



IF YOUR  
**MOCKINGBIRD**  
WONT SING

A NEW LOOK AT STUTTERING

IS STUTTERING A PERFORMANCE ANXIETY?

RUTH MEAD

# IF YOUR MOCKINGBIRD WON'T SING

Ruth Mead

PART 1  
IF YOUR MOCKINGBIRD WON'T SING.....3

PART 2  
METAPHOR OF THE MOCKINGBIRD.....11

PART 3  
STUTTERING AS PERFORMANCE  
ANXIETY.....18

PART 4  
SUMMARY.....55

## PART 1

### IF YOUR MOCKINGBIRD WON'T SING

I had a major stuttering problem until I was 33 years old. I did not have one of those “cute little stutters.” I stuttered violently.

During those years the main thing I learned in speech therapy went something like this: “If you work hard enough to develop speech controls, you can improve.” Developing controls meant planning how to say words before I spoke, when and how deeply to breathe, scanning ahead, switching words and talking to the rhythm of a metronome.

I was so adept at control mechanisms I could create them in my sleep.

I wasn't able to provide adequate pushback to this philosophy shared by speech therapists at that time because my own reasoning was a rehash of what I'd been taught. I edited my speech constantly and believed "my conscious mind is in control of speech" and the more panicky version of that theory: "If I don't work hard at various controls, I will suffer the ultimate catastrophic failure: not being able to force a single word out of my mouth."

I was paying the price, even then, of preferring the voice of authority to my own observations, one observation being that people who stuttered were the only people I knew who constantly thought about the mechanics of speech, leading me to conclude that stutterers insert a conscious element into speech that served as resistance to flow.

Like most people who stutter, my stuttering was situational. I could speak perfectly when reading aloud to myself (no one within hearing distance). The flow was there. However, as soon as an adult entered the room, the flow stopped, as I thought of each word I said as well as how to say each word.

Stuttering seemed to take on all the properties of a

full-blown performance anxiety: the more I wanted to perform well, the more I stuttered and the more I tried to control my performance, the more stuck I became.

I vaguely knew there were two systems in the brain and also that the possibility of conflict is endless between the intuitive “experiencing” System-1 and the theoretical “remembering” System-2.

System-1 is subliminal, operating in a spontaneous automatic way, taking care of automatic, spontaneous endeavors such as the mechanics of speaking and breathing...all with no conscious control or thought or effort.

There is also the theoretical “remembering” System-2: which exerts conscious control over the world around it, often acting in ways destructive to the best interests of natural spontaneous System-1. (*THINKING, FAST AND SLOW* by Daniel Kahneman).

Speech is flow, and timing between these Systems is so crucial to fluency that even one attempt to control my stutter was enough resistance to interrupt that flow.

When resistance moved out of the way, flow happened.

This belief that I had to control the mechanics of speech seemed to trigger the conscious part of my brain (System-2) signaling it to do something it was never meant to do: edit the production of speech.

We know the brain automates speech, freeing the mind from monitoring what we say. When motion signals move to the motor system without interference from the conscious mind, speech becomes automatic.

I lost this spontaneous automatic aspect of speech when I tried to control speech.

My stuttering disappeared a long time before I knew exactly why, even though I had written reams of observations during the time my stuttering went away. Later, when I read John Harrison's *REDEFINING STUTTERING* I felt I had at last come home. Harrison confirmed my own discoveries: in general, that the conscious mind, because of its inability to think of more than 1, 2 or at the most 3 things at a time, is clearly *unable* to do the incredible multi-tasking necessary to perform the astounding complexities of speech. And to expect the conscious mind to do what it has no ability to do, can, and frequently does, create a state of panic.

“Ironically blocking happens because of *over-control*” Harrison writes.

And Barbara Dahm concurs: “I stand in disagreement with my colleagues who argue that stuttering happens because of lack of control. They say that head jerks, facial grimaces, repetitions and laryngeal blocks are signs of a lack of control, but this is an illusion. The fact is that speaking is an automatic system in the brain. Neurologists say this, psycho-linguistic experts say this. The time has come for us to tell this to people who stutter.”

As I saw that recovery would only be found in allowing speech to function spontaneously and automatically, I was still unable to let go of old patterns.

Trying to speak naturally is still trying and trying is a major form of control. It was as if I said: “I’m not going to let my conscious mind control my speech any longer so I will work very hard at not working hard.”

The truth is: I simply couldn’t break through. I had a long legacy of angst from years of feeling “stuck” when I stuttered. This inability to move forward was just too hard.

When I was most afraid of losing the hard-won-ground I had gained in the “spontaneous department”, my temptation was to turn back to conscious System-2 and whine: “This control-free way is too hard and



scary! I miss my old control mechanisms!”

One day I looked at my *motivation* for giving up control. I was trying to stop controlling speech so *I could stop stuttering*. Suddenly I could see what was going on with my motivation. The fact is that as long as I was trying to stop controlling speech, I was not giving up control at all. I was simply trying not to stutter.

Sophie Sacca told me: “I know I must relinquish control over my speech completely if fluency results, but if my motivation is to speak smoothly, then I find myself back trying to gain control over speech again.”

