

# Straight Talks

*Talks on Disability Issues*

*Volume 1*

*Jon Feucht*

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# Foreword

An estimated one to two million Americans experience speech disability to the degree that they may benefit from augmentative and alternative communication. Jon Feucht is among them. He was born with cerebral palsy and makes good use of assistive technology for his mobility, communication, education, and independent living. Jon and I first came face-to-face at the Pittsburgh Employment Conference for Augmented Communicators (PEC). This biennial conference is the premier event in the world of AAC. PEC is the largest gathering of people who rely on AAC and it attracts the best and brightest. AAC professionals attending PEC for the first time have their horizons expanded. Many had no idea that people could communicate this effectively. Jon is one of the many attending PEC who serve as models of what is possible.

In August of 2000, the ISAAC (International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication) Conference was held in Washington, DC. I had agreed to meet Jon Feucht at Washington National Airport and accompany him to the conference hotel. During the conference, Jon shared his dream of a camp for people who rely on AAC and who aspire to ambitious lives.

The following summer there we were on the campus of the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater. One of the first stops was the local shopping district for the purchase of fans to combat the hot and humid nights trying to sleep in the dorms. Fortunately, the meeting rooms, computer center, and dining facility were all air

conditioned. That aside, the Authentic Voices of America AAC Camp had clearly gone beyond the dream stage.

One of the most memorable aspects of the AVA Camp was when Camp Director Jon Feucht addressed the campers during what has come to be known as the Straight Talks. Realizing how those times were inspirational to those of us who don't use AAC helps us to understand what their significance may have been to those young people among us who were formulating their own dreams for their futures.

A year or two later, I was driving from University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire back to Chicago for a flight home. It worked out that I could have a late dinner with Jon and I invited myself to stay over at his place in a sleeping bag on the floor. Before checking out that night, I spent a little time with an early edition of “The Tan Car”, a book written by Jon and dedicated to his grandfather. This was my first introduction to Jon's writing. The Tan Car is now available through The Gallery at the web site of the AAC Institute ([www.aac institute.org](http://www.aac institute.org)).

So who is this Jon Feucht? Who is this guy who, since we first met just a few years ago, has established Authentic Voices of America, has organized and directed a number of AAC camps, has completed a bachelors degree and the first year of a masters, has written a couple books, has been honored by ASHA (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, is a frequent contributor to ACOLOG (Augmentative Communication Online User Group) and often greets me with an Instant Message as soon as I log on to the Internet?

Rather than answer this question, it may be best to let the reader come to his or her own conclusion. Following reading even a

*Jon Feucht*

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small portion of this first volume of Straight Talks, you will have a good sense of just who Jon Feucht is. Further, you will have some insights into why he is so successful and why he is such a good role model for others. I feel blessed to have Jon in my life and expect that you soon will feel likewise. Stay tuned for the Volume 2 of Straight Talks.

Barry Romich

## About the Author

Jon Feucht grew up in Waupun, Wisconsin. Along with his parents, Alan and Janet Feucht, he has an older brother, Jeff and an older sister, Janeen.

In 2003, Jon received a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from University of Wisconsin – Whitewater. He presently is in a Masters program at Whitewater in the area of Special Education.

Jon founded and directs Authentic Voices of America. The AVA Camp, for children and young adults who use communication devices, has operated in the summer since 2001 on the UWW campus. The camp combines fun activities with discussions about the issues that people with speech disabilities face in the real world. The speeches in this book came out of Jon's talks with AVA Camp participants.

Jon is a frequent contributor to ACOLUG (Augmentative Communication OnLine User Group). ACOLUG is a listserv, virtual community of people interested in the field of AAC. More information is available at:

**<http://disabilities.temple.edu/programs/assistive/acolug.htm>**

Jon is also a regular participant in the biennial Pittsburgh Employment Conference for Augmented Communicators (PEC). This is the largest gathering in the world of people who rely on AAC. More information on PEC is available at:

**<http://mywebpages.comcast.net/amiprofeta/index7.htm>**

In 2002, Jon was presented with the Free Speech Now Award by one of his biggest heroes in this field, Bob Williams. It was an honor he will never forget. The Free Speech Now Award was given by the ACES program at Temple University in Philadelphia. More information on ACES is available at:

**<http://disabilities.temple.edu/programs/assistive/aces.htm>**

This same year he also won the Jabez Award presented by the AAC Institute.

In 2003, Jon was selected to be the seventh annual Edwin and Esther Prentke Distinguished Lecturer. The lecture is a highlight of the AAC program at the annual convention of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. Jon made the trip to Chicago and participated in other aspects of the convention as well, much to the delight of the speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and university students with whom he interacted. His lecture is available at the web site of the AAC Institute:

**<http://www.aac institute.org>**