

AND THE STUTTERING JUST DIES

JOHN HARRISON INTERVIEWS JACK MENEAR

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I came upon a rather unusual article that someone had sent to the National Stuttering Association. The author, Jack Menear, had apparently recovered from stuttering, and he attributed his recovery to the fact that he had adopted a different way of thinking. The ideas, although expressed in different words, were remarkably similar to what I had also discovered about my own stuttering.

Perhaps what I had learned was more of a universal truth than I had imagined. We ended up running the article on two different occasions in the pages of "Letting GO", and it generated more

response and comment from our readers than any other previous article.

Here is the article by Jack Menear:

AND THE STUTTERING JUST DIES

BY

JACK MENEAR

"I stuttered for twenty some years, and it seemed that there was no place to find real help. Through a year of self-analysis of the problem, the way out became apparent. Since I never went the route of speech therapy, my approach to becoming fluent is non-traditional.

It is clear now that stuttering is really a whole lifestyle founded on incorrect mental habits. When the speech blocks are identified as the outward expression of these mental habits, the habits can be changed, and the stuttering just dies.

It is important to note the passive element in this approach. Rather than focusing on "beating stuttering", I focused on eliminating the mental

habits that prompted it. The stuttering falls aside without direct confrontation. As a result, the classic approach of pre-, post, and in-block correction is not important.

FUNDAMENTAL THOUGHTS ABOUT STUTTERING

Malcolm Fraser makes an interesting statement about stuttering:

"...the statement can be made that stuttering is largely what the stutterer does trying not to stutter. In other words, it is an incredible trick which you play on yourself because you have such a consuming desire to speak fluently."

This statement accurately reflects that the reason we stutter is because we are afraid we might stutter. Later in the same chapter, Fraser follows this up with:

"If there were some way you could distract your mind from thoughts of fear, or you didn't think about it, possibly you wouldn't have any trouble. Or if you could forget you were a stutterer, you probably wouldn't stutter, but we don't know how you could develop such a forgettery."

It's no wonder that people have given up on developing a "forgettery." The harder you try not to think about something, the more you actually are thinking about it. One could say, "I won't think about stuttering. I won't think about stuttering. I won't think about stuttering." But the truth is that you're thinking about stuttering. What a frustrating circle it is!

But I don't think this route should be neglected. There is a way around this dilemma, and it is the fastest way to ending the stuttering

problem.

In addition, if this route is chosen, there is no residual dependence on blocking techniques or tricks. And since the route is based on truth and honesty, permanence is guaranteed.

In a nutshell, the answer to developing this "forgettery" requires that you stop fighting the stuttering. Don't even fight the causes. Just be willing to give up the patterns of thinking that stimulate the stuttering.

Don't fight and confront.

Just let it go.

MENTAL PATTERNS THAT CAUSE STUTTERING

To understand the mental patterns that cause stuttering there are two obvious places to

look:

(1) the differences between how a non-stutterer thinks when talking as compared to a stutterer, and

(2) the difference you feel inside during periods of fluency and non-fluency.

It is a fact that when we are in the habit of anticipating and trying to control that gives rise to the fear and tension which ultimately leads to stuttering.

Probably as a group, stutterers are the most introspective people in the world. The mere thought of stuttering is so frightening that it focuses our whole world inward. With time, this inward focus is all we know.

It becomes accepted that we consciously anticipate each time we'll have to talk. A frantic scramble to gain control becomes consuming, and by the time we actually do have to speak, we've "lived" the experience a hundred times in our mind.

By anticipating and trying to control, we've allowed the fear of stuttering to gain such momentum that we force ourselves to stutter. If we let go of the mental habits of anticipating and controlling, we desensitize ourselves to the fear of stuttering, and, hence, the stuttering itself dies out. In essence, we allow ourselves to think about speaking like a non-stutterer.

A non-stutterer just lets his words flow; it never occurs to him to anticipate his words or control how each word leaves his mouth.

Fortunately (or unfortunately), stuttering is not the only affliction based on the fear of fear. The stutterer has a fear that he (or she) may have a fear of stuttering. Agoraphobics (people with a fear of leaving the safety of their home) have a fear of their fear also. And, of course, it's based on anticipation and need for control starting the whole thing off.

Dr. Claire Weekes has proposed four simple rules that have effectively helped agoraphobias, and these rules apply equally well for stutterers. Dr. Weekes' rules (modified by explanatory statements) are as follows:

- (1) Face: do not run. When anticipation and control thoughts appear, look at them for what they are. Don't suppress them or hide from them; recognize and define them.

- (2) **Accept:** do not fight. Calmly accept that this unwanted thought has surfaced.
- (3) **Float past:** do not listen in. The thought is there, but you don't have to control this line of thinking (although you have a habit of continuing it.) Decide to "let it go."
- (4) **Let time pass:** do not be impatient with time. Stuttering won't disappear instantly with the understanding of this concept. It's a habit of years, and will take time to dissolve completely.

You're not "beating the stuttering," you're just practicing your choice of letting unwanted thoughts go. As a result, the stuttering grows less and less frequent.

It takes confidence to change mental habits, and that comes from feeling "I'm okay."

Because of the complexity and embarrassment of stuttering, it's easy to incorporate some "I'm not okay" attitudes (as evidenced by being unwilling to tell people you stutter.)