Stuttering was still part of my remembered voice, and memory is hard to overcome. Finally I was able to stop controlling speech only because I was given a gift: a change of perspective brought about by a new metaphor. This new metaphor did its work underground and eventually began to affect my behavior....stuttered speech.

The following metaphor (along with the metaphor “speech is a river”) changed the way I was looking at speech. The result is that I saw automated speech as one of nature’s gifts, nothing I could earn or work for. I could either take it and say “thank you” or keep on struggling, pushing, panting, trying to manufacture

something already “there.”

I also realized that most problems are rooted in this control issue, a systemic problem in which System-2 clings to the illusion it is in control and ruins our performance in sports or speech or even playing a musical instrument.

## **PART 2**

### **A NEW METAPHOR**

Powerful metaphors make the invisible visible (picture electricity as water running through a pipe.) The mockingbird metaphor gave me clarity as to what is going on with both writing and verbal blocks.

The unconscious, as we know, speaks the language of symbol and metaphor. Just as “Speech is a River” went to work underground, undoing the illusion that I had to manufacture each word I spoke and each breath I took, the following mockingbird metaphor destroyed the illusion that my mind was capable of controlling the mechanics of speech.

This new metaphor began with something that wouldn't let go: a silly little song I had played for children on my violin. You probably know it:

“Hush, little baby, don't say a word.  
Momma's gonna buy you a mockingbird.

And if that mockingbird won't sing,  
Momma's gonna buy you a diamond ring."

Finally, I wrote: "If your mockingbird won't sing" in my notebook and simply waited to see if anything else wanted to be written.

A few minutes later: "This is about a mockingbird, not any old mockingbird, but what I believe to be *my* mockingbird...and apparently it won't sing."

I continued: "Furthermore, my stuttering problem may involve more than the fact I can't speak fluently. It may also involve a relationship between my mockingbird (my creative mind, or System 1) and me (my controlling mind...System 2)...who discovers her mockingbird won't sing and appoints herself as Bird Trainer whose job is to *make* her mockingbird perform.

It was as if I had no understanding that birds sing bird songs because they are birds, not because they are taught to sing or choose to sing. There is no consciously "trying to sing well" regarding the mechanics of bird-singing whatsoever.

Anyway, I obviously appointed myself "Bird Trainer", as if my mockingbird didn't naturally know *how* to sing. No matter how old-fashioned this may sound, I

truly believed my job was to *teach* my mockingbird to sing.

I command my bird: “Perform! Sing! I demand that you sing!” (and then smugly think “*There!* Now my mockingbird will sing!”)

But my mockingbird just sat in his cage and gawked at me.

And now my demands get a bit abusive. I go “Listen, Bud, you owe me a song or two. What is *wrong* with you? Have you got a rock in your craw or WHAT?”

And then I turn to threats: “Listen, I *know* you can sing if you *want* to sing. Well, listen to me and listen good...you better start *wanting* to sing if you know what’s good for you.”

But still my mockingbird won’t sing.

This ticks me off. This bird is NOT going to get to me. It may be true that I can’t teach my bird to sing but a *specialist* surely can!

So I take my mockingbird to the most experienced specialist I can find. I drive home alone. I’m so relieved. The specialist wouldn’t charge so much money if he didn’t know how to teach my bird to

perform, would he? Of course not! So I am happy and relieved. This specialist has the answer to my problem!!!

A few days later the specialist calls me: “Your bird is cured! I put him in a room by himself and he sang so beautifully.” And I say “Wow, cool, that’s great. I’ll be right over.”

The specialist has made a diploma ready for framing for my mockingbird, attesting to his cure.

This calls for a celebration. I cook a special dinner for the family and light the candles. I tie a big yellow ribbon on the birdcage, put the cage right by the table, and feed my bird his favorite nuts and fruit.

Dinner is over.

Now for the magical moment.

We wait expectantly for the mockingbird to perform. (Oh no! Not this again!) “Please! We are waiting. We want to hear you sing,” we plead.

My child, disappointed and sad, says “Poor widdle bird feels ‘scairt”.

And I agree. “That’s it!! That’s the problem!! My bird

is *afraid* to sing. Why didn't I think of this before? This bird needs a counselor to help him face his performance fear."

I take my bird to a counselor. She listens to me, then shakes her head sadly. She cannot help my mockingbird. "Mockingbirds have no fear," she tells me, therefore I can't cure your mockingbird's fears."

"Then what is *wrong*?" I plead.

"*Caged mockingbirds don't sing*. Release your mockingbird," she urged. "He has a song of his own."

We drive home, my mockingbird and me.

I am angry at the Counselor. She doesn't know how much my bird *needs* me. If it weren't for me, what would my poor mockingbird do?

But I am desperate.

I take the cage inside my house. I sit beside my mockingbird, my head in my hands. All day long I think about my bird that can't sing songs to me.

In spite of all my efforts, I can't make my mockingbird perform.

There's only one thing to do.

I carry the cage of my mockingbird into the balmy summer evening and open the door of his door. I cry as my beautiful mockingbird flies free.

I watch him soar into the sky.

Soon darkness falls and the moon rises in the sky. Thick clouds cover the moon for a time. I shiver all over, worrying about my mockingbird in the darkness, all alone.

