

“How Did the Light Turn Green?”

My Journey Toward Automatic Speech

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PART ONE

HOW DID THE LIGHT TURN GREEN? My Journey Toward Automatic Speech

The question “how did the traffic light turn green?” could well be the first line of a joke! However, I find the traffic light a very apt metaphor to use when relating my journey towards overcoming stuttering. My hope is that, as I tell my story, other people who stutter (PWS) will in some way find help and encouragement through what I share.

Red

I am 40 years old, married, live in the UK and have blocked and stuttered since early childhood. Although mild to begin with, the problem grew in severity during my teenage years. From that time on, I increasingly felt stuck on red in many areas of my life, unable to move forward because of my fears around speaking.

As I stuttered in every speaking situation I was in (except when on my own, although that wasn't always a totally block-free zone), I felt very restricted when considering my life choices. For example, my choice

of jobs was based not on my abilities or interests, but on how much speaking would be involved. I chose the easy route of avoidance and consequently remained in jobs I often found boring, unfulfilling and not really me. Whilst at work I would sometimes avoid making business phone calls and when I did pluck up the courage to do so, I found it embarrassing, humiliating and a considerable physical struggle to speak.

Social situations were difficult too, even in the comfort zone of my own home with close family and friends. Many a time I would stay quiet when I had something to say, because I knew that as soon as I opened my mouth to speak, the physical struggle would begin, leaving me feeling emotionally and physically drained.

If I saw our next-door neighbors out in their garden, I would often avoid speaking to them. Either I would wait until they had gone back in, before going outside myself; or I might pretend that I hadn't seen them, or that I was just too busy to speak. What must they have thought! It wasn't that I wanted to be unfriendly; I just felt too embarrassed and scared to speak and stutter in front of them.

Soon after our first daughter was born, in June 1999, I clearly remember saying to my husband that he would have to read all the bedtime stories. There was no way I could envisage myself being able to do it. All in all, because of my stuttering, I saw myself as being less than other people and inadequate as a person. As a result of this, I would always push myself harder than necessary in other ways, to try to compensate for my lack of speaking ability.

Being an overt and relatively severe PWS did however have its advantages. It meant that only on the odd occasion would I substitute a difficult word for an easier one. To me, all words could be difficult to say, so most of the time I saw no point in trying to change them! The

only exception to that being our wedding day, when the fear of stuttering in front of so many people was so high. On that occasion, the marriage ceremony was re-worded in such a way that all I had to say on my own was I do, then repeat some words in unison with my husband-to-be, which of course I had no difficulty in doing.

Being this way in the world gave me great motivation to try and change the way things were. In my teens I had several sessions of traditional speech therapy, but these proved to be unhelpful. Also, in my twenties I attended several courses in the UK run by someone who had overcome his own stuttering problem. Although this was of some help, in that it allowed me to converse more easily with close family and friends, the speaking method I was taught was so abnormally slow that it was often impractical and difficult to use in real life outside situations. Over time, I gradually let go of it and returned to my old ways.

However, in September 2000 when I was 34 years old, my life took a dramatic turn. I heard about the [McGuire Programme](#); a programme that addresses both physical and psychological aspects of stuttering, and felt that I should give it a go. After all, I had absolutely nothing to lose. It was during my first course that I believe I changed from Red to Amber.

Amber

For me, the Amber stage lasted nearly 5 years and was a time of change in many ways. It was also a time of preparation, to enable me to change further and move on to Green, or Go; but more about that later. Joining the [McGuire Programme](#) gave me the first taster I had had in years, of what life could be like without blocking and stuttering.

During the four day course I heard myself speaking with a freedom I had only dreamed about; not only in the classroom setting, but out on the streets with the general public and even public speaking in the town square! For the first time since early childhood, I knew that I was physically able to say the exact words I wanted to say whilst in the presence of another person; and that was a strange and wonderful experience for me! From that point on, I knew my life would never be the same again; and it wasn't.

On returning home, I found that I was able to maintain my newly found freedom in a fair number of speaking situations. However, at the same time I found it physically and mentally tiring to do so, and sometimes I would look at other normal fluent speakers and wonder; "why do I have to use all this physical effort to speak, when others can speak so easily?" Furthermore, despite my best efforts, I sometimes found it hard to maintain my newly learned technique in certain situations; and I didn't understand why!

At the time, I believed that stuttering was caused by some sort of physical brain malfunction, and that controlling the physical behaviour was the only way forward. Also I was pretty much oblivious to any thoughts I had prior to blocking. Over the years, they had grown outside my conscious awareness.

Furthermore, although I always felt anxious and tense before and during blocking/stuttering, I in no way equated these as being contributory factors to the cause of the behavior. However, my eyes were soon to be well and truly opened when in 2003, I read John Harrison's book: *How to Conquer Your Fears of Speaking Before People*.

For me, John's book answered a lot of questions about the nature of blocking and stuttering; and for the first time in my life, I changed the belief that my speech problem was being caused by some incurable brain disorder. Instead, I came to believe that it was a self-supporting system (stuttering hexagon) which I had created and sustained over many years. John's story of his own recovery and his unique insight into the problem, brought real hope to me that one day I could be completely free too!

Having been very inspired by John's book, it also threw a spanner in the works for me. Knowing what I now knew, what course of action should I take? Should I change direction in my recovery? After all, I was going along the road of controlling the blocking symptoms, but what if that wasn't the right way forward for me? And so began several months of inner conflict and turmoil as, with John's support and help, I began to think this issue through.

Although I remained loosely connected to the [McGuire Programme](#), I was very unsure of the right path to take. Things came to a head in June 2004, while having a meal in a large room of 100 people or more. Everyone seemed to be chatting away and having a good time; all except me. There I was, sitting at the table, feeling frustrated and trapped; so afraid to be seen openly stuttering in front of people. Something had to change – and soon!

Around that time I started looking on the internet, to see what else was out there to help PWS and came across the [Neuro-Semantics](#) web-site ([Neuro-Semantics for PWS](#)). I started reading the articles there about blocking/stuttering and was soon addicted to reading everything I could on the subject! What I read made so much sense to me and furthered my understanding of blocking.

Tim Mackesey's testimony particularly caught my attention and during the summer of 2004, I arranged to have several telephone consultations with him. It was during these that I first started applying Neuro-Semantic/NLP patterns to my speech problem. Tim led me through various patterns including the Drop Down Through and the Meta Yes/Meta No. However, what I found most helpful at that time was Time-Line Re-imprinting. Using this pattern I spent considerable time alone at home, reframing past hurtful memories of blocking.

I also gave any hurt I still felt in relation to these, to my highest spiritual resource, and forgave the other people involved for any hurt they had inadvertently caused me. Of course I also needed to forgive myself; for I realized that more often than not, through my mind-reading, I had judged my listeners far too harshly!

As a consequence of doing this, and with Tim's help, I gradually began to change my perceptions of other people and in particular, of their reactions if I stuttered. Also I decided to do an experiment. Over several weeks, I telephoned numerous shops and businesses; making general and fairly short enquiries, whilst deliberately allowing myself to openly stutter.

The aim was to observe how my listeners reacted to my non-fluency. I have to admit that I was amazed at the result! Nine times out of ten, there was no reaction whatsoever. People listened and appeared to be more interested in what I had to say, rather than how I was saying it! The only reaction I did notice was the occasional pardon, if they didn't quite catch what I said. Similarly, I made several enquiries in local shops. I always maintained eye contact throughout, smiled, looked as confident as I could, and said what I wanted to say.

Again I allowed myself to openly stutter, and again people seemed to respect me and listened to what I had to say.

Also around this time, I enrolled on a public speaking course at my local college, which consisted of 30 evening classes held over a year. My aim was to further desensitize myself to stuttering in front of a group of people. As the course progressed, I discovered from the feedback I received, that I could come across as confident, relaxed and sound interesting, even though I stuttered.

My prior judgement of other peoples' reactions to my stuttering had been totally wrong, and as a result, my perceptions changed. Other people were simply other people, just like me, no doubt with their own worries and problems. Of course, I know there is a minority of people in this world who aren't so patient and understanding when faced with PWS (maybe through their own lack of knowledge about stuttering), but how they react is totally their responsibility.

When the sessions with Tim ended, I was again faced with the dilemma of what to do next. I was still very much interested in [Neuro-Semantics](#) but was also very aware that I needed to uncover the negative thoughts, beliefs, perceptions and emotions that were underlying my blocking. For at that time, I had very little idea what they were.

In due course I contacted John Harrison again, and via e-mail he helped to steer my thinking in such a way that I began to get a glimpse of what was really going on under the surface. John also suggested that I join the [neurosemanticsofstuttering](#) e-mail list. So in December 2004 I subscribed; and wasn't that the right decision!

And so began six months of very deep thinking! I had so many questions to ask, and found that the answers I got from various people on the list were really insightful, helpful and very thought provoking.

Then came the night of January 8th 2005! Lying in bed, it was as if the floodgates of my mind suddenly opened! It felt as if a torrent of buried negative beliefs and perceptions about myself came rushing to the surface all at once.

