

# Healing and Hope in Telling and Hearing Stories of Stuttering

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# Disclosures



- My wife and I own Populore Publishing Company
  - Authored and published 3 books in 2021
    - *Living With Stuttering: Stories, Basics, Resources, and Hope*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.
    - *In the Company of Friends: Group Support for People Who Stutter*
    - *One Little Snake River Odyssey*
  - I receive a royalty on books sold at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) & some clinical materials at [www.teacherspayteachers.com](http://www.teacherspayteachers.com)
- I do not consistently use person-first language
  - I prefer being called a “stutterer” than a “PWS”

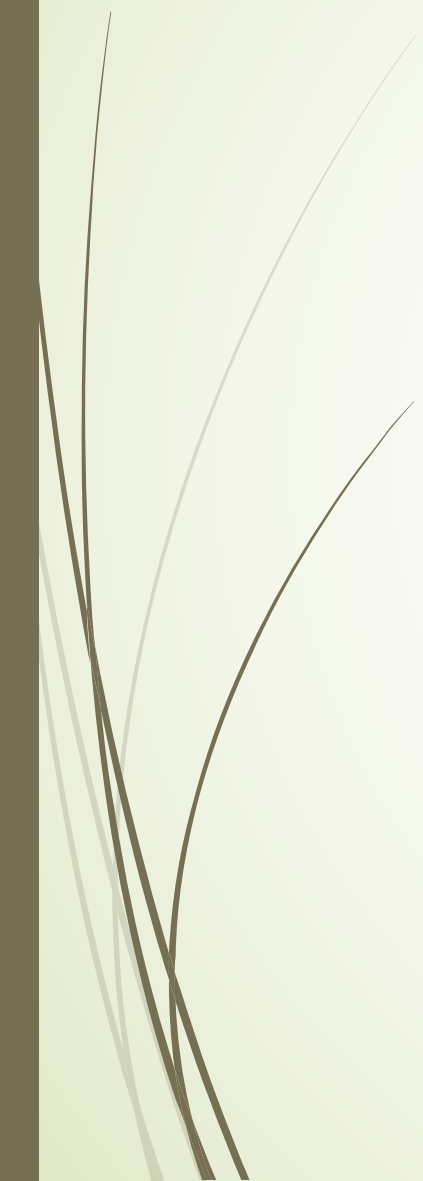
# We will cover...

- Value of stories
  - What they reveal
  - How they can heal
- A brief public attitude connection
- Telling & preserving stories
- Analyzing stories of stuttering
- Stories in individual stuttering therapy
- Stories in support groups or group therapy

**That's a lot!**

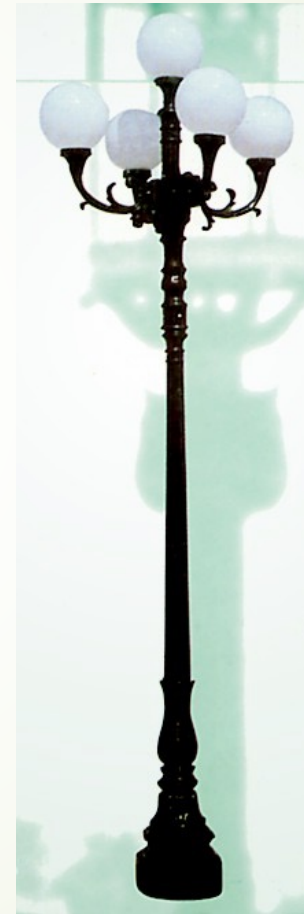


# We will *not* cover...

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- Stories or narratives designed to improve language & literacy
  - In-depth counseling of stuttering clients
    - See Anthony DiLollo (2021) or DiLollo, Neimeyer, & Manning (2002)

# Where do we look for life's meaning?

- “If we possess our ‘why’ of life, we can put up with almost any how.” Friedrich Nietzsche
- Finding life's meaning outside of ourselves is unlikely
- Much of the real meaning in our lives comes from our stories





# Why is it important to tell & hear stories?

- ▶ “We enter into stories, we are entered into stories by others, and we live our lives through stories.”

