

NO LONGER LOST FOR WORDS

FROM STUTTERING TO PUBLIC SPEAKING....AND BEYOND...

BY ALAN BADMINGTON

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CHAPTER 1

A WORD FROM THE PUBLISHERS

Alan Badmington is an “Icon” in the stuttering community and a living, breathing example of hope and possibility.

Alan not only overcame the limitations of stuttering, he also managed to engineer a total transformation of his life, evolving from a life of severe stuttering to an extremely sought-after public speaker.

Anyone who has had the opportunity to hear Alan present one of the hundreds and hundreds of speeches he has given...or has been lucky enough to read one of his poems or articles, realizes that there is still great and good hope in the world today.

Alan describes in the following pages his struggle with stuttering and how he finally achieved fluency in a controlled environment. After this achievement, he began to apply concepts of change in his life. In Alan’s own words: “I had achieved increased fluency in a controlled environment....next I had to deal with personal issues involving communication with others. I drew up a plan of action: I needed to do certain things over and over again until the behaviors became familiar.”

One personal issue had been his tendency to cope with stuttering by avoiding sounds he felt he couldn’t say. He avoided roughly half the alphabet by word substitution, not realizing the dangers inherent in replacing difficult words by substituting words that were easier for him to say. As Alan writes: “I could not use words commencing with the letters ‘b’, ‘c’, ‘d’, ‘f’, ‘g’, ‘j’, ‘k’, ‘m’, ‘n’, ‘p’, ‘s’, ‘t’, and ‘v’... and became a ‘walking Thesaurus”.

But he began to realize that every time he avoided words, that avoidance strengthened the influence of those words over his speech. He realized something else: that he could only evade those words for so long. Inevitably the time came when situations demanded that he had to say a specific word or speak in a particular situation. When that happened, his fear level increased so much that he stuttered even more severely.

Alan writes: “I did not appreciate the harmful implications of such behavior. No one had ever explained that each time I avoided a word or letter, the fear level increased.”

As someone who commenced stuttering in early childhood, he had developed many negative beliefs about his own speech behavior. As he experienced continuing difficulties, these beliefs became engrained. He writes: “I learned avoidance techniques in relation to words, sounds and situations. I perceived anything that challenged my limited self-image as a threat to my well being.”

THE YEAR 2000

In the year 2000, everything changed for Alan. The incredible event was that he, for all practical purposes, *stopped stuttering*. The debilitating shackles of stuttering that inhibited him from childhood, *vanished*. Almost immediately, after years of frustration, fear and under-achievement, Alan experienced a metamorphosis...breaking out of his cocoon and flying free.

Within weeks, Alan went from his native Wales to California to speak about stuttering. It was in San Francisco that he met John Harrison who had a great deal to do with the program in which Alan's speech began to improve. Alan writes: “It was while attending my first McGuire course that I learned about John Harrison. Harrison put the word ‘holistic’ into the program I had attended. While he was not actively involved with the program, he kindly allowed abbreviated versions of his workshops (devised to overcome the fear of public speaking), as well as information about Harrison's Stuttering Hexagon to be incorporated into the

program. John didn't run the workshops; his concepts and ideas were taught and used by those attending."

So Alan was anxious to meet up with Harrison when he arrived in San Francisco. The two men (both former stutterers) had much in common and evening after evening, they met to talk into the wee hours about this remarkable turn of events.

Harrison was blown away with Alan's rapid recovery from a severe stutterer to "elegant" and fluent speech. He was awestruck by the fact that already (after years of not being able to speak freely), Alan was a scintillating conversationalist. A friendship was forged between the two men that still remains today.

Studying Alan's speeches, one central core message seems to emerge: not only his journey out of his own comfort zone but his avid encouragement that others also find that same joy by just taking that step and "seeking those pastures new."

In his own words (found in the closing lines of his poem, "The Comfort Zone"), Alan writes:

"If you are in a comfort zone, afraid to venture out
Remember, every stutterer was once consumed with doubt
So don't hold back - just take that step and seek those pastures new
Embrace your future with a smile, success is there for YOU."

Alan Badmington managed to walk boldly out of his comfort zone and embrace a new vision of himself as a public speaker. He continues to find, as he puts it, "incredible opportunities for growth." At one time, speaking to audiences was his greatest fear and suddenly he not only subjected himself to television, radio and newspaper interviews, but he addressed audiences all over the world, and continues to do so.

Alan is not only a masterful orator, prolific writer and poet, he is also a speech writer, has been the Editor of several magazines, served in the secretary-ship of numerous organizations, was advisor to a fictional crime series on British television, but he also managed to win hundreds of prizes with his clever rhymes and

slogans.

Rather than write *about* Alan Badmington, it is only right to let his *own* words speak for him. This book is a small collection of some of his best speeches and ISAD written contributions on different subjects involving stuttering.

The first thing you are likely to discover as you read the following pages is that Alan Badmington is no longer lost for words. The first speech you will read was given at Hope University in Liverpool, England and was entitled: “Stuttering Is Not Just A Speech Problem.”

John Harrison

Ruth Mead

October, 2014

NOTE FROM ALAN BADMINGTON TO READERS:
Due to the fact that the following articles were written over many years (and presented to different groups), it is inevitable that they will include a certain degree of repetition. Where relevant, the respective publication dates have been included so that the reader may gain an understanding of the progress that I had achieved at the time of writing.

CHAPTER 2
STUTTERING IS NOT JUST A SPEECH PROBLEM
(Speech given to British Stammering Assn., 2001, at Hope University in Liverpool, England)

My name is Alan Badmington.....Alan Badmington.

You cannot imagine just how much pleasure it gives me to say that in front of an audience. You see, for over 50 years, I experienced extreme difficulty in telling people who I was. Yes, that simple task, which the majority of the population takes so much for granted, caused me so much frustration, anxiety and heartache.

I understand that I commenced stuttering at the age of about 3 years, and although I received early therapy, I do not recall encountering any major difficulties until I entered the grammar school at the age of 11.

On the first day, as the registers were being prepared, I have vivid memories of struggling to give my

name and address in front of some 30 other pupils, most of whom were complete strangers.

Reading aloud in class was another disaster. As it progressed around the room, I would be calculating (10 desks ahead) exactly what I would be saying. Struck by the stark realization that my passage contained many words with which I knew I would encounter difficulty, I would opt out, remain silent, and the reading would pass to the next pupil. That was one of the first examples, I can recall, of approach avoidance.

Further speech therapy followed without much success. I could read aloud in the therapy room, but could not ask, or respond to, questions in class. I knew the answers but would not dare raise my hand for fear of making a fool of myself. Others around me took the plaudits as I whispered the answers to them.

As I progressed through school, the situation worsened and I came to accept that I could never speak in front of a group. I felt that I would always have difficulty speaking to people I did not know intimately.

In the company of my closest friends, I was reasonably outgoing, whilst in the presence of strangers (and those not so close), I would always have difficulty expressing myself.

You see, I had particular problems with words commencing with the initial letter 'b' (which was unfortunate because my surname is Badmington). I also had difficulty with 'c', 'd', 'f', 'g', 'j', 'k', 'm', 'n', 'p', 's', 't', and 'v'; to name but a few.

Consequently, I avoided such words and substituted them with synonyms (alternative words) not commencing with the dreaded letters. My oral participation

would, invariably, be brief (comprising a few hastily delivered, carefully selected words) and I would then withdraw from the conversation. I could never give detailed explanations – I made it a practice to interrupt while others were talking, so that the attention was never focused on me when I commenced speaking.

So even at that early age, my negative beliefs were being formulated. For example, I believed that:

- (1) I could not speak in front of groups, or persons I did not know personally
- (2) I could not use words commencing with the initial letter ‘b’, ‘c’, ‘d’.
- (3) I could never give detailed explanations;
- (4) I could never speak while I was the center of attention;
- (5) That only others could perform in those speaking situations (and I envied those who appeared to speak without worry or concern).

As a prominent sportsman, I represented my school first teams well in advance of others in my age group. Consequently, my peers admired me and, unlike many here today, I can never recall being ridiculed or teased because of my stutter.

Earlier, I mentioned the fact that I had problems saying my name. Well, this caused me great heartache when I was selected to play in a prestigious sporting fixture. I promptly arrived at the venue with my kit, but could not pluck up sufficient courage to introduce myself to the persons in charge. They did not know me, I could not tell them – so I did not play.

At the age of 19, I made a very important decision in my life; one which was greatly influenced by the fact that I stuttered. I realized that someone who stuttered can take a reasonably sheltered passage through life by choosing to avoid social intercourse; seeking employment with limited speaking opportunities and restricting the occasions on which he/she engages in conversation. Simple, isn't it? – if you don't speak, you don't stutter.

Those options were open to me, but I decided that it was not the path I wished to tread. I felt I needed to meet the challenge, and so, I joined the Police Service.

In those days, the interview procedure was brief and uncomplicated – comprising of only a few questions (coupled with the usual character checks). Avoiding the problem words, I selected my responses very carefully, and was successful in gaining appointment. On reflection, I feel that the fact that my uncle had been the local magistrates' clerk for many years probably influenced the decision.

Today, the interview extends to two days and involves many group speaking situations. Had that been the case then, I would NOT have been selected.

When it came to patrol duties, I just about managed to keep my head above water by various avoidance practices, such as drawing sketches for persons who requested directions. The crunch came when I had to give evidence in court for the very first time. I could not say the oath; I just could not get past the second word – SWEAR.

I still have vivid memories of climbing up into the witness box, placing my left hand on the bible, raising my right hand aloft and saying, "I ssssss, I ssssss, I ssssss, I ssssss". Nothing would come out of my mouth as I

struggled to say a small passage that was such an integral part of my profession.

My eyes closed, my pulse rocketed, perspiration poured from every part of my body as I stood locked in combat with a simple five-letter word. (Ironically, had it been a four-letter word, I would probably not have experienced any difficulty). The court officials and the public looked on with sheer disbelief at what was happening. Well, at least, I can only conjecture at their reactions, because I had entered a state of unconsciousness, totally oblivious to everything around me.

Being a prolific writer of limericks, it was (perhaps) inevitable that I would later recount that incident in verse:

A policeman in court with a stutter
While giving the oath cause a flutter
He said, "I ssssssssssssssssssssssssssssswear"
Then gave up in despair
Not a single word more could he utter.

That was not the end of it – I then had to give the evidence. As I mentioned earlier, my whole life centered around avoidance and word substitution. But, I could not change the defendant's name; I could not change the name of the road in which the offence occurred; the day and date could not be altered, and the defendant's vehicle and registration number were not negotiable.

It was impossible, and I was subsequently transferred to office duties, away from the public contact that I so much needed.

It had reinforced my belief that I could not say certain words. Neither could I speak in front of others when the focus of attention was on me. These negative beliefs were being cemented – my behavior and personality were being adjusted to accommodate my stutter.

Yet, only a few hours earlier, I had stood in the very same courtroom, and given the very same evidence without too much difficulty. But the circumstances had been far, far different. On that occasion, the courtroom had been empty and devoid of the audience that later congregated to witness my performance. I had been practicing my spiel in advance of the real event and amply demonstrated to myself that my speech mechanics were not defective.

That was little comfort when I later failed miserably under scrutiny.

One of my supervisors later wrote of me, “When this officer gives evidence in court he is an embarrassment to all”. That reinforced my belief that listeners became uncomfortable when I stuttered. He also reported (several years later), “The only reason he has not been considered for promotion is his speech impediment”. (And I still have copies of those reports).

While very young in service, I passed the national promotion examination and attained third place in the UK (or, rather, England and Wales). This qualified me for an accelerated promotion scheme at the prestigious National Police College, which would have propelled me up through the ranks. They would not accept me because of my stutter. My belief was, therefore, that I would never be promoted within the Police Service. The point I am trying to make is that the experiences I had encountered were forming the

beliefs about myself that I was to hold throughout my adult life.

A few years later, I completed a two weeks fluency course, where I became virtually fluent. Within weeks of leaving that controlled environment, I lost the fluency and reverted to my former stuttering behavior. You see, there was no follow-up support. I did, in fact, return on a second occasion but, once again, the same thing happened. My belief was that I would never overcome my stutter.

In about 1977, there was another development in my life when I acquired an auditory feedback device called the Edinburgh Masker. This was a small electronic apparatus that blocked out the sound of my own voice by emitting an infernal buzzing sound every time I spoke.

It was simply horrific – just imagine a uniformed police officer wearing a throat microphone and a set of ear moulds, connected to a control box by lengths of wires and tubing concealed beneath his clothing and hair. Indeed, the original machine was equipped with what can only be described as a doctor's stethoscope. This was aesthetically unacceptable and so I made arrangements to have the ear moulds manufactured locally.

The Edinburgh Masker worked on the principle that if you don't hear your own voice, then it will reduce your likelihood of stuttering. I became so reliant on the device and would not go anywhere without it. I changed my speech pattern to accommodate the masking sound – prolonging the words so that I kept the sound activated. It sounded unnatural, but it helped.

I developed the belief that I could not exist without the Masker and had an array of spare parts on hand in case

of failure. I believed that I could not speak without difficulty if I heard my own voice, and became very aware of my own voice when I was not wearing the Masker.

It was, indeed, a monstrosity (in that I was subjected to a buzzing noise every time I spoke), and I was obliged to lip read if anyone chose to speak while I was talking. I wore it from 10 to 14 hours every day over a period of about 20 years, with frequent headaches and ear infections. But the truth is without it I could not have existed in my profession.

After several years, I persuaded my employers to allow me to return to operational duties. With the aid of the Masker I renewed the public contact that I had been denied for so many years. I gave evidence in court, dealt with incidents and even attempted a spot of lecturing. The latter was not really successful but at least the Edinburgh Masker allowed me to attempt it – previously, I would never have tried.

So my beliefs changed from “I can’t speak in front of a group” to “When wearing the Masker I can speak in front of a group with a lesser degree of difficulty”. I enjoyed the way I felt after giving a lecture. I enjoyed the experience of speaking in front of people. My feelings about myself were so much warmer and pleasing. I also wore the Masker socially and found that it gave me greater confidence in those circumstances.

I met dozens of people daily and expanded my comfort zones. My speech was better in some circumstances than others, but I was never fluent. I wore the Masker at all times – it had become my mechanical crutch. Without it, I could not have undertaken my role. I

constantly lived with the threat that it might let me down, and - one day - it did in a big way.

Having developed my writing skills in order to compensate for my speech problems, I became editor of the Force newspaper. On one occasion I was invited to prepare a 'This is Your Life' book for a retiring Chief Constable. Wearing the Masker, I got the courage to present it to him in front of about 200 people. (I wasn't asked, I volunteered. I had written the script and I wanted the credit).

I spoke reasonably well for the first five minutes or so, stuttering moderately, but then disaster occurred. One of the wires became dislodged and the masking sound ceased. I could hear my voice. I had severe problems with the remainder of the presentation and when it was completed my clothing was drenched in perspiration. I felt crestfallen and devastated in front of such a distinguished audience.

Yet only a few minutes earlier (before the device had failed) I had managed to undertake the role of presenter. When the Masker had been working I believed I could speak reasonably well. I could not hear my own voice and I was detached from the occasion. However, once the masking sound had been removed, I experienced great difficulty and reverted to my old speech behaviors. But at least I had not avoided the situation.

On another occasion I played the part of Goldilocks in a pantomime that I had written for a Christmas party.

I spoke with a female voice throughout and had no problem whatsoever. It was not Alan Badmington who was being assertive but Goldilocks. It was acceptable for 'her' to speak loudly, and assertively, in front of a crowd - but not ME.

A senior officer who was present expressed the view that I should always talk with a high-pitched voice. I declined his suggestion but to this very day I am convinced that I could have gained promotion in the Policewomen's Department. I thoroughly enjoyed the Thespian experience – I was doing something totally alien to my normal behavior. I found it pleasurable holding the attention of an audience and it gave me a desire to perform in front of people.

The Masker continued to let me down in really important situations. Whilst I could chat reasonably well with my colleagues (when wearing the Masker), it would inevitably let me down at promotion board interviews and other important occasions. So much so that midway through one such interview, an irate Chief Constable terminated the proceedings and told me not to waste his time in the future.

He made it abundantly clear that he would never consider promoting me. That reaffirmed my belief that I could never gain advancement because of my stutter.

I retired from the Police Service in 1993 and stopped wearing the Edinburgh Masker on a regular basis. I only wore it on special occasions but always kept it near the telephone at home. My speech deteriorated and my comfort zones became very narrow.

In 1996 I was involved in a car accident and found myself confined to home. I could not use the Masker because of whiplash injuries. I relinquished my role as adviser to a national television series and had virtually no contact with anyone apart from my immediate family. My speech hit rock bottom, my emotions and esteem were at

low ebb. I was in pain, would not answer the telephone, indulged in very limited social contact and had a great deal of time to dwell on my speech.

In May of 2000, everything changed.

In May 2000 my wife persuaded me, after much resistance, to undertake a fluency program.

It was at that time I first learned of the existence of John Harrison, one of the earliest members of the National Stuttering Project in the USA, as well as being its former Associate Director. That organization subsequently became known as the National Stuttering Association and John has been the editor of its newsletter, "Letting Go", for many years.

John is no stranger to the problem that has affected many of us here today, having stuttered throughout his school years, college and well into adulthood. His involvement in a broad variety of personal growth programs, over three decades, gave him a unique insight into the nature and dynamics of stuttering, and today he is fully recovered.

The observations he made during that period enabled him to master the problem himself.

John advances many of the views I shall be expressing here today, in his wonderfully informative book entitled "Redefining Stuttering". I strongly recommend that you consider acquiring a copy, or at least obtain sight of that publication.

John and I have become great friends since our first

meeting in California last August, and I know that I am speaking today with his total blessing.

LOOKING WHERE THE LIGHT IS

A man is walking along the road when he encounters another man on his hands and knees under a street lamp. Being a Good Samaritan, he stops and enquires if he can be of any assistance. “I’m looking for my car keys”, replies the gentleman as he scrambles about on the pavement.

With that, the second man also gets down on all fours to assist with the search.

After about ten unsuccessful minutes, he enquires, “Have you any idea where you may have dropped them?” “Yes” responds the original man, “Over there by the trees”.

Rather taken aback, the second man asks, “Well, why are you looking here then?” “Because this is where the light is” was the prompt response.

Now that story is not humorous (I’ve plenty of those to tell you in the bar later); it is intended to demonstrate just how the problem of stuttering has been approached, in many quarters, throughout the years.

“Where the light is”, meaning that area around the mouth (the articulators, the tongue, the vocal chords etc.), those parts from which speech is emitted; those parts from which speech originates; and those parts upon which speech therapists/pathologists (and others) have tended to concentrate their efforts and attention. In other words, the area that appears to be the source of the problem.

John Harrison understands stuttering not simply as a speech problem, but as a system involving the entire

person – an interactive system that is composed of at least six essential components – physiological responses, behaviors, emotions, perceptions, beliefs and intentions.

In order to facilitate explanation of his paradigm (or model), John Harrison devised a six-sided diagram, which he refers to as the “stuttering hexagon.”

In the brief time at my disposal this afternoon, I shall attempt to explain his theories and, hopefully, demonstrate how they applied to my own personal recovery from stuttering after more than half a century.

I should mention that, in his own workshops, John generally takes some two days to cover this subject. I have just over an hour – so my efforts will be somewhat abbreviated. (But if anyone wishes to remain until Tuesday, I am sure I can oblige).

I think it might be a good idea if I show you a slide of the hexagon, so you may have better understanding of what I am attempting to explain. Before someone questions my ability to spell, I should explain that John has kindly allowed me to copy it directly from his book – hence the American spelling of ‘Behavior’. As you can see, it comprises six different components:

Physiological responses

Physical behaviours

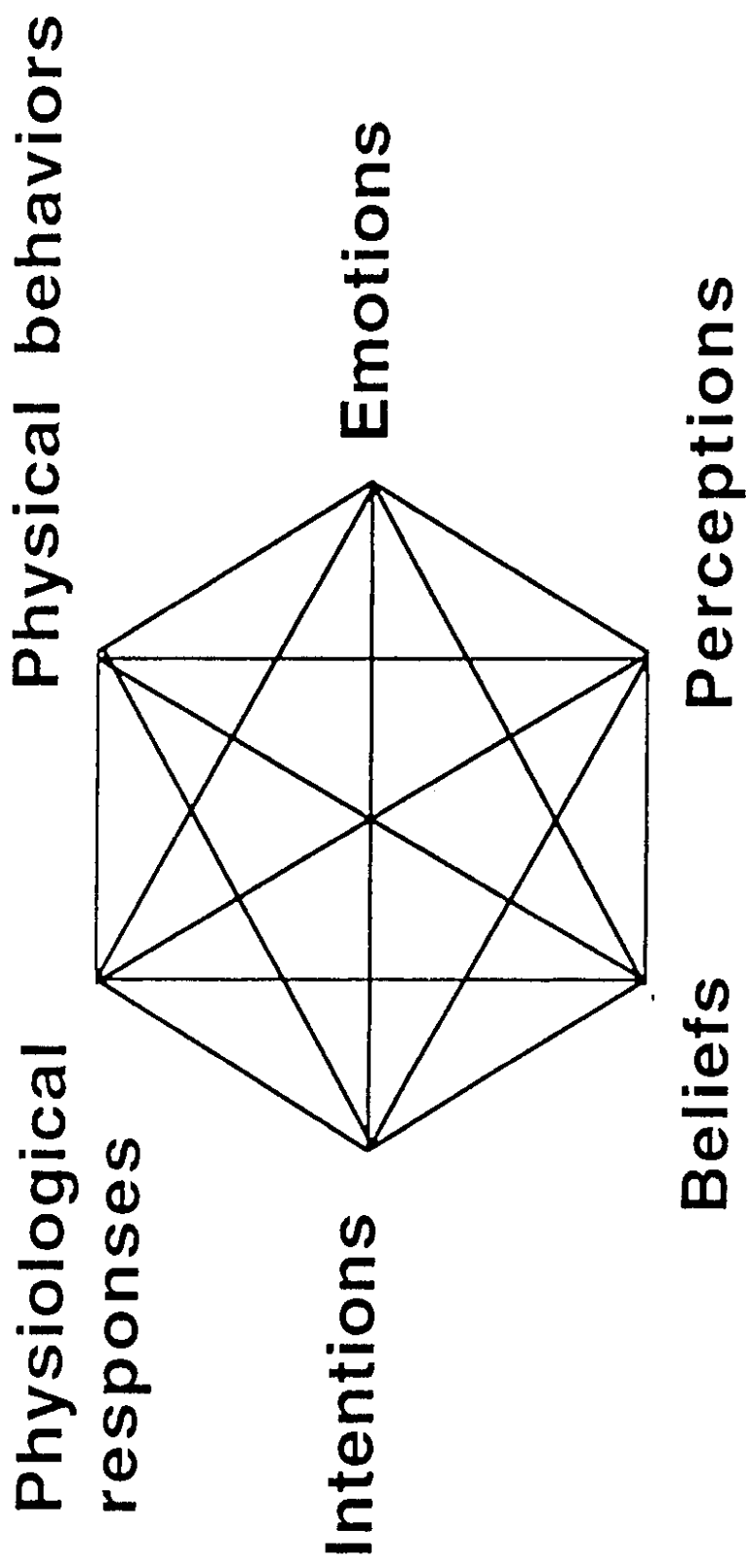
Emotions

Perceptions

Beliefs

Intentions

THE STUTTERING HEXAGON



Before I explain each component, I should mention that there is something very important about the system you are viewing. Each point (each component) is connected to, and brings influence to bear upon, every other component within the Stuttering Hexagon. None of these elements individually creates the speech problem; it is the way in which these elements instantly interact that brings to life the stuttering behavior.

