

# MY SILENT PAUSE

By Hunter Adair

## CONTENTS

Foreword.....	page 1
About the author.....	page 2
Introduction.....	page 3
Chapter 1. Born with a handicap.....	page 4
Chapter 2. My school years.....	page 9
Chapter 3. In my teens.....	page 16
Chapter 4. Meeting people.....	page 22
Chapter 5. Getting a job.....	page 28
Chapter 6. Visiting shops.....	page 35
Chapter 7. The telephone.....	page 40
Chapter 8. Communicating with people.....	page 46
Chapter 9. Getting promotion.....	page 52
Chapter 10. Controlling my stammer.....	page 57



## FOREWORD

I was very honoured to be invited to read Hunter Adair's 'My Silent Pause' and even more so to be asked to write a 'Foreword' to the book. Having been a stammerer for most of my life, I found myself able to identify with so many of the situations in which he has found himself and with so many of the problems which he has described, which are a common affliction to so many stammerers.

The book describes Hunter's lifetime experiences as a stammerer and details the remarkably successful efforts he has made to control it. It describes the communication problems that he underwent throughout his school life and the problems with adolescence, including the all important worry over being unable to invite a girl to dance. The worries over the job interview and how to deal with farmers on, the stammerer's biggest bogey of all, the dreaded telephone. These things lead up to the impetus that made Hunter really determined to improve his communication skills, this impetus coming in the form of a hurtful insult from a bombastic farmer who had probably, in reality, thought too little and imbibed too much. Hunter carries on to describe how, with some help from a speech therapist and a considerable degree of determination, he has been able to bring his stammer under control.

As I read this book, I felt an increasing admiration for what Hunter has achieved and I feel that this book will do much for the confidence of many stammerers. It demonstrates that a stammer need not inhibit one's lifestyle or ambition and it achieves this in the most descriptive prose. However I hope that this book will also be read by non stammerers as it will result in greater understanding of an affliction which is capable of causing great unhappiness to the stammerer but which is frequently misunderstood by fluent speakers.

*Hon. Wentworth Beaumont*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hunter Adair is a real countryman. He has lived and worked in the countryside all his life. He was born in Ayrshire, Scotland in 1933 and was brought up on a dairy farm. He was educated in Scotland, where he studied agriculture at the West of Scotland Agricultural College at Auchincruive, near Ayr.

In 1959 he joined the Milk Marking Board for England and Wales, working at a Cattle Breeding Centre in the north of England. Then in 1965 he was appointed Assistant Regional Officer in the Northern Region covering the north of England up to the Scottish Borders, where he visited estates and farms. He was also editor for one of the company's farming magazines for a time. Hunter worked for the company for 30 years.

At present Hunter is running the family farm near Hexham in Northumberland. He sometimes writes articles for the Newcastle Journal, the Hexham Courant and the Northumberland farming journal, about farming, wildlife, shooting, gundogs and the countryside. Hunter also does interviews for BBC Radio Newcastle on countryside topics from time to time. He writes under the pen name 'THE DALESMAN'.

Hunter is the author of several country books for both children and adults, and his 'Guide to the Countryside' is on the internet at [www.countrytrust.org.uk](http://www.countrytrust.org.uk), under 'resources'. He mostly does his own photography, drawings and paintings for his country books, which are very popular. The books are about farming, wildlife, gundogs and the countryside. Hunter is very knowledgeable about the laws and ways of the countryside. He says you learn something new every day in the countryside.



*Swallows, by Hunter Adair.*

## INTRODUCTION

Being born with a handicap can alter the quality of your lifestyle if you let it. You sometimes need help to work out the best way to cope with it.

If you happen to be blind, other people can see this handicap, or if you are born with a limp, people can see this. But if you happen to be born deaf, or with a stammer, people can't see these disabilities until they have to deal with you.

I had a very bad stammer. I could hardly string two words together without stammering. This meant I was really up against it. How on earth could I cope and deal with people, and do a good job for a company? But I ended up working 30 years for a very large national company, meeting and talking to people from all walks of life.

