

THE POWER OF OBSERVATION

John C. Harrison

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Some years ago at a holistic health center I heard a provocative talk by Frijof Capra, author of the landmark book *The Tao of Physics*. Capra had been one of the wave of brilliant young physicists who was helping to revise our understanding of how the universe was put together.

But Capra was more than just a scientist. In the 60s he also became fascinated with Eastern religion and philosophy, and spent considerable time exploring the links between Western and Eastern thought. His seminal book *The Tao of Physics* was a synthesis of his observations.

What I remember most from his talk was his awe and fascination with the strikingly different routes that thinkers have taken to arrive at the same conclusions. He told us that what most amazed him was that through meditation and thought, ancient Chinese seers five thousand years ago had come up with essentially the same picture of the universe that Capra and his band of brilliant young physicists had constructed using the disciplines of modern physics.

Said Capra: We arrived at those advanced concepts through careful scientific reasoning. The Chinese got there by simply observing.

People underestimate the power of observation. I once had a rancorous interchange on an Internet stuttering forum with a

member of the National Stuttering Project who was incensed that I had the audacity to put forth my observations and ideas about stuttering in such positive terms. He felt I should "stay in my place" and leave such investigations to the people in the white lab coats who were "much more qualified" to address these issues and who "really knew" what they were doing. He was convinced that the answers to stuttering would eventually be discovered by scientists who would then spoon feed it to the stuttering community.

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're not recognized authorities in the field. We haven't read, or written, the right textbooks. What could we know of importance?

What, indeed.

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.

I arrived at ninety-five percent of the material in this book by simply observing my own thoughts and feelings, and listening to how other people described theirs.

In fact, I made stuttering disappear from my life a good while before the blocking behaviors actually left simply by observing what I was doing in a different light. When I stopped observing my problem through the narrow perspective of "stuttering," the stuttering *per se* was gone -- that is, I stopped seeing behavior as something called "stuttering" -- and in its place was a handful of other problems in a unique relationship that needed to be addressed. By individually addressing these issues, the actual physical blocking behaviors slowly diminished and disappeared over time.

From this experience has emerged a few useful rules. One of the most functional is that *all personal change begins with observation: but a particular kind of observation.*

If we keep looking at our experiences through a familiar window, the same familiar sights and truths are going to keep surfacing. The "window" through which we see the problem has a powerful influence in shaping our perception.

For example, a starving man will look at a restaurant menu a lot differently than someone who has just finished off a six-course dinner.

A local meteorologist will notice different things about a Hawaiian sunset than a painter on holiday.

And a psychiatric social worker will perceive a convicted felon in a different light than an assistant district attorney or the warden of the local prison. To a substantial degree, what is important to the individual and what he or she *expects* to see has an enormous impact on what he or she actually observes.

The challenge, then, is to learn to observe *objectively*.

EXPLODING YOUR TUNNEL VISION

Most of us are creatures of habit, and nowhere is this more apparent than when it comes to our powers of observation.

For example, somebody rushes in all hot and bothered and blurts out, "Did you see what Bob DID?" and proceeds to run the riot act on Bob: Bob was unjust. Bob was inconsiderate. Bob was this or that. How easy it is to accept someone else's word about Bob, especially if the person presents her case with conviction. Then we bump into Bob, and poor old Bob doesn't have a chance. We're already mad at Bob, even though we don't know for certain that he did any of the things that our friend was accusing him of. We proceed to interpret everything that Bob says and does through a set of "anger-colored glasses," because *something is wrong with the way Bob is conducting himself*.

The very same process takes place around stuttering. We have a situation in which our speech gets hung up. We want to speak, but we can't. Yet, someone is waiting for us to say something. So where does our focus naturally turn? To our speech, naturally. We look at the problem through "stuttering-colored glasses." Why? Because *something is wrong with the way we speak*.

We then go outside and climb into our car and start it up, but when we give it gas, the car doesn't move.

What's the problem?