For example, your emotions will affect your behaviors, perceptions, beliefs, intentions and physiological responses.

Similarly, any change in your beliefs, emotions, etc will resonate at all parts of the hexagonal model. Very much like when a fly gets caught in a spider's web and starts to struggle to release itself. Vibrations are felt at every point on that web and, similarly, whatever is happening in one part of the hexagon is felt by, and affects, the whole hexagon.

As my talk progresses, I hope to show you how merely attempting to work on your speech, in isolation, may not be sufficient to change your overall stuttering behavior.

You need to do so much more. If you receive therapy, or attend a fluency course, you may see an improvement in your speech *in that environment* because, in addition to the various control techniques being implemented, your self-image, perceptions, beliefs and emotions are positively influenced by the relationship with

the therapist.

But that is not enough, if you do not make efforts to address other matters relating to your life (such as the limited way you see yourself; your long-held, self-defeating negative beliefs; your unwillingness to take risks, etc), the other points on the stuttering hexagon are likely to pull your speech back into balance with the rest of the system. Eventually, you will find yourself slipping back into the same old patterns.

Let us now take a more in-depth look at the individual components that make up the stuttering hexagon:

PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES:

These are the physiological characteristics we inherit. A statistically significant number of people within the stuttering community appear to show a higher level of sensitivity than persons who do not stutter. Thus, when the shop assistant has a look of impatience, or is abrupt, then we might be more liable to react.

Our bodies have been genetically programmed to initiate a fight-or-flight reaction whenever our physical survival is threatened. Your heartbeat increases, your blood pressure soars, blood rushes from your stomach towards your muscles as you prepare for the danger. You experience a stress reaction in order to meet the threat, but fear of talking is not generally a physical danger, as the body is being led to believe by these physiological changes.

It is a social danger, but your body cannot differentiate, therefore the physiological response is creating additional insecurity and discomfort.

There is not a great deal you can do about the physiological

system you were born with. However, by exercising control over the other parts of the Hexagon, you can reduce the frequency with which you experience these fight-or-flight responses.

BEHAVIORS

There are specific behaviors that are counterproductive to fluent speech – holding the breath, pursing the lips, locking the vocal chords, etc. I did all of these.

If a person curtails these behaviors, or improves his or her technique, then fluency can be enhanced.

However, the speech block is not created solely by these physical behaviors. It occurs because of the individual's emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions, physiological responses and speech behaviors all being woven together into a patterned response. None of these elements singularly creates the block – the block is created by the way in which these elements interact and reinforce each other.

EMOTIONS

There are certain feelings that contribute to, or result from, our stuttering. You will all recognize them: *fear, hurt, anger, frustration, helplessness, embarrassment, shame and vulnerability.*

Those of us who stutter have always tried to de-personalize the speaking experience because it was painful.

We did not wish to feel the feelings any more than we had to.

We avoided eye contact; we detached ourselves from the speaking situation; we retreated. That very attitude

of holding back is what helps to create and perpetuate our speech blocks.

Often our ability to block out our feelings is so automatic that we fail to recognize that these feelings exist. When we stutter, there is a sense of panic and we are completely unconscious to what is occurring. We don't even realize that we are having feelings at that moment because we become totally oblivious (as I did in the courtroom).

Instead of suppressing these intense feelings, we must learn to experience them as they surface. Experience the fear; experience the panic – so that we can use them to energize our speech (in a similar manner to actors who use it to put oomph into their performance). What we must not do is to continue to block them out.

We need to understand the differences between creative and negative discomfort. Negative discomfort is the kind that debilitates us. It is usually associated with holding back something that wants to be expressed. Creative discomfort, on the other hand, is experienced when you let go.

Transforming your discomfort into something positive - actually learning how to make it work for you – will be a major step in overcoming your fears. You will certainly experience creative/positive discomfort as you push out your comfort zones and attempt to change your old negative stuttering behavior. If you are not feeling that discomfort, then it is a sign that you are continuing to remain within your former narrow parameters.

Persons who have grown up with a stutter tend to be frightened of their own voice and do not enjoy the

feeling of power when addressing an audience. Possibly, we are afraid of coming on too strong – being too powerful? It is as though we feel obliged to compensate by toning ourselves down – pulling back.

PERCEPTIONS Perceptions are how we see and interpret things *here and now*– not in the future.

If we feel that we are an oddity because of how we speak, then we perceive that the whispered comments of one person to another are about us. For example, if I had passed a group of unsavory individuals as I was entering the courtroom, and they started whispering, I might have perceived that they were talking about me – about my speech. Whereas, they were discussing how one of their number had seduced the inspector's daughter the previous weekend. In effect, their conduct had nothing at all to do with me.

If your hexagon is in the negative (in any of the component areas) then this can affect how you react to, or envisage, any situation. If you have been involved in a blazing row with your girlfriend, or wife (or both); or just had a bad speaking experience on the telephone, your emotions would be at a low ebb – thereby affecting your emotions (and, correspondingly, your perceptions) in a negative manner.

Persons who stutter tend to have a fixation that whatever happens in their lives is related to their speech. Their speech is uppermost in their minds at all times. They go to bed thinking about their speech – they wake up thinking about their speech. Speech, speech, speech – it

consumes them. Our irrational thinking about our speech totally influences our perceptions.

Nearly every time I spoke, I perceived that I was being judged. Quite frequently, our perceptions of others with respect to our stuttering, is completely without foundation. As a result, all too often we miss opportunities for intimacy, growth and pleasure, merely because we maintain the unfounded belief that our stuttering prohibits us from experiencing our own life. We hide further and further from those around us, and we sink deeper and deeper into the mire of self-doubt, self-hatred and self-pity.

Persons who stutter may have not always been good at developing a self- image grounded in reality. Neither have they been able to define what is acceptable behavior. Generally, many of us are too worried about coming on forcibly, and so we tend to hold back. In order to move forward, it is essential that we discover that we don't need to live our lives in such narrow comfort zones. We need to discover that the world actually likes us better when we let go, and what's more we would like (and know) ourselves better too.

BELIEFS

Unlike perceptions, which can be easily modified by how we feel at a particular time, beliefs remain relatively constant. They are much more deep-rooted. I suppose they could be described as perceptions that have proven to be true over a period of time.

My beliefs about my speech came about in two different ways. Firstly, they were created by everything that happened to me; while secondly, they were developed

through contact with authoritative figures (such as my parents, teachers, police colleagues etc). Indeed, they can be passed from grandfather to father to son.

I believed that I could not gain promotion because my speech would prove a hindrance. (My former Chief Constable certainly substantiated that belief for me).

I believed that I should avoid pausing at all costs. Once I managed to get started, I believed that I had to continue speaking while I enjoyed a degree of fluency.

We may believe that we shall never become effective speakers – I certainly held that belief until last year.

Many persons who stutter feel they are flawed because of their stutter. They believe that they have to please others and that they have to be perfect to be liked and accepted. That was true for me for as long as I can remember. I felt I had to compensate for my speech problem by excelling at everything I did (sport, report writing, appearance, punctuality etc) and performing a volume of work far greater than my ‘fluent’ colleagues.

They also believe that the fears and panic they feel in front of others are unique to them; that ‘normal fluent’ people don’t experience such feelings when they have to stand and address a group.

(Surveys clearly indicate that this is not the case – public speaking is quoted as the number one fear of everyone. It is NOT unique to persons who stutter. When I joined speaking clubs last year, I found that there were several members who became extremely agitated prior to speaking).

Beliefs are the most powerful long-term influence on your hexagon and will be the last thing to change as you

deal with the rest of the hexagon. In fact, I would say that beliefs are the beginning of the real change. Once you change your beliefs positively, you are well on the road to empowerment.

Once beliefs are formed, we tend to shape our perceptions to fit those beliefs. In effect, our beliefs function like a pair of tinted sun glasses; they color the way we see and experience life.

INTENTIONS

Intentions are our motivations for acting in the manner in which we do. Frequently, our conscious intentions pull us in one direction, while our unconscious intentions pull us in the opposite direction.

In a speech block, for example, our apparent intention may be to speak the word, while our hidden intention may be to hold back out of fear of revealing ourselves and our imperfections to our listeners. When our intentions pull in opposite directions, we block and are unable to move.

You want to talk but, at the same time, you have feelings that threaten to push you beyond the threshold of what you are willing to experience. So you hold back – and for a while the forces are equally balanced. If this becomes your modus operandi (ie your usual method of speaking) in stressful situations, then it becomes your default - and you will routinely find yourself slipping into stuttering and blocking behavior...but you cannot understand why.

None of the individual elements in the hexagon creates a speech block. It is the way in which these elements interact that creates the problem.

Let us now relate what we have learned about the Stuttering Hexagon to some of the speaking situations that I have experienced in my life. You may recall me telling you earlier about the courtroom scene that gave me so many problems.

The seeds of doubt were sown some weeks before the court appearance, when I learned that I would be required to give evidence. I must have rehearsed the oath a hundred times, when alone.

I knew the second word commenced with the feared letter 'S' (SWEAR), and that the oath also contained many other problematical letters.

Let us examine some of my beliefs: Due to my previous difficulties with these letters, I believed that I would stutter and make a fool of myself.

I believed that I could not speak in front of an audience when I was the center of attention.

I believed I could not say the oath, or my name.

I believed I would be judged by my performance (especially as a young officer on probation).

I believed the court would expect me to be perfect. My perceptions (at the time of being in court) were:

I'm performing in front of people who would not understand or be sympathetic to my problem.

The group of young men at the back of the court, who I had cause to deal with a couple of weeks earlier for public disorder, were talking about me and eagerly waiting for me to stutter.

If I made a fool of myself the news would quickly spread and I would become a laughing stock.

My physiological system was generating a fully-

fledged fight or flight action. The body was pouring adrenaline into the blood stream, my blood pressure was rising etc.

My emotions were rooted in fear and terror. (After all, I had experienced severe problems during a mock court exercise, while attending a training course a few months earlier).

My intentions were that I should say the oath and then give the evidence. But my speech failed me. I was being pulled by two opposing forces: the poles of divided intention. I wanted to say the oath, the situation demanded that I say the oath – but I was fearful of stuttering. I was fearful of revealing my secret, my deficiencies to everyone present. So I had a speech block.

Let us now retrace my steps to two hours earlier. I arrive at the court in advance of everyone else, with one colleague (a personal friend of mine) for the purpose of practicing my evidence. I walk the same path to the witness box, climb up into the same hallowed area, place my left hand on the same Bible and recite, “I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give, shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth”.

Absolutely perfect – shall I tell you why? All the elements – the negative emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions and physiological responses that characterized the real event, were not present. Instead they were positive forces.

I knew the other officer well and perceived him as a friend. I believed I could speak in front of him without too much difficulty. I knew it was not necessary to perform well to earn his high regard – he was not judging

me. I knew that he was aware that I stuttered – so there was an absence of fear that my secret would be exposed. I knew there would not be any pomp and ceremony. I knew it didn't really matter if I stuttered – it was only an unimportant trial run.

The positive forces had reinforced each other to create a benign hexagon – one in which the need to hold back was not an issue. Thus I had little, if any, difficulty with the hitherto dreaded words when giving the oath and then continued to recite my evidence in a like manner. I knew that no hostile party would challenge me.

As I was not holding back, I did not create the block. I was not fearful of what I would expose when I spoke. *What a contrast!*

WEDDING VOWS

Let us also examine what happened at my wedding some years later. I knew from experience that when someone else spoke, or read, at the same time as myself I would, invariably, not encounter speaking difficulties. I made good use of this when it came time to say my wedding vows. In our pre-ceremony meetings with the vicar, we came to an arrangement whereby he would recite a line and then repeat it quietly when I was saying it.

What I didn't bargain for was my caring bride who, in order to ensure I didn't have any problems, also joined in saying my vows. So you can just imagine it – the Vicar would say a line and then *all three of us* would repeat it. Of course, mine was the loudest and most prominent voice – the other two merely whispered. But I was aware of the support. No one else realized what we were doing and

everything went perfectly.

Now let us examine that episode.

I believed I could speak when someone else spoke at the same time as myself as (in my eyes) I was not the center of attention. Like many persons who stutter, I felt uncomfortable hearing the sound of my own voice – associating it with all the shame and embarrassment I had experienced over the years.

With my wife and the Vicar joining me, I was detached from my own speech and the negative emotional feelings were not present.

I perceived the Vicar and my wife as friendly and supportive persons. Because I was relaxed about the situation, I did not experience the usual feelings of fear and panic (the physiological responses).

I intended to say the vows and I was not holding back. As there was no conflict (divided intentions), a speech block did not occur, thereby allowing the speech function to be completed.

Every component in the hexagon was positive, reacting positively with one another.

So there is another example of how the hexagon works. Having said that it went well, there are still a few things that concern me regarding that episode. I frequently lie awake at night, wrestling with the following questions:

Am I married to my wife? Am I married to the Vicar? Is my wife married to the Vicar? or Are we all three joined in holy matrimony?

Contrast this with what happened a few hours later at the wedding reception. I rose to speak in front of the guests and had terrible problems. I said a few sentences,

blocked and blocked again. It was so bad that one of my aunts intervened and started singing ‘For he’s a jolly good fellow’. Everyone joined in and I sat down a very disappointed and humiliated bridegroom.

I was not disappointed with my new bride, I should quickly explain – but with my inability to complete the speech that I had rehearsed for weeks. There was nothing organically wrong with my speech, but there were significant changes in my emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions, physiological responses and speech related struggles in the two environments.

Let us look at that painful episode in more detail. Unlike the situation in the church involving the vows, everything had changed.

I believed I could not speak in front of a large crowd and would make a fool of myself – and I did.

I believed that I could not speak while the focus of attention was on me. (I wasn’t so much worried about any feared words because I had written the speech myself and carefully omitted any letters that normally presented difficulty).

I always spoke in short, sharp bursts and believed that I could not orate anything of a lengthy nature (even though it extended to only eight or ten lines).

I believed that most guests would be embarrassed when (not IF) I stuttered. I perceived that many of those present would not understand my problem. I perceived that those who knew I stuttered were waiting for me to slip up. I perceived that my wife and parents were anxious for me.

My physiological responses created the usual fight or flight reaction, with the accompanying body changes.

My emotions were totally immersed in fear, panic, vulnerability and embarrassment.

I was caught up in the “speak/don’t speak” conflict. I wanted to continue speaking – it was the happiest day of my life. But I was fearful of stuttering – laying myself bare and revealing my speech difficulty to all present. This power struggle caused me to hold back and the inevitable speech blocks occurred.

Everything was negative – each component reacting negatively with each other to have such a detrimental effect on my speech behavior.

MAY 2000

In May 2000, everything changed when my wife persuaded me to make one last effort to overcome my speech problem. I fought tooth and nail – but she is a very persuasive lady. I had suffered so much heartache in my life (as a result of failed therapies) that I vowed I would never again place myself in a situation where I might be exposed to such disappointment.

I had retired from the Police Service, so my speech was no longer an issue in respect of employment. In any case, I doubted that I could generate the enthusiasm, or even interest, and felt content in the limited comfort zones to which I had withdrawn following my car accident. At the time, I hardly wore my Edinburgh Masker and, in fact, had only minor social contact. I rarely left the comfort of my own home. If the telephone rang, I frequently ignored it.

My wife implored me to give it one last shot and so, with an incredible degree of skepticism I very begrudgingly agreed.

The program I joined deals with stuttering from a holistic perspective and it was while attending my first course, just 16 months ago, that I learned about John Harrison. John is not actively involved with the program, but he has very kindly allowed abbreviated versions of his workshops (devised to overcome the fear of public speaking) to be incorporated into the program. John doesn't run the workshops; his concepts and ideas are merely used by those attending.

So it was just sixteen months ago that I initially became aware of the stuttering hexagon. And for the very first time in my life, I understood that whether or not I stuttered, depended very much on how I felt at any particular time. How a whole host of other factors affected my ability to speak.

I learned how to physically overcome speech blocks. I was given the tools to greatly reduce the likelihood of a speech block occurring – and also how to release a speech block should one occur. Armed with that, and many, many other valuable facets (including an understanding of the physiology and psychology of stuttering), I set out along the road to recovery.

By the second day of the four day course I was walking on air – I was speaking like I had never spoken before and I was enjoying it. I was talking in front of groups for the very first time in my life while not wearing the Edinburgh Masker. I could hear my own voice – it was initially disconcerting – but I liked what I heard.

When these four days ended I knew that the real challenge lay ahead. I had tasted fluency many years earlier (although never as manageable as now) but, previously, I

had not been able to sustain it for any length of time outside the security and safety of a course environment. I felt this was different; I knew so much more about stuttering and myself and I knew that I had the life-long support of the program.

”Keep moving forward” and “Push out of your comfort zones” were two of the many sayings I retained in my head. God knows, I had heard them enough in those four days. I knew that if I was to sustain the incredible gains I had attained, I needed to strictly adhere to this advice. So, using the new technique I had been taught, I immediately set out to dismantle the psychological framework that I had erected to support me during a lifetime of stuttering.

I had so many negative beliefs, negative perceptions, negative emotions and negative practices to eradicate. I knew I had to create a fluency system in which my new speech behaviors, as well as emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions and psychological responses, all interactively supported each other.

I began placing myself in situations where I did things I would not previously have attempted. I knew that I had to face my fears. I knew I needed to challenge the negative beliefs and feelings that I had developed (in many cases unconsciously) over so many years.

Above all, I resolved that I would never again practice avoidance. I would never again succumb to the temptation of substituting an easy word for a difficult word, and I promised myself that I would accept, and never avoid, the challenge of any speaking situation.

In effect, much of this had already commenced

during the course when I participated in the Harrison workshops, which are principally designed to improve speaking in front of people - but also to demonstrate how to challenge and change certain life long traits.

This involved speaking in front of groups by using exaggerated techniques designed to help us 'let go'. They included such tasks as "projecting one's voice"; "maintaining eye contact"; "use of inordinately..... long.....pauses"; including also "speaking with feeling" and "adding music to one's voice". There were many others.

It was uncomfortable doing something I had always avoided but that was the purpose of the exercise. I was experiencing positive discomfort. You *will* feel uncomfortable on the first occasion, less uncomfortable on the second, and so on. Eventually, the discomfort will depart as that way of speaking begins to feel natural. It was great fun and I still engage in such workshops today. I am now at ease and find it enjoyable – I have lost my inhibitions. This is the REAL me.

Your ability to tolerate short periods of discomfort is the key to change. If you are willing to take a chance, and hang in there, you can bring about a significant shift in your attitude and self-image.

On my return home, I spent many hours speaking on the telephone with persons who had previously attended similar courses. Most were complete strangers – that made it a far greater challenge. My confidence was sky- high as I chatted, and I began to feel good about myself. If my new technique strayed, then I was quickly corrected.

In addition, I regularly attended support groups that had been set up and run by graduates of the program. Here

again, I expanded my comfort zones and reinforced the speaking technique. Perhaps more importantly, I also reinforced my belief that my recovery was not temporary or fragile (as had been the case on previous occasions).

Each day, I would spend lengthy periods on the telephone – speaking to businesses I had selected from the Yellow Pages directory - making the most outrageous enquiries. All had free phone numbers – so I didn't incur any expenditure.

With each telephone call, the fear was reduced. I had demonstrated to myself that I could speak authoritatively during a lengthy telephone conversation to complete strangers. Of course I experienced fear, but I kept uppermost in my mind the words of American psychologist, Susan Jeffers – “Feel the fear and do it anyway”.

CHANGES

Throughout our marriage, my wife had always undertaken the task of making my appointments with the doctor, dentist, etc. – but now this was to change. A few days after my first course, I boldly marched into the doctors' surgery/office. In front of a waiting crowd, I projected my voice and said, “Please may I have the prescription for Alan Badmington”.

On previous occasions, my wife would have collected it, or I would have produced my National Health card (or shown a piece of paper) that conspicuously bore my name. I am not saying that I wasn't nervous, but I faced the fear, told myself that I could do it and reaped the reward. I have since repeated it on many occasions, thus reinforcing my positive beliefs.

Returning to the practice of writing my name on a piece of paper, I well recall the day (many years ago) when I took an item of clothing to the dry cleaners. I had omitted to carry my usual written note and when the assistant requested my name, I panicked and said, “Adrian Adams”. (I never had problems with vowels).

This was all very well until my landlady kindly decided to do me a favor and collect that item a few days later. She duly gave my name as ‘Alan Badmington’ but, as we all know, it was not recorded under my correct identity. I had a lot of explaining to do.

Success followed success, and I could feel my whole self-image changing. I began to believe in myself; I did not have the negative feelings of self-doubt and this positivity created a chain reaction within my hexagon – resulting in a positive effect in my speech.

During my course, I had been encouraged to engage in conversation with complete strangers in the street, and one day I spoke to nearly 300 people. I told many that I was a recovering stutterer and was amazed at the interest, and words of encouragement, that I received.

Quite apart from the fact that I was accepting myself as a stutterer, I was also desensitizing the situation. I began believing that I could speak to total strangers about my speech problem, (or any subject) and my negative perception that they would be embarrassed, or might ridicule me, was replaced with a positive perception.

Things took a dramatic change in August 2000 when I travelled to the USA to help set up the first American program. My role was to publicize the forthcoming event by telling my story. As I flew alone

across the Atlantic to San Francisco, I wondered what I had let myself in for. Only three months earlier (after more than half a century of stuttering) I still had difficulty in saying my name. Yet now, I was thousands of miles from home and knew that I would be required to introduce myself to a multitude of strangers.

I literally knocked on the door of every newspaper office, radio station and TV studio in the corridor running from San Francisco to Northern Nevada. I went for two weeks and stayed for six weeks – what an adventure!

During that time I transformed my stuttering hexagon ten thousand fold. For fifty years it had been negative – that was now to change permanently. I did things I, hitherto, thought were impossible. You cannot imagine the immense satisfaction I gained from speaking to every section of the media.

Before I move on, let me just take a few minutes to tell you, briefly, about how my hexagon had a massive positive boost early in the US adventure. Shortly after my arrival in San Francisco, I made the acquaintance of John Harrison for the first time. We hit it off straightaway and have become good friends.

John very kindly invited me out for a series of meals in the ‘City by the Bay’. Each time we dined, we talked and talked well into the early hours. Two things that John told me had such a positive influence upon my hexagon and, subsequently, my life.

When returning me to my place of residence one night, he suddenly said, “Alan, you’re a remarkable conversationalist and very inspirational”. You cannot imagine the effect that had upon me. For over 50 years, I

had struggled to talk to people; I had been castigated for the manner in which I gave evidence in court; a Chief Constable had prematurely terminated a Promotion Board interview because I was “wasting his time” – and I had failed miserably to give a speech at my wedding.

Yet now, this prominent person had paid me such a compliment. His comments took some time to sink in – I told him that I had never considered myself to possess either of those qualities. He reiterated his opinion.

Various components in my hexagon changed considerably that night:

I believed that persons enjoyed listening to me. I believed that I could inspire others. I believed I could speak well, and interestingly, for lengthy periods of time. I believed that others wanted to hear my opinions.

My previous long-held perception that persons were embarrassed when I spoke, moved from negative to positive. My emotions took a distinct upturn; I was elated and overjoyed with my efforts.

My self-image was widening, and I liked the person I was becoming.

