

## CLOSING SPEECH GES ROULSTONE, NOVEMBER 5

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

As chair of ADBN it falls to me to draw to a close to the 6<sup>th</sup> seminar in Groningen and to try to summarize the discussions and the lessons of the last five days.

The theme this year was the art of communication, but we commenced with the feel good theatre who show us how to not communicate provoking opening on Wednesday evening. And let's be honest here, how many of you sat throughout the presentations like that for real. Once the conference started success of speakers and workshops kept using one word: to define the art of communication with people who are deafblind. That one word was experience. It came up again and again. Principally as a goal to appreciate the experience of the person who is deafblind and how, as one speaker put it: a lifetime of experience the facts how we receive and respond in communication. This lead to some early revelations. For instance: I know now more than I felt I needed to know. About Lex Grandia's appreciation of being helped or caressed and I am still not quit sure Lex, what I am going to do with this information now I have it. And until I heard Megan Mann speaking how about language can be misinterpreted and how people who are deafblind experience communication differently, I had no idea.

That their was such a thing as body leagues and for the rest of the week I had been aware just how much my own body leagues and it's quit embarrassing really. Then Guusje van Raay asked us to think about experience of communication in terms of strawberries and Brussels sprouts, which was a kind of surreal but so provoking and useful.

On Friday, after the wide ranging detailed and comprehensive lecture on Usher syndrome from Dr. Claes Möller, four people with Usher themselves shared their own experiences of living with this syndrome. Carol Brill told us that her experience, that word again, has enabled her to deal with loss and helped others in cope with change. That same experience spurred her arms embrace life and all that has to offer. I believe her lovely expression "I disable my disability by enabling my ability". It's going to find it's way into a textbook of this subject and, knowing Carol as I do, it will probably be one she writes itself. This theme of shaping ones own life, despite the experience of disability, was taken up eloquently by George Kabel. He talked about the art of living and that, as he put it, the person who tries to make their life a work of art, stands out in the community. What an inspirational thought.

Yesterday we heard more about the experiences of people who live with deafblindness through a presentation of the Nordic project. In learning of the experiences of the deafblind student who gave up the university course because of a failure of the university authorities to fully understand her whole experience from a student who is deafblind, we were forced to confront a general thing. The profession goals are often only interested in practical problems, but not the whole experience of the person with deafblindness.

Despite this, if you like the science of communication still had much to offer by a way of an examination of the emerging benefits of GPS equipment for deafblind people offered by Oystein Dale. This focus on technical innovation is likely to become a recurring theme in our seminars as it has so much to offer in liberating people with a sensory impairment and enabling them to become more mobile and independent. Finally, Beryl Palmer and Lex Grandia, shared lessons in how to effect change on the political front. Beryl had words of encouragement. In the example she gave, of deafblind people achieving changes to service provision, which she as a paid non-disabled professional could not. And we learned that in the art of communication it's ok to be manipulative.

In his opening remarks to this conference William Green asked whether art can be taught. He concluded that although it will be questionable whether art can be taught it can certainly be learned. I think we have learned a lot about the art of communication this week. In hearing and sharing our own experiences and in hearing the experiences of deafblind people themselves.

We now have an opportunity to reflect on the experiences this week after which preparation will shortly begin for the 7<sup>th</sup> seminar of ADBN which will take place in Bergen Norway in the Autumn of 2008. I look forward very much in seeing you all there again. Thank you for coming to Groningen and, if this system works, with my thanks to the photographer who was with us the whole week and the system engineer, I like to leave you with some images of this week.