My first boss, the man who appointed me, was an old hand at dealing with people. He was a great help to me for many years. The first week I was with him, he said, 'Hunter, you will have a terrible time trying to deal with all the various business people if you don't do something about your stammering.' With this advice from my boss, and with some help from a speech therapist in Newcastle and months and months of hard work and determination, I managed to control my stammering.

The book explains how stammering affected all the stages in my life and how I managed to overcome this disability. I hope the book will be a help to anyone who has a stammer, and for teachers and speech therapists..

## CHAPTER I

### BORN WITH A HANDICAP

Many people are born with one sort of disability or another, and some people become disabled either during their young lives or during their working lives which can completely change the way they live.

People with no disability can't really understand what it's like to have one, though they may think they understand. Some people do try to understand and do a great deal to help. But when you are faced with a disability you have to find ways to try and cope with it.

There are many organisations now which do a great deal for disabled people, and there are many groups of local people who help and work with disabled people in their own community. However, when I was a small boy in the forties there weren't the organisations and local groups of people around to help and advise disabled people as there are today. I and people like me with a disability had to learn how to cope with it in the best way they could.

From an early age I had a very bad stammer. None of my brothers or sisters had a stammer. I seem to be the only one in the family who stammers, and there was no trace of any other family members in the past having a stammer.

Can you just imagine being the only one in a large family with a handicap such as a stammer? What had gone wrong and what had I done to deserve this horrible handicap. I know pretty well that some people will say, what have I got to whinge about. Many people have been born with a worse handicap than I had, and they turned their handicap to their advantage and made a good life for themselves.

I have never let my stammering get me down. Some people have really hurt me from time to time. At the time I was being hurt, I used to think to myself I wish I was dead. The people that set out to hurt me normally did it in front of other people.

I think I have done pretty well for myself in my life with having this very bad stammer. If I had been prepared to move further south, when I was offered work in the Surrey area, I may have even done better.

Let me tell you two short stories before I go back to my younger days, about how cruel and kind some people can be when you have a disability.

The first story happened a number of years ago. I was giving a lecture one night in a local hotel to a group of 50 odd farmers about the E.E.C. agricultural policies.

I was very friendly with a few of the farmers at the lecture and I knew most of the other farmers attending. Some farmers would soon have picked me up if they disagreed with what I was saying. The lecture went off pretty well I thought. I was using what I call my silent pause. I used this silent pause when I was having trouble getting a word out. I would stop talking for a few seconds,

the audience would then all look up to see what is wrong. I would then start speaking again. I was using my stammering to my advantage.

After the lecture was finished a few farmers invited me down into the bar for a drink before going home. About a dozen of us were all standing together having a drink and chat at the bar. We were discussing the evening's lecture and one or two farmers were telling us a few jokes. I had just finished telling the farmers a funny story, when one of the farmers turned to me and said, 'You stammering b\*\*\*\*\*d, your lecture tonight was a load of rubbish and you are a stupid stammering b\*\*\*\*\*d.'

I was hurt to the core, as this farmer attacking me said it with so much venom. I could have dropped dead. The farmer didn't just stick a knife in me, he also turned the knife in me. The rest of the farmers were all stunned at what their fellow farmer had said to me.

Everybody went silent for a few moments, to me it was like a lifetime. Then one of the farmers tried to come to my rescue. He said to the farmer attacking me, 'Now hold on, my friend, that's a bit rough' and 'Hunter doesn't deserve this sort of treatment. I think you owe our friend an apology.'

Again all went silent for a few seconds, which again seemed to me like a lifetime. No apology was forth coming and one or two of the farmers started having a conversation again. Some of my farmer friends could see I was really hurt. I finished my drink as quickly as I could and said good night to them all and made a quick exit to my car.

A few nights later most of the farmers who had been at the bar that night, phoned me up and said the farmer that attacked me that evening was way out of order, because he had too much to drink. He really didn't mean to hurt me and I should forget what was said.