Among other things, it became clear that I was always craving for the approval of others (a sign of low self-esteem). Also, I feared social rejection and felt inadequate as a person because I stuttered. This process continued on and off throughout the night. Of course I had to write it all down, so by the morning I felt a bit of a wreck! I also felt quite overwhelmed by it all.

Here in front of me, was a huge mountain of negative stuff relating to my blocking and myself that needed to be dealt with. For a few moments I thought I was going to lose it! But I managed to keep my sanity (I think). I realized that I needed to work through all of this with a therapist, and because Bob Bodenhamer shares my Christian faith, I felt that I should approach him.

In due course I had several telephone consultations with Bob, over a period of five months. I realized that I had intertwined my identity as a person with my blocking and stuttering behavior, and they needed separating. During the sessions, Bob would often have me associate into a memory relating to blocking (sometimes from childhood), then lead me through the Drop Down Through Pattern.

I was utterly amazed at the negative thoughts, feelings and identity statements that came to mind, as I dropped down through each layer. Some I didn't even believe, until Bob explained that they were coming from the child part of me. Then I applied my highest spiritual resource to each of the negative thoughts, feelings and identity statements.

As I did so, the latter disappeared, replaced with positive and more

powerful ones. I continued this process at home also, working through other memories when they came to mind. In this way, my identity as a person gradually became separated from my blocking behavior. As a result of this, I realized that I was a person of worth no matter how I talked, and that I no longer needed other peoples' approval of me.

Following on from the sessions with Bob, I continued to spend more time mentally in the presence of my highest resource. As I did so, this new perception of myself was reinforced, and my self-esteem increased further. But then I reached a point yet again when I wasn't sure what the next stage was. I now felt OK as a person and had positive beliefs about myself, even though I stuttered. But I was still stuttering on most words, although by this stage, the blocks were short and with very little tension.

Perhaps being a bit of a skeptic, I wasn't convinced that the blocking behavior would naturally fade away that easily! I also began to miss hearing myself speaking relatively fluently at least some of the time. So I decided to become more committed to the [McGuire Programme](#) again; a decision that I know was the right one for me. Gradually, with the help of friends on the program, I started to regain more fluency but I still felt there was something missing.

In September 2005, I attended Bob's Mastering Blocking and Stuttering Workshop in London. It was excellent and as I listened to the teaching and took part in the group work, I realized that I had indeed changed on the inside. It confirmed the fact that I had quite radically changed the beliefs about myself over recent months, and that my identity as a person was definitely no longer related to how I spoke.

I also found being led through the Power Zone Pattern really helpful. It reinforced in my mind the fact that I and I alone have control over

what I think and feel, and how I behave and speak. I also realized how important it was to give other people permission to own their powers too, instead of trying to mind-read what they may or may not be thinking. Although what other people thought of me was now no longer a key-issue in my life, it was good to be reminded of this.

At the workshop, I had the privilege of meeting John Harrison for the first time. Over the past couple of years or so, he had got to know where I was speech-wise, and as we spoke he made the observation that I was holding myself back, particularly in relation to my volume.

Having stuttered for many years, I had grown accustomed to speaking in a fairly quiet voice (or not speaking at all!). I usually didnt want to be noticed or stand out in a crowd, especially when I spoke. However, I didnt think this had much significance.

To me it sounded natural to speak that way because I had always done it. But I trusted Johns insight and so, at the end of one of the days sessions, I allowed him to lead me through a volume experiment, in front of a few of the other participants. This involved doubling my volume several times and then observing my, and other peoples perception of how I was coming across.

I found that experiment immensely valuable. I realized that my perception of how I sounded when I spoke was considerably different from other people. I thought I was coming on too strong and too loud but they thought I just sounded more confident and more alive when I spoke.

I decided that after the course ended, I would start using a bigger voice in the outside world and see what effect that would have. I also realized that I needed to practice putting more expression into my

voice. Again, having stuttered for so many years, I had never developed this skill. My only concern had been; “how do I get these words out?” As a result, I had grown accustomed to talking in a rather monotone way.

Something else John said during one of the sessions really struck a chord with me. He emphasized that blocking could also be seen as a form of holding back, of sucking in ones energy in an attempt to blend into the background and become invisible. I recognized that this had certainly been true in my case over the years. I had always had reservations about putting the real me on show too much, even in non-speaking situations.

By this stage too, I had pretty much desensitized myself to blocking and stuttering in front of people. I no longer felt embarrassed, and didn't particularly fear doing it in front of people; yet the behavior was still there, and it was an inconvenient way of expressing myself!

Of course the opposite of holding back is letting go, and I realized that by speaking in a louder voice, I would be doing just that. But I now felt ready to take that next step. So as I returned home, I turned up the volume! At first it felt really strange and overly loud to me, but as I kept persevering with it over several weeks, I gradually got more used to it. I also noticed that when I did speak in a louder voice, I felt more confident and actually found it easier to speak. I then started to enjoy speaking in the new way and eventually reached the point of preferring it to the old!

With increased confidence, I decided it was now time to tackle the one and only speaking situation that I was still avoiding. Since joining the [McGuire Programme](#), I had more or less given up the practice of avoiding situations, though sometimes I postponed going into them! However, there was one situation involving speaking in front of a

particular small group of people, which I had been intending to go into for months. Yet when the time came, I always chickened out.

I hadn't been following through my intentions and I knew that this was having a negative effect on my hexagon. So one evening I took the plunge; and as I did so, it wasn't half as scary as I'd imagined. In fact I quite enjoyed it and have been frequently entering and speaking in that situation ever since. No more situation avoidance for me! I was pleased with the progress I was making; yet just around the corner there was another surprise in store for me!

Last November, I went on my first [McGuire Programme](#) course in nearly five years. Again I realized just how much I'd changed during that time. I now felt much more comfortable speaking with people; not just people on the course, but absolutely anyone! I also took on board two more tools.

During the course the instructor, Martin Coombs, emphasized the need to use deliberate dysfluency; that is, choosing to prolong the first sound of a word or words, or imitating a block, immediately releasing it and saying the word again. The point of this was to advertise ourselves as people recovering from stuttering, but in a dignified and controlled way, without genuinely blocking.

As he spoke, I realized that I felt uncomfortable about doing that. It was one thing to not mind stuttering in front of other people, but it was really pushing the boat out to put in extra pretend blocks and stutters that wouldn't normally be there! But I realized the fact that I felt uncomfortable, indicated that I needed to do it!

Secondly, we were shown a way to deepen the tone of our voice whilst saying a word, which I found very helpful. Although I was

already aware of these two tools, I had never really put them into practice. With these two extra tools now to hand, I returned home and started putting into practice what I learned. It was then that I realized that during that course, everything had come together for me. I had turned a corner and had changed from Amber to Green, or Go!

Green

As I started to use deliberate dysfluency in every speaking situation and became even more open about my stuttering, I discovered just how empowering that was! I was now in the driving seat. I could choose to prolong or not prolong whichever sounds I liked. Or I could imitate a block and release it, without experiencing the real, out of control blocking. It was so liberating and fun to do! I was also outwardly demonstrating to people that I was someone who sometimes stutters, but in the way that I chose. I also discovered that I now had an insatiable desire to talk and talk and talk!

As the days went by, I noticed that there was a consistency in the way I spoke. I went into all sorts of situations and was able to maintain my new way of speaking most of the time. Furthermore, I no longer found it the great physical and mental effort that I had five years ago. This time round it felt a lot more natural and easier to me; I think, because of the internal changes that had taken place in my mind.

I started going along to Toastmasters and on the second occasion, was invited to take part in the table topics session. I jumped at the chance! I got up and spoke in front of 30 or so people I hardly knew, using deliberate dysfluency, and gave a short humorous talk. My speaking was absolutely fine. In fact I was even voted the best table topics speaker of the evening! In December, I read a poem in front of some 400 people at church. Again, everything went great and I loved every minute of it! And so it has continued.

Sometimes I have the occasional minor hiccup here and there, but nothing serious and it in no way affects my everyday life. If I do notice myself starting to hold back for whatever reason, I either reframe the situation while I'm in it, or analyze afterwards what was going on in my mind.

I always find that some slight approach/avoidance conflict had been going on. Sometimes it has merely been the fact that as I've started to present myself differently in a speaking situation, I've been aware of displaying the real Hazel like never before; and because that's a fairly new experience for me, it felt uncomfortable.

As a result, I've sometimes had the slight tendency to try and block out those feelings by holding myself back. However, I realize that I need to allow myself to feel uncomfortable; it is only a feeling! Also, I know that the more I do this, the easier it will get. Whatever the reason for holding back, I learn from the experience and then take whatever action is necessary the next time I'm in a similar situation.

As I look back over the past five years, I realize that at different stages, I've been addressing each point of my stuttering hexagon and making each one more positive.

