

## ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS POSED BY LIONEL GIACOMINO

### QUESTION 1

**First, could you tell us about your life experience with respect to stuttering, and why did you become so genuinely interested in stuttering?**

A debilitating stutter that not only destroyed my natural fluency but interfered with my spontaneity, personality and freedom was the major life experience that drove my interest in stuttering.

I spoke early, easily and well from 2 years old until I was 4, almost 5. At that time a trauma occurred that changed me from a spontaneous little chatterbox who didn't give a single thought to how to say words....into a little girl who thought constantly about what to say and how to say it with a minimum of stuttering. The evening of the trauma, sitting at dinner with my family, I asked "please pass the bread" but it came out (this is the first time I had ever stuttered) as "p-p-p-p-p-p-pplease p-p-p-p-p-p-p-p-p-pass the b-b-b-b-b-b-b-b-bread."

The stuttering didn't stop as my parents hoped it would. As I got older I continued to substitute "trying to speak" for simple natural easy-breezy speaking. I couldn't just blurt words out anymore. My speech revealed that I thought I had to think about how to say words before I said them. That's what was in my mind. Abraham Maslow told his followers at Big Sur that all the problems we were dealing with were rooted in a faulty view of reality. I agree with that.

In case you get the picture of me as a nervous nelly, felled by this thing we call "stuttering", that is not the case. My life was sunny and happy with the exception of stuttering, which I regarded as a torment. I just couldn't accept it, as people in my environment encouraged me to do. I couldn't accept my stutter because it interfered with doing what I wanted to do. For example, from the time I was a small child conversation was a big deal in our household. I would sneak out of bed and down the stairs after I had been tucked in bed and hide in a dark corner

of our living room hugging my blanket and a doll or two so I could listen to conversations between my parents, older siblings, and friends, and often went to sleep to the soothing sound of voices.

As I grew older stuttering turned that love of conversation into a two-edged sword. On the one hand was the fun of hanging out with friends and family who loved to shoot the breeze about anything and everything that occurred to us. On the other hand was the frustration when I stuttered so badly I couldn't join the conversation. Of course, I could always listen. But the frustration of not being able to join in the conversation or even ask questions was sometimes overwhelming.

This shouldn't be difficult for people who don't stutter to understand. Imagine loving to talk about cars with your friends but every time you start to speak you begin to hiccup. You get a few words out about your favorite car and you hiccup and it's not just a tiny little hiccup. Your hiccups might last indefinitely. But hiccups isn't a good metaphor for stuttering because even severe hiccuping isn't in the same league with a stutter as debilitating as mine.

TWO:

I was also motivated to get to the bottom of the stuttering problem because I remembered what it felt like to be able to blurt out anything I wanted to say without a thought as to how to say words. I couldn't have put this into words at the time but in many ways I felt robbed of just being casual and spontaneous. I loved the freedom to spout off about anything I wanted to talk without thinking and planning words in advance, substituting words I thought I *could* say for words I thought I could *not* say. I longed to return to that earlier time.

THREE:

A big motivation to understand stuttering was the fact that my stuttering was selective. I had observed that I could speak perfectly when I was alone. I stuttered horribly when I read aloud in school. But I could read aloud for hours without a single stutter when I knew no one could hear me. I refer to this discovery as "THE 900 POUND GORILLA IN THE ROOM" in SPEECH IS A RIVER because it was this discovery that caused me to doubt the theory that has been around for years: that stuttering is always genetic.

If I can speak easily and well to stuffed animals and babies and when I speak in unison or when I am in a room by myself, this said something about ME. Think about it. What if you went to the doctor with COPD and informed the doctor that

you don't have symptoms of COPD when you are sitting alone in a room. It is only when another person walks into the room that you have COPD. That kind of logic not only seemed strange to me. It seemed downright *nuts*. Like an imagination-run-wild or a person in need of the services of a psychiatrist.

I am not saying the predisposition toward stuttering isn't genetic for some stutterers. But for me, the discovery that I could speak naturally and easily when I was alone made me doubt a lot of what passed for science at that time. Nothing seemed to fit the then-current-answers to stuttering after discovering how selective my stuttering was.

#### FOUR

Free-writing was the one constant in my life that led me to understand flow, resistance to flow, blocking, and emotional anxiety. Most of all it put me in touch with my inner power. But it took a few years before what I found to be true when I free-wrote began to apply to stuttering.

By "free-writing" I mean "writing with no control, no suggestions, no opinions and no judgments." This means I didn't know what I was going to write until I wrote it. And what ended up on the page was new to me because it didn't come to me from my conscious mind; while writing from my conscious mind means "thinking it up" or "repeating something I've heard or been taught."

But it wasn't long until I ran into something I called my "Thinker" that disagreed with my Doer in almost every way. I woke up at my usual 3 a.m. and started to get out of bed because I wanted to write down one of those "fuzzy notions" nagging at me. But just as I put my feet on the floor, I became aware of a strong resistance to getting out of bed....a thousand thoughts telling me it was too cold in the house and reminding me I was too tired and I had to go to work and it wasn't healthy for me to get up so early. I'm sure that resistance had always been there, but the first time I really noticed it was through free-writing.

So I argued with this chattering voice until I could see it did me no good, so I simply got out of bed, threw on a robe, and started to write until the fuzzy notion began to develop and take shape on the pages.

But the voice didn't stop. As soon as the writing was flowing the voice told me how stupid I was and how everyone already knew what I was writing about and how I didn't know "squat" about writing. I heard the accusations...but I was noticing something else....that when I ignored that censoring voice and kept on

writing, a nice flowing seamlessness happened on the page. I was surprised at what turned up on the pages I wrote. The ideas were fresh and new and original. Everything flowed. I no longer decided what I wanted to say before I said it. I wrote first and THEN it occurred to me: “Ahhh, THAT’S what I wanted to say!” Writing in this way, with no editing and no opinion about what I was writing seemed to be the way to free this part of me I knew virtually *nothing* about.

I had stumbled onto this all by myself: first, simply writing...and second, only then being conscious of what I wanted to say. I was understanding through free-writing how flow happened and what could destroy flow in my writing...but the truths I discovered in free-writing hadn’t yet made the journey from free-writing to speech and especially, to stuttering. When I spoke I was still as stuck as ever and didn’t know what I was going to do.

This free-writing, above all, helped me to deal with the emotional anxiety that always accompanies stuttering. I woke up in the morning, often filled with dread of what was in store for me the rest of the day, and rather than lay in bed and create (with my thoughts) this state of anxiety, I forced myself to get out of bed, go to my notebook, and spell out in black and white how that anxiety felt in my body.....even giving those feelings a label. In this way, I stopped creating anxiety with my thoughts and became an observer, a witness of those thoughts. This put a distance between me and my anxiety (space is required between the observer and the object observed and it is that space that became so important.)

#### FIVE: THE INSPIRATION THAT LED ME TO FREEDOM

The primary inspiration, however, was my discovery that speech is a river. I had always noticed that everyone else seemed to speak so fluidly and seamlessly that I had to question what it was that made speech so difficult for me. All distractions had to be put away while I spoke as I concentrated on the smallest detail of speech....did I take a breath? Was I relaxed? Was I trying hard enough? Did I glide into that word as I was told I should do? All the years of speech training determined the fact that I spoke out of my memory of what I was told I should do, could do, and ought to be doing to speak more fluidly.

I WAS TOTALLY UNAWARE OF THE AMAZING SYSTEM THAT WAS AND IS ALWAYS MANAGING THAT AUTOMATIC ACTIVITY FOR ME.

When we see an old problem in a completely new way, it’s a shock. The world opens up, the body responds, synapses light up, heartbeats quicken,

understanding deepens and broadens, and behavior automatically changes. And most of all, old faulty views of what we thought was “reality” suddenly go away on their own because they are upended by a new view of the world.

