

Jaan Pill
Nordic Meeting
Sept. 1, 2018

My Story as a Stutterer

My website is called Preserved Stories; it can easily be found through an online search. My email is jpill@preservedstories.com. Please free to contact me about any topic. My website serves as a communications hub for all manner of discussions – for example, in relation to local history in the province of Ontario, Canada where I live. On Facebook, I use my full name: Jaan Hendrik Pill. My Twitter handle is @jaanpill. In 2006, I retired from a career, extending over 30 years, as a public school teacher.

My speaking notes, for my Nordic Meeting talk, are available at my website. In my volunteer efforts, I have especially promoted the concepts of (1) **leadership succession** within stuttering associations and (2) the provision of an **impartial forum** for the sharing of information about stuttering.

Outline of Sept. 1, 2018 talk in Tallinn

I stuttered severely as a child and adolescent. Sometimes I could not get out any words at all. In one case, in my late teens or early twenties, I tried to phone someone and hung up the phone, after trying for 20 or 30 seconds to say “hello.”

And yet, there were times when, with a lot of prior rehearsal, I was able to engage in effective public speaking. In my Sept. 1, 2018 talk, I describe two campaign speeches in high school, when I ran for the position of president of the student council. On those occasions, I spoke well and won the election. At other times, however, I could barely get out any words at all.

I tried various ways to deal with my stuttering, as I grew older. In 1987, at the age of 41, I finally found a way that worked for me. I attended a three-week stuttering treatment program in Edmonton, Alberta, in Western Canada. At that clinic, I

relearned how to speak. I practised my new speech skills every day for over four years, after I got back to Toronto. This is not the only way to deal with stuttering. It's just the way that worked for me.

I did run into an unexpected problem. I had begun making fluent speeches to large audiences – something I had always wanted to do. However, each time I would be making such a presentation, a voice inside me would say, “You’re not supposed to be able to do this. You’re supposed to be falling flat on your face.”

At first, I thought I should get some psychotherapy, to address this bothersome inner voice. But then I decided that what I needed to do was to compare notes with other people who stutter. That’s what led me, in 1988, to start a local stuttering group, the **Stuttering Association of Toronto**, or SAT for short.

A year after starting the group, in 1989, someone explained to me what the inner voice was telling me. After that, the inner voice never bothered me again. By that point, I could see the tremendous value of such groups. In 1989, members of SAT and other groups in Canada began organizing a national conference for people who stutter. Also in that year, I travelled to Estonia to help out with the work of the **Estonian Heritage Society**.

As a result of an Estonian magazine article, arranged by **Ülo Lomp**, which was published after my 1989 visit, **Andres Loorand** contacted me. We organized a series of lectures, in Tallinn in 1990, outlining my own story as a stutterer, and the benefits of groups such as the local Toronto group, that I have described. The lectures led to the founding of the **Claudius Club** and, in 1993, to the founding of the **Estonian Stuttering Association**. I was also involved with the founding of the **Canadian Stuttering Association**, which took place at the first-ever national conference in Canada for people who stutter, which was held in Banff, Alberta, in August 1991.

I was, as well, involved in the founding of the **International Stuttering Association**, in 1995. Prior to that, I had been involved in extensive international networking, among national associations for people who stutter, in my work with the **International Fluency Association**. These days, I am not so much involved with volunteer work, on behalf of people who stutter. My volunteer work is now more concerned with other topics, such as local history and land-use planning.