I go back into my house and stand alone at the open door.

Wait!

What do I hear?

I rush through the open door, into the night air, running on tiptoe. High above, on the tallest branch of the sycamore tree, I see the shadow of a bird in the moonlight, white slashes on the wings of my mockingbird.

When the full moon bursts through the clouds, I hear a melodic love song, the plaintive soulful nighttime song of my mockingbird.



## **PART 3**

### **STUTTERING AS VERBAL PERFORMANCE ANXIETY**

(A paper presented to Assn. for Study & Cure of Stammering, Munich, Germany prior to the mockingbird metaphor.) I include this paper because it shows my mindset only days before the mockingbird metaphor came to me, changing my perspective on stuttering. This change in perspective, working underground, gradually began to affect my beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes regarding stuttering.

The paper reads as follows:

“I have probably learned more about the creative process and the blocking of my creative flow thru writing...and wrestling with writer’s block...than any other way. When my flow of writing gets “stuck” I ponder the anatomy of the block and compare writer’s block to urgent blocks I notice when I speak: the blocks associated with stuttering.

In this way, it is obvious that “writer’s block” stands as a metaphor for “speech blocks” I experience when I stutter.

All of us in this group stutter. No one has recovered and I have never heard of a “former stutterer.” Some of us stutter more than others. I stutter on most of my words, or none of them, depending on the situation. I have spent my life, as many of you have, going to therapists. With each new therapist I am filled with hope, but like you I am now at the end of both my rope *and* any hope I might have entertained when it comes to therapy.

It was as if I went to therapists with a major artery gushing blood...and all I was given was a Band-Aid.

There is, of course, no need to go into my failed experiences with therapists because we have spent days and hours discussing the fact that we are all in the same boat, and that (at last) we have nowhere else to go. I think I speak for all of us when I say that we have collectively hit the bottom of the barrel when it comes to any hope we might have entertained in regard to stopping stuttering.

So we have decided, all of us, to each separately set forth our understanding of both the nature of stuttering and our own experiences as to what seems to improve fluency for us as individuals.

I want to talk about the fact that as far as I am concerned, stuttering is due to something I refer to as “Verbal Performance Anxiety.” I haven’t found the cure for Verbal Performance Anxiety. I have only labeled it and attempted to explain my version of what happens when I block: something that seems to me at the moment to be the result of my conscious mind interfering with (even getting in charge of) my creative flow.

The driving force in my life is to break through performance anxiety so the rich life within me doesn’t always have to remain latent and un-verbalized. The courage and art to disclose my experience is present but the ability to relay my experience (by spoken word) so others can share my vision has been lost, maybe forever. At the moment I feel that disclosing who I am through writing may be the only way I can receive catharsis, insight and compassion for myself.

We all know what performance anxiety is. One member of our group is never able to take a test in school without performance anxiety rearing its head and making it impossible to pass the test, no matter how well he knows the material.

I have a friend who was required to give a violin recital for graduation and she became violently ill, shook all over, had to go to bed, and found it impossible to graduate because of this thing we call “performance anxiety.” She agonized over this dilemma, crying, “You don’t understand me. You *can’t* understand me. You have no fear at all but my fear has ruined my life.”

And so I explained to her the fact that just because I could perform on-stage playing my violin didn’t mean I didn’t suffer from performance anxiety. As I explained to her the debilitating humiliation of stuttering and the mystery of verbal performance anxiety, she stopped crying. “You really do understand,” she said quietly. “You really *do* understand me.”

So that’s one of the main things stuttering has done for me. This inability to speak when others

are around has not isolated me, but made me fit in, definitely connecting me with other people.

## **BEING ABLE TO SAY**

There is a motto stamped on the paperback copies of Berkeley and Hume used for Philosophy courses here at the University that reads:

“To be able to say what other men only think and feel is what makes poets and sages.”

Why does that innocent-sounding motto always tear me in little pieces and produce a feeling of despair? Because, of course. I am unable to say what I think and feel, even though I am positive that I see things no one has ever seen and feel things no one has ever felt. I can *write* about what I think and feel. But my gut-wrenching desire is to be able to *speak*, to verbally express those things I feel so passionate about.

It seems to me that human life is the *experience* of life and he who experiences more lives more. Experience, for me, refers to an activity: the

flow of feelings, perceptions, passion, love, responses, ideas, insights as well as the subconscious part of my brain that transforms that experience into various forms of expression. Stuttering complicates that flow and, as you know, I stutter.

## **ANXIETY AS A NATURAL WARNING SIGNAL**

Anxiety is intended by nature to be an alarm, a way to warn us of danger.

A week ago I got on an elevator at a woman's apparel store on Karlsplatz in uptown Munich and saw what I must have interpreted as a certain "menacing" look from a stranger and my mind automatically went into "anxious mode"...my brain becoming hyper-alert for danger. And that's a good thing because this anxiety informs my behavior. I get off the elevator with a group of other people, not by myself. I enter a doctor's office and wait until the perceived threat is over.