By the time I was 33 years old speech had become unmanageable. I had come to an absolute knowing that my conscious mind, with all its tricks and techniques, couldn’t fix my stuttering. “There’s nothing I can do to fix my speech” was totally real to me. That was not a negative thought. It was simply a fact that I finally knew with great certainty because I had done everything I was told to do to fix stuttering and absolutely nothing worked. The harder I tried to speak fluently, the more violently I stuttered.

What no one, including myself, expected to happen, actually *happened*. I didn’t know it then, but I was just one insight away from seeing speech in an entirely different way. When I was most desperate, at the end of my rope, I had an epiphany.

In one crazy off-guard moment an insight can explode in your head, intruding into your awareness, changing the entire landscape of your life....reshaping your understanding, values, beliefs and finally your behavior...for the rest of your life.

What hard work and effort could not and did not do, awareness was able to do. Dr. Bruce Lipton said: “The moment you change your perception is the moment you rewrite the chemistry of your body” and Dr. Theodore Reik often told his students: “The unconscious reveals itself as vision in which an unconscious recognition of certain relations forces its way right through into consciousness.”

The day of the insight had been a strange day. I had been in a state of utter and complete hopelessness about ever being able to do anything about my stutter. In that state, I took my writing out to the balcony and sat in the late afternoon sun. I was making myself write, and the stuff I was writing was yawningly *boring*.

Before long an idea occurred to me which I followed.....and that idea turned into other ideas and finally my writing turned into random scribbles that seemed to be creating a pattern of some sort. I was drawing wavy lines across the page from left to right, one row of those flowing lines stacked on top of the other, until the whole page was filled with flowing lines....and in the margin I drew what appeared to be cupped hands, (shaped like parenthesis)...and these “hands” seemed to be pushing the wavy lines. The rows and rows of wavy lines across

the page, stacked one on top of the other....what did they represent? I had no idea. The ocean? Water? Yes, of course it was water. Flowing water.

Without a thought, I wrote under the flowing lines....."Speech is a river." And a moment later: "Don't push the river."

Those words just sat there for a moment: *Speech is a river. Don't push the river.*

What was *that* about?

And then...it was as if the page came alive and the words suddenly took on meaning, and out of the blue, out of nowhere, I *understood*.

I was seeing it all at once, intuitively understanding what natural fluency was all about....it was speech happening by itself, flowing out of me naturally and effortlessly and with no resistance from my mind. My mind could stop worrying, thinking, running around looking for a new technique or a new workshop or a new therapist. No need to make speech happen anymore. No need to push words out anymore. Speaking and trying-to-speak were suddenly seen by me as two different systems.

No one had ever told me this was even *possible*.

All I can tell you is that *all hell broke loose*. I got it! I absolutely got it!!!! The light from this simple but profound truth blew my old way of thinking to smithereens in a mega-second and gave me goosebumps.

I ran into the living room from the balcony, back and forth, back and forth..... caught up in a frenzy of delight, jumping, high-five-ing everything in sight, clapping my hands.....then grabbing a small umbrella holder, dizzily dancing it around and around the room, all the time squealing, "Speech is a river! It flows by itself. It happens on its own! No need to think about it! Or manufacture it! Or work at it! No need to try! No need to force words out! All I need to do is trust the river to flow by itself!!!!"

The relief my overworked mind felt was as close to real joy and peace as I had ever felt in my life.

I was ushered into what Dr, David Eagleman (THE BRAIN) might have referred to as "*a much more splendid universe*": "If you find space science fascinating,

strap in for what's happening in brain science, The conscious mind has been knocked from its perceived position at the center of ourselves and a much more splendid universe is coming into focus.”

My old planned, cautious, striving conscious life was being dethroned. But not to worry. I was not my mind or my stuttering. The complexity and brilliance of the system that I actually *AM* stunned me into silence...all of it given to me as some kind of benevolent birthright. A gift I had no way of earning.

This sudden goosebumpy realization of the true nature of the capabilities of my body/brain, operating automatically and spontaneously had everything to do with my return to natural fluency.

I had been given a powerful metaphor that pushed back against everything I had been taught and what I had come to believe on my own. Along with this new clarity came a state of inner calmness in which I was finally able to trust the incredibly complex and competent ability of my brain and body to do its stuff without my conscious interference.

After that revelation, I couldn't be stopped. Stuttering didn't drop off immediately but I never looked at speech in the same way again. I will never tell you I speak perfectly. Friends tell me they can still pick up the “residue” left behind from years of stuttering.....a pause here and there that I am unaware of (in much the same way I can hear my Puerto Rico friend's slight accent hidden in her English.)

Stuttering is no longer an issue in my life.

No advance scanning of words

No debilitating anticipatory fear (since fear is a reaction to thinking)...

No substitution of words I think I *can* say for words I think I *can't* say.

I no longer entertain the possibility of stuttering.

I regained my spontaneity and spunk.

And most of all, I never give the mechanics of speech a thought.

Freedom from stuttering to me means my mind is free from trying to control speech, which was getting to be a full-time job.

I began what I refer to as “the trust experiment.” I learned that trust in the unconscious process of speech is the opposite of the illusion of control. My mindset began to evolve from control to trust. Giving up on control, the work that

remains to this day is trust. I talk much more about this trust experiment in the book I am finishing now which I named PUT YOUR SPEECH ON AUTO-PILOT.

Unblocking my natural flow of ideas, speech, emotion and movement took me back to the spontaneous person I was before I started to stutter. AND putting my speech on auto-pilot freed my mind so I felt relieved and free of the stress of trying to do what I had no ability to do with my “other” mind.

SIX

Last, I want to mention the person who had the most to do with getting my discoveries down in black and white for others to read....John Harrison. After I read his book REDEFINING STUTTERING, which confirmed all my own experiences, I got in touch with him. He was an inspiration from the beginning. I sent him the manuscript I had thrown into a bottom drawer of a desk. Because of his encouragement to stop holding back my discoveries, I finished the manuscript. Without John Harrison’s help and encouragement that manuscript would still be gathering dust.

QUESTION 2

**Your book "Speech is a River" is a powerful metaphor to influence our perception of stuttering. In her comments on your book, Barbara Dahm states that the common thread in your book is this: “PWS’ let their conscious minds try to control naturally spontaneous speech.” Tell us how you stopped planning and thinking about how to say the words or force air through the blockage you felt in your throat. In other words, the art of letting go would be the key to getting out of the stuttering jail?**

After the great insight I struggled with this question: “If speech is automatic, why do I still stutter?” My speech was markedly better right away. But there were still bumps and hesitations and when I returned home from overseas to visit my parents, I went back to full-fledged stuttering for two whole weeks. At that point I realized what free-writing had taught me....that thinking about how I should speak, thinking about techniques, thinking about the mechanics of speech in any

way *interfered with the natural flow of speech*, just as critical thought had always interfered with free writing.

One thing most PWS' know is that taking massive action against stuttering results in massive failure. The one thing we can do (and will do automatically once we really "get" the great truth that our brain automates speech)...is to stop thinking about the mechanics of speech and stop planning words ahead, and stop forcing words, etc.

What I took massive action against after the river insight was not my stuttering but what I sometimes called my "blockers". Everything flows in the path of least resistance, and it was resistance I now knew I had to deal with. It was true that what blocked flow for me was my thinking mind (as it came up with one unworkable solution after another). There were too many forms of resistance to mention: thinking of the mechanics of speech, trying to force words out, substituting a word I thought I could say for a word I thought I couldn't say, The list was endless.

So instead of dealing with each blocker separately (like forcing words out) I dealt with my mind's illusion of control. What made that illusion run and take cover was the scientifically proven fact that the brain/body automates speech when I make my bossy chattering mind stand aside and allow the body to do its thing without interference.