Let's face it: You and I got caught in stuttering. We both wish we hadn't, but we did. Well, that's no reason to feel not okay. Maybe the stuttering is not okay, but you are separate from the stuttering, and you are many things besides a stutterer; you have a right to feel okay.

You have as much right to feel okay as any person on earth. While you're letting the stuttering die, take time to let this "I'm okay" feeling filter through your mind.

I'm not talking about a few affirmations of being okay. *I mean this belief absorbed throughout the conscious and unconscious minds based on a truthful inward look.*

OPEN UP

Open up to yourself. Sure, you stutter. So what! You've also got traits to be envied. You like people. You're honest. You've completed some difficult adventures. You're proud. Look at all your real feelings. If you see something you don't like, don't feel it as a negative; it's just something you want to change. Be 100 percent open; there's nothing to hide from.

And when you can see yourself without self-deception, you're basing the "I'm okay" feeling on the truth...and that's permanent!

FACING THE UNKNOWN

Years of habit become a lifestyle. To the stutterer, fear, tension, anticipation and relentless need for control guide our every move. Now you decide to give it up.

Logically, you say "I want to give it up."
But the inner mind wants to hold on. The fear,
tension, anticipation and control are all it knows.
Maybe they're bad, but at least they're familiar;
and there's comfort in familiarity.

You'll have to give up that comfort and
enter a completely new way of thinking and
living. Don't let this hold you back. The journey
is worth it. Others have done it. And since you
feel okay, you deserve to make the change. You
deserve to live the way you want.

Everything I've said so far is on a factual
level. To give you an idea of how it feels to think
the non-stuttering way, I'd like to share some
thoughts and feelings I identify with:

- (a) I feel totally aware and calm. I am aware
of my actions and directions, but I'm simply
floating from instant to instant, content to

handle each situation as it arises.

- (b) The conscious mind is quiet. It used to be filled with an endless chatter of words. But now I choose what I want to think about, and "don't listen in" to the garbage thoughts. As a result, less words are passing through my thoughts in a given period of time.
- (c) My mind is not preoccupied with thoughts of attack or defense.
- (d) I've promised myself to float through life applying my true self to each situation as it arises. Sometimes I'm forced to play a role (e.g.: work image), but I am aware of the role, and play the role being myself as much as I believe I can.
- (e) I do not fear stuttering thoughts coming to mind because I know I can let them go. I

say to myself, "that's just the stuttering mentality again," and I choose not to care about it or follow it.

(f) I try to be totally involved with everything I do, but I'm not preoccupied with the results of my action.

(g) Sometimes I feel almost irresponsible or undirected by just floating from second to second, but I know that this is only by comparison to the highly anticipative and control-oriented thinking I used to have. It's correct now, and wrong before. This is supported by my greatly increased performance in everything I do (including work, where regimentation and order is expected.)

(h) I know that the stuttering is dying off, but I don't care one way or the other. Every so

often I'll stutter, but it's such a rare occurrence that it doesn't matter. But I accept that it could happen; I just don't care. In fact, it's beyond my control anyhow whether I stutter. All I can do is let go of the anticipative and control-oriented way of thinking about speech. Certainly I don't want to fight the stuttering.

- (i) I don't have to tell the world I stutter. But if I felt it were necessary to tell someone, I wouldn't hesitate because I'm OK.
- (j) I have a right to live without unnecessary fear. Anyone who's willing to take the consequences of his lifestyle can make this decision. It's a choice.
- (k) I never "rehearse" an upcoming conversation in my mind (anticipation and desire for control), nor do I avoid talking

(because that's avoidance and I have a right to live without needless fear.)

FINAL NOTES:

Since control has been a large part of your thinking for years, it will be difficult to imagine how you can survive without controlling each moment. You may think that without control you'll float aimlessly and become mentally sluggish.

You may feel you'll walk unarmed into dangerous situations, or you'll walk into situations you can't handle.

Don't be fooled; it's just your control and anticipation habits reasserting themselves. The truth is that without the chatter in your head, you'll read situations with extra clarity and react from your "I'm okay" being.

Don't fight and don't fear. Look forward to

each new instant and enter it without fear. Go ahead.”

INTERVIEW WITH JACK MENEAR

When I read this article by Jack Menear, I was struck by the unusual ideas regarding the mental habits associated with stuttering, detailing how a person could reverse his habits to become fluent without working on his speech, per se.

Like many people, I was dying to find out how Jack had arrived at his insights and set out to track him down.

My letter caught up with him in San Antonio, Texas, where he had recently moved, and where he was working as a real estate developer (though today he is back to his original vocation as a chemist).

After suitable arrangements I conducted

an hour and a half phone interview which I transcribed.

Jack was the first person I had met who had completely mastered his stuttering problem. (Jack appeared not only totally fluent, but devoid of the kind of thinking characteristic of “fluent stutterers.”) Even less frequently had I come across someone who could clearly articulate the step-by-step process that led to the solution of his stuttering behavior.

This is a long interview, and it will take you a little while to get through it. But I guarantee the trip is well worthwhile. You will be exposed to some radical thoughts about the essential nature of stuttering.

And especially, you will discover the ways in which stuttering is a reflection of how a person lives his or her life. JCH

JOHN HARRISON: Tell me a little about your experiences as a person who stutters. How did you grow up? What was it like? How bad was your speech?