I had so many positive experiences during my perambulations around California and Nevada – too numerous to mention. However, let me recount one particular incident to further illustrate the hexagon in action. I was visiting one of the major TV stations in San Francisco. Security within major cities is quite rigid and I was obliged to relate my story to the news desk via the house telephone. This was situated right in the heart of the busy public waiting area, where at least 25 to 30 persons were congregated.

This was a stutterer's worst nightmare – talking on the telephone before a listening audience. Initially, I found this disconcerting but, as time progressed, I became less aware of those around me. When I completed the call, several members of the public approached me, expressed their interest in my recovery and wished me every success. (As it was obvious that everyone had heard my conversation, I felt justified in awarding myself full marks for voice projection).

There were many, many more occasions where I was obliged to use the house phone in public areas, but I knew I could do it because I had done it before, and each time it became easier. Quite apart from increasing my self-belief, my perceptions of how the listening public would react changed dramatically. They were NOT embarrassed to hear my story and I gained in confidence. My emotions became positive and I spoke well.

Throughout my journey north to Nevada, I talked openly about my recovery in every situation. I engaged in conversation with complete strangers in restaurants; in the street; in motels; in casinos; in shops; in laundries – indeed, anywhere. The reactions I encountered were quite unbelievable; all were courteous and nearly everyone knew someone who stuttered.

I became totally desensitized and my perceptions and beliefs about what others thought in relation to my speech became so positive. Newspaper after newspaper carried my story and I was to undergo many radio and television interviews. My comfort zones continued to expand as well as my previous narrow self- image.

Following my return to the UK, I joined three

speakers' clubs and now regularly give prepared and impromptu speeches. One experienced member, who was a public speaking tutor for more than 25 years, confided (on hearing me make my maiden speech) that he would never have suspected I had ever been troubled by a speech impediment.

Comments like this help us change the narrow and negative way in which we have viewed ourselves for so long.

A few months ago, I engineered a 'chance' meeting with my former Chief Constable at the funeral of a colleague. I knew he would be present and purposely sought him out. I had experienced some harrowing moments while speaking to him in the past, and wanted to exorcise those ghosts.

He was wide-mouthed when he told me that he did not recognize me as the officer who had served under his command for so many years – and whom he would not promote under any circumstances.

Having achieved this, my hexagon rocketed with positivity, and it was not long before I embarked upon the next stage of dismantling my stuttering structure.

Live radio interview followed live radio interview (not just about stuttering but also about other topics) as I pursued my relentless quest for recovery. I am not ashamed to admit that I regularly play over those tapes when I am in the car. Not for any egotistical reason but merely as a positive affirmation.

Since childhood, my stuttering had been fuelled by the pain and misery I encountered. For over half a century I constantly reminded myself of what I could NOT do, or the

dire consequences of attempting to speak in certain situations. I spent a lifetime accumulating, recounting and giving far too much prominence to the memories of bad speaking experiences – that is how my stutter developed and thrived. The more I nourished and sustained it – the more it took hold. I make no excuse for reversing that trait.

The worm has turned and I now constantly remind myself of the successes I enjoy. Never shirk from telling yourself how much you have achieved.

One radio interview lasted for 15 minutes (it was originally scheduled for 7 minutes but I just kept talking and talking). My eyes never fail to water when, at its conclusion, the interviewer comments, “Wasn’t that an inspirational chat. Alan, a stutterer and stammerer for over fifty years -and now you’d never know”. That certainly keeps my hexagon positive.

It received a further boost, a short while ago, when a police newsletter (which is circulated to all retired police personnel within my former force) carried an article about my recovery. It said, “You will all remember Alan when he served in the Constabulary. He suffered from a stammer that was a big obstacle to him during his police service and, more or less, confined him to administrative duties which prevented his promotion”.

Referring to the first of my many interviews on BBC Radio Wales, the item continued, “It was amazing to hear Alan speaking with such confidence and without any trace of his stammer.”

Nothing will ever make amends for the heartache and catalogue of lost opportunities that tainted my police career but, at least, my former colleagues will now view me

in an entirely different light. My beliefs, perceptions, emotions and speech are now so positive. (I should mention that the article was not of my own initiation but resulted from someone hearing the radio broadcast).

During the past few months, I have further expanded my comfort zone by undertaking a series of lectures at Arkansas State University. The Professor of Speech and Language Disorders thought it would be useful if I gave her classes of future Speech and Language Pathologists an insight into my lifetime of stuttering. (Quite astonishingly, I understand that ASHA – the regulatory body in the USA – does not require SLPs to have contact with persons who stutter, prior to graduation).

After the final presentation I was given a birthday cake to celebrate the first anniversary of the commencement of my recovery, together with a model turtle – the significance of which is that a turtle can only move forward if it pushes its neck out. The Professor suggested that I had certainly pushed my neck out during the preceding twelve months.

During my life, as I suffered the social consequences of malfunctioning speech, I changed the way I felt about myself, and others. I developed social strategies to protect myself from shame and embarrassment. I also developed strategies for pushing out, or hiding, difficult words. When these changes began to influence and reinforce each other, the problem became self-perpetuating.

All these adjustments were made to support my stuttering habit. I knew that if I did not change the components in this system, the same system would have sat around waiting for the missing component (my stutter) to

reappear. I was not prepared to allow that to happen.

So every day (even now) I set myself new goals as I continue to etch – erode - the negativity that influenced my life, and my speech, for so long. I am determined that my old stuttering behavior will never return. I am showing myself differently to the world and I love the way it is reacting differently to me.

My program recognizes that changing personal defaults in a number of areas does not occur overnight, and allows graduates to return on as many occasions as they wish. I have now completed nine courses. I didn't need to go back as many times as that; I had attained such a remarkable degree of fluency after the initial course. However, I chose to return because I wished to reinforce, and utilize, my speech in a variety of situations. During that time I have become empowered by coaching others, in addition to maintaining my own recovery.

As a person who stuttered, I built up a self-image of who I was. Anything that challenged that image, I perceived as a threat to my well-being. A self- image that is too narrow and constrictive to accommodate our entire personality, imprisons us.

It forces us to curtail our activities so that we may continue to act out of character. Persons who stutter avoid expanding their comfort zones. Many continue to live their lives doing things with which they feel comfortable. We cast ourselves in a diminished role and are content to remain in the same old safe predictable world – maintaining the status quo.

On the other hand, if we can broaden this self-image to accommodate the different sides of ourselves,

then we are able to play all these roles, and be comfortable in doing so. The moment you are willing to give up your old self-image, you will find that there are incredible opportunities for change. Unless you change you will fight the new you because it does not fit into how you see yourself.

In order to achieve this, you need to do certain things over and over until these behaviors become familiar and you get used to seeing yourself in these new roles. Only then will they become a welcome and acceptable part of the ‘real’ you. Until permanent changes occur – through continual expansion – the hexagon will remain vulnerable.

In his book, John Harrison says that he made his stuttering disappear long before his actual blocking behaviors ceased. He did this by observing what he was doing in a different light. He says, and I quote, “When I stopped observing my problem through the narrow perspective of stuttering; the stuttering per se was gone. That is, I stopped seeing the 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 addressing these issues, individually, the actual physical blocking behaviors slowly diminished and disappeared over time”.

If you do not do anything about your posture of helplessness; or your reluctance to communicate your feelings; or your lack of self-assertiveness; or your constant need for the approval of others – then the old stuttering habits will return.

Stutterers have a fear of being different – of looking strange. We are obsessed with our desire to be like

other people. We are obsessed with wanting others to be comfortable with us. We are obsessed with the need to belong.

In order not to risk upsetting others, we constantly modify and adjust ourselves until we present an image that *they* like, because we believe that pleasing people is the only choice we have. The reality is that in changing ourselves to please others, we lose contact with our real selves.

As stutterers, we seem to be overly introspective. We focus inwardly; we relive every speaking situation a hundred times in our minds before we speak. That is what I did for more than 50 years – but, thankfully, it is a thing of the past.

Now, I acknowledge negative thoughts (I don't block them out any more) but I have learned not to dwell upon them. I focus on what I want to do – I create an image of how I want the experience to be. If I feel like I am going to block, then I use my new tools to release the block. The debilitating oral shackles that inhibited me for so long have finally been removed.

I am not suggesting that everyone can make his or her speech blocks totally disappear. However, by correctly recognizing the nature of the problem, it is possible to maximize whatever efforts are made to improve one's ability to speak.

But let me give you a word of warning. All dynamic systems, from the atom to the largest galaxy have a built-in resistance to change. People fail to realize that a behavioral pattern – not just stuttering – has a life of its own. When threatened, the habit struggles to survive, much

as we would do if we were threatened with annihilation. We want to live – so does your stutter. After all, it is nearly old as you (and, in my case – that’s quite an age). This resistance is one of the reasons why stuttering is such a hard nut to crack.

There are so many other issues I would like to have dealt with this afternoon, such as:

1. How research into stuttering has suffered over the years because of the narrow paradigm that has been applied to it.
2. Why it is most unhelpful that the term ‘stuttering’ is used to encompass so many diverse types of disfluency.
3. Why stuttering cannot be solved like a mathematical problem, where the subject matter continues to exist in a different form.

Sadly, time is not on my side – but perhaps I may have the opportunity to enlarge upon this on some future occasion.

I now realize that, although I was not aware of John Harrison’s concepts until last year, I had made considerable changes in my own personal stuttering hexagon over the years – aided, of course, by the Edinburgh Masker. Despite the setbacks, I had already set up a system that would support greater fluency and fuller self-expression.

I recognize that I owe an immense debt of gratitude to the McGuire Program for providing the final piece of the jigsaw and, like a laser beam, all my energies are now moving in the same direction.

FEAR CAN HOLD YOU PRISONER; HOPE CAN SET YOU FREE

There has been, and will continue to be, discussion as to whether stuttering is a genetic or psychological problem. That is not the remit of my presentation here today. I came to tell you that I strongly believe that stuttering is not merely associated with the mechanics of speech. I hope that during this past hour or so, I have demonstrated my reasons for claiming that, “Stuttering is not just a speech problem”.

The theme of this year’s conference, here at Hope University, is “Fear can hold you prisoner, hope can set you free”. The need to overcome fear has been a prominent thrust of my presentation this afternoon, and I would like to conclude by reciting a hastily composed limerick that, I feel, appropriately reflects that sentiment:

When you stutter, some think you’re a dope
At times, it is so hard to cope
Whether mild or severe
Face up to your fear
If you let yourself go, then there’s hope.

CHAPTER 3

EVERYONE'S DIFFERENT

Laura has freckles, Nina has spots
Dominic's fingers are larger than Scott's
Barbara is skinny, Lorna is fat
Daddy has whiskers as long as a cat

Brad is athletic and runs like the wind
Toby is awkward and undisciplined
Grandma has wrinkles and silver-grey hair
Granddad is balding and sleeps in the chair

Clarice is pretty, delightful and sweet
Robert's good looking, but has smelly feet
John's a musician and plays a bassoon
Will has a keyboard but sings out of tune

Martin has black skin, Hayley is white
Charlotte is gentle, Dan loves a fight
Susan has blue eyes, Judy's are green
Rachel's are brownish, the largest I've seen

Vicky is cheerful, Angie is glum
Cher looks like Daddy, I look like Mum
Amy has blonde hair, Anna's is red
Claire is well-nourished, Dave's underfed

Bill is ambitious and works hard at school
Alex is lazy but thinks he is cool
Jason is boring, Bonnie is fun
She brightens a party like rays from the sun

Calvin has short legs, Wanda is tall
Jerry is bigger, but smaller than Paul
Jane is a good girl, as everyone knows
Joey's a naughty boy, Jack picks his nose

Paula's left-handed, Sophie is right
Wendy wears glasses to help with her sight
Brenda is thoughtful, Kramer's uncaring
Harvey is cautious, Tracey is daring

Things would be dull if our lives were the same
With identical clothing and same-sounding name
If we shared the same interests and musical choice
If we had the same accents, and similar voice

My father's a brother, an uncle, a son
So many identities rolled into one
Everyone's different, we're all quite unique
The way that we look and the way that we speak

Our troubles, our talents, the way that we think
The way that we laugh, and the way that we blink
It's great that we differ, it adds to our worth
There's no-one quite like us, elsewhere on this earth

Sometimes when I'm speaking, the words cease to flow
My speech becomes bumpy, uncertain and slow
At times I talk smoothly – at times I do not
It's just that I'm different, yes different! – SO WHAT?

CHAPTER 4

LETTING GO OF INHIBITIONS TO LEAD A MORE EXPANSIVE LIFE

ISAD CONFERENCE, 2014



ISAD, 2014 WORDS REGARDING THE AUTHOR

About the author: “Alan Badmington, a retired police officer (from Wales in the UK), commenced stuttering in childhood. He is an active and highly successful public speaker, winning numerous trophies (in competition with fluent contestants), as well as appearing as a finalist in the Association of Speakers Clubs UK national public speaking championships on two occasions. Alan regularly addresses diverse community

organizations in an attempt to increase public awareness about stuttering, while his media involvement has further brought the subject to the fore. He has travelled extensively to fulfill speaking engagements on three different continents, including a keynote speech at the 2004 World Congress for People Who Stutter in Australia, where he also won the Oratory Competition. He has addressed SLP students in the USA, as well as undertaking presentations/workshops at NSA/BSA and ASHA conferences/events. His papers, articles and poems have been reproduced in numerous publications and on various international websites/forums.”

ALAN’S PRESENTATION TO ISAD:

LETTING GO OF INHIBITIONS TO LEAD A MORE EXPANSIVE LIFE

In 2000, I acquired techniques/tools (via a self-help programme) that enabled me to achieve a high degree of control over my speech. But although I was able to speak well in that reassuring setting, I suspected that it would be difficult to transfer those gains into the outside world.

I knew (from past unsuccessful experiences) that merely focusing on the mechanics of my speech had only limited value. In order to secure permanent benefits, I needed to change my long-established mindset.

Persons who stutter (PWS) and, indeed, those who do not stutter, develop a mental blueprint of themselves. This personal concept is shaped by their beliefs and life experiences. It is also heavily influenced by what they consider to be their failures and

successes; their strengths and weaknesses; their competency and self-worth; and their perception of how other people have reacted to them.

Our beliefs and self-image create the script by which we act out our lives – they set the boundaries to our accomplishments. Disempowering beliefs confine us; they reduce our expectations, restrain our attitudes and limit our future attainments. Throughout my life, everything I did was in accordance with what I thought I was able to achieve. These views dictated the manner in which I lived my life, restricting me from undertaking many things that I considered lay outside my scope.

Having acquired an understanding of the adverse effects of avoidance (namely that every time we avoid something, it fuels our fears), I adopted a zero-tolerance policy towards all such strategies (including word substitution).

I then devised an extensive plan of action that routinely placed me in speaking circumstances that I would, generally, have chosen to avoid. In effect, I expanded my comfort zones and did the things I thought I could not do. The more I challenged myself, the more comfortable I became in undertaking those roles. As a result of confronting my fears (and demonstrating that I could fulfil such tasks), my self-image widened to accommodate responsibilities I had previously shunned.

When I commenced treading those unfamiliar paths, I had to deal with the self-doubts and uncertainties that arose. However, I gained reassurance from the fact that many (if not most) people encounter varying degrees of apprehension/insecurity when undertaking a new role. Such feelings are NOT unique to PWS.

The thoughts that occupy our minds prior to engaging in a speaking situation are hugely significant. What we believe about ourselves, as well as the manner in which we perceive the environment that we are entering (or the persons with whom we are due to come into contact) will, undoubtedly, influence our approach and expectations. In addition, it will almost certainly have a considerable impact upon the outcome. If we convince ourselves that we cannot do something, it is unlikely that we will successfully fulfil that task. In fact, we will probably avoid it.

Our minds are extremely responsive to the thoughts that we generate within. This inner conversation is a constant feature of life and usually takes place outside our conscious awareness. Negative self-talk is the foundation upon which self-doubts are built and can be hugely detrimental to one's confidence.

MONITORING WHAT WE SAY TO OURSELVES

When we monitor what we say to ourselves, it enables us to identify (and then reframe) the destructive messages that we are conveying. If I detected that I was saying something potentially damaging, I immediately evaluated its relevance and, where appropriate, amended the wording.

We travel in the direction of our most dominant thoughts. That's fine when they are positive and empowering – but extremely unhelpful when they are brimming with fear and negativity. Many people focus on what they don't want, rather than what they wish to achieve. I chose to concentrate on becoming a more effective communicator, rather than focusing on not stuttering.

Within weeks of commencing my challenging journey, I joined the Association of Speakers' Clubs (a public speaking organization similar to Toastmasters International). Addressing audiences had always figured prominently amongst my list of

fears – so it gave me an enormous thrill to stand up in front of a roomful of strangers and hold their attention. In fact, I enjoyed it so much that I soon secured membership of two further such clubs.

After initially giving prepared and impromptu speeches, I volunteered to participate in formal public speaking contests (in competition with fluent speakers). I surprised myself by winning numerous trophies.

I expanded my comfort zones further by involving myself in a multitude of activities that allowed me to sample new experiences and environments. I attended Speaking Circles seminars; drama/singing/dancing classes; and personal development workshops (that incorporated assertiveness, self-esteem, listening skills etc). Indeed, I enrolled for anything that happened to be available. All I wanted to do was TALK.

Having grown up with a stutter, I had developed certain reservations about how I should speak. For example, I felt uncomfortable when speaking in front of a group, particularly in a formal situation. The accompanying sense of power felt totally alien; I was not accustomed to speaking assertively. As I did not wish to come across too strongly to my listeners, I felt obliged to compensate by toning down and holding back.

One of the most frustrating aspects of my speech was that I, generally, enjoyed a considerable degree of fluency when alone. I found it exhilarating to stand in front of the bathroom mirror and chatter freely with myself. Yet, in complete contrast, I could struggle immensely when in the presence of other people.

As a young police officer, I was required to give evidence in court. In the days leading up to a hearing, I would rehearse my spiel so that I became more familiar with the content. If the

opportunity presented itself, I would visit the empty courtroom (in advance of the proceedings) and recite my evidence from the witness box. In the absence of an audience, I frequently spoke with authority and confidence. However, when the real situation arrived (maybe only 20 minutes later), and I was confronted by a daunting sea of faces, I often found it difficult to utter a single word. (As the result of my oral struggles, I was withdrawn from operational duties and transferred to an administrative role.)

Although I frequently experienced difficulties when using the telephone, I was most relaxed (and fluent) when speaking to someone with whom I was familiar – particularly when I was on my own. However, the moment someone else wandered into ear-shot, my speech would deteriorate. As soon as I became aware of another person's presence, I would consciously reduce the volume of my voice. I did not wish to be overheard, just in case I happened to stutter.

I also resorted to using a quieter voice when requesting a ticket at a railway station booth; speaking to a hotel receptionist; or making an enquiry where I felt that other people might overhear the conversation. I was always acutely aware of those who might be lurking in the immediate vicinity.

In all these instances, my responses were heavily influenced by what I perceived others might think about me. Many people (including those who do not stutter) are pre-occupied with such thoughts and adjust their behavior(s) accordingly. Approval and acceptance are dominant features in our lives.

REFUSE TO JUDGE YOURSELF

During recent years, I have refused to judge myself through someone else's eyes. My self-worth emanates from within – I am not dependent upon the approbation of other persons.

My new approach involved adopting a policy of greater self-acceptance and openness. I reasoned that if my listeners were aware I had a propensity to stutter, then they would be less likely to express surprise should I have occasion to stumble. Introducing that fact early in a conversation lifted a substantial weight off my shoulders. I was no longer on tenterhooks worrying about whether or not I might display some dysfluency. If it occurred, I knew that my listener(s) would understand what was happening.

I began speaking about my experiences (mostly with complete strangers) in the street; at airports; in planes; on trains; in stores/restaurants – in fact, anywhere. In addition, I commenced an extensive (and ongoing) series of talks to community organizations in an attempt to create a greater awareness about stuttering.

I also subjected myself to television, radio and newspaper interviews – revealing (often to substantial audiences) how stuttering has affected my life and career. Disclosing my “darkest secrets” to all and sundry had a hugely desensitizing effect. I am now totally at ease when discussing the subject with anyone.

Earlier, I referred to my tendency to speak less audibly in certain environments – it was yet another of my many coping strategies. But such actions exposed me to divided intentions. I felt that I was being pulled in opposing directions. On the one hand, I wanted to speak (or continue speaking) in a “normal” voice – while on the other, I felt the need to “turn down the volume” so that any dysfluencies could not be overheard by others. The ensuing mental tug-of-war created confusion and uncertainty, as a result of which I, invariably, stuttered/blocked.

BECOMING MORE ASSERTIVE

As a means of countering this holding back behavior, I decided to speak with greater assertiveness. On the occasions that I held back, it felt like I was driving a car with the handbrake applied. However, when I released the handbrake (and spoke more forcibly) my energy and confidence levels increased. Instead of “withdrawing into myself”, I discovered that I developed a more commanding presence.

Having vowed that I would never again resort to any kind of avoidance, I applied my new assertive approach to that aspect of my life. If a “feared” word loomed large on the horizon, I attacked it head-on. I went one step further and purposely introduced such words into my daily conversations. This proved particularly effective in enabling me to say my name – something that had always created considerable difficulties.

Prior to 2000, I routinely avoided using half of the alphabet and relied heavily upon synonyms. Today, as a result of forcing myself to say words that I always neglected, there are no letters/sounds/words that generate an emotional charge. Word substitution is a thing of the past.

Similarly, when confronted by circumstances that I would normally avoid, I refused to take a backward step. Instead, I became proactive and intentionally sought out fresh challenges in order to continue the process of eroding my fears.

My desire to explore a more fulfilling lifestyle resulted from a chance meeting with a PWS who had successfully embraced public speaking. Until that moment, I truly believed that such a role did not lie within the compass of someone who stuttered. That fortuitous encounter caused me to question my restrictive thinking – sowing the seeds of an empowering belief

that subsequently changed the course of my life.

The manner in which you view, behave towards, and speak to yourself plays a huge part in determining who you will allow yourself to be; what you will permit yourself to do; and how you perceive and live your life. Your relationship with yourself is of prime importance. How you feel on the inside influences how you come across to the outside world.

Those who dislike public speaking often rehearse negative scripts in their mind – telling themselves that they are ineffective speakers. Such negativity can be projected to the audiences, making them aware that the speaker is ill at ease. What we show to the world, it reflects back to us. So, if our body language demonstrates a reluctance to be undertaking that role, our listeners are likely to reciprocate by mirroring that negativity. They are unlikely to show confidence in the speaker.

When I entered the public speaking arena, I found it useful to tell myself that the experience would be enjoyable. I visualized myself delivering speeches confidently and drew encouragement from the many empowering speaking occasions that had become a feature of my life since choosing to step outside my comfort zones.

I began showing myself differently to others and was thrilled by the positive manner in which they responded to my more assured image and presence.

ABANDONING PERFECTIONISM

I abandoned my perfectionist trait and accepted that things might not always go according to plan. I also ceased to consider setbacks as failures. Instead, I chose to view them as learning experiences – stepping stones to future success.

I totally immersed myself in what I wanted to say, not how I felt I was saying it. I focused on the message(s) I wished to convey – refusing to be distracted by any unhelpful thoughts. Remaining ‘in the moment’ ensured that my mind did not stray from the task in hand. When we divert our attention and attempt to gauge how our talk is being received by the audience (or entertain concerns about possible mishaps), we lose focus. Our presentation will, invariably, suffer.

During the past 13 years, I have undertaken an extensive programme of talks on three different continents. I give myself permission to reveal whatever side of Alan Badmington I choose. I allow myself to let go of past inhibitions/restrictions. I can be humorous; I can be serious; I can be poignant; I can be informative; I can pause; I can vary the pitch of my voice, increase the volume or alter the pace. I do whatever feels natural, or appropriate, in that particular situation.

