

Women who Stutter Interview by Pamela Mertz, February 7, 2017

PAM - Hello everybody, this is Pam. This is the podcase Women who Stutter: Our Stories. Which can be found on the blog "Make Room for the Stuttering @ Stuttering like a Rockstar.com Today as always I have the opportunity and privilege to speak with yet another amazing women and she is going to share some of her par-parts of her story. So I'd like to say hello to Kim. Hi Kim How-how-how are you doing today?

KIM- HI Pamela I am good, and thank you so much for having me on your p-p-pod cast. It's a privilege to be here and to be talking to you as well.

PAM- Well I have delighted to have-have you and I am really excited to learn parts of your story. So, to get us started can you formally introduce yourself tells us who you are and where you are from and what you do to keep busy.

KIM- My name is Kim Block and I am married to David Block who is also a person who stutters. And we have two children. I am currently working as a Secretary for the BC School for the Deaf and the Provincial Outreach Program: Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. We live in Burnaby, BC in Canada. We are surrounded by beautiful mountains and we thoroughly enjoy living here and we have a dog who keeps ups busy.

PAM- (Laughing) Thank you for that great introduction. How long have you worked at the school for Deaf and the hearing impaired?

KIM- Well I have worked at the School for the Deaf and hard of hearing students, more for Deaf students, as a secretary I have worked there for 4 years and I as an EA, Educational Assistance, for 6 years. And I started learning Sign Language when I was 15, so I worked in the Deaf community for a long time.

PAM – Oh wow, I was just going to ask you, if you knew Sign Language. Are you fluent in it.

KIM- Yes, it's the only language I can say I am fluent in. ;)

PAM- (Laughing) So does your stuttering impact your job at all?

Kim – IT does because it's my responsibility there because I am the first person who answers the phone. We are a Deaf school but we are located inside a hearing school. SO I am constantly on the phone talking to hearing parents and hearing children. I do spend a lot of my time signing but it is a very vocal job. SO yeah, I mean everyone knows at the school knows I stutter.

PAM- And is everyone at work pretty much OK with that?

KIM- I think they are OK with it because I am. I am not shy about it and I talk about it and I celebrate it. Every ISAD day is like a party. Especially with the book that I have written, they are such a huge support system. I have not received any negativity.

PAM- you are very lucky. You are really lucky that you are in such a supportive environment. As you are aware many who stutter struggle in the work place that people who don't understand stuttering, that people who don't take the time to learn about it. It sounds like you are in such a great situation. I love

how you say you celebrate it. When you talk about ISAD day for people listening that is International Stuttering Awareness day. I love how you say it's a party. What do you mean?

KIM - I bring a big poster, I email all the staff and I let them know that it's my day and that it's ISAD day and I give them info about stuttering and about staff. I wear t-shirts that have stuttering on it. Everyone comes into work and say "Happy Stuttering Day" it's kind of like a birthday party.

PAM- I love it. I wish more people did that. What a great way to raise awareness about stuttering.

KIM – Yeah, and when I send out the email I always make it very humorous and make everyone know that I make it a celebration day.

PAM- That is just awesome that you do that. What about the children, the hearing children. How do they react to your stuttering?

KIM – Well I am very open about it. I actually read the book that I wrote in front of the whole school. I was very open and I introduced myself as a person who stutters and read the book. I openly stutter in front of the children and I make a point to not avoid any words. Because I think ok there is almost 300 kids in the school and I may be their first point of contact with a person who stutters. I want to make sure that experience is looked upon in their eyes as positive. Also with my position in the school it puts me in a position of authority, so I don't think anyone would say anything to me. And if they do then I know what I would say. (laughing) I just want to make sure that if this is their first exposure to stuttering that I want to make sure that I look confident and that I show them that stuttering is not a big deal.

PAM – That's great, I work in a school too. I work with high school age students that for the most part that don't have disabilities, we have some with hidden disabilities like learning disabilities, so I don't really talk about it. I do stutter openly with the students and when I do with the students will sometimes snicker or make a funny face or laugh or like that and I do stop and you need to know that I stutter and I am okay with it and I am not okay with you laughing or making fun of me. That usually nips it in the bud and it stops it right away. But I don't advertise my stuttering. I feel like I am in a dilemma there because that is not why I am there to talk about stuttering. I am there for them to talk about the topic at hand. I am going to definitely think about what you do and see if I can incorporate it into a school setting.

Kim – Right I think ISAD gives us a great excuse.

PAM – I think so. I think so. I think I could find a way to have a party and celebrate it. (laughing) So, lets talk about the book you have referred to. You have written a book and tell us what the name is what it's about it and what it's about.