JACK MENEAR: I'd say it was really bad around junior high and high school days. It was bad enough in college so that I would sit in the classroom, and instead of asking a question, I would figure I'd read it later, you know. It was bad from that standpoint. I felt it was really restricting. And, like with most people, it cycled. Sometimes it was real bad and sometimes it was real good.

It seemed like if I went out and was doing a lot of drinking with friends, I didn't stutter. And so I drank a lot. I didn't really tie that together

before. I'd go out and get loose and I wouldn't care about it. It was usually to the point where I could control it. I could get to that calm spot and push my way through the words.

But of course that's something that doesn't always work. That's the hard way to do it. You're always fighting. I never really solved my stuttering problem until just a few years ago. It was always there, and if I wasn't stuttering, I always had that tension, that anxiety. It was always there. Maybe I hid it from other people, but I was still stuttering inside.

JH: How did your stuttering manifest itself? Were they repetitions or quiet blocks?

JM: It could have been any of those. The truth is I never really got into a study of the symptoms. I

just knew I couldn't talk.

JH: Was it because you were just blocked?

JM: There were times when I'd start to say something, and the first syllable would repeat a lot. But normally, if I couldn't say it, I couldn't say it.

JH: So it started in high school?

JM: I'd say junior high.

JH: Had you been dysfluent as a kid?

JM: No. It literally started in junior high. I actually remember the first experience. It happened in geography class. There was another kid in the

class that had a stutter. And I guess I must have thought -- "God, I hope that never happens to me." And one day in class I must have dwelled on that fear long enough that it got itself going. And a guy asked me a question and I couldn't answer it. It was pretty terrifying. And it got really bad for a long time. Really awful. Then like most people I fought for some control of it. And I got to an acceptable level. But you know I didn't really like going out much, and stuff like that.

JH: So it got in your way.

JM: Yeah, it got in the way of my social life.

JH: What were the circumstances that led up to your particular insights and all the things that have happened since?

JM: Basically, what happened is that I just got teed off. I tried everything. I tried hypnosis. I did all this stuff, you know. Probably everything I tried gave a little bit of relief. But it was never permanent, and I never knew when this relapse would occur. It always seemed to come out of the blue. It wasn't there for a while, and then all of a sudden there it was. I just decided that I would change jobs. I would break my current social circle, so that I would spend an awful lot of time alone.

JH: What kind of a job did you have?

JM: I was a marketing guy. I got into marketing because I felt I needed to talk to people and that was my way of getting at it. But then I started

this period of introspection. It was around Christmastime, and the people left the house I was living in. I realized that if I was going to change the stuttering, I was going to have to change a little of everything. I was going to have to become a different person.

JH: That's fascinating. Go on.

JM: What happened was I changed jobs, I moved. And this was the most difficult part. I didn't make new friends. The reason was that I was being really greedy with my time. I wanted my own time. Every night I wrote in my diary. Incidentally, I find it difficult to believe that anybody can break the stuttering habit without the direction of a diary. It's a very strong recommendation, because it ties things together. You see the trend.

JH: It helps you to be an observer of what's going on.

JM: Yeah. And 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 was just incredibly invaluable. In fact I'm really teed off.

Somebody stole my diary. I had everything written down, step-by-step, all the way through. The whole process. I haven't forgotten it, but it would have been nice to have saved a lot of that stuff. But anyhow, I would go home, and every evening I would really get into becoming very calm.

And I started to be open to anything that was going on. I started to set directions, and figure out logically what I could do.

A lot of it came by insight. You know, when you're very relaxed, a thought comes. I'd try to capture it on paper right away. Sometimes I didn't understand what it meant. And other times it felt like the pen was moving by itself, and I was just an observer. And out it would come. But slowly I started to put it together. It started to make more sense. But I would never really totally open up.

Then one night I was stretched out in the living room, and I started to think about the stuttering. It led me to all sorts of inner thoughts, and I finally got to one area where I felt that if I thought about it, I would go crazy. I remember that I had this visualization. There was this

burning gate, and I knew if I walked through it, I'd go crazy. But I thought, screw it, I'm just tired of this. I'm going to walk through it anyhow.

So I went through it, and I was still there. The relief I felt that night meant that I was no longer afraid to go after any thought. And with that, the stuttering started to die very, very quickly.

JH: How interesting. Was what you went into something of a personal nature in terms of an observation?

JM: Yeah. It was pretty personal. But at the time I didn't know what I was going to find there. It turned out the thought was totally innocuous. I mean, I don't think I even remember what it is any more. But it was a fear of looking. Once I got

over the fear of looking, I realized that there was no thought that could hurt me.

JH: How old were you then?

JM: I was in my thirties.

JH: You're how old now?

JM: Thirty-eight.

JH: So you got to look at something you were afraid of. And it sounds like you became gradually more aware of yourself and what was happening, especially, what you might have been holding back.

JM: Exactly! It's interesting that you use those words. Because here's a thought that I wrote up

for a guy I was working with some time ago. As far as I know this guy no longer stutters. We had some good conversations, and he left for about six months. He was going to school at Stanford, and just before he left school, he called me up and asked me if I'd like to have dinner with him. We had a very fluent conversation. It was beautiful. Here was the comment I had for him: "Without a clearly defined knowledge of inner feelings, uneasiness, anxiety and nervousness are natural." And then a parenthesis under natural: "Sometimes this appears as a holding back or a fearful worry about what's going to happen next." That's exactly your perception. Even your words are the same.

