

SPEECH IS A RIVER

MY RECOVERY FROM
STUTTERING

How one stutterer (me if you must know) learned
to go with the flow.

By Ruth Mead

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INTRODUCTION BY JOHN HARRISON

(Author of *REDEFINING STUTTERING: What the Struggle to Speak Is Really All About*)

Early in March of 2011 I heard from an ex-stutterer named Ruth Mead. Ruth had found my book, *Redefining Stuttering*, on the Internet, and was startled to discover that there was someone out there who shared the same perspective on stuttering that she did. As it turned out, Ruth wasn't the only one who was startled. So was I. In my 35-year involvement with the stuttering self-help movement, nobody, but nobody, had come closer to understanding the essential nature of the recovery process.

Ruth had written a book on stuttering, *SPEECH IS A RIVER -- My Recovery From Stuttering* that “had sat in a drawer for several years.” Why had she put it aside? Because what she had written seemed so foreign to the prevailing theories about stuttering that she was sure nobody would “get” it. Then she found my book and suddenly everything she had been thinking was validated. There was someone else who shared her vision. And this someone, like her, had also recovered.

Ruth contacted me, and we started a lively correspondence. I am absolutely fascinated by Ruth's work. Ruth is a brilliant writer. She has a vibrant and entertaining style. She really has a handle on what her stuttering was about. But most of all, she recovered from a 30-year severe stutter in a way that I'd never heard of before.

You will find *SPEECH IS A RIVER -- My Recovery From Stuttering*, a fascinating read. And if you're someone who stutters, you will be introduced to a radical new perspective on the essential nature of stuttering and the path you need to follow in order to disappear it.

FOREWORD

It has taken me an inordinate amount of time to decide to write this book on stuttering. There are good reasons for this. First, I was born into a family of educators, but from my earliest memory it was apparent that I must have been in the rest room when the “Schoolmarm instincts” were passed out.

Even when my stuttering went away and I felt compelled to write the progression of what happened prior to this event, I bumped into another problem. Everything I wrote sounded too authoritarian (like Aunt Bea lecturing Opey to pick up his undies or learn his fractions.) And even statements like “I was cured by doing *this, this, or that*...and you *too* can be cured if you do what I tell you” sounded pedantic and missing-the-point, a little like saying “My parents were happily married for 60 years and had 12 children, so if you have 12 children you can also be happily married.”

So this is what I decided to do: I decided to simply tell you what happened to me and the *progression* of what happened (as well as my own interpretation of those events) as clearly and truthfully as I can and leave it to you to put the pieces together and come up with your *own* connections and conclusions.

If my observations don’t confirm yours, then by all means, *trust your own eyes*. And who knows? Even though no one has absolutely *proven* this to be true, it may well be that this elusive thing we call “universal unity” *might* turn out to be the fruit of each of us (individually and honestly) using our *own* eyes to see, our *own* ears to hear, and our *own* hearts to understand.

It seemed as if nothing I observed on my journey matched anything being pushed by the experts at that time. This led me to despair. I hadn’t stuttered badly until a math teacher took it upon herself to make me conscious of my stuttering and then tried to fix it. During that year in her class I changed from a little girl who s-s-s-s-stuttered now and then, to a little girl who had intense blocking on approximately 90% of her words.

The experts seemed to conclude that early speech therapy was important, believing that stuttering was due to mechanical difficulties or genetics or poor breathing techniques and more than one respected speech therapist told my parents that scientists concluded that stuttering was due to brain damage. Common sense prevailed, however, because I (and the other kids who were being treated in that speech clinic) knew we did not stutter when we were alone, or when we spoke to each other, or when we spoke in unison, or sang, or whispered, or talked to babies or animals (if no adult was in hearing distance). Even *we*, young as we were, knew what *that* meant. Even if the adults did not.

So even though my experiences didn’t match what the experts were saying, what I finally *did* have going for me was the fact that I, who had never made a phone call, not even *one* time, before I was 33 years old, was suddenly able to make my living by talking on the phone 24/7. Also, I had patiently recorded my observations of what was happening before and after those approximately-three-months it took me to stop thinking about speech, as well as continuing the work of observing and free-writing until now.

And then it happened. One Saturday afternoon in late summer I was surfing the internet nervously, no idea what I was searching for (but later recognized I was still seeking confirmation of my own observations and experiences regarding stuttering.) I found a massive

tome about stuttering (*REDEFINING STUTTERING*) written by a person I recognized only as being associated with the NSA (National Stuttering Association). His name was John Harrison.

This material was not heavily theoretical and was not based on a lot of psychological research or controlled clinical experimentation, but had the ring of truth to it and appeared to be grounded in his personal observations and experiences. His stuttering had disappeared, as mine had, and I noticed many similarities between his experiences and observations....and my own.

I printed off the entire book, lugged it downstairs to my big leather reading chair, forgot to eat dinner, and read until early morning. I was awe-struck by what I read. This profound book convinced me finally that my own careful observations had merit and that at least one person in the universe saw many of the same truths I had seen (and continue to see.)

Harrison's book was the "transformative moment" for me. I took my manuscript out of the dusty bottom drawer and took another look. There is no way I can over-estimate the strengthening effects of Harrison's clarity on my dim and foggy notions and my wobbly observations. I quote him throughout this book.

Through John Harrison I heard of another writer by the name of Dr. Bob Bodenhamer and the group (neurosemanticsofstuttering@yahoo.com) he founded on Yahoo. His book "*HAVE A VOICE – HOW TO STOP STUTTERING*" also confirmed my own observations: that my blocking was largely cognitive rather than merely physiological. I also found the invaluable writings of Barbara Dahm and the website of "Stuttering Jack." These books and websites are listed in the Bibliography.

**ALWAYS TRYING HAS MADE ME TIRED.
MAYBE THAT'S A START.....**

SONG FOR YOU/MURDOCK

SPEAK OR DO NOT; THERE IS NO TRY

(Me, misquoting Yoda)

“SPEECH IS LIKE A RIVER.”

Rumi

PART ONE

SPEECH IS LIKE JAZZ

(IT JUST HAPPENS)

CHAPTER 1

SPEECH IS LIKE JAZZ

(IT JUST HAPPENS)

This book is about how one person (me, if you must know) stopped stuttering.

Having said this, I can't help but wonder how you are going to react to that statement. Maybe you were taught, as I was: "No one can stop stuttering. Okay, maybe we can improve an eensy-weensy bit, but no one stops stuttering." And that's an okay reaction. I firmly believed that myself until I couldn't believe it anymore because of my own experiences. It's a lot more difficult to deny a theory than it is to deny one's own experiences.

All I know for sure is that I couldn't look a gift horse in the mouth. When insight hit me between my eyes with "speech is like jazz, it just happens (as long as you keep your pesky Critic out of the way)"...I was incapable of walking away from such a swap. I couldn't somberly shake my head, mumbling "Huh-uh, no way, can't accept this new way of looking at things because authorities assure me I will stutter all my life." No way I could do that. I couldn't walk away.

When I saw the truth "Speech is like a river" and "the river flows by itself" it wasn't difficult to make the connection: "Ah! If speech is a river, then I need to let it flow without interference. I need to stop pushing the river." Either way, both metaphors gave me hope.

SPEAK OR DO NOT. THERE IS NO TRY

There are two main paths through stuttering: the natural spontaneous flowing no-think, no-try path....and the effortful, full-of-thought-and-effort conscious pathway. The no-try path was natural, spontaneous and free. It was vibrant, joyful and edgy. The old path was planned, rigid, reactive and goal-oriented. It was fearful, defensive and ossified (with work, practice, planning, techniques, effort and willpower as priorities to push me over the top.)

I'm going to take that back about only two paths through stuttering. There is the natural path (the path less-travelled) and the traditional path, that's true. There is also the passive option: sweetly but passively waiting for stuttering to "get over with," like waiting for a kidney stone to pass. Many people confuse passivity with spontaneity, but there's all the difference in the world.

The path I took finally determined my recovery.

The reason I say "finally" is because I initially took the old authority-approved, conscious, effortful path through numerous therapies (which I tell you about in the following chapters). At

that time I was totally convinced I could think, reason, force, pummel, coerce and thrash speech into existence. Under such abusive treatment, of course, my own words suffered the consequences. I stuttered on roughly 90% of the words I spoke.

When I say I stammered or stuttered (in my opinion they are identical terms) I'm not talking cute or lispy or one of those little nervous stammers. Some people stutter that way, just as some people tan with cute, adorable little freckles rather than great red blotches. But adorable is not the kind of stuttering I'm talking about and I don't mean that I stuttered, *sort of*.

I mean I stuttered, *really*. The great red blotches variety.

And one of the most important things that happened to my worldview between "Before" and "After" was a radical change in the way I viewed speech.

Once I saw speech as difficult and manufactured by my conscious mind. Now my "take" is: Speech is like jazz. It just happens. Or Rumi's metaphor: Speech is like a river. On the other hand, stammering was what happened when I tried to *make* speech happen rather than *let* it flow.

While words are learned, speech is natural.

Steven Pinker wrote: "Children don't have to go to school to learn to walk, talk, recognize objects or remember the personalities of their friends, even though these tasks are much harder than reading, adding or remembering dates in history." (*The Language Instinct*)

John Harrison wrote "Children automatically learn to speak the Zen way--not by consciously thinking about it. Speech is such a complicated undertaking, and must happen so quickly and automatically, that the Zen approach is really the *only* way it can be mastered."

SPEECH IS NOT A CONSCIOUS ART

What *is* this big problem some people call stuttering and others dub stammering? We know there's really no *conscious* art to saying "hello". You *automatically* shape your mouth in the appropriate way, you *naturally* flex your vocal chords and let words float past your lips and out upon your audience, right?

So what was my problem? The problem was that speaking is easy and natural but I made it hard. I attempted to make speaking a *conscious* art, as if I actually believed there was no speech without effort, planning, thinking, forcing, willpower and trying to "fix" my speech.

The core issue at the root of my stuttering was my conscious mind trying to control my natural spontaneous speech. My fantasy as to the supposed power of the conscious mind was a great stumbling block for me. It was my firm belief that if you had a problem in life, nothing worked like thinking, hard work, effort, imagination, willpower, desire, discipline, making it happen.

I was clearly trapped in my brain. But a radical idea occurred to me: I realized I had to get out of my head in order to unlock the mystery of my stuttering. As Albert Einstein put it: "Problems can not be solved at the same level of awareness that created them."

John Harrison uses the term "holding back" for "stuttering" and one surprising realization about holding back came in the form of another metaphor: Expression is a natural organic part of your nature. Your nature is like a river flowing through you. The careful worrisome conscious mind, on the other hand, seeks to control that natural flow by building a dam across the river and holding back the flow. It seemed clear to me that my spontaneous flowing natural self didn't hold *itself* back but rather flow was held back by my resistant conscious mind (with its

toolbox full of wrong beliefs, concepts, values and attitudes). Spontaneity, we all know, can either be expressed or repressed.

Energy moves where it is easiest to go. If there is huge mental resistance to natural flow, energy is blocked. Stuttering revealed (to me) a conflict between my natural easy-breezy spontaneous flow and the attitude of my trained resistant intellect toward my own spontaneity and flow.

When I tried to speak fluently, nothing worked and yet I was unable to get out of my head and trust speech to happen on its own. It seemed as if the phone lines were down between: 1) Big Me: my subliminal natural innate wired-from-birth spontaneous expressive energetic core that knows what to say and how to say it (even though it doesn't know that it knows) and 2) Little Me: My rational taught intellect that acted as a censor of my natural speech and tried to change, correct and fix every word that came out of my mouth.

When speaking to a researcher about my intuitive grasp of this inner conflict caused by my interfering intellect "butting into" my natural spontaneous flow, he answered "Oh, I see what you're saying. I use different words for the same thing. I call this a 'neurological condition located in the left frontal temporal lobe.'"

So there you go.

ON NOT BEING ABLE TO SPEAK

I always stuttered in response to coercion. To be imperatively ordered by another person (or by myself) to speak on command (give my name, for example) was like being ordered to invent something original and valuable. Speaking-on-command was like trying to create something new and original on command: it was enough to *paralyze* the spontaneous part of myself or cause it to run away in terror. Speech is a creative activity and can *not* be commanded.

Just as a cheerful person emits cheerfulness without conscious purpose, design or consciousness, so it is with speech. I found speech to be (as Henry A. Murray suggested in "*Vicissitudes of Creativity*") autonomous and rebellious far more than it was submissive to my conscious will. In fact, I found that my conscious will could not control my creative spontaneous activities and processes (including speech) at *all*.

INTELLECTUAL TIMIDITY

Since we are living in an era when even the slightest sign of presumption is obnoxious, please remember when I talk about stuttering, I am always talking about my own recovery. My goal is not to convert you to my point of view. I simply want a chance to tell you what I learned about stuttering.

I found when I was writing this book that I had a tendency toward intellectual *timidity*, the tendency to hide every original observation with a smokescreen of apologetic meanderings; or worse, joking around.

On that front, I identify with the chaplain of a school I once attended. This guy was known for his inability to say definitive things in a clear way because he was so fearful of offending others. One Sunday morning he was trying to prove the existence of God to the students but he kept beating around the bush, hemming and hawing, for a full hour. When the service was finally over, I walked out the door with a friend who had listened carefully to what had just gone on. "I don't care *what* that guy says" this friend complained to me, "I *still* believe in God."

The biggest part of recovering from stuttering was getting on my own side and allowing this inner voice to express itself. By “getting on my own side” I mean the side of what I noticed, observed, perceived and what worked for *me*.

Stuttering challenged me to see the world in a new, more realistic way. It also challenged me to express this worldview in a firm and uncompromising way. That was what “finding my own voice” was all about.

MY DINOSAUR WORLDVIEW

Speech is intuitive, instinctual, spontaneous and natural, even though there was great mental resistance to that truth in my own mind. I found my greatest battle was not in my environment, not in my teachings, not in the attitudes I found around me. My greatest battle was within....in my own repression of my instinctive self by my conscious worrisome interfering mind (which I named “Bossypants”) and the false beliefs that were destroying my fluency.

My belief in the supremacy of effort, positive thought, planning, willpower and pulling-myself-out-of-problems-by-my-own-bootstraps is actually a whole worldview referred to as the “works philosophy” and I believed in it 100%. Just as behavior is rooted in worldview, stuttering was rooted in how I looked at speech.

The works philosophy is a whole worldview, a whole way of looking at things...and it differs completely from the worldview that “the grass grows by itself....you can’t make it grow.”

Some people refer to the two ways as Grace and Works. Some as Spirit and Flesh; Some as Natural and Contrived; Some as Unconscious and Conscious. It was when my worldview changed that my speech changed. And I must not be alone. As Abraham Maslow wrote: “What seems to be happening all across the United States is that we are discovering that regardless of what the problem is...crime, delinquency, mental illness, alcoholism, drug addiction or failure...the problem is basically *a faulty view of reality.*”

MY BELIEFS START TO UNRAVEL

William D. Parry, (*Understanding and Controlling Stuttering*) postulates that “the neurological substitution of effort” in place of phonation, triggered by the “urge to use effort to reduce anxiety” is at the root of stuttering. I actually believed in the power of effort in regard to speaking. At Big Sur I learned the truth in the phrase I later coined: “Speak or do not; there is no try.”

My unrealistic view of speech was the composite of many distorted beliefs. Dr. Bob Bodenhamer suggests that wrong thoughts and beliefs are central to blocking. I totally agree.

My beliefs began to unravel the day I asked an elderly gentleman, for lack of anything else to talk about, if his speaking engagements wore him out. He answered “No. Traveling wears me out a bit, but speaking doesn’t wear me out.”

So I asked “You mean you don’t have to think of every word you say, like how to form words in your mouth, how to slow down when you talk, how to take a deep breath before a long sentence?”

The kind man looked puzzled and finally asked if I was serious. When I assured him I was, he asked politely: “Why do you ask? Is this what you do when you speak?” When I nodded “yes”, his eyes widened, his mouth fell open and he shook his head unbelievably. “I can’t imagine how weary I would be if I had to do that” he said. “I guess I would never bother to say a word.”

Why hadn't it occurred to me to ask anyone this question before? Maybe I simply assumed that speech was as hard for others as it was for me. Whatever the case, this friend's answer to my question left me in shock. Here was a person (who saw speech as easy, spontaneous and automatic) sitting across the table from me (a person who saw speech as difficult, conscious and controlled). This man's view of speech was behind his fluency, just as my view of speech resulted in over-thinking, over-monitoring, and over-controlling my speech.

It came to me that I had lost trust in my natural spontaneous ability to speak and attempted to make up for that lack of faith by beefing up my conscious control of speech.

INNER SPONTANEITY VS. CONSCIOUS CONTROL

One of my earliest memories of the results of this inner conflict (between Inner Spontaneity and conscious control) occurred when I was a child of about 6 years of age. It involved our local pharmacist who had a serious problem when it came to filling prescriptions.

My parents sent me to the pharmacy when we needed medicine because I was the youngest girl in the family and had the most time to spare. Why did I need so much time? Because the pharmacist had given a customer the wrong medicine many years before, and the customer died. The druggist no longer trusted his own judgment, his own "automatic/natural intelligence".

The pharmacist read and re-read and re-read each prescription I took to him. Then he very slowly filled it. Then he handed it to me, then took it back, then handed it to me again, then took it back. I noticed the sweat on his forehead and the look of terror on his face.

Now that I am an adult, I realize the tragedy of a person who has lost trust in his own automatic and natural abilities.

I also see the application to stuttering. My speech is actually too complex to be handled by my conscious mind and must therefore be performed by my own automatic spontaneous core. I also recognize that my subliminal self does the work of speaking when it is allowed to do so, unless the conscious mind resists the natural flow and makes speaking a conscious activity.

TAKE NO THOUGHT: A NEW PARADIGM

Jesus teased the religious leaders about their faith in the power of thought. He asked "Can you, by taking thought, add even a fraction of an inch to your height?" And then he said something shocking, at least I found it to be shocking: "Take no thought what you will say and the spirit will speak through you."

The force of those words on my well-thought-out "works" philosophy was overwhelming. Take no thought what to say or how to say it? That's absolutely crazy! Thinking about what I was going to say and how I was going to say it had consumed me for a very long time and I couldn't imagine the crater left in my brain if I let it go. I was 33 years old and stuttered slightly since I was 4 years old and stuttered horribly from the time a teacher by the name of Miss Tizdale (not her actual name) had made me conscious of stuttering in 6th grade.

It is my understanding that the conscious mind takes over speech when we want a certain outcome. Suppose I want to be fluent and instead I can't get a word out of my mouth. I don't like that outcome so my logical thought goes: "If I tried harder to speak or if I truly wanted to speak well, this wouldn't have happened. My efforts are too little, too late. I need to

try harder.” (Is it not strange that my logic never seemed to err on the other side, like “See! Trying doesn’t work!”)

So I become more conscious of the words I say. I try harder not to stutter. When I do this I am giving more energy to my conscious mind: the conscious effortful part of me that actually *causes* my stuttering in the first place is now given free reign over my speech to censor, improve, and fix it. The whole situation was outrageous.

As long as we don’t deal with the slow analytical conscious mind and it’s brazen takeover of speech, due to distorted beliefs, we aren’t dealing with stuttering. When you live in a stutterer’s world you can’t help but realize you exert little if any control over your speech. As long as we are still thinking about speech and working to fix it, we are gripped by the philosophy of works: *a state of psychological disturbance in which we falsely believe we are able to control what is happening to us and the world around us by effort, trying, fixing, thinking positive thoughts or believing that we can be cured if we try a little harder.*

GIVING UP MY SCRIPT

Giving up thought and effort when I spoke was like an actor having to give up his script. Malcolm Gladwell in his book, *BLINK*, describes the difference between a regular play and what he calls “Improv”: “A regular play has structure (every word and movement has been scripted and there’s a visible director to tell the actors what to do and say.)”

Improv (short for Improvisation) is different. Improv is all about spontaneous no-think speech. It’s about spontaneous flow that isn’t scripted. It’s about no plan or forethought or thought; it’s off-the-cuff, unpremeditated, unrehearsed, delivered spontaneously. It doesn’t require cleverness. It’s not voodoo. It’s not magic. It is simply building the trust you need to speak from your spontaneous core rather than your conscious thought.

This requires a major shift from conscious control to speaking from one’s own inner spontaneity.

Most of all, an improv actor can’t depend on the producer or his script. In fact, doing improv means *giving up the script*. As Gladwell describes it, it’s like the producer says “I’m not going to tell you what to say or do and you have to give up your script, but you will be performing a play two weeks from this evening!”

Just as Improv groups often react to this lack of structure with terror, when I first began this “Take no thought when you speak” idea, I was also terrified. I believed: “I *must* think about every word I say. I *must* force words out. I *must* take a deep breath before I speak.”

Thought, willpower, discipline and forcing my way through words had made me worse, but I couldn’t bear to start all over again. I had been at this too long! I truly believed that if I let go of all my answers to stuttering my speech would be more random and chaotic than ever.

WHAT CAN A STUTTERER LEARN FROM JAZZ?

It is natural for your creative intelligence, the source of natural speech, to improv. My inner spontaneity is not the “big kahuna” in my life due to its great discipline or critical abilities or tidiness. This subliminal source of natural speech is the “big kahuna” because it is innovative, creative and has the power of perception and expression. Speech happens so quickly and is so complex that there’s no such thing as following rules anymore and that is why natural spontaneity was the major player in my speech.

Speech is like jazz in more than one way. Josh Linkner, founder and CEO of ePrize, draws on his experience as an accomplished jazz musician, so he is able to offer a fresh perspective on Improv. *What can a PWS learn from jazz musicians?* The ability to improvise.

As Linkner says “The world is now moving so quickly, things are so complex, and our environment is so competitive that there’s no such thing as just following an operating manual.”

In jazz, Linkner tells us, less than 1 percent of the notes are on the written page. The rest is improvised as you go. “With my group I might play a 10 or 15 minute song and there’s half a page of music there,” Linkner says. In other words, more than 95% of jazz has to be improvised. You gotta make it up as you go along. Plans don’t help. Scripts don’t matter. What matters is going with the flow.

Getting over stuttering was like playing jazz. There was always a hunger in me to express myself with spontaneity and abandon. One day it came to me: *“Before you can speak spontaneously, you have to give up your script!”* And as I learned more about natural speech, it all started to make sense.

* I observed that speaking is a synthesis of many movements and sounds, all flowing together in harmony with one another. My conscious mind can’t learn how to speak by rote or memorize the movements involved or send a million instructions to my muscles so I can speak. Speaking can’t be conscious.

* I observed that speech happens so fast we can’t rely on our thinking. In any instant we have to automatically make five, ten or more adjustments in our speech mechanism to keep the flow going. Can the slow and unwieldy conscious mind direct those adjustments or do we need to trust the body (guided by the right brain) and stop consciously trying to control and direct our speech? By expecting my body to act spontaneously, without the intrusion of conscious thought and effort, half the battle is won.

* I saw speaking in the same way I looked at breathing, heart beat, or other body functions which are carried out below the conscious level.

* I learned it is natural for the mechanical part of our speech to operate completely on auto-pilot, no effort at all. When we are operating naturally, we are centered on what we *mean and whether the one we are speaking to “gets” what we mean* rather than how to say what we mean or whether the one we are speaking to is judging us or not.

* I learned that writing was the way my brain created neural pathways through which easy flow of speech happened.

* I learned that any time conscious interference in speaking occurs, speech is wrested from a spontaneous inner source to the mental place we call “conscious will” or “conscious effort” and all spontaneity and flow is gone.

* I learned that what I had been taught about speech was very unlike what I observed. I had picked up implications all my life that my conscious mind should be in charge of speech and therefore speech is deliberate, difficult and requires thought and effort (and I would have to work very hard to control my stuttering.) On the other hand, what I was observing was *“When conscious thought and willpower are in charge of speaking, I stutter worse.”* Self-consciousness was obviously the killer of flow and fluency.

WILD IDEAS

Each new discovery seemed totally wild to me. The idea that I needed to trust in natural speech as “the flowing river that flows by itself without conscious intervention” was one of

those wild ideas. So was “If my conscious mind works at cross-purposes with the creative flow (speech, for example), natural flow will be repressed or stunted.”

I studied for hours on end about my “fluent brain.” I began to understand that just as a magnet conducts electricity naturally without thought, so I am a conductor of speech (which Emerson named the “whole river of electricity”)...which flows naturally and without conscious effort, pushing and prodding.

A writer and speech therapist from Israel, Barbara Dahm, summed up the whole intuitive spontaneous activity of speech in a few words...words I would have (at one time) found completely revolutionary.

Here is Dahm’s description of the natural speaking activity and process, and please note the absence of “conscious effort” from her description:

One, Attending to the nonverbal idea the person is expressing, the brain automatically transforms ideas into language.

Two, The brain simultaneously sends a signal to the speech motor system so that a natural voice that contains intonation is produced

Three, The mouth simultaneously moves subconsciously and automatically. This all happens at the same level that produces breathing and heartbeat.

Four, In normal speech production there is no conscious word awareness, no control over motor activity and no such thing as trying to “get words out.”

Dahm adds: “Everyone seems to be locked into fluency shaping and stuttering modification as the only therapies, but this is not so. *I see the key to real progress requires changing thoughts and beliefs, because this allows the system to function automatically. That is essential for the production of fluent speech.*”

All I can tell you for sure is that when I truly “got it”, I was able to stop pushing the river. I no longer substituted “pushing” (conscious effort) for natural flow. And even the urge to use effort when I spoke absolutely vanished. This is what I mean by “going with the flow” or “saying yes to the flow.”

BOTH KINDS OF YOU: BIG YOU AND LITTLE YOU

You are “both kinds of you.” If you are told “Be Yourself!” you could correctly answer “Which of my two selves do you want me to be?” Big Me is the natural creative wired-from-birth subliminal intelligence and Little Me is the conscious critical taught *editorial* mind. From Day One we learn that we are invisible and visible, spirit and mind, creative and critical, right and left, unconscious and conscious, natural and acquired, Big Me and Little Me, Perception and Thought.

Stuttering was, for me, the result of the wrong guy in charge of my speech. There are clinical ways to say this but I want to say this as clearly as possible: When thought (the critical mind) was in charge of my speech, I was in deep trouble. In fact, when Little Me was in charge of speech, Big Me left the scene of the accident (“accident” being an apt description of what happened to my speech when my critical mind took control.)

Readings of quantum physics gave me a few hints as to the nature of the conscious mind. David Bohm wrote:

“Thought is always creating problems and then trying to solve them. But as thought tries to solve the problem it makes it worse because it doesn’t notice it is creating problems and the more it thinks the more problems it creates.”

CARUSO

Many years ago, there was a famous singer named Enrico Caruso, the great operatic tenor.

Caruso was often struck with stage fright. Spasms caused by intense fear constricted the muscles of his throat. His vocal cords felt paralyzed, useless. He stood backstage, already in costume, while perspiration poured down his face. In just moments he was supposed to go out on the stage and sing, before an eager audience of thousands.

In *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind* Dr. Joseph Murphy wrote: “Trembling, Caruso cried ‘I can’t sing. They will all laugh at me. My career is finished.’

“He turned to go back to his dressing room. Then, suddenly, he stopped and shouted ‘The Little Me is trying to strangle the Big Me within!’

“He turned toward the stage again and stood taller ‘Get out of here’ he commanded, addressing the Little Me. ‘The Big Me wants to sing through me.’

“By the Big Me, Caruso meant the limitless power and wisdom of his subliminal mind. He began to shout ‘Get out, get out, the Big Me is going to sing!’

“His subliminal mind responded by releasing the vital forces within him. When the call came, he walked out onstage and sang gloriously and majestically. The audience was enthralled.”

YANNI

Yanni, the famous pianist, writes a great deal about this pull in two directions. In the book “Yanni” he differentiates between the self that wrote his music and the self that was outside judging the music he wrote. “Judging and creativity are opposites. Both are valid but they can’t exist in the same place at the same time. You have to let music flow freely. The instant I begin judging my creation, I find myself outside looking in and the creative moment is gone.”

When the conscious mind (Little Me) is finally at the end of its rope and deprived of knowing what to do, it tends to drop out of a task, turning it over instead to Big Me...outside the realm of conscious control.

We are not comfortable at first with discriminating between the two ways of being in the world. Little Me is the voice of reason, thinking it knows what it wants, the way of choice, effort, achievement. It first decides and then acts but acting on this voice is acting on the past. Michele Cassou, the French painter, describes another way (the spontaneous way of “going with the flow.”)

“There is a way that is free of result. It has a depth and a direction of exploration. There is no anchor to it, nowhere to arrive, nothing to grab, no end to it. When we write out of this flow we flow with a rhythm so perfect and precise that it dictates even the direction in which every line has to be painted, from left to right or reverse, and if for some practical reason we try to turn it around, nothing flows. If we are able to give up control and follow its movement, the painting goes its own way perfectly. If we don’t paint in this way, we paint on paper, it becomes just a piece of paper with color.”

Cassou continues: “There is a strong belief that techniques, knowledge and training are necessary to paint well. There is a tremendous fear of helplessness if we think of not acting from the proddings of the voice. We believe that decisions are necessary. But when I paint I see that choice only comes from confusion. If I hesitate between two colors I can be sure that my expressiveness is blocked and that I am outside the creative flow.”

THE ZONE: A HOME, A PLACE TO BE

I don't now refer to the place where I stopped thinking of speech as a "Cure." Why? Because I arrived at a much bigger place than merely recovering from stuttering. What happened was that my whole view of the world changed and that changed my beliefs, attitudes, values and emotions. It even changed my relationships.

Arriving in the Zone is a whole new way of being in the world. I think of this way of being as "Grace". Grace is the state of ease that includes *the cessation of doing, trying, effort, works. In sports, this state is often referred to as "the Zone."*

On the other hand, "Trying" is the mechanical muscular energy, force and effort the mind uses to get what it wants or needs. I who had believed my conscious mind had to do everything, was now in the business of wringing all conscious effortful thought and wrong beliefs out of my speech.

My slow and unwieldy conscious mind can't direct my speech but must trust my subliminal brain and body to do what is needed, expecting my body to act spontaneously, without the intrusion of conscious thought and effort.

Arriving in the Zone is arriving at a state of rest in which the conscious mind with all its effort, hard work and grim determination, is eliminated from speech. This state of rest from conscious effort has many names: Grace, Zen, Rest, Faith, The Zone, Sabbath. Sometimes I like the phrase "Sabbath Rest" best of all.

Arriving at the Zone was the result of the gradual and cumulative work through which I recognized my spontaneous Unconscious, the original source of speech.

I came to the realization that deep within me are slumbering powers and abilities that were always there, abilities that astonish me and revolutionize my life when allowed free expression.

THE SOURCE

When you are speaking without plan and thought, you are speaking out of your brain's higher centers. Everyone has heard stories about how the higher centers of the brain allow a person to do miraculous things. Speaking fluently is such a miracle, like breathing, that happens to most of us most of the time. People who stutter can return to this miraculous state we call the Zone when they can finally trust their higher intelligence to flow without the conscious mind seeking to control it.

Gertrude Stein, talking to artists, actually described natural speech:

"You cannot go into the womb to form the child; it is there and makes itself and comes forth whole and there it is and you have made it and have felt it but it has come itself."

I worked so hard at consciously moving my words forward that I was actually worn out from talking, and this worn-out feeling that comes from forcing out each word often resulted in a lock-down of my speech muscles. I pictured each word as a separate and individual challenge, along with the belief I had to force air through locked muscles.

When I realized fully and absolutely that speech is a flowing thing rather than a jerky sequence of one word after another, I saw that it was ridiculous to consciously work at handling each word separately. I also noticed that *conscious effort cut me off from my flowing spontaneous self*, and this cut-off-ness wore me out.

"All my life I had strived to keep myself under control" John Harrison (author of *Redefining Stuttering*) wrote. "I never trusted my intuitions. I never gave in to my instincts. I con-

stantly worried about being wrong. I always had a tight grip on my emotions.”

Harrison was clearly able to arrive at the Zone. What helped me on my journey to the Zone was observing what was going on in my life and trusting my own observations. Here is what I found:

Nature gives you everything you need to speak automatically. Your brain knows what to say and how to say it...that's just the way it operates. Speaking is a natural gift of grace. Can you trust that if you give up on conscious effort the natural and spontaneous will kick in? And yet that is exactly what I discovered. Here is the fact I observed:

The minute I gave up on conscious effort, my natural flowing speech kicked in. But I couldn't quit trying by trying to quit trying. The only way I could quit trying to quit stuttering was to really “get it” that speech is natural and happens on its own. I constantly pictured the “speech is like a river” metaphor. So speech is a gift that nature gives us. *It's as if Nature says: “I'm going to automate your speech so you can use all that time and energy you've consumed on speaking in productive and creative endeavors.”*

If my very own subliminal intelligence, outside the control of my conscious mind, knows what to say and how to say it without conscious intervention, then I could trust it. Then I was in good hands. What I observed for myself was: Thinking about speaking put my slow methodical mind in charge of my speech.

SHUSH THE CHATTERING MIND

Flow is what happens when resistance is gone from speech. There are many ways to rid yourself of the resistance of your chattering critical mind. Sometimes I have to get really rough with my own Censor or Bossypants (the name I gave my Censoring Mind) will completely take over my speech. I have already described Caruso's way of dealing with Little Me.

Today I met a man who deals with the chattering mind (his son's chattering mind) in a different way. It worked for him and I don't argue with anything that works. This is what happened:

Our TV broke the other day so we called a guy to take our old TV and install the new one we purchased. This man was a knowledgeable genius when it came to televisions. From the moment he walked into the room, my husband and I both recognized that he knew what he was doing. There was only one problem. He brought his son along. His son was to simply haul out the old television because the “genius” was not physically able to do so.

When the installation was complete, the father was explaining to us how the bells and whistles worked on the remote. This was quite a fancy set-up and required concentration on my part to understand what he was saying. The father got only a few sentences into the explanation when the son goes “My father is really a genius. Everyone says he's a genius.” The “genius” was obviously accustomed to his son butting in constantly and resumed his explanation.

The father got another few words out and the son goes “My dad plays the guitar at the Cowboy Church in Waxahachie.” The father said “Please do not interrupt me, Son; It is my job to explain how this works” and once again resumed speaking. Then the son goes “I'm hungry, Dad. It's time to go.” Finally the “genius” lost his cool and yelled at the top of his lungs: “Why don't you shut the hell up?”

There are more polite ways for your Big Brain to tell your Little Brain to get out of the way. But “Shut the Hell up” worked for the Genius. Maybe it will work for you.

NEW QUESTIONS

Metaphors like “Speech is like jazz” or “Speech is like a river” not only changed my understanding and fluency, but also changed my questions. No longer did I ask “how do I stop stuttering?” My questions were

- 1) “How can I deal with my mind so it doesn’t hold back flowing spontaneous speech?”
- 2) “What do I do if there is too much resistance from Little Me (my critical editorial brain I had named Bossypants)?”
- 3) “Natural speech is a flowing thing so how do I *enable* flow rather than *resist* it?”
- 4) “How can I unblock the flow within me and build the trust I need in order to live and speak from Big Me (my spontaneous core) rather than Little Me (my conscious thought)?”

So now when people ask me how I overcame stuttering I simplify. I say “I open my mouth and let nature do my talking for me.” When a person then asks, as they sometimes do: “How can you give up control? If I don’t think of every word that comes out of my mouth, I’ll say bad words. I’ll say horrible embarrassing things,” all I can do is tell them that when I rely on the natural way of speaking I don’t need to consciously think about every word I say. I trust my natural spontaneity. It’s “Bossypants” (interfering in natural flowing speech) who causes all the trouble.

CHAPTER 2

LOCKED INTO CONSCIOUS THOUGHT

I often wonder what would have happened if a speech therapist would have approached stuttering with wonder and asked questions like: “I’m looking at your behavior (stuttering) and I know that worldview is behind behavior, so how are you looking at speech? Describe to me your understanding as to how speech happens and we can deal with that.”

This is why I try to make it clear to people who stutter that I have no advice on effort, discipline, goals, techniques or proper breathing. Why? Because stuttering, in my case, was a manifestation of too much control and all the above are ways of controlling speech.

Because of my own experience I hypothesize that stuttering can become fixed when the person who stutters becomes conscious of his stutter and efforts are made to consciously stop stuttering dead in its tracks.

For those who have a child who stammers, the question is always “will my child outgrow stammering?” Well, that depends. Many children stammer when they are small and get over it naturally and without thought or effort. It is the phrase: “get over it naturally and without thought or effort” that is key here. A child who grows out of stammering is most often a child who does not become conscious of speaking, doesn’t “try” to speak, doesn’t plan his words or his breathing and eventually speaks without thought and effort as to “how” to speak.

Making a child conscious of his handicap is tragic. The problem starts when we rip speaking from the natural automatic realm and consciously try to fix it. It was a math teacher (not a speech therapist) who did that for me. During this time my speech went from a sort of innocent repetition of sounds to full blown blocks in which it took a very long time to say even one word.

I became conscious of every word I spoke and every breath I took as a result of this teacher I refer to as “Miss Tizdale”. On the first day of school in Miss Tizdale’s 6th grade math class she told each of us to report the number of our Homeroom when she called the roll. She called my name. No answer. She repeated my name slowly and distinctly, as if I was unable to understand. Still no answer.

That is when she pronounced my name very slowly and condescendingly and I exploded into the number over the door of my Homeroom: “S-SS-S-S-S-S-S-seventy-three.” One tiny number, I realize, but important enough to determine my fate for the rest of the school year.

I believe she definitely decided that day to cure me of stammering. Communication, especially verbal communication, was terrifically important to her. Diluted, mumbled, slow, or hesitant speech or speech replete with “like you know” and “I mean” and “um lemme see,” was intolerable to her. So she went about like a medical missionary who had just discovered hoof-and-mouth disease to stomp out any form of non-fluency.

A comic in the class named her Spot, as in “Out, out damn spot” because of her fanatical devotion to correcting error in any form. I won’t attempt to describe Miss Tizdale fully, due to the fact that I’m feeling charitable today, but she really did terrify me. Her hair was shaved up the back of her neck and around her ears and she wore what we grew to think of as a uniform—a pinstriped gray masculine-looking suit, and a pair of brown lizardy oxfords I figured were orthopedic shoes designed to nurse fallen arches.

Even now, if I happen to have a particularly bad day, I can still hear the strange sound of those shoes as she galumphed around the room, looking over our shoulders as we worked math problems. Think of “Jane, the banker” on Beverly Hillbillies and you’ve got the picture.

When an adult makes a fool out of a child, the child often remembers that person in a vivid way. I remember that no one would sit close to her in the cafeteria because she was apt to eat off the plates of her students (“What’s this on your plate?” Chomp) and I also remember her lectures to the girls in her class on modesty. These lectures happened between math problems, so much so that my friend Syl says she *still* can’t put on an even slightly snug dress without the ghost of Miss Tizdale appearing out of the woodwork— “That’s a sweet dress, Sylvia, but a little, ermph, *tight*, wouldn’t you say?”

The day I stammered on the number “73” she invited me to stay after class and asked me if I knew what was, ermph, *wrong* with my speech. I said, sure...what was wrong with my speech was that I s-s-s-s-stammered.

She then asked me if I had read something about stammering called ‘The Indians Have No Name for It.’ I said “N-N-N-N-N-no,” and she said that she knew that most of my problem was the result of my parents ascribing a name to stammering.

I asked “w-w-w-what d-d-d-d-difference would *that* make?” and she proceeded to explain, but to tell you the truth, she always left me, even after a very long monologue, with the question: What did the nice lady say?

I *think* she meant, from the general gist of the book I later read, that the reason Indians don’t stammer is because they haven’t named stammering and because they haven’t given it a name they aren’t afraid of it and—if you’re still following me—*therefore*, they don’t stammer.