If we apply the same kind of logic, we'd naturally look at the wheels.

They're not turning. *Something is wrong with the car's wheels.*

Except we know better. We know that the wheels are only part of the system that propels our car. After we check to see that the wheels aren't blocked by something in the road, we expand our thinking into the other parts of the system. Is the clutch slipping? Is the differential broken? Since we've already had occasions to look under the hood, we're aware that our car is a system, composed of hundreds of parts that relate in a certain way. If one or several of those parts don't function properly, the net result is that the wheels don't turn. The reason why we don't automatically fixate on the wheels is that we view the car through "system-colored glasses."

The habitual ways in which we view events has to do with our knowledge and our beliefs. If we are out of touch with our emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions and physiological responses, then our physical behavior is the only part of the system that we can see, and it becomes very easy to assume that it's the cause of our problem. If our speech doesn't work right, that's where we focus. Given the circumstances, it's logical.

Speech therapists who focus primarily on speech are likely to contribute to the problem, because they keep our focus limited only to the physiology of speech production. What's more, even when our emotions, perceptions, and beliefs are discussed, they are usually presented as an *outgrowth* of our stuttering -- things that must be dealt with because we stutter. But this is only half of the truth. What is usually not discussed, mainly because it is not understood, is the way our emotions, perceptions, and beliefs can also *create* the blocking behavior.

The reason why this second half is overlooked has much to do with

the word "stuttering," itself. The word is not functional, because it focuses only on our behavior, instead of what drives the behavior, and therefore, it does not encourage us to dig further.

LANGUAGE SHAPES THE WAY WE PERCEIVE

When I was growing up in New York, I was aware of only four kinds of snow. *Slush* resulted when a good snowfall was followed by rain. *Icy/crusty snow* was snow whose surface had frozen over and was crackly and brittle. *Powder snow* was soft and airy and usually found its way down my jacket as I rolled about. But the best snow of all was *packing snow*, because from this you could make snowballs and igloos and snowmen. Thus, fifty years ago if you'd asked me how many kinds of snow there were, I would have told you "four."

By contrast, the Eskimos have over 26 different words for snow, because their livelihood and even their lives depend on observing subtle differences. Each of the various names draws attention to a different quality or aspect of snow. This expanded vocabulary gives the Eskimo a much more acute perception of snow than some kid in New York who's waiting, snowball in hand, for the kid next door to walk out of his front door. The Eskimo is able to see more, because he is looking at snow through a bigger, broader window.

What does this have to do with how we perceive stuttering? Many people know only of "primary stuttering" and "secondary stuttering" -- one term describing a kind of effortless dysfluency while the other word describing the familiar blocking and struggle behaviors. Both terms use the common word "stuttering" which assumes they are branches from the same tree.

The two kinds of speech behavior may look alike, but in reality,

they are very different, and grouping them together under the same general heading of "stuttering" forces us to make assumptions and create relationships that may or may not exist. Because of the potential for confusion, I found it necessary to coin a new word -- *bobulating* -- to accommodate the significant differences between blocked speech and the stumblings associated with being upset, confused, or discombobulated. In the following example, notice how much clearer it is when we have two words to help distinguish between similar sounding speech patterns that in reality are quite different.

- *Four-year-old Richie rushes up to his mom and blurts out, "Look, Mommy, I found a dan-dan-dan-dandelion." What's going on? Richie is excited, his emotions are stirred and he's wrestling with (for him) a new and complex word: dandelion. At the same time, he is totally unselfconscious about his speech. His focus is on communicating his discovery. At that moment his world is no less thrilling than it was for Thomas Edison the first time he connected two wires and caused the world's first electric light to glow.*
- *Compare that experience to this one. George is a young college freshman on a first date with Marcia, a pretty co-ed at his school. George is really taken by Marcia and feels at risk, since he's not sure that he can measure up to her expectations. After much hemming and hawing he's invited Marcia out for a picnic and is anxious to make a good impression. Now they're out in the meadow together. The blanket is spread out and the lunch that George thoughtfully and carefully prepared is beautifully laid out and ready. They're just about to settle down when George spies a particularly stunning dandelion. He stoops to pick it, then offers it to Marcia.. "Look at this gorgeous dan-dan-dan-dan-dandelion," he says with his heart pounding. George has*