KIM – It's called "Adventures of a Stuttering Superhero. Adventure #1 – Interrupt-itis. I wrote this book for a little girl who stutters at the school that I work at. She is now is grade 2, and when she was in grade 1 the school was inviting people from the community to come into read. Her class didn't have someone assigned to her class. I thought wouldn't it be nice if I could go into her class and read a book about stuttering and I went into the school library and they didn't have any books that has a character who stutters.

PAM – OH

KIM- So I read the book "It's okay to be different" by Todd Parr. I thought about it and I really wish there other books about stuttering. SO I wrote her a few stories and I gave them to her Mom and they both just loved them. Her Mom said, You know you should really do something with them. I thought about it and I said well I'll have to wait till the summer comes and I have more time. That's really how this all started. The book is about a little girl who stutters and she is in her class and she is wanting to talk. She has this little boy in her class who keeps jumping in and trying to guess what her words are when she's trying to talk and she's getting really frustrated by this. So she thinks he is sick with interrupt-it is so she goes on a journey on how to cure him of his interrupt-it is and by the end of the story she figures out how to stop him from interrupting her so she can complete her sentences.

PAM – OMG, That sounds so cool!

KIM – I have gotten a lot of positive feedback about the story line. Even children who don't stutter are even able to connect with this story. So this book has been read in classes even if they don't have a student who stutters and teachers are giving me a lot of positive feedback.

PAM – That is exciting, that is really exciting. So you have said that this is part One. You have a couple other stories in mind?

KIM – Yes I have already written adventure #2, and that is going to be called: Adventure #2 Melissa meets her St-amily. It's during this story she is going to a stuttering conference and meeting a whole bunch of other kids who stutter. This is how I will be introducing new characters. So book 3, and I have planned up to book 9, the books will then rotate on these different characters and so book 3 will be a book about a boy who goes to speech therapy for the first time. So there will be about 4 main characters. There will be Melissa who is going to be bold brave and very accepting of her stuttering. The other male character will be a covert stutterer. The other female character is going to be someone who isn't really covert but hates her stuttering but wants it to go away. The other male character is going to be adopted and he doesn't want to stand out and his whole goal in life is to blend in with the wallpaper so to speak. So these for 4 are going to meet at the conference and they are going to become friends and support each other through their journey.

PAM – Wow that sounds great, I am going to have to definitely get a hold of the first book that is out and read it for myself and I hope listeners will want to do the same. It just sounds wonderful and to think you did this for a little girl in your school and it is blossoming to these 9 stories that could help hundreds of children. It's such a great thing that you are doing.

KIM – Thank you. This has been... I mean this book has really flipped my life upside down and around (laughing) um I have been putting in so many hours and every day I have been setting my alarm so much earlier than what I need to be so I can be contacting SLP's, libraries, school boards and it has been accepted 5 different local city branch libraries and Burnaby library was the first to say yes, and they have already arrived and both of them are already out on loan. So they are not even available. So there are no copies just lying around on a shelf. So, it's very exciting.

PAM – Yes, Yes it is. So you say you have been calling SLP's. What has their reaction been?

KIM – They love it. And I have gotten a lot of positive feedback on the book and a lot of SLP's are purchasing them for their offices. A lot of them are commenting on the lack of resources on stuttering and they are really excited about it.

PAM – Wow. That’s wonderful. It will be wonderful to keep up with the series and see how far reaching this book series goes.

KIM – Yes, I mean this is not a little side projection that that I am like “oh let’s just see how this goes” I am very determined to get this book out there. I just remember growing up so isolated and what a difference a book would have made for me in just thinking about other kids out there. My whole goal is to have one book in every school and library and every city to have at least one copy in the public library. So I am 37 years old and if I am spending an hour everyday contacting these people...(laughing)..even if it takes me 10, 15 years or 20 years or so then that’s fine.

PAM – (laughing) Wow, wow. Now did you self publish the book?

KIM- Yes I did, I put a lot of my personal money into this. It’s not cheap. And I need to make back the money that I put into it, which is about \$3,000 before I can then start book 2. SO I am really eager to get this sold because I am so eager to be starting book 2.

PAM – Right, so where can people purchase it?

KIM – They can purchase it online at Amazon. I know Barns and Nobles has that online as well. And Chapters/Indigo. I don’t know if you guys have that here as well.

PAM- It doesn’t sound familiar.

KIM – Ok so Barns and Nobles and Amazon.

PAM – Ok, great! Great! And what is it called again?

