

**MICHAEL WICKERSHEIM**has returned to school for a masters degree  
in instrumental wind conducting.**We've featured individuals in a wide variety of professions. Please tell us a little about your career.**

Basically, I taught for eight years in schools that offered challenging positions. They weren't in the most affluent areas. I started in a small school where band wasn't a big thing. I wanted to live closer to my grandparents, so I changed to a new school where I was able to rebuild the band program. Six years later we were in the state band festival, the band room was remodeled, and we had new uniforms. With the help of supportive administrators, we came a long way.

It was a sports-driven town and I got tired of battling for the band. It's time to step away and ask myself "what's next?" I actually did not start college wanting to go into education. I wanted to go into politics but I caught the teaching bug. There was some difficulty as an undergraduate because some of the officials didn't want me to teach due to my TS. I made the decision not to be pushed around. Other professionals were helpful. Now I'm at North Arizona University. The director here already had experience with an undergraduate with TS.

**What was it like in school? Did you have role models with TS or mentors without TS who helped along the way?**

No one in my family has TS. For the first ten years I didn't know anyone else who had it. TSA has done a great job with publicity. The more people know about TS, the more everyone seems to have grown up knowing someone who had it. It's not weird anymore.

I'm blessed with a wonderful family. My late Grandmother Annie did tons of research on TS. She was the driving force in educating the family. She even made appointments for me to see doctors in Memphis and Rochester. My mom raised me as a single mother and was also very supportive. My School Band Director, Frank Hales, was a great father figure. Dr. Schmidt is my professional mentor at Northern Arizona.

I think I've been lucky—everyone isn't as fortunate. I think my personality developed before my TS, so I've been a bit better socially than if I'd had it in Kindergarten.

**The impact of TS varies from person to person. How has it affected your life?**

If I didn't have it maybe I wouldn't be as driven. It's part of who I am and I wonder if I'd be as dedicated to success without it. When I talk to small children, I tell them to imagine that millions of years ago everyone had TS and then some people lost it, so people with TS are the originals. This really makes sense to young kids. Sitting in a college class one day I realized that when I think I'm the normal one—I'm OK.

**When and how were you diagnosed? And how have you treated your symptoms?**

I was diagnosed when I was fifteen. It waxed and waned a lot starting in seventh grade. By Junior High, it exploded and I began the rounds of pediatricians, psychologists and all that. My grandmother was the one who pegged it. Medications were effective, but they made me a zombie.

I got off Haldol because it became less effective. It took away the tics, but my academic record suffered. My TS was pretty much unleashed at twenty-one and got far worse between twenty-one and twenty-six. I tried every medication in the book.

It was a personal decision to stop the medications due the side effects. I weighed 225 pounds and I was going through a depression. I didn't care about myself. I don't advocate any one treatment over another, I just felt that the side effects were more damaging than the public response to my tics.

Diet, exercise and allergy neutralization—which helps build immunity to allergies—are what I do now. It's not for everyone. But diet control and exercise really work for me.

**Stress has a big impact on people with TS. Do you do anything to help alleviate it?**

Trying to maintain a healthy diet and exercise program. My mom and grandmother yelled at me for years to go walk around the block. And it sure does help. Parents say stuff and they actually do understand. So now I listen and exercise. Being a musician, I can change my mood by changing the music I listen to.

I have OCD and ADD so I strive to make my professional life organized even if I'm disorganized at home. I'm blessed with good friends who have helped me get organized and I've made that a goal.

Keeping an even keel is best. Financial stress kills me but performance stress is not bad. I try to budget and realize that some things I'm not able to change. I just accept who I am and accommodate. My late grandfather was a "one-day-at-a-time," "know yourself" kind of person—that approach alleviates a lot of stress. So does stopping for a second before I respond.

**TS is in the media a great deal lately. Some of the presentations are more realistic and positive than others. What do you think of the media's role in increasing awareness?**

I separate Hollywood from the general media. I have a regular massage appointment with a therapist. She saw *What About Bob* and thought she knew all about it! Hollywood doesn't portray anything real, but local media is where the real story needs to be told in a positive light.

About ten years ago, public awareness of TS was about zero. Now it's on the front burner. Even the negative can be made into a good thing because it can be spun in a positive way as an opportunity to talk about TS. I went to see *Deuce Bigalow* with the son of my principal—who is like a little brother to me. He realized that it wasn't that funny or real and came to realize how the presentation can affect people. The negative presentation was positive in this case. It brings the discussion to the table. By trying to succeed, by serving as role models you can take negative things and spin them.

I laugh at my situation. The world needs more humor, not less. So I step back. I would tell kids with TS to try to plan for the future, but take it one day at a time. People can be cruel; don't let them get to you. Deal with it with humor.