This seemed vaguely odd to me since *she* was the one going out of her way to make me conscious of stammering (even though she may not have verbally labeled my non-fluency as stammering.) The logic of her reasoning still isn’t clear to me. Maybe naming something has a little to do with increasing the fear of something, but I doubt seriously if it could be the *cause*. To refuse to ascribe the name *death* to death wouldn’t change anything at all, and especially wouldn’t keep one from dying. It would only keep the experience and fear nameless.

HERR WILBERT POWER

There were many theories about the cause and cure of stammering I was to be introduced to that year, not only by Miss Tizdale, but by the new speech therapist she suggested. The main theory of both Miss Tizdale and the therapist was that stammering is caused by a lack of willpower.

Miss Tizdale was possessed with a Victorian trust in willpower, the belief that if she flapped her arms hard enough, she could fly. And also that everything under the sun from hiccups to passion could be mastered and controlled through willpower.

I would sit in her class and wonder if she could teach a blind person to drive a car. I could just hear her lecture the blind person: “Hup, Two, Three, Four, on your feet and out the door. Don’t use blindness as an excuse. Anyone can drive a car if they *choose* to drive a car. I won’t take ‘no’ for an answer.”

She was sure she could master herself and every other self with a stiff upper lip, unflagging determination, and a forty-five minute sermon when necessary to give starch to our backbones and help us accomplish the goals she had for us. Actually, I got the nebulous idea through it all that one really ought to be able to pick oneself out in the Sears catalog and, by constant straining, effort, and trying, finally become that person.

I told my friends when I was out of her class that the reason she wasn’t married was because her lover was Herr Wilbert Power (Will Power for short) and she was waiting for him to come pick her up on his white horse so they could ride off into the sunset together. That always got a laugh since none of us could imagine her straddling a horse behind Prince Charming in that nasty gray suit and orthopedic shoes she wore.

HARRASSMENT, TIZDALE STYLE

If a shy girl (that would be me) didn’t want to speak publicly, Miss Tizdale was never content to simply wonder why. She didn’t try to understand the girl or help the girl understand herself. And she wasn’t content with merely teaching mathematics; even though math was the reason we were in her class.

No, she was like Carrie Nation without a hatchet. She took it on herself to cure me of stammering and any day, at any time during the hour spent in her class, she might launch into an emotionally charged lecture, designed exclusively to whip one into shape or produce change: “There’s no sense in your being so self-centered. Public speaking is good for you. It will make you come out of yourself.” (She was right on that score. Public speaking scared me out of my wits.) And then she always finished with “No one will hurt you, you know.”

Now not only was I feeling guilty for feeling scared, now I was feeling guilty for feeling guilty for feeling scared (*meta-guilt*, you might call it.)

So, each morning in her class I was called on to stand before the class and explain math problems or read aloud from a book of famous quotations that had to do with willpower and fear, quotations like “God helps those who help themselves” (if you couldn’t help yourself, you were sunk) and Franklin Roosevelt’s favorite “There’s nothing to fear but fear itself.” I still think President Roosevelt’s statement we keep repeating as if it is true is definitely *not* true. I can think of a dozen things to fear before 6 a.m. in the morning, any morning of the year.

To be fair, I believe I understand her reasoning a little better now. One morning after I stopped stuttering I stood behind a lady in the checkout line in an office supply store in Munich, Germany, who was intent on buying a certain kind of paint. As she stood there straining, pushing the word “farben” through rigid contorted muscles, I (who of all people should understand) turned away, impatient, annoyed, ashamed. I still can’t believe the comments that ran through my mind: “Can’t she just make herself *stop*???. Can’t she just try a little harder to speak easily?”

Of course, even those questions are contradictions. Fluency is effortless and both fluency and effortless are emptied of trying.

During the short span of one school year my speech had transferred from the level of my intuitive unconscious to my conscious mind where I was conscious of nearly every word I spoke.

It didn't occur to me at the time that putting speech on a conscious level was what stammering was all about.

The last day of school *did* arrive. There stood Miss Tizdale at the back of the classroom, straight spine, at attention, weight equally distributed on both orthopedic shoes, waiting for my final performance.

I think, in retrospect, that if only I could have let my fright and terror show, she might have gone a little easier on me than she did. But up to the end I seemed incapable of that.

While I was deeply humiliated on the inside, outwardly I appeared fully confident. And Miss Tizdale, I'm sure, was among those who insist that a guilty person *act* guilty, a frightened person *act* frightened, and a person with big ears show the proper amount of shame that he has big ears. But even though I can defend her now, years later, it is still a fact that speech became conscious to me in a big way in her class.

I've wondered if I internalized Miss Tizdale's critical attitude toward my speaking. At least, it was in her class that I learned the meaning of "Judgmental." Judgmental has nothing to do with observing people or criticizing people. A judgmental person is one who always knows what one should do, could do or ought to do (if only you would do as they say). Judgmental-ness always implies a "should."

And it was in Miss Tizdale's class that I became so judgmental of my own speech. I lectured myself endlessly about how I should talk, how I could improve my speech, what I should do to keep from stuttering. Every time I opened my mouth my critical thoughts jumped in the way.

HARDENING OF THE OUGHTERIES

Telling myself to "Take a deep breath" doesn't sound like a correction but it definitely *is*. It is a suggestion to improve the way I naturally breathe. My Critical mind suffers from hardening of the "oughteries", always trying to improve the natural part of me with lectures full of shoulds, coulds, and might-bes.

This Critic within me didn't know how to speak but only how *not* to speak. I should have named my conscious effortful mind "Miss Tizdale" but I named her "Bossypants" at that time and it is still Bossypants today. Trying became my religion.

I confused "speaking" with "trying to speak." I confused fluency with "trying to be fluent." I tried also to fix my stammering. Something had happened that made me feel shame that I stammered. At that time I didn't realize that stammering is more than a behavior. Behavior is always rooted in "worldview"...in this case, stammering is a worldview corrupted by wrong beliefs:

First, I am taught that I can will to stop stammering (and I believed it). I am also taught that if I *want* to stop stammering badly enough, I can stop (which I also believed).

The belief that I can be cured of stammering if I try hard enough or want to badly enough produced almost palpable feelings of guilt and shame. It stands to reason, doesn't it? If I believe "I can stop stammering if I really want to" or "I can stop stammering if I try hard

enough” it doesn’t take a genius to conclude: “I must not want to stop stammering” or “I’m not trying hard enough because I still stammer.” This leads to “stammering is my fault.” This belief then leads to more trying: this time trying to hide my handicap so people won’t blame me for something that seems obviously my fault.

It is dangerous to believe and teach that positive thinking, or wanting, or trying, or planning or practicing will cure stammering for the simple reason that your child may understand those theories as I did: “Since I continue to stammer, then I am not trying hard enough, or don’t want to stop or am using stuttering to evade life. So stammering is all my fault.”

So a person who stammers has to be realistic about self-discipline. You can set daily challenges for yourself (“I will stop eating sweets”) and this is possible if you stay in your logical left brain. You have all the supportive reasons in your left brain (“sweets make me feel awful”). Each time you succeed in a will/will not endeavor you may strengthen your resolve and discipline. But my stuttering was not sourced in lack of discipline.

THE RESULTS OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

One desperate mother told me about her stammering child. “On our first visit to the speech clinic the teacher talked about the extent of my child’s stammering right in front of my child. I had never really brought stammering to his attention and from that point he became conscious of his stammering. I wish I could take it all back because from that day until now he stutters worse and now will hardly say a word.”

I realize we aren’t running any stuttering contests here, but for what it’s worth and if it’s any comfort to you, after the year I spent in Miss Tizdale’s class, I stammered worse than you or you child could ever stammer. I mean it. When I was 12 years old my English teacher played a scratchy recording of “by far the most hopeless stammerer I have ever heard” (her words, not mine). The minute I heard the voice I recognized it. This “hopeless stammerer” was no one but *me. Me!! Can you imagine?*

This teacher must not have recognized my voice or she wouldn’t have played it (I am assuming this). As I heard the recording (made in an earlier session in speech clinic) I knew there was no hope for me. I had never heard a recording of my speech before and when I heard it, I was filled with despair and embarrassment, especially when the boy next to me also recognized the voice and whispered hoarsely: “Hey girl, listen to that! That’s *you!* That’s a recording of *you!*”

That recording was made after a year spent in Miss Tizdale’s math class. During the year in her class my speech transferred from the level of the spontaneous unconscious to my conscious mind where I now “tried” to speak well and was conscious of nearly every word I spoke.

There is something sad about a child who changes from believing life is a hoot to being conscious of how she sounds, how to breathe (and therefore conscious of every breath), conscious of even how to place one’s tongue for every single sound. After that year all I could do was remember my easy-come-easy-go attitude and go “oh, yeah? That’s the way you used to be? Well, we’ll just see about that.”

It didn’t occur to me at the time that putting my conscious mind in charge of speech was what stammering was all about, even though I knew from playing the violin that the worst thing I could do was to be conscious of every movement I made and every note I played. Think about playing for even a moment and my wrist and fingers stiffened so I couldn’t play

vibrato and my bow skidded all over the place. The effects of conscious effort on violin-playing was just as shocking as the effects of conscious thought and effort on speaking.

Becoming conscious of every word I spoke seemed to be at the heart of my stuttering and when I see this Conscious Thing happening to any child, I want to run as fast as I can and scream “Stop! Stop!” at the top of my lungs, just as I would if I saw this child knee-deep in quicksand.

MY RESPONSE TO IMPOSSIBILITY

If normal speech was meant to be spontaneous and automatic, and if it is *impossible* to manufacture and consciously produce every word I spoke, then doing what I was being told to do at every turn (work hard at producing fluent speech and proper breathing) was an *impossibility*.

If speech is like breathing, what would you do if you absolutely believed you had to consciously think of every breath you took. You would always be stressed and frustrated because you would know such a feat was impossible. And yet, in the case of speech, I felt I had to do the impossible every day of the week.

I don’t know about others but for me trying to do the impossible resulted in huge frustration and fear.

This conflict between what I was being taught consciously and what I intuited unconsciously engendered great fear and dread because I knew I didn’t have the goods to produce all the complexities of speech with my conscious mind. And yet that is what I was expected to do.

I GET OUT OF MY HEAD, COME ‘UNSTUCK’

While Big Me “gets” the big picture, Little Me focuses on specifics. I used to believe people who stutter (I included myself, of course) were remarkable in that they could focus on speech 24/7.

Then I took a good look-around. One friend believed everyone was looking at her front tooth that was slightly discolored and covered her mouth every time she spoke. Others focused on weight or appearances or drugs or possessions or how they felt or how other people treated them. This was their first priority, all of the time. So while I was obsessed with speech, everyone seemed obsessed with something to the exclusion of everything else.

Of course, I realized it was unhealthy to live in my head: to focus on one part of my life to the exclusion of everything else. Life is great when I lived it out of my huge general wise and intuitive Big Brain. But when I focused on consciously producing speech I was living out of small focused Little Me. It wasn’t long before this affected my personality because my natural spontaneity was being compromised.

I would like to tell you about some of the events that led to the unfortunate experience of my conscious mind taking over my speech.

Marty Jezer in his book about his lifelong struggle with stuttering, wrote that after years and years and years of working on his stutter the best he ever got “approximated how I spoke before I realized I stuttered and before I tried to stop my stuttering.”

CHAPTER 3

ALWAYS TRYING HAS MADE ME TIRED.... MAYBE THAT'S A START

After Miss Tizdale's class, I was conscious of speaking and tried to improve the way I spoke. And my speaking worsened to an incredible degree. I used to refer to stammering as "seizing up" because it reminded me of an old car we had that would be driving along just fine and suddenly it would start coughing and seize up for no apparent reason. "Seizing up" felt like a huge lump setting up shop in my throat as I tried to push air around it.

Everyone noticed the stammering but acted like they didn't notice. That was okay with me. When I said "I s-s-s-s-stammer," people always went something like: "Oh, *really??* You *do??* Why, you could have fooled me! I didn't even notice." But of course they *did* notice and were just being polite. Actually, I was grateful because I don't know what I would have done if someone answered "I wondered when you were going to mention it. You look really goofy when you stammer."

One very polite lady who was a friend of my mother's said: "your stammering doesn't bother me, Dear. I don't even hear it. But I can see it bothers you." I couldn't figure out why, if it didn't bother her, she would look down at her feet and turn red every time I opened my mouth.

From Day One I loved conversation and it drove me crazy that I couldn't participate. Conversation fed my soul. I *needed* warm, unpredictable, funny conversation that meandered all over the place like a cow grazing in a pasture...here an unplanned chomp, there an aimless clump, clearly no well-defined pattern with beginning, middle, and end. And I gravitated toward people who talked to each other in that way.

I also wanted to run away from people who could only talk from certainty and had to make sure everyone knew the extent of their knowledge. Besides, they always had a purpose when they spoke, like dry, bloodless, impersonal Amway salesmen, using language in a very pointed, narrow and economical way.

SPEAK OR DO NOT, THERE IS NO TRY

Speech springs spontaneously from within my own nature and therefore speech is not amenable to inner or outer forces or forms of coercion. Spontaneity and coercion can never go together.

The phrase “Speech is not amenable to coercion” is true down to the tiniest detail. But that didn’t keep me from trying. I fiercely believed that thought and effort would eventually win the day, no matter what the problem, and I personally had to reach a place of despair before I stopped trying to think my way out of stuttering.

It may work differently with different people but it’s a big enough issue (having to reach rock bottom prior to a breakthrough) that Ram Dass suggested for those who are stuck at some point in their progress: “Go away and suffer some more and come back in about a year. You haven’t suffered enough yet.” Only when I reached rock bottom was I willing to try anything, go anywhere, do anything necessary (even questioning boldly my own beliefs that clearly weren’t true and prevented a breakthrough from occurring).

I had tried to stop stuttering for a very long time with all the energy I had. I eventually became emotionally gutted, fed up with trying. That’s when we can either keep on doggedly working on our speech or we can quit trying and go in another direction. I thought I would tell you a little bit of what hitting rock bottom entailed for me.

When I was approximately 4 years of age, a bulldog from down the street got into our house. The dog was perfectly harmless but if you have ever seen a *really, really* ugly bulldog you will understand why it scared me nearly to death. Dogs seem to know when someone is terrified. Anyway, for whatever reason, the dog chased me through the parlor, the living room, dining room, kitchen, up the stairs, and finally cornered me upstairs. I don’t remember why no one helped me. Maybe they didn’t realize how terrified I was. Anyway, right away I developed a slight s-s-stammer. At first the stammer was not all that noticeable, I am told, but stuttering nonetheless.

I want to say something here that seems important to me. Many instructors in the endless speech clinics I attended asked me if I had a happy home life or implied that those who stutter do so because they are from abusive homes. Speech teachers used to search my past for some nasty hateful person who made my life miserable. The fact I want you to remember is that my growing-up nickname was “Happy Hannah.” That name alone should provide a few clues as to my emotional state...just to set the record straight.

MY CENSOR INTERFERES WITH EXPRESSION

One spring morning I passed my dad’s early spring flower garden on the way to school and saw the first robin of the season and heard the birds happily chirping above me...so when I got to school, I was glad our first subject was art. I knew what I would paint! I had a wonderful time painting a picture of springtime in Texas using my little box of Prang water colors.

I was painting a hill of daffodils when the teacher came up behind me, wordlessly took the brush from my hand and ordered “No, don’t use that color. Use *this* color. And *here*, I like this shade of yellow, not *that* shade.” So she added brown to my bright sunny yellow to achieve the yellow she desired. And the direction of my work flipped as it always did when I was catering to what teachers wanted. Rather than working from what was inside of me, now I was external to my work...worrying about “how” I was painting and what it looked like to my teacher...painting from the outside/in rather the inside/out.

AND NOW I’M SCARED

By the time I became conscious of my speech, self-censoring ruined the thrill of discovery. When I was small I saw a bug and was fascinated (“Look at this bug!”) But when I

became conscious of my stuttering I looked at the bug, then consciously shaped my mouth to form an L, ordering myself to take a deep breath (“L-I-I-I-I-Look! L-I-I-I-I-Look!” I cry.)

My wonder was replaced with my own criticism of the jerky way I repeated my sounds.

Sharing my excitement wasn’t as fun as it used to be. And when I couldn’t share my excitement, something dried up inside of me. Some of the fun of exploration and self-expression was gone.

At one time learning came from my own observations and expressing my own observations. Now learning came more from “out here”, from words, from books, from teachers.

And then?

Well, after Miss Tizdale’s class I woke up every weekday morning with a gnawing feeling I couldn’t identify at first. Okay, I’ll give it a try. How about “fear”? The feeling was fear. I am going to have to give an oral report today. I go downstairs to eat breakfast. Already the people around me fade into the background. I’m in my parent’s house, in the dining room. But I’m not really there. Already, while eating breakfast, I’m mentally standing in front of the class in school. I am stuttering, blocking on a word while everyone in the classroom looks down at their feet. I go to my room to get dressed for school. I’m not thinking about the clothes I put on or how I look.

I remember I have to speak in school. What I feel now is no longer fear. It is hard cold terror. I go over and over the speech in my mind. I practice speaking. I dread the fear that all I can do is keep on doing all this humiliating stuff with not even a fantasy of ever escaping this stuttering trap.

My private and public life began to separate. I was not afraid to speak to my friends, but institutions were a different matter. Going off to college some day wasn’t even going to give me a break from my humiliating life because it would be more of the same.....more teachers assigning speeches. They did not differentiate between me and the other students when they make the assignment. They only differentiated between me and the other students when I opened my mouth and attempted to speak. It occurred to me: “If I was a cripple I wouldn’t be forced to run a race. My speech is crippled and yet I am forced to speak.”

I became more and more bogged down in conscious effort. I tried everything available to my conscious thought. I planned what I was going to say before I said it. Speech was meant to be natural but I lost my faith in nature.

That was the dilemma I was in.

SPEECH CLINICS BEGIN

Anyway, it was clear that there was a screw-up in the relationship between easy flowing speech and resistance to easy flowing speech, which is actually a screw-up in the relationship between right and left, between intuitive unconscious and literal conscious...both kinds of me.

Big Me was observing my chattering mind argue with itself. All the time I was being forced to speak in a sing-song voice to the click-click of the hated metronome, this conflict was going on: I spoke in a robot unnatural staccato on the one hand and on the other hand I was going “just cut the crap. This is stupid. That doesn’t even sound like me. Okay, I’ll talk this way as long as I have to be in this God-forsaken place, but the minute I get out of here I am definitely not going to talk this way anymore.”

The way I figured it, if people were going to stare at me for stuttering, they would also stare at me for talking like a robot and then I would have two problems instead of one.

When I was speaking fluently it was because my natural motor skills had taken over. Conscious speech simply made it nearly impossible for those times to occur. I had gone into those speech therapies at a time when speech was still relatively easy and my motor skills still took over my speech automatically. The “tools” they taught me (like the metronome) produced an internal conflict with spontaneous easy-breezy speech.

I named this internal Censor or Critic “Bossypants” but actually my Censor was little more than an internalized Miss Tizdale who was always with me, lecturing, criticizing, telling me “that is bad” or “that is good.” It wearied of this constant judgment from Little Me since Good and bad are subjective judgments that have no place in flowing easy speech.

I was no longer free.

The flow was gone from my speech. Something happened to the Say part of Speech. The See part of speech was alive and thriving (I could still see what was going on), but my expression was blocked.

I judged everything I said and the way I said it. Natural flowing speech became big fat blocks.

One especially crazy belief I held was: “You must know what you are going to say before you say it.” I believed this in the face of the fact that when I was a young child I said what I was going to say, *then I knew what I was going to say, after the fact of saying it.* Small children don’t plan the words they are going to say prior to saying them because they live in the present, all-but-totally from their spontaneous core.

Now I believed I had to know what I was going to say and how I was going to say it *before* I even opened my mouth.

SPEECH 101

I learned many things from those who believed they could cure me of stammering... but all the wrong things. I mean I learned many new ways of stammering where once I had known only one way: the block-and-turn-blue technique.

When speech clinics started for me, swarms of instructors buzzed around, recording voices, checking tense muscles, ordering us to slow down and breathe deeply. I (and the others in my class) learned to stutter more brilliantly and diversely than ever. Always, the harder we tried to talk as we should, the worse we got. Always, the more we were preached at and lectured to, the worse we stammered.

Once I had said, “S-S-S-S-see the puppy.” Now I learned to glide into words, like. “Ahhhhhh see the ahhhhh puhhhhhh-pee.”

We were taught to speak in staccato, but all we learned was how to stammer in staccato: “Here we go now, all together, class...S-s-s-s-s-see thep-p-p-p-p-puppy.”

“Very, ver-ry good now, Class. Tomorrow we will practice a little harder and each of you make sure you purchase a metronome for use as you talk to your friends.”

“Are you *kidding?*” we’d punch each other in the ribs and giggle. “Stupid *plus!* I’d rather eat worms” we’d mumble to each other in our juvenile humor, suddenly and magically freed of stammering. (That’s another strange thing about stammerers: we generally don’t stammer around each other unless we are being listened to or recorded.)

Many PWS don't stammer around animals, although I did, I hesitate to tell you, but only if other people were around. I sat on a horse one bright summer morning and tried to say "Get up!" until I got so tired I nearly fell off the horse. Finally, it occurred to me that I might also get stuck on the word "Whoa!" so I gave up the idea of riding altogether.

Oh, yes, and then there's singing. I didn't stammer when I sang and I've never known anyone who did. One teacher tried to capitalize on that asset by taking us to the grocery store and ordering us to sing our grocery list. Can't you imagine asking for a pound of hamburger to the tune of "Go Tell Aunt Rhodie Her Old Gray Goose Is Dead"?

PRACTICING, PRACTICING....

My speech rehabilitation classes had to do with fluency shaping, breathing exercises and other techniques. One speech teacher's technique was to sit in a dark room, no lights except candle light and stare at the flame. Another emphasized the need for practice, telling us it takes between 60,000 and 80,000 correct productions of a word before fluency occurs. My question was always "If it is true that I can speak when I am alone and know I am alone and if it true I can sing and talk in unison without stuttering at *all*, why do I have to repeat sounds over and over again in order to be able to learn to say a word fluently?"

I also had a tendency to speak well around speech teachers. More than once I was given a little diploma announcing I was cured (as cured as they were able to cure). The only problem, as soon as I went back to the class room lugging my diploma, my stuttering was as horrific as ever.

MY TRIPS TO THE GO-TO STAMMERING GUY

I should be an expert on speech clinics since I went to every one I could find until I was 32 years old. Speech clinics taught me that no one knows anything about how to cure stammering. I'm not implying that this is still true today, only what happened to me.

Dr. Wendell Johnson at the University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa was the stammering guru and go-to-guy at that time. So I went to a lot of trouble to meet up with him. I worked myself into the belief that if I could only touch the hem of his garment I would be healed (when I finally got there, his garment happened to be a pair of plaid car-salesman trousers.)

He came down to the first floor to meet me and then motioned me to follow him up the stairs to his office. I noticed his big brown oxfords were on the wrong feet but I was confident he could help me because he had written books on how to quit stammering and I believed that anyone who wrote books on stammering and was the leading expert on stammering in the entire world, as he was, surely didn't stammer; at least, not *terribly*. I was wrong.

When we went into his office and I sat down across from him, no one spoke for a long time, but then I looked at his face and it was purple and I found out he had been trying to say "H-h-h-h-h-h-hello" for I don't know how long (until his face turned purple, for one thing.)

His stammering was so grotesquely outrageous I kept praying that God would *never* let my stammering get so out of control. Actually, it was the first time I ever met a hardened stammerer, a person who stammered so incredibly bad that he didn't even know he was stammering. It was the scariest thing I had ever witnessed.

So I went home and had to admit to everyone that this teacher didn't have the answer to my stammering after all, and when I told them how ferociously he stammered, my friends said things like "are you sure you aren't stretching this story a little bit?" and I said it was im-

possible to stretch how bad he stammered. I would have invited them to go along next time I went but was afraid they would take me up on my offer.

One day Dr. Johnson suggested that those who stutter are probably paranoid. I asked why he thought so. He answered that people who stutter actually believe no one is listening to them.

I then asked what would happen if it was *true*....what would happen if no one really *is* listening? Would he still link stammering with paranoia? He answered, grudgingly, “Well, I guess I’d have to drop the connection between stammering and paranoia.”

So I said “well, I *know* no one is listening to me when I speak. There are 12 kids in my family and they are all blabbers. Of *course* no one is listening to me and that’s okay.”

He just sat there with a half-smile on his face, then visibly brightened when I suggested: “Hey, maybe people who stammer are just a little more intuitive...like we may be more prone to ‘get it’ when no one really *is* listening to us,” as if he knew I was onto something he had wondered about himself.

Along that line, this was a statement I made up when I was 16 years old: “*Freedom of speech is an empty freedom without a listening ear.*” That original statement probably suggests that I was not aware of a listening ear anywhere in my vicinity. I’m not feeling sorry for myself. This is just what I remember. It is probably what was behind the fact that I found expressing my observations in writing to be such a miracle.

And besides, no one can demand that others listen to us anytime we want to sound off. So I grew to depend on pen and paper to be there for me, listening to the words flowing onto the paper from my inner voice, always pushing outward to express itself through the written word.

LET’S HEAR IT FOR DEMOSTHENES

In one particular speech school, I learned how to stammer with pebbles in my mouth, like Demosthenes. This speech teacher was a great fan of Demosthenes after reading he had cured his own stammering by that method. I called this teacher “Tufts” due to the fact that he had great tufts of black hair growing out of his nose and ears. He was also into autosuggestion, teaching us the phrase “Learn to think right. All other graces will follow in their proper places,” whatever *that* meant.

Actually, if you want to know the truth, I was always a little relieved and amazed he didn’t take us to the ocean to shout above the roar of the waves, also like Demosthenes. Let’s hear it. Demosthenes: “yheeee da huhheee.” An improvement on “see the puppy”, don’t you think? Now, not only do we still stammer, but what are you supposed to do with a mouthful of yukky wet pebbles?

LUCKY’S UNDIES

I would be remiss if I didn’t tell you about a high school coach who still stuttered and for that reason was allowed to substitute for our speech therapist when she was gone, which was most of the year. He obviously didn’t really believe in the methods he was told to teach us. He was short and had the build of a thug (his head attached directly to his shoulders, no neck.) Actually, he became quite popular with his students for his kindness and the fact that he was funny and always enthusiastic.

I was 14 years old and there were 5 others about my age in the class. We called him “Lucky” because of his theory about how to stop stuttering. He didn’t want anyone else to know (he confided to us in his best “confidential” voice) that what helped him speak more fluently when he was in a pinch and *had* to perform well was to wear something “lucky.”

I didn’t personally know the lucky item he wore to cure his stuttering but a girlfriend of mine (who prided herself on finding out things she wasn’t supposed to know) told me he had a pair of lucky underwear he wore when he needed to speak well.

BENJAMIN BOGUS

I will never forget the Benjamin Bogue book that declared that people who stammered should practically lock themselves in their houses so they wouldn’t be a menace to society. My response to Bogue’s books was to write across them “*Benjamin Bogue must die.*” For all I knew, he had been dead for years... but those were my sentiments.

There were and continue to be speech teachers who purposely attempt to make parents of children who stammer conscious of all their speech transgressions. It is staggering to me that even though the child worsens with each passing day, the parents of these children hope so fervently in whatever technique is being offered, and this hope sustains them in their quest so they are unable to catch on as to what is happening to their child.

THE MASKER

One class used something they called a Masker which was a device that produced a buzz in my ear (white noise) so I couldn’t hear the sound of my own voice. The fact that it slightly improved my speech when I was using it only proves to me now that stuttering happened when my very critical “Little Me” (my censoring mind) listened to my stuttering and tried to fix my stuttering. It’s possible that my stuttering happened somewhere in the auditory feedback loop. The fact is that when I can’t hear myself speak I am not going to censor my speech. But removing the sound of my voice from my conscious mind seemed pretty radical to me, especially since I lost touch with the person I was speaking to and what our conversation was about.

In the “Kings Speech” the same effect was achieved when Lionel Logue put earphones on the King (so he couldn’t hear himself speak “To Be, or Not to Be”.) My interpretation is that the reason he became suddenly fluent was because he couldn’t hear himself *and therefore couldn’t censor his own speech.*

My view of speech was beginning to change as I observed what was going on. It seemed to me that speech was meant to be “liquid”, a flowing rather than a solid thing. What if speech flows...and flows through the critical mind (call it the Door). So if the mind is like a door or a passage or a channel and if my mind is too resistant (if the door is more like a dam than an open door) then my Critic was fully capable of holding back the flow of speech. This meant I had to deal with my resistant fix-it mental attitudes and beliefs, rather than focusing on fixing speech.

CHAPTER 4

MORE STUTTERING CURES?

When I practiced air flow or fluency shaping, I found myself with no *content*. There was really no point of speech at that point, since speaking without content seemed silly and useless. There was a time when I didn't want to say anything at all. If speech was just a stupid mechanical behavior and had no meaning, it wasn't worth the bother. So for a while I just spoke when I had to speak and people would ask "Cat got your tongue?"

I found a lot of innovative ways to deal with specific stammering problems. One pretty amazing thing I thought up was to put a headphone on my head, attach it in one ear, and inform people that I was experimenting with a new device for people who stammer, which scanned my speech. This rendered me stammer-free for a while, mainly because the attention was off of me and onto the contraption on my head.

BOZO THE CLOWN

The trick I used through the rest of high school (after the Miss Tizdale debacle) was acting the clown. If asked for my name in class, I crossed my eyes, lisped in a Daffy Duck voice, spluttered, and looked as ridiculous as possible. Even now, if I happen to bump into a fellow-student from those days, they tell me they believed I was a clown ...not a person who stuttered. One speech therapist lectured me when my English teacher told me how I handled the effects of stuttering, claiming that I was "hiding" my stutter (as if stuttering is a crime and I was trying to hide my crime)and that I should "own" my stuttering.

HEEEEEEEERES JOHNNY

When I was required to make speeches at the University, I got my roommate to stand in front of the class with me and we did a Johnny Carson/Ed McMahon duo (remember the Late Night Show in which Carson spoke with Ed McMahon in front of the camera instead of looking at his audience?) For some reason, this worked for me.

All this stuff helped for a few moments. I'm sure you have innovated a few tricks yourself. But we both know, don't we, that there's a difference between getting through a temporary situation and dealing with the long term stammering problem?

HERE COMES THE BRIDE

About this time I got so wrapped up in college activities I forgot about the whole thing for a while and even thought of “being crazy busy” as the answer to stammering for several years, but you probably already know how long that lasted.

My first marriage happened (I managed to edit the “I do” out of the marriage ceremony). As I told you, I was born into a large family...an enormous buzzing beehive of people, ideas and events. Now I was married to a person so silent and somber he had managed to get himself kicked out of choir at the university where we met because Dr. O., our choir director, claimed to become so depressed, just looking at him, she had thoughts of killing herself.

In the early years of my marriage I tried everything I could to get him to laugh (I would have settled for a smile). I had an old-lady wig with an old fashioned pompadour in the front which I crammed on my head, crossed my eyes and lisped as I spoke to him. Woops! That didn't get a smile. Hmmm...oh *now* I know! I'll turn this wig around backward. That ought to do it! Nope, not even a *glimmer* of laughter.

SHOCKING THE SHOCKERS

For whatever reason, after marriage the old stammering habit reasserted itself, worse than ever, and now behavioral conditioning classes were recommended and after that, speech pathology at a state university and, finally, a full year of hypnosis-as-speech-therapy. Shock therapy was also stuck in there somewhere, but as I went through that ridiculous phase I developed a vocabulary so totally *vulgar* it was the therapist who went into shock, not me.

HYPNOSIS

I wasn't a good subject for hypnosis as it related to stammering even though hypnosis worked wonders for me when my first child was born. I was part of an experiment as to the effects of hypnosis in childbirth, but had determined that hypnosis was stupid (and positive it could not affect me one way or the other), so when labor pains started in earnest, the doctor came into my room and hypnotized me. A nurse came in at the same time and gave me a shot, which I assumed was a pain shot. Immediately, in the middle of labor pains, the pain subsided. In my own mind, I kept thinking “that pain shot is really great. I can't believe how fast it worked!”

When a nurse remarked on this miraculous event (one moment I had been beside myself with pain and the next 4 hours I felt no pain at all), I said “Thanks so much for that pain shot you gave me. It worked really fast.” The nurse assured me “that was no pain shot. That was a shot of vitamin K.”

As soon as I realized I hadn't received a pain shot, the labor pain returned. I overheard the doctor tell the nurse that I proved to him that hypnosis worked to relieve labor pain, “even when the patient refuses to believe in it.” When this same doctor hypnotized me with “You are very fluent” it didn't change my speech at all.

CUSSING CURED THIS GUY....

There are several people who claim God healed them, like one moment they were stammering like mad and the next thing you know, *boom*, they didn't stammer at *all*. And I'm not going to doubt these people. All I can tell you is that it didn't happen that way to me.

There was a guy I knew out in West Texas who claimed he cured himself by cussing.

This guy heard somewhere that people who stammer repress all their bad feelings so he decided to un-repress himself and the only way he knew to do that was to learn to spit and swear, mostly swear.

Anyway, he bought a little hunk of property close to his ranch with a rickety house and big wraparound porch and rode out to the house on his horse every evening, alone of course, to let it all hang out. “I put a rocking chair out on the front porch about sunset, got me some of my favorite Chew, and I would have found something to whittle except for the fact that I went out there so I could get plenty mad and whittling keeps me calm, you know...

“I just sat there and remembered all the gut-wrenching things I’d been through with this stammering. When a memory of some awful embarrassing event popped up in my mind, I’d turn the air blue. Like I remembered a tight-lipped Sunday School teacher who made me read out loud in front of the class so I’d go ‘blankety, blank, blank, blank,’ when I remembered her, and by George, after a while it *worked*. Anyway, Girl, if you want to get well, all you need to do is get you some Chew and ride out to the house with me. We’ll sit on the porch and cuss and before you know it, you’ll be as well as me.”

HICCUPS, BE GONE!

When I got completely hysterical and desperate, I decided to go to a religious healer who came to town. I went by myself, horrified that someone I knew might see me and ask nosy questions or tell my funny brothers who loved to tease and might add this healing story to their repertoire of funny stories.

Anyway, the service had already started when I went sneaking into the back pew. The healer was on the platform with a bedraggled haggard man in a brown tweed suit kneeling before him. The man was clearly begging to be healed of hiccups as the preacher was yelling “Hiccups, be gone. *Be gone!! In the name of Jesus, be gone!*”

In response, the man hiccupped so loudly I could hear him clearly where I sat. “Are you healed?” the preacher yelled at his pathetic victim. The man nodded his head. “Then testify! Testify!” the preacher screamed. As I watched this pathetic man try to testify through his hiccups, I pulled my trench coat around me and sneaked back out the door I had entered, too mortified to even *think* of having to testify that I had been healed of stammering, when I s-s-s-till s-s-s-s-stammered.

OOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMMMMMMM.....

The meditation group I entered in my 30’s advertised itself as a way to “get mastery over your mind.” It was conducted by a guy by the name of Raj who wore an orange turban and believed every word he spoke.

There were about 15 of us in the group. I sat on the floor, legs crossed, straight back and focused my attention on a pin on the front of Raj’ turban. The intention of this meditation was “not thinking” or “getting rid of thought” (which they referred to as “emptying your mind.”)

After four or five hours, I tried not to think about how my legs hurt, tried not to focus on the thought “did I *really* turn off the oven”? And the more I tried to silence my thoughts, the more those thoughts persisted. If you want to try it for yourself, begin by telling yourself “Do not think of putting beans in your nose. No matter what else you do, do not think of putting beans in your nose.” And suddenly you put this thought of beans-in-your-nose that has never even *occurred* to you before, front and center in your mind.

I was told that if I could get a blank mind I wouldn't stutter because I wouldn't be expecting to speak a certain way, and Raj's opinion was that we stutter because we *expect* to speak fluently and when expectations aren't fulfilled, we stutter. When I told him that I expected to stutter, not to speak fluently, it was too much for him. I thought from his bulging eyes and heavy breathing he might have a heart attack. But I haven't forgotten Raj. To this day if I see an orange turban I look beneath it to see if it is Raj.

SPARKY'S CURE

There were and are so many surface answers to stammering. I walked 9 miles once to see a man (I called him Sparky) in New York State, who claimed to have the cure for stammering. When I walked up the stairs to his house, Sparky met me at the door as if he'd been waiting there since dawn, pale runny blue eyes, shocks of white hair, and 5 sheets of paper stapled at the top, which he crammed into my hand.

I was pretty excited, naively believing as always that this was going to be the guy who would change my life, until I read the opening sentences on Page 1: "Stammering is caused by living a disorderly life. The way to cure yourself of stammering is to go home and clean out all your drawers and closets." For that I paid \$50.00, probably the equivalent of \$400 today.

This guy didn't know squat about stammering (another one of those clowns masquerading as an educator)...but maybe I got a bargain. His wife was a Christian Science lady and she told me that stammering was all in my mind, although after she heard me talk, I wondered how she could make such a statement. If she had two good ears, she would have known that my stammering had not stayed in my mind. It was right there, in-her-face, obvious for all to hear.

Anyway, she seemed not to notice, which I took as a compliment. As I left, she piled my arms with stacks of Christian Science literature and called a cab for me since it was getting dark. On the way back to the hotel another fear nudged my fear of stammering into the back seat: the fear that, after they had ripped me off for \$50, I wouldn't have enough money left to pay the cab driver.

But even as I write this, I can still see them waving me off, this pair of ancient rumped people who looked a lot like I imagined Albert Einstein and his wife: wrapped in enormous wool coats, getting off the *Westernland* onto a tugboat in New York Harbor, having escaped Nazi Germany.

This experience brought me one bit closer to the end of my rope. The truth is I still had a way to go, even though it seemed like "wit's end" to me. What I didn't know was that it was *necessary* for me to hit rock bottom. Rock bottom was the launching pad for all the good stuff that was to follow.

CHAPTER 5

A MIND-BENDING DISCOVERY: I HAVE A VOICE!

The first hint of what might be behind my stammering occurred to me when I was 16 years old. I got my first job as soon as I graduated from high school and since I still couldn't get a driver's license, I drove into town each morning with a big sweaty red-faced man who sold Jewel Tea. He arrived at a restaurant across from my work at 6 a.m. each day that summer and I waited there for my workplace to open at 8 a.m.

One morning I was reading a book in a booth in the restaurant. As I ate my breakfast I saw a 16-wheeler pull into the parking lot of the restaurant and a weary-looking black man descend out of the truck cab. Pretty soon he stood at the counter and asked for a cup of coffee.

The waitress, a huge white woman in her 50's, kept wiping the counter, seeming not to hear this man's request. When the driver asked for a cup of coffee, no answer. He asked again. This time the waitress sauntered over to where he stood, her thumbs tucked into the top of her apron, looked directly into the driver's eyes and said "we don't serve nig-grahs here."

I have little memory of what happened next, only that I felt myself jump out of my booth and heard myself spiel out very forcefully and convincingly that this truck driver had been out pounding the road all night in his truck and she'd best serve him anything he wanted or she would be sorry. I have no idea what I thought I would do if she forced me to carry out my threats but I didn't need to come up with anything because the next thing I knew, she had not only poured the driver a cup of coffee but had put two eggs on the grill and two slices of bread in the toaster for him.

I still remember, all these years later, the shocked look on the waitress' face. This woman who regarded me as a shy silent stammering teenager only a moment before was now faced with an angry fluent confident protestor. I was suddenly indignant Moses (who also stammered)... driven by his own powerful response to the respect-of-persons mentality he hated and over which his "more rational" thought had no control whatsoever.

I left the restaurant that morning with a new understanding of myself. For once in my life I had spoken in front of at least 30 people without a stammer and with such eloquence that I had been able to change this woman's behavior (I imagine she remained as biased and blind

as ever) but at least I became aware that fluency depended on whether my words came from my spontaneous self rather than my focused self.