Every time I fulfill one of my many engagements, my intention is to make it a pleasurable speaking experience, irrespective of the occasion. I am driven by my intentions and do not focus upon any expectations of the outcome.

A few years ago I gave the eulogy at the funeral of a close friend. His death was sudden and unexpected – we had laughed and joked just 30 minutes before his sad passing.

I spoke with such commitment and passion that many of those present later confided they were reduced to tears. I didn’t deliberately set out to move the audience in that way; I spoke from the heart, harnessing my emotions to energize my delivery. It felt as though electricity was flowing through my veins. I was alive and vibrant, not focusing on controlling my speech in any way. I simply let go and fully invested myself in the occasion.

Similarly, ballet dancers pay scant conscious regard to the placement of their feet when performing “Swan Lake”. Concert pianists don’t inhibit themselves by focusing on the sequence of the keys. Proficient violinists/guitarists don’t concern themselves about the position of their fingers on the strings – the music simply takes over. Successful actors don’t concentrate on the individual words contained in the script – they engross themselves in the character they are portraying and “speak from that person’s lips”.

A good communicator is able to connect with an audience, even if he/she may not be fluent. As a public speaker, you stand apart from the crowd. Some people relish being in the spotlight, while others find it daunting. After a lifetime of dreading public speaking, it is now an exciting/integral part of my life.

By venturing outside my self-imposed boundaries, and entrusting myself to speak without holding back, I have discovered things about myself that I never knew existed. Skills/attributes/talents, that remained dormant for so many years, have finally surfaced. Unless we expose ourselves to risks, we will remain ignorant of our true capabilities.

Living a safe and predictable life denies us opportunities to discover just how courageous and extraordinary we are. We gain strength and confidence each time we look fear in the face.

But, change doesn’t occur by retaining the status quo. If we continue to do the same things that we have always done, then we should not be surprised if we experience the same outcomes. I was dissatisfied with certain things that were occurring in my life, so I decided to examine the behaviors that were producing those unsatisfactory results. When I identified that certain behaviors were not serving me well, I chose to abandon them in favor of others that would enable me to follow

a more expansive lifestyle.

CHALLENGING BELIEFS

If you do not challenge the beliefs that are holding you back, they will remain to shape your destiny. Your future will merely be a repeat of the past. My approach to oral communication is now so different. Throughout my life, it was simply a question of survival. Speaking was once a chore but now it is FUN!

I no longer have cause to utilize the physiological techniques to which I earlier referred. I abandoned them after a relatively short period of time. However, I readily acknowledge the important role that they played in providing me with a springboard (and confidence) to leave my safe harbor and explore uncharted waters.

Once I commenced my transformational trek, I gained momentum from the realization that there are no limits to what we can achieve when we have faith in our inner resources. I learned that my past beliefs did not have to determine my future identity. I was fulfilling roles that I had always dreamed of undertaking; I was speaking in situations that I had principally avoided; and I was saying the things that I had always wanted to say.

The enhanced self-belief and self-efficacy (that I accumulated along the way) gave me the confidence to challenge myself even further. Having ignited the initial flame, I developed a burning desire to expose myself to greater risks. But, possibly, the most satisfying and unexpected aspect of my journey was the discovery that embracing uncertainty (and facing the unknown) can be such an exciting experience.

After years of frustration and under-achievement, I am finally participating widely on life's stage.

When I worried what people were thinking

I surrendered my freedom of choice

To speak and behave how I wanted

It diminished my lifestyle and voice

Now I dance as if no one is watching

An exciting new dawn has begun

I've abandoned my past inhibitions

And discovered that speaking is FUN

CHAPTER 5

HOW AVOIDING AVOIDANCE TRANSFORMED MY STUTTER

PRESENTED TO ISAD CONFERENCE, 2013

Having commenced stuttering in early childhood, I developed a wide range of strategies to protect myself from shame and embarrassment. I began avoiding words that appeared to cause me difficulty. Almost unconsciously, I substituted them with others that I felt more confident in using.

I developed an incredible expertise and could instantly provide a wide array of synonyms (commencing with different letters) whenever a 'difficult' word loomed large on the horizon. I became a 'walking thesaurus'. This, generally, allowed me to conceal the true impact of my struggles.

In 2000, I learned about the immense implications of such a practice. I had previously been unaware of the fact that, whenever I changed a word, I fuelled my fear of saying that word. Each time we avoid something, we strengthen its influence over us. We can evade for so long, but the time will come when the situation demands that we have to say a specific word, or speak in a particular situation. When that happened, I found that my fear level had increased to such an extent that I stuttered more severely.

Although I had been using avoidance strategies for many years, it was only when I closely examined my behaviors that I realized just how widespread they had become. They had

infiltrated so many different areas and involved considerable effort and energy. It was enlightening (and in some ways frightening) to discover the extent to which avoidance had crept insidiously into my life – influencing so many of my decisions.

I Immediately adopted a zero-tolerance policy towards all kinds of avoidance. I vowed that I would never again substitute a word, nor shirk the challenge of any speaking situation.

In common with many other persons who stutter (PWS), I found my name to be particularly challenging, so I only said it when it was absolutely essential.

I addressed this issue by routinely introducing my name into everyday conversations. I didn't wait until it was imperative (for me to say it) – I began uttering it at every opportunity, even when it may have appeared inappropriate. I would simply slip it into exchanges when there was little pressure, particularly in the company of friends and family.

After a while, I found that my name presented fewer problems. Each time I said it, a heartening message was transmitted to my subconscious saying, “Hey, you’ve just said Alan Badmington”.

Throughout my life, the same little voice had constantly reminded me that I could not say it – thus strengthening my self-limiting belief and contributing to future anticipatory fear. By reversing the adverse dialogue that I had been having with my inner critic, I eventually convinced myself that I could say that emotionally charged combination of words.

The thoughts that occupy our minds prior to engaging in a speaking situation are hugely significant. What we believe

about ourselves, as well as the manner in which we perceive the environment that we are entering (or the persons with whom we are due to come into contact) will, undoubtedly, influence our approach and expectations. In addition, it will almost certainly have a considerable impact upon the outcome. If we anticipate a negative scenario, we prepare ourselves for that eventuality. But when we believe that things are possible, they are more likely to occur.

I became extremely proactive and began introducing challenges into my conversations throughout the day. I would deliberately create sentences that incorporated words I perceived to be difficult.

I also commenced utilizing visualization – a tool used by successful athletes. This involved creating internal movies that depicted me speaking in a positive manner. To a very large extent, our accomplishments (or lack of accomplishments) are as a direct result of the images that we hold in our head. The empowering mindset that I developed (through visualization and real life triumphs) enabled me to reduce (and subsequently eliminate) expectations of anticipatory fear.

I should stress that I did not simply use visualization, in isolation. I employed that technique together with a myriad of other approaches (including physically expanding my comfort zone by systematically placing myself in a wide array of challenging real-life speaking situations).

The more I challenged myself (and did things that I previously believed I could not do), the more comfortable I became in undertaking those new roles. After a while, I felt comfortable fulfilling them and readily accepted that they fell within my compass. My self-image had extended to accommodate them.

In addition, I began answering the ‘dreaded’ telephone with my name. When it rang, I would pick it up and immediately say “Alan Badmington”. I avoided any preamble or surplus words (such as “Hello, this is Alan Badmington speaking”). That would have been an easier option but I intentionally made the decision to confront my fears head-on. Even today, I instinctively answer the telephone in the same manner – it has become so automatic. The difference is that it now holds no fear whatsoever.

I also adopted a similarly proactive approach in respect of other letters/sounds that held an emotional charge. Each day, I would call toll free numbers that I had plucked from the Yellow Pages directory, creating fictitious enquiries in which I would intentionally use words commencing with ‘challenging’ letters (and they were plentiful). The more I said them, the more confident I became.

I rang hotels and restaurants, reserving tables/rooms in the name of “Alan Badmington”. I would call back 30 minutes later to cancel the reservation.

I approached total strangers in the street and requested directions to locations that I perceived would be difficult to say. Sometimes I would ask for such places as ‘Badmington Road’, ‘Badmington Drive’ or ‘Badmington Gardens’, even though I knew they didn’t exist. When visiting the USA, I would seek directions to ‘Badmington Boulevard’ (a double dose of the ‘dreaded’ letter ‘B’).

I also created challenges when I attended my first British Stammering Association and National Stuttering Association Annual Conferences in 2001(Liverpool, England) and 2002 (Anaheim, California) respectively. Those who are familiar with such events will know that each delegate is issued with a

conspicuous lapel badge that makes their identity readily available to everyone else. I raised a few eyebrows when I removed the official name strip and replaced it with the following handwritten message:

“Please ask me my name, I enjoy a challenge”.

Those ventures were, in effect, extensions of the series of proactive projects that I commenced in 2000 in order to place myself in unfamiliar situations. They afforded wonderful opportunities to further expand my comfort zones, while also starting many interesting discussions.

Today, having consistently demonstrated that I can say my name in any situation, I have no fear whatsoever about introducing myself. Had I continued with avoidance, the same long-established disempowering beliefs and limited self-image would have continued to impose their restrictions.

Not surprisingly, I felt apprehensive when I first embarked upon my more expansive lifestyle. But, as my past behaviours were not serving me well, I knew that I had to do something different. We don't change anything by retaining the status quo.

Choosing to say specific words (that I had intentionally neglected for so many years) was bound to be scary. In the initial stages, it is possible that those who were familiar with my usual speaking pattern may have considered that (on occasions) I was speaking less fluently. But that didn't bother me. You see, I had come to view my word substitutions as “stuttering on the inside” and felt that I needed to bring the matter out into the open in order to resolve the issue.

Within a relatively short period of time, the apprehension receded and was replaced by a feeling of excitement. The

external dysfluencies were also short-lived, as I grew in confidence. Today, there are no words, letters or sounds that continue to hold an emotional charge, or generate negative anticipatory thoughts.

I fully appreciate (and respect) that not everyone who stutters would wish to repeat my actions. Some PWS are accepting of their current position and have no desire to change. Each of us is responsible for the paths that we choose to tread. The decisions we make are personal and, invariably, relevant to our own unique circumstances. My stance against avoidance seemed appropriate for me at that particular time in my life. However, the concept that we may need to experience pain, in order to achieve gain, can be difficult for some people to accept.

It is important that we do not blame ourselves when we resort to avoidance. Avoidance is NOT a crime, so we should not feel guilty about using it. I leaned heavily upon such strategies for more than half a century – it was the only way in which I knew how to cope. Many people avoid doing things that generate fear or discomfort – such behaviours are NOT exclusive to those who stutter.

I've heard it said that "every cloud has a silver lining". Well, in my case, that has certainly proved to be true. A lifetime of word substitution has equipped me with an extensive and varied vocabulary. Yet, for so many years, I only chose to call upon its services when I had occasion to write.

Transferring my thoughts to paper was, generally, the only effective way in which I could meaningfully express myself. The written option allowed me to communicate exactly what I wanted to say. I could select the most suitable words without experiencing the usual emotions associated with stuttering.

Past oral exchanges were frequently littered with words that I considered to be inferior, or in some instances, totally inappropriate. My mind was constantly in turmoil as it frantically searched for synonyms to replace those words that I feared. I purposely succumbed to mediocrity and accepted second best – simply because of my desire not to be seen or heard stuttering.

Today, having eliminated avoidances, I no longer differentiate between written and spoken occasions. The crippling oral shackles have finally been removed and I can now pluck whatever words I wish from the extremities of my vocabulary and say them without anticipatory fear. It is truly exhilarating!

Having discovered (rather late in life) that the human voice is such a wondrous thing, I now look forward to using it at every possible opportunity. After years of frustration and under-achievement, I am finally participating widely on life's stage.

CHAPTER 6

CHANGING THE WORDS AROUND

I couldn't say muffin, I couldn't say butter
If I ordered a burger, I'd stumble and stutter
So, instead of me saying the words that I should
I'd swop them for others, I hoped that I could

But you can't always leave out the words that you dread
There are times when a certain thing has to be said
My sister's called Sarah, my best friend is Ben
They just wouldn't answer to Lucy and Len

Whenever I spotted a difficult sound
I'd hastily juggle my sentence around
I spent so much energy word re-arranging
Whenever I spoke, I was chopping and changing

My efforts to search for an easier word
Resulted in sentences, sometimes absurd
At times, my selections just didn't make sense
Which made me more anxious, frustrated and tense

Each time I avoided a troublesome sound
I felt rather guilty, and very soon found
That my fear of speaking increased even more
The number of 'problem words' started to soar

I quickly discovered that word substitution
Was simply avoidance, and not a solution
Although I was fluent, or so it appeared
The words I avoided became much more feared

One day, I decided enough was enough
I made myself promise, although it was tough
To say what I wanted, whatever the letter
At times I still struggled, but I felt so much better

Today, I will say any letter or sound
Confronting my fears is the best way – I've found
Should I ever be tempted to waver sometime
I'll remember the message contained in this rhyme.

CHAPTER 7

THANKS TO MY STUTTER, I'M NEVER LOST FOR WORDS

PRESENTED TO ISAD CONFERENCE, 2008

I am aware that some people regard their stutter as a gift. While I wholly respect the sentiments they express, I have never viewed my own stuttering in that light. It has created far too much heartache and disappointment for me to ever consider it in such a vein. However, I readily acknowledge that the difficulties I encountered throughout my life have certainly equipped me with skills and attributes that I might, otherwise, not have acquired.

As someone who commenced stuttering during early childhood, I developed a host of strategies to protect myself from embarrassment. I avoided words that appeared to cause me particular difficulty, and developed the expertise to (almost unconsciously) substitute synonyms that I felt more confident in using. I became a 'walking thesaurus'. Habitual use of word substitution meant that I amassed an extensive and varied vocabulary, which I put to good use in many different situations.

My struggles with the spoken word encouraged me to cultivate useful writing skills. In many instances, transferring my thoughts to paper was the only effective way in which I could meaningfully express myself. The written option allowed me to communicate exactly what I wanted to say. I could select words without the usual

anticipatory fear associated with stuttering. My past oral exchanges were littered with words that I considered to be inferior or, in some cases, totally inappropriate. I succumbed to mediocrity simply because I did not want the listener to see/hear me stutter.

Over the years, my writing skills have taken me in many interesting and exciting directions. I have edited several magazines; held the secretaryship of numerous organisations; and undertaken the role of advisor to a fictional crime series on British television. I have also written humorous verse and other poetry. During recent years, I have composed several poems about stuttering, which are used in many parts of the world.

In addition, my slogans have enabled me to win hundreds of prizes (including cars and exotic holidays) in consumer competitions. My reputation as a wordsmith has also created many other opportunities. Over the years, I have been invited to prepare speeches/poems for use by other people at a variety of events. While it was flattering that they should wish to present my material, I always harboured a burning desire to perform it myself (but my self-image did not then incorporate that role).

Everything changed in 2000 when I discovered new ways of dealing with my speech blocks and words that held a particular emotional charge. The resultant fluency, and greater self confidence, provided the springboard for change. Speaking in front of groups had always figured prominently among my list of fears. In order to overcome that trepidation, I joined the UK-based Association of Speakers Clubs (ASC). I have never looked back.

A half a century of stuttering provided me with the

motivation to sample the experience of addressing an audience. I yearned to become a public speaker. My literary dexterity, coupled with the ability to tap into my overflowing word reservoir, proved invaluable when I needed to write my own speeches, contributing immensely to the success that I have since enjoyed in public speaking contests, competing with fluent speakers.

For the past seven years, I have undertaken an extensive series of talks to diverse community organizations in an attempt to increase public awareness about stuttering. In addition, I have addressed speech-language pathologist students at several US universities; participated in radio programs about communication skills; hosted a charity concert; provided after-dinner entertainment; and spoken at stuttering-related conferences/events on three different continents.

After a lifetime of dreading public speaking, it is now one of my favorite pastimes. Plucking whatever words I wish and saying them without anticipatory fear, is exhilarating. The debilitating oral shackles (that had inhibited me since childhood) have finally been removed.

As I reflect upon the changes that have occurred, I realize the sizeable extent of my past dependence upon avoidance. It crept insidiously into my life and became an integral part of my daily existence. I was totally oblivious to the fact that, whenever I changed a word, I fuelled my fear of saying that word. I believe that my previous avoidance strategies undoubtedly exacerbated my stuttering behavior.

However, I recognize that those very acts of word substitution have been instrumental in paving the way for

me to venture along paths that I would not have trodden.

It is ironic that my current oratory successes are due, in no small measure, to my past speaking difficulties. My writing skills and vocabulary have been enhanced considerably by the experiences that I encountered. Although my vocal struggles created considerable anguish over the years, I acknowledge that I have cause to be grateful to my stutter for ensuring that I am now never lost for words.

CHAPTER 8

HOW I CHANGED MY STUTTERING MINDSET

PRESENTED TO ISAD CONFERENCE, 2005

I understand that I commenced stuttering at about the age of 3. I received early therapy and cannot recall any major difficulties until I entered the grammar school at 11 years.

I have vivid memories of struggling to give my name and address at the initial registration, in the presence of teachers and pupils that I had not previously encountered. Reading aloud in class was a nightmare. I would calculate (10 desks ahead) what I would be required to say.

Struck by the stark reality that my passage contained many words that had previously given me difficulty, I would remain silent and the reading would pass to the next pupil. That was one of the first examples that I recall of approach avoidance.

Further therapy followed without much success. I could read successfully in the therapy room, but would neither ask, nor respond to, questions in class for fear of appearing foolish.

As I progressed through school, the situation

worsened and I came to accept that I could never speak in front of a group. I felt that I would always have difficulty expressing myself to people I did not know well.

Words commencing with specific letters attracted a particular emotional charge, as I repeatedly stumbled whilst attempting to say them. I developed the ability to provide instant synonyms, not commencing with the 'dreaded' letters. I became a 'walking Thesaurus' - further adding to the web of avoidances that had become an integral part of my existence.

During my life, as I suffered the consequences of malfunctioning speech, I changed the way I felt about myself, and others. I developed strategies to protect myself from shame and embarrassment. Fear assumed the role of guardian, shielding me from experiencing the negative emotions that I felt when I stuttered. When these changes began to influence and reinforce each other, the problem became self-perpetuating.

SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS

My beliefs about my speech (and other areas of my life) came about in a number of different ways. Primarily, they were created by my experiences, and the way in which I interpreted those events. Here are some of the self-limiting beliefs that I accumulated as a result of past difficulties:

1. I could not speak freely in front of groups, or persons with whom I was not familiar.
2. I could not use words commencing with the letters 'b', 'c', 'd', 'f', 'g', 'j', 'k', 'm', 'n', 'p', 's', 't' and 'v'. Half of the alphabet lay outside my scope.

3. I could never give detailed explanations. My oral participation would comprise a few carefully selected, hastily delivered, words and I would then withdraw from the conversation.
4. I could never speak while I was the centre of attention. To combat this, I would discourteously interrupt while others were talking, so that the focus was never upon me when I commenced speaking.
5. I would never become an effective speaker.
6. I needed to avoid pausing at all costs. If a hiatus occurred, I felt that I would have difficulty re-starting.
7. It was unacceptable for me to speak loudly and assertively in front of others.
8. That some people felt uneasy with the manner in which I spoke (The seeds of this belief were sown when a supervisor wrote the following comments after I had struggled to give evidence as a 19 year old police recruit. He reported, "When this officer gives evidence in court he is an embarrassment").
9. Based on previous lack of success, I believed that I would never be able to deal with my stuttering problem.

SELF-IMAGE

We all possess a mental blue-print of ourselves - a personal conception of who we are, shaped by our personal beliefs and life experiences. It will be influenced by what we consider to be our failures and successes, and the way in which others have reacted towards us. Our thoughts, feelings, behaviours and actions are consistent with that blue-print, irrespective of the reality of that image.

As a person who stuttered, I felt that I had to please other people. I constantly modified myself until I presented an image that I felt complied with their criteria. A self-image that is too constrictive to accommodate our entire personality forces us to curtail our activities, so that we may continue to act out of character. As a result, I lost contact with my real self.

COMFORT ZONES

It has been my experience that many persons who stutter avoid expanding their comfort zones, casting themselves in a diminished role - content to live safe, predictable existences.

They choose to remain within that tried and tested environment, where there is an absence of risk and change. Fear is the gate-keeper to our comfort zones. Stepping outside into unfamiliar territory is invariably accompanied by nervousness and apprehension. By not venturing outside our comfort zones, we eliminate risk but severely limit our personal and professional growth.

Although I had led a relatively expansive life, and was proud of what I had achieved (in spite of my stutter), I felt that there were occasions where I had allowed the fear of stuttering to deter me from attempting certain things.

SPRINGBOARD FOR CHANGE

In 2000, I acquired new tools to overcome speech blocks and 'feared' words. The resultant fluency that I experienced in a controlled environment provided the springboard for change. However, I realised that if I wished to sustain those gains in the outside world, I needed to

address other areas of my life.

I also acquired a better understanding of the physiology and psychology of stuttering, and gained access to a support network.

At the same time, I also learned (via John Harrison's stuttering hexagon concept) that stuttering is not solely related to the mechanics of speech. It involves so much more: it is an interactive system involving the entire person, incorporating such factors as beliefs, perceptions, emotions, intentions, physical behaviours and physiological responses. (Harrison, 2004)

I knew that I had to deal with personal issues involving communication with others, while also recognising the need to dismantle the psychological framework that had supported my stutter for more than half a century. I was well aware that it would involve considerable effort. It is only in the dictionary that 'success' precedes 'work'.

CHANGING MY BELIEFS

Beliefs are probably the most powerful force for creating positive changes. They have a direct influence upon the way we think and behave. We perform at a level that is consistent with our beliefs and not with our potential.

I realized that my self-limiting beliefs (about my speech and other areas of my life), were contributing to self-defeating behavior. With this understanding, I set about identifying those beliefs that I felt were holding me back.

One way to change a belief is to challenge it. So that was the path I decided to explore. Having highlighted

my negative beliefs, I prepared a plan of action in which I would place myself in challenging situations. I needed to do things that I believed I could not do.

I recognized avoidance as a crucial ingredient of my stuttering behavior, and made a pact with myself that I would never again substitute an easy word for a difficult one. I also vowed that I would accept, and never shirk, the challenge of any speaking situation.

Speaking in front of groups also figured prominently amongst my list of fears. A catalogue of painful experiences had fuelled my belief that I could never successfully perform that role.

I addressed the situation by joining three clubs under the umbrella of the Association of Speakers Clubs (in the UK). I quickly discovered that the fear of public speaking was shared by many other (fluent) club members.

I had frequent opportunities to speak before an audience and gained in confidence. I also overcame my reluctance to pause, maintain eye contact and speak assertively (also previous self-limiting beliefs).

During the past four years, I have addressed numerous organizations in the UK, and also undertaken speaking engagements, and facilitated workshops, in many parts of the world. My fear gradually evaporated and, today, I readily accept public speaking as an integral part of my new self-image.

Having participated in debating groups, drama classes, media interviews and an assortment of workshops that involved considerable interaction, I now find that giving detailed explanations is no longer a problem. Another negative belief has been discounted.

NEGATIVE THINKING

The sub-conscious mind accepts every conscious thought as though it were true. It cannot differentiate between fact and fiction. It simply receives and stores the information without question.

Negative self-talk can be so damaging. I spent a lifetime reminding myself of (and giving far too much prominence to) those instances where I felt I had been unsuccessful. Today, once a negative thought appears, I acknowledge it and immediately dispense it to the trashcan.