Michael White



# Stories have power!





# “History” belongs to all of us!

- Your story is as important anyone's story
- Anyone's story of stuttering is no exception





# Stories are lost due to geographic fragmentation

➤ Tell it or lose it!



# Nuclear Episodes

Turning points in our lives that bring about real change or are especially significant

- Graduations, birthdays
- Marriages
- Major moves to a new city/area





# What can go wrong?

- ...Each person's story become self-legitimizing...When one person tries to silence the legitimate voice of another, this is done invariably by throwing into question that person's only resource for discerning reality, his/her own judgment. All those who are thrown into that position of self-doubt are being thrown out of their own stories and robbed of their own voices.

Alan Parry & Robert Doan

- We went from the idea of thinking of people as having problems to the idea of problems having people. Michael White & David Epston



# Two-pillar conceptualization of stuttering



**Pillar I (Personal)**

**Pillar II (Listener Related)**

# Details

## Pillar I

Genetic Factors

Brain Differences

Psychological, Personality & Temperament Factors

Societal Stereotypes

## Pillar II

Societal Stigma

Societal Discrimination

- Stuttering Symptoms
- Repetitions
  - Prolongations
  - Blocks

- Life Experiences
- Laughing/teasing
  - Teasing/Bullying
  - Filling in Words
  - Advising "Slow down."

### Accessory or Secondary Behaviors

(Self-Motivated)

- Eye Blinks
- Exaggerated Gestures
- Speaking on complementary air
- Pitch Changes

### Accessory or Secondary Behaviors

(Listener Motivated)

- Avoiding Eye Contact
- Avoiding Words/Situations
- Withdrawal from Social Contacts

### Emotional Reactions

- Bewilderment
- Concern
- Unhappiness
- Frustration
- Embarrassment
- Anxiety
- Fear

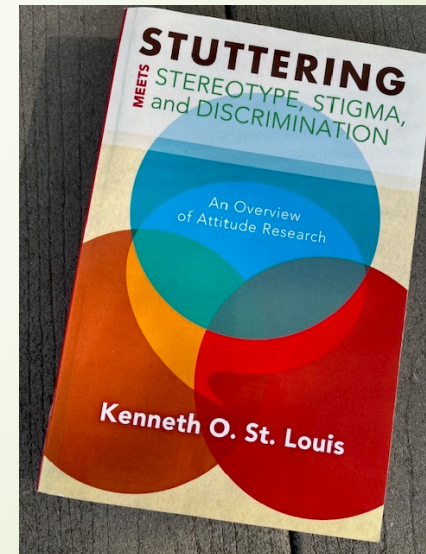
### Self-Stigma

- Social Anxiety
- Shame
- Guilt
- Reduced Quality of Life
- Compromised Health
- Reduced Access to Healthcare
- Drug/Alcohol Addiction
- Suicide

**Stories can include any part of the problem of stuttering but often focuses on Pillar II**

# A public attitude connection

- Where do beliefs and reactions relating to stuttering come from?
  - "...Identity is co-created in relationship with other people as well as one's history and culture. Thus, being seen by others in a certain way can contribute as much as seeing oneself in a certain way. We come to see ourselves by looking in the mirrors that other people hold up for us. In this way, a person's identity is said to be socially constructed..." (Sween, 1999)
  - Community (public) attitudes (one's dominant culture)
  - Personal attitude environment (one's family, friends, school, work, etc.)





# Public attitude considerations

- Consider ignorant or insensitive comments to stutterers
  - "Slow down"
  - "Don't be nervous" etc.
- Consider stutterers' attitude environment
  - Change & expand as they get older
- Consider stutterers' perceived support from their attitude environment

***Refer to the public attitude  
handout for more information***

# Telling stories: Who are the players

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- You!
  - Your clients
  - The public
  - Oral historians
  - Personal historians
  - Storytellers
  - Folklorists
  - Counselors
  - Others in Japan