Since speech is instinctual, planning words and thinking ahead as to how to say words is not only ridiculous, it also messes with the flow of words. One of the great tennis players of our time wrote about how he wins his matches. After the first match, the player approaches his opponent and asks "I just wanted to ask you how you manage that marvelous wrist movement of yours?" That question puts the opponents focus on his wrist movement and he begins to think about how he does that "marvelous wrist movement"...and his game goes south from that point.

I had to let go of thoughts relating in any way to the mechanics of speech. *It didn't matter if these thoughts were negative or positive.* When I thought "I'm talking really well now" it was as destructive to natural fluency as "I'm really messing up now." So replacing a negative thought with a positive thought didn't work for me. *For me it was trying to control speech (thinking of the mechanics of speech), not the positivity or negativity of the thought, that messed with my natural fluency.*

*Why do we have to let go of our resistance in all its forms?* Something scientists agree on is that we are not conscious of the vast majority of our brain's ongoing activities and wouldn't want to be. Our minds simply have no access to the intricate details as to how we talk, walk, see, breathe or understand. And that's a good thing. Also, we know that when the conscious mind is finally at the end of its rope, not knowing what to do, it tends to drop out of a task, turning it over instead to our "unconscious" or "inner power"...outside the radar of the control of the conscious mind.

We know that consciousness interferes with the brain's well-oiled processes. The best way to mess up your piano piece is to concentrate on your fingers; the best way to miss the golf ball is to analyze your swing. Suzuki, the renowned Zen Master taught: "As soon as we reflect, deliberate and conceptualize, the original unconsciousness is lost and a thought interferes. Calculation, which is miscalculation, sets in." And later: "Man is a thinking reed but his great works are done when he is not thinking." It's a little like this:

"A centipede was happy quite, Until a frog in fun  
Said "pray tell which leg comes after which?"  
This raised her mind to such a pitch  
She lay distracted in the ditch  
Not knowing how to run."

The answer for me to "How do you quit thinking about how to say words?" was simply Trust. My conscious mind trusting my inner power. Your brain/body holds knowledge of things your mind can't access. Riding a bike, tying your shoes, typing on a keyboard, or steering your car into a parking space while speaking on your cell phone are examples of this. You execute these actions easily but without knowing how you do it. So there is a huge gap between what your brain/body can do and what you can tap into with your conscious mind.

#### TRUST MEANS LETTING GO

"Knowing yourself now requires the understanding that conscious you occupies only a small room in the mansion of the brain and it has little control over the reality constructed for you," writes David Eagleman in INCOGNITO. What the conscious mind learns to do is to stand aside, stop chattering, making suggestions, and interfering with the flow. That is the skill I learned: Let go. Get out of the way. Stand aside. Stop trying to control speech. And let the river flow by itself. Speech is a river; don't push the river.

Flow happened by itself when my mind stopped chattering, criticizing, and making suggestions and simply stood aside and *trusted the natural process of speech to happen automatically.*

Trust in this inner power removed the decades long, deep-rooted blocks that had been sabotaging my natural fluency, my ideas, my spontaneity, my personality and my relationships.... so I could finally manifest this spontaneity in more and more areas of my life naturally and effortlessly.

So how did my mindset turn from suffering the illusion of control....to trust in the efficient and amazing system that manages the speaking process for me?

## REFUSING TO THINK BEFORE I SPEAK

I started out with a simple rule: “The body automates speech, so do not send your body mixed messages by thinking about the mechanics of speech...either what to say or how to say it.” This was easier said than done. A few days after the Big Bang experience, I went to a small bakery in Munich close to where I lived. It was a great place to write, much like Starbucks here in the States. I actually wanted one of Frau Weber’s incredible cinnamon rolls and I began to obsess with “How am I going to ask for a cinnamon roll, when I can’t say my s’s without stuttering?” Obviously I was still steeped in my habit of thinking before I spoke.

I was aware of what I was thinking and ordered myself not to give a single thought ahead of time to what I was going to order. And this time I told myself why I didn’t need to think ahead of what I was going to say....because thinking of what I was going to say ahead of time was a big time blocker.

I also had been working on being in the present moment. “In the moment” means “not a moment before we speak in a thought or plan” and “not a moment after we speak in a correction or edit.”

So I was standing in line with four people ahead of me and I urgently told myself I had to know what I was going to say and how I was going to say it before I ordered. But I stayed in the present moment and didn’t allow myself to give the words I was going to say a single thought.

The line then dwindled to three, then two. Now there was only one person in front of me and I felt more and more urgent to think ahead about what I was going to say and how I would say it but I was staunch in my decision to keep my mind in the moment and refuse to plan ahead, no matter how my mind begged. This was war. This wanting to plan words before I spoke them was butting heads with my determination to stay in the moment. Finally I was face to face with Frau Weber and I blurted: "I would like a cup of coffee, please." (Frau Weber spoke English).

"Is that all?" she asked.

"Yes" I answered.

I'm sure this sounds like a very trivial accomplishment; but for me it was *big stuff*. I had seriously wanted to eliminate those 400 calorie cinnamon rolls....and I had not only spoken easily with no pre-planning but I satisfied my desire to stop consuming those extra calories.

This was the *first* time I had ever, if you can believe it, turned the tables on my chattering mind as it pertained to speaking....actually taking control of my mind instead of letting it control my behavior. I know that's hard to believe but it's true. The confidence I felt that I could actually manage my mind instead of allowing it to control me was my victory.

It was the simple metaphor "speech is a river" (which I interpreted as "speech runs on auto-pilot) that served as a basis for ignoring the constant suggestions coming from my mind.

It still strikes me as odd that it took so long to discover that *something outside the radar of my opinionated mind could get on with the job of speaking without my continual tampering*.

I believe I mentioned in SPEECH IS A RIVER that I returned to speech therapy after the insight. We were working on our breathing again for the umpteenth time. And it struck me as I stood there (making a big deal out of how to breathe and when to breathe) that if breathing, like speech, is automatic (by automatic I mean "Happens on it's own without thinking about it"), it was ridiculous to give thought and effort to what was done automatically and spontaneously by unconscious processes not under my control.

## GARAGE SALE

The rest of that decade was like a continuous garage sale in which I threw all those things on the table that were no longer necessary for me, and in fact *interfered* with the flow of speech.

The more aware I became that my brain/body actually automates speech, the more bold I became. The fact that my body automates speech was the main principle that I used to know what to toss out and what to keep. "This masker is now worthless to me." "This metronome is unnecessary now." "This belt I put around my diaphragm to practice breathing ....look! Gone!"

Throw it all on the bargain table. It all goes. Give it away. It doesn't matter what happens to it so long as I get rid of it. If speech is spontaneous and automatic, why do I need any of it? Those things imply that I have to make speech happen, not let it happen. So I don't need it. Let it go.

And there were invisible things I had to get rid of. Offering myself options.....exchanging words I thought I could NOT say for words I thought I COULD say.....all of that had to go. Even the thought that there are words I can't say eventually went away on its own. The illusion that I could control speech.....that went away on its own. Holding back instead of blurting out whatever came to mind (and trusting my unconscious to weed out whatever might be offensive) went away mostly on its own.

In fact the realization that my Unconscious was more than a System (as "System 1" implies "impersonal") was a very important part of my journey. I found through free-writing that "it" had a mind of its own that was funnier, kinder, more sensitive to others and far more brilliant than my conscious mind.

Effortless, spontaneous System 1 is now the driver of my speech. During flow, the brain enters a state of hypofrontality, meaning that parts of the prefrontal cortex become much less active. Consciousness of what to say and how to say it is left on the sidelines.

For natural fluency, there's really no other choice but to leave effortful conscious System 2 on the sidelines. Why? Because the automatic brain performs at speeds the conscious mind can't possibly keep up with. When I found myself holding back until my slow conscious mind thought about how to say a word, the timing and sync went out the window.

This doesn't just apply to speech. Books on athletics are full of this struggle between two forces (which we could call flow and interference with the flow).