Then today a girl by the name of Gertrude warned the girls in my class to be careful, that a girl was raped in the restroom of that very store a week ago, and I am angry for what happened to this girl, yet grateful for the warning bells that went off in my head and the anxiety that overwhelmed me and caused me to get off that elevator.

But what if I go into this anxiety mode and there is no real danger?

That's basically what happened today when I was required to present a paper at the University and failed miserably. I had practiced this presentation for hours on end, in front of my mirror, to myself. I didn't stutter once.

And yet when I performed for this group of professors, my brain sent out hyper-alert "Achtung!" danger signals.

My hearing and vision were suddenly acute.

My face was flaming hot and my muscles prepared for running.

My mind shut down to standby.

Nothing came out of my mouth and my mind interpreted this as a catastrophic crash of my verbal abilities.

At the moment I began to perform, performance anxiety overtook me. This anxiety is always self-fulfilling: My brain warns me of danger (I have to speak in public) and yet I am unable to speak because of the warning. I have created a circular loop and I can't break out of this loop.

## **WHY DO I REFER TO STUTTERING AS VERBAL PERFORMANCE ANXIETY?**

Why do I believe stuttering is a performance anxiety; specifically, a *verbal* performance anxiety? The answer is simple: Because I do not stutter when I am alone. Or when I whisper. Or when I am talking to animals or small children. Or when I shout. I do not stutter when I sing.

One of my greatest fears is reading aloud in front of others. Yet when I am alone I can read aloud without a single stutter. But then I hear the door creak



and I stop speaking. If I continue to read aloud, I begin to stutter the moment I'm aware an adult is in the room. This is why I believe stuttering, for me, is a performance problem.

Think about this for a while. What if I go to my doctor and tell my doctor that I have diabetes and would like him to treat me. (FYI: I do not have diabetes.)

Doc: I can do that. Tell me a little about your experience with diabetes.

Me: Okay, I was labeled "diabetic" at the age of 12.

Doc: Tell me a little about how you handle this and whether you are on meds. Do you watch what you eat? Do you get plenty of exercise?

Me: Yes, I watch my carb and sugar intake and I am a runner. But my diabetes is a little different than other cases you may have handled.

Doc: How is that?

Me: I don't have diabetes when I'm alone. All my diabetic flare-ups occur when I am around other people. When I'm by myself my blood sugar is normal and I don't have diabetes.

Blank look. Silence. Then Doc speaks:

Doc: Wait a minute. I'm not sure I'm the kind of doctor you need.

Me: You mean you aren't going to help me?"

Doc: (ushering me to the window and pointing)...."See that sign above the building over there?

Me: Yes, I see it. It says "Doctor Freud."

Doc: That's right. I think he might be able to help you.

## KEEPING IT QUIET

So it's pretty obvious why most most of us don't mention the fact that we don't stutter all the time. Most of us never stutter when we read aloud to ourselves and know no one can hear us. One stutterer I know, however, stutters when he is alone, even though he can talk to his dog, Mildred, without a stutter. Stuttering, even in his case, is situational.

And it's obvious why most of us are in denial (not to each other, but to the therapists we encounter). When I mentioned this fact to a few therapists, the response was something like: "You are mistaken, dear. Of course you stutter when you are alone. If you don't stutter when you are alone, all the techniques I use to cure you of stuttering are worthless."

It is this fact (that I can talk when alone but not around adults) that pushes me toward questions about speech being a communication problem, rather than a speech problem. Suppose I am talking without stuttering to my friends and an adult walks in the room...suddenly communication is broken off. I'm not

communicating anymore. Why? Because in my mind I am not this person's equal: it's not "two people speaking to each other on the same level". I immediately view this person as my critical audience, and I am the performer.

This problem, of course, without a doubt, is in my head and is not the fault of the person who walks into the room. The person who walks into the room does not cause me to stutter. *My view of the relationship causes me to stutter (when I view others as my audience and myself as the performer).*

Often the excuse with stuttering is the same excuse as with other forms of performance anxiety: I am under too much stress. But that excuse doesn't work for me because I know something about myself: It is not stress that causes my stuttering but stuttering that causes my stress. (I was not under stress when I walked into my therapist's office but when I was expected to read aloud to my therapist, I stuttered severely and because I stuttered, I felt stressful.)

Or they tell me: "You stutter because you don't try hard enough. You need to practice talking." And I say: "I don't need to practice talking when I am

talking to a dog, or cooing to a child, or speaking in unison. I was fluent because I wasn't *trying* to talk, wasn't thinking about each word I said. I wasn't thinking about speech at *all*. Speech was as natural as breathing."

One teacher decided that speaking before the class every day would cure me of stuttering, since it was her belief that "practice makes perfect". I agreed that the old adage "practice makes perfect" might work for baseball or tennis... but certainly not breathing.

Why? Maybe because speech is much more like breathing than it is like baseball. And it seems to me that the reason we don't practice breathing is because breathing (like the complicated mechanics of speech) is handled by a different system (a spontaneous, automatic system) than the conscious effortful system we call the "conscious mind."

