

"I'm not hiding anymore"

By Rob Bloom

I stutter. I always have. In fact, I can remember being three years old and trying very hard to push out the word "d-d-daddy."

When it became apparent that I was not going to "grow out of it," I decided I would do whatever it took to keep my shameful stuttering a secret from the world. And thus began a life of substituting words, avoiding sounds, and quite frankly, living in fear.

I hid my stuttering throughout college, often taking drastic means to do so — from claiming to have laryngitis to giving a fake name when meeting new people. Sure, I was successful in lying to the world...but the truth was catching up with me: in the form of a stomach ulcer.

After graduation, I took a job writing for an advertising agency where I continued to portray the role of a fluent speaker on the outside. But despite professional success and recognition, I could barely look at myself in the mirror. When the economy slumped and my job was eliminated, I had the opportunity to do a little soul-searching. It was then that I had a startling realization: I needed to stop hiding.

I forced myself to face my fears directly. One way I did this was to do the very thing that scared me more than anything else: stuttering. I walked into situations and intentionally stuttered. Although agonizingly difficult at first, I slowly began to desensitize myself to the behavior. In addition, I joined Toastmasters where I willingly stood before a group of people and spoke. Did I stutter? Of course. But I also proved to myself that I was much more than the behavior of stuttering and even came to realize that I actually enjoy public speaking.

In opening up about stuttering, I've discovered the stigma and fears that I've based my life around die a little bit more with each passing day. I've also accepted the fact that, yes, I do stutter. I now know that if I stutter, my arms aren't going to fall off and

my head isn't going to spin around. I'm just going to...well...stutter. And while this may always be the case, I now realize that there are much more important things to focus on.

Rob Bloom is a humor writer who has stuttered his entire life. In addition to his humor column, Rob has written for the Cartoon Network, Travel Channel, and National Public Radio. You can read some of Rob's work at his Web site, www.robbloom.com.