JH: If you use the word "stuttering," you're looking at the visible manifestation of the problem.

JM: Exactly.

JH: But if you use the words “holding back,” you raise the question --“What am I holding back?” -- and it encourages you to look deeper.

JM: That’s why I liked the Thirteen Points (“13 Observations About People Who Stutter.”) Because my article went only lightly into the idea of developing self-awareness. But I recognized that without thoughts like your “13 points” people will not be able to let go until they’re willing to look at what’s holding them back.

JH: You mentioned that you’ve been involved in the martial arts. I had a sense that your involvement helped to give you more insight into the nature of speech blocks. I wonder if you could comment on

what you have learned from the martial arts that has helped formulate your ideas about stuttering.

JM: Truly the one thing that I learned was that instead of trying to write your script in life, just start giving it more fluidity. Just let it go.

JH: Just let the script write itself, so to speak.

JM: Let it write itself. You can still have plans and know where you want to go. But don't try and control each second. Don't try and control every conversation. Be more part of a bigger picture. Don't see yourself so much as the center. Now, that's very oriental in thinking. But in the martial arts you have to be that way. I guarantee that in a sparring match if you can mentally verbalize a thought while you're sparring, you're going to get

beaten. But if you go out there and you have no thoughts in your head, you'll probably win. In other words, if you can consciously think when you're on the mat, if you can see a punch coming and register it consciously, you've just been hit. But if you let go, it will almost appear that your hand came up and blocked the punch at the same time that you saw it. So it gave me some insight about not thinking so much. Then I bought a pistol to explore my insight even further. In pistol shooting you're supposed to squeeze the trigger until it shoots. But if you try and anticipate when that gun is going to go off, your scores will be terrible. On the other hand, if you simply keep on the target and squeeze, and every time it goes off it's a surprise to you, you'll do great.

JH: Did you ever read a book called "Zen and the

Art of Archery”?

JM: Yeah. It started me into pistols. I bought a bow, but the bow was too hard to pull. It was too much like work, but the pistol gave me the same message.

JH: An observation I've made is that peoples' speech habits are really an extension of their lifestyle. So when a person changes something basic, like how he thinks or how he relates to others, frequently his speech will change also.

JM: One thing that really helped was that I changed my posture. I would literally stand around the house, and I would assume the posture of a very confident person. I would see what that felt like. It felt very abnormal. When I stood with my

shoulders wide, my head very erect and straight, my eyes with a very nice horizon to them, that was not a natural pose. It was the pose of a confident person. Then I would go back and assume my typical slumped position to see what that was telling me. It was a great teacher. In fact, I recently finished a series of ten rolfing sessions to work on this slumped posture left over from the stuttering. I took their ten sessions, and now I'm able to stand very straight naturally. (*Rolfing is a series of deep muscle massages designed to loosen the fascia that keep muscles locked in a particular "set."*-- JH.)

JH: Rolfing is something I've thought of doing.

JM: Oh, I would suggest it. Of all the things that I've done in my life, that certainly ranks with one

of the memorable. The benefits will blow you away. Now when I stand in my natural position, it is reminiscent of the confident pose that I was playing with. You know, thoughts are reflected in your body...in your body-mind.

I changed my mind, and I stopped the stuttering, but my body hadn't caught up yet. That was why I did the rolfing. Several evenings every week I used to do a lot of stretches, twists and hard exercises to straighten myself back up. But I realized that I really wanted to have somebody rearrange the tissues so I could naturally stand upright. I would strongly suggest it. I would like to talk to you after you've done it. You'll enjoy the hell out of it.

JH: I'm sure.

JM: I learned a lot from that. Anyhow, I guess what I'm saying is that there's a very strong relation between your physical posture, the way you stand, and how you think.

JH: What can you say to someone who doesn't know anything about rolfing, or for whom rolfing is not available?

JM: People made changes long before rolfing was around. All I'm saying was that that was a nice finishing touch.

JH: Have you been cognizant of the books on assertive training?

JM: I'm aware of them. I've never had to read them. I've always been relatively aggressive.

JH: What you say actually highlights my point, because there's a difference between assertiveness and aggressiveness.

JM: I would say that I was more assertive than aggressive. The stuttering could have stopped me from doing all the things I wanted to do. But I usually didn't let it stop me. I would do it anyhow. If I stumbled, that would just be tough.

JH: It sounds like some of the things you did had a more aggressive nature, and when you got in touch with those behaviors, you went from aggressive to assertive. Assertiveness can be quiet and laid back. It means basically being in touch with yourself as a person and your rights as a person, regardless of what anybody else is doing or

saying.

JM: You know, maybe that's true. Because now I feel like I can just do what I want to do. I think the aggressiveness I had before was a kind of pushiness. I would kind of dig my feet in and say, "You're not gonna move me." That sort of aggressiveness.

JH: The difference is that when you're being aggressive, it's usually at the expense of someone else.

JM: I've never been aggressive in that way. I've always been pretty sensitive to other people.

