

2021 DOT SOWERBY PIONEER AWARD RECIPIENT: Marcia Sterling

For her many contributions to the NSDA as Support Group Leader, Board Member, and past NSDA Treasurer – using her leadership skills to support, educate, and raise awareness about spasmodic dysphonia and related voice conditions

In 2015, the NSDA created the **Dot Sowerby Pioneer Award** to recognize an individual who has made a significant positive impact on the NSDA community. For the seventh year, the NSDA is delighted to bestow this award. We wish to recognize **Marcia Sterling** for her leadership, and commitment to the NSDA that she has shown for a number of years. The NSDA salutes her and is most grateful for her extraordinary service. She is an enthusiastic, empathetic, and organized leader who has served the NSDA in a variety of ways.

For 15 years, Marcia has served as Leader of the Silicon Valley SD Support Group. She is a member of the NSDA Board of Directors after joining in 2004. In addition, she served as NSDA Treasurer from 2007 until 2020. She is an attorney and published author. Her two novels are: *One Summer in Arkansas* and *Tangled Roots*. Marcia has written a number of documents for the NSDA, including “Tips on Raffle Fundraisers” and “Sample Picnic Raffle Flyer” – after having hosted a picnic and raffle at her home in 2007. During the picnic, Dr. Mark LeDoux collected blood samples from volunteers and talked about the genetic research on spasmodic dysphonia that he was conducting. In 2006, Marcia and her group attended and supported the Walk Across the Golden Gate Bridge fundraiser which was hosted by past Board Member, **Stephie Mendel**, and held in honor of Past President, **Dot Sowerby**. In addition, Marcia has organized letter-writing campaigns to benefit the **NSDA**, and later shared samples as exemplars for those carrying out this type of NSDA fundraising activity. Marcia helped with the draft of Chapter 5 of *Easier Done than Said: Living with a Broken Voice*. She worked tirelessly with NSDA Board Member, Dot Sowerby, on the updating of Dot’s book which is now called *Speechless No More*.

In 2015, Marcia was jointly presented the Midge Kovacs Annual Awareness Award together with two other support groups from northern California – Sacramento and San Francisco. These three groups served as the host committee for the 2015 Symposium held in San Francisco and Marcia worked diligently on the preparations for this event. In addition, Marcia has represented the NSDA at Dystonia Advocacy Day and has participated in SD research. For our 2020 Walk for Talk event, she organized the collaboration of three Northern California groups: Silicon Valley, Oakland, and Sacramento. Together, the groups raised over \$ 7,000 for the NSDA.

Marcia Sterling exemplifies solidarity, unity, and mutual support in her NSDA volunteer leadership work. She uses her many gifts and continues to lead by example. She has embraced all aspects of our mission – providing support to the group that she leads; fundraising to advance medical research; and participating in SD research.

Marcia Sterling describes her meetings this way: “The mix of people participating is different every time – some reliable old timers who are committed to our cause and bend over backwards to be there; some folks who are newly diagnosed and still learning about the condition and how to deal with it; some who are busy and often can’t make it to meetings but who show up because they are dealing with something particularly hard in their lives. We as a community value all of them. Facing so many of the same challenges, we know how important it can be that someone will always be there who understands what you are going through. I am grateful for our dedicated support group leaders, who carry the torch to big meetings and small, keeping us connected and committing to being there when needed.”

In her eloquent poem, *Strain to Speak*, Marcia stated:

“So finally I learn

To listen, not to judge

To hear without retort

Humility comes hard

And that’s a strain as well

But take what life hands out.

And joy’s the end reward.”