I then replace it with a positive thought of my own choice. I also found it useful to maintain a register of positive happenings, which served to reinforce my progress. When I experienced setbacks, I viewed them as stepping-stones to success, and not as failures.

Negative thinking can also activate the body's 'Fight and Flight' response, which can lead to stress.

VISUALIZATION

In order to bring something into physical reality, it must first be created mentally. By using such techniques, I was able to generate images of success that allowed me to build up a pattern of positive behaviour in my subconscious mind.

In addition to visualization, I utilised affirmations - positive statements about myself. This further fed my subconscious with positive messages.

EXPERIENCING THE CHANGE

While serving as a police officer, the severity of my stutter made it necessary for me to wear a small electronic device, known as the Edinburgh Masker. It emitted a buzzing noise every time I spoke, blocking out the sound of my own voice. I wore it daily for 20 years, not hearing myself speak whilst it was activated. Although the equipment never eliminated my stuttering, it gave me the confidence to venture into situations that I might otherwise have avoided. Consequently, I expanded my comfort zones and developed my inter-personal skills.

Despite considerable setbacks, I built up a system that would eventually support greater self-expression later in life. When I acquired the new breathing/speaking techniques in 2000, they proved to be the final pieces in the jigsaw.

In the early days of the transformation, I experienced some unusual happenings. While enjoying greater freedom of speech, I would suddenly be hit by the realisation that I was not stuttering. A little voice would then chirp, "Hey Alan, why aren't you having any problems? This feels strange".

Once this occurred, I would invariably encounter my former feeling of holding back. Eventually, I became totally accustomed to the more liberated manner of speaking, and, today, I accept it without reservation. It is as natural as walking.

If I had not challenged and reversed my self-limiting beliefs (not just in relation to stuttering), and widened my narrow self-image, then my thoughts and actions would have continued to be generated in

accordance with those beliefs, and my personal blue-print. As long as we retain a self-limiting belief, our resultant negative thoughts and behaviors will continue to influence our lives and speech.

But the changes did not happen overnight. I had to do certain things over and over until the behaviors were familiar, and I became used to seeing myself in the new roles. It was only then that they became an acceptable part of the 'real' me.

The moment I was prepared to give up my old self image, I found that there were incredible opportunities for change. I adopted a holistic approach and worked on various aspects of my life.

My speech improved as a by-product.

Once I had decided to take the initial step, I didn't require any motivation. You see, I was doing things that I had always dreamed of - I was saying the things that I had always wanted to say.

When we achieve something that we have always considered impossible, it causes us to reconsider our self-beliefs. If we conquer something that has challenged our advancement, we grow in stature. When we overcome hurdles, it opens our eyes to possibilities that we could never have imagined.

That's exactly what happened. My self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy all grew immensely as I discovered my true potential. I thrived on the new experiences and responsibilities.

NO LONGER AN ISSUE

During the past few years, I have shown myself

differently to the world, and I love the way in which it is reacting differently to me.

Stuttering has now disappeared from my mind, in the sense that I cease to think about the physical act, or my personal attachment to such behavior. Do I still block? Minor dysfluencies occur very infrequently (principally in casual conversation), but they do not involve blocking. Most of the time, they don't even register with me. I choose to totally disregard the dysfluencies of which I become aware.

Fluent speakers don't take account of them, why should I? Perfectionism no longer oversees my speech. Talking is now a thoroughly enjoyable experience. I make no apologies for indulging in it at every opportunity - I'm simply making up for lost time. I am driven by my intentions and not my expectations. I simply LET GO and have FUN!

Today, I do not have any anticipatory fear about saying any specific word, letter or sound. When I approach, or enter into, any speaking situation the implications of stuttering no longer permeate my thoughts. They are simply non-existent. The debilitating oral shackles that had inhibited me since childhood have finally been removed, and I can now pluck whatever words I wish, from the extremities of my expansive vocabulary (swelled by years of substitution), and say them without fear.

Since changing my stuttering mindset, and eliminating the components that once contributed to my blocking behavior, I have discovered that it is no longer necessary to constantly focus upon my speech or any technique. Stuttering is no longer an issue in my life.

CHAPTER 9

HOW BELIEFS AND SELF-IMAGE CAN INFLUENCE STUTTERING

PRESENTED TO THE ISAD CONFERENCE, 2009

Although I began stuttering during early childhood, it is only during recent years that I have gained an understanding of how I developed my stuttering mindset.

Throughout my life, there were times when I experienced difficulty in communicating with others. I blocked on many words and struggled to speak in various situations.

Each time I stuttered on a particular letter/word, I became more afraid of saying that letter/word. I also stuttered more noticeably when speaking to specific people. As a result of the problems that I encountered, I developed certain beliefs about myself.

For example, I believed that I could not use 13 letters of the alphabet and would avoid them at all costs. I adopted avoidance strategies, including extensive use of word substitution. I also believed that I would stutter when I was the center of attention; giving detailed explanations; or addressing groups.

There were many other self-limiting beliefs that I held in relation to my speech, the most powerful being that I would never be able to deal with my stuttering issues. The

latter belief remained firmly ingrained until 2000 when I met someone who had made immense strides in overcoming his stutter.

This caused me to question whether I might also be able to attain some improvement. He became my role model.

SPRINGBOARD FOR CHANGE

Shortly afterwards, I acquired new tools and techniques that I found relatively easy to implement in the group environment in which they were being taught. Everyone was so supportive and accepting - I felt totally at ease.

Within a few days, I achieved a high degree of control over my speech, eliminating blocks and learning how to cope with the challenging words that had always held such an emotional charge.

For the first time in my life, I enjoyed talking. I grew, immensely, in confidence.

But although I was able to speak well in that reassuring setting, I suspected that it would be difficult to transfer those gains into the outside world. Memories of past traumatic experiences triggered self-doubt, while concerns that others might judge my new speaking behaviors were never far from the surface.

I recognized that the acquisition of tools and techniques, in isolation, had only limited value. I knew that I needed to do so much more than simply focus on the mechanics of my speech.

You see, I was still operating under my old belief system. I continued to have reservations about ordering at a

drive-thru; of speaking on the telephone; of addressing an audience; and of saying those letters/words that had caused me so many problems.

Our beliefs and self-image play such a prominent part in our lives because what we believe (and how we see ourselves) colors how we think. Correspondingly, our thoughts influence our behaviors and emotions.

I set about dismantling the psychological framework that had supported my stutter for more than half a century. In order to initiate change, I first identified those areas in which I had been holding back. I then devised an extensive plan of action that allowed me to consolidate (and test) my new speaking patterns in a wide range of situations. I expanded my comfort zones and did the things I always thought I could not do.

DISSENTING VOICE

Changing my beliefs and self-image was a gradual process. In the early stages, there were times when my inner critic would interrupt (while I was speaking) and say such things as "Why aren't you stuttering? You should be stuttering. You ALWAYS have problems in these situations."

When I initially became aware of this negative internal dialogue, I would momentarily experience the discomfort and insecurity associated with my past difficulties. I was uncertain of my identity.

I felt that I should still be stuttering because that is what I had done since childhood. I did not 'feel' like Alan Badmington.

Gradually, the voice became less talkative and,

finally, fell silent. I came to accept (and felt comfortable with) the new techniques and different manner of speaking. It no longer felt 'strange'. I was far more relaxed, more assertive, more confident and more in touch with happenings.

I also grew accustomed to my wider self-image that incorporated many additional and challenging roles. These new responsibilities no longer felt unfamiliar. I became more adventurous with each challenge.

SELF-CONCEPT

Persons who stutter (and, indeed, those who do not stutter) develop a mental blue-print of themselves. This personal concept is influenced by what they consider to be their failures and successes; their strengths and weaknesses; their competency and worth; and the way in which others have reacted towards them.

Our thoughts, feelings and behaviours are consistent with that self-determined identity, irrespective of the reality of that image. Our personal opinions about ourselves are more influential than facts.

Our beliefs and self-image create the script by which we act out our lives - they set the boundaries to our accomplishments. Throughout my life, everything I did was in accordance with what I believed about myself and what I thought I was able to do. These views restricted me from undertaking many things that I considered lay outside my scope.

POWER OF BELIEFS

The majority of our belief system is established

during childhood and adolescence. So, regardless of your current age, the beliefs that dictate the way in which you live your life today were largely developed during those formative years. That hugely critical period will continue to dominate our current lives, unless we reassess our long-established opinions and self-worth. Account should be taken of more recent and relevant information that challenges those views, or has been acquired from experiences that bring them into question.

If we fail to confront our disempowering beliefs, they can imprison us. I admired (and had dreams of emulating) those who appeared at ease in front of an audience. Yet, I always shunned public speaking, justifying my avoidance by the fact that I stuttered. I could never envisage successfully fulfilling that role.

Persons who are of a reserved nature may claim that they have always been shy, accepting timidity as an irrefutable and permanent part of their makeup. Such beliefs confine us - they shape our expectations, influence our attitudes and limit our future attainments.

Many of us hold beliefs that are based upon inaccurate or irrational information. Even though they may not be true - because we accept them as authentic, they have a direct bearing upon the way in which we think and behave. Our screening process filters out information that is inconsistent with our innermost beliefs.

What we believe about ourselves molds the way in which we perceive the world. It influences our educational and employment paths; it determines our relationships and social interaction. But, most importantly, when we believe that we cannot do something, then it's almost certain that

we will not do it.

The unconscious mind accepts whatever it is told. If we tell ourselves that we cannot speak in front of an audience, it helps us to behave in a way that supports that statement. We may decline invitations or (when avoidance is not an option) become so stressed that our performance is adversely affected, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

If we believe that we will encounter difficulties while ordering a beer (or meal), then we may allow others to make the purchase on our behalf. If we convince ourselves that we will struggle to say a particular word, we will probably substitute it with another.

If we think of ourselves as inept in a particular area, and continuously reinforce that view with negative language, we will act out that viewpoint and substantiate our belief.

Much of our belief system was inherited from those with whom we came into contact during our childhood. As an adult, the majority of our programming now comes from within. Instead of being persuaded by outside opinions, we tend to rely upon self-suggestion to determine who we are, and how we choose to live our life.

Some people routinely forecast pessimistic scenarios, reflecting their negative inner programming. We need to be diligent in recognising those harmful utterances because they creep furtively into our internal chatter without us realizing. The words become habitual - the damaging messages play over and over in our heads.

INTERNAL IMAGE

The self-image is such an important factor in determining our quality of life and in effecting change. The ability to formulate and hold picture images in our minds is, apparently, unique to the human species. In effect, we are the director, producer and scriptwriter of all the images that appear on the motion picture screen in our heads, as well as being the principal actor. To a very large extent, our achievements (or lack of them) are as a direct result of those images.

In addition to physically expanding my comfort zone, I hastened the process of changing my self-image by utilizing a technique known as visualization. By creating internal movies that depicted me speaking in the manner of my choice, I duped my subconscious into believing that I had already successfully spoken in circumstances that I always considered beyond my capacity.

Successful athletes regularly create visual images of desired behavior to improve their performance. I built up a reservoir of positive speaking experiences (within my subconscious), thus reducing (and then totally eliminating) anticipatory fear of stuttering.

HABITUAL BEHAVIOURS

Most of the tasks that we undertake are performed unconsciously. When we attempt something new it will, invariably, feel strange. That is why so many people (not just those who stutter) avoid venturing outside their comfort zones, preferring their habitual (tried and tested) way of doing things.

But behaviors are not changed by retaining the

status quo. We need to widen our self-concept to accommodate the new behaviors and roles; otherwise our existing self-image will continue to impose its restrictions. Many of us have difficulty letting go of the past. We cling onto our old self-image because we (and those around us) derive a sense of security from the familiar face that it presents.

Self-concept is at the very core of our life experience - it can cause us to resist attempts to embrace change, even though it may be to our advantage to do so. The moment I relinquished my old self-image, I discovered incredible opportunities for growth.

DUAL APPROACH

It is relevant to mention that I confronted my stutter on two fronts. Firstly, I consciously applied the new techniques to the physical side of my speech. The resultant control served as a springboard, giving me the confidence (and means) to address the cognitive and emotional issues.

By cultivating more empowering beliefs, I gained the impetus to make things happen. I strengthened my self-efficacy by regularly using positive affirmations, while also choosing to view challenging situations as learning experiences, and not difficulties.

Although our long-established beliefs may be deeply entrenched, it is important to understand that they are NOT set in stone. The realization that I could reappraise (and adjust) my beliefs was hugely empowering and a cornerstone of the advances I have made during recent times.

Having eliminated my negative thoughts about the

physical act of stuttering, and my personal attachment to such behavior, I no longer find it necessary to constantly focus upon my speech. By adopting a holistic approach, and working on different areas of my life, my speech improved as a by-product.

FULFILLING POTENTIAL

Thomas Edison wrote: "If we did all the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves." I, wholeheartedly, agree. For so many years, I was oblivious to my true potential - sacrificing my aspirations for the false illusion of comfort and safety. When I took charge of my thoughts, and systematically exposed myself to risks, I created the perfect antidote for the debilitating effects of fear and self-doubt.

During recent years I have achieved things that, for most of my life, I considered impossible. Public speaking has now become an integral and exciting part of my life. Stepping outside my comfort zone, and treading less familiar paths, has greatly enhanced my existence.

CHAPTER 10

TWO THINGS I WISH I'D KNOWN ABOUT STUTTERING WHEN I WAS YOUNGER

PRESENTED TO THE ISAD CONFERENCE 2007

Looking back, I believe that my life could have been so different had I enjoyed my current insight into stuttering when I was younger. I'm not one to waste time and energy dwelling on the past. We can't change the outcome. But that does not preclude me recounting, and sharing, a few of the many lessons I have learned, in the hope that others may glean something that could better equip them to deal with their stuttering at an earlier age.

COMFORT ZONES

I have benefited tremendously from acquiring an understanding of the principles (and advantages) of expanding our comfort zones. Many people (not just those who stutter) rigidly cling to the belief that they should be comfortable at all times, and avoid situations they feel may create discomfort.

Fear is the gatekeeper to our comfort zones; it holds us back from doing things when we cannot guarantee a successful outcome. By not venturing outside our comfort zones, we eliminate risk but severely limit our personal (and professional) growth.

It has been my experience that many persons who stutter (PWS) avoid expanding their comfort zones, casting themselves in a diminished role, content to live the same safe predictable life. Our self-image sets the boundaries of our accomplishment. When we have a narrow self-image, it restricts our personality and potential. It curtails our activities because we believe that we are incapable of doing certain things.

We all possess a mental blueprint of ourselves, shaped by our personal beliefs, life experiences and the way others have reacted to us. Our thoughts, feelings and behaviors are consistent with our personal concept of who we are, irrespective of the reality of that image. We develop a kind of tunnel vision, which causes us to focus on things that fit our self-image/beliefs, and exclude those that do not.

How we view ourselves impacts enormously upon the way in which we live. If we believe we are incapable of fulfilling a particular task, we avoid it. When we widen our self-image (to accommodate new roles), we are presented with so many fresh opportunities.

Many people are fearful of change, preferring the tried and tested, where there is an absence of risk. They feel more at ease in a familiar environment, communicating with people with whom they have become accustomed. It is so rewarding when we embrace change and accept the accompanying challenges.

I drew up a plan of action that involved preparing a list of situations I avoided (including public speaking). I knew that I needed to face my fears and challenge the negative beliefs/emotions that I had accumulated over so many years. At first, the things that I

did feel uncomfortable, but they became progressively more comfortable as I repeated them again and again.

Our ability to tolerate short periods of discomfort is the key to successful expansion. We must not give up at the first hurdle. Like the turtle, we can only move forward when we stick our neck out. We need to take risks, and challenge ourselves, if we are to transform our attitudes and self-image. No one ever changes behaviors by retaining the status quo.

I believe that expanding comfort zones should be an ongoing process for everyone - not just for PWS. It doesn't have to be too challenging; maybe something small to begin with, just as long as we are not standing still. There is a tendency to stagnate when we continue with the same lifestyle. We need change!

I began setting myself daily challenges, the greater the challenge, the more satisfaction I derived. I incorporated them into my everyday life and routine, making my new behavior habitual. Stepping outside my comfort zone, and treading a less familiar path, greatly enhanced my existence.

Personal growth occurs when we venture beyond our existing boundaries. When we feel the discomfort, we know that we are confronting the fear. When we achieve something we had considered impossible, it causes us to reconsider our limiting beliefs.

If we conquer something that has challenged our advancement, we grow in stature. When we overcome hurdles, it opens our eyes to possibilities that we could never have imagined. When we are stretched by a new experience, we grow as human beings. The more we

expand the more confident we become with our own ability.

AVOIDANCE

Having commenced stuttering in early childhood, I developed strategies to protect myself. I began avoiding words that appeared to cause me difficulty. Almost unconsciously, I substituted them with others that I felt more confident in using.

Avoidance crept insidiously into my life. I was unaware of the true extent of my dependence - it became such an integral part of my existence.

Until recent times, I was completely oblivious to the fact that, whenever I changed a word, I fuelled my fear of saying that word. Each time we avoid something, we strengthen its influence over us.

We can evade for so long, but the time will come when the situation demands that we have to say a specific word, or speak in a particular situation.

When that happened, I found that my fear level had increased so much that I stuttered more severely. Had I been aware of the implications when I was younger, I would certainly have made every effort to reduce my avoidances.

By deliberately introducing such words into my daily conversation (and not waiting until they had to be said), I found that the fear gradually receded. Today, I no longer avoid words or situations, nor experience any anticipatory fear.

LIVING LIFE TO THE FULL

Fear and self-doubt can sabotage the hopes and

aspirations of many people, not just those who stutter. Some PWS allow their speech to influence their educational paths, choice of careers, relationships and social involvement. It is important that we do not adopt a victim mentality, or exclude ourselves from participating widely on life's stage.

Some of us are presented with greater challenges than others. We cannot select the cards we are dealt, but we can certainly choose how we respond to those challenges. We should make every effort to ensure that stuttering does not inhibit our personal growth. There will, undoubtedly, be setbacks along the way, but they should not be viewed as failures. They are learning experiences, stepping stones to eventual success.

Our time on earth is relatively limited. We must, therefore, enjoy life to the full. There is no re-run; we don't get a second chance.

CHAPTER 11

STEP OUTSIDE: Why expanding comfort zones can improve our stuttering and lead to fulfilling lives

PRESENTED TO ISAD CONFERENCE 2003

What is a comfort zone?

A comfort zone is an area of thinking, behavior and/or experience to which we confine ourselves, because we do not wish to feel uneasy. It's the living, work and social environments to which we have become accustomed. It's the equivalent of the shallow end of the pool to someone who lacks confidence to swim. It's being with people you know. It's the tried and tested, the habitual, the predictable - where there is an absence of risk and change. It need not be a happy environment - people remain in failed marriages or boring jobs merely because trying something new feels too scary.

Most of us operate within a zone that feels 'right.' We make decisions based upon the confines of that comfortable space. Comfort zones differ from person to person. They determine how we react with others; the type of friends we choose; the people we associate with; the way we handle situations. Some call it being comfortable; others refer to it as being in a rut.

WHY WE REMAIN IN OUR COMFORT ZONES

Comfort is fine, up to a point, but no one can expect to be spared trouble, pain or inconvenience. Some people rigidly cling to the belief that they should be comfortable at all times, avoiding 'uncomfortable' events they encounter. Although most of us have the potential to tackle the source of our discomfort, many decline to attempt anything constructive, refusing to tolerate the slightest degree of temporary discomfort (even though it might be in their interest).

When we avoid short-term discomfort, we actively invite long-term disadvantages, which could have been avoided by initially taking prompt action (and putting up with short-term discomfort).

Fear is the gatekeeper to our comfort zones. Stepping into unfamiliar territory is invariably accompanied by nervousness or apprehension. Some become prisoners of their own insecurities - fearing change, failure and even success. People seldom procrastinate doing things they enjoy, yet frequently defer (or avoid) tasks that involve something new.

When we move into uncharted waters, we cannot guarantee a successful outcome. We allow the fear of consequences to deter us from taking action. We hesitate because we view it as too difficult, involving too great a

risk, or likely to expose our vulnerability.

One of the greatest obstacles is the fear of failure. But, all change involves an element of risk. Those who do not experience set-backs are not attempting anything. Failures are the stepping-stones to success.

Our natural reluctance to break out of our comfort zones is also motivated by our unwillingness to accept greater responsibility. By not venturing outside, we eliminate risk but severely limit our personal and professional growth.

COMFORT ZONES AND STUTTERING

For the purpose of this paper, I shall relate the comfort zone concept to persons who stutter (PWS). As someone who commenced stuttering in early childhood, I developed many negative beliefs about my speech behaviour. As I experienced continuing difficulties throughout my life, these beliefs became engrained. My behaviour and personality were adjusted to accommodate my stutter.

As I suffered the social consequences of malfunctioning speech, I changed the way I felt about others and myself. I developed strategies to protect myself from shame and embarrassment. I learned avoidance techniques in relation to words, sounds and situations. I perceived anything that challenged my limited self-image as a threat to my well being.

A self-image that is too narrow and constrictive to accommodate our entire personality imprisons us and curtails our activities. It has been my experience that many PWS avoid expanding their comfort zones, casting themselves in a diminished role - content to live the same old safe, predictable life.

On the other hand, if we can broaden this self-image to accommodate the different sides of ourselves, then we are able to play all these roles, and be comfortable in doing so. The moment you are willing to give up your old self-image, you will find that there are incredible opportunities for change.

Expanding my comfort zone

When younger, I purchased a small electronic device (the Edinburgh Masker), which I wore constantly for more than 20 years. Although this mechanical crutch never resolved my speech problem, it gave me the confidence to venture into situations that many PWS would have avoided. Despite the setbacks, I had unwittingly sowed the seeds of a system that would support greater fluency and self-expression.

Three years ago, I acquired new tools to overcome speech blocks and 'feared' words. Many years earlier (prior to the Masker), I had achieved increased fluency in a controlled environment but was unable to sustain those gains in the real world. In order to progress, I now had to deal with personal issues involving communication with

others. I needed to dismantle the psychological framework that had supported my stutter for over half a century.

I had always considered myself to be relatively outgoing (despite my stutter) but I had never attained my true level of potential.

I drew up a plan of action, preparing a list of speaking situations that I had always avoided. I realised I needed to view myself in a different light. I needed to do certain things over and over again until the behaviours became familiar and I got used to seeing myself in those new roles.

I knew that I had to face my fears; I needed to challenge the negative beliefs and feelings that I had developed (in many cases unconsciously) over so many years. I would never again succumb to the temptation of substituting an easy word for a difficult one, and I promised myself that I would accept, and never shirk, the challenge of any speaking situation.

The things I did were uncomfortable at first, but they became progressively more comfortable as I repeated them again and again. Your ability to tolerate short periods of discomfort is the key to change. If you are willing to take risks, you can bring about a significant transformation in your attitude and self-image. Here are some of the things that I did to expand my comfort zones:

USING THE TELEPHONE

Each day, I spent lengthy periods speaking to businesses selected from the yellow pages. I created fictitious enquiries involving such commodities/services as mobility vehicles; wedding photographs; water dispensers; car rental; photocopiers; drain blockage; musical equipment; and transportation of household effects. Most companies were accessed via toll free numbers, so I did not incur a great deal of expense.

With progressive calls, the fear level subsided and, over a period of time, I demonstrated to myself that I could speak authoritatively to complete strangers during lengthy conversations.