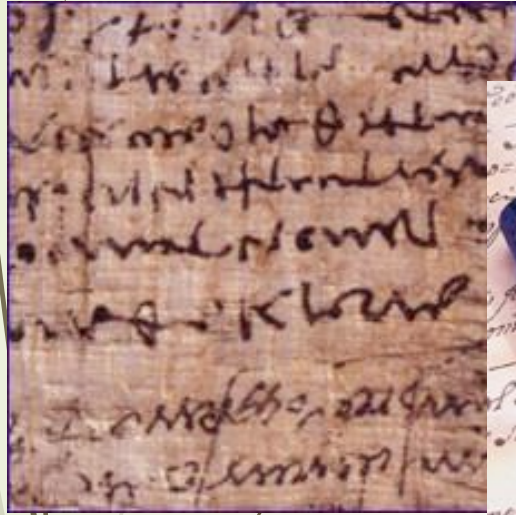
# How can stories be told?

- Oral options
  - Stories to family or friends
    - Parents
    - Spouses
    - Siblings
    - Children
  - Self-help groups
  - Speeches



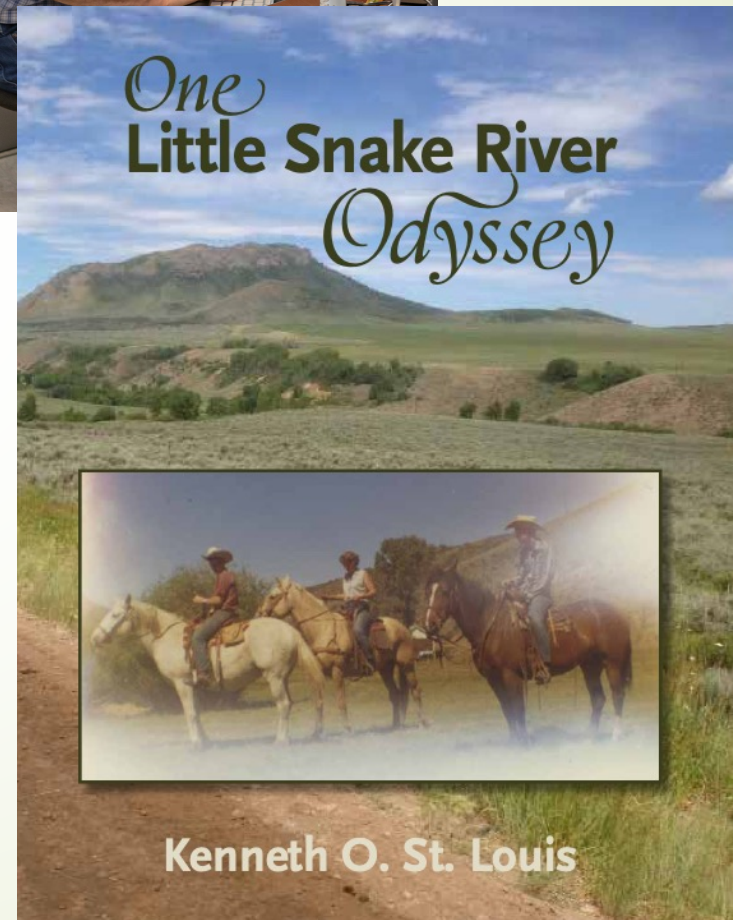
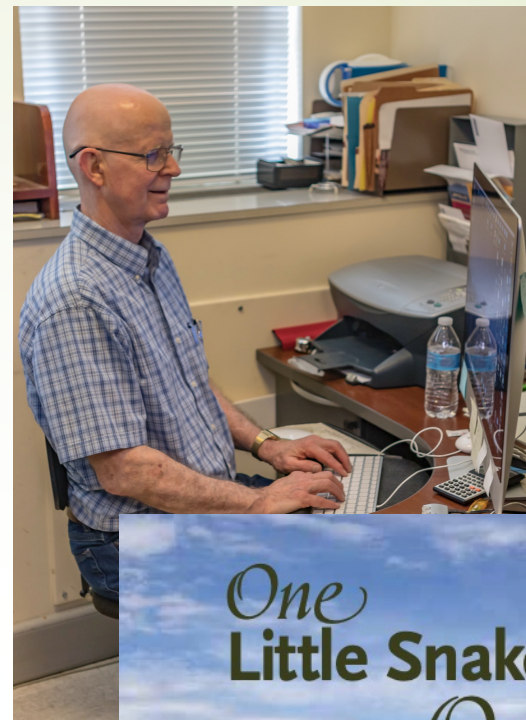


