



Einer Boberg. Photo source: Jaan Pill



Deborah Kully. Photo source: Jaan Pill

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## **Einer Boberg's contribution to the self-help movement for people who stutter in Canada and worldwide**

I first met Einer Boberg and Deborah Kully in July 1987 at a speech clinic they had established in Edmonton, Alberta, in December 1986.

I learned about the Institute for Stuttering Treatment and Research (ISTAR) when I read an article about it on May 4, 1987, in the Toronto Star. I was not planning to read a newspaper that day but a good neighbour, in the apartment building in Toronto where I was living at the time, left the paper outside my doorway after she had finished reading it. Years ago, I stuttered severely; sometimes, I could not get out any words at all. What has worked well for me, by way of addressing my stuttering, may or may not work for other people. Each of us must find our own way.

In a 1988 Journal of Fluency Disorders article, “A comparison between two treatment programs for stuttering: A personal account,” I note the ISTAR clinic provided individualized instruction involving an integrated set of fluency skills which gives rise to a natural sounding speech pattern (as opposed to a speech pattern in which clients are instructed to speak in a droning, robotic monotone). It wasn’t like an assembly line. It wasn’t ‘one size fits all.’ In my talk I note that by mistake, I referred in the article to an ‘exploratory’ breath; the correct word is ‘expiratory.’

As part of the process of relearning how to speak at the ISTAR clinic in 1987, my breath groups, inside of which a series of blended syllables would be voiced, were initially too long. When I shortened them, I made them too short, leaving me gasping for air. Finally, I learned to ‘breathe for speech’ with just the right length of breath group. The clinic also focused on openness about being a person who stutters.

When I got back to Toronto, I worked on generalization and consolidation of my fluency skills. I also felt a need to compare notes with other people who stutter which led to the founding of a local self-help group, the Stuttering Association of Toronto, in September 1988. Einer Boberg came to visit in 1989; he suggested the local Toronto group get together with a similar group in Edmonton to organize the first-ever national conference in Canada for people who stutter. The conference, which took place in Banff, Alberta, in 1991, led to the founding of the Canadian Stuttering Association. In 1990 I delivered lectures in Estonia leading to the founding, in 1993, of the Estonian Association of People Who Stutter. Boberg got me involved at the international level when he served as the first president of the International Fluency Association. In 1995 I was involved in the founding of the International Stuttering Association.

I have been reading with interest two books that Boberg edited, namely, Maintenance of Fluency (1981) and Neuropsychology of Stuttering (1993). The two studies are based on conferences, organized by Boberg, which took place in Banff in 1979 and 1989, respectively. In my talk today I also refer to Nerve: Lessons of Leadership from Two Women Who Went First (2021) by Martha Piper and Indira Samarasekera, and to Dal and Rice (2008) by Wendy Davis, who said some years ago that somebody should write a book about Einer Boberg.

My speaking notes and handout are available at the Preserved Stories website. Other articles (available online) that I’ve written include: “Einer Boberg’s contribution to the self-help movement” (1998) and “Self-help and the international scene” (2003). In research for the book project, I’m currently seeking out additional people to interview. If you have comments or questions you wish to share, by way of a conversation, or can recommend other people I can possibly speak with, please contact me. The book project includes a focus on the 27 years since Einer Boberg died in 1995. I can be reached at [jpill@preservedstories.com](mailto:jpill@preservedstories.com) or through my website.