“Take the game of baseball, in which a fastball can travel from the pitcher's mound to the home plate at one hundred miles an hour. In order to make contact with the ball, the brain has only about four tenths of a second to react. In that time it has to process and orchestrate an intricate sequence of movements to hit the ball. Batters connect with balls all the time, but they're not doing it consciously. The ball simply travels too quickly for the athlete to be consciously aware of its position and the hit is over before the batter can register what happened. Not only has consciousness been left on the sidelines, it's also been left in the dust.” David Eagleman, THE BRAIN

The book SEVEN SECRETS OF WORLD CLASS ATHLETES describes the law of motion which works just as well when applied to speech as it does to playing ball. The law, applied to speech, goes like this: *In order for natural speech to occur a signal enters the brain. If that signal goes directly to the motor system, speech will be fluid, effortless and effective. But if conscious thought interferes with the signal, speech will not be fluid, effortless or effective.*

I didn't consciously try to drive wrong beliefs away or push them underground or repress them. When I discovered and then TRUSTED the great truth that the brain automates speech and all I have to do is stand aside for that river to flow, old programs and habitual reactions fell away by themselves.

After that, it was a process in which I saw that I didn't have to believe my lying mind. I could walk away, ignore it. The word “fraudulent” occurred to me often in regard to my mind. When I saw that speech is automatic, natural and spontaneous my old beliefs were simply exposed as fraudulent.

One thing I stopped doing was ARGUING with my blaming accusing mind. Instead of wasting time arguing, I simply kept on doing what I was doing. If I was writing I kept on writing, turning a deaf ear to the lectures and accusations of my mind. *Simply continuing to write* was my best revenge. Eventually this carried over to my speech.

To just “be” is effortless.... that is the meaning of flow and grace.. Simply be-ing is natural. Spontaneous. Automatic. It is the opposite of “think, plan, try, work, put forth effort, push.”

Why was the concept of “effortlessness” so hard for me? Because it seemed that if I didn’t think, do something, work according to my own little plan (my oughts, shoulds, coulds, woulds), to get over stuttering, then I’d be lost in a sea of inaction with no direction whatsoever. When I wasn’t acting to change my speech I was filled with panic, afraid of doing nothing. It felt like my mind was way out ahead, acting alone, leading the parade, never acting in a secondary position, in unity with my own inner river.

Details as to how my conscious mind got out of the driver’s seat of my speech is another story, one that I share in the book I am writing now. All I need to tell you now is that when my conscious mind got out of the driver’s seat and into the passenger seat, speech flowed as free as a river because my mind wasn’t blocking those impulses and promptings anymore.

I felt natural and free and spontaneous, feeling as if I innately “had what it took” without trying or putting forth effort or forcing words out. I knew the words would come. I don’t mean I *tried* to know. I mean I *knew*. Speech was thoughtlessly executed and after I spoke there was no self-congratulation. The reward was always flow, grace, effortlessness...being in the zone, a place of unthinking spontaneity. No thinking about how to speak. No thoughts flashing on and off as to the consequences if I couldn’t get words out. No running ahead, worrying or deliberating. Just trusting the spontaneous part of me, with a deep sense of confidence.

If the river within me is as powerful and brilliant and loving as scientists say it is, I could trust it. My feeble mind no longer was allowed to boss it around.

I just kept trusting, letting go and practicing non-resistance. I didn’t only let go and trust the natural flow of words. The amazing thing is that I was able to let go and trust the flow in other areas of my life.

### **QUESTION 3**

**“Richard Parent's summary of the philosophy underlying the metaphor ‘Speech is a River’: "The final outcome that was obvious to me was that speech being, by definition, a spontaneous act, it should not be controlled. Consequently, people who stutter must come to a point where they do not**

**control their speech, letting it flow like a river, trusting their inner power”. Do you have any examples to share with us to illustrate this interesting idea (of an inner power)?**

I fully agree with Richard Parent’s summary of the philosophy underlying “Speech is a River” and would like to comment on what “trusting my inner power” implies.

My speech changed when I stopped controlling speech and started trusting this behind-the-scenes “inner power” of the unconscious that works spontaneously, automatically, efficiently when my conscious mind stands aside.

When trying to understand the strange details of human behavior we sometimes appeal to a “dual process” account. In this view, we talk about operating on two separate systems: one (my inner power) is fast, automatic and not conscious of itself. The other is slow, cognitive and conscious. The first system can be labeled automatic, intuitive, holistic, responsive and instinctual; the second system is cognitive, systematic, analytical, rule-based and reactive.

Daniel Kahneman refers to these two entities as *Effortless* System 1 and *Effortful* System 2.

System 1 which I personalize as “Big Me” is my hidden inner intelligence (my inner power) which is staggering in its brilliance and efficiency. What it doesn’t already know (using billions of memory cells and neurological communication circuits), this inner intelligence learns with childlike ease, automatically, with no help from my conscious mind. System 1 is unconscious of itself, does not take credit for the work it does, is instinctive, brilliant, efficient and acts on its own without being told to do what it does.

Most of what we do is not under our conscious control. Vast jungles of neurons operate these programs. The conscious you is the smallest bit of what’s transpiring. Although we are dependent on the functions of the brain for our inner lives, the brain runs its own show. The conscious mind has no right of entry. And yet it somehow manages to take all the credit for what is going on. One writer put it like this: “Your conscious mind is like a stowaway on a transatlantic steamship, taking credit for the journey without acknowledging the massive engineering underfoot.”

Our ‘inner power’ effortlessly, efficiently and automatically performs its work 24/7. Thousands of different automatic operations are taking place every moment. My eyes are moving effortlessly and automatically. At the same time, again without conscious effort, my heart is pumping and my breath is going in and out, keeping a complicated system of organs, glands and muscles nourished and working. It constantly coordinates and synchronizes processes that make it possible to walk and talk. Without conscious effort billions of cells are functioning, reproducing and fighting off disease. Notice the way words spill out of your mouth more quickly than you could consciously do. Your brain is working behind the scenes, crafting and producing language, conjugations and complex thoughts for you. (Dr. Daniel Kahneman)

When you walk up a flight of stairs while having a conversation, you have no idea how you calculate the dozens of micro-connections of your body’s balance and how your tongue dynamically whips around to produce the right sounds for your language. All we know is that it is not accomplished consciously.

The same behind-the-scenes work is true of ideas. We take conscious credit for all our ideas, as though we’ve done the hard work in generating them. But in fact, your brain (unconscious-of-itself) has been working on those ideas—consolidating memories, trying out new combinations, evaluating the consequences—for hours or months before the idea rises to your awareness and you declare “I just thought of something.” James Clark Maxwell, the famous mathematician, referred to this inner power as “something” within him who discovered his famous equations. He admitted he had no idea how ideas came to him...they simply came to him.

William Blake wrote of this inner power: “I have written this poem sometimes 20 lines at a time without premeditation and even against my conscious will.” And Carl Jung referred to this inner power: “In each of us there is another whom we do not know.” “Pink Floyd” referred to his inner power as “There’s someone in my head but its not me.”

One scientist spoke of this inner power so staggering in its power and brilliance that if we undertook to create an electronic memory of a capacity equal to the human one (by using the most sophisticated computer parts yet devised), the finished product would be larger than three Empire State Buildings....and no computer yet made is capable of doing the calculations and giving the necessary muscle orders involved in something as simple as hitting a fast ball in the time required to do so.

The author of THE BRAIN cited an example of how this inner power works by showing what happens when it malfunctions: “The unconscious machinery of our brains is at work all the time, but it runs so smoothly that we’re typically unaware of its operations. As a result, it’s often easiest to appreciate only when it stops working. What would it be like if we had to consciously think about simple actions that we normally take for granted, such as the seemingly straightforward act of walking. To find out, I went to speak with a man named Ian Waterman.