a fear of saying "dandelion." He manages to say "dan" okay, but there is a fear about completing the word. On the other hand, he has an even bigger fear about starting the word and then lapsing into a long embarrassing silence. So he keeps hammering away at the word, repeating "dan" over and over until he feels free enough to complete the word. George's repetitions are driven by entirely different dynamic than Richie's. Yet, they sound exactly alike.

- For this reason it is absolutely essential to have different words to describe what each person is doing. Just saying that both Richie and George are stuttering creates confusion and covers over the real issues. One kind of disfluency is an unselfconscious reflex, a struggle with verbal skills and maybe a tendency to overreact to stress. The other is a strategy, usually accompanied by a great deal of self-consciousness, to push through what is perceived as a difficult and threatening speech block. Thus, if you say that Richie is bobulating and George is blocking, you are able to immediately see significant differences. What's more, Richie's mom doesn't have to get all crazy because he's "stuttering." She knows the differences between bobulating and blocking, and can more easily decide when it might be appropriate to initiate some kind of remedial action.*

Enhancing my language around stuttering was very important in broadening my ability to observe my speech difficulties. By not seeing my problem as "stuttering" but as a combination of a speech block (a holding back) and a strategy to break through or avoid the block, I was encouraged to direct my focus into areas where previously I would not have thought to look.

"Why am I stuttering" is a kind of mushy question that is hard to respond to, especially since most people don't have a clear understanding of what stuttering is, whereas "Why am I blocking?" or even better, "What am I holding back?" is an issue that is

potentially more productive. Other questions logically flow from it, such as "What would happen if I didn't block? What might happen?"

Of course, most people's first response is to say, "I might stutter." But if you're willing to look past the obvious, you may find other things that you're afraid will surface and that have to be kept under control. It may be a forbidden emotion. It could be an awareness of an issue you don't want to deal with. It could be a feeling of vulnerability that seems too much to handle. Any of these could deter you from speaking until you are feeling ready.

As Tony Robbins notes in his book *Awaken the Giant Within*, "it's not the actual pain that drives us, but our fear that something will lead to pain. We're not driven by the reality but by our *perception* of reality."

There are several disciplines that can help you to perceive more clearly and accurately. A couple that I'm familiar with are *general semantics* and *neuro-linguistic programming*.

General semantics deals with how we perceive the world and how the language we use has an influence in shaping that perception, often locking us into seeing the world in a particular way. Wendell Johnson was best known for his writings on stuttering, but he was also a persuasive advocate for general semantics, and his landmark book *People in Quandaries* is in my estimation the clearest exposition of the discipline. Another good book on general semantics is S. I. Hayakawa's *Language in Thought and Action* which became a Book of the Month Club selection some years ago.

Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), which is enjoying a growing popularity across many sectors of the population, has often been described as "software for the brain." The brain, in this case, is the human computer that takes in sensory data, interprets it, organizes

and stores it. The "software programs" it creates are what we rely upon for day to day living. These programs are usually randomly created by the people and events in our life. NLP is the study of how to reinforce, refine or change those programs. Through NLP, it is possible to bring to light our unconscious perceptions and to understand, evaluate and change our attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to be congruent with our deepest life values and goals.

The following four pieces are written by people who are all good observers, and who stumbled on useful and interesting insights about their stuttering by allowing themselves to observe with an open mind and to question and challenge what they perceived. These kinds of observations, made over a period of time, have the potential of substantially changing your perception and understanding of what you're doing -- and what's going on -- when you find yourself blocking and struggling to speak.

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT STUTTERING

WRITTEN BY B.C. (B.C. was 31 years old when he wrote this, and working for a consulting firm designing communication networks for corporations.)