I would telephone hotels to enquire about accommodation rates, although I had no intention of using their facilities. I also rang restaurants to reserve tables in my name, primarily because I had always feared saying 'Alan Badmington'. I would ring back later to cancel the booking - again taking the opportunity to announce my identity.

Throughout our married life, my wife had always undertaken the task of arranging appointments with the doctor/dentist. I told her that I greatly appreciated her previous assistance but stressed that I now needed to assume those responsibilities. It was imperative that I explained my reasons, otherwise she may have felt rejected.

TALKING TO STRANGERS

Although many people knew that I stuttered, there were occasions (particularly in unfamiliar surroundings) when I would attempt to conceal my dysfluency. To reverse this trait, I made a conscious decision to engage in conversation with complete strangers (in the street; on trains and planes; at airports; in restaurants and stores) and talk openly about stuttering. I was amazed at the courtesy and apparently genuine interest that was displayed.

Quite apart from the fact that I was now acknowledging my problem, it also had the effect of desensitising such speaking situations. I began believing that I could talk to anyone about a subject that had so adversely affected my life since childhood. My negative perception that the listener would be embarrassed, or might even ridicule me, was replaced by a positive perception.

Although introducing myself had always proved problematical, I was determined to say my name at every opportunity. I discontinued my life-long practice of carrying a paper bearing my particulars.

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Speaking in front of groups figured prominently among my list of fears. A catalogue of painful experiences, accumulated throughout my life, had fuelled my belief that I could never successfully perform that role. The only way

to combat my fears was to face them head on, so I joined the Association of Speakers Clubs in the UK. I now attend three such clubs, where I regularly give prepared and impromptu speeches, chair meetings, participate in debates, present tutorials and provide oral evaluations of speeches made by others. In addition, I have enjoyed a remarkable degree of success in public speaking contests in competition with fluent speakers.

I also undertake an extensive series of talks to community organisations, aimed at creating greater public awareness about stuttering. I am frequently invited to return to speak about totally unrelated topics. In addition, I have addressed student speech and language pathologists and presented workshops at the annual conferences/conventions of the British Stammering Association/National Stuttering Association. My fear of public speaking has now totally dissipated. What a transformation!

APPROACHING THE MEDIA

In order to expand my horizons further (and spread the word about stuttering), I have undertaken television, radio and newspaper interviews in the UK and USA. Revealing my stutter to such wide audiences has further assisted my self-acceptance.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Many persons who stutter are denied opportunities to develop interpersonal skills, choosing to remain on the

fringe of conversations. Recently, I have attended numerous adult courses/seminars that, at first sight, may appear totally unrelated to stuttering. My decision was influenced by the fact that I wished to place myself in situations where I could interact with persons I did not know. They have embraced such subjects as assertiveness, self-esteem, confidence building, positive thinking, public speaking and communication skills. I view these challenges as further stepping-stones along the road to personal growth.

INTERNET CHAT ROOMS

The Internet affords excellent opportunities to practice one's speech. I regularly visit chat rooms (stuttering-related and otherwise) where I converse with persons from all parts of the world. I have even ventured into the romance chat rooms - with the full blessing of my wife. On such occasions, I promptly announce that my sole purpose is to practice my speech. At first, I was wary of how I would be received but, almost without exception, I have been encouraged by the positive reactions of the other parties. They invariably ask questions about stuttering, and it is surprising how many have relatives or friends who stutter.

DAILY CHALLENGES

Every day I still set myself goals - the greater the challenge, the more satisfaction I derive. For example, I will pluck at least three telephone numbers at random, either from the directory, or off the Internet. When I make the call, I acquaint them with my stuttering history and explain that I

am attempting to expand my comfort zones. One unsuspecting recipient was Judy Kuster, whom I telephoned at her place of work.

The avenues for expanding one's comfort zones are immense, providing you use initiative and imagination. Here are some areas that you may wish to consider:

Purposely use a word (or words) that you always avoid.

Make a telephone call within the hearing of a work colleague.

Strike up a conversation with someone who intimidates you.

Contact a business by telephone, rather than via email.

Tell a joke in unfamiliar company.

Book your theatre or transport ticket by telephone.

Use the courtesy telephone at the airport to enquire about car rental.

Chat with the cashier/teller at the supermarket.

Stop someone in the street and ask for the time.

Commence a conversation with a stranger at the bus stop or a social event.

Make an appointment with your hairdresser (by telephone).

Ring a health club to enquire about services and tariffs.

Ask a store assistant for the opening/closing hours.

Make small talk with the taxi driver.

Purchase your rail ticket at a booth (and not from a machine).

When walking the dog, stop and chat to another pet owner.

Seek membership of a school parent/teacher organization.

Enroll for an educational class or group.

Speak to persons you would not generally speak to.

Register a complaint about inferior service.

Whilst I initially set aside a certain period of time each day in which to expand my comfort zones, I now incorporate them into my everyday life and routine. Whenever I enter a store, for example, I request directions from an assistant, even though I know my way to a particular department. If you purposely create speaking situations, your behavior will become habitual.

PERSONAL GROWTH

Personal development occurs when we venture beyond our existing comfort zones. It requires re-drawing our mental maps so that we increase the size of our familiar areas. When we feel the discomfort, we know that we are confronting the fear. It confirms that we are taking risks. If you are not feeling uncomfortable, then you need to push yourself more. Like the turtle, you can only move forward when you stick your neck out. The only limitations are those that we impose upon ourselves.

The success we achieve will be proportionate to the risks we take, and we become increasingly powerful as our lives expand to accommodate more experiences. As our power increases, so does our confidence in our own ability. We find it easier to continue the process of stretching our comfort zones, in spite of any fears that we may experience. I certainly found that I became more adventurous as time progressed, the magnitude of the risks expanding correspondingly.

When we achieve something that we, hitherto, regarded impossible, it causes us to reconsider our limiting beliefs. If we conquer something that has challenged our advancement, we grow in stature. We are never quite the same again. When we overcome hurdles, it opens our eyes to possibilities that we could never have imagined. When we are stretched by a new experience, we likewise grow as human beings.

(We should, however, be mindful of the fact that comfort zones can shrink as well as expand. The former may occur due to inactivity or lack of social intercourse. I experienced this several years ago when I was confined to home following a road accident. My speech deteriorated considerably as I was denied contact with others.)

Having performed virtually all of the challenges listed above (and so many more), I have reversed the negative stuttering mindset that pre-occupied my thoughts for more than 50 years. I am well aware that there are PWS who will consider some of the escapades a little too demanding.

We all have different histories; different amounts of emotional baggage; and different aspirations. I did what I considered appropriate for my own personal circumstances. I'm not, in anyway, suggesting that others should attempt to imitate my example - I have merely described what was successful for me.

I have achieved things during the past couple of years that, at one time, were beyond my wildest dreams. I stepped outside my comfort zone and challenged the limiting beliefs about myself. I thrived on the new responsibilities and have grown immensely in stature. By working on other areas of my life, my speech has continued to improve as a bi-product.

I certainly do not have any intention of applying the brakes at this stage. My recent journey has

been exhilarating and I am having so much fun. I feel I am a more complete human being; my life is so much more meaningful. Stepping outside my comfort zone, and treading a less familiar path, has greatly enriched my existence. I can thoroughly recommend it to anyone who is contemplating a similar venture.

I would like to conclude with the poem I wrote (in the next chapter) named “The Comfort Zone,” (a version of a poem of unknown origin) that I feel epitomizes much of what I have touched upon in this paper. It has been amended to accommodate my personal circumstances.

CHAPTER 12

THE COMFORT ZONE

I used to have a comfort zone, where I knew I couldn't fail

But the routine and familiar walls were really like a jail

I longed so much to do the things I'd never done before

But I stayed inside my comfort zone and paced the same old floor

I said it didn't bother me that I wasn't doing much

I said I didn't care for things like self-esteem and such

I claimed to be contented with the things inside my zone

But deep inside, I longed for something special of my own

I couldn't let my life go by just watching others win

So I held my breath, and stepped outside, to let the change begin

I took that step with inner strength I'd never felt before

I kissed my comfort zone 'Goodbye', and closed, then locked the door

If you are in a comfort zone, afraid to venture out

Remember, Alan Badmington was once consumed with doubt

So don't hold back - just take that step and seek those pastures new

Embrace your future with a smile, success is there for YOU

CHAPTER 13

IT'S GOOD TO TALK ABOUT IT

PRESENTED TO ISAD CONFERENCE, 2004, “YEAR OF THE CHILD”.

When I was young, I had difficulty reading aloud in school. I couldn't change the words that sometimes gave me problems. I had to say what was printed in the book.

When the teacher asked questions, I never raised my hand. I pretended I didn't know the answers because I was afraid that I would become tongue-tied in front of everyone else.

There were times when I wanted to know more about a particular subject. Maybe, I didn't quite understand something that had been said. But, again, I kept quiet. It was so frustrating! I felt cheated at not being able to join in, especially as I knew I had something useful to contribute.

I never really talked about it with my friends or family -- I guess I felt too embarrassed. Besides, I didn't think that they really understood. I thought I was the only person in the world who had such problems.

When I grew older, everything changed. I started to talk about my stutter with everyone -- even strangers. I didn't hide it anymore. I realised it wasn't something to be ashamed of. It wasn't my fault.

And, do you know what? - I found that people didn't really care if I stuttered - they were more interested in me as a person. They admired my sporting skills -- they enjoyed my jokes and sense of humor -- they liked being in my company. And above all, they could see that my stutter was only a small part of me. I was Alan the athlete, Alan the poet, Alan the coin collector and (way down their list), Alan who sometimes had difficulty with his words.

It wasn't a big deal to them. We are all unique, I just happened to talk a little differently from most. So what?

Looking back, I only wish I had been more open about my stutter at a much earlier age. If only someone had told me that I didn't need to bottle it up inside. If you share a problem, then it never seems quite so bad. I now realize that if I'd talked about it with others, I wouldn't have felt so alone and isolated. Why don't you try it?

CHAPTER 14

SPORTING MILESTONE HELPS TO SET MY STUTTER ON RIGHT TRACK

PRESENTED TO ISAD CONFERENCE, 2011

On May 6, 1954, British medical student Roger Bannister became the first person to run the mile in less than four minutes. For so many years, it had been considered impossible - many had tried and failed. Yet, the moment he overcame that mystical barrier, the mindset of athletes worldwide changed overnight. They now had evidence that it could be achieved. Before long, others were regularly fulfilling the same feat. Such is the power of belief.

Fast forward 45 years to April 1, 2000 when I witnessed a PWS recounting how he had won several public speaking trophies in formal competition with 'fluent' contestants. It was such a defining moment that the date is indelibly imprinted upon my memory. Prior to hearing his story, I was convinced that such a role lay outside the scope of someone who stuttered. A catalogue of painful experiences fueled my belief that I could never successfully undertake that task. My whole outlook changed.

The man that I heard speaking so enthusiastically about how he had successfully embraced public speaking

effectively became MY Roger Bannister. He opened my eyes to possibilities that I could never have dared imagine. For the first time in my life, I allowed myself to entertain the thought (and hope) that I might be able to do something similar. That fortuitous encounter sowed the seeds of an empowering belief that was to subsequently change the course of my life.

Inspired by his example, I joined the UK-based Association of Speakers Clubs that has its origins in Toastmasters International. Membership afforded me frequent opportunities to speak in a variety of situations. I gained progressively in confidence and stature. My extensive vocabulary (swelled by a lifetime of word substitution) proved invaluable when I prepared my own speeches. Very soon, I too was 'walking away with the silverware.'

My newly-acquired oratory prowess motivated me to challenge myself in other areas. During the past 10 years, I have undertaken an extensive series of talks aimed at increasing public awareness about stuttering. In addition, I have addressed speech-language pathologist students at several US universities; participated in radio programs about communication skills; hosted a charity concert; provided after-dinner entertainment; and fulfilled engagements on three different continents. Public speaking now occupies a prominent and exciting place in my life.

Our beliefs and self-concept create the script by which we act out our lives - they set the boundaries to our

accomplishments. The moment I relinquished my old self-image, I discovered incredible opportunities for growth. However, if we fail to confront our limiting beliefs, they will continue to restrict us.

We need to take risks if we are to advance in any aspect of life - not just in relation to our speech. Progress is achieved when we are willing to expose ourselves to uncertainty by treading the paths that generate fear. Like the turtle, we can only move forward when we stick our neck out. Unless we place ourselves in more demanding situations, we will remain ignorant of our true capabilities.

Fear and self-doubt can sabotage our hopes and aspirations. It is important that we do not exclude ourselves from participating widely on life's stage. We are not always presented with a level playing field - some of us may encounter more hurdles than others along the way. We cannot all emulate Roger Bannister and break a world record, but we owe it to ourselves to strive to realise our maximum potential and achieve a personal best.

CHAPTER 15

FOR BETTER – FOR WORSE PRESENTED TO ISAD CONFERENCE, 2002

When Babs and I first met, she accepted me for who I was - my stutter was never an issue. Her support was unflinching. She never undermined my position, nor belittled me in any way. She just lent a hand in her own quiet unassuming manner.

It is difficult for a spouse/partner to stand by when their loved one is experiencing difficulty. Despite my disfluency, I regularly placed myself in challenging speaking situations. Our wedding day was one such occasion.

Marriage is supposed to be a happy event (or so I had always been led to believe). Yet, as my wedding day approached, my feelings were tinged with apprehension and doubt. Not, I should quickly add, at the prospect of spending the rest of my life with my fiancée, Babs, but the daunting anticipation of saying my wedding vows in front of a large audience. Aunts, uncles, cousins, future in-laws, friends, many of whom I had not seen for several years.

Having stuttered since childhood, it was inevitable

that speaking in front of groups figured prominently among my list of fears. A catalogue of painful experiences had fuelled my belief that I could never successfully undertake that role.



However, I knew that when someone else spoke, or read, at the same time as myself, I would encounter little, if any, difficulty with my speech. My prayers had been answered. In our pre-ceremony meetings with the vicar, we discussed the situation and came to an arrangement whereby he would recite a line and then repeat it quietly when I was saying it.

What I hadn't bargained for was my caring bride

who, in order to ensure I didn't have any problems, also joined in saying my vows. So you can just imagine it - the vicar would say a line and then ALL THREE OF US would repeat it. (I Alan Badmington take you...). Of course, mine was the loudest and most prominent voice, the other two merely whispered. But I was aware of the support. No one else realised what we were doing and everything went perfectly.

Now, let us examine that episode. This phenomenon of people who stutter being able to speak fluently in unison has long been recognised. I believed that I could speak when someone else spoke simultaneously as (in my eyes) I was not the centre of attention. Like many persons who stutter, I felt uncomfortable hearing the sound of my own voice, associating it with all the shame and embarrassment I had encountered over the years.

With my future wife and the vicar joining me, I was detached from my own speech - the lifelong negative emotions were not present. I perceived the vicar and my bride as friendly and supportive persons and, because I was relaxed about the situation, I did not experience the usual feelings of fear and panic.

Despite the successful outcome, there are still a few things that give me cause for concern. I frequently lie awake at night, wrestling with the following questions:

Am I married to my wife?

Am I married to the vicar?

Is my wife married to the vicar? or

Are we all three joined in holy matrimony?

Contrast this with what happened a few hours later at the wedding reception. I rose to speak in front of the guests and had terrible problems. I said a few sentences, blocked and blocked again. It was so bad that one of my aunts intervened and started singing 'For He's a Jolly Good Fellow'. Everyone joined in, and I sat down a very disappointed and humiliated bridegroom.

I should quickly explain that I was not disappointed with my new bride, but with my inability to complete the speech that I had rehearsed for weeks. I believed I would flounder and I certainly did. I wasn't so much worried about any feared words because I had written the speech myself and carefully omitted any of the letters with which I would normally experience difficulty.

But I was caught up in the speak/don't speak conflict that Joseph Sheehan talked about many years ago. I wanted to continue speaking - it was the happiest day of my life. But I was fearful of stuttering, laying myself bare and revealing my speech difficulty to all present. This power struggle caused me to hold back and the inevitable speech blocks occurred.

Our marriage vows included the expression "For

better, for worse." Babs certainly witnessed me giving one of my better speaking performances when reciting the vows, but things took a marked turn for the worse as I attempted to deliver the speech at the reception.

Babs has been true to her word and today, thanks to her love and support, I am a far better communicator. My worst speaking moments are a thing of the past. I was tempted to say that that my vows went without a hitch, but that's not strictly correct. We were definitely 'hitched' and I have the grey hair to prove it! No, seriously, we have now been happily married for 36 years and I owe her a great debt.

Throughout our married life, Babs and I have always made a special point of celebrating our wedding anniversary. However, on that very day in September 2000, I happened to be in San Francisco alone. As I lay in bed at 1:30 am, I reflected upon the fact that it was the first time we had been apart (on our wedding anniversary) in more than three decades. My thoughts were rudely interrupted when the furniture appeared to move. At first, I thought I was dreaming but soon realized that it was not a figment of my imagination - an earthquake was occurring.

As soon as the vibrations (5.4 on the Richter Scale) had subsided I telephoned Babs, in the UK, to tell her of the incident. After wishing her a Happy Anniversary, I said (with tongue firmly implanted in my cheek), "Do you remember all those years ago, you told me that the Earth moved for you? Well, it's just moved for me too." I

reassured her of my safety and we reminisced.

Oh! One further point, I am pleased to report that the seismic activity did not result in any tremors in my speech.

CHAPTER 16

TECHNOLOGY: A FRIEND OR FOE OF SOMEONE WHO STUTTERS?

PRESENTED TO ISAD CONFERENCE, 2006

Technology figures prominently in the lives of many people. It has become an integral part of our everyday existence - we tend to take it so much for granted. I suspect that it is only in the event of product failure or power disruption, that we really appreciate the role that it plays.

For the purpose of this paper, I shall divide technology into two separate categories -- 'assistive technology' and 'general technology'.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

While technology is helpful to many, there are those for whom it is a necessity. It plays a significant role in the life of someone with a severe disability, handicap or illness. Such persons may be heavily dependent upon equipment in order to perform routine tasks and cannot function without them.

Assistive technology can also improve the quality of life for people who experience impairment of vision, hearing, mobility, learning and communication. The list of products is endless.

In relation to stuttering, assistive devices have been commercially available for many years.

The 1970's saw the development of an electronic fluency enhancing device, known as the Edinburgh Masker, the function of which was to obliterate (mask) the sound of the wearer's voice by emitting a white noise into the ears. This technology is sometimes referred to as Masked Auditory Feedback (MAF).

The Edinburgh Masker was the forerunner of other prosthetic devices which produced Delayed Auditory Feedback (DAF); Frequency Altered Feedback (FAF); and/or Altered Auditory Feedback (AAF), all of which change the manner in which the user hears his/her own voice.

Persons who stutter (PWS) have also enlisted the aid of text-to-speech programs to facilitate speaking on the telephone, ordering in restaurants, or giving speeches. Other groups with communication difficulties may also use such technology.

Incidentally, the British Police Service has recognized the importance of technological assistance for persons with communicative difficulties. It is to my

knowledge that they are currently considering ways of improving the manner in which such persons may provide them with information relating to criminal occurrences etc.

GENERAL TECHNOLOGY

The array of general technology available to PWS is wide and varied, although it is not specifically designed for that section of the population.

THE INTERNET

The advent of Internet has, in many ways, proved to be a boon for PWS, although (as I will discuss later), I feel it can also be a bane. It has facilitated extensive dissemination of information about stuttering, thus enabling people in all parts of the world (including speech-language therapists/pathologists) to gain a better insight into the subject. Although stuttering has heavily influenced my life from a very early age, I knew virtually nothing about the problem until recent times.

Today, there is an abundance of websites offering advice and support for PWS, family members, friends, employers, teachers and professionals. Many, who previously felt isolated, have learned about stuttering organizations/associations throughout the world. The internationally renowned Stuttering Homepage (in addition to hosting this ISAD Online Conference) provides a wealth of information about many different aspects of stuttering.

Various “listservs” and other stuttering-related forums have emerged during recent years, enabling PWS (and other interested parties) to readily exchange views, experiences and information. Many of these sites also incorporate articles of interest and useful links.

Online programs, such as Yahoo Messenger, MSN, Skype etc, afford facilities for instant communication (speech and text) worldwide. My involvement with a host of different Internet groups has brought me into contact with thousands of persons associated with stuttering.

However, it has been my experience that the majority of those who belong to the major English-speaking international discussion forums are reluctant to use the voice facilities available. As a former moderator of one such forum, I frequently encouraged members to take part in oral discussions, viewing them as wonderful opportunities to converse, or practice techniques, in a safe and friendly environment. Only a very small minority accepted the challenge, preferring the non-speaking text options.

OTHER TECHNOLOGY

The use of the mobile/cell phone has flourished during recent years. However, I am aware that some PWS favour text messaging, rather than engage in voice conversations.

In my younger days, I recall utilizing a

metronome in order to create a rhythmic speaking pattern. It proved reasonably successful at home (in a benign environment) but I could never transfer the gains into the real world.

THE EDINBURGH MASKER – MY EXPERIENCES

As a police officer, I experienced considerable difficulties as a result of my stutter, particularly when giving evidence in court. I was transferred to a non-operational role when a supervisory officer reported that I was "an embarrassment to all concerned".

The severity of my stutter caused me to acquire an Edinburgh Masker, which I wore at all times while on duty. I also used it on social occasions and always kept it near to the telephone at home. I became so reliant on the device that I wore it for 10/12/14 hours daily. I developed the belief that I could not exist without it, and always had an array of spare parts on hand in case of failure.

It became my mechanical crutch for more than 20 years, during which time I did not hear myself speak whilst it was activated. I was subjected to a buzzing noise every time that I uttered a sound, making it impossible for me to hear others who spoke simultaneously. Consequently, I became very adept at lip-reading. I also experienced frequent headaches and ear infections.

Shortly after purchasing the device, a senior police officer expressed his concern about the fact that I

would be wearing such an item while performing my duties. He went strangely silent when I politely enquired if he would be able to fulfil his responsibilities without the thick horn-rimmed spectacles that he constantly wore.

After several years of using the apparatus, I persuaded my employers to allow me to return to operational duties. With the aid of the Masker, I renewed the much-needed public contact that I had been denied for so many years. I gave evidence in court, dealt with incidents and even attempted some lecturing. I continued to wear it in social situations.

I met many people daily. My speech was better in some circumstances but I was never fluent. I wore the Masker at all times - it became my mechanical crutch. I constantly lived with the fear of mechanical failure and always carried spare components.

Although the apparatus never eliminated my stutter, it gave me the confidence to venture into situations that I might, otherwise, have avoided. Consequently, I expanded my comfort zones and developed my interpersonal skills.

Despite experiencing considerable setbacks, I built a system that would eventually support greater fluency and self-expression later in life. I am in no doubt that, had it not been for the Edinburgh Masker, I would never have been in such a favourable position to take advantage of another approach when it subsequently became available.

The device provided invaluable assistance when it was most needed. Without it, I would have floundered.

Reflecting on my lengthy experience of wearing the Edinburgh Masker (which, incidentally, is no longer manufactured), I have become increasingly appreciative of the important interim contribution that it made in, subsequently, enabling me to deal with my stuttering problem.

Use by others

Since commencing my association with the international stuttering community (via the Internet and attendances at workshops/conferences in various parts of the world), I have come into contact with PWS who have experimented with the device. Many discarded the apparatus within a relatively short period of time, due to lack of success and personal discomfort.