## **LETTING NATURE TAKE ITS COURSE**

Often performance anxiety happens when a person, for whatever reason, attempts to perform

consciously and finds that conscious attempts to perform don't work, in fact, the harder he tries the more anxious he becomes. It is a fact that speech is a natural activity. We can learn words. We can learn rules of public speaking. But we can't learn speaking. Speaking is an instinctual spontaneous activity. You don't say to your child "You must put your lips together and make a sound that sounds like mmmmmmmmmmmmm.""

I don't need to repeat that my stuttering began with a single traumatic event (a bulldog got into our house and chased me around the house, then upstairs, cornering me in an upstairs bedroom) and after this event I began to stutter slightly.

I had always depended on speech happening without having to think about it....and the moment speech didn't happen in that way anymore, I tried to **make** speech happen rather than **let** it happen. I began to consciously try to perform better.

It seems strange to me that speaking, (which had been natural, flowing and spontaneous before the trauma) became repetitive, and yet the first thing my

“logic” came up with as an answer to stuttering was “try a little harder.”

I know this so-called logic is wrong at this point but I am having a hard time getting over the old and inaccurate belief: “conscious effort is effective in order to stop stuttering.”

I am so obsessed with the idea of trying as the way to force words out of my mouth, so I always seem to turn in the direction of “work harder”, “push a little harder”, “give it one more great big Try”.

## **HOW IT ALL BEGAN**

So when my stuttering began, it was not due to performance anxiety. It had always been natural and easy for me to communicate with other people, with no thought at all. But once I began to repeat my sounds (at the very beginning stuttering began as a repetition of sound rather than the hard blocks it later became)... then I immediately began to “try” to speak without repetition.

At dinner that evening (the day the bulldog got in our house), I asked “P-p-p-p-p-p-p-p-please pass

the b-b-b-b-b-bread.” I remember the worried looks on the faces of my parents and older brothers and sisters. And even though I don’t remember my reaction to this and how it affected my speech, it is probably true that my reaction to my failure to get sounds out was something like: “I failed at this so all I have to do is try really *really* hard and my problem will go away.”

We know that speech is natural and is therefore produced by my spontaneous brain (not my editorial critical controlling brain.) So it seems to me that what happened when I thought of every word I spoke was that my conscious effortful mind took over attempting to produce the work that had always been produced naturally and un-self-consciously.

The reason I believe this is what happens is because I *know* this is what happens in other endeavors. I talk about writer’s blocks but the same principle certainly holds true for other blocks.

I have a friend who used to be here at the University (a former Professor) who was a prolific composer.



Now, when he attempts to create, the source within himself that previously produced reams of music, doesn't produce anymore. Nothing he has been able to do has changed that. He can copy or repeat his old works, but this source within himself (of fresh new original work) has gone on strike and he doesn't know what to do.

## **THE LION AND LION TAMER**

This Professor has gone to one expert after another and he has received as much advice as I received with my battle with stuttering. He was told: "You must demand that your unconscious produce the work you want it to produce for you. You must clarify the assignment to your unconscious before you attempt to compose a new and original piece of music. Think of your creative mind as your lion and think of your conscious mind as your lion tamer. Your lion tamer can make your lion perform."

So he began to think of his creative mind as a lion he had to tame. He put his conscious mind in charge of this lion and set out in earnest to tame his lion. The reason he put his conscious mind in charge of his lion was because he wanted to produce

something. He wanted an outcome and he wanted to dictate that outcome.

His whole world became focused on performance. “I believed at first that all I had to do was to learn how my lion worked best and do whatever was required to produce the desired composition.”

I asked how all of this worked out for him. “It didn’t work out at ALL. All that happened was I became more wrapped up in Performance. No matter how my consciousness summoned my unconscious to reveal itself, nothing happened.”

“Maybe your Unconscious source won’t be commanded,” I suggested.

He nodded vehemently, as if he knew what I was talking about.

Already I was connecting his experience with composing...with my experience with stuttering. I asked him how he accounted for the fact that his conscious mind could not demand that his unconscious mind perform.

“My entire take-away at this point is the recognition that my conscious mind is not the boss of the creative self,” he answered simply.

I wrote the following that afternoon:

***“The Unconscious mind, the source of all natural and original production, absolutely cannot be commanded.”***

If there are two distinct “minds” and if my Creative Unconscious mind refuses to write, speak, compose....that’s a problem. And if my conscious mind has no power over the Unconscious (as my friend experienced and believed), then it didn’t take a genius to inform me that we were both in a “pickle”....he with his music, me with my speech.

I don’t know the way out of my dilemma but I know two things through observing my own experience:

- 1) “Stuttering seems to me to be a performance problem” and

- 2) “Thinking of speech and taking control of my performance is definitely the wrong way to go.”

That explains a lot of things to me. Any natural activity, any production created by this “unthinking, unplanned source within me” cannot be commanded by my conscious mind and this is why the hours and years I have trying to produce fluency has amounted to absolutely nothing. *Nothing.* Nothing at *all*.

And why I have to admit that regardless of the fortune of time and money I have spent in chasing a cure for my inability to speak, there is nothing to show for that expenditure. My conscious mind has not been able to summon up my natural flowing self and get it to perform, no matter how much I demand, command, boss and control.... and no matter how many techniques my therapists have conjured up to help me perform.