I can never forget what happened that night at the bar. I will carry this with me for the rest of my life. I still feel very hurt at the thought of what he said to me in front of all these other farmers. I still see this farmer from time to time and he chats away to me as if nothing had ever happened between us.

The second story I want to tell you about which still sticks very much in my mind is when I was asked by the Directors of a large dairy company in Newcastle if I would organise and run an agricultural seminar for their young managers. They had about 15 managers in the various departments in this company. Most of the managers were young men and women, with one or two older experienced managers.

I agreed to run the course. I arranged to take half the management in the morning and the other half in the afternoon. It was going to be a full day's seminar about the agricultural industry.

At the end of the seminar one of the older managers in the company, who I knew very well and had done business with over many years at the creamery, came over to me and said, 'Hunter I very much admire you on how you handled the day's seminar.' He said I didn't stammer once, and that when he first knew me I could hardly get two words out without stammering. He asked

how on earth did I do it.

This was a great compliment to me at the time. I have also been asked many times since by farmers and business people, how on earth did I manage to stop stammering. These people knew me when my stammering was really at its worse.

There are many incidents that happen when you have a stammer, and how some people look at you with this disability. A few adults seem to get some sort of pleasure out of mocking the disabled. Most people at least try to understand the disabled. I know pretty well that children sometimes mock the disabled, but they don't really understand. The adults should know better.

When I was a young boy I used to know a boy a bit older than myself who was born blind. I many times tried to have a conversation with this blind boy. What a job I had trying to get the words out.

One thing in my favour was the blind boy couldn't look at me straight in the face when I was trying to talk to him, so I could press, screw or twist my face as much as I liked to try and get the words out. I many times just couldn't get the words out that I wanted to say to the blind boy, and many times I changed the subject to use words that I could get out. Words starting with T, S, P, or H, were many times the most difficult words to start speaking with. I would try and think quickly of some alternative word which would mean the same. It was not easy by any means.

I sometimes found trying to talk to this blind boy was more difficult than trying to talk to other boys his age, because they could look at me straight in the face. I thought the blind boy would be easier to talk to, but this wasn't the case. I think I probably tried too hard to force myself to talk to the blind boy and I just got myself stuck and couldn't speak to him.

I admired the skills of this blind boy, he could strip and build a bike, yet he had never ever seen any machinery. The boy had never seen anything as he was completely blind. He once asked me how it felt to have such a bad stammer. I told him I didn't know anything different. But I would give everything I had, which wasn't very much, just to be able to speak properly without stammering.

When I managed to get the words out one day, I asked the blind boy how it felt not being able to see. He said it would be nice to put a face to a name and to see all the colours. I said to him what colours. He said people tell him there are different colours all around him. I said to him I was just testing him to see how clever he was. He had a good laugh at my remarks.

I knew the blind boy for several years. He could tell when I was beside him without me ever speaking, as he used to know people by their footsteps. Many times where he had only met a person once a long time ago, he would often surprise them by asking them by name how they were keeping.

When my stammer started as a young boy. S, H, T, or P's. were letters which I found it very difficult to start speaking with. Words beginning with the letters A, O, I, or B's were a lot easier. If I did happen to try and start speaking with a word beginning with a T, I might be lucky to get the word out, without starting

to stammer. If however I did start to stammer and was trying to force the word out, then after a few minutes I would be exhausted and would stop trying to speak.

I was easy prey for older children to torment me when I started to stammer. I would sometimes let out a yell or scream when I couldn't get started speaking. If some children were trying to take something from me, like my free school milk or some sweets I had, then I would yell 'no', as words starting with N, didn't need much force to get them out - and most times I got away with this without starting to stammer.

However if the same children asked me a question which I had to reply with the word 'yes', then I could be in trouble. I would try and say the word, but most likely I would start to stammer. I would many times get myself into such a state that my face would be scarlet red with me trying to force the word 'yes' out. If the children were still looking at me as I was stammering, I would stop stammering and just nod my head.