# It's easier than ever!



# Written options

- Diaries & journals
- Short examples of one's personal history
  - Examples...
    - A typical elementary school day
    - Learning to drive a car
    - Family dinners
- Memoirs of more details of one's life
- Autobiographies





# Recording a client's story

- Get a good recording
  - Quiet environment
  - Attention to fidelity
  - Backup recorder, batteries, periodic checking for quality, etc.
- Effective interviewing skills
  - Careful listening
  - Open-ended questions & prompts
  - Sensitive, caring demeanor
  - Expecting & accepting emotional reactions





# What is the value of preserving stories?

- Value to the person telling the story
- Value to society
- I never tire of speaking about stuttering. It has been the most intimate experience of my life, and in the lives of almost everyone I have come to know and love in the stuttering community. And what do I love most of all? Telling our stories, of course. John Ahlbach



# A 20-year story project

- Class assignment
  - Locate a person who stutters/stuttered or parent of child who stutters/stuttered
  - Record them after instructing them to "Tell your story of stuttering!"
  - Unstructured interviews
  - Verbatim transcripts of 15-30 minutes
- Fascinating & valuable for students
  - Put a human face on the disorder of stuttering
  - Gave them experience with a real person



# 371 stutterers interviewed

## ➤ Demographics

- Sex: 28% female; 72% male
- Average age = 33.6 yr (from 9 – 96 yr)
- Education varied
- Majority (69%) had no or mild stuttering

## ➤ Interviews analyzed four different ways

- Content of interviews (first 100)
- Lexical analysis of interviews (first 100)
- Main themes of interview (>200)
- Optimism or pessimism of interviews (Selected)



# Content Analysis

- Coded each utterance for 615 content categories & subcategories
  - Example: Category: When I stutter...
    - Subcategories:
      - Blush
      - Cry
      - Withdraw
      - Make excuses
      - Scream
      - Joke
      - Other
- Analyzed 166,000 words for the first 100 adults

# Lexical (word) analysis

- Analyzed by computer program *Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC)* (Pennebaker & Francis, 1999)
  - Similar to a “spell check” program
    - Counts/classifies 2290 words (e.g., “happy”) or word stems (e.g., “teas\*” [tease, teases, teasing, etc.] )
- Analyzed by category & subcategory
- Compared interviews to emotional writing, control writing, all words in books & psychiatric interviews

# Main theme analysis



- Selected up to 5 of the most important themes of each entire interview
- Example: “Death of father & mother contributed to stuttering”
- 483 themes categorized & summarized