Another way of putting this is *“I am more than my thought, more than my stuttering. I “be” a living breathing intelligence with a voice of my own that flows on its own without being controlled by my conscious mind.”*

This was one of my first intuitions that stammering had nothing whatever to do with mechanics of speaking (since I used the same equipment to speak that morning to the waitress that I always used when I stammered.)

This incident made me more receptive to the idea that stammering is a problem regarding my conscious mind wresting control of speech from my natural spontaneous activity of seeing/saying. When I saw some urgent truth, speaking was no issue. Looking back I see that my response to gross unfairness was so powerful it overpowered (for one magical moment), the power of my conscious critical mind.

The way I see it now, the event at the restaurant happened because I was able to express my inner “core” (before my critical mind could censor or criticize what was going on) hidden somewhere behind the locked doors of my unconscious.

When I say “unconscious” I don’t mean “coma.” By “unconscious” I refer to Big Me, my subliminal intelligence, outside the control of my conscious mind (and to which my conscious mind and will has no access.)

My response had, therefore, traveled below the radar of my conscious mind, zinging past the blocks my critical mind erected, so it had no chance to censor or criticize. It was becoming clear...my destructive conscious mind might be at the root of stammering,

When I was speaking from the place where I said what I meant and meant what I said, stammering was nowhere around. I have found that the light from this place isn’t like a light bulb I can turn off and on at will and definitely is not “tap-able” by my conscious mind (a fairly manipulative belief), but is like a candle flickering in the breeze that can be easily extinguished or snuffed out by one’s own repressive conscious mind. Once the flickering candle catches fire, however, nothing can stop it and you’d best run for your life.

This was my first memory of recognizing, even slightly, the spiritual side of myself, but from that day I became less fatalistic and more determined than ever *not* to passively accept stammering. It was like I made a pact with myself to understand the workings of my mind, knowing my mind was at the bottom of this staggering problem. During the years that followed until I was cured I relentlessly searched for a cure.

CHAPTER 6

THE 800 POUND GORILLA IN THE ROOM

People who stutter, as well as speech therapists, are faced with a fact in regard to stammering that is so huge and consequential I like to compare it to an 800 pound gorilla sitting on a sofa in the living room where we are all gathered. As ridiculous as that sounds, the gorilla-sitting-on-the-couch isn't the most ridiculous part of the analogy. The joke is that no one is allowed to say a word about this strange and unwieldy lummoX dominating the room.

The 800 pound gorilla is an apt analogy of a fact we who stutter are vaguely aware of, at least at an instinctual level, and yet are trying to ignore. We are trying our best to ignore this fact even though we suspect that nothing would be as transformational or have such far-reaching implications in the treatment of stammering as the recognition of this fact.

I believe this one fact would change every single thing we are taught about stammering, every method used, and every product sold.

What is this 800 pound gorilla in the room everyone is trying to ignore? This fact: People who stutter or stammer *do not stammer all the time. Most of us never stutter when we are alone and when we absolutely know we are alone, just as we do not stammer when we sing or when we speak in unison.*

Do you realize why this is the one pivotal fact around which the cure for stammering must revolve? Then let me ask you...What if you are a doctor and a patient comes to you with what she describes as the H1N1 virus. But before you make a diagnosis your patient adds: "Oh, I forgot to tell you, Doctor. I only have this virus when I am around other people. When I'm by myself, I'm just fine." Wouldn't that one small statement have everything to do with your diagnosis?

People who stutter are not a bunch of looney tunes who have to be taught the mechanics of speaking. For the vast majority of people who stammer, stammering has nothing to do with mechanical difficulties, brain damage, the physical production of speech sounds, or certain behaviors one must seek to overcome. There are many reasons we know this is true but the most important reason is: we do not stutter when we sing. We do not stutter when we speak or read aloud when we are absolutely alone and know no one else is around.

It is often the parent who is more surprised by this fact than the person who stammers. Many stammering children share the secret that they do not actually stammer when they speak when they are alone, but do not share this secret with their elders:

One, we do not stammer when we sing.
Two, we do not stammer around certain friends, small children or animals.
Three, we do not stammer when we read aloud to ourselves when we know no one else is within hearing distance (even though reading aloud usually strikes terror to our hearts).
Four, we do not stammer when we speak in unison.
Five, we do not stammer when we whisper.

This is such a glaring contradiction to all the “facts” we are taught and has such far-reaching implications that most therapists refuse to admit this truth: *When you are alone and know you are alone, all effort to speak goes out the window and the mechanical part of speaking goes on auto-pilot, requiring no effort.*

Refusing to talk about this fact is cruel beyond words. Someone told my parents when I was ten years old that stammering was due to brain damage. This worried my parents. I often wish I could have reassured them by reasoning with them like this: “I don’t stammer when I am alone. That means there is nothing physically wrong with me. So I don’t have brain damage.”

GIVE ME A BOOK TO READ.....

One person who stammers wrote the following: “I could prove there is nothing wrong with me if I was allowed to. Give me a book to read aloud, give me privacy, and make sure no one is listening at the door and I will guarantee you: I will not stammer. Why can’t my speech therapist accept this?”

Think about it: There are many excellent speech therapists today, but at that time speech therapists were trained and often a big part of their training was to memorize the fact that stammering is a mechanical problem and like all mechanical problems, can be treated with practice, planning, thought, repetition, positive thoughts, metronomes, hearing devices, you name it. One of their favorite theories was “stuttering is a habit.” All one must do to rid oneself of this silly idea is to realize that when you are alone, you do not stutter....so how could this be a habit?

When a person who stammers can blissfully say “Why would I need to consciously plan every word I say? I can talk as well as you” this can be very threatening to a therapist, but is nonetheless true.

This was the one insight that blew the whistle on all the money and time I was spending on speech clinics. If you do not yet realize this truth, reading aloud when you are alone may convince you that nothing physical is actually wrong with your speech. This was just one of the first great truths in a very long list of great truths that changed my stuttering. I can tell you about it....only you can realize it. And knowledge and realization are two entirely different animals.

If you *do* stutter when you speak when you are alone and know you are alone, then find a circumstance in which you never stutter...like singing or speaking in unison or talking to a child or a stuffed animal. Anything that works.

I also found the more I tried to stammer, the less I could stammer. This is why intentional stuttering helps some who stutter. The fact that I didn't stutter when I was alone proved to me that I was not dealing with brain damage or a mechanical defect or a lack of willpower or inadequate knowledge.

GETTING IT

Why was it necessary for me to read aloud to myself as often as I could? Because actually *doing* that (more than *knowing* it) transformed this "knowing I don't stammer when I am alone" to real awareness or "hey! I really *don't* stutter." Before long, acting on directives contrary to imbedded beliefs, I became wonderfully *aware* that I actually do not stutter and couldn't make myself stutter when I was absolutely alone and knew I was absolutely alone.

I assure you that observing leads to *awareness* and awareness is transformational (whereas mere knowledge had no power to change my speech.)

Being from a family of a dozen children where I was virtually *never* alone might have had something to do with the fact that I didn't *experience* the fact that I could speak well when I was alone as a very young child. I also didn't realize the huge difference between "knowing" something because I had been told, and "knowing" something by seeing it for myself.

Later, I continued to read aloud to myself alone as often as I could manage to be alone (with 4 small children that was almost impossible.) At this time, reading aloud to my kids had become a chore I hated, but reading aloud when I was alone was amazing and fulfilling for me.

What this did for me was help me recognize that the cause of stuttering is *not* brain damage (as I had been told), or lack of mechanical know-how or an insufficient amount of willpower. The belief that stuttering can be improved if the student had more "know-how" or more "information" or if he planned or practiced more, has to be replaced with the truth we intuitively know: *Speaking is natural and is not produced by conscious effort to speak. In other words, we subliminally know both what we want to say (content) and how to say it (the mechanics of speaking) without thought or effort.*

A BASIC INTUITION

As I sat in speech classes with other children who stuttered, we all shared one basic intuition: We did not need to be taught how to speak. We could speak as well as the speech teacher standing over us lecturing us to breathe deeper, slow down, take a breath at certain intervals, form our mouth correctly, and do all of these things consciously and at the right time.

So let's talk now, in a very non-clinical way, about this "800 pound gorilla" that changes everything. This was the secret I knew that my teachers didn't know. This was the secret my stuttering friends intuited that the professionals treating their stuttering didn't. It was also what created the unspoken camaraderie between all of us in various speech clinics who were forced to endure the same stupid cures.

Rather than learning "fluency restoration" (which was what we were paying for) we had to learn tolerance for trained educated people we all eventually knew were on the wrong track. Every answer the speech teachers came up with was based on their ignorance of this one simple truth we all shared: there could be nothing mechanically wrong with our speech be-

cause we could all speak perfectly when we were alone, just as we could sing or speak in unison without stuttering.

“You do not stutter at all under certain circumstances” became the Landmark Truth by which I measured all the cures presented to me. Stuttering had nothing to do with the mechanics of speech or bad habits. There is an automatic pilot part of our innate natural brain that knows how to turn perceptions into symbols and express this content in a micro-second, before the conscious mind can say “snap my cap.” My conscious taught academic mind, on the other hand, is too lumbering and slow to be in charge of speaking.

WHAT IF BLOCKS ARE NEVER “OUT HERE”?

When I stuttered I believed the block was “out here”...in what others expected of me (or even physical problems like a tight throat or chest or windpipe.) One day it occurred to me: “What if it *isn’t*? What if the block is *never* “out there”?”

One evening I picked up a tablet and pencil and scribbled this:

“Today I asked myself “why do I block when another person enters the room?” Is it because “they” expect me to speak well? No. I have no idea what another person expects of me. So my problem is not what “they” expect. No, my problem is what *I* think or expect. So I am once again dealing with something within my *own* mind. When it’s “out there” I am helpless. When it is something “in here” I can observe it. It becomes manageable. I can deal with the problem as if it is within myself and I know (now) that it *is*. *That is a tremendous relief.*”

When others were present it felt like I was being coerced or forced, as if once I started a sentence, I had to finish it. Again, something I believed.

As Neil Schmitz wrote: “It is not what is to be said that makes the stutterer hesitate but that it *must* be said.” There is no question that when we are forced to speak the conscious mind takes over the activity of speaking.

I know now that others do not coerce me to speak or force me to speak. Something inside of *me* demanded that I speak well and finish my sentences when others were around, and therefore the force and coercion were from my own Censor. In other words, I needed to deal with my own beliefs and expectations more than others.

Jein Metellus in “La Parole Prisonniere” allied censorship with stuttering. I agree. But for me *self-censorship* was behind so much of my stuttering. What if a toddler came bumping into the room when I am reading aloud to myself? I wouldn’t pay any attention. How about a dog? I still wouldn’t pay any attention. Why? Because I know that neither a toddler nor a dog will be censoring my words. I am clearly intimidated by censorship, both my own and others.

WHAT IF I AM CENSOR OF MY OWN SPEECH?

By wanting to perform well for others, *I make the other person my judge*. But that’s not what is really happening. What is really happening is that *the real critic and judge is the part of me I refer to as my “Censor.”*

To sum this up, I truly believe the reason I always stuttered as soon as an adult entered the room is because suddenly my conscious (social) mind kicked in and I became conscious of what I was saying and how I was saying it. Before that adult came into the room, I was not per-

forming. I was merely talking. Performance always calls for the conscious mind to be in charge.

Marty Jezer tells about how he stuttered on approximately 80% of his words when he spoke to others but did not stutter at all when he talked to Katie, his little girl.

My theory continued to form in this way "If I can speak without stuttering when I am alone, or when speaking to small children or animals, or when speaking in unison, this is the benchmark truth, this means stuttering is not a mechanical difficulty."

TALKING BACK

It helps me tremendously to observe and "talk back" to Little Me (my intimidating conscious demanding Bossypants mind). I wanted to say "I can speak without stuttering when no one is around but the minute you show up and take control of my speech (like you do when other people enter the room), then I suffer from performance anxiety because I just can't measure up to all your rules and standards."

I don't fully understand how Big Me functions in such amazing ways. All I know (through observing my experiences) is that it *does*...and always below the radar of my conscious mind. Abraham Maslow commented often on the fact that our society invests such huge amounts of money in training Little Me (this limited 5% academic mind) and almost nothing in helping us understand how to free the natural mind from the restraints, rules and standards put on it by ourselves and by society.

NLP

Neuro-Semantics, an offshoot of NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming) is a method that works on the supposition that if you can speak fluently in any particular situation, you can speak fluently in all situations; that stuttering is a "thinking problem" manifesting itself in a "speaking problem". Dr Bob Bodenhamer is the author of a book regarding how to understand and apply this process. (*I HAVE A VOICE – HOW TO STOP STUTTERING*).

CHAPTER 7

HITTING ROCK BOTTOM

Look, it's like this: No one is ready to stop stuttering until his hands are empty. And hey, I'm not saying, not ever, that no one receives help from speech therapy because that absolutely would not be true. What is true is that you need to come to the place when your own observations trump the beliefs of others.

If I say "Did you notice that the harder you try to speak, the more you stutter?" and you go "But my speech teacher says that isn't true. He says that the more you practice the better you speak and I have no reason to doubt him", it's not a bit difficult to see what is going on: you are not engaged. You have not opened your eyes. You are still following rules.

If you are still clinging to unworkable solutions to your stuttering, Ram Dass would say "You haven't suffered enough. Go home and suffer some more."

If those of us who stutter have to reach rock bottom before we are cured of stuttering, I hit bottom in Munich, Germany where I lived when I was 33 years old. I had never made a phone call before this time although I answered the phone when friends called me. I informed my friends: "If you call and no one answers, don't hang up. It's me."

No matter how many speech clinics I endured, at this point I stuttered worse than ever, even around my own kids. Reading aloud to them had become one of those "out of the question" feats.

For me, that was the last straw.

It was like the day a very huge friend of mine, told by his doctor to lose weight, accidentally passed in front of his full length mirror...naked. It was his day of awakening and the first day of his weight loss.

In that context, my awakening began the day in Munich I opened an empty school notebook that belonged to one of the children, wrote the word "Rants" at the top of the page and began writing my experiences with my attempted cures of stuttering. Rant was exactly what I did. I did two major writing stints...one was Rants and the other was a 3 month stint regarding my own observations and connections regarding stuttering.

During this one month stint I wrote and wrote and wrote. I had tried every so-called "cure" in the world and now it was over as far as I was concerned. There was nothing else to try and I didn't need a crystal ball to know what *that* meant. It meant that the rest of my life I would have to settle for the crushing limitations that stammering forces on all its victims.

I scribbled about the frustration that had driven me crazy for so long. I cried for the humiliated little girl who had suffered so greatly and tried to cover her suffering with humor. I wrote about the stupid cures that hadn't worked.

I said every nasty thing I wanted to say because only my paper could hear me. Everything was between me and the paper ...not to be read by anyone else in the world.

And it wasn't pretty. Let's just say that. This writing was like Colon Cleanse except it didn't clean my colon, it cleared away the circular chatter of my mind, at least for the time being.

Maybe I thought the cleansing process would affect me the way it did Jane Eyre who wrote when she stopped swallowing angry words and expressed her anger: "Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult as if an invisible bond had burst and that I struggled out into unhopd for liberty."

I was still a little annoyed, even after the pages and pages of rants I had written. Somehow I still believed that if you put a sign on your door with "Speech Therapist" on it, and collect gobs of money from every victim who knocks on your door, there better be a pretty good chance that you know at least a *little* about how to cure stammering.

But let me assure you that most speech therapists took more pride in what they called their "honesty" than they did their expertise. It's as if they said: "There is no cure for stammering. We are perfectly honest about that. But, ermph, please write us a check and give it to the receptionist before you leave the building and have the receptionist make another appointment for you."

My feelings reminded me of the day I took my car to a repair shop and the mechanic charged me \$400. When I started the car, all I got was a whirrrr, so I went back into the shop and told the mechanic my car wouldn't run. "Oh, did you want it to *run*?" he asked.

I had gone to therapists to be cured of stuttering and was told that such a goal was stupid and unattainable. When I tried to stop stuttering, I was made to feel guilty by one speech teacher who informed me I was dishonest, a "covert" stutterer who needed to come out of the closet and therefore I must "accept" stuttering. There was no question that I had already acknowledged the fact that I stuttered. But I kept wondering if stuttering was merely blocked speech or was blocked speech simply a symbol of being blocked in other ways? As I wrote, I recognized I was what Julia Cameron referred to as a "blocked creative." I wondered if it was a general truth for those who stutter. When I stopped blocking on speech and turned to writing, I found that I had blocks in my writing as well as my speaking.

Also, even though I happily acknowledged the fact that I stuttered and was always able to kid around about my stuttering, it seemed that *accepting* stuttering meant accepting my chattering mind and all the crazy beliefs at the bottom of stuttering.

And then, after doing everything I was told by these professionals, plus always laying out a pretty outrageous chunk of change for their advice, the day of reckoning finally arrived when it *had* to occur to me that *nothing worked -- period*. No matter how much I spent or how hard I worked, *nothing had even slightly worked*. And I hadn't even demanded any sort of guarantee.

I was obsessed with thoughts about this hopeless stammering I had endured so long. How could I quit thinking about this stammering thing? You know how people feel when they've been scammed or conned...how they don't want anyone to know about it because they feel embarrassed to be so naïve? That was me.

I had hit the wall, no question about it. I reminded myself of an acquaintance who was diagnosed with cancer. He always assumed that if he went to the right doctors and threw enough money at cancer, he was sure he could find a cure. But the day he found that no amount of money, no amount of work, no right choices, nothing he could say or do was going to cure him of cancer was the darkest day in his life and he was absolutely devastated.

That was the mental state I was in.

MENTAL UNWORKABLE ANSWERS TO STUTTERING

- Plan your words (action of the mind)**
- Know what to say and how to say it before you speak. (action of the mind)**
- Watch for mistakes and then fix them. (action of the mind)**
- Try harder (action of the left brain)**
- Get more willpower (illusory function of the volition.)**
- Think positively (function of the mind)**
- Make the right choices (choice is a function of the mind.)**
- Lecture yourself as to how you *should* speak, how you *could* speak if you would just try harder (shoulds and coulds are constructs of the mind).**
- Practice speaking, repeating words.**
- Slow down when you speak.**
- Speak to the rhythm of a metronome.**
- Focus on breathing.**

PART TWO
WHAT I SAW
ON THE WAY TO
THE ZONE

CHAPTER 8

BOTH KINDS OF ME

(SOMEONE GREATER THAN MY CONSCIOUS MIND)

After the restaurant event in which I sounded off fluently before my head figured out what was going on, several years elapsed before something similar happened again: when I recognized this hidden voice, allowed it to have its “Say”...then responded with amazement at the implications that *hidden beneath my compliant demeanor was a firm and fierce view of the world (and what was important in that world) that was uniquely my very own voice.*

This is what happened:

My mother-in-law visited our home when the two oldest boys were small. The boys got new tricycles for Christmas and were outside feverishly driving them up and down the sidewalk. Pretty soon the two neighbor girls, their age, came running toward the boys, pleading to ride their trikes.

Without thinking, the boys got off their trikes to allow the girls to ride when my mother-in-law came tearing out the door, screaming “No! No! Those tricycles are *yours*. It is your responsibility to keep them nice. Your father’s tricycle is still in my attic as nice as it was the day we bought it for him!” As was always the case, I momentarily backed off in the corner, positive she was right, and ashamed for a moment that I was careless enough to let the kids share their trikes with the neighbor girls.

Like I said, that backing-off was momentary. The *next* moment I said with total confidence: “Hey, wait a moment. Those trikes belong to the boys. Their friends share *their* stuff so the boys want to give back. *I would much rather the kids be unselfish than have perfect unscratched tricycles in my attic 25 years from now.*”

My mother-in-law was livid. She screamed “Then be a slob if you must. Just let them ruin their tricycles, but don’t forget that I warned you.”

So the boys continued what they had started...sharing their trikes...and everything seemed to be back to normal. One thing had changed, however. I had drawn a line in the sand. I had made a statement about my own values and beliefs and I was still breathing.

Something spontaneous had emerged and said words I was amazed to hear, words that caused me to stand back and scratch my head and go “Whoa! What is going on here?”

A SEA CHANGE

I doubt if anyone can deal with stuttering without dealing with his or her whole life.

One summer I took all four children to Lignano, Italy from Munich. I rented a villa on the

Adriatic and the first day we headed for the beach. My stuttering was a crushing burden at this time. I was unable to talk easily even to my own kids, or read aloud without huge blocks.

Up to this point I had intellectually recognized “two kinds of me.” I had taken a writing course in college in which the teacher used Dorteia Brande’s *Becoming a Writer*, in which she wrote about the artist and critic sides of our brain, so obvious to most of us when we are writing. Here is a quote from her book:

“Most of the methods of training the conscious side of the writer—the craftsman and the critic in him—are actually hostile to the good of the unconscious, the artist’s side. But it is possible to train both sides of the character to work in harmony and the first step in that education is to consider that you must teach yourself not as though you were one person, but two.”

Later in the book: “The process of making a writer is the process of teaching the novice to do by artifice what the born writer does spontaneously. By isolating the functions of these two sides of the mind, even by considering them as separate personalities, we can arrive at a kind of working metaphor, infinitely helpful in self-education.”

PWS (People Who Stutter) ARE STIFLED CREATIVES

What I was about to discover was that knowing this intellectually (as I learned in school) was vastly different from actually experiencing that same truth. I truly dislike this part of the book because it seems too religious or “kooky” to some, so I dread talking about it. If I was Neale Walsh, I might tell you that this “Other” was God, but I make no such claims. I like Dr. Bob Bodenhamer’s description of the “source” best: “That place in the back of your mind where you find your answers.”

I strongly believe that people who stutter are often “Stifled Creatives” and it was true that I had repressed my own perceptions and observations for so many years...so maybe it was the pent-up Stifled Creative inside my brain that was sick and tired of being sick and tired. If you remember Archie and Edith Bunker, maybe it was simply the Edith-in-me, tired of being repressed by the Archie-in-me, although I’d rather go with the Stifled Creative idea.

I had been playing in the ocean with the kids but came back to our umbrella to get out of the sun for a while. I began doodling in the sand with my finger, wiping out the images, doodling, then erasing, when I heard myself mumble something like “Well, here I am, *still here, still watching myself stutter.*”

I jumped when I realized someone might have heard me. No one was in sight. “What do you *mean*? Whatever do you *mean* you are watching me stutter? Who *are* you anyway? Some kind of schizo?”

No answer.

“Aw, c’mon now. You were the one who started this. Now you’ve made me curious. Who are you?”

(Still no answer.)

I was accustomed to asking questions no one answered, so I went back to doodling in the sand. But just in case this Thing had something else to say, I reached for a pencil and got out one of the notebooks I had filled nearly full of “Rants”.

I opened the notebook and began scribbling a picture of a cartoonish character on a psychiatrist’s couch. Before I finished I felt a strange nudge and a knowing (but not words) “I am the one who knows you. I am always watching you. I know how many hairs you have on

your head.”

“You’re kidding!” was my response. Anyone who could count the hairs of my thick unruly mass of hair had my attention right away. Maybe I better get my pencil ready, just in case this Hair Counter decided to speak to me. I picked up the stubby little pencil I found in my swimming bag and wrote:

“Well, you must get a big kick out of that....standing there watching me stutter while I knock myself out trying to get even one miserable word out of my mouth.”

No answer.

I continue to badger: “Okay, if you are my ‘I am’, that means you are my Thought....you know.... Like ‘I think therefore I am.’ I learned that many years ago.”

“Nope. Not your Thought.”

“More than my Thought?”

“But of course.”

“How could you be more than my *Thought*?” I argue. “You are either my mind or you are out of your mind.”

“I am the One who *observes* your Thought. I am the one who sees your fear, your crazy beliefs, your feelings of frustration. I am the one who watches you, who looks out for you.”

“Well, that’s pretty shocking.... How can you just stand there and watch me turn blue and stutter? What a hoot it must be to watch me make a fool of myself.”

“That’s enough.”

“Oh, okay. I guess you can’t *observe* my Thought and *be* my thought at the same moment. I guess you can’t *observe* my stuttering and *be* my stuttering at the same time. That means you are not my Thought, not my conscious mind.”

“I am not.”

“Then you are Someone greater than my conscious mind.”

I thought I heard laughter. “Of course I am greater than your feeble conscious mind.”

“Who *are* you?”

“Do you remember Marley’s ghost?”

“You are my ghost? Now, that’s just plain spooky.”

“I am your *spirit*. I am your huge vast wired-from-birth intelligence, your sense of reality, the one who ‘gets it’. I am the ‘hidden treasure.’ Hidden to your conscious mind until you hit rock bottom.”

“Wow.”

“Your mind can see appearances but I am more than your mind. I see the big picture. Your mind can see behaviors but I ‘get’ the meaning of behavior. I call my knowing ‘Foreknowledge.’”

“You mean like predestination...like you know everything ahead of time so I don’t have a chance?”

“You have every chance. Always. Foreknowledge isn’t Fore-planning. Just because you know the sun will come up in the morning doesn’t mean you *planned* it or *caused* it to happen.”

“I guess that’s right.”

“Foreknowledge is like the knowing you have before you think it. Foreknowledge goes before Thought. Your mind can acquire knowledge second-hand...from books, from

words others speak, from the morning newspaper. You go shopping with your mind. You choose subjects in school with your mind. You study with your mind. Your mind is now putting words on paper.”

(A long, long silence and then I’m unable to make out the words that come next on the original copy) but I wrote something like:

“What about speaking? I have to consciously know what to say and how to say it before I speak. That takes a lot of thinking and planning.”

“What if you stutter *because* you believe you have to control speech... what to say and how to say it before you speak?” (And now the words are clear again....):

“What’s wrong with that?”

“What if speech happens naturally in a mega-second. Like breathing. Do you consciously have to know how to breathe before you breathe?”

(Pout) “Everybody knows that speaking is conscious.”

“You have made speech conscious and you therefore you stutter. Do you see a connection?”

“What other choice do I have?”

“When you stop trusting your conscious mind to produce speech, then the universe steps in and does its stuff naturally and spontaneously before your head figures it out. That’s the way it works.”

“I’m getting it that you are completely outside my control...the control of my conscious mind.”

“You are right. ”

“So my conscious mind has no power over you?”

“None, except for futilely trying to take over.”

“If I must accept that which is outside the control of my conscious mind, does this mean I have to accept stuttering?”

“It means you have to accept that speech is natural and your conscious mind can’t control it.”

“What does that mean for me?”

“It means you have to trust the truth that speech is a gift and you are not in charge of speech. Accepting that which is outside your control means fluency happens on its own. It means you neither control flow nor cause it to happen. That’s just the way it is.”

“Shorten that so I understand....”

“Shortened: Let me do your talking for you. I’m a lot better at it than you.”

WAKING UP

To know that speech is sourced in this invisible intelligent activity going on within *my own self*, outside the control of my conscious mind, was mind-blowing to me.

Up to this point there had been a communication breakdown between this deeper source of spontaneity....and my Critic (my conscious “fixer-upper”). This breakdown in communication was due to my conscious mind taking control of natural spontaneous activity.

Think about it for a moment. The reason you breathe naturally and without thought is because breathing is done without the constant haranguing and interruption of your conscious mind. I looked at the matter over and over. I got a clear picture of what was going on. *Speech flows spontaneously (like a river) at a subliminal level and my job was to keep my conscious*

mind (no matter how well-intentioned) from interfering.

I found that the cause of this communication breakdown between Big Me and Little Me happened when Little Me took over the job of natural spontaneous Big Me. Big Me, if interfered with constantly, is just going to butt out and say “Okay, you think you can take speech over with your conscious mind? Then I will leave you alone to try out this experiment. I am not going to fight with you. You will just have to find out for yourself that you have no power to handle all the complexities of speech with your conscious mind.”

BEFORE AND AFTER

If you had asked me “who are you?” before the Lignano incident I would have said “I think, therefore I am.” I was a “brainiac” who believed thought was all that mattered. Thought controlled my speech. I had filled my pitcher at the wellspring of the opinions of those I considered to be “Authorities.” This was the beginning of actually living from the dictates of my own spontaneous intuition, the impulses of my natural intelligence, the source of natural speech.

If you asked “Who are you?” *after* that short incident on the beach, I would have answered “I am awake.”

That’s all that mattered to me. I was awake. A whole new dimension had entered my life. And I was finally awake to the truth that I was far more than the total of “all the things that happen to me.” I was far more than my stuttering, far more than my thought. I was the Observer or Witness of all that happened to me, the observer of my thoughts, feelings, imaginations, beliefs; even my blocks.

My Censor (Little Me) went for cover. Little Me had told me all my life that, left to myself (my natural instincts, impulses and intelligence), I would ruin myself. And then she banged the door shut to my inner spontaneity, put the key in the door, locked it, and tried to forget where she put the key. Only *then* did she fear that this “I” she locked away might break out of prison and be free, because to be free means to be free of the Censor’s control.

When we reach this most subtle dimension of ourselves, everything is different. There is an unmistakable shift in the way we look at things. Judith Blackstone and Zoran Josipovic wrote:

“This ground of being is not something that we have to create or imagine. It arises spontaneously when we reach a degree of openness to life. We can employ many techniques to achieve the openness that unveils this aspect of our being, but *this is not a volitional experience*. It is not something that we do: it is who we are. That is why it feels completely authentic, as if we have finally found reality.”

The more fully we come to know ourselves at this level, the authors continue: “the more effortlessly, deeply and vividly the movement of life occurs and flows. This openness to the flow of life gives us a sense of being present to each moment.”

SOLVE OR DISSOLVE

I observed that when my conscious mind over-monitored speech, my speech lacked “grace” or “flow.” This led me to see that over-monitoring was one of the keys to dissolving my blocks. Eyes to see objectively allowed me to see for myself without having to rely on “experts” that weren’t able to help me. Observation doesn’t “solve” problems. It “dissolves” them.

John Harrison compares “solving” with “dissolving”:

“When you solve a problem, the subject continues to exist although its form may be al-

tered or disguised. When you dissolve it, the subject disappears because you have dismantled it.”

I have heard many people claim that one “spiritual experience” was all it took to recover from whatever problem they had. This was not true for me at all. It was as if this meet-up between my effortful mind and a deeper, wider intelligence only laid the foundation for what was to come. I had written down every word of the so-called encounter, and those words encouraged me in the days ahead.

CHAPTER 9

GETTING ON MY OWN SIDE: (OPENING MY EYES; SEEING FOR MYSELF) “A ZEN EYE IS FRESH, DIRECT, SPONTANEOUS, AND REAL”

If you resist stuttering, you give it power over your life. If you observe it in a non-judgmental way, this is the way to insight and freedom. My task became clear to me. My task was not to seek fluency. My task was to observe the barriers within myself that I had built against my spontaneous natural core.

The poet, Rumi, speaking of the critical brain, wrote: “I’ve given up on my brain. I’ve torn the cloth to shreds and thrown it away. If you’re not completely naked, wrap your beautiful robe of words around you, and sleep.”

Two main events caused me to give up on my intellect-as-the-way-to-fluency and brought me to a realization concerning the inherent limitations of my intellect when it came to the problem of stuttering.

FALSE EXPECTATIONS

The first event was the result of unrealistic expectations on my part. I was looking for an academic answer to stuttering, as I told you, and my own intellect failed to find an answer. But that didn’t mean I gave up on academic answers....it simply meant I kept looking I looked for some intellectual Whiz Kid “out there” who would pull a magic cure out of his hat. When a friend of mine who was working on her PhD. informed me she was going to do her thesis on stuttering, I was bursting with hope. This friend was clearly the brightest tack in the drawer intellectually and I thought she would find an answer that would free me of stuttering.

I will never forget the sinking feeling I got when I read her much-vaunted thesis. The thesis was about stuttering but was simply a composite, one quote after another, of all the “authorities” in the field I was already personally acquainted with who were still stuck on techniques that weren’t working. I’ll never forget my incredible disappointment. As I read further and further into the thesis, there was not a single original statement or new insight. Every single word was a repeat of quotations she copied from “authorities.”

She had witnessed my stuttering (which was at its worst at that time), along with conversations between me and other people who stuttered, but not a mention of her own observations or any of her own responses to stuttering.

I don't know why I was disappointed. I had known for some time that the academic community does not allow personal observation (if you doubt that, just try to insert your own observations and experiences in an academic paper and see what the response is.) But that didn't change the incredible disappointment I felt. After this experience I quit either looking *up* to my academic mind or looking *down* on my big original spontaneous "unsophisticated" intuitive intelligence.

THE SECOND EVENT WITHIN A MONTH

The second event was a 10 year old boy, the son of a PWS in a group I belonged to at the time. This boy began to stutter horribly a few years before, when he was made conscious that he stuttered and effort was made to try to fix his stuttering (just as my stuttering had changed from about 1 on the Richter scale to 10 when I became conscious of speaking and tried to fix my stuttering.)

This child had been taken from one therapy to another for two years. Right in the middle of all the "cures" he was offered, along with numerous rules, shoulds, expectations, and lack of hope (everyone assured him that there was no possibility he would ever be cured since "stuttering is inherited and there is no hope of a cure") *this child simply stopped speaking*. That's all. He stopped speaking. We were simply told that he had lost his "will to speak."

This event gave me a whole new "take" on the dangers of the conscious chattering mind taking over speech. While I was realizing that it is the spontaneous and automatic intelligence that is in charge of both what I say and how I say it (scientists assure us that both content and translating content into symbols are spontaneous)...it hadn't occurred to me that even the "will" to speak, the resolve or will or intention to speak is also a "gift" and can be tampered with.

I suddenly realized that there is a danger that the know-it-all chattering mind with its mixed-up belief system, persistent demands, expectations and circular thinking can be so powerful it will mess with a person's energy, resolve, or "intention."

It seemed so obvious to me that the more my Trying interfered with my speech, the more I stuttered. But I kept telling myself "Other people must not be affected by trying-too-hard-to-speak or I would hear about it from other people who stutter."

It seemed simple enough to me that interference with one's flow of energy (or resolve) caused a siphoning-off of energy and was somehow rooted in the constant interference from one's own learned mind. But as I say, before I came across this child who had completely lost his will to speak or express himself, I didn't know this interference could have such devastating effects. To me, this child who had lost the will to speak was like a sick person who loses his will to live.

I was starting to get angry at things I had put up with all my life up to that time...because I was able to see the effects on children with their whole lives ahead of them. Not just myself.

AN EXAMPLE OF LOSS OF WILL/INTENTION/RESOLVE

About that time I decided to lose all the weight I had gained through 4 pregnancies. I started a diet and as soon as it began to work I noticed that others tried to sabotage my new lifestyle. They did this for different reasons. My mother showed her love for me by feeding me, and she seemed disappointed when I didn't eat her food. One friend was disappointed

because I didn't go with her to a coffee shop on Karlsplatz anymore because I couldn't pass up the pastries. There were many reasons for this sabotage.

One day this question came to me: "So you see all the sabotage going on out here, right? You have no part in this sabotage, right? You are the victim of others' sabotage, correct?"

I didn't have the answer to that question but it seemed to me that others were trying to keep me from my target.

The next morning I was heading to the doctor for a weigh-in, full of resolve, full of energy, full of good intentions. I was very proud of my weight loss. So there I was, driving along, when suddenly I *noticed* something I had not allowed myself to observe before. I noticed that "something inside of me" wanted to make me an offer. "You know how you are not supposed to touch sugar or white flour products? Don't you think that's a little extreme? Mary is skinny as a stick and she eats sugar and those wonderful German yummy pastries all the time. You wouldn't have to eat more than one."

By the time I opened the door to the doctor's office, I noticed something else. I noticed that my resolve had vanished. I felt conflicted. I felt slightly "torn up" inside my head. There was a big lobby downstairs outside the doctor's office. I sat down on a couch and got out my notebook and wrote: "What has ruined my resolve? What has split this wonderful energy I started out with this morning? No one 'out here' has made any suggestions or tried to sabotage me. What's the matter? What has happened?"

WHAT IF YOUR IMAGINATION IS THE CULPRIT?

By that time I was in full operating mode. "Hey," Big Me observed, "I see you are trying to blame others for sabotaging your motivation and doing away with your resolve. But what if the Saboteur is *you*?"

"What if your own suggestions, shoulds, woulds, coulds, excuses, blaming, rationalizing, dealing in fantasy....what if your own imagination is the culprit? What about it? You came in here this morning full of hope and resolve and good intentions and look at you now. You have listened to the voice of "shoulds and might be's" and by doing so you have allowed your own chattering mind to sabotage you."

It wasn't difficult for me to see the implications as applied to stuttering. My own resistant chattering mind was the trouble maker. Miracle workers have said that resistance to creative energies prevents them from performing great miracles. Most of the time that resistance comes from our own chattering mind.

Jesus himself, it is said, could do no mighty works because of unbelief and unbelief is simply a very formidable form of resistance-to-the-max.

THE WORK OF UNLEARNING

So I was dealing with changes in my diet and changes in my speaking at the same time and when I observed interference from my chattering mind, I had a simple solution. I ordered my critical jabbering mind to just shut the hell up and stop ruining my life. This was a complete reversal from my imagination in charge of eating and speaking. Now it was as if something inside my head could see what was going on and wouldn't stand for it any longer. It was as if my "observer" was on my side to the extent of taking charge and protecting me from my chattering mind.

At that time I was busy *unlearning* so many things I was taught and one was the implication that my conscious mind could handle all the complexities of speech. No one ever came out and said “Your conscious mind can handle your speech.” I simply intuited that if a person said “consciously think of every word you say and every breath you take” or “always be aware of your bumpies” that, of course, what they were *really* saying was “Your conscious mind can handle your speech.”

I was finding the exact opposite in my own experience. I found that when I spoke quickly without thinking about what I was going to say or how I was going to say it, speech was automatic and fluent. So where was I going wrong?

I remember reading the book *Inner Skiing*, especially the authors’ (Timothy Gallway and Bob Kriegel) theory that *when the conscious mind butts out*, flow results, and this becomes apparent, as they say, “not just during breakthrough runs, but also in the most mundane activities: washing dishes, hammering a nail, getting dressed, eating. The complexities involved are truly amazing.”

They describe one such simple activity that is handled for us *without our conscious thought*...hammering a nail:

“Initially you must exert pressure with the fingers of one hand to position the nail in place, then grip the hammer with the fingers of your other hand, flexing the forearm enough to keep the grip firm but not so hard as to lose flexibility. Next you must tighten the biceps to bend your elbow and rotate your shoulder to raise your arm while cocking your wrist at the top of the swing. All this and more just in order to get the hammer in position before bringing it down on the head of the nail! Then comes the amazingly complex hand-eye coordination which guides the hammer to the nail head.”

All of this goes on naturally, outside the knowing or guidance of the educated academic part of the mind...in fact, the trained mind can never learn by itself to do the least complicated of these activities.

Here is something I hope will be heartening to you because it is so solid, so *true*:

The truth was I was not going to speak more fluently by strangling myself. When I finally got it that my conscious, learned, educated intellect actually ruined my speech, at that exact moment a monumental breakthrough occurred. I didn't have to beg for a breakthrough and I didn't have to plead because the natural original flowing wise and gentle Big Me automatically kicked in at the very moment I gave up on the Old Brain (Little Me) to handle spontaneous and automatic speech.

Speech, like breathing was set up to be handled the natural way. When I tried to control it, I left the natural path.

A NEW COMMITMENT

First I had recognized the nature of my taught conditioned mind. This is important. "Like most journeys, self-evolvement has a starting point. That starting point is the recognition that some (or even most) of your guiding values and beliefs are based on imitation of parents, teachers, peers, satisfied customers, celebrities, authorities, the successful, or even the world's failures," says Harry Palmer, author of *The Avatar Path: The Way We Came*. "The life you are living is a copy of someone else's. It is a patchwork quilt of borrowings and unconscious influences. When you recognize this, really see it, something independent of any mental

embellishment awakens—a new self. You can call this new self, “I am.” This ineffable spirit—authentic YOU—wakes up.”