JH: I was, too. But, say, if I was going to ask someone for a pack of cigarettes, that would often

feel like an aggressive act, rather than assertive one. Somehow in my mind I had formatted any self-assertion on my part as a threat to someone else. It's as if when I "won," the other person had to "lose."

JM Was this during the stuttering time, John?

JH: No, this was my nature as a whole.

JM: Then maybe it's a hangover from the stuttering. The stuttering mentality leads you to believe that each time you ask even a simple question, you have to struggle.

JH: I was always afraid of coming on too strongly with the other person. Being assertive was often seen as a confrontation, because I had confused

assertiveness with aggressiveness. Do you remember the game "King of the Mountain"? That kind of mentality carried over to everything I did. Either someone else was on the mountain and I had to get him off, or I was on the mountain and they had to get me off. But after I went through a lot of the personal growth trainings, that view of the world changed to a world in which everyone had their own mountain. So that instead of a one-mountain world it was a world with infinite mountains and everyone had an opportunity to climb to the top of his.

JM: Yeah, that's a nice visualization. I can't remember specifically if I felt like that or not. At this point everything I've learned is kind of integrated.

JH: Did you notice other changes in your life as your speech changed?

JM: I began seeing a more holistic picture. After I got through the stuttering, I began to see how the mind restricts the body. The next thing I decided to do was to take the Bates system for improving eyesight. And now I see very well without glasses.

JH: How long did it take you to do that?

JM: About a year and a half. It took a lot of effort and a lot of thinking. But sure as hell, all the same things were there. If I looked in your face and saw too much detail, that was being too aggressive. And so I just didn't see that. If I shifted my vision all over your face, that was

intruding. You couldn't have that. It wasn't totally acceptable.

JH: How interesting.

JM: I wasn't the only one. That was a very common observation among the people in my class. They were not stutterers, but their vision was related to that sort of mentality. I used my stuttering experience to help me through that. The paper I wrote about how to get past stuttering—people understand it on an intellectual level, that's going to be their first hit. But if they get stuck on the intellectual level, nothing will happen. However, if they become submissive to the habit of letting thoughts go, stuttering will die. If you do the Bates exercises and understand *intellectually* how to shift your eyes, open your periphery and so

on, it'll simply be an exercise that you periodically do in class. But if you take it on as a goal for the rest of your life, then your vision will improve.

JH: What commonality did you find in what you were doing with your eyes and with your speech?

JM: All the same picture. Holding back.

JH: You said before that your right eye was virtually blind.

JM: Yeah, it could perceive light patterns, but it couldn't discriminate...fully see. I simply saw with the left eye. If I talked to you, the right eye would squint. It would be shut most of the time, or almost shut. It wasn't doing anything. It was just kind of there. I still have more work to do in

this. Because now that I have both eyes being able to see, my next job is to make them work together. I've got systems to do that now. I've got these playing cards. I wear this red lens and this green lens. And one eye can see one card and one eye can see the other. If I see both sides together, I've got both sides of my brain working. It's still a continuing thing, but both eyes do work now. I think we're getting off stuttering.

JH: Not really.

JM: But the thing that stopped the vision...I'd had bad vision before I stuttered, but when I look back as to what was necessary for the cure, it was the same mentality, the same holding back. The same inability to let something function the way it was meant to function. I was going to

control it, right? I wasn't going to let the body work the way it was meant to work. I was going to do it. And that screwed everything up.

JH: Fascinating. You said some marvellous things just now. You just tied it all together. In our conversation yesterday, I mentioned that one of the observations I've made about the Precision Fluency Shaping Program is that if someone is ready to make a change, then the program really helps their speech...in part because of all the practicing they do after the course is over.

JM: I wouldn't call that practice. I would call that integrating it into your life.

JH: They literally have to practice a certain amount of time over the next year because they're

learning how to relax certain muscles.

JM: The idea is to carry it into your everyday life, to make it part of you. When you do, it's no longer an exercise, it's your habit.

JH: The point is that you need to be at that stage in your life when you're really willing and motivated to take the next step, so to speak.

JM: I can see what you're saying.

JH: What I notice is that some people have not made this change in their life, so that even though they've acquired a new skill, they're constantly fighting that skill because it doesn't fit into how they see themselves.

JM: Right. To absorb that skill they have to give up something more familiar, and they won't do it. I stopped going around and giving talks on this, because I felt that it did not work. I would carry my article in and just talk to people. I would talk off that sheet, and then I would let them ask whatever questions they had. But it turns out that if I went looking to help them, no one got any help. But if they came looking for me... like one guy in particular, his name was Mark Gottlieb. Mark called me up one night and said he heard that I was going to give that talk and he really wanted to hear it but he couldn't make it that night. So he said would I send him a copy of that article. I sent it to him. He read it and called me right back, and said could he talk to me. We met for supper and talked about the article. He was primed to learn. He was really motivated.

Interesting guy. He also had a lot of yoga background. So when I talked about letting thoughts go and being an observer, he was very tuned to that. He called me a couple of times afterwards to say he was having a little trouble here, here and here. And we talked about it, and got together for supper again. By that time he was getting very fluent. Then he disappeared for a few months. I saw him before he left, and he was totally fluent. But he came to me. He came looking. He was ready to change.

JH: He also had a point of view enhanced by yoga.