# Optimism/pessimism analysis



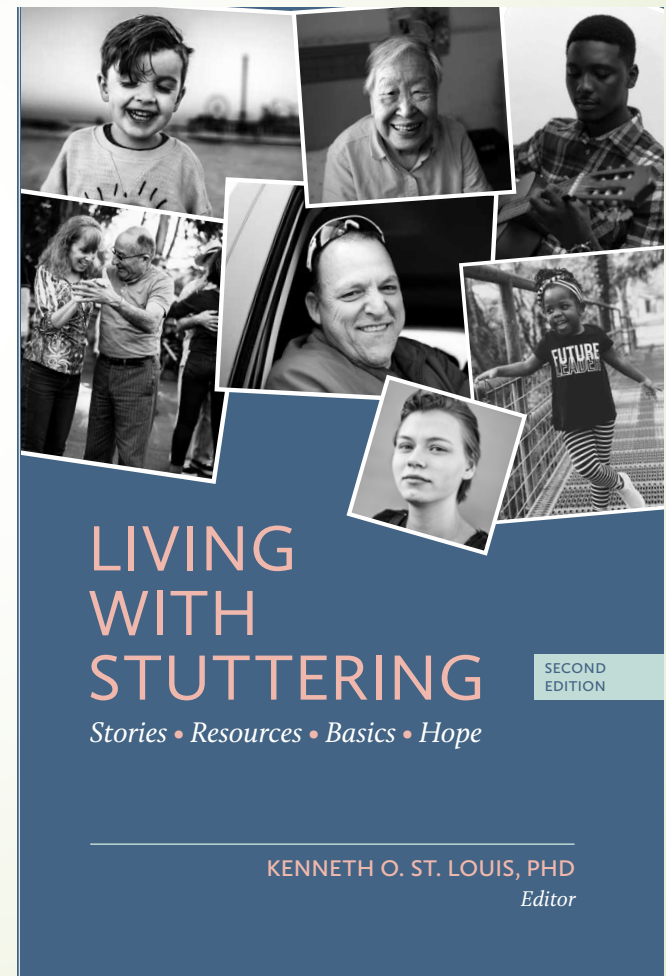
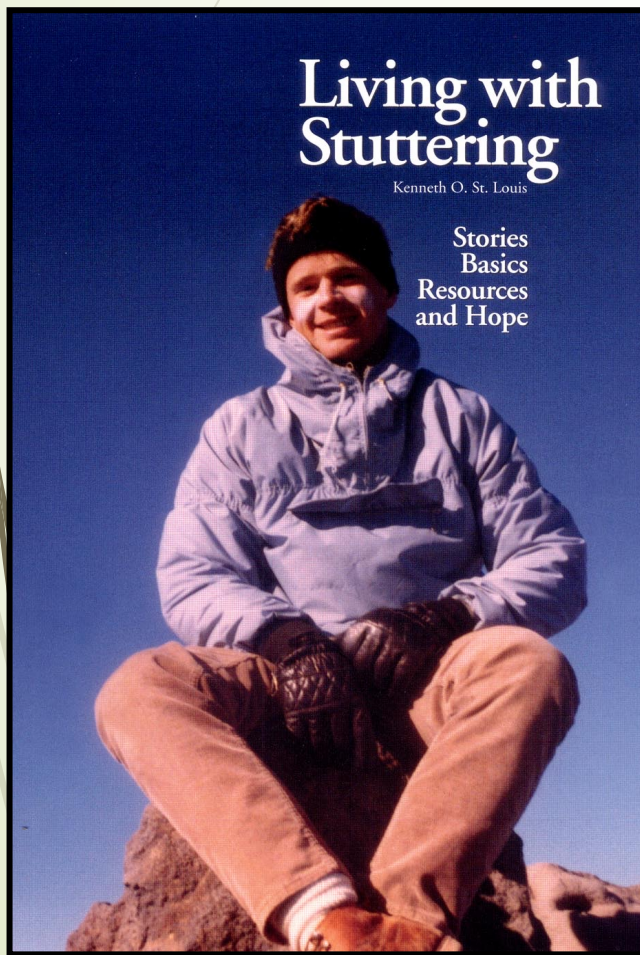
- Read entire interviews & rated them on a 1–10 rubric (scale) for...
  - “Overall uplifting attitude”
  - “Shared negative moments”
  - “Shared a lot of information”
- Identified a few interviews each for stuttering adults & parents of stutterers that reflected...
  - “Positive or optimistic” outlooks on stuttering
  - “Negative or pessimistic” outlooks on stuttering
- Compared “optimistic” versus “pessimistic” individuals on rubric & LIWC analysis

# Interviews: overall results

- Majority of content, themes, optimism/pessimism analyses consistent with textbook information
  - E.g., many teased or ridiculed
  - E.g., few discriminated against
- Stuttering is variable & unique for different people
  - E.g., Communication pressure reduces stuttering for some stutterers
- Stuttering often affects life choices
- Most stutterers unsure of cause & many came up with explanations by themselves
- Many had therapy with typical techniques (e.g., fluency shaping)
- Many developed their own techniques (e.g., use humor, talk with pebbles in their mouth, give speeches)
- Not all stutterers view stuttering as negative (as some previous research has suggested)
- Lexical analysis of interviews most similar to writing about a deeply emotional experience
- Large differences between optimistic & pessimistic interviews

