

A STUTTERER'S LIFETIME JOURNEY

1.INTRODUCTION

This submission is about my speech journey over the last seventy-three years. In my submission I have written about my family association with stuttering, speech therapy, psychiatric treatment, job environment, Australian Speak Easy Association (ASEA) and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT).

2.FAMILY ASSOCIATION WITH STUTTERING

I was adopted at birth. It was only two years ago that I discovered that my birth mother was a stutterer. I have also tracked down a half-brother who has a severe stutter. He lost his job as a school teacher because of his stuttering and he became a pig farmer. We believe my half-brother may have a "double dose" of the "stutter gene" as our mother's parents were cousins and my half-brother's father was our mother's cousin? I recently mentioned to my half-brother about Smooth Speech and CBT. His response was "I guess I try to deal with my stuttering as best as I can. I find self-acceptance easier if others encourage acceptance. Again, I have to be accepting in turn. I have little desire to undergo any kind of formal/ semi-formal therapy except that of day-to-day engagement." My son is also a stutterer. All my life I have been told my stuttering was my problem, brought on by myself. I now know otherwise.

3.CHILDHOOD

My stuttering was picked up at infant's school when I was six years old. My parents had no idea that I stuttered. I recall having some speech therapy at infant's school on an irregular basis. At the age of nine I attended speech therapy on a Tuesday afternoon at the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children for one year. My recollection is that I had no more problems with my stuttering until I was thirteen years old. I struggled at high school with my stuttering.

4.WORK

My job after leaving school was at AGL, Australian Gas Light Company, employed as a "unit record equipment operator" in the IT Department. I had no need for fluency. At the age of twenty-one I realised I had become a social recluse because of my stuttering.

5.SPEECH THERAPY

At this time my stuttering got worse and I went to Speech Pathologist Elinor Wray "one of the founders of the speech pathology profession in this country". After about six months of speech therapy with Elinor Wray, Elinor suggested she could do nothing further for me and suggested I see psychiatrist Dr Harry Bailey. Some of Elinor's adult patients had done well under Dr Bailey's treatment. Elinor also suggested I should change my job and leave home.

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6.DR HARRY BAILEY

At my first consultation, Dr Bailey prescribed medication to assist me with my stuttering. I was prescribed amobarbital sodium, morning and night. Dr Bailey referred me to his associate psychiatrist, Dr John Herron, at the Cerebral Surgery Research Unit at Callan Park Mental Hospital. On my first visit to CSRU, I was strapped to a bed, held down by two orderlies and given an injection. My head “exploded”. I can’t recall what tests they undertook while I was “under”. I was then given the “antidote” injection and told I would not stutter for the next hour. I didn’t. I was able to purchase a train ticket for my journey home without the trace of a stutter. I had follow up visits to CSRU for EEGs. The EEG results were that I had spiking on the left hand side of the brain. Dr Bailey suggested he could operate to stop my stuttering as he had located the part of the brain that was causing the stuttering. Dr Bailey also suggested that I change my job.

7.CHANGING JOB

I changed my job at the age of twenty-three. I joined AGE, Australian General Electric, as a trainee computer programmer. The manager asked me to take on the position of Specialist – Technical Applications and deal with customers using the GE Project Scheduling Programs at the GE Computer Service Bureau. I would also be required to give training courses. I mentioned to the manager that I had a stutter. He said fine by him, the customers would be hanging in on every word I said. AGE had all young staff. The social life was amazing. There were parties every night. I can’t recall having any problems with my stutter.

8.CHANGING JOB AND LEAVING HOME

At the age of twenty-six I joined Mount Isa Mines, one of my customers at AGE. I left my family home in Sydney and went three thousand kilometres to outback Queensland where I stayed for thirty-one years. In Mount Isa, as a single person, I engaged in recreational activities new to me such as squash, horse riding, caving, abseiling, swimming and sailing. I had regular promotions in the IT department. My stutter was of no great concern to me and I believe it never held me back from a promotion. After two years in Mount Isa I proposed marriage to my future wife. The night of my proposal I abandoned the medication I had been taking for six years and I had no further contact with Dr Bailey.

9.STRESS AWARENESS COURSE

After sixteen years in Mount Isa and at the age of forty-two, I attended a three day Stress Awareness Workshop at Mount Isa Mines that changed my lifestyle. I began swimming daily before work, a practice I still do today, a surf at Mooloolaba Beach every morning. I undertook walking, my wife and I did a one hour walk after dinner every evening while we were living in Mount Isa. I became a teetotaler.

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10.SMOOTH SPEECH

At the age of forty-nine I read in our local Mount Isa newspaper about a smooth speech course that Mount Isa schools were undertaking. I contacted the school speech pathologist and she put me in contact with the speech pathologist at the Mount Isa Base Hospital. Over the next six years I attended the Speech Pathology Department at the Mount Isa Base Hospital on ninety-seven occasions. The smooth speech technique I mastered in the six year period resulted in me being mostly stutter free. However, I now believe that the "safety behaviours" procedure I implemented at that time was detrimental to my social interaction freedom.

11.SPEAK EASY ASSOCIATION

In 1991, at the age of fifty-one, I joined the Queensland Speak Easy Association. The Sunshine Coast Branch of QSEA, with a grant of \$900 from the Sunshine Coast Council, was set up in 2010 with a speech pathologist, two psychologists and about five members. At two seminars in 2011 we had presentations made on stuttering research and the latest methods in stuttering treatment, with a considerable amount of time spent on discussing Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). Our speech therapist attended a seminar on CBT in May 2011 and provided us with the contacts for the Australian Stuttering Research Centre (ASRC) CBT on-line program. At the age of seventy-one I commenced the CBT program. I completed the ASRC CBT program in three months.

12.CBT (COGNITIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPY)

At the start of the CBT program, I could only find two social anxiety questions that I felt applied to me. What I got out of the CBT program for those two items was unbelievable. Along the way I picked up so many great ideas that I have implemented into my everyday activities. The Attention Training Technique procedure and the Rescripting procedure provided excellent results for me. Dropping of "safety behaviours" provided an incredible result. I found that the CBT program acknowledged that people who stutter often have undesirable personal character traits. The program recognised these character traits and in lessons and exercises I was shown how to drop these character traits and "get a life".

The CBT program was one of the great events of my life.

13.ASEA CONFERENCE MELBOURNE 2012

I attended the ASEA Conference in Melbourne in February 2012. It was suggested to me at the conference that I should write up the history of my life as a stutterer. This I have completed, a 6,000 word "speech history". I was also given the opportunity to speak to conference delegates about my experience with the ASRC CBT program and on my involvement fifty-two years ago with "mental health issues and stuttering".

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14.ASEA CONFERENCE SYDNEY 2013

I attended the ASEA Conference in Sydney in March 2013. At this conference I gave a talk on my lifetime journey with my stutter.

15.CONCLUSION

Never in my wildest dreams did I anticipate that later in life I would finally conquer my stutter. CBT has been the “icing on the cake” in my lifelong ambition to achieve fluency. I believe that changing jobs, leaving home, undertaking a smooth speech course and finally taking part in a CBT program, all played their part in my successful “Lifetime Journey”.