Neurosemantics in particular has played a key role in helping me to change my beliefs about myself, and my perceptions of other people. At this point, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank Bob and Tim for all their help and for all that they do to help PWS. I'd also like to thank John too, whose unique insight has tremendously influenced and helped me, particularly in the area of my perceptions and emotions. And of course all my colleagues and friends on the [McGuire Programme](#), who have helped, supported and inspired me in so many

ways.

I'm very aware that this new way of speaking and presenting myself to the world continually needs to be reinforced day by day, so that eventually it becomes habituated and second nature. Which is why I now enjoy pushing out my comfort zone and making the most of every speaking opportunity.

For example, whenever I'm in a shop I will usually start chatting with the shop assistant (providing there isn't a long queue behind me!). If I'm in a queue waiting to pay for something, I will often pass the time of day with the person in front or behind me. And I love chatting with the parents at the school gate, when I pick my children up each day.

How different life is now! Instead of waking up each morning with a sense of heaviness, wondering how I'm going to get through each speaking situation, I now wake up looking forward to enjoying speaking as much as possible. At last, I am able to be myself and show others my true colors!

HAZEL PERCY, 2006

PART TWO

October, 2014

As most of you know, for the past few months, I've been choosing not to use any physical technique when speaking, as I've wanted to be able to speak more naturally fluent. In some ways, this has been a really useful and positive thing to do. It's enabled me to be more fully aware of, and uncover thoughts and feelings which have been underlying speaking, holding back, being myself and being real with people. In other ways it's often been a struggle, sometimes resulting in me 'screaming' inside with frustration.

During this period, I've also been having NLP therapy with Bob (by phone), which has been very helpful. He's helped me to feel more comfortable about 'being real' and 'being myself' with people; also with

the whole area of 'fear of rejection' from other people. I've also been 'healed' from a controlling 'part' of me which was trying to 'protect' me from feeling hurt or embarrassed if I stuttered. And I've re-framed/removed the negative emotion from a whole load of childhood/teenage and some adult memories which had pain attached to them, all of which were fear or stuttering related.

Although I've seen slight positive changes in speaking behavior here and there, they haven't been consistent and in some ways I've felt like I've not been getting very far. So, a few days ago, I contacted Bob about this and expressed my frustration once again. The result was, we both came to the conclusion that I should at least *allow* myself to use McGuire technique sometimes, if I feel I need to, as a resource to fall back on. So, I began to use it again.

Here are some extracts from a subsequent 'conversation' we had, which Bob has given permission for me to post to this list. We both hope you find it helpful in some way. I'm in lower case and Bob's responses are in upper case:

‘You asked me to let you know what thoughts I have while actually speaking, using McGuire. Well, I’ve been using it a lot during the past 3 days or so – in fact, pretty much all the time. Simply because, after 5 or so months of not using it at all and then going back to it, I really appreciate hearing myself speaking relatively fluently again. To be honest, it feels such a relief to be more able to ‘be myself’ with my husband and children, and to say exactly what I want to say to them, with very little, if any, difficulty. I almost feel like a different person.

The more I use it, the more I want to use it.

Yes, I know it's not 'natural' and not what my ultimate goal is, but at the end of the day, it's my brain/body which is doing the talking and by using it, I'm finding it fairly easy to portray that bigger, fuller and more confident version of me – at least at home. Which is, perhaps, more

important than focusing on *how* I'm talking i.e. whether I'm using McGuire or not.

I DIDN'T REALIZE THAT YOU HAD RECEIVED SUCH GREAT BENEFIT FROM McGUIRE. I WOULD WANT TO USE IT AS WELL IF I WERE A PWS. TO MY KNOWLEDGE, OUTSIDE ALAN, I HAVEN'T PERSONALLY TALKED TO ANYONE WHO GOT THE GREAT RESULTS FROM McGUIRE THAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED. LATER IN THIS EMAIL, YOU MENTION THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO CONTINUE USING McGUIRE WITH YOUR FOCUS OF ULTIMATELY BECOMING NATURALLY FLUENT – LIKE WHAT ALAN DID. I SAY, YES, YES. THAT IS A BEAUTIFUL OUTCOME. GO FOR IT.

I'm aware as I'm speaking that although I'm using the breathing technique, it's just in the background of my mind and I'm not really focusing on it. I suppose after 14 years, I know it very well, to the point that it has become an 'unconscious' program which I can run without much thought, whenever I want to. I'm also aware that in the comfort zone of my own home, simply giving myself permission to use it has the effect of reducing my anxiety about speaking. I'm also finding that as I allow myself to use it, I sometimes have an increased confidence in my own natural ability to speak, which I find interesting. So, I sometimes find myself only half using the technique, yet still able to speak fluently. It's like I'm very loosely holding onto it at times, but not so that it's making any real physical difference.

These moments of almost natural fluency seem to be happening due to temporary changes in my belief in my own natural ability to speak. I'm not consciously doing this; it seems to happen on its own. I think this is what happened to Alan – though on an accelerated scale. He didn't consciously choose to give up his technique one day – it just happened naturally, the more he went into unfamiliar situations, initially using his technique, but then reached a point of being able to let go of it and speak more naturally as confidence in his own natural ability grew.

THIS IS ABSOLUTELY EXCELLENT. THE WORK YOU HAVE BEEN DOING ON YOUR “THINKING” ABOUT YOUR STUTTERING IS BEGINNING TO BRING CHANGES AT THE UNCONSCIOUS LEVEL. YOU STATED: “So, I sometimes find myself only half using the technique, yet still able to speak fluently.” THIS TELLS ME THAT YOU HAVE MOST DEFINITELY MADE SOME POSITIVE CHANGES IN YOUR UNCONSCIOUS BELIEFS THAT LED TO “FEAR” THAT LED TO STUTTERING. YOU ARE MINIMIZING THE STRENGTH OF THOSE FRAMES AND YOU ARE STRENGTHENING THOSE FRAMES OF ALLOWING YOURSELF TO TALK FREELY WITHOUT BEING SO ANXIOUS AND FEARFUL ABOUT STUTTERING. I APPLAUD YOUR PROGRESS.

“As I allow myself to use it, I sometimes have an increased confidence in my own natural ability to speak...”

SO, IF I UNDERSTAND YOU CORRECTLY, USING McGUIRE IS ASSISTING YOU IN MINIMIZING THE NEGATIVE THAT TRIGGERED STUTTERING, AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, BUILDING A STRONGER AND STRONGER SELF-CONFIDENCE IN YOUR ABILITY TO SPEAK FLUENTLY. I APPLAUD YOU IN DOING THAT. YOU KNOW WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN WHEN YOU NO LONGER NEED McGUIRE OR ANY OTHER PROGRAM TO HAVE THE SELF-CONFIDENCE THAT LEADS TO NATURAL FLUENCY, DON'T YOU? YOU WILL INNATELY SPEAK AS ANY OTHER ENGLISH SPEAKER - I ENCOURAGE YOU TO CONTINUE TRANSFERRING THE SELF-CONFIDENCE THAT YOU GET FROM McGUIRE TO SELF-CONFIDENCE IN YOUR OWN GOD-GIVEN ABILITY TO SPEAK FLUENTLY. KEEP UP THE GREAT WORK.

As far as what else I'm thinking about as I'm using it, I'm not really sure. I don't always plan what words I'm going to say.

AS WE HAVE DISCUSSED BEFORE, NATURALLY FLUENT PEOPLE RARELY EVER THINK ABOUT WHAT THEY ARE GOING TO SAY BEFORE THEY SAY IT. WE ONLY DO THAT WHEN WE HAVE A STRONG NEED TO “MEASURE” WHAT WE ARE GOING TO SAY.

Sometimes I just start speaking and say whatever comes out. I feel I can do this because I have total faith in the technique. I've proved to myself time and time again that it works.

WHEN YOU “START SPEAKING AND SAY WHATEVER COMES OUT (LIKE FLUENT PEOPLE DO ALL THE TIME), DO YOU HAVE IN THE BACK OF YOUR MIND THE THOUGHT THAT SHOULD YOU STUTTER YOU CAN FALL BACK ON McGUIRE? OR, ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT JUST TALKING WITHOUT ANY THOUGHTS OF McGUIRE OR NLP/NS TO BACK YOU UP? YOU LET YOUR SPEECH “FLOW LIKE A RIVER” AS RUTH SAYS? IF THAT IS WHAT YOU ARE DOING, I ENCOURAGE YOU TO DO THAT MORE AND MORE. THE MORE THOSE MENTAL FRAMES THAT TRIGGER YOUR STUTTERING HEAR YOU SPEAKING FLUENTLY, THE LESS POWERFUL WILL THEY BECOME. IT WILL TAKE TIME BUT NO DOUBT IT IS HAPPENING.

What I mean by *'I just start speaking and say whatever comes out'* is; I'm still using McGuire breathing to a greater or lesser degree but I don't think about what words I'm saying before I actually say them. Also, I'm not all that aware of how I'm breathing either, though I am aware of there being some use of McGuire. But, sometimes this seems more like a 'placebo effect', rather than physically preventing the blocking, as my mind isn't thinking about how I'm speaking or about stuttering either. So, I guess it's my unconscious mind producing the speech but with the 'safety net' of McGuire at the back of my mind.

