

Public speaking and constant improvement

by Jaan Pill

Over the past twenty-five years I've done extensive volunteer work for the Canadian Stuttering Association (CSA) and similar organizations. The current focus of my efforts as a volunteer is heritage preservation in my local community of Long Branch, a southwest neighbourhood of Toronto. I was recently elected president of the Long Branch Historical Society.

JANE'S WALK IN SOUTH LONG BRANCH

On May 6, 2012, I helped to lead a "Jane's Walk" in South Long Branch. We had a turnout of about eighty people and used a portable amplifier to ensure that everyone could hear the speakers.

A Jane's Walk is a walk in dedication of the lifelong work of Jane Jacobs, the urbanist and writer who had a strong influence on urban planning processes in cities around the world. I'd say she's helped to make the world a better place.

Many of the skills that I now apply as a volunteer in my local community are skills I developed as a volunteer working on behalf of the worldwide stuttering community.

I'm a great believer in the value of planning when it comes to the staging of meetings, conferences, Jane's Walks, and every other occasion where people get together for a specified purpose.

I learned of the importance of planning during the years I was involved with organizing events and conferences on behalf of the Canadian Stuttering Association. Our Jane's Walk benefited from extensive



PETER FOLEY

The Jane's Walk event in South Long Branch neighbourhood, Toronto, co-led by Jaan Pill

planning involving consultations with large numbers of people.

One of the things that I learned when working with CSA is that it's a wonderful thing to have speaking time at meetings and events shared widely, instead of having just one or two people doing most of the talking. For the recent Jane's Walk, I took turns with another leader at the microphone as the walk proceeded. Sometimes we had a brief conversation, passing the microphone back and forth between us.

ATTENDING TO THE BODY LANGUAGE OF THE AUDIENCE

Another concept that dates from the years when I was active with the Canadian Stuttering Association is the concept of continuous improvement. It's a concept that's the heart of the work that ISTAR (Institute for Stuttering Treatment and Research) has been doing over the past twenty-five years, and a philosophy I adopted and apply to my skills as a public speaker.

I attended ISTAR twenty-five years ago, in July 1987, and learned how to make fluent presentations to large audiences for the first time in my life. After learning this skill, I began paying a little more attention to the listeners and to focus even more on the body language of the audience.

I learned a lot, in that context, from a recent guest speaker who spoke at a meeting of the Long Branch Historical Society about the history of Canadian aviation. He remarked that sometimes the lights from video equipment prevented him from seeing the faces of people in the audience. This made delivering the speech more difficult because he was used to reading facial expressions and body language as a way to gauge how he's doing in delivery of his content. Hearing this prompted me to pay much more attention to the body language of those I'm speaking to during my own presentations. It has helped me to become a more relaxed and spontaneous speaker.

There's a lot that we can learn about public speaking. Fortunately, there are many ways in which each of us can improve our skills in this area.

I'm pleased to have this opportunity to share with you a few things that I've learned, over the past twenty-five years of making presentations to a wide range of audiences.

Jaan Pill is the co-founder of the Canadian Stuttering Association and is currently on the Board of Directors. You can read more about Jane's Walk and the other work that Jaan does in his community by visiting his website, www.preservedstories.com