JM: I think his yoga helped him a lot. In fact, once I learned he was into yoga, I suggested something I did myself at the beginning. I called it calibrating my mind. Every morning I would

practice the yoga concept of the blank mind. I think they call it looking at the candle...they've got a million names for it. You sit down and try not to have any thoughts. Of course, if you try to force the thoughts out of your mind, you just get more of them. But when you are content to simply sit in the eye of the hurricane, the thoughts die out. Then you can start to get mastery over your mind. He identified very strongly with that. And he did it; every morning he got up and for the first half hour he would go to the blank mind. The idea is to carry the blank mind through your life. If you can, you won't stutter, because you're not anticipating.

JH: You know, somebody pointed out recently about anticipation that it gets you out of touch with your present experience.

JM: Oh, absolutely.

JH: And the problem with being out of touch with your experience is that you can't effectively deal with what's happening. So your responses tend to be unconscious and automatic.

JM: I totally agree with that. If you're mentally verbalizing thoughts, you are no longer in the current experience. You are no longer able to experience fully what's going on. Because you're either in the past or in the future.

JH: Whereas when you're really *in* the experience, you're not even aware that *you* are talking. It's more like the talking just happens.

JM: Yeah, yeah. I don't think I'm quite at that stage. I wish I were. That's my ideal. I chase that one. I think I get better every year. I think that there are many, many levels to understanding that, and I think I've got a long way to go.

JH: I few months ago I got involved with an improvisation (acting) class that calls for the same kind of spontaneity. I could not have done that years ago because I'd think too much and get in my own way. Improvisation requires you to be willing to trust what comes up and just let it happen, no matter how foolish you feel at the time.

JM: You're exactly right. It's like we were saying, don't force the script, just live it. It goes all the way back to being comfortable...to your "13

common characteristics about people who stutter". If you know who you are, it's pretty easy to simply address yourself to each moment when it arrives. If you don't know who you are, you're not sure you can handle it.

JH: So it sounds like what you're saying is that it's hard to make changes without having at least a certain level of self-knowledge. Because without it you tend to work against yourself.

JM: Yes, there will always be some unknown factor inside you that's holding you back. If you don't have the guts to look inside...it's very difficult. I wish I knew how to tell people to do that. But if you block yourself through your feelings and your thoughts...your concept of who you are...my god, you can be just terrified of that. Anything

unknown is terrifying. That's why I'm glad that your "13 points" appeared in the same issue with my article. They really supplement each other. Because if people don't think about your 13 points, then what I wrote will simply be an intellectual exercise that people may say nice things about, but no one will gain from.

JH: We've been recommending that people do EST or Lifespring (*These were personal growth programs that began on the West Coast and became available nationally.—JH*) or one of the other growth trainings to begin to get a feeling for themselves as people. What I've noticed about people who stutter is that there seems to be an inordinate amount of unconsciousness about themselves as people. And especially, at the moment when a person stutters or blocks, there's a

sense of panic and complete unconsciousness as to what's going on. People don't even know they're having feelings at that moment. They have this uncontrollable block, and they don't relate it to anything such as, well, I may be feeling something that I want to block and therefore I'm doing it in my speech. So the block seems to be an unattached phenomenon. Even people's language supports this, like—"I've been hit by a block."—as if somebody dropped it on them from the top floor, rather than the block being something that they're creating themselves.

JM: I've felt like this when I stuttered. No one can help me. No one can define it. It's coming from nowhere. Well, it wasn't coming from nowhere. I was creating it each time. I used to tell people when they would look at my article initially, I'm

not proposing a way to cure stuttering. All I'm proposing is a way that you can stop creating it. Because you create it every time.

JH: Exactly. And what is fascinating—and this is also what people have a hard time getting—is that stuttering disappears as a by-product of doing something else.

JM: Absolutely. That's the whole point of what I tried to write. You don't attack stuttering. You change. And then the stuttering belongs to another mentality. Or a past life style. And if you have a remission where you fall back into it, look at what happened to your life, and you'll find that you just fell back into that same old mentality again. But if you can see it, if you can define it, you jump right back out again.

JH: So in that way the blocks, the stuttering can be a really good indicator of what's going on in your life...like some kind of dial or meter. So instead of seeing that as something to run away from, you look at it as something to use. It's your body talking to you. It's the same as getting a pain from doing too much exercise. Or a pain from not using your body right. Your body tells you things. And your speech, being part of your body, is also telling you things.

JM: It's a message, you know, for sure. In fact, I'm sure you must feel this way since you also brought yourself through this thing. You learned an awful lot about how your mind and body work. And I think this is an advantage. I can't say that I'm glad that I once stuttered, but being where I

am now, I tend to feel like I have a very large advantage over a lot of people in terms of understanding myself. I think that there's a capability that you get from coming through it, and so anyone who undertakes this sort of work, their goal is going to be a lot more rewarding than just not stuttering. Their life is really going to get nice.

JH: What are some of the questions that people have asked you when you present these ideas to them, Jack?"