This “New Self” that Palmer refers to has many names; Big Me, Spirit, Intuition, Faith, Observer, Witness, the organ of Perception, Heart, Seer, Unconscious, Vision or even Spontaneous Core.

Regardless of the name we give to this New Self, I knew that no permanent change was possible without observing the problem first. All change for me was preceded with being able to observe what was going on and it was this New Self that handled the work of observation.

All self-knowledge (so necessary to growth) is only possible through objective observation. The ability to observe enables us to perceive aspects of reality our laborious deductive logic has no access to. For example, a leader of one of the classes I attended told us to tell our top 3 core values. A woman I knew very well who was known for her almost-total narcissism stood to her feet and said “I value God first, others second, and myself last.” The rest of us were so taken back that no one else bothered to express themselves on the subject.

This event left me with the insight that without this activity I then referred to as “objective Observation” we are all in deep doo-doo.

ALL THE DIFFERENCE

The difference between being guided by words/techniques...and being guided by our own activity of observing is the difference between learning to ski by word of my instructor and learning to ski by engaging my own observation (Ah! I see! When I bend my knees *this way*, *that* happens! When I bend my knees *that way*, *this* happens!) Of course, this is not an either/or situation in which we depend on one or the other, but one (words/techniques) *without* the other (observation) doesn't do it.

As soon as I actually “got it” that speech could not be forced or manufactured or “willed,” that insight affected the behavior I call “stuttering.” It wasn't overnight, but in the space of 3 months this truth actually “felt on the pulse” worked its magic and changed my stuttering in an astonishing way.

GETTING OUT OF MY HEAD AND LOOKING WITH MY HEART

During that 3 month period I did something I had never done before. I got on my own side. Instead of resisting all my own observations, I agreed with them. My thought was “Okay, I've tried everyone's ideas except my own. I'm going to stop trying to fix stuttering and I'm just going to sit back and see what is going on...what stuttering is trying to say to me.”

I stopped speech clinics. I stopped my own chattering mind and I opened my own eyes and looked. I didn't know what I was looking *for*. I simply looked without agenda and without judgment. I didn't judge my observations. I observed the results of shoulds, would, could, likes and dislikes and saw how they were able to mess with my resolve. It was all new to me and very powerful.

I turned off the radio and television.

For three whole months I made a promise to myself not to read a single book or book reviews, or any other interpretative text about stuttering. I wanted to get in touch and live out of my own looking/seeing for a while. I turned away from my own conditioned mind (things I

had rigidly believed and never questioned) toward the work of seeing for myself and writing out my own observations.

A NEW FORM OF DISCIPLINE

Observation, watching my conscious mind, changes the nature of my conscious mind. Krishnamurti confirmed all my observations on this score:

“By watching that I am callous, indifferent---watching it, watching it—the mind becomes sensitive. Watching is the discipline. I wonder if you have got this. In this kind of discipline there is no suppression, there is no suppression in the discipline that is necessary in order to see. So the observer watches pleasure and sees that the continuity of pleasure is created by thought. Right? So I have entered into a totally different dimension....You understand? A dimension in which I have to work very hard (at observing) and which nobody is going to tell me about. I can tell you, but you have to work for yourself. So I say ‘Why does thought come into this at all?’ No, I am learning the art of looking without thought...why is this constant interference of thought?”

CONSUMMATE OBSERVERS

John Harrison, author of *REDEFINING STUTTERING* wrote this in regard to observation:

“Those of us who grow up with an overly high regard for authority are likely to sit back and allow those with letters after their names to preempt our thinking and formulate our truths, simply because, as professionals they ‘know’ what they’re doing. In doing so, we downplay our own ability to make significant discoveries through self-observation and by observing the behavior of others. After all, how important could our own observations be? We weren’t self-proclaimed experts. We weren’t recognized authorities in the field. We haven’t read, or written, the right textbooks. What could we know of importance? What, indeed.”

Harrison continues:

“People I’ve met who have substantially or totally recovered from stuttering have shown themselves to be consummate observers. Each was able to speak from a unique position of authority---that is, from the point of view of his or her own experience. These individuals have known how to use their observations to work through the complexities that underlie their own stuttering syndrome.”

NEW OBSERVATIONS

Right away I noticed that when my mind exerted control over the spontaneous act of speaking, I ended up disrupting the speaking process and this disruption left me feeling afraid of future “performances”, frustrated, panicked and helpless.

Put in another way, I observed Control, Disruption (stuttering), and Fear:

- 1) Attempting to control speech was the primary culprit when it came to stuttering.
- 2) Control disrupted my flowing spontaneous speech and produced halting hesitant repetitious speech (stuttering.)
- 3) And I reacted to this disruption of my speech with feelings (fear, frustration, panic and hel-

plessness).

I created a powerful metaphor which I used constantly. I saw speech as a flowing river, flowing in the path of least resistance. Stuttering always seemed to go back to its source: the result of my conscious mind building a dam over the flowing river in order to control what was meant to be a flowing spontaneous activity. Speech flows in the path of least resistance. As long as my Inner Control Freak was in charge of speaking, no flow was going to happen. That's all there was to it.

I observed that the more I obsessed about stuttering, the more I stuttered. Stuttering was the product of my own control system (controlling by beliefs, imagination, wrong priorities, and rigidly resisting the flow). Until I got really, really, really angry at this whole control system, I was still bound by it.

The greatest paradox seemed to be to be the truth “The harder I try, the worse I get.”) Even the great intellectual, Saul of Tarsus, vented over this dilemma. He lamented “The things I try to do are the very things I can't do. Oh, wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me?”

I was no longer my Stutter. I was the Witness who observed my stutter, who looked at what was going on without judgment (this is good, this is bad, this should be, this should not be.) The way I did this was something like: “I notice I am stuttering. I notice I am pushing one word out after another with great effort. I notice how exhausted I feel. I notice my breathing. I notice I am making an effort to breathe the way I have been taught to breathe. I notice the more I try techniques the more I stutter. I notice centering on technique erases my content (thinking of “how” erases ‘what I want to say.’) I notice connections forming between trying too hard and stuttering more.”

As soon as I reacted to what I was noticing with “That should not be so” or “I have to fix that”, I could see what I was doing and simply returned to observing.

I engaged my conscious mind in the work of writing down my observations. That was a pretty sly trick as I see it now, because the crux of the stuttering conflict for me had to do with getting Big Me and Little Me to work together, thus erasing the conflict. So when I inadvertently engaged Little Me in the difficult work of writing my observations down on paper I was doing exactly that: creating unity between Big Me and Little Me.

BEING THE WITNESS NOT THE JUDGE

And there was more: I made it a practice that Little Me could write words on the page but she couldn't run the show. I often woke up at 3 a.m. to a whole new “take” on the subject I was writing about, and I did a wrestling match many mornings to get my writer self (Little Me) to get out of bed and start writing. This was a hassle at first until it became a job I loved to do. My attitude toward writing changed because every day I would write new things I had never written or even *thought* of prior to that time.

So this was new for me....looking, observing, noticing...and leaving the judgments behind. When I went off on reactions and other tangents, I simply noticed “That's a tangent” or “That's an unobserved belief...I'll have to look into this.” When I reacted to what I was observing with “I don't like this” or “that is bad”, I noticed how those reactions (if I ignored them or refused to question them) brought my objectivity to a halt.

I learned about “the Witness Stage” of development at Big Sur many years earlier. Now I realized what they had been talking about.

IMAGINATION WORKS AGAINST OBSERVATION

My observations turned to the content of my conscious mind...so many wrong beliefs so deeply imbedded in my psyche that I had no way to know they were there. One day as I was writing about stuttering I wrote this: "There is a block in my throat around which I have to blow air."

As soon as the words hit the paper I couldn't stop laughing. Can you even imagine getting such an enormous breakthrough? A discovery that might have taken a psychiatrist 30 years to discover revealed itself to me through writing my observations. Did I have to then deal with this incorrect belief? No, of course not. The moment I observed my wrong and distorted beliefs, then poof...those beliefs evaporated into thin air, never to be seen again. I must add here, however, that there were all kinds of versions of that belief I had to deal with, but as far as that particular belief was concerned.....poof, gone.

I could see I was creating monsters with my imagination and these monsters served as blocks in my speech. At this point I noticed my imagination was the source of nutty beliefs and incredible fear. It was similar to when my kids were small and manufactured boogiemen in their imaginations which, in turn, scared them nearly out of their wits. All I had to do to get rid of the boogiemen was to walk into their bedroom and turn on the light...and poof, boogiemen gone.

I no longer tried to quit stuttering. Instead I observed my stuttering. I watched myself holding my breath and saw the result. I saw myself trying to speak through clenched muscles and saw the result. There's something about looking at what is going on that changes everything without trying to change anything. I entered *that* door and have never looked back. It was the first day of the rest of my life.

I OPEN MY EYES

There have been moments in my life when I was pure observation. No thinking. No criticism. No rigid unobserved beliefs. No shoulds. No clinging to things I've been taught. Nothing but free and happy looking. When I am free to look and see whatever is "there" I am happy because I am not having to come up with certain prescribed answers.

These moments of pure observation are not rare moments for me now and it is true that observation changes things (as Quantum Physics teaches.) One connection I've made is that this freedom came to me after I *observed* my mind's endless chattering, *observed* the accusations, *observed* crazy beliefs, *observed* the power struggle my mind was engaged in with my very own natural inner spontaneity.

What happened in my mind when I allowed myself to observe my own bizarre beliefs and values and thoughts was a little like what happened in a once-popular TV show in which Super Nanny entered the various homes of chaotic families and brought order to that chaos. My Observer stepped out of the unknown and gradually took control away from my Critic.

PROBLEMS ARISE

Problems come when we want to cling to a particular thought or idea or belief because someone "important" told us it was true. The very moment we start clinging to the known (or what we believe is "known") is the same moment we stop looking. You absolutely can't find the cure for stuttering if you are clinging to unobserved (and therefore unquestioned) ideas and beliefs.

The Victorian mantra was “You can’t see with your own eyes. You need a priest, preacher, teacher or wise man to tell you what to do.” That had pretty much been the way I lived my life until the day I didn’t live that way anymore. This happened after I saw it was my *responsibility* to keep my eyes open.

Not that I would stop respecting teachings and advice from others....only that I would cherish my own vision and be responsible for what I learned from my own looking/seeing.

It came to me that I was going to get acquainted with my resistant destructive mind. I saw that *observing* my thoughts, beliefs and fears was the opposite of being *driven* by my thoughts, beliefs and fears.

Ram Dass wrote: “The problem comes when we want to cling to a particular thought or idea. The mind always wants to cling. I’m 60 years old and if I’m still clinging to being 40, then I’m in trouble.”

WHEN I TRY TO SPEAK I STUTTER

What I observed was the reason I had to deal with my chattering mind, full of subtle suggestions, was because a chattering mind (even if that mind is mine, even if it is well-educated) siphons energy from my resolve. I noticed when speech was flowing easily, my busy chattering brain came up with numerous alternatives or rules or shoulds or suggestions when I was speaking, and this interfered with my resolve, content and expression itself (which turned out to be interference with flow and fluency.)

When I noticed that consciously working on speech made me stutter more, I simply stayed with my observations and looked at what was going on. That’s all I did. I simply listened to the non-stop chatter (“but that should not be” or “this really ought to work”). I wrote down all the solutions my “smarty pants” academic mind came up with. Just wrote them down. I didn’t judge the words that appeared on the page, I didn’t try to change anything. I simply watched. I became the Witness. That’s all. Not the judge. Just the Witness.

And I was amazed at what happened. Through being the Witness to what was going on I was able to observe major forms of resistance: obstacles, wrong beliefs, resistant attitudes, and discovered to my delight that, as quantum scientists have told us many times, “Observation changes things.” *And the minute I could see what was going on, the wrong belief evaporated.*

I found later that to look *up* to the academic mind is to look *down* on the natural spontaneous intelligence outside the control of my conscious mind.

Malcolm Gladwell (explaining the academic attitude) wrote about their contempt for the natural mindthe big natural intelligence not created by the conscious mind. This is what he wrote:

“They had been exposed as stupid. But they weren’t stupid. Why not? Because everyone in that room had not one mind but two, and all the while the conscious mind was blocked, their unconscious was scanning the room, sifting through possibilities, processing every conceivable clue.”

THE GIFT OF OBSERVATION

If you look up the word “observation” in a dictionary, you will find something like this: “The *faculty* of observing or noticing.” That this faculty is below the level of consciousness and we have no conscious access to it is seldom noted.

Dr. Theodore Reik wrote in *The Third Eye* about this innate but subliminal ability we all possess but which does its work “underground” or outside the control of the conscious mind. This is what he wrote:

“A little known and concealed organ receives and transmits the secret messages of others before he consciously understands them himself. And yet the literature of psychoanalysis neglects it. There is one word that may make claim to being a rarity in psychoanalytic literature: the word ‘I’. It is remarkable that the unconscious station which does almost all the work is left out of analytic discussions. Imagine discussing the science of sound/acoustics, without mentioning the ear, or optics without speaking of the eye.”

The academic world, according to Reik, not only denies the importance of personal observation as a source of information, the academic must only quote authorities in the field in which he is writing, making sure he never states his own personal observations, even as confirmation of his theories. *The scientific mind, dependent on the observant creative mind for its survival, often denies the existence of Observation.*

Nothing can, of course, be said about the nature of those unconscious impressions we receive as long as we do not acknowledge this huge vast subliminal intelligence which has a keen eye for (back to Reik): *“little peculiarities scarcely noticed movements, intonations, and glances that might otherwise have escaped conscious observation because they were inconspicuous parts of the person’s behavior. The conscious mind generally tends to brush aside observations of this sort as immaterial and inconsequential, little things not worthy of our attention.”*

This “organ of perception” (which some refer to as the “heart”) is able to perceive vast areas the conscious mind has no access to, since the conscious mind has to do with the material world only. We can see when someone is shy or embarrassed. Shyness is not a “thing” we can touch...it is perceived or observed. The observer sees in a micro-second what it would take the mind a very long time to comprehend. And all of this is going on outside the control of the conscious mind and has nothing to do with volition.

OBSERVING THE WORKINGS OF LOGIC

My own logic (and the logic of others) battled with my own observations. I would be tempted to back a theory regarding stuttering that was popular at the time, but then if I kept my eyes open long enough and operated from an innocent point of view (no agenda), I finally came around to supporting my own observations.

Some of these theories were learned from others, but there were exceptions. There were also beliefs that Little Me, my conditioned mind, had come up with on her own. My logic was often “figuring out” solutions to problems and this logical voice would pipe up with some ridiculous explanation and I would soak in the logical explanation before I questioned it.

Logic worked like this: I open my mouth to speak and Little Me stepped in and said “You need help.” And I grudgingly agreed. So Willpower would help me huff and puff and blow words out, one word at a time. And each time I pushed a word out, I was grateful (believing trying and pushing got me through the words.) Okay, so it wasn’t pretty to push words out, not even *kind* of. But my reasoning was still “If I barely got the word out with all the pushing I did, think what would have happened if I didn’t try at all! I would be stuck forever!”

So I credited willpower for helping me push the word out until the day I had to admit: Easy speech came to me at a *break* in periods of voluntary effort. Once again now: Willpower

wasn't the cause of easy speech. Easy speech happened, I observed, when I experienced a *break in planned or voluntary effort*. It was like: *"If your conscious mind can't provide you with what you need, let the Unconscious do it."*

CHANGE YOUR BELIEFS, NOT YOUR STUTTERING

Observation changed my tactics...how I dealt with stuttering. I noticed that working on speech was counter-productive and as I followed that "string" I found out *why* it was counter-productive to focus on behavior (stuttering.) So I did nothing but follow every behavior back to its source...and every single time that source turned out to be the way I was looking at things (mainly my beliefs).

I noticed something that has turned out to be incredibly powerful in my life: Behavior (stuttering) is rooted in worldview and beliefs.

This observation caused me to stop working on stuttering (behavior) and keep my eyes open for wrong beliefs about speech.

I noticed my beliefs and questioned them boldly, on paper. When I put this on paper, it became more real to me what was going on. *So I majored on beliefs rather than behavior*. I was intent on seeing speech realistically more than caring about my behavior (because I noticed that if I took care of the truth, the truth took care of my stuttering.)

My Observer simply walked into my dark mind, turned on the light and calmly looked around. And just as I had done that with my kids when various "boogiemens" scared the day-lights out of them, I turned on the light. And it was the light that caused those crazy beliefs and images to go away.

I discovered to my complete delight that, as Quantum Scientists have told us many times: *Observation changes things*. The trick is *not* "Observe wrong beliefs and try to change them." The trick was "Observation alone changes things." Without exception, the minute I could see what was behind my stuttering behavior, I didn't have to work on stuttering anymore. I dealt with how I was looking at speech, what I believed about speech. I cover this experiment in a later chapter.

By constantly taking note of my beliefs rather than trying to change my behavior, not only did my irrational beliefs evaporate, so did my stuttering.

OBSERVING RESISTANCE

I'm repeating myself here a bit, as I'm prone to do. Anyway, I found that before I could look at my stuttering objectively I had to have a relatively judgment-free conscious mind. So the first thing I began to observe was my own rigid judgments. I stopped blocking out things I didn't want to look at. To block out something is to resist, and we know that "whatever we resist, persists." I found that my mind had been conditioned to resist.

So I observed resistance. I noticed resistance in many forms. I alerted myself to ways I had resisted the flow (which is natural spontaneous speech).

When I say I observed what was going on in my speech and in my life, I don't mean I consciously sat down and said "Now I am going to observe." Any real noticing or observing I have done that really mattered happened before I knew I was observing. Ray Bradbury wrote:

"I thought that I saw nothing, heard nothing, felt nothing of Ireland. The Church was deplorable. The weather was dreadful. The poverty was inadmissible. I would have none of it. I did not count on my subconscious tripping me up. In the middle of all the threadbare

dampness, my antennae were noticing the people. Not that my wide-awake self, conscious and afoot, did not notice them, like and admire and have some for friends, and see them often, no.

“But the subliminal eye is shrewd. While I lamented my hard work and my inability, every other day, my interior self kept alert, snuffed deep, listened long, watched close, and filed Ireland and its people for other times when I might relax and let them teem forth to my own surprise...

“Then one sunny afternoon Mike (whose real name is Nick), the taxi-driver, came to sit just out of sight in my mind. He nudged me gently and dared to remind me of our journeys together across the bogs, along the Liffey, and him talking and wheeling his old iron car slow through the mist night after night, driving me home...the one man I knew best in all the wild green country. ‘Tell the truth about me,’ Mike said. ‘Just put it down the way it was.’ And suddenly I had a short story and a play. And the story is true and the play is true. It happened like that. It could have happened no other way.”

Our observations are our wealth. Again Bradbury writes: “So, thinking myself bankrupt, ignorant, unnoticed, I wind up with one-act plays, a three-act play, essays, poems, and a novel about Ireland. I was rich and didn’t know it. We are all rich and ignore the buried fact of accumulated wisdom.” (The Zen of Writing by Ray Bradbury))

Ray Bradbury’s main observation? “*Self-consciousness is the enemy of all art, be it acting, writing, painting, or living itself, which is the greatest art of all.*”

BELIEFS VS. REALITY

My view of the world is *not* the world. And our beliefs about the world tend to be in conflict with reality (what is actually going on). Our beliefs can be updated quicker and easier than trying to change reality to meet our beliefs about the world (in this case, our beliefs about speech.) But observing our beliefs (and boldly questioning those beliefs) will make it possible to rid ourselves of wrong-headed and deep-seated beliefs.

I learned it is much, much easier to change beliefs than reality. After all, reality doesn’t *care* what you believe. It just keeps flowing along. It doesn’t *care* what you want, it just keeps doing what it does...being what is.

When my mind is so rigidly set against what is going on because I think I know what should be, could be, might be, ought to be, no objective “looking” at what is going on is going to happen.

KNOWING WITHOUT LEARNING

As Joseph Chilton Pierce writes: “Isolated thought, locked in its arrogant posture of prediction and control, fears the unknown, which always means the insight-intelligence realm.” Thought when not in alignment with observation, resists our own original and perceptive intelligence, denies all we observe and see. Pierce continues: “To isolated and arrogant thought, emerging from a brain locked into escape from anxiety, such an observation is sheer gibberish.”

Richard M. Bucke describes the perceptive “observing” faculty of the brain: “He knows *without learning* certain things, as for instance...that individual existence is continuous beyond what is called death and he takes on enormously greater capacity both for learning and initiating.”

There are brainwave studies that show (I'm explaining this phenomena in a very non-clinical way) that when Little Me (our critical conscious censoring mind) goes off duty (at night when we go to sleep), the lights in the spontaneous right hemisphere come on and the "party" begins. Never being a person who wanted to miss a really good party, my question was always "what can I do to change the nature of my sober critical self so I won't have to "put her to sleep" in order for my joyful self to come out and play? "

RIGID MINDSETS DON'T LIKE TO BE QUESTIONED

Writing down my inner spontaneity went against the grain of my mind and often wore me out for the simple reason that mindsets don't like to be questioned. If you have an anti-war mindset, your mind is closed to people you judge to be "warmongers." If you have a mind-set that says "Nothing is worth fighting for", you will not want to observe exceptions to this mind-set. If you have a mindset that says "war is the answer to all things", this is definitely going to limit your options. When you are in the grip of a way of believing anything (even about stuttering), your conscious mind becomes extremely selective and distorted, selectively opening only to what you want to consider. This is why written conversations between "both kinds of me" was helpful and eye-opening to me.

RIGID BELIEFS VS. OBSERVATION

Sydney Jourard reminded me that when we have a fixed mindset, we see nothing new. Suppose you have a fixed image of me. In that case, you will always react to me in a stereotyped way. You may believe I am a source of harm to you and attack me verbally before I have a chance to say a word. When your beliefs are fixed, you can't receive new data from me. Not only that, but when I intuit you are relating to an image of me rather than to Real Me, there will be no new disclosures on my part because I intuit (partly through past experience with you) that your image or belief of me remains rigid and fixed.

You can use many words interchangeably like Image, concept, belief, imagination or thought. You can deal with life through a rigid image of how things are (or should be or might be or could be if I would just try a little harder.) If, however, you observe me with no rigid agenda I will more likely reveal new things about myself to you. My holding back will often be based on your attitude toward me (which I intuit.)

The only way to stop stuttering is to keep your eyes open to what is going on and stop clinging to beliefs you know do not work for you. The greatest destroyer of creative looking or observing is the problem the conscious mind has of grabbing onto some idea, belief, image or philosophy and hanging onto it, regardless of the facts.

Rumi might say it something like this: The path of observation causes a hundred veils to fall each moment, to take steps without feet.

CHAPTER 10

WRITING DOWN THE STUFF

If you are wondering if the light I saw at the end of the tunnel was really an oncoming train, the answer is no, it really was a light at the end of the tunnel.

Writing was the discipline by which I discovered my inner world. It includes seeing (which is a discipline on its own...to *look* rather than *decide*). It includes the actual writing of words down on paper. And it involves the part of my brain that reads the words on the page and goes “Hey, that’s true! That’s really true!” It also was the best way to confront wrong beliefs and question them boldly. Being able to see what was going on inside my chattering mind, written down on paper, was invaluable when it came to dealing with crazy mixed-up beliefs.

As I said earlier, I found that working on my stuttering didn’t work, but *observing* that working on my stuttering didn’t work led to *awareness*. *And it was keeping my eyes open rather than repression (and writing those observations) that moved me forward.*

Writing became my way of being heard above the noise of my chattering mind. I realized early on that words were simply symbols that represented a hidden reality: my own voice pushing to be heard *through* symbols (images and words). And a lot of the writing I was doing at the beginning was my own voice informing me “Hey, stop wasting your energy trying to speak well. Your brain naturally *automates* speech so you can use your time and energy in other endeavors.”

Writing was one of the main “other endeavors” that took the place of my obsessive thought about speech. When I obsessed about my speech I had nothing to show for it. When I wrote down what was going on in the relationship between my observations and my chattering mind, I soon had reams and reams of writing to show for it. And a new awareness of what was going on.

DAILY WRITING MYSELF OUT

After this new awareness of my ability to observe my own processes and learn from what I was observing (rather than depending on the “experts”) I began to notice a new depth and expansion to the way I looked at things. One day I would write myself out and by the next morning I could come back to my writing and see flaws in my logic I had been blind to the day

before. So I didn't go back and change what I had written the day before, I simply wrote myself out again. Often I marked time by how I was looking at the world when certain events happened. ("Oh, I remember why I blocked so badly at that point....I still believed I had to tediously manufacture words on my own.")

A figure/ground reversal thing began to happen. The internal conflict caused by two forces of equal strength began to evaporate as my second-hand thoughts that had come from other people began to weaken as I trusted my own observations in the area of stuttering, just as I was learning to trust it in other areas.

For example, when I was a teenager I noticed how well I felt all the time until I didn't feel well anymore. How could I find out the cause of feeling so bad? Go to a doctor? Remember there were 12 kids in our family and doctors were for emergencies only. My only resource was my own homemade observations...by observing what had happened before the "bad feelings" took over. As a child of 13 years old I came to the conclusion: "Every time I eat sweet stuff I feel bad in about a half hour." No doctor, no expert could have told me this. I had to make my own observations.

At first these observations were wobbly, so I simply opened my eyes and kept them open. There would always be a "Next Time" because I loved sweets, so the next time I felt bad I went back to looking and observing, but this time I added *writing* to the mix. I would *record on paper* what I ate and how I felt. If I had only recorded my feelings without reference to what I was eating (or the other way around), the record would have been meaningless and incomplete.

This same process was also true with stuttering. One day I couldn't get a single word out of my mouth, and I couldn't make myself speak well by different approaches I had learned, so I began to write, observing and writing both my behavior and the way that behavior affected my speech. The first conversation I wrote is at the end of the chapter.

Another quote from Harrison's *Redefining Stuttering*:

"Since your goal is to not think about stuttering, you don't have to if you put it down on paper. You don't have to carry the thought in your head. If you did something right, you don't have to remember how you did it. It's accessible at any time. It's your permanent record of your past. And that is just incredibly invaluable."

THE GLORIOUS EFFECTS OF WRITING

To quote "Soul Work":

"Writing teaches you to listen and to write without censorship because there's no wrong way to do it. Your censor can scream, 'You sound so negative! You sound so whiny! You sound so petty!' But simply by continuing to write page after page, you are saying to your censor, 'I'm sorry, but I'm going to keep right on writing.'" Because there's no wrong way to do this, your censor is made to understand that you mean business. It is to stand aside. This allows you to try any form of writing and to do it more freely."

The authors of "Soul Work" also talk of the results of writing in this way. "Hyperactive people calm down and underactive people become more active. If you need to get sober, you get sober. If you are overweight, you end up exercising more. In a twelve-week workshop people begin to look physically different only three or four weeks into morning pages. I have always said that people ought to do this just for vanity.

“Friends come up and say ‘Have you fallen in love? Have you had a facelift? You look so different.’ That’s what happens when people get in touch with their inner juice; their skin tone improves, their color changes, they rearrange the furniture in their house.....I don’t feel we have even scratched the surface of where people are going with this. It’s like we are in a quiet revolution. I call it a “creative contagion” because if one person looks happier, her friends ask, ‘What did you do? Are you having an affair? You seem so happy.’ Then they get involved in this process.”

THE POWER OF WRITTEN EXPRESSION

I had four children who grew up listening to me stutter. The fact that none of them stutter is remarkable but I attribute much of this to the fact that they expressed themselves in written words or pictures almost constantly from the time they could hold colors or pencils in their hands, especially during long winter months. Writing/drawing never interfered with friends or play or normal activities. It was just something they did that supported all their other activities.

I didn’t make them write or even suggest it. They merely saw me writing and imitated me until it became something central to their lives.

I observed the things that slowed down their expression. One of the things I noticed was that if my husband brought home stacks of paper from work that was printed on one side and bleeding through on the other, the kids simply wouldn’t draw. I have no idea why. It wasn’t my job to figure out the “why” of everything....it was just to notice what was going on. So I made it a habit to buy packages of clean white typing paper and flowing pens and they wrote and drew until the paper was gone. So I just made sure it was never gone. That was a very easy thing to do to keep four kids entertained for hours on end.

Another thing was that I didn’t judge anything they did. I didn’t say “this is good” or “this is bad” (both value judgments). I asked “what does this mean?” and I got some amazing answers that ended up in revealing conversations. One son, at four years old, drew a picture of people falling through space, dresses and trousers and shoes falling through space. I said “what does this mean?” He lisped “Thith is what my Thunday Thkool teacher thaid.” As I asked more questions I found that his Sunday School teacher had given a lecture on how bad boys and girls go to hell....hell described by her as “the hottest flames licking at you and you can’t get away from them. You keep begging for cold water.”

Suddenly these images, recorded on paper, gave us something solid to talk about. I wasn’t there to make trouble for the teacher but my job was to understand what those images meant to the kids and make sure to raise a dissenting voice.

This was when I began to realize that there may be meaning in words and images...but meaning is primarily in the eye of the beholder and if I couldn’t understand what the picture was about, I always asked. I was also always given an answer. I found that kids love to talk about what their images meant.

Children are almost pure perception/expression (both perception and expression being subliminal activities.) Their conscious minds have not yet developed, so they bring their work to the adult in the room for approval or disapproval. What matters is for parents to realize that the symbols (words and pictures) are simply *represent* a hidden reality....*the child’s own voice pushing to be heard through symbols* (images and words.)

I am still convinced that the reason my children didn't stammer was because they found a form of expression they loved and did every day of their lives and no adult judged them unfairly or judged them at all. That's just a theory, completely unproven, of course.

THE "NOTICING BOOK"

At the time all of this change was going on in my life the community in which I found myself was a highly academic one, people who believed that all our knowledge is limited to what others teach us, what we have been taught. The mantra of these people was the Victorian mantra: You can't see for yourself. You need an authority figure to lead you around by the nose." The general idea was "You are merely a composite of all the things you have learned or been taught."

So one evening I said "Okay, I will see if this is true. All of you are certain that we know nothing except for what we have learned from 'out here', so I am going to find out for myself."

That evening I went home and when I read to the kids before they went to bed, I had a pile of paper and some bright pencils and colors and I said "We are going to make a notebook. We will call it 'The Noticing Book'. In this book we are going to write all the stuff we know that no one has ever told us."

That sounded like a lot of fun to the kids (they were between the ages of 5 years and 11 years old). Immediately, the kids were excited about this project.

"I know, I know!" was one response...."Robbie acts real brave and brags on himself all the time but last week going down that high slide, I could tell he was real scared." So I wrote that down. "David's dad is going to marry that lady down the street. He lets her sit on his shiny new car even though her jeans have rivets in the pockets and us kids can't even get close to his car." I raised an eyebrow, but wrote it down anyway.

Then the observations came faster and faster, some written in their own hand. Observations about themselves, their friends, our relatives. Even me: "You always smile and act real happy" my oldest son wrote "but I can tell you feel real sad inside sometimes." And another observation: "I noticed Mrs. Dugan always says 'fine' or 'whatever' when she wants people to shut up." And "I noticed Dad always says 'Nothing' when he wants you to keep asking him what he wants."

I was the one who was stunned. How did these little kids know all these things? We had never talked about any of these matters together. No one told them any of these things they mentioned. I'm not saying every single thing they observed was true. I'm simply telling you what happened.

And then I made up a separate notebook which I named "Things I notice about Stuttering." This became a huge project for me. In this notebook I recorded my observations that when I was alone or when I sang or spoke in unison, etc., I did not stutter. I could read aloud for hours at a time when I was alone and knew I was alone without a stutter.

ZEN AND THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE

It was writing my observations that put me on my own side and gave me incredible self-esteem (esteem for my own looking/seeing). Writing reflected externally what was going on between my head and my heart. Writing reflected my life of observation. Writing taught me the dignity of "Big Me", the dignity of speaking truth. I wanted to destroy my typewriter or com-

puter more than once, but I always knew there was nothing else for me. Writing, for me, has been the basis of new understanding. Writing taught me nearly everything I know. Writing is like this Giant Windmill inside my head that turns vision, observation, and perceptions through the written word into living energy.

The book, “The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance” written by Robert Pirsig, was another Godsend for me, confirming again the transformative power of observation. I am still awestruck by this book because it managed to strengthen my emerging but shaky view of the curative value of cherishing this ability to gain important information through observing and expressing those observations (by writing without correction, criticism, or fixing what I wrote.) I was just going with the flow. This flow easily and naturally carried over into my speech.

WHERE DID MY STUTTERING GO?

Three months into this looking/expressing I began to notice my stuttering was mostly gone. Others noticed it before I did. It was a total shock for me....here I was taking no thought whatsoever about improving my stutter, and for all practical purposes it went away on its own.

Robert Pirsig’s book fell into my hands at an opportune time. It is a work of fiction about a college professor who had traveled the long road through mental breakdown. In his new life we refer to him as the Narrator, in his “old life” the author referred to the Narrator as “Phaedrus.”

The Narrator was on a motorcycle journey with his young son, traveling back to Montana to the town and campus where he had been a college professor. Gradually the Narrator found himself getting back in touch very gradually with what he had formerly believed and taught. Here is an example:

“Today now I want to take up the first phase of his journey into Quality, the non-metaphysical phase, and this will be pleasant. It’s nice to start journeys pleasantly, even when you know they won’t end that way.”

So, using his old class notes as reference material, he wanted to reconstruct the way in which Quality became a working concept in the teaching of rhetoric:

“He’d been innovating extensively. He’d been having trouble with students who had nothing to say. At first he thought it was laziness but later it became apparent that it wasn’t. They just couldn’t think of anything to say.

“One of them, a girl with strong-lens glasses, wanted to write a 500 word essay about Montana. He was used to the sinking feeling that comes from statements like this and suggested without disparagement that she narrow it down to just Bozeman.

“When the paper came due she didn’t have it and was quite upset. She had tried and tried but she just couldn’t think of anything to say.

He had already discussed her with her previous instructors and they’d confirmed his impressions of her. She was very serious, disciplined and hardworking, but extremely dull. Not a spark of creativity in her anywhere. Her eyes, behind the thick-lenses glasses, were the eyes of a drudge. She wasn’t bluffing him, she really couldn’t think of anything to say, and was upset by her inability to do as she was told.

It just stumped him. Now *he* couldn’t think of anything to say. A silence occurred, and then a peculiar answer: ‘Narrow it down to the main street of Bozeman.’ It was a stroke of insight.

“She nodded dutifully and went out. But just before her first class she came back in real distress, tears this time, distress that had obviously been there for a long time. She still couldn’t think of anything to say and couldn’t understand why, if she couldn’t think of anything about all of Bozeman, she should be able to think of something about just one street.”

He (Phaedrus) was furious. “You’re not looking!” he said. A memory came back of his own dismissal from the University for having *too much to say*. For every fact there is an infinity of hypotheses. The more you look the more you see. She really wasn’t looking and yet somehow didn’t understand this.

Finally he got angry: “Narrow it down to the front of one building on the main street of Bozeman. The Opera House. Start with the upper left brick.”

The girl’s eyes widened behind the thick-lensed glasses. Long story short, the girl came to the next class with a puzzled look and handed him a five-thousand-word essay on the front of the Opera House on the main street of Bozeman, Montana.

“I sat in the hamburger stand across the street,” she said, “and started writing about the first brick, and the second brick, and then by the third brick it all started to come and I couldn’t stop. They thought I was crazy and they kept kidding me, but here it all is. I don’t understand it.”

“Neither did Phaedrus, but on long walks through the streets of Montana he thought about it and concluded she was evidently blocked with the same type of problem that had paralyzed him on his first day of teaching.”

UNBLOCKING

Here is Phaedrus’ assessment of this student:

“She was blocked because she was trying to repeat, in her writing, things she had already heard, just as on the first day he had tried to repeat things he had already decided to say. She couldn’t think of anything to write about Bozeman because she couldn’t recall anything she had heard worth repeating. She was strangely unaware that she could look and see freshly for herself, as she wrote, without primary regard for what had been said before.”

The narrowing down to one brick destroyed the blockage because it was so obvious she had to do some original and direct seeing. *“Once they got into this idea of seeing directly for themselves they also saw there was no limit to the amount they could say. It was a confidence-building assignment too, because what they wrote, even though seemingly trivial, was nevertheless their own thing, not a mimicking of someone else’s.”*

Phaedrus believed that education can separate us from our own ability to learn through observation. If this happens, what is the way back? He had overlooked his own sample as the image of the way back to spontaneous flow. Didn’t his student get over her stuckness by sitting down and writing and writing and writing what she was observing, noticing, seeing (and therefore, writing from her right brain?)

While our thinking is shaped and formed by our environment, our ability to observe is not. If we want to define the work of this Observer we could say: *The Observer sees what is going on through unbiased looking. It sees for itself without being told what is there or what should be there*, and observing without judgment is not unlike being able to see the meaning of things at a deep level, far deeper than the conscious mind (limited to logic and imagination and memory) is able to go.

That was the secret: This girl had been cured of her stuckness by “writing out of her observing right brain rather than her thinking left brain.”

And what worked kept on working because, as one writes what one observes, one strengthens the right brain. Since the right brain is the initiator of speech coming from you, strengthening the right brain is at the root of returning to fluency.

As you write in this way, great truths about your stammering (and a lot of other things) will jump out of the most ordinary events. Think about that a minute. You realize that ideas don't literally jump out of ordinary events. It is a right brain ability to observe and interpret, secretly assessing the deeper meaning hidden in even the most mundane events. You do not consciously *try* to observe and interpret. It's what the right brain does spontaneously and automatically.

Observation simplifies life. As you observe how your beliefs drag you around, creating complex entanglements, only observation of those beliefs will help you cut through your resistance. As you observe your thoughts and beliefs, notice what thoughts keep popping up as distractions and write them down.

Simply observing and giving a voice to those observations is central to most of the material in this book. The importance of data I read or heard from others served to confirm and strengthen my own findings.

The most important thing you can carry with you is this statement: *All changes in your speech begin with observation.*

OBSERVING (AND WRITING DOWN) YOUR BLOCKS

I was taught that we create reality. This never rang true to me. I didn't create gravity. I didn't create the universe. There is one thing I *did* create, however. Something I began to take responsibility for. Little Me (my mind/imagination) was an *expert* at creating blocks.

It was not a happy realization that I, myself, created my blocks. And the only way I was able to rid myself of these blocks was to observe them. Rigid beliefs (clumps of thoughts) that don't represent reality were able to get in the way of speaking and blocked nearly every word I spoke. But these blocks didn't just “happen.” No. No way. Wrong beliefs were created by Little Me (the logical mind) to explain things to myself...and therefore, nine times out of ten, they were wrong. *Only careful observation blasted through those blocks.*

YANKING OUT ONE WELL-HIDDEN BELIEF

This observing/writing was hard work but it was through doing the work of observing my beliefs and writing down what I observed that I was able to find a hidden belief I had clutched onto for years. This hidden belief was “I have a huge lump in my throat around which I have to blow air.” When I finally got it all down on paper, I had something solid to look at. “I have a block in my throat around which I have to blow air” were the words I wrote on the page and these words sounds extremely funny to me now. How could I have ever believed such a ridiculous thing! And yet it took both observation and writing that observation on paper before I was aware of this first very important self-created block.

Observation and writing that observation clearly led me to awareness. I don't know what others use to bring light to their problems, dissolving their problems, but it is clearly simple observing and writing that does that for me. And it is awareness, after all, that is the big game changer in arriving at the Zone, the state of ease that is free from conscious effort.

CONVERSATION #1 (Little Me writes in italics).

"It drives me crazy to block on words. I see how people look at me. I feel their embarrassment even more than my own. But I can't help the way I talk. It's like getting hit in the back of my head with a baseball bat and there's nothing I can do to predict it or nothing I can do to prevent it. I am helpless. I am suddenly stuck on a word, trying to blow breath around my block."

I can see your stuttering, your feelings, your despair. Let me ask you a question. Why are you trying to push your breath out? What is blocking you?"