“When Ian was nineteen years old he suffered a rare type of nerve damage as a result of a fierce case of gastric flu. He lost the sensory nerves that tell the brain about touch, as well as the position of one’s own limbs (known as proprioception). As a result, Ian could no longer manage any of the movements of his body automatically. Doctors told him that he would be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life, despite the fact that his muscles were fine.”

Ian wasn’t willing to let his condition confine him to a life without movement. So he gets up and goes, but the whole of his waking life requires him to think consciously about every movement his body makes. Ian has to move his body with focused, conscious determination. He uses his visual system to monitor the position of his limbs....he must anticipate the exact distance of each step and land it with his leg braced. Every step he takes is calculated and coordinated by his conscious mind.

Having lost his ability to walk automatically, Ian is highly cognizant of the miraculous coordination that most of us take for granted when going on a stroll. Everyone around him is moving around so fluidly and seamlessly, he points out, that they’re totally unaware of THE AMAZING SYSTEM THATS MANAGING THAT PROCESS FOR THEM. (Caps are mine)

## TWO ATTITUDES TOWARD THIS INNER POWER: TRUST OR CONTROL

While Ian has actually lost his automaticity, PWS only THINK or IMAGINE they have lost this power because it often feels like it. To trust my feelings instead of facts seemed to be one of my major downfalls. These incorrect feelings may be why I tried to replace automatic speech with conscious controlled speech.

What do I mean by “Trust yourself”? I don’t mean positive thinking...for example, expecting that I am going to never stutter again. *Trusting myself means letting my body speak naturally without consciously working at it or thinking about it.*

Sometimes I call this “trusting my body”. Trusting my body in tennis means letting my body hit the ball. Trusting my body in speaking means letting my body (this includes my brain, motor system, etc., of course) do its thing.

When I stopped trying to make speech happen, System 1 (the part of me that is not conscious of itself) was able to do its own thing and proved to be good at spontaneous speech, original ideas, innovation, instinct, intuition and initiative.

When I was still trying like crazy to speak well (constantly thinking, thinking, thinking how to speak) all it meant is that I was still trying to control my speech because I was ignorant of the true capabilities of System 1, my inner power. I know now that while my mind can “will” to do a thing, it can’t perform it. Performance itself is left to System 1.

Most of us have no awareness of System 1. Even though “it” is always there working its magic, I was totally unaware of this amazing system that is always looking out for me, silently managing the work it does spontaneously and automatically.

We can think of these two forces as the Doer and the Thinker. The story of Caruso, the great tenor, who wrote of Big Me and Little Me, was one of the stories that gave me a hint of what I was doing to block my flow: One part of me (the inner power) doing the singing or talking or walking or breathing.....and the other part of me resisting, chattering, criticizing, interrupting, interfering and scaring the daylights out of me.

## SEEING THROUGH THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL

Our minds take credit for our ideas, preferences, and behaviors without even *wondering about* the vast hidden work going on behind the scenes. Consider what happens when you move your arm. Your brain depends on thousands of nerve fibers, registering states of contraction and stretching and yet you aren’t conscious of that lightning storm of neural activity. Your conscious mind has nothing to do with that lightning storm. You are simply conscious that your limb moved and that it is somewhere else now.

Scientists in the last few years remind us that our conscious mind is never at the center of action....instead it is “far out on a distant edge, hearing but whispers of the activity.” But it is as if we believe that our inner power and the mind are 50/50...and therefore deserve a 50/50 chance to be in control. The inner power,

however, drives the boat and all that a dominant, strong, interfering conscious mind does is create conflict. Like a backseat driver.

Your System 1 already knows how to talk and walk and see and hear and anything it doesn't know it learns at the speed of light. But the mind has a tendency to butt in if what happens doesn't happen immediately or happen in the way the mind expects it to happen. In this case, the mind needs to refrain from giving "how-to instructions" or force itself to do System 1's job, but simply let go and wait to see what happens. A growing confidence in the ability of System 1 will emerge from that.

How do I know I am trusting System 1? I often don't. But I do know when I have lost trust. When I make an effort to say words or force speech it is from lack of trust in my automatic inner power to happen on its own.

Why does conscious System 2 take credit for the ideas and behaviors produced by System 1? Because the Unconscious is so brilliant and efficient it manages to work its magic in secret, conjuring up ideas like tremendous magic and does it so efficiently we don't notice it because this inner power doesn't allow its stupendous operating system to be probed by conscious cognition.

*So my new relationship between System 1 and 2 is based on the phrase "trust thyself" (my mind trusting this brilliant efficient System we call System 1.)*

By "trusting their inner power" I mean "trusting the unconscious activity and processes that produce speech automatically" or "trusting the spontaneous automatic way speech happens without interference of my conscious mind". The more I experienced the true capabilities of System 1, the more I trusted it.

The more I trusted, the more I felt I could ask this inner power to go to bat for me....to put my speech on auto-pilot so I didn't need to think about it. There was a time when my mind was constantly asking for my inner power to take over my speech. The more this happened, the quicker my trust grew in the ability of my amazing body to put my speech on auto-pilot.

This inner power is generous...never charging for what it gives me, never throwing my needs up to me. That's why I call natural fluency a "gift." I could finally relax since I didn't need to think about how to say words anymore. I heard myself saying "thank you" many times a day at first. Gratitude for this free gift of natural fluency sometimes overwhelms me, even now.

#### **QUESTION 4**

**In your book, there are many similarities in thinking with John Harrison's book "Redefining Stuttering", including the role of the Stuttering Hexagon. In particular, you refer to the notion of "zone" that Richard explains (in French in your book) as follows: "Speaking of the Zone, the authors state the following: when the brain and body collaborate in harmony, all movement is performed on automatic pilot, without any disagreement; in short, the PWS is in the zone. The opposite of being in the Zone means poor quality of execution." It reminds me of a state of mind close to mindfulness meditation, isn't it ?. In this respect, do you think that the daily exercise of mindfulness mediation can constitute a significant asset in the recovery from stuttering?**

There's an interesting upshot to automatized skills. Attempts to consciously interfere with them worsen their performance. And I agree with Richard's statement: "When the brain and body collaborate in harmony, all movement is performed on automatic pilot, without any disagreement; in short, the PWS is in the zone. The opposite of being in the Zone means poor quality of execution."

Letting go of the illusion that the conscious mind can control speech moves us onto another level. At that time a whole new world opens to us. Some of us refer to it as the Zone.

Being in the Zone produces the kind of spontaneous performance which occurs only when the mind stands aside. As you are well aware, the "zone" speaks of a far more natural and effective process for learning and doing almost anything. This state is similar to the way we all learned to talk when we spoke from the generative unconscious as new intuitions and ideas are forming, at which time the censor we call the mind stands aside and speech goes on auto-pilot. We act from the effortless unconscious more than the deliberate self-conscious mind; the spinal and midbrain areas of the nervous system more than the cerebral cortex. This process doesn't have to be learned, of course. We already know it. We don't KNOW that we know it. We simply assume that what the body does so efficiently must be something it knows. So we don't need to change the brain.

We don't need to reprogram it. All that is needed is to rid ourselves of the resistance to spontaneity and "just let speech happen"

Reflect on the state of mind of a baseball player who is said to be up on his game or in the zone. Is he mindful as to how he should hit each ball? Is he thinking at all? No, in fact we could refer to this state of mind as "He is out of his mind." He is not conscious of himself. He isn't conscious of his movements. He doesn't plan what he will do ahead of time. In fact, there is an intuitive sense that the mind is standing aside watching but not doing anything. Peak performance, as we know, never happens when the players think about what they are doing or put forth effort, or try harder.

The truth is that the mind can "will" to speak well....but it can't produce natural fluency. Natural fluency is what it is....natural and effortless and so, of course, not produced by thought and effort. The truth is this: my mind suffered from the illusion that I had to do everything or it wouldn't get done. I had to form every word, remember to take a deep breath before I spoke, remember to glide into words I thought I couldn't say and substitute words I *thought* I could say for words I *thought* I could not say.