“I have had a stuttering problem for most of my life. When I was younger, my stuttering was very peculiar in that it had two faces. I never stuttered in public, nor did I have the mentality that usually goes with stuttering when I was in public. But when I communicated with my family, you could bet even money that I would stutter.

I didn't understand why this was for a long time. I made it through my college years without a hitch. I gave oral presentations and had to defend my senior thesis in economics in front of a panel of four professors. I never stuttered. I had many friends that, until recently, never experienced my stuttering. When I used to tell them I had a stuttering problem, they thought I was joking.

Then something happened after I graduated from college. I was getting tired and exhausted. Even though I was fluent in situations outside of the home, I was tired of hiding. I was fluent on the outside, but I still considered myself a stutterer, and it was eating away at me on the inside. I didn't understand the stuttering. I felt helpless and alone. But I knew there had to be a way out, so I started searching.

My search began in the library. I looked up "stuttering" and found about 20 books. I read for hours and hours. This was a great relief for me because I realized that I was not alone. But what those books had to say did not answer my questions. I continued my search.

I met a great speech therapist in Pittsburgh. He helped me open the doors to many opportunities, including having the confidence to start my own business. Just what I had always wanted to do! But as good as my therapist was, I eventually had more questions about stuttering that his model was not able to answer for me. Questions like, "Why am I fluent outside of the home, but when I speak with my family I stutter? Why is it that when I think of myself as a stutterer I will stutter, but when I forget that I stutter, I am fluent?"

Just to clarify, I did not come from an abusive home. My parents and sisters were loving toward me, and they were always patient to hear what I had to say.

Recently, I made some observations about my stuttering that I would like to share with you. These insights have given me hope of finding a way out.

One of these observations came to me just the other night. I was at a local jazz club with a good friend of mine. Before the

band had a chance to start playing, my friend and I engaged in some conversation. My stuttering mentality was in full force. I blocked throughout our conversation, hesitated initiating conversation most of the time, and avoided certain words as well. Then something happened. The band started playing very loud. Now I had to yell at the top of my lungs to be heard by my friend. But I was totally fluent! I even initiated some topics of discussion, and I can't even remember avoiding any words. Then the music stopped, and I was back to blocking again.

I couldn't help but think to myself, "Why did I go back to stuttering without the loud music playing?"

The answer was obvious: I was holding back.

I couldn't hold back when the music was loud because my friend would have trouble understanding me with my stuttering over the loud music. So I let it loose and wailed at the top of my lungs in order to be understood. The stuttering mentality took a back seat. I was fluent.

But what was I holding back when the music wasn't playing and I was stuttering?

What did I want to block out of my consciousness?

What was I afraid of saying?

How was I afraid of coming across to my friend?

I didn't have any ready answers.

Another observation I made occurred over the past month.

Because of my religious background we engage in fasting. Fasting involves eating before sunrise and after sunset, but not partaking of food or drink between those times. As you can imagine, this is a powerful exercise that can really test your discipline of mind over body.

The first several days of the fast take some getting used to. By noon your body is crying out for nourishment and water. But you have to learn to let go of those thoughts and not allow your body to control your mind.

Something interesting happened to me during those first several days. I became naturally fluent in many situations that I

would have stuttered in. What was going on here? How was this situation similar to the jazz club scenario?

What I observed was that my mind was so focused on my fundamental needs of hunger and thirst that I forgot about the stuttering. All I could think of was "When am I going to eat. Boy, am I thirsty." I wasn't even thinking about being a person who stutters!

Then one afternoon during the fast a client of mine called and asked me to troubleshoot a computer problem. Before I arrived at their office, I found myself anticipating what would happen with the client. Though I was very thirsty and hungry, it had become a familiar feeling and no longer held my attention.

This left my mind free to run scripts of the situation over and over again. I started to feel the familiar tension and stress that accompanies stuttering, and sure enough, when I spoke, I noticed that I was blocking again.