"I push because I need to get air past something in my throat."

"What is that 'something'?"

"I don't know."

"Let's look at this block together. Two heads are better than one."

"Okay."

"What kind of block is it?"

"It feels like a BIG block in my throat."

"A literal block?"

"Literal? What do you mean 'literal'?"

"Okay, I mean a physical block."

"Of course I believe it is a physical block."

"Let me get this straight...you believe you have a big literal physical block in your throat around which you have to blow air, before a sound will come out?"

"Of course."

"Why don't you write that down?"

"Okay, Okay, there! It's written down."

"Okay, I see it. You believe you have a literal block in your throat."

"I do."

"I've noticed you don't always have a block in your throat, like when you read aloud to yourself when no one else is around."

"That's right."

"Wouldn't it be logical to question, to ask "if this was a real block, it would be there whether other people are around or not?"

"Okay, I'm writing. Now that I see it all down on paper, I'm beginning to doubt that there's an actual block in my throat."

"Your behavior reveals your beliefs. Pushing through something in your throat shows you *believe* something is there blocking your speech. Believing something doesn't make it true."

"Wow! So this block isn't real. It is a belief!! Something I've built myself. That's a real breakthrough. Okay, how did I go about changing this belief?"

"You don't have to work on changing that belief."

"What do you mean?"

"Look! That particular belief is gone!! Pay attention to what we did. We took the belief from your mind and put it out here on paper, making it visible. Writing not only gives "hidden beliefs" visibility, the belief becomes solid so we can look at it and question it and everything clears up. As soon as awareness hits, you go 'wow! That's true! I can't believe I've been fighting a paper tiger.' Something like that...."

“Let’s see if I understand...this hard rigid belief has been with me for a very long time (even though it was hidden) and as soon as I give visibility to this hidden belief, and read the words written in black and white, I know for sure it isn’t true...so that whole belief evaporates into thin air (without trying to make it evaporate). It’s just so ‘not there’ anymore.”

The Quantum guys are right: Observation changes things.”

“Will this process change other beliefs?”

“That is going to be our job. You tell me your fears and I will turn on the light so you can see the boogie men in your life evaporate. Only then will your fears vanish.”

“And the paper will be our meeting place?”

“Is there a better place? Next time you stutter worse than usual, bring your thoughts and beliefs to the paper so we can get behind stuttering behavior to the “hooy” behind the behavior.”

“I’d like that. That’s very comforting to me.”

LOOK! SOMETHING’S HAPPENIN’ TO MY SPEECH!

I make no claims that what worked for me is applicable to everyone. All I know for sure is that my stuttering yielded to this process of allowing both kinds of me to flow on paper and spill the beans for hours on end. I fired my conscious mind from CEO of speech, and assigned it the job of writing down the flow without spouting opinions, sermons or platitudes.

After 3 months of writing the flow (most of which were observations of my own feelings, beliefs and behaviors), *my speech changed dramatically....and without ever giving stuttering so much as a thought.*

One strange thing I still don’t understand: even though I stopped stuttering when I was in Munich, when I returned to the States to see my parents, from the word “H-h-h-h-hello”, I stuttered as badly as ever (only around my parents.) It was at least 3 years before I could speak around my parents as fluently as I did around others. That’s just one more unsolved mystery about my stuttering.

PART 3

ARRIVING AT THE ZONE

CHAPTER 11

ARRIVING AT THE ZONE

Arriving at the Zone meant I no longer had to do battle with my intellect. I don't go there anymore. Big Me is in charge of my speech and won't tolerate the take-over attitude, distorted beliefs, suggestions and arguments from my little chattering intellect anymore, especially when it comes to natural and spontaneous free-flowing speech.

The moment I returned to thinking about what I was going to say or how I was going to say it, I yelled "halt" and went back to the metaphor that was forming in my head.....seeing speech as it is before the interfering Bossypants enters the scene....speech as a flowing river, flowing outside the control of my conscious mind. My conscious mind has no access to the flowing natural part of me. So when my chattering mind tried to drive a wedge between the flow and my flowing speech, I ordered my mind to stay out of my business. I just told my mind to shut the hell up.

As long as I was still thinking about speech and working to fix it, I was still operating on a false worldview. I was still in the grips of a way of thinking I often called "the bootstrap philosophy," believing I could pull myself out of stuttering by yanking on my own bootstraps.

Rather than work on my speech, I worked on observing all the ways my conscious mind interfered with speech. When I finally stopped stuttering, it was not the result of trying to quit stuttering but the result of clearing out the channel I call my mind or "Little Me" so flow could happen once more. It was my mind creating all the barricades, all the blocks and when stuttering went

away, it happened on its own, more or less suddenly.

When I entered this "Zone", my pushy efforts gradually stopped. My trying stopped. My mind stopped chattering. I didn't insist anymore that I knew what should happen. I let go of the direction and content of my writing and speaking. By giving up resistance the words on the page "wrote themselves". While this spontaneous writing took a while to spill over into spontaneous speaking, writing reconnected me with my inner spontaneity, confirming the truth that the "force" was always there, ready to express itself, when given a chance.

As I became aware of this "Other" in me, I began to see how everything done by this "it" was done without conscious effort and happened naturally and spontaneously. I gained great respect for the capabilities of natural Big Me. I stopped trying to take speech over as I recognized that speech emanated from Big Me...without thought and effort.

TAKE IT FROM THE MYSTICS

Mystics have always told us there are two basic attitudes toward reality: Grace and Works.

Grace is the attitude in which we rest from: trying, discipline, effort, pushing, pulling and nail-biting so that flow can happen. Works is the state in which we haven't let go. We are still trying like crazy to speak well, thinking, thinking, thinking...still mentally "hanging onto the side of the pool" so spontaneity can't happen.

Arriving at the Zone seemed more organic and natural than anything I'd ever experienced. My jerky speech became less jerky and began to flow, a flow that wasn't scripted, words spoken with no thought, with no plan, no preparation, no lectures, no expectations. I believe speech changed "on its own" because I had done battle with over-monitoring and over-controlling...and I had won the war. My worldview had changed, particularly my views of speech, and by observing the beliefs that didn't support this new way of speaking, things were changing.

WHAT'S GOIN' ON HERE?

My kids noticed the change in my speech first, then my friends. And then one day I thought "Hey you know what? I don't remember stuttering for a very long time!" (then dismissed the observation right away so as not to build up a pile of expectations and therefore disappointments).

A few weeks later one of my best friends who was familiar with my situation knocked at my door, then couldn't wait for me to open the door and rushed in, marching right past me, waving that morning's hot-off-the-press "*Die Welt*" newspaper. "You've got to read this!" she insisted. And there it was: the story of many German children who were experiencing freedom from stuttering, not by working on their stuttering, but by sitting at typewriters four hours a day, writing their own honest and authentic observations about their very own feelings, beliefs and behaviors. The article was like a shot in the arm that gave me tremendous "mojo" for the days ahead.

Oh, I would have times when I hesitated momentarily, but as far as the big blocks...they were completely gone. *Gone! Do you hear me?* Can you even imagine the total joy I felt? This disaster that had all but ruined my life was, except for stops and starts here and there, gone.

I came back to the States from Munich a few years after this and was able to start a business in which I spoke on the phone for hours each day without a stutter. This was amazing, given the fact that the telephone up to that time, had been my worst enemy (as it is with most people who stutter.)

I still can't definitely sit down with you and tell you how I arrived at this easy-breezy place in my life I referred to as "the Zone", and that is why I have been as careful as I have to simply tell you as accurately as possible the events prior to the bursts of fluency that were suddenly happening to me.

SUDDEN BURSTS OF FLUENCY

When I started experiencing sudden bursts of fluency without any kind of warning I was amazed. Why? What was different? Why hadn't these bursts of fluency occurred during the countless hours I'd spent sweating through speech therapy? I didn't know and I didn't

care.

I was so beside-myself with freedom and happiness that it took a few weeks for it occur to me: I no longer thought about speaking. Something had happened to this know-it-all critic in me that had interfered with the spontaneous flowing part of me for so many years. One thing I can say for sure, I had been thinking too much. Rex Jung, a researcher at The Mind research Network in Albuquerque would say I'd been thinking too *hard*.

A growing body of research in neuroscience supports this no-thought approach to flow. Kimberly Elsbach, a professor of management at the University of California says: “*You can't force creativity to happen.*” The same can be said of fluency and flow.

A SURPRISING DISCOVERY

It is more realistic for me to say “I arrived at the Zone” than it is to say “I quit stuttering” although both happened at approximately the same time. And this is understandable to me now that I understand more about what has to happen in the brain before flow can happen. The truth is, I had to quiet my brain's frontal lobe which is the control center in the brain that directs planning, practicing, repetition, goal-setting and problem-solving that some people call the “will” or “volition” or “the censor” or “the inner taskmaster.”

I didn't know ahead of time that this was a requirement of unleashing the natural easy-breezy flow of my creative juices. I had inadvertently fulfilled the requirements required for flow to happen without knowing what I was doing.

The journey to the Zone (fluent easy-breezy speech, free of conscious effort) started out rough, agonizing and just plain hard, the way journeys often begin. When I, inadvertently, arrived at the Zone I looked back on the journey and went: “why did I ever go through that ridiculous, mixed up, just plain *ignorant* ‘trying-to-cure-myself-by-thinking-and-trying’ phase of the journey?”

The Zone (like Zen or faith) is a state of rest, a restful attitude in which we rest in the laws of “the way things work” naturally, without interference and effort from my conscious mind. Breathing is a good example. We have faith that the body will take in air and let out air automatically and we do not need to consciously work at breathing properly. Breathing, like speaking, is outside the control of the conscious mind.

Rest is not something to prepare you for work. *Rest is a state of being, an attitude, a state of the mind in which chatter, criticizing, carping and lecturing of the mind is gone. It happens when Little Me (the effortful part of my conscious mind) gives up, gives in, lets go.*

Rest is what happens when we give up trying. I was free of conscious effort when I saw how reality works, when I found out why the conscious mind working on speech is doomed to failure.

THE MIRACULOUS FEELING OF THE WORDS BEING THERE

Speaking then becomes an exercise in “Leap and the net will appear.” Leaping without thought is what happens when you just open your mouth and turn off your chattering mind. *Open yourself to the flow and forget each separate word.* Fluency happens when we trust the words to be there without “thinking up” those words, when the torrent of ideas flow through and no thought is given to each separate word or the way I'm breathing or planning what I am going to say.

Vladimir Nabokov wrote: “*The pages are still blank but there is a miraculous feeling of*

the words being there, written in invisible ink and clamoring to become visible.”

Nabokov’s words were very comforting to a stuttering person who believed she had to think up every word she spoke.

THAT’S JUST THE WAY IT IS

The miraculous feeling of the words being there is rooted in the mystery of speech (both perception and expression) happening naturally. And it *is* a mystery. We could get clinical about it and explain how it happens, but when it comes down to it, there is no theoretical explanation that would be worth the thousands of words required to explain this event. It is summed up best by Barbara Dahm, a speech therapist from Israel. I have included that explanation in Chapter 1 and 13.

An anonymous writer wrote this: “Observe the power of the watermelon seed....drawing from the ground and through itself 200,000 times its weight... tell me how it takes this material and creates a watermelon, thickly imbedded with black seeds, each one capable of drawing through itself 200,000 times its weight...all of this happening naturally without conscious thought or conscious effort or conscious planning. It just happens because *that’s the way it is.*”

A PICTURE OF HOW SPEECH HAPPENS

I was watching a documentary regarding UPS, a leading mail carrier in the United States. I had imagined that every step in the process of sending a package from one place to another was due to a conscious action or choice. The truth I discovered in the documentary was that every part of the process had been automated (through bar codes) so nothing happened consciously or “on purpose”. *All parts of the work of package delivery had been automated. That was what I also discovered about speech.*

ZEN

I had finally arrived at the easy state of being I can only refer to as “the Zone.” And a new reliance on the truth: “Communication is a gift and *speaking is a synthesis of many movements and sounds, all flowing together in harmony with one another.*”

When you realize this completely, you will realize that this truth is not only speech-changing but life-changing (meaning every area of your life is going to change.) You will be more natural and spontaneous in all areas of your life.

If my very own subliminal intelligence, outside the control of my conscious mind, automatically handles not only “what to say” but “how to say it” without conscious intervention, then I can trust it. Then I am in good hands.

WHOA! IT WORKS!

When I was in the Zone, speech happened so fast I couldn’t rely on my slow methodical thinking to consciously produce speech. In any instant, the speaker in me automatically made five, ten, even a hundred or more adjustments in my speech mechanism to keep the flow going. Could my slow and unwieldy conscious mind direct those adjustments or did my mind need to trust my subliminal brain and body to do what was needed? By expecting my body to act spontaneously, without the intrusion of conscious thought and effort, the results were phenomenal.

Dr. Daniel Neuenswander explains the Zone: “In tennis the Zone happens when you

watch the ball leave your racquet cleanly while it sails deep into the back court, just inside the baseline. The focus of your attention flows between the path of the ball and your own body mechanics. Forehand after forehand, the rhythm of the drill *overtakes your conscious efforts at control. You are in that 'zone' that athletes love when everything flows together and there are no hang-ups.*"

In order to arrive at that "zone" in speaking, I needed to rid myself of interference, whether that interference involved fixing my speech, hiding my stammering, or trying to speak better.

What is the opposite of faith? Think about it for a while. The opposite of faith is control. Faith, on the other hand, is the state of mind which is free of conscious effort and trying, very similar to the "Zone". And it's only natural since "Speech is a natural synthesis of many movements and sounds that produce fluency, all of the 'work' occurring at a subliminal level, outside the control of the conscious mind."

By observing my conscious mind, it's chatterings and stupid beliefs (along with questioning those beliefs boldly), I was depriving my mind of its power over me. No longer did I accept all the old-fashioned beliefs without question. I became bold in my writing, questioning everything I was taught and everything I thought I believed about stuttering along with my fantasy in the raw power of my mind to overcome stuttering. What I had found through my new work was nothing more or less than a voice I had never heard before, my very own voice.

EASY-BREEZY SPEAK-AS-IT-OCCURS-TO-YOU

Something had happened that caused me to realize my brain naturally automates speech so I could use the energy I had been spending on "trying to talk" for other endeavors.

When you take out both the "Try" and the "Think", when you stop trying to control your Inner Spontaneity, you will enter a different world in which there are no rules. There are laws to be discovered, but no rules. Everything is an easy-breezy speak-as-it-occurs-to-you: No pushing. No forcing. No pre-planning. Everything is spontaneous once more. It is the truth that sets us free; and it is flow, not force, that is the path to the "Zone."

I had been unable through my stammering years to let speech happen the way it happened naturally. It was like I couldn't let the grass grow by itself without my conscious mind interfering, taking control.

I had spent years developing the part of my mind called "Willpower" or "Try Power." One day it occurred to me how strange it was for me to believe that I could arrive at the Zone through effort when I realized that the Zone is the state in which all conscious effort is wrung out of speech.

Julia Cameron ("The Artists Way") writes: "Through my own experience and that of countless others I have come to believe that creativity is our true nature, that blocks are an unnatural thwarting of a process at once as normal and as miraculous as the blossoming of a flower at the end of a slender green stem."

I stopped seeking fluency. Fluency is a by-product of arriving in the Zone (in which all effort to speak is gone). Just as you can't seek happiness directly because it will elude you (because happiness is a by-product of something else) so you can't seek fluency directly or it will elude you.

So there is no magical technique which you can adopt to stop stuttering immediately because fluency is a by-product of a deep change in your view of speech, a change in belief

structure and (as a by-product) a change in your confidence level, self-image, attitudes, and fluency.

RETURN TO CHILDHOOD: A FRESH WAY OF SEEING

I believe that a new way of looking at speech (“speech is like a flowing river....natural and automatic”) was the major contributor to suddenly finding myself in the Zone. Many times a day it came to me “*You can’t push the river.*” Or “*The river flows all by itself.*” Or “*All I need to do is go with the flow.*”

It’s like this: Suppose you realize that you want to *be* free of stuttering. You don’t just want to *believe* you can be free from your own controlling mind. You want to actually *be* free. There is a huge gulf between believing something and being something.

Suppose you say to me “I believe in love” and I say “Yes, but what matters is that I *be* loving” and you ask “How can that happen? It is impossible for any of us to change by trying to change. No one can change who they are” and I think “Oh, that’s it! That’s why we are told to return to childhood. Children *are* loving. We *return* to freedom and love and spontaneity because *that is who we are.*”

This is precisely what is true of speaking. You don’t start by manufacturing good speech. You return to childhood. We were not *born* with a stuttering problem. Stuttering is an acquired problem. *So we have to find a way to return to childhood before we believed we had to work hard at speaking.*

EFFORTFUL REPLACED BY FREE-FLOWING FLUENCY

C. S. Lewis writes about the remission of his wife’s cancer: “She could not be moved in bed with a lifting squad of three of us, and with all our care we nearly always hurt her. Then it began to appear that the cancer had been arrested; new bone was being made. And so little by little the woman who could hardly be moved in bed began to walk about the house and in the garden. She even found herself getting up *unconsciously* to answer the telephone the other day. It is the *unconsciousness* that is the real triumph---the body that would not obey the most planned volition now begins to act on its own.”

It is when we begin to speak “unconsciously” (without the aid of conscious volition and consciousness of self) that we know we have finally arrived in the Zone. Planned speech is replaced by “unconscious” natural speech for which I take no thought at all. As fluency happened on its own I had a sense of “I had no idea I could do this. Where does this flowing speech come from?”

THE FORCE WAS WITH ME

It was as if the “force” was with me, which was quite different from the “force” with which I had formerly forced myself to speak. The “force” was natural and flowing and resulted in fluency....while forcing myself to speak worked in exactly the opposite direction.

The words from my childhood came back to me: “Out of your inner being will flow rivers of living water.” And this became a profound confirmation of what was happening to my speech.

During this time I stopped fixating on correcting what I considered to be negative performance (stuttering) by “bold and positive performance.” That “positive performance” was writing. I kept writing. I kept “showing up” every day at my writing endeavors.

SPEECH IS A RIVER – My Recovery From Stuttering

My writing was not goal-oriented. I just allowed the spontaneous part of myself I had formerly repressed, a *voice*. Writing took me through an entire creative process, one that used who I was, my environment, where I had been, and where I was going. Writing allowed me complete freedom of expression, something I had never experienced before this time. Expressing my insides stretched my imagination, enhanced my outlook, softened my mindset, and continually pushed my limits. There is nothing flattering enough I can say about the simple act of free-writing and the power it had over my stuttering.

The impact of writing has extended all the way through my life. Everything I wrote improved what I wrote next. Every barrier I broke through helped me break through the next barrier as I glimpse the next truth. There are days when my mind and body have a very difficult time keeping up with the flow of perceptions and insights, flowing *from* my inner spontaneity, *through* the channel of my mind, *to* my speech.

This, of course, has established a great friendship between my Creator and Critic (Big Me and Little Me.) *It was writing that turned my Critic/Censor into my Supporter.*

This was not a miracle but a return to the natural, to the way it was always meant to be. I recognized this poem as what had happened to me and maybe you will recognize it also:

The time will come
When, with elation,
You will greet yourself arriving
At your own door, in your own mirror
And each will smile at the other's welcome,
And say, 'sit here. Eat'.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give Bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you
all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,
The photographs, the desperate notes,
Peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.

(Derek Wolcott)

PART 4

7 KEYS TO THE ZONE

**FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE THEIR SPEECH
IS LOCKED BEHIND A CLOSED DOOR....
AND THEY DON'T HAVE THE KEY.....
THIS IS FOR YOU**

CHAPTER 12 -- ONE OF SEVEN

TAKE THE SCARY OUT OF SPEECH (THRU HARRISON'S HEXAGON)

“Do not weep. Do not wax indignant. Understand.” Spinoza

The driving force of my life has been the drive to understand. The need for further exploration has always haunted me and nothing frustrated me as much as being in the dark about something I not only *wanted* but *needed* to understand.

The fact that stuttering was a complete mystery for years is probably why it was so tough for me. Stuttering was like some lummoX barreling up behind me with a baseball bat and whomping me in the back of my head with all his strength. Each time it happened, I was as confused and surprised as the last time. Where was the logic? Was this a joke? How crazy was this? It just didn't make sense to me.

It was a long journey from “perplexing” to “understanding.” I had already stopped stuttering for many years before things began to clarify. But what did I expect? Understanding is *always* in retrospect. The fact that I became fluent before I understood what was behind my stuttering taught me that understanding doesn't necessarily *precede* fluency; neither does understanding *cause* fluency.

My understanding came about by first experiencing stuttering and then *not*-stuttering, making my own observations, and then finding a book by the name of *Redefining Stuttering* by John Harrison, *naming* those experiences and elements....helping me to see all the different strands of my journey as one inter-related whole.

HOLDING BACK

One of the first things Harrison suggested right from the get-go that made a difference in how I viewed stuttering was to substitute “hold back” for “stutter” whenever I spoke about stuttering. This was helpful in seeing what was actually going on. “Holding back” implied there was a purpose for the blocks I had experienced. It also implied personal responsibility, something I do. I was already in the process of understanding stuttering in a different way than my initial view of blocks coming from the bat of a bully, over which I had no control.

THE INTER-CONNECTEDNESS OF ALL THINGS

John Harrison wrote: “Stuttering is really the product of a constellation of problems, including difficulties with self-assertion, a confused self-image, a reluctance to express what you feel, bad speech mechanics and so forth.”

There were some things I understood about the inter-connectedness of things (even though I was still unable to connect what I understood about life in general to stuttering.) I was aware of how everything in other areas of my life affected other areas. Eventually I understood that nearly everything that happened in my life affected my stuttering in one way or another.

If I had a conversation with a fixer-upper type of person, the type of person who picked lint off my shoulders and brushed imaginary dandruff off my collar, I stuttered more.

If I thought about stuttering or obsessed about it, even when I was simply trying to fix my speech, I stuttered more. If I was too busy to think at all, I stuttered less.

When I felt like a “Before” in a room of “Afters,” I stuttered more. When I was around friends, I stuttered less.

If I talked to the tick-tock of a metronome and then tried to carry the technique over to my classroom, the new way of talking got into a fist fight with my natural mind (“What are you trying to do? Prove to everyone you are a robot? Well....that’s what you sound like....a stupid robot. Go back to stuttering. It sounds a *lot* better than *that*.”) And then I had *two* things in my head fighting like two pigs in a gunnysack, and I stuttered more.

My emotions affected my stuttering. Feeling inferior affected my stuttering. Being around critical people affected my stuttering. Trying to fix myself affected my stuttering. Obsessing about stuttering made stuttering infinitely worse. So everything affected my stuttering. Succeeding at something affected my feelings and this generally meant I stuttered less.

This understanding of the constant interaction of all factors in my life began in an unusual way, through a seemingly silly event that yielded hugely significant insights into what was happening to my speech. When this event happened I was fortunately doing pages and pages of free-writing each day, so I wrote about this event (as I did nearly everything else that was going on in my life at that time.)

BIG RED BLOTCHES

I went with a few girlfriends to a “makeup party” where they did makeovers, using a well-known beauty product. When they asked for volunteers, my hand shot up, because I wanted to see what this much-heralded makeup could do for my skin. So hey, that’s great...there were 10 chairs in a row and I sat down near the end. I was excited to see the results of this product that was being advertised all over Dallas.

First, the lady who was making the presentation told us about the amazing properties of the makeup, assuring us it would make our skin “smooth, polished, and supple.” I felt a “nudge” at this point...like “something’s wrong here”....and the image of a leather saddle hanging in a relative’s barn flashed through my mind.

I watched while my friends were being made up and I was really impressed. Finally it was my turn. The lady representing the product applied the makeup on my face and it really was yummy looking. My skin looked creamy and took on a beautiful radiant glow.

The presenter was delighted. As she proceeded to finish the remaining makeovers, I sat around with my friends watching what was going on, all of us impressed with the huge improvement this product seemed to make. I went into the kitchen, got the coffee pot and was pouring coffee for everyone when I heard squeals: “Look! Look at your face!” I ran to the bathroom and was horrified...the image in the mirror looking back at me was shocking. Unlike

the others, I had reacted to the product, and big red blistery bumps were coming out on my face.

At that point I remembered the “nudge” I felt when I first heard the presenter use the words “smooth, polished and supple” which my mind automatically connected with products used for leather saddles. I immediately bombarded the sales person with questions about the ingredients, etc. She opened her briefcase and pulled out literature written by the architect of the skin products and read it aloud to all of us.

I went home from the party and wrote: *“It is strange that one person’s worldview can produce a formula, the formula becomes a product, and the product can end up as big red blotches on my face.”* It was amazing to me how inter-connected everything was.

This *view* of skin as: “Something that needs to be kept smooth and supple” was carried out by formulating a product with ingredients that would supposedly polish, shine, smooth and protect skin. This way of looking at skin was carried out by “how-to” to produce a visible product. The product when applied to my face produced both emotional (Yikes!) and physiological changes (big red blotches). As simple as it may sound now, this inter-connectedness didn’t seem simple to me at the time.

TREATING THE SYMPTOM

One similarity between stuttering and the big red blotches was that just as the doctor treated only the symptoms (my big red blotches) by giving me a little tube of cream that didn’t work, for years I had only dealt with the symptoms I experienced when I spoke: severe blocking and holding back. I was beginning to understand at this time that stuttering is only the visible symptom of something deeper (like my big red blotches were) but I was not looking into the complexity of what this might be. Just as the doctor treated the symptoms and probably never wondered about it again, so I was dealing only with my blocking and holding back, without looking at the whole story surrounding this blocking.

I am old enough to remember Abraham Maslow and all the “greats” of the self-actualizing movement and I realized that Maslow was correct...if you want a “starting point”, a “point zero” for what appear to be isolated problems, look to your worldview...the way you are looking at the world. Abraham Maslow’s teachings made it possible for me to look at something as seemingly isolated as face cream and know that if you keep going back and back and back, what you will arrive at is the creator’s (or architect’s) worldview. If it is wrong, the product will either not work for the long haul or will be harmful. This part seemed very clear to me.

When Maslow spoke about worldview, he was not referring to the way I was looking at myself or my own personality, but how I was looking at the world. He believed we are the ones who *look* at the world; we are not the *objects* of our looking. So when he said “worldview” he wasn’t referring to self-esteem or self-confidence (no matter how important those factors are.) He was talking about how realistically we are looking at the world.

So I carried this over, for the first time, to my understanding of stuttering. Was it possible that my worldview was at the bottom of stuttering? Was stuttering possibly a *by-product* of a complex inter-active system just as asphalt is a by-product of oil refining here in Texas? If holding back was a by-product of another conflict in my life, then trying to control stuttering was like trying to control the big red blotches.

STARTING WITH NATURE

Nature is like a river. This river runs through me. Speech is part of this spontaneous flowing river. This river part of me (my spontaneous, original, flowing unconscious/subconscious intelligence) flows in the path of least resistance. There is another part of me that I refer to as “resistance to that flow”. We call this “the conscious mind or conscious intention or will or conscious thought/beliefs/imagination.”

The reason the mind is in conflict with nature is because of something called “inherited conditioned responses.” This inherited mental conditioning is like the brake system on a car. It resists natural easy-breezy spontaneity because the intellect looks down on all that is native or natural. We all inherit this mental conditioning and pass it on from generation to generation until we turn the light of our big intelligence on our beliefs, values and attitudes.

When I stuttered this conflict between flow and resistance to that flow became obvious. I think of flow as the river and resistance as the dam we, ourselves, build across the river, preventing its flow. What began as a mere view of how speech happens (“Speech is manufactured by my conscious mind”) led me to what seemed like “logical” beliefs: “Since speech is produced by conscious intention, therefore I must think about every word I say, every breath I take, as well as plan what I am going to say and how I am going to say it.”

Those beliefs, in turn, produced certain behaviors (the more I thought about speech, the more I stuttered.) And the more I stuttered the more it affected my emotions: helpless, frantic, and “copeless,” (“Copeless” was Dr. Wendell Johnson’s word that reflected my feelings very well.)

As my emotions became locked into the fear-mode, this also affected the way I felt about myself and the way I felt about myself affected my personality (as I became more and more fixated on conscious intention...constantly willing myself to speak.) Nothing kills the personality like being controlled by one’s own critical censoring mind. And of course, spontaneity and conscious effort work in inverse proportion: the more effort expended on speaking, the less spontaneous I became.

In other words, when my mind exerted control over what was meant to be “the spontaneous act of speaking” I ended up disrupting the speaking process and this disruption left me feeling afraid of future speech. Attempting to control speech consciously was the primary culprit because control disrupted flowing spontaneous speech.

EMOTION: THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG

The question at one time when it came to stuttering was “Which came first the stuttering or the emotion?” Or “Which comes first, a persistent fear of one or more unfamiliar social situations...or stuttering?”

It didn’t matter to me which came first. I only knew there was a connection between stuttering and fear...both fear of speaking and fear of academic or social situations where I would have to speak. But there was something else I learned from Maslow: namely, fear is a reaction. Feelings are reactions: sometimes reactions to events, sometimes to behavior, sometimes to beliefs, values or attitudes. All I can tell you is that once I stuttered horribly and now I don’t...and along with the stuttering went the fear.

I knew that just as my emotions in the makeup incident were reactions to the big red blotches (Yikes! Ugly! Terrible!), this was what was happening when I stuttered...fear and helplessness was a reaction to something and that something was the behavior we call stutter-

ing. Stuttering always preceded my fear of stuttering and my worldview always preceded my stuttering but those elements also seemed to affect everything else in my life. This led me to believe if the stuttering went away (regardless of the cause of stuttering) so would the fear of stuttering (this turned out to be true).

But I couldn't will stuttering away. My mind was unable to control it. I had to understand how blocking was related to everything else going on. Was it possible that holding back was a by-product of my beliefs about what I had to do to improve speaking? Was holding back a by-product of my will taking over an activity that was meant to be both spontaneous and automatic?

About this time I heard Krishnamurti speak. He said something like this: Is it possible for you to get rid of fear right this moment? Not to deny it or resist it or lie about being afraid or pretend not to be afraid? This is our job tonight to get rid of fear, and if we can't do it, our meeting is worthless. Then he connected everything about how fear would not exist without thought and to understand thought you must separate thought from observation. So even fear was connected to everything else.

PARALYSIS BY ANALYSIS

My blocking was like paralysis: Paralysis by analysis. When I tried to analyze what was happening when I spoke, I blocked. When I attempted to fix the way I spoke, I blocked. When speech was viewed by me as a performance, I held back. (I wasn't conscious that I viewed speaking as a performance, I *acted as if* speech was a performance.)

I was finding something else that messed with my stuttering: Whenever the relationship between intuitive spontaneous expressive Big Me and intellectual judgmental Little Me was out of sync, I blocked worse. When I was speaking and suddenly my intellect would "take over" and critique what I was saying, I lost my enthusiasm for what I was saying. This led me to believe that my spontaneous flow decreased as my resistant intellect increased. How did this all fit together?

I didn't know, but I intended to find out.

CONNECT, CONNECT, CONNECT

Buckminster Fuller used to say "Thinking isolates events and Understanding interconnects them. Understanding is structure" he declared, "for it means establishing the relationship between events."

One day I wrote out some of the things I had observed about how some elements of speaking related to other elements. I had been taught that I could fix stuttering through certain conscious mind techniques so I somehow assumed that speech is a product of my conscious mind. Certain beliefs about speech followed logically: I need to think about speaking. I need to make Herculean efforts to breathe correctly, plan my words, practice. I held back until my censor approved of what I said. Speech was hard, but I had hope in this: the harder I tried the better I thought I would speak.

Action followed: I tried, pushed, forced words through clenched muscles. I froze up. No words came out no matter how hard I pushed.

I was embarrassed by this freeze-up. I was frantic, confused. I felt all kinds of turmoil going on in my body: my heart raced, my face felt hot, I had the urge to run. My body responded by holding back because no matter what I said, my inner critic would reject it.

I keep repeating this behavior, stuttering, freezing up, being embarrassed. My conscious mind then took over more aggressively, trying harder and harder to break through the blocks it created. My conscious intention (will) became more entrenched. Confusion reigned. I felt disappointed: I believed my conscious will could accomplish this task and yet it failed me every time.

When my mind exerted control over the spontaneous act of speaking I actually *disrupted* the speaking process and this disruption left me feeling afraid of future performances, frustrated, panicked and helpless. Fear then caused me to hold back and block even more. It seemed like a vicious circle.

THE EFFECT OF THINKING ON MY SPEECH

If you have ever driven a stick shift, do you remember how everything would be flowing together really terrifically and then you'd get to the top of a steep hill with a bunch of cars behind you and you'd go "wow, what am I going to do" and you'd start frantically thinking and planning what you were going to do and thinking messed up the sync that was going on? That is basically what used to happen when I spoke.

There are people who say "Well you are thinking about it too much so we have to practice not thinking about every move." Of course you know this is foolish because the more you think about not thinking, the more thinking you do. "Take no thought when you speak" implies that conscious control is not part of the loop. When you are in sync, your body instinctively, without thought, acts on the promptings of this subliminal hidden intelligence.

HARRISON'S HEXAGON

I had a lot of foggy notions about stuttering I had gained from careful observation of my own stuttering and other PWS in Munich. I had also been through many years of speech therapy both in the USA and Germany.

I had taken to free-writing for hours on end, and after a few months of writing the "river" (how I refer to my spontaneous flow), my stuttering went away. Eventually, I wanted to understand what happened.

Enter John Harrison's book *Redefining Stuttering*. In this book Harrison made it clear that stuttering is not caused by one thing but is due to intertwined influences. To explain his theory he constructed a hexagon, labeling each of the six sides with a term or label.

These six terms, one for each side of the hexagon, were:

- Perception
- Beliefs
- Behavior
- Emotion
- Physiological Response
- Intention.

When I reached this part of the book a big red "Achtung!" flashed in my mind, and I jumped to attention.

A HELEN KELLER MOMENT

Do you remember the story of blind Helen Keller when her teacher pumped water over her hands as she helped Helen to form the word “water” with her mouth? She did this over and over and over, heroically attempting to connect the *reality* of the water with the *word* “water”? And remember how that simple connection became the great turning point for her? Harrison’s Hexagon was a similar revelation for me. All the things I had been observing for myself in my own experience suddenly had names and the names made sense.

It is worth noting that Harrison didn’t list six techniques, or six theories. He listed six elements with which I was well-acquainted. The inter-connections I had been noticing now started to make sense, simply because Harrison was able to *name* those elements. Wow, I kept thinking, *this* is now familiar landscape. Foggy outlines began to shift-shape into recognizable terrain. Oh, look! *Now* I’m in familiar territory...now I’m finding my way around. I felt like I was home.

What I referred to as “vision” or “worldview” or “the way I am looking at things” was similar to what Harrison referred to as “*Perception*.”

My logic took clusters of thoughts and made beliefs out of them that attempted to explain things. Many of these explanations were wrong. I created certain ways in which my will could improve the mechanical aspects of my speech and these ideas were similar to Harrison’s “*Belief*.”

When I carried out these beliefs into action (making great efforts to breathe correctly, plan my words and practice speaking) and this conscious effort resulted in hesitating, blocking and holding back, Harrison might have used the word “*Behavior*.”

When I reacted to this behavior with embarrassment, or when my writing cleared away emotional residue and unblocked frozen energy, his word “*Emotion*” fit the bill.

When I intended to speak fluently but failed or when my energy split between following my natural tendencies and following conscious intention, he might have used the word “*Intention*.”

And when my heart raced and my face turned red in response to behavior or emotion, Harrison’s term might have been “*Physiological Response*.”

I could see how my emotions then affected my behavior and how my physiological responses affected my intention, as well as how my beliefs affected my behavior and my behavior affected my emotions....all elements maintaining dynamic interaction and reinforcing each other. When my feelings about myself improved, my stuttering improved. When my beliefs changed, my behavior changed. Intuition put me in touch with my deepest feelings and perceptions. Everything depended on everything else.

THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF THINKING

Years before I heard of the Hexagon when I was stuttering worse than ever, I was very involved in a movement called “Positive Thinking.” I was really into it. People sometimes consider positive thinking as “new-agey” or linked in some way to law-of-attraction, but at that time positive thinking was the big fad. I couldn’t see any connection whatsoever with my worsening speech and something as “positive” as my new way of thinking.

The next time I went home to see my parents, I mentioned positive thinking to my dad. My dad who counseled depressed people pooh-poohed the whole idea of positive thinking, reminding me that not one severely depressed person ever came to him without a copy of “The

Power of Positive Thinking” either tucked securely in his armpit or on the tip of his tongue. My dad even spoke derisively of the author of the book, referring to Norman Vincent Peale as “*Normy* Vincent Peale.”

I told my dad that I wanted to be positive above all else. He said, “Well, good luck. The danger is that pretty soon you will water down everything you see and everything you say and you will lose sight of what is true and real.”

And I said to my dignified intelligent father: “Don’t be so negative. There’s no such thing as ‘it doesn’t work.’ All it means is ‘it doesn’t work for *you*.””

My father reminded me: “If it doesn’t work, it doesn’t work. Period. If *you* can’t swim as long as you are holding onto the side of the swimming pool, it means *Junior Lindberg* can’t swim if he is holding onto the side of the pool.

My dad equated positive thinking with “whistling past the graveyard.” When I said “I don’t want to hear negative things,” he assured me that judging reality as negative meant I would have to give up my intuition. When I asked why, he answered (reminding me of intuitions that kept me out of danger more than once), that intuition, especially intuitive warnings, are often “negative.”

He told me that positive thinking is still thinking and ‘positive’ is just a label. He said “It’s not up to you to judge reality as either positive or negative. The question you *can* answer is ‘is this true?’”

When I questioned my dad as to how I would know if something was true or not, he (being a Pragmatist) answered: “Does it work? That’s the way you know. If it’s true that you can swim while still hanging onto the side of the pool, then it will work (you will be able to swim while still holding onto the side of the pool.)”

He continued: “And you know how obsessive thinking *always* throws a monkey wrench into the flow of things?” (He knew how well I realized *that*.) “Well, that’s just not ‘now and then’. That’s *always*.” He didn’t want to rub it in...the fact that obsessive thinking about speech always made me stutter worse (a fact I had explained to him many times) because he was pretty careful never to bring up the subject of stuttering unless I first initiated it.

One comment from my dad was about his favorite subject: *truth*: “If you ever want to find your way through any problem, it is important to report to yourself *what is really going on* at any moment and not selectively pick and choose what you report to yourself.” He told me that my unbiased perception of reality was absolutely necessary input if I ever hoped to find my way through the difficulties I was facing.

THE EFFECTS OF BELIEF ON HOLDING BACK

It was my father’s opinion that the censorship I experienced in my major relationship at the time had become *self*-censorship and this was definitely messing with my spontaneity and causing me to hold back. My parents both noticed that stuttering was taking its toll. I would start a conversation filled with energy and excitement and within a few seconds or minutes I would stop mid-sentence and just never bother to finish my sentences. My friends repeated many times over: “Finish your sentence. What were you going to say?”

Even when I *wrote* about what was going on with my speech, my sentences would stop mid-stream. Since I have this holding-back down in black and white, you might be interested in the conflict that went on in my mind during that time. Here are some of the notes I wrote after the “big red blotches” event:

“Wow! Who in their right mind would put harsh chemicals into face cream? That lady must be crazy!”

“Now, don’t be so harsh. She’s actually a very nice lady. People have great respect for her.”

“What does ‘nice’ have to do with anything. This stuff was meant to be used on dead leather.”

“Well, you notice the other girls didn’t react.”

“What is *that* supposed to mean?”

“Just saying: we all have a right to our own opinions.”

“We may have a right to our own opinions. We *don’t* have a right to our own *facts*.”

“There you go again. Who are *you* to say she is wrong? Stop being so negative. Stop judging people.”

“You know what I wish? I wish you would get on my side. You always tell *me* not to judge....but you are judging me for judging. I need you to listen to me without constantly criticizing me...I need you to get on my side. I get so, so tired of....”