Oh, of course, I may be able to perform for my teachers, just as I am able to perform for myself. I once lined up all the little “diplomas” I had received

from various speech clinics (pronouncing me “Cured”)...on a bookshelf.

But the moment I returned to the classroom or my family or anytime I had to relate to the adults in my life (I could speak well to babies and friends my age) I returned to stuttering, if anything more wrenching than ever.

There are many days now when I wish I could go back to a more naïve time (when I truly believed that each new therapy would cure me of my inability to perform).

### **DON'T TELL ME NOT TO FEEL**

The more I think about my inability to perform, the more I am unable to perform, the longer my blocks, the deeper my humiliation. And it doesn't do me any good to demand that I not feel humiliation (many teachers and therapists actually demand that I not feel humiliation, as if I can boss my feelings around.) The fact is that as long as I am unable to get a single word out of my mouth, the more impotent and humiliated I feel.

There have been therapists who have worked on my feelings rather than my stuttering and the result has been entirely futile for the simple common-sense reason that if I hammer my finger I am going to feel it and the only way I can stop suffering the pain is to stop hammering my finger. As long as I keep hammering my finger and demand that I feel no pain, the more conflicted (and crazy) I am. Pain is the natural by-product of various kinds of experience.

### **IS READING ALOUD TO MYSELF A PERFORMANCE?**

Lately I have worked on changing my perception of stuttering, refusing to look at speech as a performance. I found that when I read aloud to myself in a room where no one can hear me, I am not regarding speech as a performance *because there is no audience*....which means I do not regard myself, or animals, or friends, or small children as an audience.

And I am not sure that one can consider any event in which I am performing only for myself a “performance.” It seems to me that performance implies an audience, at least an audience of one other person. So I have taken it on myself to try to change

my idea of speech as performance. But once again, I bump into a familiar problem...the problem of changing myself (this time my way of looking at things) by *trying* to change. My mind can't change my mind. My mind clings so tenaciously to certain beliefs, that only this activity of standing outside my beliefs and observing my beliefs seems to have an effect.

I also need to deal with this idea that all I have to do to change is to make a choice or decision to do so. This is not true, however, and I know it isn't true by experience. I need a metaphor to understand this....

Okay, what if I am chaotic and spend my time going around and around in circles? And what if I say: "All I have to do to stop acting in a chaotic way is to decide to change" or "all I have to do to stop acting in a chaotic way is to change my behavior."

But I actually know better. I realize that the only way I can act less chaotic and circular is to **be** less chaotic.

And that's the way it seems to me relative to stuttering. Stuttering has to do with **being** conflicted: my creative mind not being in sync with my critical mind (because my slow perfectionistic critical mind is trying to control my free flowing creative mind).

And while it may be easy for me to **act** less conflicted, it is not easy to **be** in sync. Sync only happens when my mind begins to pay attention to that which is arising within me rather than being concerned with outcomes and performances.

This evening it occurred to me that often (for me) stuttering *is* the result of putting the cart before the horse (my critical mind ahead of my creative mind.) Is there any option open to me other than dealing with my stuttering by judging it and trying to change it? I need an answer to that question.

I have been overtaken by fear today. The dark scary kind of fear every one of us in this stuttering community knows very well. So I tried something different:

I just observed my fear.

I didn't judge myself for it.



I didn't try to reason myself out of it.  
I didn't try to change the fact that I am afraid.  
I simply noticed my fear.  
I let it write itself out on paper.  
I simply noticed my fears until they went away.  
And I was left with my Other Mind....my creative mind, the mind that doesn't judge me. Or condemn me. The mind that never lectures. The mind that just says "Notice, see, it's all right here. I will help you find the way."

Also when I notice my fears without judging them, I can deal with my fear. It's as if all I need to do is turn on the light of my observation, and the light makes the scary boogeyman go away.

The light of observation sends my fear scooting out the door. The fact that I can observe my critical mind (*even though my critical mind can't observe my creative mind*) means something very obvious to me today: it means that my Creative Mind is the Real Me and absolutely *does have* the power to invite (not command, but *invite*) my Critic to cooperate and act in a more beneficial way.

In my natural state (when performance fears aren't in charge), I am an explorer, a "noticer", a seer who can make sense out of things in a micro-second, a wild and crazy Edison, in love with the world, jumping up and down with excitement at the amazing world I live in. At times like this, I recognize the truth that I am not my fear, I am the observer of my fear. I am not my stuttering. I am the observer of my stuttering.

That "Observer" is *me!*

Thinking about performance, planning each word and each breath, doesn't seem to work for any of us. But observation is working wonders.

## **FLOW AND RESISTANCE TO FLOW**

I have been realizing how important words are to me and how words can interfere with my good judgment. I didn't realize this until I moved overseas. Words (especially self-description) seems to block my flow of fresh and present-tense observation. Believing words without observing accompanying actions, attitudes, behaviors...is a rigid unyielding way

of relating to people.... and rigid beliefs prevent me from seeing for myself.

I didn't know this until I moved to Europe. But suddenly, there I stood, stripped of all words (because people couldn't understand me).

And others were also stripped of words (because I couldn't understand them).

After a while I found myself observing more and noticing how my *observations* differ from my *beliefs*.