But when awareness hit me, I began to speak "out of my mind". Maybe a better way to describe this state is by saying that when the mind stands aside, the body is so in tune with the brain that automatic functions flow without interference. Flow has no time or room for thinking how badly or well I am speaking or about the mechanics and how-to of speaking. In fact, as we know, the mind with all its suggestions, opinions, and beliefs as to how speech happens must merely stand aside so speech can flow.

You mention "mindfulness". If by that you mean living in the present moment, I agree mindfulness is important. But if you mean being conscious or mindful of the words I am speaking or how to say those words (as many people believe), of course that isn't true. When I speak fluently I am "out of my mind." I am mindless. I don't think what I am saying or how to say it. The common factor in all the times when speech was effortless for me was the complete absence of thinking, trying, planning, or mindfulness of how to say words.

Arriving at the Zone seemed more organic and natural than anything I'd ever experienced since I started to stutter. As I dealt with over-monitoring and over-controlling, my jerky speech became less jerky and began to flow, a flow that

wasn't scripted, words spoken with no thought, plan, preparation, lectures, expectations.

Yes, I agree that there are many likenesses in my philosophy to John Harrison's. It was John Harrison's chapter "Zen and the Art of Fluency" in REDEFINING STUTTERING, that made the biggest impression on me. In that chapter he dealt with being in the zone and about speech as instinctive, natural and spontaneous. That was the first time I found confirmation for what I had written in the very rough draft of SPEECH IS A RIVER (but which I had thrown into a drawer where it was gathering dust until I read John's book and got in touch with him.) John asked me to send that manuscript to him and his encouragement and suggestions changed everything.

#### QUESTION 5

**"You seem to have a somewhat "complicated" history with therapies and therapists, especially speech-language pathologists. Could you summarize in a few words your whole experience with these therapies?"**

I had a tendency to believe what speech therapists told me. I am a Pragmatist so I would try everything out for as long as I could, until I could definitely see it wasn't working.

When I was told to exert effort when I was speaking, replacing phonation with effort, I tried it. The more I tried, the more violently I stuttered. But in the beginning I kept working at it anyway. My response was NOT: "My therapist tells me to think hard about how to say words but the more I do that, the more I stutter. So I'm moving on." Oh no! My response was "My therapist tells me to think hard about how to say words and even though the more I do that the more I stutter, *I'm going to try harder.*" I wasted many years with that attitude.

Stuttering gained more and more power over me because I had no understanding of what was going on or what I was doing that changed my once-effortless speech into such a war with words. I was fearful and anxious because I had no any idea at that time when this stuttering was going to happen... or why.

I finally decided that I would do everything in my power to understand what was going on when I talked and what I was doing to resist the easy flow that speech had once been for me. I am sure speech therapy has changed but at the time I experienced it, therapy was all about the “outer game” (techniques, workshops, and public speaking) rather than dealing with what was happening within my own self. This is the essence of John Harrison’s “hexagon” or it seems so to me.

My speech therapists watched as I spoke. When I spoke I stuttered. Then I began to try not to stutter. I kept trying to spit words out until I was blue in the face. My muscles would tense around my mouth. My eyebrows would set in a serious determined frown, and I would start panting and pushing like crazy, having NO idea I was making fluency impossible.

I had simply exchanged “talking” for “trying to talk”, but I didn’t realize it. Neither did the therapists. Or if they did they didn’t mention it to me. In fact at that point, the stock response of the therapist was “That’s much better. Now just try to relax. Take it easy. Let’s try that again.” (Didn’t they know I had no understanding whatsoever as to how to “try to relax”?) I still don’t know what “trying to relax” means since relaxing and trying to relax are as opposite as speaking and trying to speak.

Russ Hicks and Dori Holte tell us how they view speech therapy and they might be more in touch with recent therapy than I am:

Russ Hicks of Dallas wrote what he had been taught: “Control your stuttering and you will be fluent.” He continues: “Everyone believed I just didn’t work hard enough, that I just didn’t care enough...maybe I wasn’t smart enough...even I believed that. If you can control it for a month, why can’t you control it forever? You just need to work harder and care more, or get smarter.”

Dori Holte writes in VOICE UNEARTHED, “The primary message young children get in stuttering therapy is that they can and should manage their speech - in other words, try not to stutter - by utilizing speech tools and techniques. Is it possible that the anxiety this causes can create an even greater burden? Can that burden lead to excessive silence and disengagement - a far greater handicap than the stuttering itself?”

As I mentioned earlier, Abraham Maslow taught at Big Sur that every problem in the USA is rooted in a faulty view of reality. I truly believe that if one of my therapists would have said “How are you looking at speech?” it might have

helped me. If you see a child forcing words out, the obvious question to me is “If speech causes you to work so hard at something that is instinctive...gasping, panting, pushing, forcing words out of your mouth, it makes me wonder how you are looking at speech?” But nothing like that ever happened.

## **QUESTION 6**

**“As such, would you have any advice for my fellow students, all speech-language pathologists, in this new university specialized training, who are planning to work with stuttering children, teenagers and adults?”**

The most important thing for me was becoming absolutely convinced that speech truly is a river and flows in the path of least resistance. This is not a statement I learned to accept. It’s not just *thinking* I believe that my body takes care of speech if my conscious mind stays out of the way. I was speaking out of my experience. When the flow was happening in my speech and I interfered, natural fluency took wings and flew away. It happened time after time until I was positive it was true.

I think helping the child to notice what is happening in his own speech is important. Therapists told me that I was forcing words out and that was okay, but I think it would have been more helpful if they had given me a mirror and let me watch myself forcing words, bringing my own observations into play.

When I truly believe that my brain/body automates speech for me, it shows in my speech. I used to look for my beliefs....asking myself “what do you believe about this?” And finally, after many years, I found that beliefs aren’t there standing in a row, easily identifiable as beliefs. In fact I finally discovered that beliefs are always hidden in my behavior. I can look at my behavior and get an idea of what I believe. Behavior is a reflection of what we call “beliefs.”

The key to positive change in the way I spoke was found in being convinced of this one profound truth:

“Your brain/body automates speech for you. Speech is far too complex for you to control consciously. This means you do not need to ever waste another moment thinking about how to say words.”

It's like "before" and "after." Before you truly believe that your inner power puts your speech on auto-pilot, statements like "You need to practice breathing" or "You need to take a deep breath before you speak" or "You need to send energy to your vocal chords" are going to sound rational. After you get the picture, those same statements will sound ridiculous.

### CREATE A NEW METAPHOR

Therapists used to swamp me with words, words and more words, but the only way words ever had any effect on my behavior was as a result of truly *understanding something I had not previously understood.* This new understanding always seemed to happen as a result of finding a new metaphor (something physical and visible) that explained something non-physical and invisible. Like you could begin to understand a tiny bit about electricity (unseen) if I told you to compare it to a pipe with water running through it. That's a poor example, but the best one that came to mind this moment.

That's why connecting the way the body automates speech to something we know about in our own lives is so important. When you can see a young person attempting to control his speech, it's hard to explain the unconscious process by which natural fluency happens and long verbal explanations never worked to help me understand....but a good metaphor did what mere words could not.

Since so many PWS are male, I like to compare the way speech happens to the way shifting takes place in a car with automatic transmission. Before the automatic transmission, we used to shift gears manually. But with the automatic transmission, the gears still shift...but we don't shift the gears manually. We don't think about how to shift gears anymore. That's what an automatic transmission does. It shifts gears automatically.

A 14-year-old neighbor stuttered very badly and one day I connected the way an automatic transmission works with the natural way of speaking. I could tell he didn't get it at all. But almost a year later, George couldn't wait to tell me about his new discovery. "Hey" he says, "Think about this.....If speech is automatic then trying to force words out is a little like trying to shift an automatic transmission manually. And that's really crazy." That image, planted in his mind like a seed, produced something new in his awareness that was all his own and not something he was simply repeating.