We have had problems with this client and dealing with them face-to-face has always been a sticking point with me. Because they have a tendency to take advantage of their contract beyond what is allowed, my supervisor always instructs me to be firm in my dealings with them. So how have I traditionally dealt with stressful situations like this? I anticipate what might happen. I try to hold my ground, take control and get the upper-hand. This means I have to come across as powerful and confident.

But what if I go too far, and they terminate their contract? I will be at fault. I may get fired. So what do I do? You guessed it: I hold back. And the way I learned to do that was with stuttering and blocking.

Through these observations, I realized something about the basic building block from which the stuttering mentality feeds. I use my speech blocks to mask out feelings that I don't think will be appropriate or that I don't want to experience. I have found this to be a recurring pattern.

By contrast, when I am just living in the moment, these questions don't come up at all, and I am naturally fluent. The

stuttering mentality is gone.

These are the kinds of observations I've been making about my stuttering that I've found to be useful. Perhaps you may want to ask yourself the same kinds of questions. Don't worry if you can't find an answer immediately. Just keep asking. Over time, you'll notice that the same patterns come up again and again. When you start seeing the patterns, that is when you can start making changes.”

My Two Modes of Stammering by Dr. David Creek - (David Creek is a physicist living in England who is currently writing a book on stammering which he hopes to finish when he retires in the year 2000. This piece was abstracted from a longer article that appeared in the British Stammering Association's quarterly newsletter “Speaking Out.”

“An anticipated block starts life with me scanning ahead and latching onto a word. This word might already be a feared word, but if it is not it soon becomes a feared word as it draws closer. A short time before I attempt to say it, I know that I will block. I found the physical processes start with a nasty feeling inside, in the pit of my stomach, a feeling of *deja vu*, "Oh dear, here we go again, another block."

Going through the actions in slow motion, this feeling is violent and very nasty.

Then I became aware of a small but very definite tension high in my throat I was unable to localize it precisely but it was certainly in the region of the larynx. Was it locking of the vocal cords? Probably not because I could breathe in and out with the tension still there.

When I tried to say my name, this small tension rapidly grew into a much larger tension involving my whole tongue and other parts of my throat. I had obviously flipped into a full-scale block. What I was doing was expanded in time. In normal

circumstances everything would have happened so quickly that the onset of a block would have seemed instantaneous and beyond comprehension why I was suddenly behaving in this curious way.

A bit later during my experimental phone calls, I decided to try and relax out of the small tension in my throat. The first time it took considerable concentration and many seconds: I breathed in and out three times. Eventually I felt the tension evaporate, my throat was free. I tried to say my name and was astonished when the words, "David Creek," popped out with complete fluency. I was astonished because I still had the nasty feeling in the pit of my stomach signaling a block. I was expecting to block and gearing up my mind, my whole body, to deal with the unpleasant experience. Total fluency was an amazing result.

Further tests indicated the simple rule that, with tension in my throat I would block, without tension I was fluent. I felt I had the beginnings of an answer to my throat-blocking problem. Fluent people do not go around tensing the wrong muscles in their throats. If I really want to attain fluency I have to unlearn my bad habit and teach myself to stay relaxed.

However, this is not the whole story. While all this was going on, I was becoming increasingly aware that in stressful situations my breathing was apt to become erratic and irregular. I could not make sense of it at first but then it struck me in a flash. This erratic breathing was a product of fear, pure panic reaction.

My particular foible was a perceived fear of authority figures. When I had to ask for information from someone who knew more than I did, when I was being questioned or thought I was the underdog, I was literally quaking with fear. When fear was dominant, my breathing, my diaphragm, went out of control and the quality of my speech took a very dramatic downturn.

This was illustrated over a weekend when I went to visit relatives, for me not the most stressful of situations. I spoke very fluently, managing to control my anticipated blocks using pausing and throat relaxation. The next day back at work I went to see my boss, a pleasant and relaxed fellow.

