

# LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

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## Overcoming Adversity

David J. Bunce, M.S.



King George VI

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:King\\_George\\_VI\\_of\\_England,\\_formal\\_photo\\_portrait,\\_circa\\_1940-1946.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:King_George_VI_of_England,_formal_photo_portrait,_circa_1940-1946.jpg)

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## ***The King's Speech* – an Award Winning Movie**

Recently a British movie, “The King’s Speech,” overwhelmingly won the Oscar award for best picture. The movie received many other prestigious and highly coveted awards as well. The stories, scenes, characters, dramatic episodes, and the imagination that goes with movie-making have immense impact on the viewers.

### **A King's Adversity**

I find stories of people who have overcome adversity deeply moving, and inspiring. One story of overcoming a great impediment, one that seems insurmountable, is the story of King George the VI. I'd like to briefly summarize his story because I think you'll find his struggle with stuttering and overcoming this handicap most interesting.

The story also highlights how confidence-building measures, encouraging spouses and friends, and simple therapies help overcome adversity in life.

### **Albert – King George VI**

King George VI was the last Emperor of British India, and his face occupied a prominent place in coins and currency notes of British India; and it continued to be so in the period immediately after the independence of India from the British rule. There were many stories about him and his predecessors in almost all English and History textbooks published in India for Indian students. While these related to the Queen/King Empress/Emperors' achievements in empire-building, national programs, military prowess, wars, etc., their intensely personal struggles and attributes were often not touched upon. “The majesty” of the Kings and Queens was in display, but their personal lives were sort of “hidden” from the masses.

### **People's Views on Majesty or Lack Thereof!**

However, people in the British Empire in Asia and Africa had different notions about the British Royalty. This was evident when many citizens of these nations actually appreciated, admired and celebrated the abdication of the British throne by a King (older brother of the person who would be King George VI later on) who was not allowed to marry the woman he loved. Indian view, expressed in so many articles and books, focused more on the personal relationship and the courage of this king to abdicate than on the allegations of the power hierarchy in England against the woman partner of the King (personal communication from Thirumalai).

### **George VI, A Reluctant King and Emperor**

King George reigned fairly recently, his story isn't ancient history. He reigned during World War II and he was the father of the current Queen of England, Queen Elizabeth. Before he became king, his name was Albert. Albert was a very quiet and shy boy growing up. He also had somewhat of a nervous disposition. He never planned on becoming king and was very happy to stay in the background. His older brother was a very confident, outgoing gregarious boy, and was groomed to be king some day.

### **Sudden Change in Position**

Two events happened in Albert's life that changed his plans. When he was in his 20's, his father died fairly suddenly of pneumonia. As planned, Albert's older brother became king. His older brother had a serious conflict. He was in love with an American woman who had been divorced once, and was currently not yet divorced from her second husband. The Church of England refused to allow Albert's older brother to marry a divorced woman (it was the tradition of the English royalty), so he abdicated the throne in order to marry her. Albert was now king and changed his name to King George the VI. Fate and fortune placed Albert in a position he did not anticipate ever facing.

### **Stuttering Viewed as an Impediment in Public Life**

King George had a speech problem, he stuttered. He started stuttering at the age of 5 and it plagued him his entire life. Unfortunately for him, he became King at a time when microphones, loudspeakers, and radio were becoming widely used. It is one thing to stutter in front of a room full of people, but it's another to stutter when your voice is broadcast to a stadium full of people, or over the radio to an entire country! Anybody who stutters is seen to be weak and unintelligent. These are terrible impressions for a King to present before his loyal, adoring subjects.

### **Persistent Effort to Overcome Adversity**

King George realized this and he reluctantly sets out to overcome his stuttering problem. His wife, the queen consort, encourages him to go to therapists. He goes to several speech therapists that use very unorthodox methods to cure stuttering. He finally finds one who is very strange in his methods, and forceful. His insistence on stalwart dedication to the task at hand, and faith in the therapy encourage Albert's spirit. King George takes heart, works incessantly to overcome the stuttering.

At one point, actually very soon after he becomes King, he has to deliver a speech to his nation and empire, declaring war on Germany. His speech is carried live on radio to the entire country of England, and probably to half the rest of the world. He didn't stutter. He confidently stood up to Hitler, and strongly assured his citizens that everything would be alright. He stood tall before his nation, and the British Empire.

## **True-life Events in the Movie**

These true-life events are all portrayed with great emotion, tact and technical skills, including a superb script and screen play in the movie “King’s Speech.” Note the pun on the word. It is speech delivered by a King, no doubt, but the speech in itself also refers to the ordinary speech, indirectly focusing on the delivery of speech. King George overcomes his stuttering problem and delivers a speech that inspires Great Britain and their allies in their struggle and fight against bigotry, genocide and dictatorship.

## **My Story**

I can identify with King George. My stuttering started later in life during my last year of high school. It followed me through college and was at its worst after I graduated and was looking for a job. At one point I was one of a few people that had been selected from a large pile of resumes to be interviewed by a company in Pennsylvania. The company flew me down for a full day of interviews. During one of the interviews, I was asked if I had any design experience. I took a class in college where we were given the challenge to design and build a model car that was powered only by a rubber band. At the end of the class, we raced our cars down the hallway. The car that went the farthest won, and received an A in the course. Mine went the farthest. I started telling this story to the interviewer, but the problem was that I couldn’t say the word “rubber” without stuttering.

## **A Lost Job**

People that stutter develop a large vocabulary so if they have trouble with a word, they can substitute another. Unfortunately, there are no synonyms for the word rubber. I was stuck, so I tried to describe a rubber band without using the word rubber. I said, “it was a thin, circular elastic device”. The interviewer was puzzled, looked at me and said, “you mean a rubber band?” After he said that, I thought I would try to say it, but got stuck on it and only r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r came out of my mouth. After a minute I finally spit out the word. Needless to say, I didn’t get the job.

## **Need for Moving and Motivating Stories to Overcome Adversity**

I find stories like King George’s very inspiring. I love hearing about people that have faced their fears and overcome adversity by persistence and hard work. I have no doubt that many others also find stories like King George’s very inspiring.

Inspiration comes through listening to such stories told with passion and confidence, and a word of encouragement. Inspiration comes also through reading well-written stories. Fortunately for us now, in addition to listening and reading, we also can see the stories happening before our eyes through movies. When the script and screen play are done

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with realistic portrayal, focusing on the intensity and frequency of the problem faced by the protagonists and the step by step success achieved, our children and all those who face adversity will be encouraged never to give up.

Around the world, life is full of personal and social and economic adversities. In nations like India, children need to be greatly encouraged to overcome adversities, especially when they are first-generation school goers. Movies become more meaningful when they focus on overcoming adversity, and they help these children succeed in life through hard work, combined with a hope for the future embedded in their hearts.

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