Another thing that gives PWS a new look at stuttering is to ask if there are times he can speak without stuttering at all. I often ask if this person notices whether

or not he can read aloud to himself, when no one else is around, without stuttering. Most of the children who stutter find there are many times they can speak fluently....when they speak to a baby, or an animal, or a doll or stuffed animal, or when they speak in unison, or when they read aloud to themselves when no one is around, or when they sing, or when they get “out of their mind angry”, as one teenager put it.

Most young people simply don't realize they can read aloud fluently when they are in a room by themselves and believe no one else is in earshot. When they try it, most young people are able to read aloud without stuttering (if this person knows he is alone and no one is listening.) At times like this, they are not trying to remember how to say words or remembering they should take a deep breath before speaking; so that's a good thing. Relying on one's automatic process to happen on its own rather than relying on one's memory of what to say or how to say it makes all the difference.

When a person who stutters knows there are times when he can speak fluently and without thought or effort, this engenders trust in his natural ability. Trust in the spontaneous automatic process of speaking happens when we see that speech happens for us without thought or effort over and over and over again. We can depend on it. We can take it to the bank.

I also want to make the PWS aware of his forms of resistance to flow and how these blockers destroy natural fluency. This resistance is not happening *to* him. *He is doing the resisting. He is actually resisting the flow himself. Seeing the many forms of resistance is sometimes the first time he takes responsibility for what he is doing to make stuttering occur.*

One last word, and that is that stutterers tend to feel hopeless. Dr. Wendell Johnson referred to this trait as “copelessness.” So even if you think that speech can't be cured or that speech is genetic and Lucy is always going to stutter like her Uncle Ben, try to keep it to yourself. In the first place, I think your assessment is wrong. But even if you are right and I am wrong, a hopeless stutterer doesn't need to have his worst fears confirmed by his therapist. I speak from experience here.

Dealing with severe stuttering taught me how to remove the decades long, deep-rooted blocks that had been sabotaging my natural fluency, my ideas, my spontaneity, my personality and my relationships so I could finally manifest this spontaneity in more and more areas of my life naturally and effortlessly. In the

book I am writing now I give two main exercises that had a lot to do with sustaining the flow throughout the years. It would take too much time to go into those exercises at this time.

## **QUESTION 7**

**What do you think of the following paradox: the PWS suffers from stuttering because she cannot communicate verbally with others as she would like, which implies that she wants to communicate. Suffering would not exist if this desire were absent. The PWS are therefore communication-prone people, frustrated communicators, unlike some fluent people who lose interest in verbal communication, aren't they?**

When I first read this question, I thought you were asking if wanting to speak well is behind the behavior we call stuttering. But I believe now that you are asking if communication-prone people are more apt to stutter than people uninterested in verbal communication.

It may be true that stuttering occurs in frustrated communicators more than those who have no interest in communication. But wanting to speak well wouldn't be a problem if natural fluency was still "there". It was in the absence of natural fluency (after a few years of spontaneous and easy speech) that I began to want to speak more fluently. And wanting to speak well had its problems.

This is very true in other areas of our lives. There is much current science, especially in the field of athletics that postulates an inverse relationship between strong desire/strong intention and execution.

One would think the opposite: we all imagine that a positive relationship exists between desire and execution. Focused wanting and determination is what athletes, for example, believe separates them from the field. But appearances in this case are deceiving.

The insertion of conscious deliberation into the flow of speech (brought on by intense desire) causes a huge problem. Suppose the brain and body are working together (the brain sending commands to the body and the body obeying seamlessly) when suddenly something happens. The body which was acting seamlessly on the commands of the brain is now frustrated because something like a "censor" has entered the scene and starts shouting orders to the body....so

the body is getting mixed messages.....the brain sending its silent commands to the body at the same time the mind is also telling the body what to do. (fromINCOGNITO)

In THE SEVEN SECRETS OF WORLD CLASS ATHLETES, two great coaches tell us that desire or Intention drives us to try harder. “Trying harder creates tension, creates anxiety, creates an over eagerness to succeed” Steven Yellin and Buddy Biancalana write, informing us that desire and intention translate into the breakdown of of the processes that create effortless motion: “If an intention is foremost in the mind with a ‘life or death consequence’, then it trips an alarm in the prefrontal cortex, which then delays its arrival at the motor system and shuts down the fast-twitch muscles. When the Fluid Motion Factor is not active, fluid, and effortless, powerful motion is almost impossible to achieve.”

Infielder Nick Green talks about desire and intention: “In one situation I was in, I had to get a hit to win the game. That was not a thought I wanted to have. I understand the relationship between strong intention and the inability to execute. I was able to correct that thinking and manage to get a hit. If I did not get that thought out of my head, there was no chance I would have gotten a hit. To be honest with you, I wish I could not think at all when at bat. When I am hitting well, I don’t think about trying to get a hit. It just happens. I know this may sound strange but I would like to forget about baseball when I am in a game.”

What desire or intention does to the stutterer is very similar to what it does to the athlete: It drives us to try harder and trying harder creates tension, creates anxiety, and creates an over-eagerness to succeed.

#### **QUESTION 8.**

#### **HOW DO YOU VIEW THIS DISORDER, PARTICULARLY IN THE LIGHT OF THE LATEST SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES?**

Stuttering seems to me to be the result of a dysfunctional and disorderly relationship between my effortless flowing innate inner power and my effortful reactive resistant mind. David Eagleman referred to the relationship between these two systems as “an uneasy interaction between two characters: the automatic System 1 and the effortful System 2.”

In my view, two neural systems battle to control the single output channel of behavior (behavior includes speaking). If this sounds like System 1 and System

2 are equal in efficiency and power, this is not true in any way. My inner power or System 1 is the driver of the car. It is capable, effortless, efficient, fast, brilliant, automatic, spontaneous, responsive and outside the radar of the conscious mind. System 2, on the other hand, is slow, reactive, mechanical, effortful, cognitive and acts under the illusion that it is the driver of the car. When System 2 interferes in the work of System 1, it's like there are suddenly two sets of hands on the steering wheel, pulling in different directions, and the mixed messages to the body cancel each other out, which means "stuckness." We can't go anywhere.

If you're floundering right now in your journey, it's likely that you've become a micro-manager of your speech rather than trusting the power of your natural automatic spontaneous body to take you where you need to go. I found that when I am not focused on words at all....either the words I'm going to say or how I'm going to say them...the flow is there.

THE AMAZING EFFORTLESS SYSTEM THAT MANAGES THE SPEECH PROCESS IS BASIC TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF SPEECH IS A RIVER. I refer to this as the "inner power" or the Unconscious or Big Me or System 1. Indeed, the main point of SPEECH IS A RIVER is to inform you of the amazing unconscious automatic system that manages the speech process. Everything (including the fact that speech is best left on auto-pilot) is rooted in scientific facts surrounding the automatic nature of the body (which includes brain, nervous system, etc.)

Speech feels so effortless that it's hard to appreciate the effort the brain exerts to construct it. This feeling of effortlessness is rooted in the automatic nature of the brain. The idea of "speech on auto-pilot" would be unthinkable if it wasn't for the fact that the brain automates speech. So one of the great take-aways in brain science today is the AUTOMATIC NATURE OF THE BRAIN.

*"The amounts of 'processing power', attention and effort a process requires is the primary factor used to determine whether it's a controlled or an automatic process. An automatic process is capable of occurring without the need for attention, and the awareness of the initiation or operation of the process, and without drawing upon general processing resources of interfering with other concurrent thought process."* (Bargh, John; James S. Uleman. UNINTENDED THOUGHT. Guilford Publications.