Just before I started to speak, I was overwhelmed by this panic breathing. I was almost hyperventilating. I stammered catastrophically for about half a minute until I got it under control. Occasionally I have found that the level of fear can be so great that an enormously long pause, saying absolutely nothing, is the only way towards a calmer state.

Nowadays I find on average that this erratic breathing only occurs about once or twice a day in higher stress situations, often when speaking to strangers. As such, it is susceptible to reason. When I find my breathing going out of control, I suggest to myself that it is not really stressful but a perfectly normal speaking situation. I am sure that in the past, erratic breathing due to fear was a much more frequent occurrence and contributed to lack of success with "block modification," "passive airflow," and other techniques

My most frequent problem remains the throat block, which seems to be caused by the fear of individual words. Blocks can occur every few seconds. They are independent of the diaphragm in the sense that I can remain breathing perfectly regularly and yet have problems in the throat. I tend to deal with them by a series of mini pauses during which I rapidly relax. The end result might sound like hesitant speech, or if I am holding back, whereas in fact I am pausing and relaxing.

What I have said will not be applicable to all stammerers. Some are avoiders, some do not anticipate, and some do not block in the same way as I do. However, I feel that there is a vast body of stammerers out there who do behave in a similar manner to myself.”

Selections from an Internet Correspondence with Andrew Rees

(These are selections from an Internet correspondence between myself and Andrew Rees who is twenty-four, lives in Wales, and is studying sociology and psychology at the University of Swansea. Andrew notes that:

"I have stammered for as long as I can remember but until I was sixteen, I just had occasional blocks. Then my stammering became more severe. Today, the power of observation has given me a totally new perspective on stammering. I no longer see what I do as stammering, and this has enabled me perceive myself and the world in a totally new and refreshing light.")

4 March 1999 I did a presentation to my seminar class recently. As a result, I felt nervous. Initially, I really stammered even though I tried to slide through the blocks, but after a while, I began to notice my shallow breaths. I didn't try to control the perceived reality. I tried to have fun with the blocks. Then I began to stop being afraid. I tried to stay in touch with how I felt. On this occasion I didn't get to the stage where I was fully immersed in what I was reading, but that will come. I didn't feel any regret or self hate. I felt integrity for myself, nothing but respect, true grit, and character. I was proud of myself.

Recently I have been stopping strangers in the street, just to practice asking questions. What I have found has really opened my eyes. When I concentrated just on trying to get the words out, I struggled and fought. But when I focused on connecting with the other person and held a positive feeling in my mind about the emotional connection, the words just seemed to tumble out with no fuss or bother.

When I get the feeling that I'm going to stammer, I try not to identify with the panic. I just accept it's there, but I now know that I have a choice to go with it or not. Instead of focusing on my speech, I try to look at what I wanted to block out. I can see now that it's about wanting to block something out, and it's a marvelous realization.

6 April 1999 Over the weekend I took a telephone call from my girlfriend who is in Milan. I did feel the old control and anticipation thoughts entering my mind. Then I did something interesting. I asked myself how I really wanted to respond to what she was saying, not what I thought she wanted to hear, or what I should say so I wouldn't stammer. This was a major breakthrough

because I just spoke. I asked myself how I felt and spoke my mind for the first time in years with no hint of holding back.

It was like I had learned how to surf the waves rather than continually falling into the sea and getting caught. I did have blocks, but here is the interesting thing. I didn't really pay much attention to them. I was too interested in representing my own thoughts and feelings. For the first time in ages, what I wanted to say was more important than how I said it. When I did stammer I quickly got back on my surf board and caught the next wave rather than waiting in anticipation for the next block and letting it beat me under the ocean. I can't tell you how good it felt. I feel like I have an even better picture of the total feeling of letting go.

28 April 1999 Had a job interview today, and it's fair to say that I blocked my feelings throughout. My speech was very disrupted. After the interview it was hard not to feel some embarrassment and sadness.

