



Many members of the TSA family know 25-year-old Matt Giordano of Rochester, NY from the drumming circles he has led at TSA National Conferences and other events. In this Family Portrait interview Matt tells us how he turned his passion for drumming into his life's work.

TSA: What are drumming circles and how did you become a drumming circle leader?

Matt: Drumming has been a part of my life forever. I heard about drumming circles when I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do. Someone I used to work with sent me an article about drumming circles and I looked into it. I like it because it combines my two passions — working with people and drumming.

I have some regular, ongoing circles but what I usually do is work with organizations — schools, rehab clinics, all sorts of organizations. They contact me because they saw me or heard about me. My drumming circles are for entertainment, not therapy, but drumming is good for stress relief. It's a way of bringing everyone together. It can be before a meeting or as part of a special event. I often make presentations about drumming and do a circle as part of it.

You don't have to know anything about drums or have any musical experience. I go over all the basics. I also direct drumming theater productions. I'm working on one now with a school. I do a script and I work with the students' other talents, singing, dancing and more. My script is the blueprint for the show and they fill it in with what they like to do. Every show is different. I work with adults, high school kids and younger kids, too.

Right now I'm working on doing workshops at larger corporate events. I know a lot of corporations do boring, dry events. A drumming circle is a team building experience.

TSA: Oliver Sacks' new book is about music. Tell us a little about your involvement with it.

Matt: I was doing a drumming circle presentation and I wrote him an e-mail about it because I knew about his interest in music and in people with TS and different disabilities. He attended but I didn't know he was there until I had already flown home. I'm looking forward to reading his book.

TSA: You were diagnosed with TS as a child. How were things at school and at home for you?

Matt: I had very severe TS. I started having symptoms at two and was diagnosed at five. I also started playing drums at two and taking lessons at five, so drums have always been a part of my life. Every time I had a difficult time, drums helped me through it.

My mom was great and wanted to help me. She did great things during my struggle with extreme TS. When I was six I decided to tell my class about TS because they were teasing me. They really understood and the teasing pretty much disappeared and the acceptance went way up. After that I realized how positive it was to talk about TS. Every year after that I would tell everyone about TS the first week of school to make the rest of the year easier.

I had a large circle of support, but I also had a very extreme case of vocal and motor tics, ADD, OCD and rage episodes, too. I

had everything to the extreme. But I was also a very good drummer, very smart and with a very positive personality so there were strengths and people to help me through it. I was good kid with bad episodes.

I had drum lessons from a lot of great people. One is now playing with Yo Yo Ma! I was in talent shows and I won a lot of them. Drums helped me with my social life. People would see me as a good drummer and that would break the TS barrier, and the discomfort caused by my symptoms. But after they'd see me play, they'd see me as a good drummer and good person. Drums are obviously a strong release of tics, but they're also good for my focus, confidence and for working with people. Drums have helped me face every challenge in my life.

TSA: What do you think of the way media portrays people with TS and other neurological disorders?

Matt: I think awareness is good and important as long as it is done in the right and accurate way. I have to admit that I laugh when shows make fun of symptoms

but not the person — like *Monk*. *Monk* is a quality person but the show makes fun of his OCD. I laugh at that but I do not approve when they make fun of the person. That's not OK.

I didn't see *Deuce Bigalow* because I heard a lot about it. Shortly after it came out someone said to me that they thought TS was just that "swearing thing" because of the movie. I'm not happy with that.

TSA: What is your advice for children with TS?

Matt: I would say there's nothing wrong with you. Don't ever feel ashamed of yourself because of TS or feel like you are less of a human being. You can do everything everyone else can do — and more.

I had TS to the extreme and I got through it very well and I'm leading a successful, independent life. And because I had such a severe case, no matter what you've got I definitely know that I carry the message that you can get through the hard times. You can lead a great and successful life, whatever kind of life you choose to lead. ■

Research Appeal Follow Up

Help our scientists solve the TS puzzle. If you haven't contributed to the latest TS research campaign, now is the time to do it. In November 2007, you should have received the latest TSA Research Award Program Update with information showing how your dollars are used.

Your support is vital in making it possible for our world-class

investigators to do their work and bring us closer to the day when the cause of TS is found and a cure is developed. Your gift, at any level, will help make it possible for our talented team of researchers to continue to move ahead with their critical work in 2008 and on their behalf, and with their appreciation, we take this opportunity to thank you for your generosity.