THIS IS MUSIC TO MY EARS. YES, ABSOLUTELY, WHEN WE ARE SPEAKING WITHOUT THINKING ABOUT WHAT WE ARE SAYING, IT IS OUR UNCONSCIOUS MIND PROVIDING THE WORDS FOR YOUR RESPONSE. KEEP UP WHAT YOU ARE DOING AND I HAVE HIGH HOPE THAT GRADUALLY YOU WILL DISCOVER THAT YOU DO NOT NEED MCGUIRE OR EVEN NS IN THE BACK OF YOUR MIND. YOU ARE NOW FLUENT.

At other times, I do, to an extent, think about the words, but not that much. I still have some feared letters/sounds so I sometimes see those coming up in a sentence. Sometimes I trip up on them and sometimes I don't. I know that with these feared letters/words I need to change my approach towards them, and do what Alan did. Pro-actively use them in sentences even when I don't need to (where it's appropriate of course and makes sense!) and to keep saying them and saying them in different contexts until they lose their emotional charge. I think one effective way to eliminate fear is to face it head on, and keep attacking it until it dies – at least in the context of feared words/sounds.

MANY, MANY, PEOPLE HAVE OVERCOME THEIR FEARS BY “FACING THEM”. THEY DO THIS FOR WHATEVER TIME IT TAKES THEM TO WHIP THEIR FEARS. SHOULD THEY BE FEARFUL OF HEIGHTS, THEY GO A LITTLE HIGHER EACH DAY IN THE TREE OR IN THE BUILDING – THEY JUST KEEP CLIMBING UNTIL THE FEAR FINALLY GIVES UP. THIS IS WHAT I MEAN BY ALLOWING THOSE PARTS OF YOU THAT FEARS STUTTERING TO HEAR YOU SPEAK FLUENTLY. LET THOSE PARTS KNOW THAT YOU CAN SPEAK FLUENTLY. THIS PROVIDES A “COUNTER EXAMPLE” TO THOSE OLD FALSE BELIEFS THAT YOU HAVE TO FEAR THAT YOU WILL STUTTER OR YOU WILL STUTTER”. AS THE COUNTER TO THE NEGATIVE BELIEF IS REVEALED TO THE PART THAT FEARS STUTTERING THE LESS AND LESS WILL BE THE

STRENGTH OF THAT OLD FEARFUL PART. EXCELLENT. KEEP IT UP.

In speaking situations not involving my immediate family, I've been experimenting a bit with using that image of 'confident me, safe in Jesus' hands'. As you suggested, I've been imagining it before going into a speaking situation where I don't feel totally comfortable. I used it earlier today with a couple of phone calls and doing that seemed to help to keep me calmer as I was speaking. One of the calls, in fact, was about me possibly giving a talk in the future to a community group about my journey towards overcoming stuttering.

WOW! PRAISE THE LORD. THIS IS GREAT, HAZEL. MAY THOSE PARTS OF YOU THAT TRIGGER YOUR STUTTERING STRATEGY HEAR THIS. MAY THEY HEAR YOU BEING "CONFIDENT IN THE HANDS OF JESUS", YES, YES. THIS IS GREAT WORK. I ENCOURAGE YOU TO EXPAND ON DOING THIS. YOU HAVE A POWERFUL "RESOURCE" IN YOUR FAITH IN JESUS. FOR WHEN "FEAR" MEETS JESUS, "FEAR" DISAPPEARS.

I can't remember if I told you but last September (2013) I did a half hour talk in front of a group of about 60 ladies (all strangers) as an audition to become a speaker for the Women's Institute (do you have that in the States?). Anyway, I trusted God, used McGuire technique, had great fun and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.....and I passed the audition. Some of the feedback I got was that they found it inspiring. But then shortly afterwards, I had all this upheaval in my mind about using McGuire versus natural speech and for the past 5 months, although I've had a couple of phone calls inviting me to speak at various events, I've declined them, as I didn't feel able to cope with them by speaking naturally.

YOU STATED, "I've declined them, as I didn't feel able to cope with

them by speaking naturally.” SINCE YOU ARE NOW “FACING YOUR FEARS”, I BET YOU WON’T DECLINE ANY MORE FOR YOU HAVE CONFIDENCE IN McGUIRE AND YOU ARE BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN YOURSELF. CORRECT?

Correct :) But, this past weekend, I happened to come across the YouTube video of our friend Alan B, giving a presentation at the ASHA Convention 2012 and decided to watch it. I’d not seen it before. And as I saw and heard him speak, it made me so, so hungry to get what he’s got..... whatever it takes. It’s really fired me up! I’m going to contact him soon and hopefully have a Skype chat with him. If he can do it, so can I! I am NOT going to be beaten by this. No way!!!!!!!

“IF HE CAN DO THAT, SO CAN I.” YOU BETTER BELIEVE YOU CAN. EVERY TIME YOU RECALL WATCHING ALAN’S SPEECH, YOU WILL BECOME MORE AND MORE MOTIVATED TO BECOME LIKE ALAN, WHICH IS BECOMING NATURALLY FLUENT. YES, I SURE DO BELIEVE THAT YOU CAN AND WILL ACCOMPLISH THIS GOAL.

So, going back to that phone call earlier today. When I spoke to that man about me possibly giving a future talk, I used that image in my mind, spoke relatively calmly and fluently with him and decided to go ahead with it. Avoiding situations is definitely NOT the way forward for me anymore and if I end up needing to use McGuire, then so be it. It’s not ideal, but it’s better to go in using it, to convey my message and enjoy the experience, than to not do it at all.

YES, YES. I SURELY DO NOT HAVE A PROBLEM WITH THIS STEP . YOU HAVE HAD A GREAT DEAL OF NLP/NS THERAPY AND YOU BELIEVE TOTALLY IN THE POWER OF “THINKING”. YOU HAVE HAD McGUIRE AND YOU KNOW IT EXTREMELY WELL. SO, IT SEEMS THAT IT IS TIME FOR “McGUIRE” AND “THINKING” TO

SHAKE HANDS BECOMING BUDDIES IN THE LEADING OF YOU TOWARDS HAVING CONFIDENCE IN YOURSELF AS A TRULY FLUENT PERSON – WHICH YOU ALREADY ARE. MAY MCGUIRE AND THINKING CONTINUE IN THE LEADING OF YOU TO BE THE PERSON WHO NO LONGER HOLDS ANY THOUGHTS OF BLOCKING / STUTTERING IN HER MIND.

YOU ARE WELL ON YOUR WAY TO LIVING YOUR LIFE NOT “BC” OR “AD” BUT SIMPLY, “A-S” – “AFTER STUTTERING”. REMEMBER, THE ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO NOT ENTERTAIN ANY THOUGHTS IN YOUR MIND ABOUT STUTTERING OR HOW YOU ARE SPEAKING. YOU ARE TOO BUSY LIVING LIFE TO FOCUS ON SUCH NEGATIVITY. YOU CAN DO IT. INDEED, YOU HAVE DONE IT. YOU SAID SO IN YOUR EMAIL. WAY TO GO.

I must just quickly tell you this. I don't expect it will mean that much to you, but for PWS, even small, simple achievements can mean so much. Today, I had to top-up the credit on my phone. I'd bought a voucher from the shop (which I'd asked for with no problem) but for some reason, the voucher number wouldn't register with my provider, as I typed in the numbers on the phone. So, I had to phone Customer Services to get the problem sorted out. Even as recent as four days ago, I would have found this really difficult and probably blocked on most of the 12 numbers as I was trying to say them. Today though, I felt really pleased, even excited that I had to phone someone up to sort out the problem. And when I did so, I clearly and confidently explained what the problem was, then read out all 12 numbers pretty easily. It was such fun!!!!!!! Afterwards, I felt I real buzz. And I realised that this is why I like McGuire - because it allows me to be my confident real self. And I love being that way!!!!

YOUR STATEMENT: “I CLEARLY AND CONFIDENTLY EXPLAINED WHAT THE PROBLEM WAS...” EXCITES THIS HILLBILLY. YOU ARE GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS WITH YOURSELF SINCE YOU STARTED BACK USING MCGUIRE. THIS IS AWESOME WHAT YOU

ARE ACCOMPLISHING IN SUCH A SHORT TIME. AND, YES, I AM MOST FAMILIAR WITH THE IMPORTANCE OF JUST A SMALL POSITIVE STEP IS GREAT NEWS TO THE PWS. ABSOLUTELY. (I'M AFRAID TOO MANY GIVE UP TOO QUICKLY AND DO NOT EXPERIENCE THE BRIEF BUT IMPORTANT "WINS" THAT THE BRAIN GIVES TO YOU. THAT IS SAD.)

YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES, HAZEL. THERE IS NO DOUBT ABOUT IT – THE DAY WILL ARRIVE WHEN YOU WILL KNOW LONGER NEED A SAFETY NET. IT IS GOING TO HAPPEN. IN THE MEANTIME, KEEP ON DOING WHAT YOU ARE DOING AND AS YOU MARCH FORWARD CONTINUALLY FINDING PROOF AFTER PROOF THAT YOU CAN BE NORMALLY FLUENT, THOSE OLD FEAR FRAMES WILL CONTINUE DISSIPATING UNTIL THEY ARE TOTALLY GONE.

So, there you have it, everyone. This is the direction I am now traveling: Focusing on being that bigger, more confident, more 'real' me in the outside world; pro-actively facing my sometimes challenging letters/words; regularly expanding my comfort zone by putting myself in unfamiliar situations; and *not* focusing on whether I'm using a technique or not using a technique to help me achieve my ultimate goal of more natural fluency/ease of verbal self-expression.

Hazel, 2014

PART THREE

EMAILS FROM HAZEL PERCY TO YAHOO “NEUROSEMANTICS OF STUTTERING” WEBSITE, OWNED AND OPERATED BY DR. BOB BODENHAMER

10/30/2014

Thanks Anna for sharing that Toastmasters speech with us. I hadn't seen it before and enjoyed watching it.

Thanks too, to all those who have commented on my recent post(s). Sorry I haven't always replied individually, but I do read and appreciate them all. Sometimes, when it's busy on this list, it's hard to keep track of who said what, to whom, and when! But when it's all positive stuff that's being said, it's a great problem to have!

Anyway, just thought I'd share this. As most of you know, in recent months, I've been going along to Toastmasters with no physical technique and openly stuttering a lot during meetings – both when taking on roles at the front, and in conversation during the interval. In hindsight, I realize I was holding back A LOT on those occasions! But that's the way I chose to be for a while. I had good reasons for doing it and in many ways, I don't regret that period. Going through that, helped to give me the motivation and drive to change, and to put that way of 'being in the world', behind me. I am now no longer choosing to live that way.

So, last night, I went along to my 'first' meeting since turning this corner in my life (as John H put it). Beforehand, I was aware of recent memories of me, standing up in that Toastmasters room and presenting myself in a certain way – holding back, blocking/stuttering and not feeling at all confident. But last night, I chose not to think about those images. Instead, in my mind, I recalled the times that I had spoken well there – for example, last year, and at my previous

Toastmasters club several years ago. I also remembered the audition I'd done to become a speaker for the Women's Institute and how good and confident I'd felt when delivering that talk. As I recalled these positive memories, and even though I felt nervous, I knew I had it in me to present myself as the 'bigger', more confident me at that meeting last night.

There were about 25-30 people present, including some guests. I took on the role of hesitation counter for the evening. For those not familiar with Toastmasters, it means making a note of other people's inappropriate hesitations and use of filler words such as 'em' and 'er' and reporting back towards the end of the meeting. Including the introductions, I got up to speak three times throughout the evening. And, just before each one, I decided to hold an image in my mind of the confident person I am working on becoming in real life. Doing that helped me to stay focussed and to keep a positive mind-set throughout the evening.

It was a great evening and I thoroughly enjoyed it. As I was speaking, it felt as if I was turning all the frustration I'd felt during recent months into positive energy, which I was releasing, as I was letting go and having fun speaking.

I want to encourage everyone on this list who isn't currently a member of Toastmasters or another public speaking organisation, to give it a go. I know it's been said before, but it really is a great way to face your speaking fears in a supportive environment. During the past few months, whilst I've been 'experimenting', the members of my club have been so, so supportive. Even when I've been blocking on nearly every word! They've simply been there for me; sitting quietly in the audience - listening and showing me patience, support and love. I'm confident that you would find a similar level of support in whatever club you decided to attend, whatever the severity of your stuttering.

11/9/2014

About a year ago, I wrote two 45 minutes talks about my journey towards overcoming stuttering, with a view to delivering them to community groups in my local area. One was geared towards secular groups (e.g. Women's Institute) and the other, church groups. Shortly after writing them, the inner turmoil I'd been experiencing for some months, came to a head (control vs.spontaneous speech), which most of you know about. So, I did nothing further about those talks and kept them in a folder, filed away; even declining a couple of invitations to speak which I had earlier in the year, because I didn't have the confidence to go ahead and do them.

However, after going back to McGuire technique a couple of weeks ago, and chatting with Alan B. recently, it hit home that I needed to stop messing around and holding back from giving these talks. I knew I had a lot of vague excuses going around in the back of my mind as to why I shouldn't go ahead and do them, so yesterday I brought them out of hiding and wrote them all down. There they all were, in black and white in front of me.....and there were a lot!!!

But when I looked at them, I realized none of them were really very good reasons, and none of them were giving me anything positive. They were just getting in the way of me achieving my goal of enjoying speaking in the outside world, of building confidence in my own natural ability to speak, and of being the person I was created to be – someone without stuttering. So, I decided that I needed to take some positive action.

This evening, I dug out the two talks and as I read them, I realised something interesting. That over the past year, whilst once again

being a member of this group and having NLP therapy, my attitudes, perceptions and beliefs about stuttering/holding back have changed to such an extent, that I no longer agree with what I've written!

Those talks no longer give an accurate story of where I'm at, or of what I believe about myself and stuttering/holding back. So, I now face the task of re-writing both of them! But at least now, the end result will be talks which will give even more hope to PWS than before, and which will give a more accurate description of what stuttering/holding back is really all about. And hopefully something of what I share will, somehow, get to reach PWS in my local area who need to hear this message.

11/18/2014

Alan/Junaid:

Thanks for your good wishes.

Over the weekend, I finished re-writing the basic outline for both my talks. And today, I did something I've never ever done before. I sent off 40 flyers, advertising myself as a speaker. I sent them to 40 different churches in my area, offering to give a free talk about my journey towards overcoming stuttering, from a Christian perspective. It felt really weird, and quite surreal.

I have absolutely no idea where this will lead. Hopefully, somewhere good. I just know it's something I need to do, to help me move away from having a stuttering mind-set.

Hopefully, in time, I will get some positive response. They have nothing to lose, but will hopefully gain something, as I share my story. I've also prepared a hand-out to give out at the end, to anyone who knows of someone, who might want help with their stuttering.

On it, I've given the URLs for Bob's "mastering stuttering" website, the website for free books...www.freestutteringbooks.com, this NS e-mail group, and contact details for the McGuire Programme. I know there are many other great sources of help 'out there' too, but I don't want to bombard them with too much information. I know that if they look up even one of these, they will receive a lot of help.

Also in the New Year (in between moving house!) I will send out more flyers, including some to secular groups. And, I'll work my way through sending one to each of the 225 Essex Women's Institute groups in the UK (whom I auditioned for). Although I'm advertised in their speakers' book, it gives only very brief details (e.g. name, title of speech, fee), and there are many others listed.

If I do receive any invitations to speak, they will most likely be for several months down the line (if not a year or two ahead), unless they have a cancellation. But at least I'm heading in the right direction. I know I've still got more work to do on my thinking. But at the same time, I know that as we choose to go out into the unknown, challenge our self-limiting beliefs and create more positive speaking experiences, these in themselves can help to change our thinking, and increase our confidence.

12/1/2014

Alan:

Where do you find all those great quotes?

Yesterday evening, I attending a 2 1/2 hour workshop, aimed at helping people discover and explore their five highest 'strengths' and how they can be best used in everyday life. Although I had briefly spoken to two or three people who were attending before, I hadn't met

most of the twenty or so people who were there. I went alone, knowing that it was something I wanted to do, and knowing that there would be quite a lot of discussion in small groups with people I mostly didn't know. I went with the intention of doing my best, being open about the fact that I sometimes might stutter, getting to know others and myself better, actively participating in the discussion and enjoying the evening.

Reflecting on last night, I realize I fulfilled all those intentions. Sometimes I could feel myself holding back a little, but it didn't stop me saying what I wanted to say and actively taking part in the discussions. Next time I go to a similar event, I will probably find it that little bit easier. I also went, knowing that my thinking 'wasn't all sorted'. Even so, I was able to enjoy the evening and was really glad I went.

As Alan has said, sometimes we need to put ourselves into these types of situations, even when we don't feel totally prepared, or feel 100% confident. By doing so, we are saying 'no' to fear and 'yes' to the confident person we want to become.

12/22/2014

Yesterday, I was doing some editing of a talk I'm giving at the end of March, to a church group. For this particular talk, I only have 15-20 minutes in which to speak, so I've had to cut out some material. But one of the stories I'm going to tell, as part of that talk, is of an incident which happened in 1980, when I was 14.

At that time, my fear level was often high and my stuttering severe. Anyway, I won a prize for a school art competition and had to go and meet the mayor to receive it. First, I had to travel with my headmistress, in her car, to the Town Hall, which was a scary experience in itself. Just her – an authority figure, and me – who had

almost zero confidence.

