

SPEAKER

Motivational speaker and author Kate Adamson

**SHOW YOUR
COMMUNITY
SPIRIT!**

WAYS TO GIVE BACK

**GET APPLAUSE
& LAUGHS**

IN ONE MINUTE FLAT

**VOLUNTEERISM
MARKETING**

BUILD GOODWILL WHILE
MAKING MONEY

2012 NSA FOUNDATION
**SCHOLARSHIP
WINNERS**

**MANAGING
COMMUNICATIONS**
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FROM

PARALYSIS TO POWER

Kate Adamson gives voice to both challenged and able-bodied audiences



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to **F**

FROM PARALYSIS

TO POWER

Kate Adamson couldn't speak or move for months. Today, she inspires audiences to focus on their abilities and take action.

A severe headache and a wave of dizziness were the first indications that something was wrong. Then, when Kate Adamson's muscles turned to jelly and her left leg started to give way under her, there was no denying that something was indeed very, very wrong.

"I need help," she said to her husband, Steven Klugman, not realizing that these would be the last words she'd speak out loud for several months.

She was 33—in the prime of her life, physically fit, happily married and the mother of two beautiful daughters. She was young and healthy, yet had suffered a massive stroke. As a result, she was completely paralyzed with the exception of some voluntary eye movements.

Still, while she couldn't move, she was cognizant of everything going on around her. She could hear her doctors and nurses. She could hear her husband. She could feel pain. She had thoughts, feelings, hopes. But she couldn't articulate a single one.

Known as "Locked-In Syndrome," the condition is very rare with no clear course of treatment, and its victims are given dismal odds of recovery.

Adamson was given a one-in-a-million chance of surviving. Doctors offered her husband little hope, telling him that if she survived, she'd be a vegetable—not the woman he had married and shared his life with. In fact, they told him, death would be preferable.

He didn't listen. And neither did she.

Fighting the Odds

Adamson was trapped inside her own body, and she wanted out. When she discovered she could communicate by blinking her eyes, it was a huge victory. Her husband was encouraged. But there were no illusions about how challenging—seemingly impossible—her road to recovery would be.

"In the hospital, Steven forged a powerful partnership with the entire medical staff. He made sure everyone who came into contact with me knew my goals and that everyone had the chance to make a contribution to my recovery," Adamson says. "I got the best possible care, in part because my triumph became the triumph of the entire team. Everyone contributed, and everyone was acknowledged for the part they played."



With her husband, friends, family and her medical team behind her, Adamson also leaned on her faith.

“At first I felt utterly alone in the dark. I had to constantly turn my fear into faith. No one was there but God,” she remembers. “I wanted to run away, but the only person I could run to was God. I found strength I never knew I had. I had to totally lean on God and know that everything was in God’s timing.”

After a year of inpatient and outpatient rehab, Adamson was a medical miracle. Though her left arm and left leg from the

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knee down remain paralyzed, she exercises regularly, and is able to speak her mind — and give voice to others.

A Voice for the Voiceless

Before her stroke in 1995, Adamson was planning a career as a personal trainer. But during her recovery, she saw herself doing something else.

“The seed to give back to others who helped me or others in my situation was planted while I was in rehab. My husband and I decided that I needed a bigger goal than just to live,” she recalls. “There had to be something bigger than just survival and getting back to a life I’d never get back to anyway.”

After rehab, Adamson started speaking to local support groups and even started

her own support group. She became a director for the Stroke Association of California and a spokesperson for the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association.

In 1997, she started lobbying in Washington, D.C. and addressed Congress to raise awareness and drive public funding for stroke and heart disease research.

In 2005, she felt a calling — and a connection to Terry Schiavo, a young woman who was in a vegetative state and on life support. Schiavo’s husband wanted to remove her feeding tube and allow her to die.

Adamson testified before the Florida legislature in support of a bill that prevented physicians from removing a feeding tube from a vegetative patient unless a clear written advance directive was in place or there was clear evidence that the patient had previously expressed that this was his or her wish.

“I connected emotionally to the Terry Schiavo case in 2005, because I, too, had my feeding tube disconnected while I was in the hospital. I remember the unbelievably painful ordeal of starvation,” Adamson adds. “When the Schiavo case hit the press, I knew she could not speak for herself but I could speak for her ... I was one of the very few people who had any idea what Terry felt before she died.”

Embarking on a New Career

While she had a clear mission when she began her advocacy work, she hadn’t considered a career as a public speaker until about 10 years ago.

“I saw a flier in my community advertising that the Greater Los Angeles NSA Chapter was having a symposium in Palm Springs,” she recalls. “I was intrigued.”

She was nervous and curious. As a child in New Zealand when she was taking speech lessons, Adamson loved being in front of audiences, but she wasn't sure what to expect from the world of professional speaking.

"That first night, guests were asked to stand, introduce themselves and why they had come," she says. "I didn't know why I was there—and, at that moment, even if I wanted to be there—but by the end of that weekend, I had a renewed spirit of wanting to get serious about speaking."

Unlike most speakers, though, Adamson has had to learn how to speak twice.



Adamson's got her groove back.

"I learned to speak again in rehab," she explains. "My lungs had collapsed. I needed to practice breathing to learn to make sounds, then words and finally sentences. It didn't happen overnight."

After being unable to speak at all for so long, she found joy in hearing her voice and using it to move audiences to action. Plus, she discovered that her message not only resonated with those who were disabled, but it had wider appeal, too.

"We all suffer disabilities and paralysis. Even corporations suffer paralysis," she says. "During my journey, I discovered a simple but powerful three-step solution for dealing with paralysis, whether personal or professional."

She helps audiences focus on what they can do instead of what they can't; focus on what they want rather than what they don't; and focus on what they have, not what they have lost.

"Audiences walk away with a new appreciation for the possible," Adamson adds. "It is simple yet powerful, and when I find myself stuck and paralyzed, I am giving myself the message I give others."

Adamson's story helps others find inspiration—and just as importantly, perspective. After all, most problems are easier to solve than what she has overcome.

Giving Back

Through her keynotes, she empowers and inspires multiple audiences—small or large, corporate or medical. And helping others and giving back in any way she can, she says, feels good.

"My life is enriched by reaching out to people disabled or abled-bodied," she says. "I love to give hope, encouragement and inspiration." She often visits hospital patients when she travels.

She also—at the request of families—travels to bedsides to encourage the critically ill to do the work necessary to become their own miracle.

"Nothing can replace the look of a total stranger completely paralyzed and seeing me standing by their bed. I remember that feeling," she says. "I had a steady trail of visitors, but no one who had been through this. It may take a little longer out of my day, but it's a boost of encouragement for the patient lying there."

Still, she says, it isn't entirely selfless because "I always get back more than I give."

She actively encourages other speakers to give of themselves when they can.

"Don't sell yourself short. But give yourself away," she says. "Make a difference for other people and you will make a difference for yourself."

While her experience was a truly terrible one, she focuses on the positive—on the ways that it has enriched her life and let her help others.

"Helping others deal with their ordeals creates for me a life that has more meaning and purpose than it ever did when my life was 'perfect,'" she says. "I love what Sir Winston Churchill said: 'We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.'"

Learn more about Kate Adamson's story in her book, *Paralyzed but Not Powerless*, which is available at KateAdamson.com, Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble and other booksellers.



Stephanie R. Conner is a writer and editor who is inspired by Kate Adamson's story and hopes she can give half what Adamson has. You can reach her at Stephanie@TheActiveVoice.com.