However, I remained positive like I always do and tried to learn from the experience. It's fair to say that I cocooned myself throughout the whole interview and slipped back to my familiar attempts to block my feelings. I wasn't aware that I was even having feelings. I looked back and thought wow, what happened? The fact that I know that I caused it is comforting because in the past I thought it was due to sorcery or a demonic force.

30 April 1999 The weeks before the interview, I don't know why, but I was not in touch with myself and almost felt neutral, neither alive nor dead. It strikes me now that why I felt like this was because I had been holding myself back for a number of weeks before the interview and that hindered the way I spoke in the interview. This is why my inner harmony was disrupted. It was just an external manifestation of what was going on internally.

I always wondered what "holding back" meant. In my experience it means not allowing yourself to feel negative feelings. By not allowing yourself to experience these negative feelings, you cannot open up to the corresponding highs. I think this is becoming a lot clearer to me. Most of the blocking which occurs during

speech is the result of non-verbal inner inabilities to flow with how one feels. This is, I feel, part of the reason why I blocked persistently during the interview.

Interviews are also challenging because you have to play a role, and this can be challenging for someone who needs to get in touch with how he feels. The role can almost mask what the person feels, unless the feelings at the moment of the interview are acceptable to projecting a favourable image of oneself.

Two nights ago I felt down, and this stayed with me all day. Everything I saw, I saw through the glasses of someone who was down. It occurred to me, however, that I wasn't down; I was holding back from feeling what was going on. I was on the water's edge, afraid to jump into the cold water, afraid of the initial shock of the icy water. If, however, I just jumped in, the shock would hit but would diminish as my body got used to temperature. In the evening I suddenly realized what I was doing and let myself feel what I was holding back. I got onto a bus, and the way I spoke mirrored how I felt, and this was okay. After about half an hour of really getting down with the negative feelings, my head felt clear, and I felt good.

9 June 1999 I went into a shop to sell a piece of equipment. I didn't even think about stammering. I was too busy trying to connect with the person. He seemed a nice chap, and I wanted to get friendly with him. Then he told me that he had been verbally abused by two shoplifters and that he had threatened them with violence. I didn't want to get on the wrong side of this guy in case he threatened me. I tried to become invisible. I didn't want to annoy him. I tried to be a *good boy*. This caused me to hold back.

Sunday I watched a sad movie, I knew it was sad because I had seen it before. Events have occurred in my life recently, and I have tried to let myself experience the feelings that they have invoked. I watched the movie and used it to feel the negative feelings that I'd been carrying around with me as a consequence of the events (I broke up with my girlfriend). I cried and really let go. Experiencing the feelings hurt. I could feel something in the pit of

my stomach, but I stayed with it. Recently I have been discussing what has been happening to me with my parents, I told them that I hadn't cried for years, nor had I really laughed for the same duration.

After a recent conversation with my mother I wondered how I was totally fluent with her for an hour and then I began to hold back. "Why?" I wondered. I traced the conversation back and found out that I wanted to not think about a carpet fitter who my mother briefly suggested, could come down to my flat to fit a carpet. This was only briefly mentioned. I know the fitter and have negative feelings, not toward him, but toward his son. I tried to block these feeling out and this led to me holding back for two hours until my mother left. I could not process what was being said with clarity, I wasn't letting myself flow. What I feel I have learned is that I can have an acute reaction to something which I'm not consciously aware of and this can lead to holding back for days and sometimes even weeks and beyond."

ANATOMY OF A BLOCK, John C. Harrison

One day back in the spring of 1982 I walked into a camera shop on 24th street near where I live in San Francisco to pick up some prints. The clerk, a pretty young girl, was at the other end of the counter, and when I came in, she strolled over to wait on me.

"What's your name?" she asked.

That question used to throw me into a panic, because I always blocked on my name. Always. But by 1982 stuttering was no longer an issue. Never thought about it. I liked talking to people, and never worried about speech, because my blocks had all but disappeared.