One major exception was the late and respected Marty Jezer (a fellow long-term Masker user), with whom I enjoyed considerable dialogue in the years immediately preceding his sad death in 2005. Despite never being particularly fluent, Marty (who also used the DAF and FAF devices) came to enjoy talking, including public speaking.

In an article reproduced in the ASHA SID4 Newsletter in October 1999, he wrote:

"Empirically, I know that they have made a difference.

Friends who I've not seen in a long time almost always comment on my improved speech. More to the point, I speak more, and in all situations. I always battled with my fear of speech. To me, avoiding speech is worse than the actual spasms of stuttering. But sometimes speech was just too difficult -- for me and the listeners. There were many times, before I used the Masker, that I wanted to speak but chose to keep silent.

Now I don't fear talking. Conversation is no longer an issue for me. I consider myself fluent, even though I am still stuttering. With the help of my devices, I've joined Toastmasters, and have come to delight in public speaking, not only at self-help conventions for people who stutter, but for audiences of fluent people.

A few days ago, I spoke up at my local school board meeting. It was a heated topic, there was a large audience, and it was being broadcast live on cable access TV. I stuttered, but I held the attention of the audience. Without my DAF unit, I wouldn't have done it. It wasn't the fear of stuttering in public that would have stopped me. It was my level of dis-fluency; without my portable DAF, the audience would not have understood me. And that, not the fact of my stuttering, would have been humiliating."

Based upon my personal experiences of using the Edinburgh Masker, I feel that such devices can play an important role in improving the quality of life of some PWS.

In my particular case, it allowed me to develop useful interpersonal skills, which are often deficient in someone who stutters. Acquisition of such skills is an

ongoing process that begins at an early age. Some PWS lose out by remaining on the fringes of social interaction. I have no hesitation in saying that, in common with Marty Jezer, I would have shirked many of the challenges and responsibilities that I accepted during the 20 years that I persevered with the device, particularly whilst on police duty.

When we expand our comfort zones, and tread unfamiliar paths, we grow as human beings. The Masker certainly aided my personal development.

THE BENEFIT OF HINDSIGHT

With hindsight (isn't it a wonderful thing?), I feel that I could have made more effective use of the Masker in relation to one specific area of my stuttering. Although I faced many challenging situations (both on police duty and within social environments), I realise that I still succumbed to some avoidances. In particular, I continued to practise substantial word substitution. I could have derived greater benefit had I used the machine to deal with the avoidance issue.

But, at the time, I did not appreciate the harmful implications of such behaviour. No-one had ever explained that each time I avoided a word or letter, the fear level increased. I was strengthening my long-held belief that half of the alphabet (13 letters) lay outside my scope.

PARTING COMPANY

In 2000, I made the decision to abandon the Edinburgh Masker. It had been a faithful servant for two decades, sustaining me in my greatest hours of need. It had played an immense part in enabling me to cope with the extensive demands that I faced during my former police career. Without it, I would have remained confined to administrative duties.

I felt that it was time to move on and release myself from the dependency that I had developed upon my mechanical crutch. Severing the connection was similar to losing a close friend -- after all, it had been my constant companion for two decades. We had been through so much together.

In the absence of the 'reassuring' (yet infuriating) buzzing sound, I felt rather 'naked'; I was being exposed to the outside world without my protective cloak. It was, initially, disconcerting to listen to my voice, as it had been purposely silenced for so many years. But, I soon became accustomed to it and I, actually, liked what I heard.

BEFRIENDING TECHNOLOGY

My divorce from the Masker coincided with my decision to adopt a more pro-active approach to my stutter. This involved, inter alia, total non-avoidance (including zero-tolerance to word substitution) and extensive expansion of my comfort zones.

At the same time, I also made a conscious decision to purposely befriend the everyday technology that I had previously tended to shun.

I vastly increased my use of the telephone -- an item that I had, hitherto, used only when absolutely essential. I spent several hours each day calling toll-free numbers (selected from the Yellow Pages directory), inventing fictitious enquiries. I simply wanted to practise speaking, while also challenging various self-limiting beliefs, including my perceived inability to say certain words.

I would leave messages on answering machines/voicemail -- technology that had always filled me with trepidation.

When purchasing petrol, I declined to use the credit card facility at the pumps, choosing to complete the transaction, in person. As an added challenge, I would deliberately select a pump bearing a number that caused me difficulty, so that I was obliged to say it when fulfilling the purchase.

I would call the National Enquiry line to obtain train times, rather than seek the information online. I also booked theatre/concert tickets via the telephone, ignoring the non-speaking Internet option.

Email is a wonderful means of communication, but can encourage avoidance. There are, of course, times when

it is more expedient to communicate via this method. I adopted strict criteria when contemplating the use of email. If there was any suggestion of avoidance, then I opted for personal contact, even when it involved calling someone in another country.

There are many other examples of where I have embraced technology in an attempt to deal with my previous fear of speaking. I joined an international support group network and regularly engage in conversation with PWS (on three continents), via telephone and Skype.

Having entered the world of public speaking, I utilise a voice recorder so that I may monitor the content and delivery of my speech, in advance of the presentation.

A PERSONAL CHOICE

I am of opinion that some forms of technology can work to the disadvantage of persons who stutter, particularly where their use fuels avoidance. The Internet and text messaging certainly fall within this category. However, I would like to make it abundantly clear that I am not in any way criticising such usage -- I'm merely making an observation.

It would be improper of anyone to question the motives of those PWS who lean upon technology for assistance. It's entirely their choice. Who can blame those who wish to avoid the adverse reactions that sometimes occur, simply because we are unable to communicate in a

manner that is acceptable to some sections of the community?

Who can blame those who wish to escape ridicule, isolation or lack of respect? Who can blame those who wish to avoid the erroneous perception that they are of a nervous disposition, uneducated or unsociable? Who can blame those who simply wish to converse with a friend; commence a relationship; or contribute to discussions at work, school, or social events?

We should never berate ourselves for indulging in avoidance. So many people evade things that cause them fear or discomfort. Such behaviour is not exclusive to PWS.

My decision to discard the Edinburgh masker, while simultaneously attempting to deal with the issue of avoidance, was generated by a desire to gain independence from the support that both had provided for so many years. Those dual crutches (I certainly consider avoidance to be a crutch) served me well for so long. But, having been supported for such a lengthy period, I finally wanted to stand on my own two feet. I wanted to walk unaided through life.

Relinquishing the Masker, and choosing to say the words of my choice, irrespective of the consequences, proved to be so liberating. I felt that I had finally broken free from the debilitating oral shackles that inhibited me since childhood.

I wish to stress that the route that I have taken is unique to me. We all come from different backgrounds; possess different personalities; have encountered different life experiences; and accumulated different degrees of emotional baggage. We also set out from different starting lines, and have different aims and aspirations.

I am not, in anyway, suggesting that others should attempt to follow the path I have trodden. That was my choice and mine alone -- it was what I wanted to do. We each have to accept responsibility for our own journey through life, and make whatever decisions we feel are pertinent, in accordance with our individual circumstances.

CHANGING THE MINDSET

While readily acknowledging that technology can have a positive effect upon the life of a PWS, I also firmly believe that there are occasions when it may be less than positive. That is why I feel it is healthy for us to take time to examine our attitudes towards, and the use of, such items.

If we simply take possession of a prosthetic device, and confine ourselves to our safe environments, then we will, forever, retain our fears of speaking in more challenging situations. If we continue to practise approach avoidance, then we will continue to have self-limiting beliefs about the words, and situations, from which we choose to shelter.

It is of prime important that a prosthetic device

should not be viewed as a 'quick-fix' or a 'cure'. That, certainly, is not the case. In my opinion, they are best used (perhaps in conjunction with some kind of therapy, approach, or stuttering management) to assist the wearers to challenge their fears and self-limiting beliefs and expand their comfort zones. As I discovered, there is a need to change the stuttering mindset.

Our thoughts and actions are shaped by our beliefs and self-image. As long as we continue to hold self-limiting beliefs, or fail to change the way that we see ourselves, we will continue to act in accordance with those beliefs and image.

FRIEND OR FOE?

During my lifetime of stuttering, technology has been both a help and a hindrance. The Edinburgh Masker was, undoubtedly, a valued friend -- always on hand in times of need; sharing in my successes and witnessing my tears. Other types of technology have, unwittingly, become foes by allowing me to increase avoidances.

But, even the best of friends sometimes part company. Relationships alter; the attraction wanes; the bond lessens. That's what happened when I made the decision to change the direction of my life. But, unlike most break-ups, we parted on amicable terms - there were no recriminations. I will cherish the memories of the time we spent together.

CHAPTER 17

HELPING TOMORROW'S THERAPISTS GAIN A GREATER INSIGHT INTO STUTTERING

PRESENTED TO THE ISAD CONFERENCE, 2010

During recent years, I have visited several American universities to address student speech-language therapists. I speak about my personal experiences of stuttering, recounting some of the struggles that I have encountered since early childhood.

As well as reciting several of my poems, I incorporate a host of amusing anecdotes because I believe that humor can be a very useful tool with which to convey a specific message.

In order to provide the students with an insight into what it is like to live with stuttering, I touch upon such things as approach avoidance, negative self-talk, self-acceptance, assertiveness, self-esteem, self-image, emotional baggage and the stuttering mindset.

I also draw the students' attention to the importance of recognizing the uniqueness of their future clients. I emphasize the need to make good use of listening skills; earn the respect of each individual; and appreciate

the difficulties associated with transferring speech gains and techniques from a safe therapy environment into the outside world.

I never fail to be impressed by the enthusiasm and interest displayed by the students. They have a voracious appetite for knowledge and I am always inundated with a wide array of questions.

The seeds of this association were initially sown when I was invited to spend four days at Arkansas State University. On that occasion, I gave a series of talks that were video-recorded for future training.

Next, I travelled to Temple University in Philadelphia, where I spoke to a class of graduate clinicians who were reading my life-story as part of their studies. I returned the following year as a member of a panel drawn from the local National Stuttering Association chapter (support group). I have since widened my US connections by speaking to students at universities in Pennsylvania, Mississippi, West Virginia and Missouri. On these occasions, the presentations were given from the comfort of my own home, in Wales, via a telephone or Skype online link.

In May 2010, I completed the 11,000 miles transatlantic round trip from the UK to California, to undertake the role of guest speaker at the annual luncheon of the Santa Clara County Speech-Language Hearing Association. The event was held in Los Gatos, located in

the San Francisco Bay area, and coincided with US International Stuttering Awareness Week (which is entirely distinct from the annual International Stuttering Awareness Day that is celebrated, worldwide, each October).

During the 75 minutes talk (entitled 'Lost for Words'), I spoke passionately about how stuttering impacted upon my life for so many years, outlining the restrictions imposed upon me by my disempowering beliefs and limited self image. I also shared details of the many exciting and challenging paths that I have trodden in recent times while coming to terms with my stuttering issues.

I took the opportunity to tell the audience (which comprised principally speech-language pathologists and students) that, in my opinion, simply addressing the mechanics of our speech (in isolation) has only limited value. I explained how changing my stuttering mindset had allowed me to enjoy permanent gains.

Although our long-established beliefs may be deeply entrenched, it is important to recognise that they are not set in stone. The realisation that I could reappraise (and adjust) my beliefs was hugely empowering and a cornerstone of the advances I have made during recent times.

I genuinely believe that such interaction is to our mutual benefit. I understand that many speech-language establishments now incorporate these exchanges as an integral part of their training programs. I have found it to

be a most rewarding activity that has also allowed me to expand my comfort zones. I encourage persons who stutter to seek out similar opportunities.

In addition, I have long advocated the need to create a greater public awareness about stuttering. Can we really expect others to understand what is happening, or know how to react, when we suddenly block or display secondary behaviors? In many instances, even members of our own families have little knowledge about the difficulties that we experience.

Those were the reasons why I embarked upon a series of talks to community organizations. I felt it was time that the public, at large, should become better acquainted with what it is like to be a person who stutters. I also saw it as a means of challenging myself by speaking in situations that I had always avoided.

I initially prepared for the venture by joining several public speaking clubs (similar to Toastmasters International), enabling me to improve my confidence and presentational skills.

I was surprised to learn of the diverse groups that require speakers for their weekly, monthly and annual meetings. There is an insatiable demand, together with a hugely active grapevine that rapidly circulated my particulars to other organizations.

But I could never have envisaged the extent to

which my engagements would escalate. During the past eight years, I have addressed several hundred such bodies.

Audiences appear genuinely interested in what I have to say -the feedback is always so positive. Many of those present confide that (prior to my talk) they did not appreciate the extent to which stuttering can affect someone's life.

During the question and answer sessions, and subsequent social interaction, my listeners frequently tell me that they feel better equipped for any future communication with persons who stutter. I feel that the lives of many PWS could be significantly improved if more of us were prepared to speak publicly about the subject.

It really is to our mutual advantage. However, I fully appreciate that the very nature of stuttering is such that some may well feel reluctant, or unable, to discuss it with others.

Greater openness about my life-long difficulties has proved invaluable in helping me to overcome previous embarrassment. Revealing my 'darkest secret', to all and sundry, has greatly helped the desensitization process. I sincerely hope that some of you may be tempted to do likewise.

Quite apart from deriving immense personal satisfaction, you have the added incentive of knowing that your actions could be beneficial to others.

CHAPTER 18

THE VALUE OF INTERNET DISCUSSION GROUPS

When I first joined the internet forums, I was surprised and intrigued by the nature of the exchanges that were taking place. My reaction will be better understood when I explain that, throughout my life, I had met very few people who stuttered. I was also blissfully unaware of the existence of self-help groups or other supportive organizations.

After living in virtual isolation (from other PWS) for more than 50 years, I now found myself reading intimate and moving details about the experiences of total strangers scattered around the globe.

It was bizarre, yet somehow reassuring, to learn that there were so many others who had experienced (or were still experiencing) similar struggles, heartaches and disappointments.

At first, I just absorbed what I was reading without making any effort to respond. Everyone seemed to know everyone else – each forum appeared to be an established social circle. I wondered how they would react to intervention by a newcomer and questioned whether or not I had anything of value to contribute. Why should someone on the other side of the world be interested in things occurring in my life?

I JOINED IN THE DISCUSSION

It didn't take me long to change my thinking. When someone recounted a particular incident; raised a specific issue; or asked for advice; I felt an urge to respond. After all, they were talking about matters to which I could relate. The circumstances may not have been identical but there were many similarities to the personal experiences that I had encountered. I, therefore, felt qualified to offer my views.

In due course I submitted my first post; quickly followed by the second...and the third. Within a relatively short period of time, I had become a regular subscriber to several different forums, spending several hours each day at the keyboard.

The subjects under discussion were varied and plentiful, creating daily exercise for my old grey matter. Before long, I wasn't content to merely respond to topics generated by other members. There were new subjects that I wished to initiate myself.

I should explain that my introduction to the Internet (and discussion groups) coincided with the commencement of another very significant chapter in my life. I refer to my decision to seek the assistance of a stuttering management program that encourages a holistic approach, including assertive self-acceptance, non-avoidance and expansion of one's comfort zones. As a result, there were so many exciting things happening to me.

Having been provided with new tools and techniques (that enabled me to combat blocking and deal with troublesome words/sounds), I devised an extensive and pro-active plan of action designed to challenge my self

–limiting beliefs and widen my restrictive self-image (as outlined in the following paper that I contributed to the 2003 International Stuttering Awareness conference “STEP OUTSIDE: Why expanding comfort zones can improve our stuttering and lead to more fulfilling lives.”

We don’t change behaviors by retaining the status quo – I knew that I needed to confront my fears and tread unfamiliar paths. Like the turtle, we can only move forward when we stick our neck out.

My daily efforts to live a more expansive lifestyle were incredibly stimulating - I approached each day with optimism, vigor and zest. I grew progressively in confidence and stature as I fulfilled a wide range of challenges and roles.

But, although I felt considerable personal inner satisfaction, I also recognized the value of sharing those experiences with others.

So, whenever I accomplished a specific breakthrough, or completed a new venture (such as winning a public speaking contest; attending an acting school; addressing a community group; hosting a charity concert; facilitating a workshop; or undertaking a live radio interview), I didn’t keep it to myself. I used the appropriate group as a vehicle to tell everyone else.

I also drew attention to many mundane occurrences that I felt were relevant and of interest. Relating those incidents had a very powerful impact upon me. Each time I relived a successful incident, it reaffirmed what I had achieved. I genuinely believe that my progress during recent years has been helped considerably by the fact that I have been able to tell myself (and others) about the positive

experiences I have enjoyed.

Some people may be of the opinion (and it's their prerogative to think whatever they choose) that speaking about one's successes is egotistical. Well, I happen to hold an opposing view. That was certainly not my motivation for sharing. It's simply that re-living the successful episodes strengthened my memories of those events. (I didn't feel too guilty because I knew that the delete button was always readily available to those who did not wish to read my posts).

ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE

Since early childhood, my stuttering was fuelled and perpetuated by the difficulties, setbacks, pain and catalogue of lost opportunities that I encountered. For over half a century, I constantly reminded myself of what I could NOT do, or the dire consequences of attempting to speak in certain situations.

I spent a lifetime accumulating, recounting and giving far too much prominence to the memories of negative speaking experiences. As a result, my stutter flourished and thrived.

The more I nourished and sustained it, the more it impacted upon my daily existence. I make no excuse for having reversed that trait. The worm has turned and, in direct contrast, I now constantly remind myself of my successes. You should never shirk from telling yourself how much you have achieved.

I recently read an interesting article that appears to justify the practice I have adopted for the past 11 years. Research indicates that when we savour and foster positive

experiences, it intensifies our positive responses to them. The longer something is held in our awareness, the more emotionally stimulating it becomes.

When we focus on positive happenings, it increases our positive emotions, which correspondingly generate health benefits in relation to our immune system and stress. Other long-term advantages of positive emotions are that they lift your mood and increase optimism, resilience and resourcefulness. They also counteract the effects of painful experiences, including trauma. So, you see, it appears that I was right all along.

Another spin-off (of speaking about our successes) is that it can encourage others to emulate the challenges that we have fulfilled. I frequently receive feedback from people (both within and outside the stuttering community) who generously confide that my revelations have influenced them to confront obstacles in their own lives.

From a personal point of view, learning about a PWS who successfully embraced public speaking had a huge impact upon my self-concept. Until I heard him speak (in early 2000), I truly believed that such a role lay outside the scope of someone who stuttered. I was inspired by his activities and wanted to tread a similar path.

That fortuitous occurrence sowed the seeds of an empowering belief that was to subsequently change the course of my life. After more than half a century of self-doubt and holding back, I finally allowed myself to entertain the thought that I could do something meaningful about my communication issues. The rest is history, as they say.

I cannot overemphasize the immense benefits that I have derived from participating in online discussion groups. Perusing posts submitted by my fellow members rekindled memories of earlier events that I had long forgotten. Each time I composed a response, I continued to travel that mental journey through time, jogging additional recollections from the past.

When we start thinking about one thing it can trigger a chain reaction— creating links to similar occurrences. That’s how memories are stored in the brain. I never cease to be amazed by what the subconscious can unveil when it is stimulated or interrogated. Fear and self-doubt figure prominently in the lives of many people, not just those who stutter. They can sabotage hopes and aspirations.

When left to our own devices, it is possible that we may never summon up sufficient courage to confront the issues that are impeding our progress. However, as a member of an online forum, some people gain confidence and encouragement by leaning upon the knowledge, camaraderie and collective support that are present within that group.

I have witnessed this on many occasions, particularly in two of the forums to which I subscribe. Those who invite guidance and suggestions from others in advance of an upcoming event (maybe a job interview or public speaking engagement) report positive outcomes. But, of course, prior consultation does not always guarantee success. Following a highly successful work presentation, one member of the Yahoo neurosemanticsofstuttering group wrote: *Thanks for your very kind messages. Not*

being alone is very important. Of course, when we are in speaking situations, it's up to us and we are the only one who can do something. But I believe in the effects of "coaching" and positive speech. You know, for this oral presentation, I feel I was prepared like an Olympic athlete! Best coaches (and champions) in the world had provided me the best advice. I have been very lucky.

Online discussion groups represent different things to different people. You've probably heard it said that we are all unique. Well, that really is the case. We originate from different backgrounds; are subjected to different life experiences; and accumulate different degrees of emotional baggage.

We commence from different starting lines; operate in accordance with different beliefs, self-concepts and values; and possess different aspirations. The desired aim of one person is likely to differ appreciably from the expectations of another member.

While some hope to deal effectively with their stuttering issues, others may not believe that this is possible. Those who wish to adopt a more expansive lifestyle will, undoubtedly, welcome tips on how to achieve that goal, whereas less ambitious members might be content to follow a less-risky passage.

GROUPS HAVE THEIR OWN ORIENTATIONS

I have found that online groups vary considerably in their objective, format and content of discussion, as well as the composition, age, attitude and behavior of members. Some forums tend to fulfill the role of a support group, while others have a more specific agenda.

For example, the Yahoo *neurosemanticsofstuttering* group was set up for the “primary purpose of helping and working with PWS to overcome stuttering, utilizing Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), Neuro-Semantic tools and other cognitive methods to help achieve that outcome.”

Another forum caters wholly for those with covert issues, while a separate group exists to assist parents of children and teens who stutter.

Some stuttering management programs also offer online support for clients, incorporating the written and spoken word.

The National Stuttering Association provides a network of online meeting places to facilitate interaction between members of its local chapters (self-help groups), as well as an additional group that allows delegates to keep in touch between annual conferences.

The websites of several forums also contain a wealth of useful reading material, together with links to podcasts, videos and other online resources.

I think it is relevant to highlight the fact that, whereas the majority of online discussion groups restrict access to its members, some allow the written exchanges to be viewed by the public.

I add this cautionary note because there may be occasions when a subscriber might unwittingly furnish personal details that he/she would not wish to be read by all and sundry.

Another point to be considered is that the exchanges may, occasionally, become a little heated as members write about matters of an emotional nature. Freed from their customary struggles with the spoken word, some

PWS adopt a more assertive (or even aggressive) role and communicate, with passion, exactly what they want to say. Words are plucked from the extremities of their vocabulary without the usual anticipatory fear associated with stuttering.

For so many years, transferring my thoughts to paper was the only effective way in which I could meaningfully express myself. My past oral exchanges were littered with words that I considered to be inferior or, in some cases, totally inappropriate. I succumbed to mediocrity simply because I did not want the listener to see/hear me stutter.

While it is heartening to see members letting go and giving vent to their feelings, it is important that the rules of netiquette should always be observed.

We can be both assertive and respectful at the same time.

Thankfully, personal attacks are infrequent and can be quickly nipped in the bud by the sensible intervention of the moderator(s). There are forums to suit everyone – it's simply a case of trial and error to determine which satisfy your individual needs. If you find that a particular group is not providing what you require, then simply transfer your attention elsewhere. That's exactly what I've done.

At one time, I held simultaneous membership of no fewer than 11 groups. (No wonder my wife used to complain that I was spending too much time online.)

Today I am far more selective and restrict my contributions to only two groups. As stuttering has ceased to be an issue in my life, I have greatly reduced the number

of posts that I now submit. Although I no longer find it necessary to publicly reinforce the memories of my positive experiences,

I still occasionally share details of such occurrences. My principal purposes are to illustrate how such challenges can be created; reiterate the value of exploring uncharted waters; or to demonstrate a particular point.

Nowadays, my limited participation is generally confined to subjects that ignite my interest, or in responding to specific questions that are posed by others. Due to fluctuations within a group, it is not unusual for certain topics to be resurrected from time to time, as new members join.