And then, mid-sentence, the writing broke off.

So once again I was experiencing the effects of censoring on my own holding back (whether the holding back occurred in speaking or writing.)

POLICING PERCEPTIONS

When my parents mentioned self-censorship, a little bell went off in my head. For several years (the same years that my stuttering went completely off-the-chart) I had been policing my own perceptions and responses with judgments regarding what I said or how I looked at things (isn’t it somewhat astonishing that I called this censorship “positive thinking?”) And the more I censored myself, the more I blocked, stuttered, spluttered, held back.

It was like my critical mind was ganging up against my own intuitive knowing and common sense. I who had always insisted on “say it like you mean it” didn’t really care what I meant anymore. I just wanted to spit any necessary words out and run the hell away from it all. What I was running away (without realizing it) was from was the control of my vastly inferior bossy conscious mind.

I instinctively knew what to say and how to say it without thinking about it. I knew what I meant (starting out strong and full of meaning) but my Censor watered everything down, condemned me, intimidated me, and a tired washed-out feeling took over, accompanied by the guilty feeling that I had no right to an opinion...and if I *did* have a right to an opinion, I certainly had no right to *express* that opinion.

It was as if my intellect stepped right into the middle of a sentence, held up a hand (like a crossing guard at a school crossing) and said “whoa, stop, back up”, and this stopped me from making any definitive statements at *all*.

PESKY BELIEFS

By the time I left my parents’ home, my defensiveness about positive thinking had vanished. In fact, I told them that one of the well-intentioned Positive Thinking gurus had inadvertently messed with my speech with her belief that before we made any statement at all about *anything* we should think carefully about each word we say, sending our words through 3 gates. The 3 gates were 1) Is it positive. 2) Is it necessary and 3) is it kind? By the time

anything I had to say got through all three gates I was stuttering so badly it didn't matter anymore. My mom was still laughing when I waved goodbye.

BLOWING A GASKET

John Harrison suggested in *Redefining Stuttering* that people who stutter often have a difficult time getting angry. This was absolutely true for me.

I was bothered by people being angry with each other even at a very young age. My mother told me that when I was around 4 years old, she and my father were arguing and I scooted a chair across the room, smack between my parents, got up on the chair, took my mother's hand and held it together with my dad's hand without saying a word. That pretty much ended their argument.

It occurred to me once or twice that I didn't know myself. Once we were asked certain question in a discussion group so we could all get to know each other. One of the questions was "what is your favorite color?" I looked around the room thinking "What is wrong with me? I have no favorites. Everyone else in the room knows what he or she likes but me. I like green for grass but I wouldn't like it for the sky." But the guy sitting next to me jumped to his feet with "My favorite color is blue. Blue is the only color I like." So I was next and I said "green" because that was the easiest word for me to say without stuttering, and I was stuck with green. I was continually handed green ribbons and green notebooks and green pencils because, after all, "that is your favorite color."

Even though I didn't know my favorite color or favorite movie or favorite anything, in many ways I was realistic about myself. When asked to lead discussions I said "No, I stutter." Those who asked me stood back horrified, mumbling "don't run yourself down" or "we didn't even notice that you stutter" (like I wasn't supposed to know or admit that I stuttered.) My response was "I'm pretty smart and sometimes I'm pretty funny and I get along well with people. *But I still stutter.*" It was unheard of for a person who stuttered to admit he/she stuttered.

IS STUTTERING A CONTROL ISSUE?

The first hint that my blocking and holding back was a control issue happened when I was 13 years old and a speech therapist asked my mother if anyone in our family was controlling. No one talked about "control freaks" at that time and besides, it was considered a good trait when one person in the family bossed everyone else around. The word "organized" often came up, or even "managerial". But never the word "controlling." So my mother looked at my therapist silently, her gray eyes peering over her glasses and answered in her always-polite sweetness: "Well, no, Dear, I don't believe anyone in our family is controlling."

Later that evening I heard my mother tell my dad what happened at the clinic. When she got to: "I don't believe anyone in our family is controlling" my dad stopped her. "Didn't you hear what went on this morning before she went to school?" he asked. No, she hadn't heard it. So he proceeded to tell how I had taken a walk before school that Spring morning and then sat on the porch swing for a split second when he heard my sister, seeing how delighted I was, scream "Look! She's out there! Sitting in the swing! She shouldn't go outdoors before school."

It didn't occur to me to wonder why my sister had an opinion about what I did with my time. My life was about "live and let live" and I wasn't going to allow anyone to bug my happiness.

STUTTERING WAS LIKE A BURKA

I've heard many PWS state that stuttering didn't bother them excessively. You can leave my name off that list. Having to live with stuttering, for me, was like living my life under a burka. What are you going to do if you have to wear a burka everywhere you go? It will control and limit everything you do. How about a swim? Oh wait, I can't swim with my burka. Okay, how about a walk on the beach....Hey, great....oh wait, what's the point of walking on the beach under my burka? Okay, then why not ride a bike? Oh sure! I love to ride my bike....oh wait, no, my burka would obviously get tangled in the chain.

Everything, for me, was affected by stuttering. Remember that hilarious story? I *love* that story. Oh wait, I better hadn't tell that one. I'd get stuck on the punch line.

Your friends are talking about Elvis Presley and even though your parents lived across the street from Elvis and your mother walked his dog every day...no, no, better keep that under your hat. You would get stuck on the word Elvis for at least two minutes while everyone suddenly looked shoe-ward. And there's nothing you can easily substitute for the word "Elvis." You can't say "the guy with the blue suede shoes" or everyone would suddenly need to clear their throats or go to the bathroom...all together now....

Or how about this...how about when they needed a great idea at work last week and you thought up a real doozy, but you mumbled so softly no one heard your insightful profundity except the guy who sits next to you (in order to capitalize on your depth), then brazenly swaggers to the front of the group and describes your ideas as if they are his own. Oh wait! I forgot! He's no longer with us....he was promoted last month to upper management.

I knew a guy who secretly worshipped a girl for two years but couldn't get a single word out of his mouth after he said "h-h-h-h-hello"....and then...see that guy over there...yeah, *that's* the guy, the back-slapping dork with the slicked-back "doo"...well, just as my friend had worked up the nerve to ask the girl out after two years, Slick cut in on him and asked her out to "Phantom of the Opera" and when my friend found out about it, he promptly left work, tore home, jumped in bed, pulled the covers over his head and literally *grieved* for hours.

I had experienced limitations all my life. And if its okay with you, I'm going to assume that maybe one of the main reasons I was as unbearably tolerant as I was had to do with having to meet the challenges faced by all people who stutter as severely as I did.

RIDICULOUS TOLERANCE

Tolerance isn't always a desirable trait. An example of an over-abundance of tolerance was an event that neighbors remember (when I was around 28 years old). All four children were small. One evening a lady who had moved to our small town from East Germany decided to pay me a visit. We had eaten dinner and I had baked a huge pan of cinnamon rolls (the sinfully rich kind full of butter and cinnamon with brown sugar caramel frosting a half inch thick poured over the top) and I had it on top of the oven cooling for breakfast the next morning.

So this lady, by the name of Charlotte, sat down and began to talk about her life in the "old country" and how her husband died and even about a run-in she had with the school principal in that town that very day. The Principal had informed her that her daughter was extremely messy and slovenly in her homework and didn't turn it in, to which Charlotte replied (she told me): "I will have you know that Annie is *very* thorough. She washes her important places very thoroughly every day before she goes to school."

So I knew what I was dealing with quite early in the evening. Then she proceeded to tell me about her husband who was buried in the town cemetery. “I tell my shil-dren: ‘Shil-dren, I say, it is goot Helmut is dead. Now we know where he is.’” A few minutes later she added “You know, Roooooot, no flowers grow mit Helmut? No flowers. No! And I say... I say ‘Charlotte, maybe no flowers grow since Helmut is *bad* man, no?’” To drive home the connection she was making, she kept repeating “no grass grow...bad man...bad, bad man.”

So I had no illusions that I was speaking with a sane person, but there I sat as the hours ticked by: 8 o’clock, then 9, then midnight, then 2 a.m., then 4. When she first arrived and I offered her a cinnamon roll she refused. But soon she asked for a plate and scooted off 3 rolls on a dinner plate, asked for a fork and got to work. By 4 a.m. she had socked down the whole pan of cinnamon rolls, and I was still sitting there, watching what was going on, never even *suggesting* that maybe it would be better if she went home since I had to get the kids off to school in a few hours. It didn’t even occur to me that she was a control freak, using my energy, time and food.

Finally I said “let me drive you home” and she said “well, it’s almost morning. I could just stay and eat breakfast with your family.” But I went downstairs to the garage, backed the car out, and to my credit, I took her home.

One neighbor saw me driving at around 5 a.m. that morning with Charlotte by my side so as soon as the kids left for school my neighbors wanted to hear the story. When I told them, they did not laugh. They didn’t see the humor in it at *all*. They said things like “What is *wrong* with you, Girl?” or “Anyone in their right mind would get mad as a hornet at that lady.” Or “What in the hell happened to your brain?”

I learned from that experience and many others that it is okay to ask Harold Snodgrass to go home after 8 hours. That was one step in the right direction.

HOLDING BACK EMOTION

I knew people who stammered in Munich, all of them men, and without exception these were people who couldn’t get angry. One guy was a scientist married to a tiny little woman who carried a big stick. In spite of the fact that she spent her days at a beauty salon/spa and never, not once in her life, held a job, she spent her days “budgeting” their income. The most humiliating thing she did was to put her husband on an extremely limited allowance, like a small child, and required him to ask her whenever he needed to spend a few cents over his allowance. So we all shared our stories in our PWS meetings and it made for some great comedy.

One evening I was asked by the group why I thought I had never been angry in my life, and I told them I thought it was because I had put up with so many limitations, along with goofy therapies that it had served as an inoculation against anger. I was probably even a little proud of myself, thinking of myself as a “good sport” or other flattering names. One evening I said, “When I get mad, I’m not going to use the word ‘mad’. I will use the term ‘righteous indignation.’ Mad is bad, but righteous indignation is a beautiful term, reminding me of God on Mount Sinai, delivering an ultimatum to the people below.”

A few months before I got really angry, I had been to a family reunion and had blown up at the sister who reported on my “whereabouts” earlier. The blowup in this instance wasn’t really terrible, it was just shocking to me. I was 31 years old and had never been angry in my life. I just couldn’t get it. What was wrong with me? It never occurred to me to even question whether

or not I was justified in getting angry. In my mind, there was no excuse whatsoever for losing my cool.

After this, I returned home to Munich, and I also returned to the speech therapy I was involved with in Munich. This therapist may have succeeded at controlling her students but it seemed to me she had done so only at a stunning cost both to her own intelligence and personality. Frau Weber (pronounced Vay-burr) spoke broken English laced with guttural German and had some pretty weird ideas about how to stop stuttering.

I took this therapy with a German man by the name of Hans, another PWS who claimed he had never been angry in his life. When Frau Weber went to refill her water class, we would talk. We would laugh about what might be wrong with us that we couldn't get angry. He told me about several friends of his who stuttered who had never been angry either.

Anyway, when class resumed, there we both stood, breathing in, breathing out, listening patiently to the therapist tell us for the umpteenth time that stuttering was caused by shallow breathing and if she could simply get us to breathe deeply ("diaphragmatic breathing" was what it was referred to at that time), maybe we wouldn't stutter so much (even though she didn't believe in the word "cure.")

And then she monologued. She began her diatribes with statements like "Stuttering is very destructive.... *very bad, yah?*"

I knew what would happen if I agreed with her but Hans never seemed to catch on. Hans made the mistake of nodding his head.

At that point, the Frau turned to Hans. "Then Vhat? Vhat?????" (implying by this question that Hans wouldn't stutter if he didn't get some reward from stuttering. She had made it clear on numerous occasions that people who stutter do so in order to manipulate people or "work the public.")

Hans always looked as if he had just awakened from a bad nightmare. Hans, his hair standing straight up, quickly gathered his belongings, calmly remarked that he forgot to turn the stove off in his home...and left. This left me alone with Frau Weber.

And then the badgering began again. "You, Roooot, you had a bad shildhood?" I told her no, I did not. When she ridiculed American's tendency to potty train children early (a claim of hers unsubstantiated by fact), I was tempted to lie to her, tempted to tell her I wore diapers until I was 12 years old, but I kept breathing out, breathing in, breathing out, breathing in....

I had learned I could read aloud to myself for hours on end if I knew no one was in the room with me, so I wanted to ask a question as to why this was so. Especially since I used the same breathing mechanism in the same way both when I stuttered and when I didn't. So I stopped the breathing exercise for a moment and said calmly "I wonder if I could ask you a question?"

"We are in the middle of learning something new" Frau Weber said.

"This isn't exactly new for me" I answered.

"This is teaching moment. We have time later for talking moment," she assured me. (She always answered questions, telegram style).

"Uh, maybe we could have an *understanding* moment now and then" I said, my voice still calm.

"You need to work on breathing," the Frau answered.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because breathing incorrectly is cause of stuttering."

“I know that’s what you *believe*,” I answered.

“I don’t *believe* this. I *know* it.”

“So you are telling me that when I am speaking I am supposed to constantly interrupt what I’m saying with the thought ‘Now, take a deep breath’?”

“Deep breath mit *diaphragm*,” she corrected.

“Okay, Okay, but when I think about breathing, I stutter more,” I explained simply.

“You should not be in class if you don’t believe in techniques we offer, Miss Roooot.”

Suddenly I didn’t care. I didn’t care about being nice. I was tired of listening to her, tired of her rudeness, tired of stuff she was handing out that in no way matched my own observations or experiences.

I was still breathing in, breathing out, when BOOM. I couldn’t hold it in anymore. My voice was shaky now....“Soooooooooooo....well, all I can say is it must be pretty nice to know for sure what the cause and cure of stuttering is.” I try to get the shakes out of my voice.

“Experts know for 10 years now, Root” Frau Weber assured me.

That did it. My voice was still shaking like crazy, but I didn’t care: “Do you know what you educators do?” I screech. “You teach people like me to distrust our own impulses, reject our own observations. You order me not to ask questions or won’t answer them if I ask. Well, I’m *mad as hell* and I’m not taking it anymore.”

(I could see my face in those little 12” square mirror tiles with nasty little gold flecks in them across the room and it wasn’t a pretty sight.) In the mirror, I saw a 30-something woman with wild auburn hair and a bright red face. I would never have known as I listened to the furious woman in the mirror that she had ever stuttered in her life.

Frau Weber’s watery blue eyes were huge behind her turquoise-rimmed glasses. She had been looking at a calendar all the time I was screaming, and then she said something to the effect: “You were born to be a great force in the world,” and I was pretty sure she had read that sentiment off the inspirational calendar she had been ogling.

“But that force is not *controllable*,” I yelled. “I’m *tired* of not saying what I see! The more I think about how to speak or how to breathe, the more conflicted I am and the worse I stutter. It’s *thought* that messes me up...”

“It would be best for you to leave. Leave and don’t come back. Gertrude will have your bill ready.”

THE RELIEF OF EXPRESSION

When I paid my bill and walked out into the balmy evening on Karlsplatz, I felt free....free and happy and energetic. It was like another self had taken over at the point I hit rock bottom...and even more, it was as if I *loved* the intensity and flow of this self over which I obviously had no control. When I hear people talk about how the spirit breathes them, I now understand what they mean. All I know is that I didn’t first “think” and then “speak.” This inner flow simply “spoke me” without asking my permission.

When I saw behavior and emotions for what they were (a barometer of what was happening inside), it helped immensely. Emotion was not a “thing” I could decide to feel or not feel but merely reflected what was going on inside myself.

It is worth noting that I stopped stuttering temporarily for a few weeks after this blow-up. But once again, “temporarily” is the word to remember here.

THE POWER OF OBSERVATION

John Harrison wrote a great deal about authentic observation: Observing our own beliefs, values and attitudes turned out to be what I did to extricate myself from negative influences, such as wrong beliefs, perceptions, etc.

Observation allows us to see what is going on...how we keep creating the beliefs that trap us and cause us to hold back. It is clear to me that what happened between the time I blocked and held back and now (when the impulse to hold back is gone) was that my hexagon changed from negative to positive. During the years I held back, this is a picture of what was going on.

- 1) I saw speech as painstakingly manufactured by conscious will/intention. (Perception)
- 2) My conditioned mind was convinced that conscious knowing (instruction, skill, talent, effort) was required to speak well. My inherited conditioned belief system placed great value on “perfect product” rather than originality and spontaneity. (Belief)
- 3) This conditioning was a pervasive barrier to flow. The harder I tried to speak well, the more I held back and blocked. (Behavior)
- 4) The more I blocked and held back, the “worse” I felt. (Emotion)
- 5) My perceptions, beliefs, behavior and emotions affected my body. My heart pounded and stress mounted. (Physiological response.)
- 6) I woke up each day with new resolve to speak fluently but failure destroyed this resolve. (Intention)

MY POST-STUTTERING HEXAGON

- 1) I see that speech is a gift, a flowing river that does not depend on conscious control. Speech is part of my spontaneous nature not created by my conscious mind. (Perception)
- 2) My perception of how speech happens changes my beliefs. I don’t have to manufacture speech anymore, so speech is easy. I no longer believe I have to think before speaking. When my conscious mind attempts to interfere, I recognize this as resistance to flow. (Belief)
- 3) I speak freely when I go with the flow. I am centered on saying what I mean and meaning what I say and I watch your face to see if you understand me. (Behavior)
- 4) Free and easy speech affects my emotions. I don’t have to try anymore. Effort and turmoil is gone. I feel peaceful. I calm down. I feel free to respond to what you say and notice your response to me. (Emotion)
- 5) My muscles relax. I notice the warm glow I feel when letting go of conscious control. I notice there is no stress, effort, trying, pressure. No more pounding heart; no more desire to run away. (Physiological responses)
- 6) I can now carry out my intentions. This is the meaning success for me. As I give up control of my speech, I attain a single-minded state of high clear-sighted functioning and satisfaction. I have a clear resolve to say what I mean and mean what I say and am able to do so without holding back. (Intention)

LOOKING AT THE BIG PICTURE

Paying attention to all six elements involved in the Hexagon was helpful to me. At first I had been stuck on “behavior” alone. Although the successes I was able to achieve under

certain circumstances (when I was around supportive people, for example) affected certain components of the Hexagon, especially “emotion”, those improvements also turned out to be temporary for me.

Many times, after meeting with supportive people, I would temporarily improve but I realized I needed to move on. What I was doing was addressing other parts of the hexagon, particularly *perceptions* and *beliefs*. Only then did I realize permanent gains.

An element of the Hexagon that had an effect on my holding back was beliefs...in my case, wrong and distorted beliefs. When I was holding back and blocking to an incredible degree I was operating under dinosaur beliefs. My inherited mental conditioning tended to believe in (value) “perfection” or “perfect product” rather than originality, meaning and spontaneity. This conditioning served, without question, to hold back natural and spontaneous flow.

I also believed that conscious knowing (instruction, skill, talent, effort) was required to speak well (denying that speech is the natural way I express my spontaneous intelligence.) The day I was able to shine the light on one particularly bothersome obscure hidden belief and expose it to the light of day was a great day for me.

I was writing about a “literal block in my throat around which I need to blow air in order to make a sound.” As soon as those words hit the page, I read the words and BOOM....there it was! Right there in black and white! *This* was apparently what I believed! It was incredible! I didn’t attempt to sugar-coat the words I had written on the page. I didn’t judge the words or explain the words away. I simply became aware for the first time that this distorted twisted little belief, along with many more just like it, had hunkered down in some dark corner of my mind, making trouble for me every day until the day I noticed it. I grabbed it by the nap of the neck and jerked it out of hiding.

The moment I became aware of this ridiculous belief...poof, it went away. I didn’t have to try to change that belief. I didn’t have to talk about it. All I had to do was turn the light on that particular silly belief and it went away, never to appear again. As soon as the belief went away, so did my fear. I did this with one belief after another. Over and over I found that ridiculous unobserved beliefs were inextricably linked to emotion and when the belief went away, so did my fear.

IMAGINARY BELIEFS

It all reminded me of what happened when the children were small and believed there was a “boogiemán” hiding in the corner of the dark room at night. As soon as I switched on the light, poof, fear was gone (until their imaginations were able to create another boogiemán....and another, and another). But for the moment, turning on the light was all it took to evaporate the belief...and the fear.

When I discovered this particular wrong belief I had created out of thin air (the belief that I had a literal lump in my throat), I began to take personal responsibility for creating blocks. I saw that blocks didn’t just happen to me. My imagination (part of Little Me) had been busy creating one boogiemán after another most of my life. I opened my eyes and kept them open, hunting down these distortions and bringing them into the light of my awareness....and I got pretty good at spotting these images and confronting them. My ability to see (perceive) what was going on took the scary out of life.

YOU HAVE EYES TO SEE

I also dealt with what Harrison refers to as “perception.” I couldn’t rid myself of superficial values, harsh judgments and wrong beliefs without perception. Sometimes I call this activity “observation” or noticing or looking. The day came that my unrealistic view of speech began to unravel. As I mentioned in Chapter I, that memorable day I asked an elderly gentleman if his speaking engagements wore him out. He answered “No. Traveling wears me out a bit, but speaking doesn’t wear me out.”

So I asked “You mean you don’t have to think of every word you say, like how to form words in your mouth, how to slow down when you talk, how to take a deep breath before a long sentence?”

The kind man looked puzzled and finally asked if I was serious. When I assured him I was, he asked politely: “Why do you ask? Is this what you do when you speak?” When I nodded “yes”, his eyes widened, his mouth fell open and he shook his head unbelievably. “I can’t imagine how weary I would be if I had to do that” he said. “I guess I would never bother to say a word.”

Why hadn’t it occurred to me to ask anyone this question before? I clearly had simply believed that speech was as hard for others as it was for me; and my friend’s answer to my question left me in shock. Here was a person (who saw speech as easy, spontaneous and automatic) sitting across the table from me (a person who saw speech as difficult, conscious and controlled). This man’s view of speech was behind his fluency, just as my view of speech resulted in behavior (over-thinking, over-monitoring, and over-controlling my speech.)

So my view of speech began to evolve, along with my beliefs. I created powerful metaphors that helped change my view of speech. But there could have been no permanent change in my speech if either perceptions or beliefs had remained unobserved and, therefore, unchanged. Paying attention to all elements of the Hexagon eliminated blocking and holding back in this one area of my life (speech). I am now using this same Hexagon to rid myself of writing blocks,

We who stutter are “blocked creatives” and I believe John Harrison has created in his Hexagon the framework to set us free of blocks in whatever area we hold back.

CHAPTER 13 – TWO OF SEVEN SPEECH IS A RIVER (CREATE A POWERFUL METAPHOR)

**(I begin to trust my natural ability
to speak without conscious aid)**

Leonardo daVinci wrote: “All our knowledge has its origins in our perceptions.”

William D. Parry (*Understanding and Controlling Stuttering*) suggests that blocking is often rooted in the perception that speaking is difficult or that a particular word or sound will be hard to say. Parry continues: “There is probably no stutterer in the world who doesn’t have such a negative anticipation.”

My fear of speaking was rooted not only in the way I looked at speech but also in the fact that I found it to be absolutely impossible to consciously produce speech (even though I had been taught that this was the only way to speak.) I felt helpless and afraid when I was trying to achieve such an impossibility. No one told me that speech is like a river. No one hinted that speech is spontaneous and natural. No one suggested that the conscious mind absolutely can not produce fluent speech because of the nature of my slow unwieldy conscious mind.

NEW VISION AND NEW BELIEFS

So trying to do the impossible over and over and over again, and of course failing every time, took its toll. It was a new vision of speech (“speech is like a river”) that changed my life. Every single time my mind started sending me alternatives to stuttering or “trying to help me speak well” my new way of looking at speech as a flowing river, totally outside the jurisdiction and control of my conscious mind, took over. Without that new vision, I would have been lost. Along with that vision came new beliefs: “The river flows all by itself” or “Don’t push the river” or “Go with the Flow.” So a new vision and new beliefs changed my speaking.

TAKE THE SCARY OUT OF THE NEXT WORD

Most of my fear of stuttering was the feeling that I didn’t know where my next word was coming from. There was always the question: do I have to think about how to form my mouth and how to breathe? If I do, my mind is just flat not able to multi-task to that extent.

When I was small my beliefs were shaped by limitations. I learned there *are* certain limitations to the physical world. When I grew up, I still had to recognize limitations, especially those formed by actual *impossibilities*.

What was behind my fear was the fact that I can't do the impossible and one impossibility was having to manufacture language. I needed to understand the physical world so I knew my limitations (time runs forward, not backward. You grow older, not younger). I may *want* time to move backwards but that is inconsistent with the nature of nature and therefore impossible. So I learned that my wants and beliefs have nothing to do with actual reality...they are simply reactions to reality.

Here is something I hope will be heartening to you because it is so solid, so *true*. This is the law I learned:

When I finally got it that my conscious knowledgeable, learned, educated, left-brained Intellect can't help me speak fluently, at that exact moment a monumental breakthrough occurs. I don't need to beg for a breakthrough and I don't have to plead because the huge, powerful, full-of-light, wise and gentle Big Me automatically kicks in the very moment I give up on the Old Brain (Little Me).

As soon as I actually "got it" that speech could not be forced or manufactured or "willed," that insight affected the behavior I call "stuttering." It wasn't overnight, but in the space of 3 months this truth actually "felt on the pulse" worked its magic and changed my stuttering in an astonishing way.

How did I arrive at an accurate view of speech? I had to move out of my mind, move out of that closed space. Since my mind can come up with nothing new and since I needed to conceive of speech in a more realistic way, it was my deeper self that came up with a new analogy or metaphor (based on my own observations) and this blasted through all my old rigid beliefs about stuttering in a hurry.

Metaphor is able to slip right past the censoring intellect because the intellect doesn't "get" metaphor. The way you get past the head trip (the censor) is through non-intellectual, non-rational expression. Symbolic language slips right by the so-called "rational mind."

THE METAPHOR

My view of speech eventually became compressed in one tiny seed, a clear image to represent what really happened when I spoke. This seed is a metaphor. The metaphor went like this:

My nature, as well as natural spontaneous speech, is *like a river*. My conscious mind (intention, will) is *like a dam* built across the river. My mind/imagination constructs the dam. The dam is the only thing powerful enough to hold back the river and that's what it does. So even though the river flows in the path of least resistance, the conscious mind can construct a dam (resistance to the flow.) You can use words like mind or will or imagination or conscious intention or thought interchangeably.

My mind/imagination (Little Me) is able to build resistance to flow...able to build a dam. The fact that the dam is built by imagination does not mean it can't block flow. Imagination can and does block flow. (Remember the block I created around which I believed I had to blow air?) This imaginary dam absolutely *did* block flow and it did it very well. I didn't want to believe that blocks are created by my imagination because I had spent so much time and money trying to eliminate blocks that it was grossly humiliating for my academic mind to realize that

the lion's share of mentality (theories, beliefs, thoughts) have another label. That label is *Imagination*.

When this metaphor kicked in for me, the world was my oyster. When I truly "got it," when I truly got an accurate picture of how speech happens automatically and unconsciously, my obsessing about speech stopped. I stopped over-monitoring every word I said and every breath I took. I stopped thinking about stuttering.

When I found out it was my subliminal intelligence that did all the "work" of speaking automatically, without taking conscious thought, I could finally trust it to speak (without interference>) Once I got the big picture, my speech changed.

Another likeness I found between John Harrison's cure and my own was the fact that we had both used a speed-reading course somewhere during the time stuttering stopped. I wonder if speed-reading gave me a whole new perception of speech. Focusing solely on getting through each word as a separate entity was wrong for me. The speed-reader I bought for the children flipped through a long flow of words which I had to grasp in one quick moment, rather than one-word-at-a-time (my old way of talking). This new way of seeing words as a flowing thing rather than isolated words may have helped me to see words as a flowing river, a more realistic way of seeing.

CONFIRMATION

I want to repeat this from Chapter 1 because Barbara Dahm's summary of how speech happens was so basic in confirming my own observations. Here are her 4 points about how speech happens again:

- 1) Attending to the nonverbal idea the person is expressing, the brain automatically transforms ideas into language.
- 2) The brain simultaneously sends a signal to the speech motor system so that a natural voice that contains intonation is produced
- 3) The mouth simultaneously moves subconsciously and automatically. This all happens at the same level that produces breathing and heartbeat.
- 4) In normal speech production there is no conscious word awareness, no control over motor activity and no such thing as trying to "get words out."

This information not only confirmed my new way of looking at speech, it literally rocked my world. I was onto something! The event in which I asked a person whether he thought of every word he spoke or not, came back to me.

Have you ever noticed when you're trying your hardest to control your stuttering, all you can think of is stuttering? What if you could go about your days focusing on things other than your speech? *Wouldn't that constitute a major breakthrough?* Here's the thing: when you allow your body to go about its normal task of spontaneous and automatic speaking, it becomes easy to achieve and maintain easy-breezy spontaneous speech. This happens naturally without willpower, thought or effort. So in many ways, stuttering was a visible manifestation of what was happening on an invisible level. My body's intention was "expression of my spontaneous self" and my mind's intentions were something entirely different.

ONE'S VIEW OF SPEECH TRUMPS ONE'S VIEW OF SELF

I watch a child who is conscious that she stutters. She is approximately 7 years old. Think of this: a little girl overwhelmed by speaking. It's obviously too much for her. It's too hard. Somewhere this child got the idea that every time she opens her mouth to even say "hello" she has to struggle. This child, young as she is, already seems to have a distorted belief as to how speech happens. She obviously, from her behavior, believes she has to form each word in her mouth consciously, breathe deeply enough and at the right time, knowing ahead of time what she is going to say and how she is going to say it.

When I viewed speech as something I had to produce by my own work and effort (while at the same time realizing that speech is too difficult for my conscious mind to handle) it made me feel inadequate and afraid. When I viewed speech realistically: *"speaking is very definitely too difficult for my conscious mind to handle so I let my unconscious do the work" then my fears about my own abilities went out the window.*

STUTTERING IS NOT ABOUT ME

I would still stutter today if I hadn't dealt with my concept of speech. Whenever I talked about beliefs in the early days listeners would always say "When you talk about beliefs, I suppose you are talking about 'believing in yourself'" and I'd go "No. I'm referring to believing the truth about speech and doing away with gross distortions as to how speech happens."

When I mention beliefs I'm not talking about the little engine that could if it only thought it could. I'm talking about *beliefs about how natural speech happens*: whether or not we believe that we need to direct speech with our conscious thought, whether or not we believe we have to consciously know what to say and how to say it before we speak, whether or not we believe stuttering is caused by literal physical blocks, or whether or not we believe we have to huff and puff in order to "spit words out."

It's very important to tell you that the beliefs that supported my cure were not beliefs about myself. Imagine that you are learning to garden for the first time. You need to believe certain things about gardening....not about yourself....before you will be successful. You do not need to believe "I am a great gardener. I am a great person. I believe in myself. I can do it."

You need to know facts: how to plow the garden, how deep to plant the seeds, how to water the garden and how often, how to fertilize your garden and why you need to fertilize it. You need to know that you must plant the seeds before you can expect the garden to grow. But you do not need to have self-esteem. Gardening may give you a certain kind of self-esteem, but your beliefs need to center on gardening, not on you.

The same thing is true when it comes to the beliefs that support your cure. You do not need to believe in yourself or repeat slogans like "I think I can and I can do most anything if I only think I can." When I didn't block anymore it had very little to do with changing what I thought about myself.

One day in the middle of writing, I wrote this: "I did a fantastic job in creating this horrendous stutter. By believing that I had to think about how to say each word, that I had to plan every word, breathe properly, etc., etc., I was able to create one whiz-dinger of a stammer. Now as I see through these ridiculous beliefs, stuttering goes away on its own. By patiently dealing with how I am looking at speech, being true to my own observations (and refusing to

listen to opinions that don't make sense), I have almost completely stopped focusing on speech."

THREE WAYS OF LOOKING AT SPEECH

My journey to the "zone" came to a place in the road that could go any of 3 ways. There are actually only three major ways of looking at speech that applies to stuttering.:

- 1) Speech is a flowing river. My mind is like the construct built across the river which is able to hold back the flow. So I have to deal with the dam, not the river.
- 2) Speech is difficult and requires thought and effort.
- 3) Speech is a performance.

ONE (1) SPEECH IS LIKE A RIVER

The author of the book "Reading in the Brain", says this: "Something is going on inside your skull right now that is translating irregular shapes into meaningful letters, words and sentences....a sophisticated set of mechanisms admirably attuned to the task."

This offers a new perspective on how speech happens by proposing what the author of "Reading in the Brain" (Stanislas Dehaene) calls the "neuronal recycling hypothesis": and suggests that early scribes invented letter systems that fitted the organization of our brains: words, he argues, evolved to fit the cortex rather than the other way around as we have believed for a very long time. He describes "the mechanics of a ubiquitous human activity, *not produced by conscious thought.*"

I began to rest in the truth that I didn't have to *consciously* think up words, think up how to form my mouth or when to take a deep breath. Speech happened too quickly for every word I spoke to go through the maze of the conscious mind. My mantra became: "*There is an activity alive in me that automates speech without consulting my conscious mind. I don't ever need to think about speaking again! Something has taken speech out of my hands.*"

THE UNTOUCHABLE

Maybe we all intuit that there is a powerful intelligence inside of us (behind the door of the unconscious mind) that *will* express itself freely if we don't interfere. Steven Pressfield wrote:

"The part we create from can't be touched by anything our parents did or society did. That part is unsullied, incorruptible, soundproof, waterproof and bulletproof. In fact, the more trouble we've got, the better and richer that part becomes."

The more psychic energy we expend "trying" to express ourselves, or "working" at expressing ourselves, or dredging and re-dredging the tired boring injustice of our personal lives, the less juice we have left.

When I actually "got" the truth as to how speech happens, the change in my attitude was dramatic, changing from judgmental, should-oriented, critical and carping, to a full blown friend and helper (simply a carrier of speech...allowing speech to flow on its own.)

When I was acting from the voice of technique, knowledge and training, I believed it had to bring order and harmony into my speech. But when I looked at the actual facts, the facts said "working on techniques is not enough. The harder you try to acquire the right techniques, the worse you stutter." On the other hand, the spontaneous automatic part of my brain says: "I

will do your speaking. You can depend on me. This means I won't need your willpower, your suggestions, your worry, your effort to speak well."

I trusted that when I gave up on conscious effort the natural and automatic would kick in. After all, it is a law:

The minute you give up on conscious effort, your natural flowing speech will kick in. But you can't quit trying by trying to quit trying. The only way you can quit trying is to really "get it" that speech is natural and happens on its own.

Thought and spontaneity are at two opposite ends of the spectrum. When you stop thinking what to say and how to say it, at that same moment your natural inborn spontaneity will kick in. You can't quit trying to speak by trying to quit trying. *The only way you can quit trying is to really "get it" that speech is natural and happens on its own.*

YEAH, BUT HOW ABOUT CORRECTING SPEECH?

One of the major false beliefs that contributed to stuttering was my belief that even though speech might happen spontaneously and automatically, correction or improvement of what I said *has to be* the work of the conscious mind.

It was John Harrison who confirmed my own discovery that correction, as well as speech, happens automatically. Here is what he wrote:

"One evening some years ago I was listening to a new talk show host on KCBS radio in San Francisco. The host was discussing advancement opportunities for women when he made a Freudian slip that he caught and corrected in the shortest instance I'd ever experienced. The host made an embarrassing faux pas. He had called women girls. But what was startling was how fast he corrected himself. He said the word girls, his ear processed the sound, his mind processed the word, caught the slip, searched the stored memory for the appropriate word, delivered the word to the voice mechanism which spoke the corrected word *all without missing a beat*. There was literally no perceived time between the slip and the correction. His original statement and his correction were spoken as a run-on sentence with no discernible pause. He was racing along at maybe 130 words a minute, so each step in the process I just described had to have been measured in milliseconds."

All of this goes on spontaneously and automatically without getting stuck on over-monitoring what I am doing. Speaking is so natural, fast and automatic, that we can depend on this flow happening without interference. John Harrison continues:

"Just listen to any play-by-play sportscaster. Or listen to a simultaneous translator at work. There can be no deliberate control because there is no time to operate consciously. Of course children do struggle when they're first learning to speak, but they're not doing it in a self-conscious way. They're doing it with the intuitive mindset."

There is an order to speech you may not be aware of. The subliminal mind looks, beholds, and has an excellent grasp of the obvious. ...even before our conscious minds have any idea of what is going on. The subliminal mind is also able to take our perceptions and translate them into a likeness of the reality they represent, a symbol or image. All of this happens outside the control of my conscious mind. . Sometimes the conscious mind breaks into the flow and edits, corrects, fixes and repairs what we say before the words are even out of our mouths.

I became less conscious of what to say and how to say it...and more spontaneous. Instead of working on breathing or stuttering I worked a different angle, acting easily and natural-

ly on my unplanned, un-thought Inner Spontaneity that always used my body to speak naturally (and thumbed its nose at my interfering mind.).

TWO (2) SPEECH REQUIRES THOUGHT & EFFORT

The old way of looking at speech is “speech requires thought and effort.” One speech therapist actually told me “Don’t ever underestimate how difficult speech is. You need to try to speak well, you need to plan your words, you need to take a deep breath before you speak, etc.” Another professor said “There is no cure for stuttering. There are only therapies that require hard work to take back control of speech.”

One therapist often began class with what amounted to a course in speech physiology. This therapist wanted the class to understand that speech is hard and complex and he believed we didn’t have a sufficient appreciation for the complexity of speech. He explained that he didn’t want us to ever, ever, ever believe that all we had to do was open our mouths and words would fall out because everything has to be lined up.

“Speech doesn’t just *happen*” he warned soberly “It involves the complexity of airflow, movement, timing, sound and tensing.” And yet, from the fellow students I knew and spoke with, this man’s misunderstanding of how speech happens was behind his ability to make everyone in the class stutter worse when we left his class than when we entered.

The belief that “speech requires thought and effort” is part of the old world, the old brain. This belief requires resistance: the conscious mind pushing, pulling, forcing, trying, practicing and planning.

THREE (3) SPEECH VIEWED AS A PERFORMANCE

When I view my conscious mind in charge of speech, I view speech as a performance. This view is a result of the conscious mind/intellect being in control of speech and the huge 95% creative part of our brain being the servant of our tiny bossy conscious mind. I viewed the conscious mind like a tiny woman with a pinched face clomping around in stilettos bossing the huge spontaneous creative core we call Big Me.

We know that speech has its source in the Unconscious, so the person who views the Unconscious as a performer who obeys the orders of the conscious mind, needs to ask himself a few questions.

It is no news that many people view speaking as a performance. Malcolm Gladwell suggests that people panic when they lose touch with their instincts and think too much about behavior.

When I take the belief “speech is a performance” away I also take much of the pressure away.

I was surprised and somewhat horrified to find that many people really believe that the unconscious is meant to perform for the conscious mind. Not only that, but they also believe the conscious mind is meant to be the trainer and boss of this vast unconscious. This means that they false believed that the intellect (the Censor and Critic) is in charge of our big Creative Intelligence.

Jean Liedloff compares the relationship of the two brains (unconscious and conscious) to the relationship between a lion (the unconscious intelligence) and the tamer (which is compared to conscious intellect.) She writes: “*A block is what we call the frustrating time when the*

conscious mind, or will, does not succeed in getting the unconscious mind, the creative part to produce the work.”

This analogy proved to me only that stuttering blocks are like other blocks: blocks are caused by the frustration when the conscious mind (which Liedloff compares to the tamer) can't control the unconscious and therefore does not succeed in getting the lion to do what the tamer wants.

So rather than Liedloff questioning her own assumption as to whether Little Me (conscious mind, tamer) should be trying to control Big Me (the unconscious, the lion) she says this:

“Think of the conscious mind as the lion tamer and the creative department of the unconscious mind, the lion. The desired product is the circus act: the lion jumping through hoops or sitting on command. The mind of the lion is very different from that of the tamer, so it is the task of the tamer to learn how the lion's mind works, at least enough to get it to obey and perform its tricks.”