KIM – It’s called “Adventures of a Stuttering Superhero: Adventures #1 – Interrupt-it is

PAM – Ok we want to make sure people hear it loud and clear and people know where to get it. (laughing) Awesome! Awesome! This is very exciting and I am really impressed with your persistence and the confidence you have in perusing this. I wish you the best of luck in your whole endeavor.

KIM – Well thank you! I have really I think I have reached a point where there is no excuse or no reason why there shouldn’t be books out there shouldn’t be books out there with strong characters who stutter. And I think we as a community have every right to expect and demand books out there that people have access to.

PAM – I agree! I agree! Have you heard of the new American Doll that stutters?

KIM – Yes I have and I was shocked. I was like “wow”

PAM – Yeah, and I guess there is a book that goes along with the doll and I have started reading an excerpt of it that someone sent me online and um the girl the Gabriella or Gabby and apparently, there is going to be 2 more books that go along with the doll. So that is very exciting too.

KIM – Yeah, I would be very curious as to how the book portrays her. You know, like did they do their research well. Because we can sometimes be portrayed in the media in a positive light, so I hope they are doing it justice.

PAM – Well, like I said I haven't read it, I just read an excerpt. I haven't read the whole thing yet. But I have heard from some people in the community that they are concerned that the girl's friend that makes some suggestions like "just slow down" and "breath" and "take your time". You know, that 's a concern. (laughing)

KIM – Yeah, oh my goodness (laughing)

PAM – Yeah, Yeah And apparently there was a section where Gabby does a presentation of some sort and afterwards she remarks that she was so glad she was successful because she didn't stutter.

KIM – OH (sigh)

PAM- Yeah

KIM- Yeah so that is concerning

PAM – Yeah definitely, so it sounds like they didn't do enough research.

KIM - Right

PAM - But I cannot really form an opinion because I haven't read the book. You know what I mean, I want to give them the benefit of the doubt. Maybe in book 2 the realities of stuttering will be better explained. But at least the story line is good. And plus she's African-American and I just think that's wonderful.

KIM – yeah, it's definitely good. Anything that raises the awareness and starts a conversation is a good thing.

PAM – Yes absolutely. So in wind down mode. I wanted to ask you one more question that doesn't have anything to do with your book. But it does have to do with your story. You mentioned that you are married to a wonderful man who also stutters. How did that come to be?

KIM – Well he was the Coordinator of the Canadian Association of People who Stutter and he was living in Montreal and I was in Ontario and I had just finished reading the book "A Life Bound up in Words" by Marty Jezer and reading that book changed my whole life. It made me want to connect with other people who stutter. So I reached out the Canadian People at that time they were called the Canadian Association of People who Stutter and I started attending a support group and that is how we met.

PAM – That is so cool. You said you have kids?

KIM – Yeah, we have been married for 15 years and we have 2 children. A daughter who is 11 and a son who is 9.

PAM – Do they stutter?

KIM- My daughter did start stuttering when she was young. Her stuttering was quite severe. And we started her with the Lidcombe program and it took about 9 months. And she no longer stutters.

PAM – oh wow

KIM – We started her when she was pretty young. She was 4, just after she was 4 we started her. But her stuttering was intense. Sometimes it would take her 30 seconds to say one word. But it was

interesting being 2 people who stutter, we already talked about like what would be our game plan if we did have a child who stutters. We already had the SLP and the type of speech therapy in mind. So we were ready to go.

PAM – Wow and what better parents to help a child who stutters than parents who stutter themselves.

KIM- Exactly! (laughing)

PAM – Wow, Are the children pretty supportive of both their parents being stutters?

KIM – OH yes, yes. Both David and I are so open it and my son is so proud of this book. My son talks to everyone about it. They are so used to hearing both their parents stutter all the time. It's not a big deal to them at all. It's normal. Both David and I are both proud and open about stuttering.

PAM – That's wonderful. I feel like we could go on for hours just talking. I feel like we have just scratched the surface. This time has just flown by. I was just want to thank you for sharing and being so open and honest about your story. And just a BIG congratulations to you for the persistence to have books available for children who stutter.

KIM – Well thank you very much Pamela, it's been a real joy talking to you and I'll be at the NSA conference in July so hopefully we will be able to meet and chat some more.

PAM – That will be great to meet you in person. Will you be bringing the book to the conference?

KIM- Yes I will. The NSA has agreed to sell the book in their store. So it will be available.

PAM – That is wonderful. That is great. So many people buy things at the NSA store. Thank you so much again for being a guest. I really appreciate it and I miss you the best of luck!

KIM – Thank you Pamela.

PAM- This has been Women who Stutter: Our Stories