# Living With Stuttering: Stories, Basics, Resources, and Hope

- Content, theme & lexical analyses lose much of the richness of the stories
- Motivation to include entire stories in a book





# Potential uses & value

- For adults who stutter or parents of stuttering children
  - Stories let them know they are not alone
  - Resources provide information on...
    - Where & how to get help
    - Rights & responsibilities
    - “Taking stock” of stuttering’s impact
      - Telling one’s story
      - *Inventory of Life Perspectives–Stuttering (ILP-S)*
- For the public & SLP professors or students
  - Chapter: “Stuttering 101: Basics”
  - Appendix on class interview assignment
  - Testimonials on the value of stories to students
- For clinicians
  - Diagnostic activities
  - Selected stories for certain clients
  - Referral resources for clients
  - “Taking stock” resources


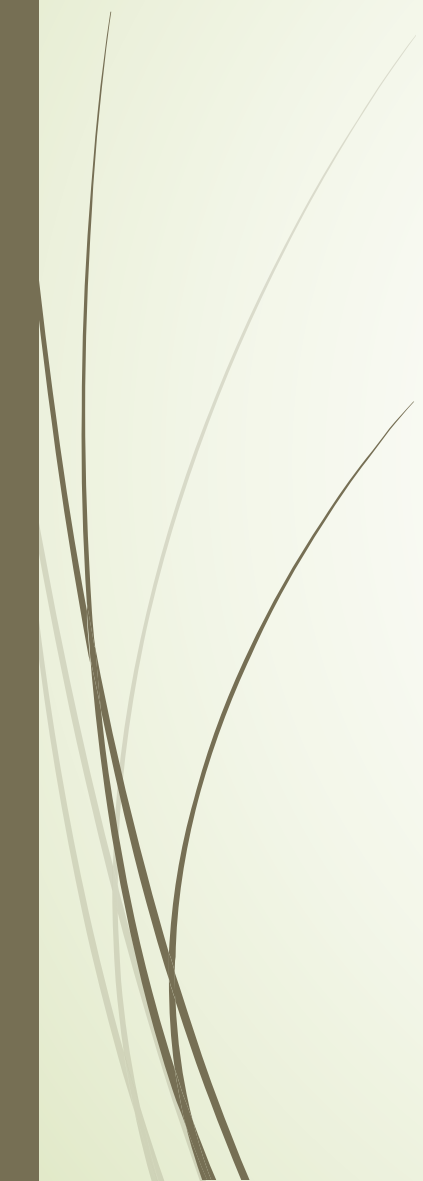


# Stories in individual therapy

- Assessment: Case history
  - Ask simply, “Tell me your story of stuttering” or “Write your story of stuttering”
  - Identify major themes
  - Look for “dominant narratives” and “alternate narratives” (See DiLollo)



# Stories in individual therapy

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- Individual therapy
    - Identification activities
      - Read or play videos of stuttering stories of others
      - With client, jointly search story for nuclear episodes
    - Desensitization activities
      - Often anxiety- or fear-reducing to tell or write one's story
      - Telling parts of one's story to a group is greatly desensitizing & also personally empowering
      - If this is too difficult for the client, consider story-related counseling (DiLollo)
    - Stabilization or carryover activities
      - Recommend telling/reminding significant others of one's story