Why does this writer assume that Little Me is in command of Big Me? Because she assumes the relationship between Big Me and Little Me is all about performance, which is referred to as “the circus act: the lion jumping through hoops or sitting on command.”

What shocked me about this misunderstanding of the relationship between Big Me and Little Me was that it was *assumed* that the product of this relationship was always “performance, a “circus act” if you will, “the lion jumping through hoops or sitting on command.”

My reaction to this was “No wonder I was always feeling coerced by Miss Tizdale and all those other ‘fixer-uppers’ who believed speech was about performance and coercion, getting me to jump when they said jump (and the only question I was allowed to ask was “how high?”) Liedloff says: “The desired product is the circus act: the lion jumping through hoops or sitting on command.”

To make this problem even more clear we could reword the implications of this belief in control to say: “The belief that the conscious mind is in the driver's seat commanding the vast quick intelligence of the unconscious is at the root of blocking.” Why? Because Little Me is seen as the superior mind and Big Me (our huge perceptive by-far-superior intelligence which is the source of natural speech) is viewed as “something to be tamed, controlled and monitored.” Nothing could be further from the truth.

I saw clearly that I blocked when my conscious mind attempted to get the “Unconscious mind, the creative part,” to speak on command of the conscious mind.

So I was already ten miles down the road, going “so the answer to the problem is ‘if my conscious mind can't command my unconscious source of speech (because my conscious mind simply has no power over my unconscious)’ *then* it make incredibly good sense to stop commanding Big Me to live up to the expectations of Little Me. Little Me has no *right* to demand a certain performance from Big Me.”

So one reason therapies hadn't worked from the beginning may have been because my teachers perceived speech as a performance (to which I reacted with huge performance anxiety). *The academic tendency to believe the conscious mind is superior to and able to control the unconscious intelligence, is clearly at the heart of the stuttering dilemma.*

To believe that the inferior conscious mind can command speech (speech being the natural activity of the unconscious) is outrageous and upside-down, lacking in understanding of

the simple fact that the creative unconscious absolutely will not be commanded by the conscious mind.

I have not known it to fail: When a person who stutters sees that his conscious mind has no right to interfere with his speech, he begins to balk at the commands of the conscious mind (Big Me balks at bossy, controlling Little Me). We know intuitively that we can speak without someone from the “outside” (the conscious mind) controlling what we say and how we say it.

This realization was no doubt behind the anger I was finally able to express. My anger was aimed at controlling people “out here” in my environment who simply mirrored my own inner Control Freak trying to take over natural speech. Pretty soon I was able to stop reacting to the mirrors in my life and see what the control issue was all about.

CHAPTER 14 – THREE OF SEVEN

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR CREATING BLOCKS

EXPOSING BLOCKS AS IMAGINARY

Stuttering Jack writes “The belief system plays a major part in the degree of stuttering a person will exhibit at any one time. In that regard it can be argued that where a person is fluent in one situation and not fluent in the next it is as a result of the actions of the belief system.”

Wrong beliefs about speech work at cross-purposes with flow. If one’s beliefs work at cross-purposes with reality the result will be either stasis or conflict and the spontaneous self will be repressed or stunted. The spontaneous self functions with rules and logic of its own and wrong beliefs can easily interfere with nature.

Every system has bugs....and bugs cause a system to break down. If you keep on pushing and prodding through those bugs you will end up frustrated, angry and totally at wits end. It was my imagination that created these bugs and I knew I needed to find a debugger. What could I do with all these self-created ridiculous beliefs that were so well-hidden I couldn’t find them? I believed speech was hard. I believed I had a literal block in my throat. I believed that I had to think about every word I said. My nit-witted wrong beliefs and imaginations could fill a book.

My fears were definitely rooted in the “copelessness” I felt when faced with the impossible task of producing speech with my conscious mind. The struggle was actually inside my own head between what I was observing and what I falsely believed.

We all now know that a strong belief in the ability of the conscious mind to take charge of speaking leads to frustration because of the sheer impossibility of it. People who stutter often intuit this before they become aware that consciously planning every word is like trying to plan and control every breath we take. A great conflict goes on between what we intuit and what we are taught....and during the years I stuttered what I was taught won out over intuition every time.

Trusting the spontaneous flowing nature of my brain was not easy. I was taught from earliest days that the spontaneous automatic brain is not to be trusted and that if I gave up consciously controlling every word and action, I would be in trouble. I had been taught in numerous ways to trust the process of rational thinking and ignore my own intuitive spontaneous perceptive brain. Albert Einstein wrote: “I never came upon any of my discoveries through

the process of rational thinking.”

It was only after “getting it” that speech is a flowing thing my conscious mind could not control that flow returned to my speech.

ONE BELIEF: STUTTERING IS A HABIT

One of the speech experts I consulted believed strongly in this: “Stuttering is a habit.” This was a very popular concept at one time. Many people still believe this. This professor believed I found it difficult to create a change in the behavior of stuttering because it was a habit. She believed, in fact, that I had created a network of strong neuro-associations within my nervous system. She would say: “You unconsciously developed these neuro-associations by allowing yourself to indulge in stuttering. Each time you stutter, you strengthen the network of strong neuro-associations within your nervous system.”

Then she repeated what she considered to be good news: “If you stop indulging in stuttering, if you interrupt the stutter pattern of using these old neural pathways for a while, the neural connection will weaken and atrophy and your stuttering will disappear.”

That theory didn’t rest easily in my brain. I kept looking at it from all directions, I kept poking at it, I even got so bold as to ask it questions. One of the questions I asked was: “If it is true that stuttering is a habit, then why can I go into the next room where no one can hear me, open a book, and read aloud without a single solitary stutter, even if I read aloud for 10 hours?”

START LOOKING, STOP IMAGINING

Even though our metaphor tells us that speech is like a river and my mind is like a dam, built across the river, it wasn’t until I realized that my mind is actually my *imagination* that I was able to get a handle on the fact that I create my own blocks.

Even though the river flows in the path of least resistance, the mind/imagination can build a dam across that flowing river and block the flow. My mind/imagination constructs that dam. The dam is the only thing powerful enough to hold back the river. But that’s what it does.

I can use words like mind or will or imagination or conscious intention or thought interchangeably. This system is able to build resistance to flow (the dam). The fact that the dam is built by imagination does not mean it can’t block flow. Imagination can and does block flow...literally.

Remember the block I created around which I believed I had to blow air? This imaginary block absolutely did block flow and it did it very well. The reason we don’t want to believe that blocks are created by the imagination isn’t hard to figure out. I spent so much time and money trying to eliminate blocks (so it was grossly humiliating for my academic mind to realize that I was creating my own blocks with my own imagination.)

The other PWS I suffered with basically intuited what I intuited: if we could speak well when we were alone or when we talked to animals or babies or spoke in unison or sang, that meant that we did not need to practice speech, plan our words or control our speech in order to speak fluently. We clearly weren’t born into the world stuttering, so when we disappear stammering, we actually return to childhood before the conscious mind was developed and took speech over.

Eventually I created what I called a “benchmark” by which I felt I could ascertain whether blocks were real or imagined. The fact that came to be my benchmark was “I do not stutter when I read aloud (when I am aware no one can hear me read)”. This benchmark brought a

great deal of stability into my life.

I often wish this would have happened earlier, during the years my parents were told that stuttering was due to brain damage and were horrified at the prospects. People who make up stories like this do not realize the debilitating effect such theories have on parents as well as children. Anyway as each so-called “scientific discovery” came and went my parents worried less. But I often wish I had been able to say to them, in their lifetime: “Of course that’s a silly theory. I can read for hours without a single stammer, so how could I have brain damage?” This would have been comforting to people who cared about me.

My worst fear during my stuttering years was reading aloud in class but I could read aloud for hours on end when I was alone and knew I was alone without stuttering even one time. Not once. But when I mentioned this to therapists, I drew a blank. They were either unwilling or unable to see the logic: if I speak fluently at certain times then this could be the benchmark by which I could assess what I was finding about stuttering.

THE IMPLICATIONS ARE CLEAR

If I can speak without blocks or hesitation when I am alone, this has serious implications for the treatment of stuttering. It means that control (thinking of breathing, thinking of words and how to form those words, thinking, thinking, thinking) is not the right path. It means that the blocks are created by myself...that I, myself, am creating those blocks. When I looked at one block after the other, I came to the conclusion that my imagination was the guilty party here...starting with the belief that I had a “lump” in my throat around which I had to blow air in order for a sound to come out. It seems to me only my imagination could have created such an illusion.

No doubt about it, observing what happened when I read aloud to myself when I was alone and knew I was alone, totally changed my attitude toward stuttering and proved to my own satisfaction that stuttering is not a physical handicap. Not brain damage. Not a lack of effort. I read aloud to myself every day. I found some other astounding things: I did not stutter at all under these circumstances:

- Reading aloud to myself when I am alone
- Reading or talking in unison with others
- Whispering
- Singing
- Talking to an animal
- Talking to a very small child.
- Talking when I can’t hear myself

FINDING THE TROUBLEMAKER

Prove to yourself that stuttering is not a physical handicap. One main way to achieve this knowledge is to stop thinking about stammering and replace thinking with observing reality (what is actually going on.)

You must become an astute observer.

Observing replaced Thinking. My own observations caused me to let go of answers to stuttering that didn’t cure me and couldn’t cure me. My observations helped me reach the

bottom of the barrel, the place every person who stutters needs to reach before he is ready to really look, observe, notice without agenda.

My own observations led me to the truth that my conscious mind is incapable of being in charge of speech.

I intuited that the pre-frontal cortex, the part of the brain where conscious control is housed, is not in charge of speaking. These intuitions led me to recognize the troublemaker in my speech: my conscious mind.

So stop and think about that for a while. If stuttering was a physical handicap or a genetic disorder for everyone, then I would have stuttered all the time. If you have diabetes, there are not times when you don't have diabetes. Diabetes is a physical problem and because it is a physical problem there are not occasions when the problem simply isn't there.

BEYOND KNOWING

Reading aloud and finding that you don't stutter will help you go beyond *mentally* "knowing" you don't stutter when you are alone to full-blown awareness.

One way to explain the difference between knowing something and being aware: When I was young my mother said things I didn't understand at the time. So I merely put those statements away until one day – bam – I would have some experience that made a statement I hadn't understood before suddenly appear as clear as a bell. "Oh, so *that's* what she meant!" was something like the response in my head.

So I can tell you that there is nothing mechanically wrong with your speech and that stuttering is not "something physically wrong" with you, but you have to become aware of it yourself because if it's not a physical problem, there is a cure.

This awareness removes the greatest block to your cure, which is the fact that, contrary to what you've been taught, there is nothing mechanically or physically wrong with your speech.

So take every opportunity to read aloud when you are alone and know you are alone. You will experience the truth that you don't stutter at all when you read aloud (something very difficult for PWS to do). If you don't believe you can sing or whisper or speak in unison or speak to animals or children, then *actually do it* and keep on doing it until you are fully aware of the truth. Before long you will realize that your brain automates speech so you can use your energy in other endeavors. The awareness of this truth became the cornerstone of my cure.

If someone told me that stuttering is due to brain damage, I would go back to this fact: "I do not stutter at certain times....so how could I have brain damage?" Or if I was told to practice speech (as if stuttering is a lack of practice), I would ask myself "if I need to practice in order to speak fluently, then why am I fluent when I am alone or when I whisper, or speak in unison, or sing?"

KNOWLEDGE VS. AWARENESS

You can *know* you have no mechanical or physical problems, but only success (actually reading aloud to yourself without stuttering) will make you *aware* that there is nothing actually wrong with your speech.

This is so important in the cure for stuttering. We don't learn how to stop stuttering by reading books or being told by speech professionals how to stop stuttering. We stop stuttering by *Awareness*, which is a very different thing than *Knowledge*.

The reason I stress Awareness as much as I do is because I am not going to *learn from others* how to quit stammering. If you are helping a stammering child, passing out orders such as “speak slowly”, or “take a deep breath” the child will not stop stuttering.. The child may obey what you tell him to do as well as he can, but obeying the orders of others is not learning. That is what is called “obedience” or “memorization” but in no way can we call it “learning.”

Okay, suppose I tell you that effort and practice and planning won’t help you stop stuttering. Even if you believe me, you will not actually *learn* this by listening to words or believing my words. The only authentic learning that takes place is when you, yourself, try to stop stammering and try and try and try and finally observe the truth: “My trying does nothing to help me stop stammering.” *This realization is called awareness.*

Observation of your own experience leads to awareness. Observation is the ability you have to observe and interpret what is going on. This is not a conscious action but happens before the conscious mind even becomes conscious of what is going on. When I say “observe”, this is more than simply looking at something. One teacher at college repeated “Do more than look...*observe. To observe is ‘to watch attentively’*” What you learn will always be the result of your own work of observation.

OBSERVATION IS SELF-CORRECTIVE

The beauty of observation is that, as physicists often say, observation is self-corrective and does not require the conscious mind to jump in and exert effort to fix things. It’s not “observe and then fix”. It is “observe and observation is the change agent.” Observation provides you with actionable intelligence so natural that it all happens below the radar of the conscious mind.

Suppose you are teaching your child to ski. You could say to your child “bend your knees this way....and that will happen” or “bend your knees that way...and this will happen.”

Your child may obey your instructions and be able to spout back what you tell him, but this does not mean he has actually learned anything. If your child sees for himself the fact that he stammers when he thinks about every word he says, then real learning occurs. In this case he may observe that thinking about every word he says causes him to stutter badly. *By observing, he is able to learn things he can learn in no other way.*

Learning does not actually happen until your child gets out there and learns for himself: “*Oh, I get it! When I bend my knees to the left, this happens. I’m going to try that again. Something I did matters! I have a little bit of control over the situation. How I ski has something to do with how I bend my knees!*” That’s what we call “awareness.”

When you truly become aware of the truth that you do not stutter when you are alone, you will no longer make statements like “with persistence and hard work I can stop stuttering.” I wish there had been a savvy adult who had said things to me like: “You were wired from birth with the ability to communicate spontaneously and it will develop naturally unless you interfere with this activity (by persistently working at speech.)”

EXPOSE BLOCKS AS IMAGINARY

This truth that I do not *really* stutter under certain circumstances was the same truth that made me look further for the source of my stuttering. That is when I began to ask “If I do not stutter at all under certain circumstances, then what is the nature of stuttering? Is it real or imagined?”

I will never forget the first time I used the word “imagination.” That is a word I avoided for years. Why? Because it made me feel utterly foolish to spend the enormous amount of energy and money on curing my stuttering when there was even a possibility that I myself had created the blocks.

FEAR IS REACTION TO IMAGINATION

Where do blocks come from? Fear. Where does fear come from? Imagination. What do I mean by imagination? Imagination is the ability to create images of reality. When we create images that are wrong or exaggerated or magnified beyond recognition and mentally hold on to those images regardless of facts, we create chaos and fear.

My nature, as well as natural speech, is like a river. My conscious mind (intention, will, imagination) is like a dam which my mind constructs across the river. The dam is the only thing powerful enough to hold back the river. And that’s what it does.

- 1) So even though the river flows in the path of least resistance, the conscious mind can construct a dam which is a metaphor for “*resistance to the flow.*” You can use words like mind or will, or imagination or conscious intention or thought interchangeably. This system is able to build resistance to flow...able to build a dam. *The fact that the dam is built by imagination does not mean it can’t block flow.* Imagination can and does block flow. (Remember the block I created around which I believed I had to blow air?) This imaginary dam absolutely *did* block flow, and it did it very well. The reason we don’t want to believe that blocks are created by our imagination isn’t hard to figure out: we’ve spent so much time and money trying to eliminate blocks (so it’s grossly humiliating for the academic mind to realize that the lion’s share of mentality (theories, beliefs, thoughts) have another label. That label is *Imagination.*
- 2) Everything changes with this new bit of information: that the blocks we create are imaginary. This information is humiliating and wonderful, all at once. If the dam that blocks the flow is an imaginary dam (it is), then we are no longer afraid. The dam is a boogie man. Blocks are boogie men.
- 3) I perceive a new thing and this new thing changes everything. I realize the dam is not real. It is imaginary. If it is imaginary, I am no longer afraid because resistance to the flow (the dam) is manageable. I can manage the dam if it is imaginary. I am relieved. It is as if fearful Little Me was cringing in the dark corner of the room, shaking with fright. And Big Me comes into the room and soothes his fears. “There, there” Big Me whispers softly. “There, there, it’s all right. Shhh. Go to sleep now.” And Little Me cries “But there are scary men hiding over there in the corner” and Big Me turns on the light. “There, there, all gone now” Big Me soothes...”See, no one is here. The boogie man was only in your imagination.”
- 4) I now have nothing to do but *expose the boogie men, the scary blocks, as imaginary.* The blocks may still be there but they are not “there” in the true sense. My mind/imagination has created the scary blocks. My imagination created them and put them there. *This changes everything. I can stop spending time and money getting rid of blocks because I have created the blocks all by myself. This means I can get rid of them by myself. Now, I stop looking “out here” for blocks. I take responsibility for the dam, for the blocks I, myself, have created.* I have spent my lifetime creating blocks out of thin air. This realization is

the turning point: Natural speech is a river so I will let it flow and stop building imaginary structures to stop the flow.

- 5) I stop trying to talk well and instead do the productive work of casting down stupid imaginations. I do this by questioning (on paper) these beliefs. Up to this point, my mind has tried to control my speech. But now I turn around and call its bluff. I question every expectation, assumption, belief and I question boldly. Suddenly I have found my assertiveness. The joke was on me but I don't care. I am happy and free.
- 6) Magic happens. The boogie man miraculously disappears. Imagination can't frighten me anymore when my big spontaneous intelligence turns on the light. Look! Blocks all gone. Dam is gone. No more fear. Boogie man....gone.
- 7) My personality changes. I get rid of resistance and whoot...everything works. I can do anything if there is no resistance. I need to stop eating sugar? No arguments from my resistant mind. If there are arguments, I am "on" to her. Even miracle workers and healers say they are unable to do mighty works when there is "resistance" (the Greek word is "Unbelief.") As my spontaneous river is freed up and flows more powerfully, the energy of the flowing river overpowers the "works" or "creations" of the imagination.

CHAPTER 15 -- FOUR OF SEVEN

OUTWITTING MY BLOCKS: I TALK TO MY MOUNTAIN

There are belief systems that absolutely will not allow you to stop stuttering. So I *had* to find a really terrific way to change those beliefs (blocks). That's all there was to it.

Talking to my mountain was how I outwitted my blocks. Instead of my mind blocking my speech, I took charge of the mountain my mind constructed by talking to my mountain. When I talked to my mountain it becomes very clear who was in charge.

PWS all agree that they do their best speaking when they aren't thinking about speaking. We all intuit that trying and effort mess with fluency. They used to say "trying is lying" and what they meant is that it doesn't work. If I try to speak I stutter more. If I try to be funny, I'm definitely not funny. If I try really hard to play the violin, trying makes it worse.

When I am trying, it means I have a goal. Trying is always goal-oriented. So whenever trying and thinking enter spontaneous speech, the magic is gone. Fritz Perls used to say "As far as possible, I refuse to think." So thinking is a mountain. So is trying. So are wrong beliefs. Resistance to flow is a mountain.

My mind, as Theodore Reik reminded us, is to some degree "unnatural, sort of a culturally induced immunization against one's own innate wired-from birth intelligence." One day I asked: "Okay, how do I deal with my blocking intellect? What do I do?"

It occurred to me that every person has a mountain in his life. They might call it an addiction or an obsession or they might stutter. This mountain starts out by talking to us, blaming us, pushing us to the brink, humiliating us. Stuttering was my mountain and it said things to me like "You need to know what you are going to say before you say it." It said "You need to try harder." I used to believe all the things my mountain told me. There were enough years I allowed my mountain to speak to me. That's not happening anymore. I won't listen.

What I did was turn the tables on my mountain. It has been telling me all this stuff. It has been accusing me, blocking me. Now, I turn it around. I talk to my mountain. I speak to it. I say "Be removed and be thrown into the sea" and it is removed.

I talked to my attitudes, I ignored my chattering mind. Why? Because nasty attitudes and constant chattering siphons off energy from Resolve or Intent. It siphons energy away from action.

So I am glad for the day I said: “I’m not going to listen to my mountain anymore. I am going to command my mountain.” That was another turning point in my speech.

We could do anything we wanted to do except for one thing: something we call resistance. Within us there is Flow and there is Resistance. Thought is resistance. I desire not to eat sugar. Then resistance-in-the-form-of Thought comes and whispers in my ear: “you can stop eating sugar tomorrow not today.” But when Big Me turns on the mountain and says “Be removed. Get out of the way” then good stuff starts to happen.

CONFRONTING THE BLOCK OF ‘SLEEPINESS’

I was able to affect a form of fusion or collaboration between Big Me and Little Me through free-writing. Writing out the block was another way I went about outwitting my blocks. My blocks were sourced in wrong beliefs, obsessing about stuttering, imagination and wrong ways of looking at speech.

Your censor has no way to fight back against a head-on offensive. I learned a lot about my blocks when I attacked them head-on by talking directly to them. I learned that my Censor has loads of ammunition to use against what it believes are “attacks.” So I had to see through every defense.

For example, I may get almost to the point of uncovering my block and I suddenly grow sleepy. I noticed, time after time, that I could be very near to discovering what I was holding back as I wrote out the discussion between Big Me and Little Me (Creator and Critic) *and suddenly I would become very sleepy*. This happened many times until I recognized that sudden sleepiness was a sign I was hiding what I was holding back. It was also a sign I was getting very close to seeing through a particular block. So rather than going to bed, I just kept on writing.

For a few moments I would turn away from my conversation about my block and simply state the fact that I was feeling very tired. When I wrote about tiredness, suddenly I would feel a new surge of energy and find the hidden belief or manufactured block in a few minutes.

TALK TO THE BLOCK

Talk to your blocks.

You are a river, alive, improvisational, intuitive, with associative creative intelligence. You are form and style and excitement; you learn by doing; learn to write by writing; learn to create through creating, can bring forth new life out of any set of circumstances.

You are also resistance to that flowing river. When you talk, this resistant part of you (thinking, imagining, rationalization, wrong beliefs) interferes with the flowing river. Only when you observe this resistance can you make a change. So what I did was make a contract with my resistance. I wrote out little promises like “If you will reveal the block, I will throw out the words you put on paper since you seem not to want others to know. Tell me. I will keep your secret.”

Big Me is the flowing river. Big Me also had to teach Little Me to go with the flow, to write without judging, criticism or offering opinions.

The reason I don’t blame authority figures for my screwed-up beliefs about stuttering is because I actually didn’t need any help constructing explanations for stuttering. I believed at that time, please remember, in the great curative value of will and willpower. After all, consider this, there I am huffing and puffing through a word and willpower whispers “keep trying, keep

trying. Just push a little harder” and I do that and finally spit a word out, then find myself actually *grateful* to willpower (who actually caused the problem in the first place.)

As I look at stuttering from where I am right now, it appears to me that *the blocks I was creating were presented to me as though they were external*. In other words blocks in my understanding presented themselves to me as blocks in my speech.

A belief is a picture we create as to how things happen. We don't consciously do this. Belief is not a choice. We don't “choose” to believe this or that. No one can tell you to stop believing this or start believing that, because belief cannot be commanded. What I believed about stuttering had a little to do with experts and authorities, but it had more to do with my own logic that figured things out...and figured them out wrongly.

Okay, I know the clinical explanations of how behaviors and beliefs get stronger and stronger....neurons link to other neurons and then the more we repeat the illogical logic or bad behavior and keep repeating it, what began as a tiny spider's web grows into something as strong as a cable (that explanation isn't entirely correct, but it will do for now.)

So my belief in willpower might have begun as a tiny web but eventually it grew into something so fierce and strong I couldn't break it on my own. At first, I doubted that *anyone* could change those rigidly held beliefs....until I actually faced off with those beliefs, one by one, observed them, questioned them boldly and saw them evaporate—poof---into thin air. I've never heard of anyone else doing this, but it did wonders for me.

I often remember times in my past by remembering how I was looking at things at that particular time. I remember my early 30's as “that time before I saw clearly that the academic mind is a miserable failure when it comes to dissolving problems and my intuition is up to almost any task.”

WHO SAID BELIEFS ARE SACRED?

One of the most dangerous beliefs and the one that will prevent observation and questioning is this belief: Beliefs are sacred. Beliefs, opinions, thoughts, and imaginations are synonymous terms but I found many of my most harmful ideas were well-hidden under the umbrella called “Belief” so I wouldn't dare question them. I used to tip-toe through those beliefs until the day I realized “There is nothing sacred about beliefs.”

One of the most destructive beliefs besides “beliefs are sacred” was the belief that I had a literal block in my throat around which I had to blow air in order to produce sound. (I wrote that conversation in an earlier chapter.)

CHANGING BELIEFS IS POSSIBLE

At first it just wasn't in me to put my beliefs in the dock and question them boldly. I was a Pragmatist who was confident that beliefs were true or not, depending on whether they worked or failed.

The most hopeful thing I discovered was that my mind could be changed. I found that the answer to the question: “Is it possible to change the very structure of our brain?” was an absolute and resounding “Yes.”

In “*Pragmatic Thinking: Refactor your Wetware*” the author write: “It is possible to break the chemical connections that form many of the memories, habits, chattering, and *core beliefs* that we have picked up over the years. The idea that we can change the very structure

of our brain is relatively new and has been labeled 'neuroplasticity.' This simply means that your mind can be changed, reformed and remade to better serve you.”

“Remade to better serve you?” What did that mean? For me, at that time, it meant that I held so many enslaving beliefs that didn’t support my cure that there had to be a change in my core beliefs. And it was something I could do. Something I *did* do.

THE BENCHMARK QUESTION

I am often amazed that people who stutter refuse to let go of wrong beliefs. I have spoken with numerous people who stutter very badly who will stand there and tell me that they believe in the stuttering course they are now engaged in, or they believe that stuttering is caused by brain damage or genetics, or stuttering is caused from not trying hard enough or from inability to plan well enough. When I listen to this, I hear something like this: “I know my beliefs don’t make sense but I’ve gone to all the trouble of accumulating all these beliefs about stuttering and I’m too old or rigid or worn out to start over.”

So I talk to these people about the *benchmark* I use to see if my beliefs are true. The benchmark I use is:

“You do not stutter when you are alone or when you sing so how can it be true that you can improve your fluency by _____ (fill in the blank... practicing or planning or speaking to a metronome, etc?)”

When I inserted that benchmark into the conversation I was writing on the page it was instantly very clear whether the belief was “hooey” or whether it was true.

An example of using the benchmark to check my beliefs: I began to feel guilty for stuttering and doing everything I could to hide my stuttering.

So one day I asked myself: “Why are you feeling guilty for stuttering?” (At this point notice that my Observer speaks in plain type....and my conscious Critic speaks in *italics*.)

The answer was: *“I don’t know.”*

“Tell me about it here on paper.”

“Okay. I was thinking how easy it would be to stop stammering if I just tried hard enough.”

“Where did you get that idea?”

“Are you asking for a list of names?”

“Of course not.”

“Okay, then, you know that idea is everywhere. How many people have I known who believe we can do anything we want to do if we only want to badly enough or if we only try hard enough.”

“So those are the beliefs behind the shame you feel? When anyone believes such statements, those beliefs are always accompanied with shame.”

“I guess so.”

“So let’s get out the old Yardstick.”

“You mean observe the fact that I don’t stammer when I am alone?”

“That’s it.”

“So you want me to put those together....if it is true that I cannot stutter when I am in a room by myself...then how can it be true that the way to stop stuttering is to want to stop stuttering or try to stop stuttering?”

“That’s it.”

“Okay, and if you could stop stammering by trying a little harder, then what kind of a moron are you for not trying a little harder. It never seems to occur to me that if I could stop stammering by wanting to stop stammering, I wouldn’t stammer. If I could stop stammering by trying harder, I would have already stopped stammering.”

“Is it starting to make sense?”

“It really is.”

STOP THE BLAME

You do not stutter when you are alone or when you sing. This is the benchmark you must continually return to in order to recognize that stuttering is not physical.

“How can I use this?”

“Okay, tell me one of the things you have written on your list.”

“Okay, I’ll take this one: “Slow down when you speak.”

“Ask yourself ‘if I can speak well when I am alone, then why do I have to try to speak slowly? Trying to speak slowly can’t be the answer. That’s not hard to figure. It’s simple logic.”

“So why does my teacher tell me this?”

“It doesn’t matter what she tells you as long as you question it and refuse to believe it if it doesn’t make you stop stuttering. You are the judge. You know when something works and when it doesn’t.”

“I am the judge?”

“Of course. For sure. You are the judge of whether certain cures work or not.”

“But my mom paid a lot for this speech teacher.”

“Then you will be helping your mom to tell her the truth. Simply ‘This does not work’ is enough.”

“But she will say ‘But it should work. This lady is a professional and we are paying her a lot of money, so she has to be right.’”

“As I said, you are the judge. Not your mother. Not your teacher. Not your speech professional. You! You don’t need to argue or be disrespectful. Just make a new pile in your files, as I did, and stick a label on that file: ‘Things I observed for myself and no one agrees with.’ (You don’t need to get cranky as long as you have paper and pens and express yourself every day.

DON’T BELIEVE WHAT YOU KNOW IS NOT TRUE

A method to rid myself of enslaving beliefs happened spontaneously. First, I wrote the behavior on paper (pushing through each word). Then I asked the important question “if you are behaving in this manner (blocking), how would you have to be looking at speech?” (For example, ‘if I try very hard to push a word out through clenched muscles, what do I believe about how speech happens?’) So I wrote that question down: “I am trying very hard to push a word out and this makes me question the belief behind the fact that I am pushing so hard.”

And then I question this silly belief boldly. I sit the belief down in the chair and ask questions. I say “defend this belief to me. You believe the harder you try the better you speak?”

And the answer I wrote was: *“Yes, how else am I going to get this damned word out of my mouth....just keep trying. I can’t give up. I have to keep at it. If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.”*

“Does it work? Does your belief work? When you try hard to push words out, do you block less?”

“Of course not! I block worse than ever!!”

“Then go with your experience that this particular belief doesn’t work.”

“Hmmmmm....I think I’m getting it. I need to refuse to believe anything I know is not true.”

“I think you’ve got it! You’ve really got it! I couldn’t have said it better myself...We agree about this one thing: ‘always refuse to believe anything you know is not true.’”.

WALKING THRU ONE ENSLAVING BELIEF

(Little Me speaks in *italics*; Big Me in plain type.)

“I work very hard at planning words ahead (and how I’m going to say the words) before I say them.”

“So you plan both content (what you say) and mechanics (how to say it) before you speak?”

“Sure. Otherwise, I’m going to be in trouble. I have to be prepared. I have to know before I speak. Otherwise it’s like jumping into the ocean without knowing how to swim.”

“Let’s deal with that. Why do you believe a thing like that?”

“Isn’t it true that everything comes from conscious knowing and planning?”

“Why don’t you tell me?”

“Okay, it seems logical to me: if it is true that speaking comes from conscious knowing and planning, then it stands to reason that I have to know what I am going to say and how to say it before I speak.”

“You believe you have to consciously know what to say and how to say it before you speak?”

“That’s what I mean. The way things work is: first, know; second, act.”

“Is that true?”

“How can I know?”

“I understand you like to doodle.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Do you need to know what you are going to draw and how to draw it before you pick up a pencil?”

“No, of course not. I don’t learn to draw before I draw.”

“You mean learning to draw and drawing aren’t two different things?”

“Of course they aren’t two different things. I can’t learn to draw without drawing. I draw and as I draw I learn to draw. Drawing and learning to draw is the same thing.”

“And you don’t learn to breathe before you breathe. When you were born you began to breathe. No one showed you how to breathe. You didn’t have to know how to breathe before you took a breath, did you?”

“Okay, I’m beginning to get it. I treat speaking differently than breathing. When I speak I believe I have to consciously prepare, to know what to say and how to say it before I speak and that is unlike what I do in any other area of my life, like breathing or growing fingernails...or even drawing.”

“That’s true.”

“Then it’s natural for me to speak without thinking about it?”

“That’s true. Your brain automates speech so you can use your energy in other endeavors...like putting words on the page.”

“Then I can keep my conscious mind out of the mechanics of speaking?”

“You better keep your conscious mind out of the mechanics of speaking.”

“It’s going to be hard.”

“When you say ‘it’s going to be hard’ you sound as if you still think you have to try hard to do everything.”

“How else except try?”

“When we communicate with each other, you change your beliefs. Not because you try to change your beliefs but because certain beliefs doesn’t make sense anymore. Don’t try to rid yourself of wrong beliefs. Just hold your belief to the light and see what happens. I’ll guarantee you it will evaporate into thin air as soon as the light hits it.”

“Okay, I’ll do that. This morning I believed ‘I have to consciously know what to say and how to say it before I open my mouth to speak. Now it doesn’t make sense to me.’

“You also need to get the big picture. After all, you are being slightly phony, you know?”

“Which means?”

“Which means to recognize that your conscious mind isn’t up to the challenge of producing or manufacturing speech and *that’s* why your brain automates speech.”

“Why do you have to bring that up?”

“Because it’s so central to everything else. It must be pretty scary for you to take charge of speaking when you absolutely have no ability to do so. How can you orchestrate all the thousands of impulses and messages that automatically happen to produce speech?”

“Okay, don’t rub it in. I’m catching up with you. I’m starting to understand that speech happens outside my conscious control.”

“Now we’re starting to work together.”

CHAPTER 16 --FIVE OF SEVEN

WRITING THE RIVER; ALLOWING THE FLOW

“Out of your inmost being will flow rivers of living water.”

WRITING IS OXYGEN FOR MY SOUL

When I got to high school (and stuttered very badly), I would answer “I don’t know” when asked questions in class until a brilliant intuitive teacher who truly cared went to the trouble to acquaint herself with my I.Q. Armed with this information, she confronted me, asking me what was going on.

When I told her about my stuttering, she didn’t react as other teachers did (“You must get to work and learn to speak in front of others”). She was kind and intelligent and made it possible for me to write out my assignments rather than speak in front of the class and of course I aced the course. As long as this teacher was in the school system of the school I attended, I was home free.

So early on, I realized that written expression was a great substitute for verbal expression. *But I want you to understand right off that I am not, I repeat not, suggesting that you substitute writing for speaking. Never in a thousand years.*

It did take me longer to realize the primary importance of spontaneous self-expression than it should.

Self-expression can only happen when my “heart” and “mind” are in sync and that only happened for me when my mind, once resistant to my “free self”, became the writer...the person who picked up pen and paper and expressed this spontaneous inner self without inserting its own opinions, judgments, criticisms. I just kept that pen flowing and when my mind wanted to stop and criticize, I let my actions do it for me. I just kept on writing. No arguing. Just kept on writing.

I realized it is the freedom and movement (expression) of my spontaneous self that determines the tone of my life...changing my life from *strained* to *effortless*. Self expression became the oxygen for my soul.

FLOW HAPPENS

Flow is what happens when resistance is gone from speech. Flow happened to me in writing before it happened in my speech. In fact it was writing that helped me see the difference between thinking and writing, and between dreaming and writing. Writing, as I am sure

everyone else realizes, is putting words in the computer or on paper. That's what it is. Everything else is thinking or wanting or hoping or dreaming of writing.

Recovering from stammering is the process of finding the river inside you and saying "yes!" to its flow. Just as electric current needs "welcoming circuits", so the flowing spontaneous part of me needs a welcoming mind. Your mind either serves as a welcoming circuit for the flow from your natural instinctive self...or it does not. When my mind was too lazy or stubborn or resistant to write words on paper, nothing happened. When my mind picked up pen and paper and said "Okay, I'm ready to write!" and actually became engaged in the work of writing words on the page without criticism or censoring, flow happened.

Writing without censorship means there's no wrong way to write. Your censor can holler "That sounds dumb" or "That's trashy writing" but simply putting one word after another is the same as saying "I'm going to keep right on expressing myself, so don't waste your time."

The written word is powerful because, according to psychologist Matthew Lieberman (University of California), writing words on the page "changes how the brain deals with stressful information." Free-writing is the creative process and this process has a different structure than a life of reacting. All of us react and all of us create but our orientation or dominance is determined by where we spend most of our time. If your life is organized around reacting to the circumstances in your life that is a very different life than one where you go with the flow, following the river, writing it down.

People have been doing this writing gig for a very long time. The great poet, Rilke, wrote this (and I still have it above my computer):

"Be attentive to what is arising within you, and place that above everything you perceive around you. What is happening in your innermost self is worthy of your entire love; somehow you must find a way to work at it and not lose too much time. These very days of your transition are perhaps the time when everything in you is working at Him, as you once worked at Him in your childhood, breathlessly. Be patient and without bitterness and realize that the least we can do is to make coming into existence no more difficult for Him than the earth does for spring when it wants to come."

When I read, I learn about the world "out there." When I write I learn about the world "in here." I learned about who I was and how I responded to things. When my formal education ended, my real education began.

Writing opened a door from the inside/out rather than the outside/in. This seemed very important to me: if I am ignoring my own Voice, no growth is possible.

I can't say enough about writing. What I was doing without thinking about it at all was creating. By putting words on the page day after day, I saw a body of work pile up and this body of work were *my* words, my observations, *my* way of seeing the world. This work, in many ways, has saved my life.

Writing shaped me, determined how I spent my time and gave me insight into what was going on with stuttering. By writing I saw clearly that my own mind/imagination creates blocks. At one time I thought blocks merely *happened* to me. By writing my observations I saw the truth. If you asked "where did the blocks come from?" my answer would have been "I, myself,

made those blocks out of my own resistance.” And that’s why I knew how I could rid myself of them.

I had no literal *need* to do this work of writing. Art is not a need. Writing is not a need. At least it’s not a need if you are thinking of mere human survival. But expression was another kind of need, pushing from within. When the flowing part of myself was running free, it was natural for me to pick up paper and pen and write.

Actually I found I physically need very little. Food, water and warmth is about “it.” But the creative flow needs expression and my mind was finally so in tune with the river that I could write all day without being tired. I was doing what I loved.

Finding a way to express myself has been a life worth living. Every day at the end of a day of free-writing, I would know many things that evening that I hadn’t known that morning. I had not read those “new things” in a book. The words were from me and ended on the page because I allowed the river to flow and find expression.

Einstein recalled his relief at ending his formal education: “It is nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry, for this delicate little plant, aside from stimulation, stands most in need of freedom; without this it goes to wreck and ruin without fail. It is a grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty.”

“THEN IT BECAME AN ORGY” – D. H. Lawrence

D. H. Lawrence believed there was nothing new under the sun until, at the age of 40, he began to paint. He wrote: “By having a blank canvas, I discovered I could make a picture myself. That is the point, to make a picture on a blank canvas. And I was forty before I had the real courage to try. Then it became an orgy, making pictures.”

Writing, at first, was all about writing to understand...and only later did I write to *be* understood. Writing was all about finding my own voice. And finding my own voice was all about self-exposure. When I revealed my “deep self” on paper, what I was doing was revealing myself to *me*. *Me!* I didn’t need to worry about other people not knowing who I was. *I* didn’t know who I was until I began putting words on paper.

Success, they say, is the best revenge. And to experience a release from stuttering was success enough, but to find a work meaningful enough to engage my brains and energy for a lifetime was pure gravy. Writing strengthened the wild and crazy Edison inside of me. The more I wrote the stronger my Seeing became.

WRITE LAVISHLY...AND QUICKLY

When I wrote lavishly, allowing anything that wanted to be expressed to find expression, flow happened. When I don’t write for a few days, flow stops. When I feel there is no fight left in me, no energy, then I pick up my pen and flow begins again. With flow comes energy and confidence. And this transfers automatically into my speech.

