. I encouraged myself to concentrate really hard and after I got through the first couple of minutes of a public speech, it became really easy. The more I spoke, the more confidence I gained. The more confidence that I gained, the more the problem started to go away.

I feel like I overcame the problem because of my determination. I approached my stuttering the way I learned to swim. I used to be scared to death of water. One day, I just jumped into the deep side of a lake and decided that I was going to sink or swim. I was embarrassed that I couldn't swim just as I was embarrassed that I couldn't speak in front of a group. So, instead of drowning, I just swam to the other

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shore. Stuttering was the same way. I just decided that I was going to start speaking in front of a group of people and either sink or swim.

Because I was so afraid of speaking in front of people and so self-conscious of my stuttering, I forced myself at an early age to start speaking publicly. I began much earlier than a lot of other high school kids. While colleagues still spoke of their nervousness when speaking in front of groups, by the time I entered my professional life, public speeches never really bothered me. By gathering the determination to jump into the deep end and practice the feared unknown, I gained the confidence to overcome my stuttering both physically and emotionally.

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