Observation/looking/noticing is always in the Now. Beliefs are like dinosaurs....they are *never* "now". They can affect my behaviors and attitudes now. But beliefs are based on something that already happened or something learned in the past.

And what is completely fascinating and perplexing is the fact that it is very possible (I do it all the time) to believe things that actually *clash* with my own observations.

So I open my eyes.

I look at what is going on right now in front of my eyes, rather than relying on words.

When I went to Villa Boscotta last weekend, I was absently watching Ralph (who cleans the walks and driveways at Villa Boscotta) with my eyes and listening to his grandiose description of himself with my ears.

He has been telling me on a regular basis what a hard worker he is. He says “no one ever in my life has accused me of being lazy” in broken English.

So what happened is that I stopped seeing what was right there in front of me and started believing “this guy is a hard worker and not the least bit lazy.” Can you believe this?

It is because Ralph speaks English that there is a clash between words and observation.

Because I can't understand the other boy who works around the gardens, I am not confused. Why? Because I don't understand his words.

*When words and observations collide, it means there is a fight between my ears and eyes.*

## **LEARNING TO JUDGE BY ACTIONS, NOT WORDS**

So it occurred to me that even though I understood Ralph's grandiose descriptions of himself, I would *prefer my own eyes over his self-description*. When I did that, once again I began to look and see for myself.

I simply looked.

My eyes flew open.

I observed. I noticed.

I looked objectively at what was going on.

I notice Ralph sweeping about a minute and then going next door to get a drink.

When he returns, he sweeps a few more feet and drops his broom on the ground and doesn't pick it up. All of this information comes through my eyes, through looking, through observing.

So anyway, believing words without observing seems to be the root cause of why I stop looking at reality, what is going on, what is happening.

When I prefer the information I receive from my own eyes to the second-hand information relayed through Ralph's words about himself, I gain self-esteem, which can be defined as "trust in my own eyes, my own vision, my own judgment."

Self-esteem develops when I look and observe....and then trust my eyes to see what is there, rather than super-impose "what I want to be there" or "what I am told is there" on my own vision of "what is there."

When I trust my own eyes and ears and understanding, I grow in self-esteem. When I see only the reflection of other's opinions and beliefs, I lose all clarity, all trust in what my eyes tell me.

Sometimes people mess with us by throwing words "out here" that express what they want us to believe about them and this confuses us (...even though they surely know that all of us are born with

the innate gift of looking with our own eyes and coming to our own conclusions.)

The trouble with rigid beliefs not open to the light of observation is that when I believe something in that situation, not because of what I've noticed or observed...but because I've been persuaded by words... then, eventually, I stop looking.

The flow stops.

Seeing is like a flowing river until belief chooses one little rock out of the roaring river, hangs onto it and yells "Stop! I like this!" and focuses on that one little rock...losing the great big, huge, general picture. That's very sad to me.

I'm trying an experiment this week. I have to find a way to deal with this performance anxiety because failure engenders more failure when it comes to speaking.

This calls for something truly drastic.

Instead of speaking this week I will write (except when it's absolutely necessary to speak).

I don't mean I will write notes to others when I need something (writing "Pass the ketchup, Bitte" instead of actually ASKING for things I need.)

It simply means I am going to write more and speak less.

I started writing this morning bright and early. I tune into the silly little ditties and other things that won't let go because I know now they are almost always "Announcements" from the deep unknown part of myself...the source of original perceptions, ideas, similes, metaphors, connections, feelings and flow.

You (in this group) know very well that my view of art, and artist's blocks, has always been something like, stated simply: one day everything is flowing free and I can create freely, without thought. Then suddenly, *without warning*, my free-flowing creativity STOPS for whatever reason "it" decides to hold back.

I previously saw my creative flow as petulant, choosy, and every time things didn't line up exactly as desired, it took a long hike without even saying good-bye.



No explanations.

Just *bang*, out the door, never to appear again until “it” felt like returning.

That’s the way it felt when I couldn’t get in touch with “it”: just *boom*, suddenly the color and flow and sunshine in my life was gone for no earthly reason I could imagine.

I read everything I could about holding back and breaking through blocks, trying to understand why writing could be flowing smoothly for me and there weren’t enough margins and notebooks to contain the connections I was seeing, and suddenly, without warning, *nothing*.

So that’s what I’m going to be grappling with this week...not my stuttering blocks but my writing blocks. Writer’s Blocks are very similar to Speech Blocks so Writer’s Blocks make a very good metaphor for Speech Blocks and maybe taking the focus off Speech Blocks will shed some light on those blocks.

It’s worth a try, don’t you think?

The first thing I found out this morning, that Writer's Blocks have a lot to do with a problematic relationship between my natural innate flowing river of perceptions and ideas and new perspectives....and another part of me that feels as if it wants to take over and tell me I didn't see what I saw.

As I wrote this morning I saw this very clearly: my Writer's Block has to do with the relationship between my conscious mind (which I realize...going back to my composer friend.... I wrongly believed to be the Lion Tamer.) And this big huge vast Gift Brain swarming with new perspectives, new paradigms, new ideas (which I wrongly believed to be the Lion.)