Sark wrote: “Whatever coaxes us out of hiding to notice, record and express is a revolutionary act.” Writing is “sharing” as far as I am concerned. This inner natural spontaneity located somewhere behind my face (as Bradbury described it) is the source of speech. So when I “hoard” my words I seem to cut myself off from my flow. So I splash words on the page in a hurry, before I have even a moment to think or censor or correct or fix. Bradbury wrote:

“What can we writers learn from lizards, lift from birds? In quickness is truth. The faster you blurt, the more swiftly you write, the more honest you are. *In hesitation is thought.* In delay comes the effort for a style, instead of leaping upon truth which is the *only* style worth dead falling or tiger-trapping.” (“Zen in the Art of Writing” by Ray Bradbury).

When I free-write without stopping to correct or edit or criticize what I write, my writing speeds up. The best antidote to a critical defensive conscious mind is simply to write so fast that a slow sluggish critical mind, as deliberate and methodical as it is, simply can't keep up. Remember that Little Me is your “Writer” and when you keep it busy, writing fast, it doesn't have time to judge and edit and criticize. All it has time to do is write as fast as it can in an effort to keep up with your natural flow.

The truth is that “Flow” will not be bossed around or controlled. All we can do is write as fast as we can and get as much as we can on paper. When you refuse to plan words, your words will then *have* to come from the free-flowing part of yourself rather than the effortful willful “trying” part of your mind, which is the conscious mind powered by willpower. No matter how stupid your words appear at first, just stick with it.

Flow transcends logic and rational thinking. Flow can only be experienced through surrender to what is already going on inside of you, simply *allowing* flow to happen. I substituted writing for speaking because when I wrote freely flow happened. When I spoke, it did not. I personally had to write early each morning before my brain figured out what I was doing.

Many years later I found the time of day didn't matter at all. All that mattered was that the work going on outside the control of my conscious mind found a way to express itself. And since I can't pick and choose as to whether I have a listener or not, writing is the way I found to express myself anytime I wanted to.

A WRITING EXERCISE

I started writing about stuttering in a new way without realizing what I was doing. One evening at the Wienerwald (where I wrote for years), I thought it would be fun to act like I was a reporter for the local newspaper and ask people I interviewed one particular question. The question I asked was “Please tell me what happens when you speak, like ‘Do you think about speaking before you speak?’ or ‘Do you think about taking a deep breath before you speak?’” I was still stuttering rather fluently at the time but it didn't seem to matter. Before long, I found everyone wanted to tell me how they felt about speaking.

Often the person I was interviewing would turn the tables on me and ask “Do you think about speaking before you speak?” So I told the truth. I answered that I thought of words I said before I said them. I thought of taking a breath before a long sentence.” And as I told the truth, something happened. I found that fluent people at first had no idea what I was talking about (when I told them I thought of every word I spoke, every breath I took and how to form words in my mouth, plus how difficult it was to stop thinking about what I was going to say and how I was going to say it). This banter about speech interested a lot of people.

But as I explained how much time and effort thinking about speech consumed, the response of those around me was nothing less than shock and awe. “You mean you *actually* plan what you are going to say before you say it?” they would ask incredulously. Or “You mean you *actually think* about each separate word and tried to force words through clenched muscles? I can't imagine how hard that must have been!”

FLOW CARRIES OVER FROM WRITING TO SPEECH

How do you get the flow going?

I practice the flow indirectly...not by speaking it but by writing it. Don't *think* about writing flow. Write it. Be obsessed with flow by doing it every day for the rest of your life. And stop your resistance to flow...all your thoughts about what you should be doing or ought to be doing or could be doing if you just tried a little harder.

Find all the forms of resistance by writing (and noticing all the forms of resistance to writing). I needed to practice flow in something other than speech because my speech definitely didn't flow and I couldn't make it flow. Writing was the activity with maximum carry-over, carrying over from writing to speaking. When I got my words to flow on paper, in no time at all the flow came back to my speech. I had a few rules:

1. I wrote by hand so my body actually got into the flow of words spilling from my inner self (the source of speech). Later you can put words into your computer, but initially write by hand. I bought Steno Pads from the "Dollar Store" for a buck each. I still keep piles of paper handy so I don't have to look for paper when I get an idea. Handwriting is still connected in my mind to the expression of my subliminal inner spontaneity (right brain) rather than my taught opinionated left brain.
2. I kept my pen moving on the page (page after page after page) without allowing my Censor to fix or ridicule what I wrote. Refusing to stop was what connected my pen to the part of me I had blocked for so very long. This meant I didn't (a) get a dictionary and look up words I was writing or (b) worry about spelling. Those are both forms of censorship. I didn't control any aspect of my writing. *This is the way I practiced not controlling any aspect of my speaking.* I also eliminated thinking and logic and shoulds, woulds, coulds, and might be's. When I previously wrote from my "standards of good and bad", I was judging my writing.
3. I realized I do not know first what I want to write...and then write. I write out of my unknowing and as soon as I read the words I write, *then and only then* do I know what my inner spontaneity wanted to tell me.
4. Observations seem to be full of energy and writing seems to free that energy. My free-writing always begins with an observation like "I notice that P. isn't as friendly as he used to be." I don't allow my Censor to argue with that written statement. Then I continued to write "when did I first notice this?" and answered "what I connect to this unfriendliness is that I first noticed it about the time he read his writing aloud in writing class". Then I related other events I noticed. As I wrote I came up with new connections and new questions and was amazed at the detailed noticing I had been doing (even when I had no idea I had noticed anything.) I wrote about my family. I wrote about my teachers and speech therapists. A bit of the writing in this book first appeared in those notebooks.
5. I bought the easy flowing roller pens that represented the easy flow that I was expressing. My thoughts and observations were much faster than my writing. So I always bought roller pens that helped the inner flow appear more rapidly on paper.
6. I had a certain place I did most of my free-writing. For many years I wrote daily in the "Wienerwald" in Munich, Germany. Nearly every day I showed up at my table with my notebook and wrote. I did this because staying at home wasn't demanding or structured enough. I would notice dust on the furniture and stop to dust...or someone would come to

the door and want to stay for the afternoon. So having a place to write worked great for me.

7. I found that my mind forgets and that is why it is so important to retain my perceptions and ideas on paper. Writing frees my mind. If I don't write, then my mind keeps trying to retain my ideas, but writing frees my mind from this responsibility (the paper now retains what the mind had to make an effort to retain.) When I refused to write (thinking "I can surely remember. This is too important to forget") it would be no time before I completely forgot what I had been so enthusiastic about only a few minutes before.
8. I learned to recognize my Censor. The way I got a good look at my Censor in about two seconds was to make a statement (on paper) like "I am going to cut all sugar out of my diet." What happens next is the voice of the Censor. Write down what your censor tells you but recognize it is your Censor. One time after I had written "I am going to cut all sugar out of my diet" I wrote the following: 1) "Tomorrow is a better time to do that." (2) "Chocolate is good for me. I need to eat some chocolate to make me feel better." The list went on and on. My Censor is shameless in the number of excuses she can originate in a matter of seconds.
9. Welcome the flow. Don't try to do anything as you write. Don't try to remember things to write. Don't try to remember details. Simply keep an open heart and allow flow onto the page and you will find you took in more than you imagined and you soaked it in without thought; naturally, like a sponge. Record your own responses to stuttering. This is important. Your life is important. You are important. You, a person who stuttered lived in this time and place and felt humiliation and frustration and rage...and underneath it all was a steady hope. Don't forget the hope. So let it be known how you responded to this handicap. You can say "This is what it means to stutter." This is important. This is your history. Your life. As we write we can accept what happens to us, how we managed it, how we kicked the Censor out of our lives....every detail of it. Write the river. You really need to welcome the flow before it will flow. Your mind must be the welcoming circuit necessary to receive the current, the flow...just as electricity needs welcoming circuits before flow happens.

STOPPING TO THINK IS VERBOTEN

I didn't allow myself to think as I wrote. How did I stop thinking as I wrote? By noticing my thoughts. By saying "Next" every time a thought took over the flow. You can be as crude as you like with the constant chatter that interferes. No one is listening but you. You can use the Genius' favorite if you like ("Shut the hell up.") Use anything that gets you out of the thinking mode. Notice when you revert to old memories ("that reminds me of ----") and your memory is off to the races, and away from flow. Notice resistance. When you observe what's going on, things begin to change on their own..

If you want to know who you are, write your flow, listen to the words you write on the page and eventually you will celebrate this wise one within you that flows from you when your Censor is out of the way.

Be in tune with the flow. If your mind is too busy or has its own agenda, you won't have the patience required to write.

After 3 months of writing freely, my blocks were gone. So if anyone asks me "you must have worked very hard to stop stuttering," I have to answer "I didn't work at speaking better. I

worked very hard at allowing flow to happen. I worked very hard at unblocking my mind so flow could pour through my mind (my mind is the channel through which words flow).

WELCOME THE FLOW

Respect the flow. Cherish it. Welcome it. Give it a voice. How do you do that? You re-establish the relationship between the Flow and your understanding by writing. Flow will occur like lava from a volcano. Your “Core”, your Inner Spontaneity is always there....you are simply unable to see it and if you are like me, often it seems too “flaky” to trust something (or some one) you can’t see, hear, feel or touch.

Anything that destroys your wired-from-birth-spontaneity robs you of personality. You can look at the great works of art or look at a natural spontaneous personality and see that they possess something beyond what can be taught. You can’t teach this natural flowing spontaneity at any school in the universe because it is a natural part of who we are, unless we destroy it with fear, rules and too much conscious effort and thought.

This means we have to deal with the claims, expectations and beliefs of our conscious minds so we don’t block the flow of the river. Thinking about what to say and how to say it, worrying, planning our words, having to know before we speak, are forms of resistance that impede flow. *You need a new kind of mind free of rigid beliefs.* When I made it my job to tend to the flow, the nature of my mind began to change and expand.

Eventually I not only lost interest in trying to control my speech, but I also lost interest in trying to control the rest of my life. I gave up my resistance to flow and “surrendered” to reality....observing how reality operates.

BLOCKED CREATIVES

But it was writing every single day that kept the flow going for me. No matter how many things came up to put an end to writing every day, I kept at it. We who stutter are “blocked creatives” and as Julia Cameron writes:

“Blocked creatives are easily manipulated by guilt. Our friends, feeling abandoned by our departure from the ranks of the blocked, may unconsciously try to guilt-trip us into giving up our newly healthy habits. It is very important to understand that the time given to writing (morning pages) is time between you and God. You will be led to new sources of support as you begin to support yourself.

“Be very careful to safeguard your newly recovering artist. Often, creativity is blocked by our falling in with other people’s plans for us. We want to set aside time for creative work, but we feel we should do something else instead. As blocked creatives we focus not on our responsibilities to ourselves, but on our responsibilities to others. We tend to think such behavior makes us good people. It doesn’t. It makes us frustrated people.”

I found a way to deal with people who imagined themselves to be more “benevolent” than I, and who, therefore, demanded my time for their endeavors. One morning, torn between writing and “benevolence”, a strange little rhyme occurred to me. It was the old “The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker” rhyme. It has worked for me many times since to explain this dilemma to myself: The butcher is benevolent by doing his work, providing meat for the community. The baker is benevolent by doing his work, baking bread for the community. The candlestick maker is benevolent by doing his work, giving light to the community. And I

was being benevolent by writing the flow. Of course, I needed to fit writing into the rest of my busy life, and that was a problem for many years.

Be patient but persistent. It may take a few weeks or months for flow to occur, but keep at it. When it happens you will *know* “It was worth waiting for.”

THE ARTIST’S WAY

The importance of writing as a way to flow returning to your life again just can’t be over-estimated. Writing gets rid of blocks so flow can happen. I have Natalie Goldberg’s words above my computer:

Take out another notebook, pick up another pen,
and just write, just write, just write.
In the middle of the world, make one positive step.
In the centre of chaos, make one definitive act.
Just write. Say yes, stay alive, be awake.
Just write. Just write. Just write."

Through writing every day I became acquainted with this Big Intelligence that had been looking for a way to express himself/herself/itself. I wrote out my resistance to what I was observing. My resistance was idealistic. The way my resistance fought reality was like “But I try harder than anyone on the face of the earth tries to speak, so I should be successful and fluent.”

I just sat there, listening to all the lectures of my resistant mind who believed it knew both what to say and how to say it (if I would only try a little harder.) Finally, the awareness hit me like this: “I can either surrender to reality or not. Speech happens naturally and without coercion of my academic mind so I either surrender to reality or not.”

What my tyrannical mind was saying was “It’s not fair. I work hard at speaking. I go to every speech clinic that was every thought up, I keep all the rules, and yet I stutter worse than ever.”

And my realistic self didn’t say a word. It just waited until my conscious mind surrendered to the unchangeable facts of reality.

You must surrender to (have faith in) the laws of reality. As we learn how speech naturally happens (and doesn’t happen by consciously manufacturing words), we know we can trust that truth. People often tell us to have faith, but they don’t tell us what to have faith *in*. So maybe I can help you out, save you a little time.

For example, you can have faith when you plant a garden. The truth is that if you plant a garden you *do* have faith. What do we have faith in? We have faith that nature works in a certain way. That if you plant a seed in the ground, nature will take over. If you plant lettuce, lettuce will grow. Not beets or radishes or tomatoes...but lettuce.

I can tell you to float on the water, to lay on top of the water and trust that the water will hold you up, but if water doesn’t truly hold you up, then your trust won’t last. I needed to surrender to nature.

Dwayne Dwyer defines surrender:

“By surrendering I simply mean trusting in the forces and principles that are always at work in this perfect universe,...without questioning, fighting, demanding, or even asking to fully

understand them all...just as you surrender to the greater principles that govern the universe and all of the living beings contained within it.”

So much of the stuttering cure has depended on being able to trust nature and seeing nature as providing me with adequate “stuff” to communicate with my world.

Peter Elbow wrote in “Writing with Power”:

“People often lack any voice at all because they stop so often in the act of writing a sentence and worry and change their minds about which words to use. They have none of the natural breath in their writing that they have in speaking....we have so little practice in writing, but so much more time to stop and fiddle as we write each sentence.”

The more I wrote without allowing myself to go back and edit words and spellings and content, the more this freedom carried over into my speech.

Stuttering is a handicap that seriously challenges your worldview. Many people, actually most people, have few or no challenges to their worldview, so we who stutter are extremely lucky because the depth and reality of our worldview determines our lives.

CHAPTER 17 -- SIX OF SEVEN

STOP THE CHATTER; PRACTICE NO-THINK; LEARN TO IMPROV and a technique that worked!

I PUT MY SPEECH ON CRUISE CONTROL

It was my job to develop my belief system to work with me rather than against me. I was not complete until my mind cooperated with Big Me. As I lost control over my speech I gained flow and spontaneity....that was an amazing thing to me.

Nature intends speech to be natural and spontaneous. You don't have to learn each aspect of speech or practice all the components of speech. Michael Murphy wrote:

“Most of the beautiful order seen in ontogeny is spontaneous, a natural expression of the stunning self-organization that abounds in very complex regulatory networks. We appear to have been profoundly wrong. *Order, vast and generative, arrives naturally.*” (God and the Evolving Universe)

There is nothing so productive for me as driving aimlessly through the countryside. Ideas flow easily and before long I am looking at things in a more realistic, more enlightened way. But one day I got a ticket for speeding. This ticket wasn't the first one. I had been ticketed often before for the same thing, so this ticket carried a huge fine with it. After that, driving aimlessly wasn't fun anymore. All spontaneity was gone...

After this I kept looking at the speedometer, thinking about how I was driving, whether I came to a full and complete stop at a stop sign, whether I made the proper signals when changing lanes or turning, etc., and this conscious focus on how I was driving ruined my stream of ideas, my spontaneity, my fun. I didn't have a new idea when driving for a very long time.

I know what you are going to say. You are going to say “Why didn't you use your cruise control?” That's a good question but every free spirit in the country is going to know the answer to that: I simply didn't want to have to think about putting on the cruise control. But this time, cruise control was the lesser of two evils, so I decided to use the cruise control.

And you know how magical cruise control is: It allowed me to put my speed on auto-pilot so I didn't have to think about it anymore. My old idea-flow returned almost immediately.

One day I saw the connection between that experience and stuttering. Just as ideas flow when my conscious mind is free of thought, my ideas dried up when I focused on thinking about how fast I was going at all times. In the same way, speech flows for me when my conscious mind doesn't interfere with the flow by focusing on the mechanical aspects of speech (represented by cruise control).

THE SHIFT

When I put my speech on "Cruise Control" my speech was taken over by my automatic natural subliminal mind/body. Speech on cruise control means that my conscious mind is relieved of any effort in regard to speech, just as cruise control relieves the driver of having to focus on his speed.

Natural speech is never planned in advance. It is not "thought up" or "thought about". It is not caused by conscious thought. Speech is a flowing river that happens on its own when we put speech on "Cruise Control." As fluency happened on its own I had a sense of "*I had no idea I could do this. Where does this flowing speech come from?*" My speech began to flow according to its own nature and not because of my expectations, efforts and demands.

Putting speech on "Cruise Control" could be compared to the relief of no longer focusing on the physical/mechanical aspects of what to say and how to say it. Speech on cruise control means that my conscious mind is relieved of any effort in regard to speech, just as cruise control relieves the driver of having to focus on his speed.

NO-THINK

No-Think means speaking out of the natural (un-self-conscious) big mind, speaking out of the unknown and unplanned. Don't think and then speak. Do not ever think about what you are going to say before you say it.

It seemed to me that once upon a time my censoring brain (Little Me) went poking around trying to find something to focus on, to fix, to makeover...and it settled on speaking. When I stopped listening to the Censor I experienced the shift from Conscious to natural, from Known to Unknown, from Thought to Inner Spontaneity.

A fact you should know in order to put speech on cruise control:

When the conscious mind is finally at the end of its rope and deprived of knowing what to do, it tends to drop out of a task, turning it over instead to the right hemisphere...outside the realm of conscious control. This is the natural self that knows what to say and how to say it without the help of conscious thought and effort. You have to truly understand this: Why would you ever, ever, ever look for a non-mental answer to stammering if you could trust your intellect to take you where you need to go? Why would you need faith to move mountains if you have earth moving equipment?

Some of us have too much at stake to admit that trying and working on the mechanics of speech just doesn't work so we hang tenaciously to conscious effort because we have no other answers. Some of us just flat give up on the conscious mind. Giving up was the way I arrived at the perception of the truth: "*any change achieved by my conscious mind is not permanent*" and "*trying is baloney.*"

So listen carefully: You don't choose or decide to put your speech on cruise control, you simply sit back and quietly observe reality (what is going on). *Observe* that your conscious mind is incapable of working all the muscles, breath, sound, etc. together. When you see this

clearly, your conscious mind will drop out and your natural flowing speech will take over what the conscious mind gives up.

STOP YOUR CHATTERING MIND!

The dangerous kind of thought is focused thought...thought focused on something that one has no need to think about at *all*....breathing, speaking, growing fingernails. Anytime thought focuses on anything, whether being happy, or successful, or playing the violin, I have observed that the very thing I am focusing on is the very thing that evades me. Thought focused on speech is what we have to deal with. The reason we focus on consciously trying to speak is because we truly believe effort is going to help us speak better. Only observation will tear down that stronghold.

I found my answer as to how to deal with focused thought when I raised my children. My oldest child was constantly focused on one plug-in in the living room. The minute I put him on the floor to crawl, he would head over to his Total Fascination, the electrical outlet.

I realized at this point that he wasn't old enough to change his own point of focus, so I did it for him. I didn't say a word. I merely picked him up, carried him to a favorite toy in an attempt to re-focus his thought. That would work for a while until he got bored with the toy, and he was off again, across the carpet to re-visit his favorite thing in the world: the electrical outlet.

WARNING! DON'T OPEN THAT DOOR

When you speak don't allow one moment to think about it. Thinking about what you are going to say or how you are going to say it is a door. It's like when someone asks me if I want a piece of cake, I say "No" before I think about it. If I think, even for a moment, I've opened a door to the possibility of eating the cake. Same is true with speaking. If I think about what I am going to say and how to say it, I have opened a door to a possible block and I didn't need to open that door.

HOW TO STOP THE CHATTER

As I mentioned in Chapter I, you must learn to recognize your chattering mind, differentiating it from your spontaneous mind. The chattering mind includes thinking about things people have done to you and you haven't forgiven them. Or thinking about ways to improve yourself, or remembering embarrassing situations. Any should, would, could, might be or ought to be falls into the category of "chattering mind." How do I stop the chatter of my mind and stop its incessant suggestions? I simply observe what it is doing. I see what is going on. And then I totally disregard its suggestions because even when the suggestions seem to be helpful or good suggestions, I found suggestions like "take a deep breath" to be as harmful as other chatter because it focused my mind on improving my speech.

Some ideas that help me put speech on cruise control:

* Every time I think about what to say or how to say it, I am taking my speech off cruise control and taking it back in my own hands. At first I had to realize this many times a day, that every time I was tempted to consciously make an effort to speak I was literally taking my speech off automatic cruise control.

* Be the witness to all the effort, willpower and trying you are putting forth. Every time you start planning how to say a word, observe what you are doing and poof, your plan will

evaporate into thin air because observation of your beliefs alone changes things. Speech is automatic so put it on auto pilot and refuse to think, plan, work or try to improve speech.

- * Be on the lookout for shoulds, coulds, woulds and, might be's capable of destroying the flow of speech.

- * When I found myself planning a word before I said it, I observed what I was doing and stopped it dead in its tracks.

- * When I observed myself thinking about taking a deep breath or speaking to the rhythm of a metronome, or any number of other suggestions from my conscious mind, I observed my thought and stopped it dead in its tracks. All of this "Observe and let go" was new and strange to me...and kept me on my toes all the time.

- * Putting my speech on cruise control meant "Don't ever work on speech directly or consciously, no matter how tempting."

- * Write out your wrong beliefs and question them boldly, thus getting rid of resistance (so flow can happen.)

- * Get a handle on resistance and recognize it in all its forms: trying, effort, shoulds, woulds, coulds, lectures, willpower, positive thinking, thinking-in-general as the way to freedom, and inordinate ability to criticize, try to fix, taking over what it has no ability to run, etc.

- * Speaking is not "thinking about speaking." The mind wants to substitute "thinking about speaking" for actual speaking. Where do we get the idea that thinking about speaking has anything to do with speaking? So you need to disconnect "thinking about speaking" from "speaking" in your mind. Really cut the connection.

- * You must be able to picture the fact that speech happens in a part of your brain completely inaccessible and outside the control of your conscious mind.

- * The "pathological critic" is a term coined by psychologist Eugene Sagan to describe Little Me (my inner critic.) Everyone has an inner critic but in people who stutter this critic seems to attack spontaneous speech. Remind yourself "Nature's gift to me is 'I am going to automate speech so you don't have to worry about it and can save that energy for other endeavors.'"

FEELING GUILTY

When your own Censor blames you for stuttering and you ask "why is it my fault" and it comes back at you with: "If you tried harder you wouldn't stammer," you realize you are chained to a pretty negative critical mind. One teacher (expressing her own critical mind) said "Everyone chooses what happens to him, not consciously, but he chooses it nonetheless" and suddenly I feel guilty as if I had *chosen* to stutter.

The voice of the critical mind is woven so tightly into thought that it is impossible to separate criticism and wrong beliefs from thought. In fact "I think" and "I believe" and "I imagine" are identical terms. The way we get rid of blocks is to observe our own blocks by free-writing, and as we do so, we don't need to consciously work to try to change beliefs. As soon as we see our beliefs written down in black and white (and we see how wrong and stupid they are) those beliefs evaporate into thin air.

No one but my conscious mind was able to do the work I assigned it to do: that task was to diligently write the words on paper even when there was no desire to do so. By giving my mind a clearly defined job and insisting that she do it, the nature of my conscious mind

changed from a nosy in-my-face wedge driver, to a *cooperative employee who helped me immensely*.

As we blindly follow what others tells us, we grow increasingly fearful of our natural and spontaneous nature which gives us all things to enjoy...freely and without effort. We attempt to control this natural gift by creating authoritative rule structures that define “correct speech” in a very heavy-handed way.

As I talk to stutterers I see they are intimidated and controlled by this tiny little 5% mind....the trained academic mind.....and their great struggle with speech is actually a struggle with their own demanding conscious mind.

The more I distrusted the abilities of my natural self, the more I stuttered. It was as if my stuttering said “repress natural speech and I will punish you by breaking out in your speech in cruel and distorted ways.”

Your mind was meant to be a clear channel so speech can flow unhampered. When your channel is full of resistance, whether that resistance is in the form of wrong beliefs or demands or criticism or judging....it means that we have to deal with clearing out the channel.

EVERYTHING IS NEW

When your speech is on cruise control, everything is new. You are now walking by faith....unable to rely on your old tricks. When I first put my speech on cruise control and gave up the struggle to speak consciously, I felt helpless. And judging from the old-fashioned belief that speech is the work of the conscious mind, I was helpless.

At first, every day you have the struggle “How am I going to get this word out?” and you want to resort to your old tactics because they were so comfortable; stupid and unworkable, but comfortable. You want to take off the cruise control and go back to doing it on your own. Your old beliefs were so *wrong* and yet I was so *used to them*. Beliefs like “just keep pushing the word out” or “take a deep breath” try to get the upper hand again and then it occurs to you: “No, that’s stupid. That doesn’t work. I can’t depend on those stupid tricks anymore. They never did work anyway.”

GIVE YOURSELF A GIFT

Give yourself a gift that will change your life. Stop reacting. Stuttering is a reaction. It helped me to wring reaction out of my speech and out of my life-in-general. Response is not reaction. Response is from Big Me....it is the natural non-reactive original action you can’t predict. (“If you brother steals your sweatshirt, don’t react. If he slaps you on one cheek, offer the other one also.”) No one is saying “You better quit reacting or you are going to hell.” That’s absolutely silly. There was a good mental-health reason for this turn-your-cheek philosophy: As long as you live a reactive life, your spontaneous flow will not kick in. That is absolutely a fact.

There was a time when I couldn’t go on with my writing. My cure came to an absolute standstill. The problem was that I was spending every available minute thinking about all the hurts and stings a certain relative inflicted on me. I brought those grievances, all the ones I could conjure up, built a fire in the fireplace and allowed every stick and every log to represent some grievance I had never let go.

This letting go of grievances didn’t need to involve the person I resented. It didn’t matter about her at all. All that mattered was that I cleared the channel so that flow could happen

again. Just try observing this for yourself and see what happens when you refuse to react to what people do to you or say to you. It's amazing.

SPEAK AND THEN KNOW

Since I have learned to speak spontaneously I learn what I want to say after I say it. Does that sound strange to you? Notice this for yourself, please: begin to speak or write and notice that in the act of expression you become aware of what this realm of "Unknowing" want to let you know. When I write I do not decide what to say and then say it. I say it spontaneously and then I go "Wow, that's true! It's real! I should have seen it all along!"

But we are taught that we have to consciously know what to say and how to say it consciously *before we speak.*" The reiteration of "I have to know before I speak" taught to us by authority figures builds a certain reaction to speech into our nervous system.

This Know-before-Speaking is a misunderstanding of how things work. If you want to be an artist, do you have to go to school and learn how to draw before you draw? Or do you draw and as you draw you find what and how to draw? And yet our educational system teaches:

First, learn, plan, know
Then express.

This did not work for me. The way it worked for me was: *"I speak spontaneously and then I learn what I want to say after I say it."*

A TECHNIQUE THAT WORKED FOR ME

I noticed that the stronger my thinking and imagining, the more I stuttered. Also the angrier I became at this control system taking over my speech (I came to the place where *I preferred stuttering to all the techniques I was using that made me sound either robotic or insane) the more I stuttered.* One therapist took us to a small grocery store with a list and demanded that we *sing* our list of groceries to the checker. I went home that day actually embracing my stuttering, preferring it to the artificial ways of talking I was being introduced to.

But there is one technique that worked for me in the interim (between the time I started free-writing every day....and three months later when I didn't think about stuttering anymore.) This was also the interim between when I stuttered horribly and when I didn't give speaking a thought.

I got this idea from studying early childhood development...as to how children learn language.

Suppose a child is learning to speak. He learns a word by automatically matching the *reality* of the word to the *word*. For example the reality of the moon (the moon itself) is matched in the child's mind with the word "moon". His mind holds the image of the moon at the same time he is saying the word "moon." He matches the reality with the word and he does this without thinking or effort of any kind. This is naturally how he learns.

He matches his friend's face with the word John. He looks at the blue sky and says the word blue. The matchup is the connection between the *reality* (blue sky) and the *word* "blue."

Children learn the natural way. What is actually happening when we speak (on a subliminal level) is that the unconscious perceives the non-verbal reality (for example, I see everything together....the red face, the drooped eyelids, the inability to look at anyone when one

speaks.....and the subconscious turns this “perception” into symbols (words, images, behaviors) and it does it naturally and automatically without thought. So the child also (subliminally and automatically) perceives the moon and the subconscious affixes a symbol to it...the word “moon”. This happens so quickly on the unconscious/subconscious level that we don’t realize what is happening.

HUNG UP ON WORDS

As we grow older and want to learn another language, we don’t focus on the reality behind the word. What we do is compare the word “moon” in English to the word “moon” in German. So all the time we are speaking we are focusing on words, not the reality behind the word.

I believe this is because I forgot that words are secondary to the reality the word only represents. A house on fire is a reality...the word “fire” merely represents that reality. The word “fire” is not a reality, only a symbol or representative of that reality.

What helped me was that when I got stuck on a word, I refused to repeat the word that was in my mind. If I needed to say the word “brick”, I pictured a brick, focused on that, and the word “brick” came out automatically.

If I had to say another person’s name, I would picture that person and focus entirely on the image of that person and the word came out automatically. When I returned to thinking “this guy’s name is Joe Schmoe and I have to say his name” then my mind focused on the name Joe Schmoe (instead of the image or reality of Joe) and I stuttered on the name.

If I couldn’t help but think ahead to what I was going to say, I thought of the person or the image of the concrete object, operating wordlessly. As I did so, it was natural for me to affix a name or word without ever thinking of the name or the word....only what the name or word represented.

When I spoke on the phone I realized I stuttered more than when I was face to face with the person. I think this is another manifestation of the fact that I speak better when my mind is off of words and onto the face or image before me.

So when I would get stuck during this time, I practiced focusing on the image the word merely represented....not the word itself. So don’t think of the word. Think of the image you are expressing or naming. Words are merely symbols of something else...the reality you are naming.

Talk from images, not from words. Words simply label reality. Words are like taking a Brothers labeler around and affixing a label to a reality. It’s the reality that matters far more than the word. Now it is hard for me to see words as separate from the reality words represent.

CHAPTER 18 -- SEVEN OF SEVEN

STOP CHATTERING; READ LIKE CRAZY, GET ON THE INTERNET, CONFIRM YOUR OBSERVATIONS

Back when I was trying to change my stutter, to no avail, I was shocked to find that only a relatively small group of stutterers join self-help groups or seek therapy. I wondered about all these people who didn't try to cure themselves. Who were they? Where were they? Maybe they lived on an island somewhere, Ayn Randish style. I called that island "Stutter Island" and I'd fantasize about how much fun it would be to have a huge pow-wow and talk to all those stutterers and how at-home I'd feel. I would never have to think about stuttering again.

But something better happened than getting to live on Stutter Island. I get to live in the real world and I *still* never think about stuttering.

Now, done with stuttering and busy about other things, do I have an after-the-fact theory to fit stuttering?

Yes.

Only *after* the stuttering is gone can one examine and give an explanation for what happened. To try to know beforehand is like all trying, or as Ray Bradbury wrote: (*Zen in the Art of Writing*) "To try to know beforehand is to freeze and kill. Self-consciousness is the enemy of all art, be it acting, writing, painting or living itself, which is the greatest art of all."

I no longer tolerate lectures from my effortful censoring mind. My speaking teaches *me*. I no longer need to first, know and second, speak. My secret mind tells *me* what I've observed about stuttering (and about life)...*even when I thought I wasn't looking*, even when I thought I was "sitting this one out."

As Bradbury assures us: "We never sit anything out. We are cups, constantly and quietly being filled. The trick is knowing how to tip ourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out." That is the secret of natural spontaneous speech.

THE PAIN OF LETTING GO

I had to let go of thinking about the word coming up next.
I had to let go of planning what I was going to say.
I had to let of shoulds, woulds, coulds and other judgments.
I had to let go of "trying".

As I let go of thoughts and beliefs that had been so central to my mind, I felt a sense of deprivation. I felt like a druggie who was no longer allowed to obsess about drugs, or an alcoholic never again allowed to obsess about alcohol. Or a food addict not being able to think of food or a video game freak unable to think about video games another time in his life. This strict adherence to “no-thought” was very painful for me.

When I was talking to a friend about this dilemma she said “Oh! I know what you mean now! Last year I decided to stop thinking about my mother-in-law, thinking about how I hated her, remembering all the hurts she had inflicted on me. But I didn’t have any idea what I was in for. Whenever a thought about her would cross my mind I would notice it and turn away from it....I just kept an eye open for the thoughts I had nourished for many many years. And you know what? I felt like I had this huge hole in my heart, a vacuum that nothing else could fill. Eventually my obsessive thinking about my mother-in-law went completely away and then the big hole went away. It took a few weeks.”

Inability to think about what to do about stuttering or plan what I was going to say also left a big hole in my mind that I had to fill with something. I filled it with writing.

It has been so interesting to me to read what others write about their stuttering experiences. The following paragraph was written by Anna Margolina.

"The price of trying to adjust to others is a loss of personality. And then you have to peel back all the layers to find out who you really are. But what if my parents were right, when they put every effort to harness, to suppress, to make over this raw personality of me. When they told so many times - you have to be such and such in order to fit in, to be accepted. Because if left to your instincts, you will be so horrible, no one will ever like you. So go hide and come back with a smile. Do not say what you want without thinking - you may offend someone. Do not do what you are inclined to do, because you will ruin yourself. So if I want to know who I am, who I was before the corrective measures were taken, I need to peel away all those layers of protection and be ready for hurts." (What Anna meant to say was “be ready for hurts.” But “hearts”, she added, was more descriptive of what really happened.)

FIND CONFIRMATION ON THE INTERNET

The way I find truth is to look, keep my eyes open, keep my understanding open and constantly observe. When I see a new truth I am often wild with excitement. But then, sooner or later, I need confirmation. First, I see a new truth and next, I find confirmation. What confirmation does is to firm up the weak wobbly truth I have seen. It’s an amazing process. So today I was reading a conversation on Facebook and I found this, written by Sebastian Scala. See what you think:

“Back from my summer vacation. Greg, I am definitely NOT keeping up with science. I will not surrender my awareness and growth to people in white coats. If you need to cite the New England Journal of Medicine to strengthen your Internet arguments then go for it just don't let science be your voice. Don't give it that power. What the NEJM doesn't understand is me the individual. Can you explain to me how I could win the Northern California Public Speaking championship in 2002 and yet not be able to order a pizza the next day? How could I go 6 minutes and 24 seconds without a blip one day and be so non-fluent the next. There was nothing genetically holding me back on the phone with the pizza guy. If so it would have shown up the

day before. It was only through observation which created awareness which caused change that my speech has MONUMENTALLY improved. The way to resolve this issue is from the inside out not vice versa. We have to observe our behaviors of when we are fluent and non-fluent and chart what we are doing in both these situations.

“Non-fluency can be a gift because it provides insight into what we are doing or not doing. Blaming stuttering on genetics is taking the ball out of our hands and becoming victims. I'm not ready to do that. Salvation is an inside job and this situation we all face is salvageable. Look at the people who've recovered from this and there are many. They haven't done it by taking pills or surrendering their role in recovery. I am open to honest and good dialogue. There are no aspersions being cast here I hope there are none taken. It's all about exchanging ideas. I feel after 40 years I'm hot onto something. I'll bet my house on it! :)”

BE BRAVE

Expression of what I experienced caused some problems for me. I began to discern that there are people who are so committed to idealism that they despise any observation or statement that does not fully back up their ideals and beliefs. Even in the stuttering community I found this mindset. This was really disappointing to me at first until I committed myself once again to the search for truth. I copied the following paragraph and kept it close at hand...from Marshall Mathers: *“Cause sometimes you feel tired, feel weak, and when you feel weak, you feel like you wanna just give up. But you gotta search within you, you gotta find that inner strength and just pull that shit out of you and get that motivation to not give up and not be a quitter, no matter how bad you wanna just fall flat on your face and collapse.”*

Stuttering was not merely a speech block, it was a block in my understanding. Therefore overcoming stuttering involved growth in understanding of what was going on when I spoke.

I stopped purposely trying to change my behavior (at one time I had seen stuttering as mere behavior) when I became aware that stuttering is rooted in something deeper: wrong beliefs that played havoc with the reality of speech as a flowing river, spontaneous and natural.

Essentially I learned “Take what you will. Take fluency if you like. You can have it. You can have anything you want. But hey, *‘Take what you will’ is only half the story.* The other half of the story is *“Take what you will but you must pay for it.”*

Paying for it doesn't mean that I've changed my view about communication being a free and spontaneous gift. I didn't pay to stop stuttering by working hard, practicing speech, learning to breathe, etc. The work I did was of a different order, of course. I didn't work to stop stuttering. I worked to clear the channel (my mind) so speech could flow easily without constantly starting and stopping in order to criticize, fix or second-guess my speech.

THE INTERNET CHANGES THINGS

The greatest help to me emotionally through early feelings of hopelessness (Dr. Wendell Johnson referred to this feeling as *“copelessness”*) was to find a few others who were going through what I was slogging through. At that time there was no Internet, so it wasn't easy to find others with my problem. And when I did find these like-minded “others” we formed a group. In this group we knocked our ideas around, told each other our embarrassing stories, and gained comfort from the awareness that we weren't alone in our struggles. I lived in Mu-

nich, Germany at that time and we named our group “Assn. for the Study and Cure of Stuttering.” This group was a bright spot in my life.

No one was able to offer any terribly profound suggestions about stuttering although we did do a lot of talking and a lot of writing. We spent hours researching the subject and talking to each other about our own observations. But even though we may not have produced any major breakthroughs we *were* able to comfort each other.

Things have now definitely taken a turn in your favor. It is now easy to find others with your problem and communicate with them. Blog. Twitter. Put in the word “*stutter*” in any search engine and follow where it takes you.

YOU DON'T STUTTER ONLINE

Relentlessly express yourself to other people who stutter about your particular problems. And listen to them when they speak to you. We who stutter often need to be listened to. You will be shocked but comforted to realize there are approximately 50 to 60 million people in the world who have the same problem you do.

Four out of five people who stutter are male. Find out for yourself why this is so. Ask others what they think. You will find great community on the Internet. If you don't have Internet, you must find a way to get it. Going to a library may be okay for a while but you need your own computer. There are programs that provide school age children computers at a greatly reduced price. Ask your school about these programs.

“Wordpress” offers free blogs and free web pages. Start a blog. Start writing about where you are on this stuttering journey. You will be amazed at the response you get.

Yahoo has stuttering groups you can join. “Facebook” has a large group of PWS. You will find what helps and hinders other PWS. My time is stretched too thin to spend a great deal of time at this, but if you can find the time you will feel an enormous sense of belonging and community.

What to look for? I found that a few in the stuttering community confirmed my own observations and this was important. And all you need are a few voices to confirm your own. Maybe you will also be able to be there for others who are searching for answers..

As it turned out, John Harrison wasn't the only one who was able to think out of the box. Others had also stuck their necks out; others had flown the coop. As soon as I got on Facebook, and “liked” a few stuttering organizations such as *National Stuttering Association* as well as *British Stammering Assn.*, Stuttering Jack “friended” me. I found that this guy had spent his life researching stuttering. His website (www.stutteringjack.com) was very helpful. The listings I include at the end of the Bibliography were ones I initially found through his website.

To close this out, I have made a list of websites and books that were helpful to me in the “Bibliography.” Maybe they will also be helpful to you.

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