LEARNING FROM OTHERS

I have gained varying degrees of benefit from virtually every forum to which I have subscribed. We can all learn something (however small) from each other's stories. Diversity encourages different perspectives. The Internet has become such a valuable asset in enabling those who stutter to communicate with each other.

Over the years, I have developed some close friendships that now extend outside the parameters of those groups. Reading about the lives of other PWS can provide an interesting insight into how they deal (or have dealt) with their respective difficulties, as well as offering reciprocal inspiration. It can also alert us to possibilities of which we were previously unaware – in relation to therapies, techniques and opportunities that allow us to unearth our true potential when we are prepared to expose

ourselves to uncertainty and change. In effect, it can open our eyes to possibilities that we could never have imagined.

As a result of these online interactions, and the revealing evaluations that we have retrospectively conducted in relation to past (and more recent) events, many of us now possess a far greater understanding of the issues that shape our lives. We are also better informed about how we (and others) react to the diverse challenges that confront us, and have discovered that there are exciting and fulfilling paths available for us to tread.

But, perhaps, most importantly, we know that we need never again experience the isolation of walking those unfamiliar paths alone.

2012

CHAPTER 20

THE BEST MEDICINE

I was in intense pain; my back had been causing problems for several days and I could not sleep. We had just returned home from holiday, where the non-supportive bed had been unsympathetic to my medical condition and I was still suffering the consequences.

Wearily, I made my way to the doctors' surgery; I required something to alleviate the extreme discomfort. The usual pills had failed to have the desired effect and I was in desperate need of relief. As I sat in the waiting room, it was rather ironic that I dozed intermittently. My eyelids seemed as though they were implanted with lead; I felt absolutely drained and devoid of any energy.

My usual GP was unavailable, and so I had no alternative but to accept the first appointment offered. The doctor, a youthful female locum, appeared quite attentive as I explained my predicament. But, for some reason, I felt uncomfortable. Could my poor physical condition be affecting my speech?

The supreme confidence I had exuded since joining the McGuire Programme (just three months earlier) had, momentarily, evaporated and I sensed that certain tricks (which had been such a trait of my life-long stutter) were

attempting to return. It was extremely disconcerting; I could not understand what was happening.

I succeeded in explaining the circumstances of my medical problem without too much difficulty, although I was convinced that I may have practiced minor word substitution. I had promised myself that avoidance was a thing of the past and....now I was succumbing to temptation. The medical practitioner duly handed me the prescription I had sought and I bade farewell. I felt crest-fallen and insecure as I left the surgery; my self-esteem and confidence tinged with fragility and doubt.

Upon my return home, I reflected on the occurrence; deeply concerned at my performance. Had the bubble burst? Was this the start of a regressive journey down the slippery slope? Fortunately, I was not permitted to dwell on the matter any further, as I sought the refuge and comfort of my own unyielding mattress. Within seconds I was asleep. When I eventually surfaced, the painkillers had performed their purpose and I felt surprisingly refreshed. Despite the obvious physical improvement, the memory of the unpleasant surgery experience was still uppermost in my mind.

I knew that I could not move forward until I had eradicated the setback I had experienced: it was essential that I practiced cancellation. Within minutes, I made a disciplined telephone call to the surgery to arrange another appointment for the following day. Not only that, I insisted on being allocated the same doctor, at a time identical to

the original encounter. If I was going to cancel, then I wanted to do it with style. I needed to re-create a similar set of circumstances (albeit 24 hours later).

At the appointed hour (9-30am), I entered the same surgery/office, where I was greeted by (yes, you've guessed) the same receptionist. I occupied the same seat and waited for the same GP to call my name. She appeared surprised, as I deposited myself in the chair before her, and enquired if there had been any improvement in my back condition.

Resisting time pressure, I paused, secured eye contact and acquainted her with the fact that I was a recovering stutterer. Outlining the purpose of my revisit, I apologized for taking up her valuable time, but stressed the importance of cancellation to my successful recovery.

I believed that my wellbeing was at stake and felt totally justified in enlisting her aid to resolve what I considered to be a genuine health problem. Would she view it in the same light? I fully expected some kind of admonishment (or, at least, a display of displeasure) but, to my amazement, she exhibited considerable interest and developed the discussion further. We spoke for at least 25 minutes, while I related experiences about my recovery.

Indeed, when I suggested that I might incur the wrath of her backlog of waiting patients, she made it clear that she would much prefer to continue with our oral exchanges, rather than fulfil her mundane consultations. As we parted,

the accommodating medical practitioner confided that I had “made her day”. “Don’t hesitate to come back at any time, I’d be delighted to see you”, she added.

I thanked her profusely for her courtesy, patience and understanding, but diplomatically stressed that I hoped my future visits would be few and far between. We laughed, shook hands and I left the surgery feeling ten feet tall. (Indeed, I had grown in stature to such an extent, that I have a distinct recollection of bowing my head slightly in order to negotiate the consulting room door).

That visit proved invaluable; the original episode had caused me a great deal of consternation, and it was imperative that I replaced it with a positive occurrence. Had I not orchestrated a cancellation, then I have no doubt that the former uncertainty and fear would have festered and multiplied.

Stuttering is an interactive, self-perpetuating system of components, which thrives on bad experiences. It is fuelled by the memories of unpleasant speaking difficulties (and associated situations) that have accumulated throughout our lives.

After joining the Programme, (and, finally, experiencing the removal of the inhibitive oral shackles), I vowed that I would never again nourish and sustain the debilitating demon that had so adversely controlled my life since childhood. I knew I had to arrange an action replay,

without delay, in order to redress the balance, and get back on track.

The outcome was just what the doctor ordered, allowing me to continue my successful passage to recovery.

August 2000

CHAPTER 20

SUMMARIZING---PLUS TESTIMONY TO THE POWER OF SELF-HELP

PRESENTED TO THE ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE AMERICAN SPEECH-LANGUAGE-HEARING ASSN., 2012

I understand that I commenced stuttering at age of three.

I had speech therapy when I was young – but I cannot recall any major problems until I entered high school at the age of 11.

I have vivid memories of struggling to give my name and address at the initial registration in front of 100 new pupils.

Reading aloud in class was a nightmare. As the reading progressed around room, I would be calculating 10 desks ahead the passages I believed I was going to have to read.

Realizing that they contained many words I could not say, when the reading eventually came to me, I would opt out and it would pass to next pupil.

I never asked, nor responded to, questions in class for fear of looking a fool. I knew the answers, I wanted to participate – it was so frustrating.

I had particular difficulty with the letter “b”, which, as you can imagine, was a problem because my surname is Badmington.

I also experienced difficulty in saying words commencing with the letters c, d, f, g, k, l, m, n, p, s, t and v (to name but a few). Half of the alphabet lay outside my scope and I would avoid using words commencing with those letters at all costs.

My mind would race ahead like radar and when one of those words loomed large on the horizon, I developed the expertise to provide an instant synonym – a word meaning the same but commencing with a different letter. I became a “walking thesaurus”.

This is called approach avoidance - it doesn't just apply to persons who stutter. Other people avoid doing things because they fear them...and it snowballs.

It shapes our personality and self image. It influences our thoughts and actions.

So even at an early age, I was to develop a host of negative self-limiting beliefs:

I believed that I could not use certain letters.

I believed that I could not speak in front of groups.

I believed that I would stutter when giving detailed explanations, or when I was the centre of attention.

Another very important belief was that I would never be able to deal with my stuttering issues. I shall return to that point as my talk progresses.

These beliefs were to become reinforced throughout my life as I continued to have problems in those situations.

That's how my stutter developed and thrived – fuelled by the memories of negative speaking experiences.

I constantly focussed on my speech at all times. When I awoke in the morning, the first thing that came into my mind was “How will you be able to deal with the speaking situations that arise today?” Throughout the day that thought would recur.

And last thing at night, as I lay my head on the pillow, I would be thinking, “How will you be able to deal with the speaking situations that arise tomorrow?” Speech, speech, speech - it consumed me.

I could never say my name and so I always carried a piece of paper with it written on.

But one day, I didn't have it with me and this caused me a great deal of grief.

I was 18 years of age at the time and quite a prominent athlete. Having been selected for a prestigious sporting event, I promptly turned up with my equipment but I did not have the courage or confidence to introduce myself.

The organizers did not know who I was – so I hung around conspicuously, hoping and praying that someone would come up to me and say – “Are you Alan Badmington?”.

But that didn't happen and I watched with horror and disappointment as they selected someone else to take the field in my stead.

A person who stutters can have difficulty asking for items in stores. It's far easier today with the advent of self-service outlets. But that hasn't always been the case.

I remember, as a young boy, my mother would ask me to go to the grocery store for potatoes. I've already told you that I couldn't say words commencing with the letter 'p'.

I would wait in line, rehearsing in my head “potatoes, potatoes, potatoes”.

When the store assistant eventually asked me what I wanted, I would answer ”Onions” - because I didn't have difficulties with vowels.

But I suppose it had its consolation - we had the finest onion soup in the area because I always went home with onions.

The little things in life that a fluent speaker takes so much for granted lie outside the scope of many persons who stutter.

I never asked for the time or directions -I would continue searching and searching.

At the age of 19 (when my hair was dark and there wasn't a wrinkle in sight) I made an important decision, influenced by the fact that I stuttered.

I realized that I could take a relatively easy passage through life by avoiding social interaction and taking employment that didn't require a great deal of speaking. Simple, isn't it, if you don't speak you don't stutter.

Many people do just that – that's why the full extent of the problem is never realized.

People can't understand why you stutter in certain circumstances, yet appear relatively fluent in others.

Some days, the stutter can be worse than others.

It can be very situational. It can depend upon who you are speaking to – or how you happen to feel.

It can depend on whether you are ill, tired, or if you've had an emotional upset.

It can depend if you've had a row with your wife, or if you've had a row with your girlfriend. I'm told it's 10 times worse if you've had a row with your wife and girlfriend but, of course, I'm not speaking from personal experience.

I said that I realised I could take an easier passage through life by seeking employment that involved limited speaking - but that was not the path I wished to tread.

I knew I had to face my fears head on – and so I did something that most people would consider idiotic for someone with a stutter.

I applied to join the Police Service - because I knew that I needed to have contact with the public.

In those days, the interview was relatively brief and comprised just a few questions, plus the usual security checks.

By carefully selecting my responses, and using words that I knew I could say, I conned them and gained acceptance.

I initially kept my head above water by using avoidance techniques.

But every time you avoid a word (or a particular speaking situation), the fear level increases. It grows and grows.

You can hide for so long but the time will finally come when you have to say that word – you have to speak in that particular situation.

The crunch came when I had to give evidence in court for the very first time. I remember it as clearly as though it were yesterday.

I knew that I was going to have to say the oath. I had calculated well in advance that the oath comprised 23 words –19 of which I knew I couldn't say. So the odds were heavily stacked against me.

The fear and trepidation were immense in the weeks leading up to the court hearing. I remember walking into the courtroom as a fresh-faced 19 year old - with every eye upon me.

I stepped up into the wooden witness box. I placed my left hand on the Bible, raised my right arm in the air and said, “I-I-I ssss...., I-I-I ssss..., I-I-I ssss... And that’s as far as I got.

Many years later I composed a limerick that recaptured that humiliating experience in verse.

A policeman in court with a stutter
While giving the oath, caused a flutter
He said “I...Ssssswear”
Then gave up in despair
Not a single word more could he utter

But you don't just give the oath – then came the evidence-in-chief. You can’t change the defendant’s name, the date, time or location of the offence. You can’t change the make, license number or colour of the automobile. They are all non-negotiable.

If I found a drunk lying in Somerset Street, it was a huge temptation to help him around into adjoining High Street to make the arrest - because I knew it would make things so much easier when I eventually had to give evidence in court.

I was moved indoors away from my much-needed public contact when a supervisory officer wrote (of me) –“When this officer gives evidence in court, he is an embarrassment to all”.

A few years later, he also wrote, “The only reason he has not been considered for promotion is his speech impediment”.

When I was a young officer, I passed the promotion examination and came third in England and Wales, which qualified me to be considered for an accelerated promotion scheme at the prestigious Police College – which would have rocketed me up through ranks.

But they would not accept me because of my speech.

In 1977, I acquired a small electronic device called the Edinburgh Masker.

It worked on the principle that if you cannot hear your own voice, there is a less likelihood that you will stutter.

But it really was a monstrosity. Every time I spoke, all I heard was “Buzz, buzz, buzz”.

If someone spoke when I was speaking, I could not hear them. So, I became very adept at lip reading.

I wore the device for 10/12/14 hours every day for next 20 years. It became my mechanical crutch

It improved my speech but it never made me fluent.

But I tell you what it did - under the umbrella of that masking sound, it somehow gave me the confidence to venture out into the world and speak in situations that I know I would, otherwise, have avoided.

In doing so, I acquired useful interpersonal skills which many persons who stutter do not possess.

They tend to remain on the fringes of conversation, whereas other people acquire those skills progressively from an early age. I'm not talking about fluency - I'm referring to the art of conversation.

After a while, I persuaded my employers to allow me to return to operational duties. I wore the Masker at all times. But, it would always let me down in really important situations.

I recall an irate chief officer of police prematurely terminating a promotion board interview (while I was struggling), yelling "Get out, you're wasting my time. Don't come back, I'll never promote you".

And that did wonders for my self-confidence.

In 1996, I was involved in an automobile accident where I sustained whiplash injuries. As a result, I was unable to wear the Edinburgh Masker.

My speech hit rock bottom. I was in pain; I would not answer the telephone; and I had very limited social contact.

If I was walking along the street and I saw someone I knew, I would cross over to avoid speaking. And I had a great deal of time to dwell on my speech.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I look around this conference room, I can see many glum faces. Well, let me tell you that

you've heard the bad news; from now on it's good news - so SMILE you miserable lot: SMILE!!!

In April 2000, my whole life changed. My wife spotted a notice advertising an open day for a self-help group for persons who stutter. I wasn't interested - no way was I going to attend.

Over the years, there were occasions when I had attained increased fluency in controlled environments - yet it was always cruelly snatched away when I returned into the outside world.

You see, there was no support, there was no back-up...and these are so essential whether you are attempting to deal with drugs, alcohol, stuttering or whatever.

I had suffered so much heartache and disappointment that I vowed I would never again place myself in such a situation. I was so skeptical...but my wife had other ideas.

Using her feminine wiles, she conveniently arranged for us to be passing the venue at the very same time that the event was being held.

As we drove into the parking lot, I was still resisting. But she dragged me screaming and kicking into the hall where I saw a group of persons speaking about their experiences of stuttering.

One spoke about how he had won several public speaking trophies in competition with fluent speakers. I was VERY impressed.

In 1954, British athlete Roger Bannister became the first person to run a mile in under four minutes. Athletes from all over the world had been attempting to achieve that feat for many years. It was considered impossible.

The moment he broke that mystical barrier, the mindset of other athletes changed overnight. They now had evidence that it could be achieved.

Within one year, many others had fulfilled the same feat. The following year, more than 300 attained what had previously believed to be an impossible goal. Such is the power of belief.

Well, the man that I heard speaking about how he successfully embraced public speaking became my Roger Bannister and for the first time in my life, I allowed myself to entertain the thought (and hope) that I might be able to do something meaningful about my speech.

That fortuitous encounter sowed the seeds of an empowering belief that would subsequently change the course of my life.

May 4, 2000 will be forever etched upon my memory because it was on that day that I attended a self-help workshop, in my home country of Wales, together with a group of other people who stuttered.

Coming into contact with others who were experiencing similar issues was, indeed, a defining moment. I no longer felt alone.

Everyone was so supportive. I soon become attuned to the camaraderie that permeated within the group.

Those who were inclined to hold back gained encouragement from witnessing the positive behavior of the more established and gregarious members.

There were many role models to emulate. Inhibitions were cast aside as we all participated in a wide-range of activities.

The moment I learned about the harmful implications of avoidance, I made a pact with myself that I would never again avoid any word, letter, sound or situation.

During the past 12 years, I have not once succumbed to temptation. As a result, there are no longer any words or letters that hold an emotional charge.

For the very first time in my life, I felt confident while speaking in front of a group. It was disconcerting at first listening to my own voice - because I had purposely blocked it out for the preceding 20 years.

But, having discarded my mechanical crutch, I could hear it loud and clear...and, do you know what, I liked what I heard and I haven't stopped talking since.

During that workshop, I learned many new things about myself. I discovered that, when in the company of other persons who stutter, I no longer felt that I was being judged. Speaking ceased to be a chore – it became exciting and fun.

But I didn't just want to speak well in a supportive environment – I wanted to experience that freedom in EVERY speaking situation.

In order to achieve that goal, I realized that I needed to lead a more expansive lifestyle and routinely step outside my safe areas.

When I returned home, I knew what I had to do. I set about dismantling the psychological framework that had supported my stutter for more than 50 years.

I spent hours plucking toll free numbers from Yellow Pages and calling them with fictitious enquiries. All I wanted to do was to talk, talk, talk and I was doing it at someone else's expense.

I rang hotels and restaurants –reserving tables in the name of Alan Badmington. What a joy to be able to say my own name.

I would call back 20 minutes later - “Alan Badmington here, there's been a change of plan - I'd like to cancel my reservation”. I would never leave them high and dry.

And I did one thing I had never done before. I walked into the doctors' reception room; I stood in line and in full hearing of everyone else, I said, “Please may I have the prescription for Alan Badmington”.

It may seem mundane to you but to me it was exhilarating.

Previously my wife would have collected it on my behalf, or I would have handed them a piece of paper with my

name written on. When I left the building, they had to enlarge the door because I had grown 10 feet tall.

But I'd like to stress that whatever approach one adopts, it is not merely sufficient just to work on the mechanics of your speech.

In my opinion, that is only of limited value. In order to achieve permanent gains, I believe you need to change your stuttering mindset.

You see, despite the many successes that I enjoyed during that self-help workshop, when I returned home I was still operating under my old belief system.

What I mean by that is:

I still had fears of ordering at a drive thru.

I still had fears of speaking on the telephone.

I still had the fear of using those 13 letters of the alphabet that had always caused me so many difficulties.

Those fears don't disappear overnight.

Our beliefs and our self-image play such an important part. They create the script by which we act out our lives.

They set the boundaries to our accomplishments.

Throughout my life, everything that I did was in accordance with what I believed about myself and what I thought I was capable of doing. These views (this personal blueprint) restricted me from undertaking many things that I considered lay outside my scope.

What we believe, and how we see ourselves, influences our thoughts. And what we think - shapes our behaviours.

If we believe that we cannot do something, then it is unlikely that we will successfully fulfil that task. In fact, we will probably avoid it.

But if you change your beliefs (and make them more empowering), you change your thoughts. And when you change your thoughts, you change your behaviours AND your life.

I initiated change by identifying the areas in which I was holding back. I then devised an extensive plan of action that allowed me to consolidate my speech in a wide range of circumstances.

In effect, I expanded my comfort zones and did the things I thought I could not do. The more I did them, the more comfortable I became in undertaking those roles.

And, during recent years, I have achieved things that for most of my life I considered impossible.

Speaking in front of groups had always figured prominently amongst my list of fears.

I addressed the situation by enrolling in drama classes, as well as personal development and psychology workshops that embraced such issues as assertiveness, self-esteem, listening skills, confidence building and the reframing of unhelpful thoughts.

In fact, I would seek out any opportunity to interact with total strangers.

I also joined a public speaking club. Well...not one, not two but three. And over the past 12 years, I have enjoyed a pleasant degree of success in public speaking contests, as well as undertaking numerous engagements on three different continents.

Please be assured that I'm not telling you this for any egotistical reason – I'm merely trying to illustrate the transformation that has occurred.

Public speaking now occupies a prominent and exciting place in my life.

In 2004, I went to Australia where I was a keynote speaker at the World Congress for People Who Stutter. I spoke to a large international audience about how expanding our comfort zones can help us to lead more fulfilling lives.

I told them that when we achieve something we, hitherto, considered impossible, it causes us to reconsider our limiting beliefs.

If we conquer something that has challenged our advancement, we grow in stature.

I told them that it opens our eyes to possibilities that we could never have imagined.

When we are stretched by a new experience, we likewise grow as individuals.

I also told them that I feel I am a more complete human being; my life is so much more meaningful.

Stepping outside my comfort zone, and treading a less familiar path, has greatly enhanced my existence.

Living a safe and predictable life denies us opportunities to discover just how courageous and extraordinary we are.

We gain strength and confidence each time we look fear in the face.

The only limitations are those we impose upon ourselves.

But when left to our own devices, it is possible that we may never summon up sufficient courage to confront the issues that impede our progress.

However, as members of self-help organizations, or online forums, some people gain confidence and encouragement by leaning upon the knowledge and collective support that are present within those groups. I have certainly benefited immensely from such participation.

Self-help is to be found under many different guises. The most commonly recognized self-help activities are those that involve interaction with other persons who stutter.

But, as I have already mentioned, I explored a variety of resources (totally independent of the stuttering community) in my quest to resolve my communication issues.

I viewed each as an important piece in my personal stuttering jigsaw puzzle.

No one has ever changed behaviors by retaining the status quo. You need to be proactive. It's only in the dictionary that success comes before work.

Like the turtle, you can only move forward when you stick your neck out. And that's exactly what I've been doing for the past 12 years.

I told you earlier about the fact that I used to rely so heavily upon word substitution. But it involved using so much energy and effort. My mind was constantly in turmoil.

But fear is often only a thought in your head. That principle can be applied to anything that we fear, or feel uncomfortable about. If you continue to avoid it, the fear will grow and grow.

But if you have the courage to confront it, you'll find that (in the majority of cases) the fear is merely a thought in your head – and it will go away.

Much of my talk here this afternoon has focused on the difficulties that I have experienced throughout my life.

But as my talk draws to a close, I would like to mention an incident that brings a smile to my face as I recall it all these years later

It involved my wedding. Leading up that big day, I suspected that I would have difficulties in saying my vows.

It's a strange phenomenon that when a person who stutters speaks in unison with someone else, then he or she doesn't

stutter. The other party merely has to whisper the words, or simply move their lips.

With this in mind, we approached the vicar and asked him if he would kindly repeat my vows with me. He agreed.

But what I hadn't bargained for was my caring bride, who also decided to join in.

So when I was reciting:

“I Alan take you Barbara to be my lawful wedded wife”, the three of us were speaking simultaneously.

Everything went well – without a hitch, but to this very day, I still wake up during the early hours of the morning, in a cold sweat, wondering:

- (1) Am I married to my wife?
- (2) Am I married to the vicar?
- (3) Is my wife married to the vicar?, or
- (4) Are we all joined in holy matrimony?

Some people now say I talk too much, a charge to which I willingly plead guilty. But I have waited for more than half a century to say exactly what I want to say.

The debilitating oral shackles that inhibited me since childhood have finally been removed and I can now pluck whatever words I wish from the extremities of my vocabulary and say them without any fear of stuttering.

There is no fear. I still get the occasional reminder – but they are few and far between.

Having discovered (rather late in life) that the human voice is such a wondrous thing, I now look forward to using it at every possible opportunity.

After years of frustration and under-achievement, I am finally participating widely on life's stage.

Speaking at events such as this has greatly assisted me to come to terms with my stuttering issues. I relish these challenges.

So, I should like to thank the Fluency Committee for kindly inviting me to address you this afternoon....and I should also like to thank you all for your courtesy in not falling asleep.

But I would like to close by paying tribute to my wife, Babs, to whom I owe everything for persuading me to give it one last try.

I've composed a little verse that encompasses my feelings for her and I'd like to share it with you:

My stutter has been such a load
In childhood, the first seeds were sowed
But thanks to my wife
I have a new life
An incredible debt she is owed