So let me just reason out loud for a minute. Let me ask the question "Why are stuttering blocks the result of seeing speech as a performance?"

I'll go back to the metaphor of the Lion and the Lion Tamer (my creative mind and my critical mind).

Think about it for a moment.

Why is there a problem between the Lion and the Lion Tamer?

Because the whole point of a circus act, complete with Lion and Lion Tamer is *performance*. The whole *point* of a circus act is trying to get the Lion to *perform*. When there is no motivation to get the Lion to perform, the performance problem is gone. So I theorize as follows:

***Performance problems arise when the conscious critical mind can't get the creative mind to perform in the way the critical mind thinks it should.***

Is this possible? Then performance problems are rooted in the critical mind being in control and trying to control what can't be controlled: my spontaneous, natural flow of writing and speaking.

What would happen to my writer's block if I removed all expectations and demands....more than that....*what would happen if my Critical Mind got out of the loop entirely as "the guy in charge"????*

Maybe I'll find out this week.

Another metaphor comes to mind.

Suppose there is a coach...one of those fancy coaches that were pulled by horses through the streets of Munich many years ago? Suppose that particular coach has a driver. And suppose the driver of that coach gets the idea that the coach belongs to him.

(After all, isn't he the guy driving the coach? If he's driving the coach, it's only natural to assume that he's the owner of the coach, right?) Also (he reasons with himself), he has never seen the owner of the coach, and since he is the only one who drives the coach, the coach must belong to him. That's only logical, isn't it? He's the boss. He's the guy in charge.

So one evening as the sun is setting, he is driving back home from his day's work, listening to the horses klippity-klop along, deep in reverie...when he suddenly jumps in fear as he sees, out of the corner of his eye, a long thin hand emerge from the compartment at the back of his coach.

The driver has never even *noticed* that compartment before. And suddenly the curtain of the compartment opens, very very slowly at first.

The driver of the coach is paralyzed with fear. What is going *on*???

The driver turns around and watches as a man gets out of the compartment. He's all dressed up in a black suit and as he stretches to his full height, he takes his fancy walking stick and walks up to the driver. "I will drive now," the man in the black suit announces.

"Who are you? Get out of this coach!!"

"I am the owner of this coach" the tall man answered. "I will be driving the coach now."

The driver was shocked into silence. He thought the man in the dark suit was crazy! Where did he get the audacity to claim ownership of his coach?

"You can't be the owner of the coach. See, I am driving the coach! This is my coach."

And the Owner of the coach laughs. He laughs so hard; tears start rolling down his face.

And the Owner of the coach says to the Driver of the coach..."Where did you get the idea you own this coach? Show me your title to this coach. Show me your buyer's contract."

And the driver of the coach sputtered in surprise and the Owner of the coach ordered the Driver of the coach to move over to a passenger seat. And the owner took the reins of the coach and drove the coach where *he* wanted to go, do what *he* wanted to do.

That's basically what is now happening in my life. The owner of the coach is now in the driver's seat. Not all the time. But it's actually going on. It's actually happening.

And now, to summarize.

## **PART 4**

### **SUMMARY**

One last word to the group. Why do we try to control speech? How did it happen that my conscious mind thought it could take over something as complex as the mechanics of speech?

I think it had a lot to do with lack of trust.

So I ask myself “what is the opposite of trust?” That’s sort of a game with me, this thinking of opposites.

“The opposite of trust is absence of trust” I answer.

But that answer doesn’t satisfy me.

“Okay, maybe the opposite of trust is resistance. To believe = to be receptive, to trust. Unbelief = to be resistant, to fear.

Are you happy with that definition?

Not really.

Then make another stab at this: What is the opposite of trust?

I’ve got it! The opposite of trust is control. When I don’t trust this innate spontaneous subliminal active System to do its work (one of the things “it” does is automate speech), then invariably I try to control.

*Control! Control is the opposite of trust!!*

When I lose faith in my natural spontaneous automatic processes, I try to control speech. Much of my stuttering is based on lack of trust.

Rather than judging my speech, rather than trying to control my speech....I now have greater



awareness of my natural impulses. When I do this, I feel a release of energy I can use for other things. When I have an impulse to be more honest or trusting or loving...but ignore that impulse, I notice something. I notice I soon begin to feel an irresistible compulsion to eat or goof off or get off the path in some way.

So I am experimenting with following my impulses instead of repressing them....even when following my impulses involve doing things I don't want to do because they are outside my comfort zone.

I am noticing this desire to control my speech....and when I notice this, it means letting go of control, becoming trusting again, becoming vulnerable again. That's the way I want to live my life.

Thank you for reading this.

P.S. A few months after I wrote this paper, the Mockingbird analogy practically wrote itself and served as a great motivating insight for me. It also became clear that the girl represented my conscious mind (believing herself to be Bird Trainer) and the mockingbird represented my natural innate abilities that are neither produced by my conscious mind, or

improved by my conscious mind. And something rewarding: I was able to read “If Your Mockingbird Won’t Sing” to that little group of stutterers in Bavaria. We went next door and celebrated with a few rounds of Löwenbräu. Löwenbräu is something we always manage to agree on.