JM: My most common question from people I've worked with a year and a half ago—they would say, "Look, how can I monitor my progress?" And that was a very serious question because, remember, you're not fighting symptoms. You're

fighting the mentality that creates them. So you're succeeding when you're not thinking about stuttering. I was grossed out by the fact that people would talk about percent of fluency—that's bull! What they're doing is simply measuring a frequency of symptom. What you should really do if you want to monitor your stuttering is to take a hike in the mountains, take all day and go up to Muir Woods and hike. And if you spend all day thinking about the trees and nature and the plants and fresh air and sunshine, you've improved. Because you haven't thought about stuttering. If you come home and can put on your favorite album and get all the way through that album without thinking about stuttering, you've improved. So actually, the only real measure of your improvement is how well you can stay focused on what you're doing. That's how you measure it.

JH: What you seem to be saying is that the best way to deal with something you're afraid of is to do what often feels unnatural; that is, take the thing you're afraid of and simply put it aside. Let it be there, but don't become obsessed with it. Instead, focus your attention on the things you really want to do. Get caught up in useful details, like how you want go about accomplishing these things.

JM: When a fear thought comes by, if you take that fear thought and identify with it right at your center, it consumes you. And then you'll screw up because you're afraid. The other way is to say, "Oh yeah, that's a fear thought which is just the opposite of that other thought here, which is a success thought."

JH: And you simply notice it.

JM: You simply notice it's there and say, "Well, I'd rather go over here with this success thought." In other words, it becomes a choice, like other things in your life.

JH: It's the difference between "being" the thought and "having" it.

JM: Yes, very good. When you "be" that thought, it wins. It takes over your body. When you have good thought mastery, you can simply look at it, take from it and extract from it what you need, but it always remains just a thought.

JH: Another thing that's a killer is the label

“stutterer.” Talk about being it—labels are nefarious things, because they force you into a box with four walls and no door. Once you “are” something, there’s no way out. Whereas, if you can change “stutterer” to a “person who stutters,” you’ve changed the language from *being* the thing to *having* the thing. The difference between a person who sees himself as a stutterer and a person who sees himself as simply a person who sometimes stutters can really be illustrated by this example. If I talk for an hour, and I see myself as a stutterer, and I don’t block, then I see that hour as an absence of something that should be there. Whereas, if I’m a person who stutters, and I talk for an hour without difficulty, then that’s just how it is. I’m not aware of missing anything. There’s not something I should be doing.

JM: That's why, in my last comment in my article, there are a lot of thoughts which are the flip side of the fear. And those thoughts are like— "Hey, I'm doing pretty damn good." It's murder. Because that will start the down cycle. You'll go to another trough the minute you think about that, because that reinforces the idea of—"Hey, I've escaped for an hour."

JH: Exactly, but your context, your frame of reference has not changed. The window through which you view the world has not changed. If you say, "Hey, I'm doing okay," you're still looking through the window of performance which says that I have to perform, and that there are a lot of things I do which aren't okay.

JM: Right. And the only thing you can do is just

decide that you're going to change that way of thinking. People are what they think. So if you want to change, then change the thoughts that occupy your mind most of the time. Let's say one of the changes you want to make is take out the fear that you might stutter. There's a double fear there: *fear of the fear* of stuttering. That's the killer. So you need to say, "Okay, I've decided I'm not going to live with that any more. I know that I can't stop it from coming to my mind, but I'm simply going to stop becoming caught up in it.

JH: That sounds good. But a lot of times that's not enough unless you have something positive you can move towards. What I've been hearing is that through the various things you've done you've more than just absented yourself from that kind of thinking. You've moved toward a whole other kind

of thinking in your life. Not just about speech, but in your life in general. I think that's an important thing that people need to know— that if they limit their change only to their speech, they're in trouble.

JM: If your whole life was only dedicated to giving up something about yourself that you don't like, it would probably fail. But if you decide that, hey, what I really want to do is move myself over here, this is my goal, this is my direction—this is where the diary helps. It helps you to find that direction. Then you have something to move towards. When I first understood that I was creating the stuttering myself, then I went to this blank mind concept. It was almost scary, because my mind felt like a vacuum. I mean, there wasn't anything going on in there. And I started to feel

lonesome. I started to be a little afraid, because there was a void there. I had taken out what had consumed like 90% of my conscious thinking hours, and there was nothing there to replace it. And I said, well, if I don't get something in there, I'm really going to screw up. I thought the best thing I could do was read for a while. So I began reading in different areas. I went through quite a few books at that point. I tried to make them pleasure books, books that expanded my mind, books on adventure, things that might show me how other people perceive things.

It led to some alternatives that were available to me. Even a fiction book is good for that. I certainly don't want to become macho man or something like, but I now have some alternatives. At that point I began to get totally involved in my job and my social life after work. And my life

began to fill up.

JH: So your whole life gradually turned in a different direction and took on a different quality.

JM: I'm considerably different than I was at the point when I made that change. I look back, and there were some things that I really liked about myself. I think I had a better sense of humor back then, but I haven't lost it entirely. But I think part of that humor was that I was relatively insecure. Now at least when I'm having a good time, I know I'm having a good time. It was easy back then to follow more powerful people, because I didn't have to decide, and I didn't have to propose a plan. And sometimes it was difficult to say no. I found that more or less I was being whipsawed around by what other people wanted,

rather than what I wanted. A big change was that I decided to take that part myself.

JH: That's part of the change in being assertive.