Then, I had to meet the mayor, along with two other pupils from other schools. The mayor was quite tall. I clearly remember; he looked down at me, smiled and asked me my name. There was a deathly silence, as I struggled to say just one word. I felt hot; my chest and throat tensed up; I was running out of breath...but no sound was coming out. Finally, I managed to blurt out 'Hazel', to which the mayor said: "Pardon?"

(I've since removed the negative emotion from that memory!)

But at that time, a photo was published in the local paper of the three of us, with the mayor, collecting our prize.

Now, today, the weirdest thing happened. I received a Christmas card from a friend, and inside was a copy of that same photo – of me when I was 14, meeting the mayor, back in 1980! For some reason, that photo was re-printed in the same local paper, last week, December 15th.....34 years later!!!

Why am I sharing this? Because, as I look at that photo of myself meeting the mayor, 34 years ago, I see a fearful teenager, with low self-esteem and very little confidence. And I realize how much I've changed since then. I know I'm not where I want to be. But I'm not where I was, and I know things can only get better. As they can with us all.

1/01/2015

I share the following, in the hope that it will encourage you to venture

out of your comfort zone, and try new things this coming year.

A few weeks ago, I was finding speaking in social situations often quite challenging, particularly when outside my comfort zone. Especially one to one conversations with people. Even having a coffee and chat with a friend was sometimes difficult. I'd no problem with the coffee..... just the chat! So, as well as continuing to do NLP work on myself, I talked this over with someone on this list and acted on their advice.

So, for the past two/three weeks I've been regularly using voluntary stuttering/deliberate non-fluency (or whatever you prefer to call it,) in pretty much every speaking situation. Even at home with my husband and children. To be honest, I thought I didn't really need to use it these days, as I've used it a lot in the past. Though not in recent years, and not since returning to McGuire. But.....it seems I was wrong in thinking that. I've also been reading out loud to myself every day for 10-20 minutes and whilst reading, imagining my speech flowing like Niagara Falls (or Ruth's river!). And, I've been putting myself in uncomfortable speaking situations on a regular basis.

For example, yesterday, as I was sat at a table on my own, in a coffee shop, a lady came and sat on the table next to me. I'd no idea who she was but we smiled. She was waiting for her husband, who was ordering at the counter. I thought, 'I have a choice here'. Either I can hold back and we can both sit in silence and ignore each other. Or, I can venture out and start a conversation with her. I chose to do the latter and so, we both enjoyed a brief conversation. I had no difficulty speaking at all - my speech just flowed. When her husband came over, we all wished each other a happy new year, then I moved on.

Last night, I went to a New Year's Eve party..... on my own. It was a family party (my husband's cousins' family/friends). Although

the rest of my immediate family were invited, they didn't go for various reasons. So I thought – 'Oh well, I'm going to go anyway!' It was outside my comfort zone, but I thought.....let's start the New Year as I mean to go on!

Although I knew some of the people there, I hadn't spoken with them much before, as I only see them maybe once or twice a year. There were others there, who I'd never met before. I went with the intention of being deliberately non-fluent with everyone I spoke to, and of chatting with different people, as much as possible. I followed through on these intentions. I spent a lot of the evening talking with various people, covering all sorts of topics, including sometimes mentioning stuttering, and my speaking plans for 2015. Some people I'd spoken to before, others I hadn't. But, I would say, at least 90% of the time, my speech was just there for me – there was no struggle at all. It just flowed. The other 10% - I'm still working on.

But.....I had the time of my life! I proved to myself that change is possible, and that I'm more than capable of easily holding social conversations with lots of different people. When I talked with my family on returning home, it seems that I'd definitely had the most fun, out of the four of us!!!

Today, I phoned up my uncle and aunt, to wish them a Happy New Year. They're now in their mid-eighties, and I'd not spoken to them for nearly 2 years! The last time I'd been in their company, I'd really had a hard time speaking. Fear had been high and I just hadn't had the right mind-set.

When I was younger, I used to feel intimidated by my uncle. He always came across as so loud and confident and I'd felt the complete opposite – really small and insignificant. Although we regularly keep in touch by e-mail, it's only very recently, that I've had enough confidence to pick up the phone and speak to them again. But today I

did.

At first they were out, so I left an answerphone message. But then I spoke to my uncle later in the day. I continued to be deliberately non-fluent as I spoke to him, and we had a great conversation for ten minutes or so. I didn't feel totally comfortable, but I was able to speak to him a lot more easily than a couple of years ago. And this time around, it was a pleasurable experience. I know that next time, I will probably find it that little bit easier again.

As I gently push out of my comfort zone a little bit each day and face my fears, I notice that it feels a little bit easier to do the next time. And the more I do it, the more motivated I feel to keep doing it. It's like, as I stand up to the fear and don't shy away from it, it is slowly beginning to shrink. I know I need to keep doing what I'm doing for a long time yet, but my hope is that one day, the fears I have around speaking, will just not be there anymore.

I think I may have caught the 'Badmington bug'! The more I talk and have positive speaking experiences, the more I want to talk!

If I have, I hope it becomes highly contagious and that many other PWS catch it, on this list.

1/3/2015

Anna, as you know, what I put myself through last year was out of my own choice. Yes, I found it difficult, yes it was frustrating and often painful, but I don't regret doing it one bit. It's what I personally needed to do – to see just how far I could go, simply using NLP/NS and nothing else. If I hadn't found that out, through experimenting and

putting myself out there with no physical 'crutch', I'd have always been wondering.....'what if?' And I wouldn't have gained what I now have – a drive and determination like never before, to break free of the stuttering mind-set which I've held onto for far too many years.

You're right – it's a wonderful feeling, being at the beginning of a big adventure. In some ways, I feel like a butterfly – starting to break out of its chrysalis. I don't know exactly what I'll find or what I'll do 'out there' in the whole 'new' world waiting for me, but I know it will be far better than I've ever experienced in my life so far, or that I've even imagined.

Every day it feels like I'm shaking the structure of the self-limiting belief system which I've had for years. And as I do so, I find myself having thoughts like 'hold on a minute Hazel, you've been short-changing yourself all these years. Why didn't you do this years ago?' I guess the answer is: Because I wasn't yet ready. But now I am, and there's no stopping me.”

1/7/15

About a year ago, I was having significant problems saying a particular word – 'leather'. I don't know what first triggered it, but I remember having trouble saying it at home, and in face to face situations in shops. At the time, I didn't pay too much attention to it. I thought maybe the fear of saying this word will go away on its own, if I ignore it.

For most of last year, I had very little reason to say it, and forgot about it. But at the end of last year, the need for me to say it cropped up again, as I wanted a pair of leather gloves for Christmas. Well, my brain remembered the difficulties I'd had saying that word several months before. And the fear and problems saying it came back.

After a few times of continually saying it at home on various occasions, I managed to eliminate the fear/emotional charge associated with that word in that particular context. But trying to say it in shops was still a trial. So, just before Christmas I decided the time had come for me to knock this fear on the head, once and for all.

Not that easy!!! During the past month, I've gone into shopping areas on several occasions, saying the word to a whole host of shop assistants, and every time I've kept blocking on it. I've kept trying different things e.g. deliberate non-fluency around the challenging word, but still didn't seem to be making any headway. Then I would go home, or be with friends, and be able to say the word perfectly fine. It was driving me nuts!!!! How can a stupid seven letter word hold so much power???? It was a tough nut to crack.

Yesterday I went out again into the local shopping centre, saying the word again to various shop assistants, and still no joy. I came home and again, could say it fine with my children. So I thought - there has to be a way through this; of convincing my brain that it can say this word in a shop situation.

So, I decided, in the comfort of my own home, and keeping the same mind-set and physical state as I had when talking to my children, to phone up a department store. I did manage to maintain the same state and ended up speaking to three different shop assistants, over the phone. With each one, I said the word 'leather' – absolutely fine. 'Mmm', I thought afterwards. 'See, brain.....you are capable of saying this word fine to shop assistants. There is very little difference between saying it to them over the phone and saying it face to face, right?' So, I felt a little more positive after that.

Today, I went out to a different shopping centre, with the main purpose of tackling this seven letter word, yet again. Actually, the problem wasn't the word itself, but the belief associated with it – that I can't say it to a shop assistant. As I went into each situation, I did my best to keep the same mind-set and physical state as I'd had when speaking on the phone last night. And.....guess what? I said that word about 15 times, to all sorts of shop assistants. Most of the time, I said it so easily. Two or three times, I momentarily thought of the fear just before saying the word, and blocked. But I released it, and managed to say the word easily afterwards, on each occasion. And, I made sure I ended the 'shopping' trip with a completely positive experience.

I know I've not completely nailed it yet, but I feel I've finally made some progress in the past 24 hours. I've made a big crack in the self-limiting belief that I can't say this word in shops. I have proved that 'belief' to be a lie.

Sometimes these negative beliefs/'mental blocks' can seem so insurmountable – even almost impossible for us to ever change. But, I've proved to myself today that given the right approach and attitude, even the most deep-seated negative beliefs can be changed, and progress made.