I started to say "Harrison", and suddenly found myself in a panic; I was locked up and totally blocked. All the old, familiar feelings had come back. I could feel my heart pounding. So I stopped, took a breath, allowed myself to settle down, and while the woman stared at me, collected myself enough to say "Harrison."

I walked out of the store with my prints, feeling frazzled and totally mystified. Where in the world had that block come from? Why had I suddenly fallen into the old pattern? Stuttering was the furthest thing from my mind when I walked in. I never thought about stuttering any more, because it never happened, so I knew it wasn't a fear of stuttering that caused me to block.

At that point I did what I had always done in previous years when stuttering was a problem. I began playing the event over and over in my mind, trying to notice as much detail as possible to see if I could spot any clues, something that would explain what was going on.

"Where was the woman when I walked in?" I asked myself.

Let's see. I pictured the layout of the store. I had come in and stood at the cash register. The woman was at the other end of the counter talking to someone.

"Who was the other person? Anything significant in that?"

It was a guy.

"And what did he look like?"

Hmmmm. Oh yeah, he was a biker. Tough looking. Had tattoos on his arms and was wearing a Levi's vest.

"What else did you notice?"

Well, the two of them seemed to like talking to each other. The guy appeared very much taken with the girl.

"How did he seem to you?"

Scary looking. Reminded me of the tough guys on the block when I was a kid. I remember those guys. They lived in the next town. They all had mean looking eyes, and they petrified me.

"How did you respond to people like him when you were a kid?"

Well, if I were on the street when several tough guys passed by, I would make myself invisible so they couldn't see me and hassle me. I'd suck all my energy in. I'd blend into the background. I'd look like a tree, or a bush, or a brick wall. No energy would radiate from me until they had passed. Nothing.

"Did you have any other feelings or observations about the biker in the store?"

I guess I felt like I'd interrupted an important conversation, because the two of them were getting on so well together.

"How did that make you feel?"

I reviewed the scene once more, trying to recall how I felt. How did I feel? I really concentrated, and a malaise swept across me. Then it became clear. I was worried that he'd be irked because the girl had left him to wait on me.

"So what was your response in such situations when you were a kid?"

I'd hold back. I didn't want to stand out. I didn't want to seem too strong or too assertive.

"Because....?"

Because it would put me in danger. The guy might give me trouble, so I didn't want him to " see" me.

"So in the camera store you...."

Right. I slipped back into the old program. I held back. Blocked my energy. I tried to make myself invisible, just like in the old days.

I had no sooner come to realize this than all the muscles in my neck and shoulders relaxed, all the muscles that had tightened during the moment of panic in the photo shop.

I know what you're thinking: that I was just trying explain away what had happened. But that is not my experience. Through the years I've noticed that when I come upon a real truth, I have a physical reaction...a release. It's happened enough times so I've learned to recognize the signs.

Today, there's no doubt that I had stumbled on the answer.

This brief experience taught me something. I used to think that I stuttered because I was afraid I was going to stutter. I thought that everything revolved around my fear of being blocked, and how people might react. That was undoubtedly true in many cases. But not always. And certainly not in this instance when stuttering was furthest from my mind.

I had an art teacher once who gave me an excellent piece of advice. I was taking a drawing class and was having trouble sketching the model who was standing arms akimbo. I just couldn't get the arms to look right. The teacher came over, watched me for a few minutes and then said, " Look at the spaces."

"Huh?"

"Look at the spaces. Instead of focusing all your attention on the outline of the arms, look at the spaces around the arms. Notice the empty space in the middle that's created when the model puts her hand on her hip. Study the shape of that space. Then draw it."

I noticed it. I drew it. And the drawing came magically together.

You can learn to do this around stuttering by looking at the spaces. Look at the experiences around the speech block, not just at the stuttering, itself. See if you can tell what's going on.

What do you notice?

What are you thinking and feeling?

What are your expectations, perceptions and beliefs?

Many of the answers to why you're holding back are hidden there.

If you keep your mind open and don't allow yourself to obsessively focus only on your speech, you will begin to discover many interesting and useful things.