# Benefits of telling stories in groups

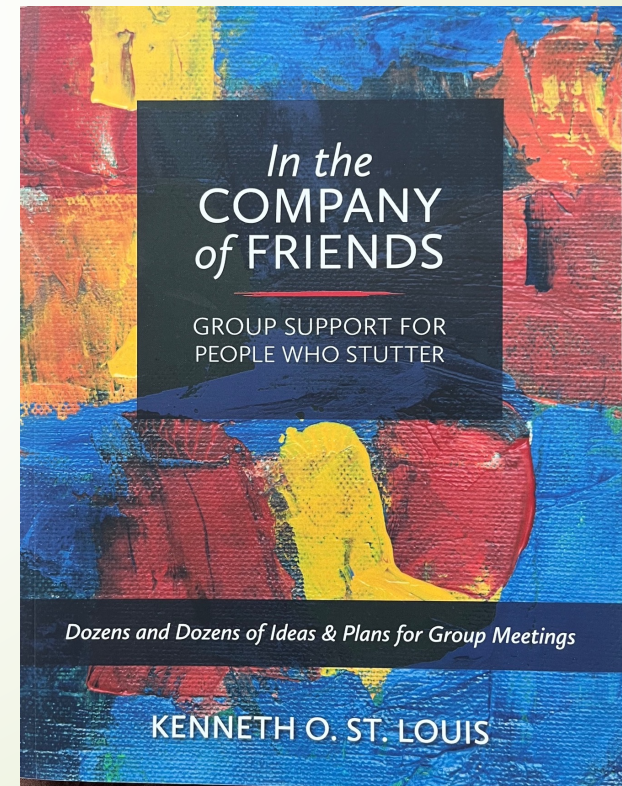
- Group therapy & support groups
- Healing & hope for stutterers
  - Reduce fears & reticence
  - Build self-esteem & self confidence
  - Gain perspective & insight into the variability of stuttering





# Stories in group therapy/support groups

- One model from *In the Company of Friends: Group Support for People Who Stutter*
- Guiding principles: Each session...
  - Has a theme & takeaway lessons
  - Is fun!
  - Involves *personal* experiences
  - Allows for new participants
- Session components
  - Individual goals
  - Ice-breaker
  - Experiential activity
  - Processing/discussing
  - Takeaway lessons



# Sample lesson: Identifying automatic negative thoughts

- Icebreaker: You are about to get a flu or COVID shot. How will you react?
- Activity
  - Each person chooses the situation that would create the most felt anxiety
    - Interviewing for a job
    - Giving a live speech to a large group
    - Meeting your romantic partner's family for the first time
    - Testifying in court about an accident you witnessed
    - Giving complex directions to a stranger who is lost



# Sample lesson

- Tell the group your situation & why it makes you anxious
- Next, one at a time for every person's anxious situation, everyone comments on that person's situation
  - What is the worst possible outcome?
    - Outrageous outcomes are encouraged, e.g., "You would have a heart attack & be rushed to the ER"
  - What is the best possible outcome?
    - Unlikely outcomes are encouraged, e.g., "You would be offered the job on the spot with a promotion to manage the entire organization"
  - What is the most likely outcome

# Sample lesson



## ► Processing

- Why do we have automatic nervous thoughts or fears?
- Where do these thoughts come from?
- How can we control our automatic nervous thoughts?

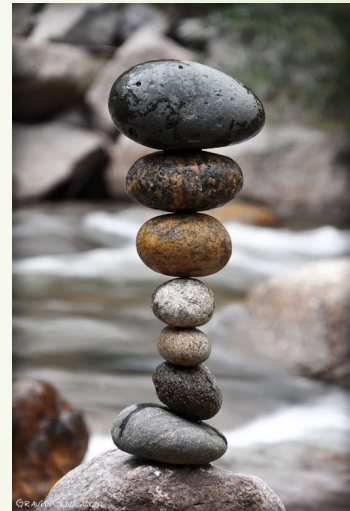
## ► Takeaway lessons

- When evaluated, many negative thoughts & fears are not accurate
- Possible to change our “scripts” (what we tell ourselves) by evaluating how we view thoughts & attitudes
- Self-evaluation is important but not always a solution
  - Important to avoid making a person feel guilty



# A parting thought

- Tristine Ranier (1997): *Your life as Story*
  - Your story, like a novel, has a beginning, middle & end
    - Beginning: Describes who you are, the values that shaped you, and what you wanted
    - Middle: Describes the adversaries you encountered as you sought what you wanted
    - End: After significant turning points in your life, describes what you learned
- Summed up by some Rolling Stones lyrics
  - “You can’t always get what you want, but if you try some time, you just might find, you get what you need.”



# Questions & comments



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