1/21/2015

A few days ago, Jerrie quoted the following: **"Stuttering is what you do when you're trying not to stutter."**

Relating to this, just thought I'd share the following story:

Early last year, I went to visit a friend. We go back a long way, to when we were both at university. Although we don't see each other that often, we are still quite 'close' emotionally. Well, I hadn't seen her for a while and while driving over to see her, I was imagining myself speaking fluently with her and being confident. I was looking forward to seeing her again.

When I arrived and started speaking though, I unexpectedly started to feel uneasy and could feel myself holding back. Fear gradually crept in and speaking to her became increasingly harder. At the time I was thinking, 'this is ridiculous - I tried so hard to prepare myself for this speaking situation and it's all going wrong. Why.....? Although we spent around 3 hours together, it was 3 hours of struggle, as far as my speaking to her was concerned. It was a very frustrating and annoying time.

A few months down the line I realized, "wait a minute.....you were trying too hard to be fluent, and to not stutter". My conscious mind had been working overtime – monitoring and trying to say every word correctly, and making a complete mess of it!!!

Moving forward now to last week. I decided to phone her, as we'd not spoken since that time. This time round, I had a completely different mind-set. I thought; 'I'm going to be deliberately non-fluent when speaking with you. I'm going to prolong or deliberately repeat the first sound of some words. I'm going to choose to speak differently than you. I'm not going to try and speak 'normally' and I'm not going to attempt to be even remotely fluent. I'm going to speak how I want to speak and focus more on 'being me', expressing myself and enjoying the conversation.

And what happened? We chatted for about 45 minutes. I found speaking so easy. I wasn't 'fluent' but there was no struggle or difficulty and I said exactly what I wanted to say, how I wanted to say

it. In fact, I said more in that 45 minutes, than I did in the 3 hours I'd spent with her previously. On this occasion, speaking was an enjoyable experience.

I just want to encourage people to give voluntary stuttering/deliberate non-fluency (or whatever you prefer to call it) a "go." You may even think the whole idea of it is scary. But believe me, it certainly beats "trying to not stutter" by a long, long way.

It's really quite liberating and once you get into it, it's such a fun thing to do!!!

1/30/2015

Some of you may remember that last July, I asked for advice about doing my 7th Toastmasters speech, which was all about 'Research Your Topic'. I was struggling to think of a topic to research, with which I could also express emotion. Plus, at that time, I lacked the confidence and self-belief to even give a speech at all! In fact, I'd been scheduled to do it on two occasions in the past, and each time I'd 'chickened out' and withdrawn my name from the programme.

Anyway, having recently gained enough confidence to do it, I finally went ahead and did the speech on Wednesday evening.

I went along with the intention of having fun with it, and hopefully brightening up the audience's evening. I also planned to use (and actually did use) voluntary non-fluency here and there throughout the

evening – both in conversation and during the speech itself. My topic was about the possible health benefits of chocolate, so..... who can't have fun talking about that?????????

I felt a bit nervous beforehand, as I hadn't done a Toastmasters speech for over 2 years! But I remembered the ones I had done in the past, how good I'd felt whilst doing them, and how enjoyable they had been. So I put myself in the same positive mind-set that I'd had when I'd done those.

Once I started speaking, the feeling of nervousness subsided and I loved every minute of it!!! It was a great feeling, knowing that I could say exactly what I wanted to say, in the way I wanted to say it. And doing a speech again after quite a long break, reminded me of how much I love public speaking. It was also a great 'practice run' for the community talks coming up in March.

So, even though we may find it tough at times (or all the time!), things can change for the better. It's just a case of finding out what works for us, then persisting with it. For me it's a combination of things e.g. NLP/NS, McGuire and speaking in a stronger voice. I think it's often a mixture, and it's probably a different mixture for each one of us.

Hazel

2/26/2015

.....I had an interesting time being 'Flow Evaluator' at Toastmasters last night and took on board your suggestions. And I made a couple of interesting observations.

When people (mainly 'fluent speakers') were speaking from the heart and expressing their feelings, there was more 'flow' in their speech and body language, than when they weren't. I also noticed an interesting effect on me. I'd gone along to the meeting, with the intention of using quite a lot of voluntary stuttering, as I usually do. And I did follow that through when introducing/explaining my role.

I then spent the rest of the evening almost constantly looking out for and observing flow in the other speakers. 'Flow' was very much on my mind. When the time came for me to give my report at the end, the meeting was running slightly late, so I was a bit pushed for time.

Normally, I know pretty much what I'm going to say beforehand, and have it quite planned out on paper and in my mind. But this time I felt I could be more spontaneous and less structured with it. Also, I noticed whilst I was speaking out my report, I was only very loosely holding onto McGuire, but I somehow 'knew' it was all right to do that, at that time and in that context.

So, there was more 'flow' going on with me too. It seems that by focussing on flow throughout the evening, something changed in me at an unconscious level, at least temporarily. It was an interesting experience.

3/10/2015

Just thought I'd let you know how my first church talk went, which was this afternoon.

Well, I got there about 20 minutes early and chatted with the organiser for a while. I'm used to going to church, but it felt really weird arriving at a different one.....and as a guest speaker!!! As I

looked at the speaking area, I was glad I hadn't got notes with me, as I wouldn't have had anywhere convenient to put them. Maybe I should buy one of those portable lecterns!

Although the meeting started at 2.30pm, I wasn't called on to speak until about 3 o'clock. So I had about half an hour's wait. Although I felt slightly nervous, I also had a sense of peace and calm, believing that my highest resource (God) would help to keep me in a positive mind/body state whilst I was speaking. And that's exactly what happened. As I was speaking, I did stay calm and relaxed. My focus was on sharing my story with those present, enjoying the experience and using my whole body as I expressed myself. And yes.....it was fun! Although I spoke for 25 minutes, I felt I could have carried on speaking for longer, and still remained in that positive state.

Afterwards, as I chatted with a few of the ladies, I received some positive feedback, such as they could hear every word, that I spoke clearly and that they appreciated my talk. They've even invited me back to speak there again, at some point in the future. So.....that's always a good sign!

Thanks again to those on this list who gave me the opportunity to practise to a 'live audience'. I really appreciated that. So now.....on to preparing for my next one, in a week's time!

3/10/2015 (2nd e-mail)

.....Now, the question is, how to make the transition from needing McGuire, to not needing it, yet still be able to have a positive hexagon. That's something I'm still going through.

All I know is, that today, when I was doing my talk to that group, I was not as reliant on using McGuire in its strictest form, as I have been on previous, similar occasions. Yes, I still used a costal breath at the start of each phrase, but if I'm honest, it wasn't a 'full' one, which is what is taught on the programme. But I knew inside, that I was doing what I needed to do, to be able to express myself freely, how I wanted to, in that particular situation. I felt able to 'let go' more, than in the past, when in similar situations. So, there was more 'flow' going on. How did that happen? I think partly because I used voluntary stuttering, here and there, throughout the talk – and even demonstrated it at one point! Also, using a very loud, confident sounding voice really helped, and the fact that I was being very animated in how I delivered the speech. There was very little holding back going on – though I know I could have been even more animated. So.....that's something to work on next time!

I also felt more at ease, I suppose, at displaying the 'real me' to people – something else which NLP therapy has helped me with in recent months.

3/17/2015

Today, I gave my second community talk at a different church. There was double the number than last week, so about 24 ladies.

Just before the meeting started, I was told that their microphone wasn't working (it hadn't been for the past 3 or 4 weeks) and that some softly spoken speakers hadn't always been heard by everyone. Also, that there were four deaf (or hard of hearing) people in the audience. So, I was asked to speak up. I thought: "Great!!! Now I can project my voice as loud as I like and it will never be too loud." I

was so glad their technology was broken. 😊

I also planned beforehand, to take the vocal variety up a few notches more than last week, and to use even more body language . To really “go to town” with using my whole body. And.....IT WAS SO MUCH FUN! LAST WEEK WAS FUN, BUT THIS WEEK WAS EVEN MORE FUN!!! I HAD THE BEST TIME EVER.....and it was evident, by the comments I received afterwards, that I wasn't the only one who'd had a good time.

Talking about voice volume, one lady said to me afterwards, something like: “I didn't know our voices were capable of being so loud!” To which I answered that it was all part of how I'd been trained to speak (another benefit of costal breathing— great voice projection.)
😊

5/29/2015

You know Alex, and everyone. I've really had my eyes opened this past week, with what the key issue is with regards to my stuttering. It's not 'fear of stuttering'. It's not 'holding back from being my real self'. It's the habit of self-monitoring how I am talking. The thinking ahead about the sounds/words I'm going to say; the continual self-monitoring of how I'm speaking. I am constantly keeping my brain in the rut of producing speech in the feed-back rather than feed-forward mode. My brain is designed to produce speech automatically and I'm continually throwing a spanner in the works, by trying to consciously control speech. I am overloading my brain with too much to do. No wonder it's not producing the outcome I want –natural, spontaneous fluency. I can totally relate to Ruth's experience. I know that with me, it's this self-monitoring that has to completely go from my mind. The question of course, is how?