JM: Basically, what I had seen was that when things were going well in my life, it was very easy to let go and employ this technique that I had worked out for myself, but when things weren't, it got really tough. I would hide from the negative or sad or emotionally drained feelings. I'd just push them to the background and cover them up with happy feelings. I don't do that any more. If something is going badly, if I feel saddened by something, I just feel it. Sometimes I'll actually come home and just cry the thing out if that's necessary and *feel* what it's like to be sad. That's a valid feeling, too. Like, get into it. Go through

the thing. And it, too, will pass. But when you come out, it means that you've lived the bad times second to second just like you've lived the good times. And there's no reason why you should go back into stuttering because times are bad. If you're living second to second, if you're just flowing with this life trend, you flow through it in good times *and* in the bad times. You're complete.

JH: Was this something that you didn't do when you were younger?

JM: There's no way I'd have done this. I always hid from sad feelings.

JH: So you went along with only what made you comfortable, and whatever you didn't like you blocked out. My guess is that a major way

you blocked out bad feelings was in your speech...since speech is the major way to communicate feelings.

JM: Undoubtedly that had to be it. And I think I still have a lot to learn about that. I'm still having a little bit of trouble feeling the emotions of true sadness and rage. Rage and anger.

JH: Common problem with people who've grown up with a stuttering problem.

JM: Right now I've joined a school to do some full contact karate, just to get back in the game a little bit. And obviously, I don't show rage when I'm on the mat. But I'll come home and practice it. I have a punching bag here. I'll get myself just worked up like a sunofabitch and just hit that

thing as if I wanted to kill it. And I feel it...as if I want to kill it. Just to see what it feels like. I don't have to do it every day, and I don't have to unleash that on another person. But feeling is valid. And hiding from anger is just as bad as hiding from anything else. They're all valid. You should be able to feel everything. And I think there's still a couple of holes in my program that at least I'm aware of.

JH: How did you get in touch with the need to feel all these things? That's a major shift in philosophy.

JM: It came from the "night of the burning gate." When I went through that gate, I was still there. I realized that I had walked through a fear of taking a look. And at that point there was nothing

to hide from any more. So I just let these thoughts surface as they would, and I probably filled up two diaries in a matter of a month. I would go home and write for hours, as this stuff just started pouring out. It was a release. I would think—"If that thought appears, I will at least follow it to make sure I'm not hiding from it. I will just follow it until I think I understand it. And then I'll just drop it again and let it be a part of me from now on." That was the starting point. Like anything else, there are levels of understanding. I began to understand a little bit more about the acceptability of different feelings.

JH: You know what my starting point was? The year that I graduated from college I was working for my father's ad agency in New York. I was working in the mail room. They had a black tele

that went directly to the photostat house. And several times a day I had to pick up the phone and say "pickup." You know, the p's were always a bear. But I'd keep trying. One day I picked up the phone—I probably had had a good day and was feeling more confident. The guy on the other end got on with his gruff voice and said, "Yeah?" I mustered up every bit of concentration I had and relaxed all my muscles and kept talking and said "pickup," and I said it without blocking. What I noticed was that when I didn't block, I had a huge rush of fear. For the first time I realized that the block served a function, which was to keep those feelings out of my awareness where I wouldn't have to experience them, let alone deal with them. That was my threshold experience.

JM: Then you see it. You see that stuttering is a

mechanism to stop you from being able to go inside. It's like it has a purpose. As I remember, when I used to stutter, when I went into the stutter, there was a complete block of everything. There was a total insensitivity to everything that happened until I was done.

JH: It's panic. It's a sense of panic. It's a total unconsciousness about what's going on.

JM: That's really true. It's total tension. Total insensitivity.

JH: So part of what you have to do is to assist people, first of all, in staying conscious. Somebody will stand up and they'll be really tight, and they'll say, "Well, I don't want to talk any more because I feel foolish." So we say, "Okay, can you

talk a minute more and make it okay to feel foolish, really get in touch with those feelings, just let them be there.” So the person says, “Well, okay.” And they’ll talk a little more, and then they’ll say, “Now I’m feeling like I’m too aggressive.” So we say, “Okay, can you allow those feelings to be there, too. Just let ‘em be there, stay in touch with them. Really be in touch with them and continue talking.” Well, what happens, magically, is two things. Number one, they suddenly find themselves talking without blocking, and secondly, the quality of their voice, what a psychologist calls the “affect,” the feeling level, magically transforms. Suddenly, instead of being tight and rigid and constricted there’s a fullness to their voice, because their feelings are coming out. It’s simply a question of allowing people to recognize what’s going on and staying

in touch with it while they're talking.

JM: You know, I think once people open up, if they're going to live their feelings, then they're on their way. If you're not afraid of your feelings, then they can't hurt you. And they start to become valuable.

JH: Feelings are just feelings, you know. Have you done any of the growth trainings like EST or Lifespring?

JM: I never did any of that, but I read an awful lot.

JH: These are very experiential types of things. One of the things they've helped me realize is that I can feel anything. I can cry. I can get angry.

All kinds of things.

JM: That took me a long time to get over that one.

JH: I think for a lot of men it's tough. And for people who stutter it's even tougher. My feelings are a lot more accessible now. And consequently my self image is a lot broader because I've accepted a lot more.

JM: Exactly. Certainly from the time I saw what was going on until now I like life a lot better—more than I ever did back then. There's just more to it.

More to enjoy.

More to do.

More to be.