Of course we know that the way speech or sight or hearing or walking happens is so automatic and complex, so many events happening at the same moment, that it simply can't be handled by the effortful, trying, pushing, forcing, thinking, planning mind...for the simple reason that the mind can handle only one or two or at the most *three* things at a time. But, unbelievably, the mind takes credit for what System 1 does even though there is no doubt that, as Eagleman writes: "Your consciousness is like a tiny stowaway on a transatlantic steamship taking credit for the journey without acknowledging the massive engineering underfoot."

If we think this gives a negative image of System 2, I should add that while it is true that System 2 may not *intend* to resist the natural flow of speech, the fact is that mind thinks it is there to protect me from harm. When we stutter, it is possible that the mind tries to keep this from happening by constantly chattering instructions ("You should take a deep breath, you need to try harder, you need to look at the person you are talking to, please try to relax, etc.") not realizing that the flow is held back at that point of interference.

"The conscious you, the I that flickers to life when you wake up in the morning, is the smallest bit of what's transpiring in your brain. Although we are dependent on the functioning of the brain for our inner lives, it runs its own show. Most of its operations are outside the security clearance of the conscious mind and the conscious mind simply has no right of entry."

"Consciousness is the smallest player in the operations of the brain. Our brains run on autopilot and the conscious mind has little access to the giant and mysterious factory that runs below it."

The Unconscious can speak without taking thought, spontaneously, automatically. This is a natural automatic process of learning and performing waiting to show us what it can do when allowed to operate without interference.

Latest scientific advances confirm the basic tenet of speech-on-autopilot: "The complexity of speech from the scientists point of view, is part of our biological birthright; it is not something that parents teach their children or something that must be elaborated in school." Oscar Wilde's famous statement turns out to be true: "Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught."

Languages have to be learned but "speech is an instinct, which means we have an instinctive tendency to speak, as we see in the babble of young children;

while no child has an instinctive tendency to brew, bake or write. Moreover no philologist now supposes that any language has been deliberately invented: it has been slowly and unconsciously developed through time by many steps.” Daniel Pinker in THE LANGUAGE INSTINCT

My stuttering went away as I learned to trust the instinctual process that happens without my conscious thought and effort. Since speech is both automatic and instinctual, it gave me the basis for an amazing experiment I called “the trust experiment.” At the core of the experiment is a single statement: “Language is instinctual and therefore it is NOT necessary for the mind to produce it, control it, monitor it, judge it, try to change it, or regulate it.”

It didn’t help me to deal with only one problematic belief or behavior at a time. I had to deal with my mind as a whole, the way my mind wanted to take credit and take control for work it had nothing to do with. But the most important thing was that “Big Me” had to get back in the driver’s seat. When that happened, relaxation occurred, as my mind simply sat in the passenger seat and went along for the ride. That is when permanent change happened in my speech. I simply stopped forcing words and observed the flow (as speech happened on its own without my mind interfering, controlling or resisting.) Note that flow is not something I am DOING but something that is happening by itself. The flow was simply there....I wasn’t *making* words happen. I was *letting* them happen. I was just conscious that the flow was there.... a gift of nature. “Nature does all things perfectly unless we interfere” turned out to be true.

Doing and Thinking are two different processes, done by two different systems and as we know, thinking is often a lazy substitute for doing. Natural fluency is a lot like breathing....when I breathe I am engaged in the work of breathing in, breathing out. I am *doing* it. I am not *thinking* about doing it. Or thinking about *how* to do it. I’m just doing it. That’s all. Just breathing in, breathing out. I’m not thinking about it. I’m not thinking “Wow! I am getting good at this!” or “I’m getting better and better at breathing in, breathing out.” Breathing is simply instinctive and natural, just as speech had been for me before I started to stutter.

Comment: I refer to breathing and speaking as “unconscious” not because I am in a coma....but because I am not conscious of what I am doing. It is being done for me but not by my effortful mind.

My view of “speech as a river that flows spontaneously and automatically when I get resistance out of the way” is constantly confirmed by the latest scientific

books, articles, journals, etc., just as it was confirmed by my own experience. As stuttering automatically dropped off, it occurred to me that my body (which includes my brain and motor system) is doing all the right things for natural fluency to occur and I don't even have to think about doing those things. The proof, as we have often been told, is always in the pudding.

A few of the books and articles of confirmation:

THE BRAIN, by David Eagleman;

THINKING FAST AND SLOW by Daniel Kahneman;

BRAIN PLASTICITY (Experiential brain research), Novich and Eagleman;

INCOGNITO by David Eagleman;

THE LANGUAGE INSTINCT by Steven Pinker;

THE TEENAGE BRAIN AND INCREASED SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS in "Psychological Science";

THE QUEST FOR CONSCIOUSNESS, by C. Koch.

UNINTENDED THOUGHT by Bargh and Uleman

THE AUTOMATIC BRAIN, YouTube. Video created in Europe on the nature of the brain.

## QUESTION 9

**How do you view your considerable contribution to stuttering? How do you think your work and your contribution differs from other authors who have devoted themselves to stuttering? In other words, what would you like us to retain from your considerable contribution?**

To overcome stuttering was the achievement of a lifetime for me. Speech was far too complex for my conscious mind to handle and I found great joy in the discovery that I am free from the unbearable hardship that "trying to speak" put on me.

There is one main purpose I have as I write: What I'm saying has to make sense to me and center around certain principles that I actually "get" because they work in other areas of my life also. Being a Pragmatist, I always experience everything many times over before I actually believe it to be true. And then, over a lifetime, I come to certain conclusions that I trust implicitly because they work. I'm not saying therapists don't have answers to stuttering but what they taught me was so fuzzy that I always left the clinic with the attitude: "What did the nice lady say?" It was a little like going to the doctor with a problem and he says "I want you to meditate two hours a day, do jumping-jacks three hours a day, avoid processed food, stop worrying, take vitamins and don't forget to spend an hour outdoors every day." It boggled my mind because there was no glue to hold it all together.

My time dealing with stuttering was extremely limited for many years but I have corresponded with PWS as often as possible and will do anything I can to help them achieve the same freedom I achieved. I view my contribution to stuttering as simply my charity, done freely and without charge.

Something that makes my day is to hear from a stutterer who has been unable, for whatever reason, to become truly AWARE that speech is a river. Just recently I listened to two “kids” I truly believed could never come to trust their own effortless unconscious processes. In both cases, they suddenly came to the insight, accidentally and on their own, that their brain is their friend and speech truly is a river. That kind of news makes me happy all day long.

#### **QUESTION 10**

**Your book has many quotes, but which one is your favorite quote, related or not, to stuttering? And why this choice?**

“There are two main paths through stuttering: the natural spontaneous flowing no-think, no-try path....and the effortful, full-of-thought-and-effort conscious pathway. The no-try pathway is natural, spontaneous and free. It is vibrant, joyful and edgy. The old path is planned, rigid, reactive and goal-oriented. It is fearful, defensive and ossified (with work, practice, planning, techniques, effort and willpower as priorities to push me over the top.)

“I’m going to take that back about only two paths through stuttering. There is the natural path (the path less-travelled) and the traditional path, that’s true. There is also the passive option: sweetly but passively waiting for stuttering to get over with, like waiting for a kidney stone to pass. Many people confuse passivity with spontaneity, but there’s all the difference in the world. The path I took finally determined my recovery.”

I like that. It still pretty well sums it up for me.

#### **QUESTION 11**

**Your work being very important for the stuttering community, do you allow me to come back to you in the coming months to carry on this interview?**

Yes, of course. I appreciate your interest.

Thanks for giving me this opportunity, Lionel. I have enjoyed it. Since you expressed an interest in websites, etc.....I created a website offering books or parts of books to people who stutter, free of charge. Richard Parent and I are joint owners of this website so if you have suggestions, let either of us know. [www.freestutteringbooks.com](http://www.freestutteringbooks.com)