As you know, there's been some mention on this list recently of Barbara Dahm and her Dynamic Stuttering Therapy program. Well, following Ruth's e-mail several days ago, giving the link to her website and new e-book, I got curious, read up on her approach and bought her book. The outcome is (as some of you already know), that I'm starting therapy with her next week – to help me get rid of all this interference going on in my head, which is blocking my flow.

I know it's no quick fix. I will need to work hard, practice hard, take risks and get out of my comfort zone. But these are all things I'm willing to do. I will continue to use McGuire when I need to, and I will continue doing my public speaking engagements. But my ultimate goal is to be able to let go of McGuire and move on to spontaneous, automatic speech.

I really appreciate what McGuire has given me. In many ways, it has changed my life. But I believe that something even better is waiting for me.....just round the corner. It feels like I'm at the beginning of a new chapter in my life. And it's exciting!

5/30/2015

Ruth/everyone

During the past couple of days, I've been reflecting back over my life. In particular the times I was naturally fluent in my early childhood. How did I do it back then? I was speaking without thinking how I was doing it. It was all automatic. Whatever happened back then to cause me to start to monitor how I was talking, is probably now no longer relevant. It was probably fear of stuttering initially – then that developed into a habit, which has remained with me all these years. But I never, ever realised that it was this self-monitoring which was

causing the blocking behaviour. The very thing I thought was 'helping' me to speak, was the very thing that was causing me so much difficulty to speak.

It's all so obvious now. The many times in the past when I've said something spontaneously fluently.....and then someone's said 'Pardon!' I'm sure many on this list can relate to this. Second time round it was so difficult to say. Why? Because at that point I was trying to say it fluently. I was once again thinking about how I was talking and was trying to make it work.

To me, my stuttering is no longer a mystery. There is a cause and effect relationship. Self-monitoring and 'trying to speak fluently', leads to stuttering.

I am so looking forward to learning how to break free from this habit; to view and approach 'speech' differently. In fact.....I can't wait!

6/7/2015

I've been in two minds whether to share this, but I think I will. Just as a means of bringing hope – particularly to those of you who believe that you can never change how you respond in certain situations.

As I may have mentioned before, the last time I remember having any degree of consistent natural fluency was when I was in my early teens. Even then, I stuttered quite a lot, quite often. But one memory which stands out in my mind, is reading a short passage out loud in my French class, perfectly fluently, when I was about 12 or 13 years old. That is the last time I remember being able to read out loud in front of someone else, with any degree of ease. That was some 35

plus years ago now. Since then, whenever I've attempted to read out loud in front of another person, without any physical technique e.g. slowing my speech right down, or using costal breathing - it has been extremely difficult – with me blocking on most syllables. It's been exhausting in fact, so I've not chosen to do it that way, very often.

Last week, my brain experienced something different. By changing what I was focussing on, I experienced reading almost 100 words out loud in front of someone else – effortlessly – using my natural way of breathing/speaking. I don't share this to boast about an achievement or a good performance. I know that I (and all of us) need to move away from seeing speaking as a performance. But I share it, to give evidence that during those moments of reading out loud, my brain was processing speech differently. I was seeing the words in front of me on the paper. But I was not focussing on the mechanics of how I was saying them, at all. And the result was – my speech was effortless.

This gives me hope that how my brain currently responds and works in speaking situations, can be changed. I hope it gives you hope too.

6/8/2015

Today I took a step forward.

As my brain generated speech in a different way to what I'm used to, I experienced having a fluent conversation using my natural way of speaking. Even though it was in a therapy setting, that is the first time I've ever been able to do that with anyone, since my early teens. Throughout the conversation I had no thoughts of stuttering and knew that I could say whatever I wanted to say, easily. It was effortless and so much fun! Whilst in that mind/body state, I could have carried on speaking like that for longer.

That experience was, in effect, an arrow shot into my old self-limiting belief that I can't speak naturally fluently in front of another person.....because today I did!

If anyone ever says to you that controlling stuttering is the only way.....don't believe them. There is another way. Even though I have not found it easy to carry on speaking that way during the rest of today, I now know that it is possible – because I've done it. It's just a matter of focus, practice, perseverance and learning through the times when things don't work out as I'd like.

Hope this encourages you all.

6/9/2015

I was aware of my brain automatically formulating language in my head about the ideas I was thinking about. I was sometimes aware of what words I was going to say before I said them, but I wasn't really focussed on that. So, if I was asked a question, I knew the answer in my head but I wasn't thinking about how I was going to say it. I was not consciously controlling how I was speaking at all – it was all happening automatically. I didn't need to think about stuttering, because I somehow knew that I'd be able to say whatever I wanted to say. I knew that my body could do that for me, without me having to think about it. My head felt really light (but not lightheaded J) – no tension, like what happens if I stutter. It was the opposite feeling. Everything felt light, loose and easy to do. It was really different to what I'm used to doing. But it was very enjoyable. I could certainly get used to speaking that way in everyday life. Now I just need to train my brain to be that way in other situations.

Actually, yesterday I did manage to speak that way with a couple of

strangers. One incident was rather embarrassing, but funny. After the session, I had to drive to a shopping area which has lots of different parking areas. Well, I parked my car without paying much attention to where I'd parked. When I came out of the shopping centre, I just could not remember where I'd parked. I reckon I was wandering up and down lanes of parked cars, for at least 15 minutes. I just could not find mine. There were way too many silver cars in that car park! During my time of wandering, I saw a lady standing by her car, so I casually went up to her and passed the time of day, telling her that I couldn't remember where I'd parked my car. She said she couldn't help me – which I didn't expect her to – but it was fun just going up to her and speaking to her so easily – with no physical technique. I did finally manage to find my car. It was such a relief!

6/11/2015

There is definitely more than one way of gaining spontaneous speech.

For me, I could have done all the NLP, clowning and improvisation in the world, and I still don't think I would have gained spontaneous speech. Simply because I needed to be shown the 'how' of speaking spontaneously. I just didn't know. Although I used to do it quite often as a small child, I just did it –without knowing how I was doing it. During the past week or so, I have come to realize how I used to do it. Through simply focusing on the internal speech in my head – hearing myself speak internally in my head. Not focusing on the words themselves – yet still having some awareness of what I'm saying – of what I'm talking about. And not focusing on my mouth, how I'm saying

the words and not observing or paying any attention to the speech I am producing externally – just being aware of it happening.

At the moment all that takes a lot of concentration. I am still learning how to, and getting used to this new way of doing it – of producing speech. And I'm falling over a lot! But I believe that with time, it will all become second nature and that will be the way my brain will automatically go, when I'm speaking. I won't be perfectly fluent all of the time – no-one is, but I won't pay any attention to the times when I'm not. Like my post to Alex just now, dysfluency won't mean anything negative to me so it won't bother me if I occasionally stumble over my words. I might not even notice it. I'll be so focussed on my overall message, connecting to my listener etc, that how I'm speaking will become the last thing on my mind.

Definitely – NLP, Toastmasters, John Harrison's and Ruth's books, McGuire and no doubt other influences, have all played their part in positively changing my beliefs, perceptions and emotions. But for me, there was always a piece of the puzzle missing. I believe I have now found that missing piece.

6/24/2015

Today, I gave my 6th talk to a church group in my local area, sharing about my journey towards overcoming stuttering (from a Christian perspective). It was the first one I had done since starting therapy with Barbara Dahm, about a month ago.

Last night, I did a practice run of the talk with Barbara, over Skype.

The talk was for 15-20 minutes and I used my natural, spontaneous and automatic way of speaking throughout. It went brilliantly. I had no thoughts of stuttering whilst I was doing it, and I think we both thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Today was the day of the actual talk. It was a fairly small group this time – around 10-12 people, but I'd never met any of them before. Beforehand, I decided that I would start off using McGuire, then at some point switch to using the automatic process of speaking which I've been learning and practising during and in between therapy sessions. So, that's what I did. After the first few phrases (of using a very watered down version of McGuire technique) I changed over to the new automatic process that I've been learning. And I carried on my talk using my spontaneous, automatic way of speaking for much of the time. Very occasionally I loosely touched base with McGuire – for confidence reasons more than anything – then carried on using my natural way of breathing/speaking. The talk went really well and I had so much fun doing it. Although I was doing the talk from memory, I hadn't learnt it word for word, so as I went on, I added bits here and there, as they came to mind – which, of course, is all part of 'not thinking before speaking'.

Afterwards, I did use McGuire for one-on-one conversations, as my brain has not yet adapted to using the new automatic process in that context. But in time, it will.

I'm so glad I'm taking this route. I can see that this therapy is going to result in major changes to my life. It's a process and it will take time, determination and persistence on my part, but I can tell that already, my brain is adapting to doing things differently. And it's exciting!

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I welcome your comments. Hazel Percy