Because of my severe stammer I had to develop other methods of communication to get the things I wanted. If for instance I wanted my mother to get me something, I used to touch her or pull on her dress and point to what I wanted. My mother made this very easy for me.

My brothers and sisters didn't make it as easy for me as my mother did. Sometimes I would point to something I wanted, but one of my brothers or sisters would ask me what I wanted, and they would keep asking just to frustrate me and to start me stammering.

It was easy to start stammering, especially if the thing I wanted started with a word such as an S. I would simply start stammering and crying until I sometimes got what I wanted. Many times I got what I wanted just by pointing to it, if the other members in the family couldn't be bothered listening to me stammering on. At other times I would be teased by members of the family so that they could hear me stammering. They could be very cruel at times and think nothing of it, seeing it as a great game.

I had got a small red farm tractor and trailer as a Christmas present when I was about five or six years old, and I spent hours and hours playing with this toy. If anybody wanted to hear me stammering, all they needed to do was to pretend they were going to steal my tractor and trailer. That would frustrate me and set me off stammering.

Or if I wanted the tractor, and it was sitting up on the table out of my reach, I would point to it and one of my brothers would ask me if I wanted a spoon. When I started stammering to try and tell him I didn't, he would then ask me if I wanted a fork. He would go on like this just to keep stammering, as he knew all the time it was the tractor I wanted. This is how my brothers and some family friends used to tease me. My mother many times had to intervene and tell them to stop teasing me. They would sometimes be crafty and take me into another room away from my mother and she would miss quite a lot of the torment I was going through.

When I was playing outside with some of the neighbours' older children, they were often very cruel. One of the children would start teasing me trying to get me to say something just to hear me stammering and then the other children would join in stammering in my face. When the older children got me started stammering, they would gather around me laughing and sniggering at me and enjoy listening to me stammering. Some of the children would try and imitate me by stammering in my face, and they would hit me in the face as I was trying to get the words out. This torment could go on for a long time until someone stepped in and stopped it.

Apart from my brothers and sisters, there were plenty of neighbours' children around of all ages and I was the only one with this stammering disability. Some of the older children pounced on this disability and treated me like a lame duck. This gave me rough times for a few years.

I was too young to understand that I was being teased and tormented by my brothers and by some of the neighbours' children. It was when I was about six years old or so that I began to realise that I was different from the other children.

One of a neighbour's boys used to tease me and torment me something awful every opportunity he got. He would start me off stammering, then he would start pushing and kicking me until sometimes I was black and blue. This was great fun to him. I have never seen this man for 30 odd years who made part of my young life hell, and don't know if he is still alive today.

My mother was a great help at supporting me, but she had the rest of the family to look after. I was one of a big family. So I had to take my share of the rough with the smooth, and there was plenty of it.

We weren't a rich family. Very few families were rich in the 1940's, and we had very few material things. I had the little red tractor and trailer and some of the neighbours' children very often came into our house to play with it. There weren't many children's toys around - we played with simple things like milk bottle card tops, or marbles, or we played at kick-the-can - and as boys we always played football.

We all seemed to be very happy when I was a young boy in the 1940's. The neighbours used to help one another both in health and in sickness, nothing ever seemed to be any trouble to the neighbours we had around us.

None of the adults ever teased me when I was very young. It was always the children much older than myself.

The only thing I now wish that had happened to me when I was very young: my parents were offered to send me to a special school in Edinburgh in Scotland, but they refused to send me away from home. I don't know their reason why they refused to send me away to this special school. They probably thought I was better off at home. If I had gone I may have ended up doing better than I have done. At the same time I think I have done pretty well for myself.



## CHAPTER 2

### MY SCHOOL YEARS

I can well remember my first day at school. I was just a few months over five years old, when my mother marched me up to the local village infant school.

We were met in the school yard, by this tall slim elderly lady who was to be my first teacher for the next year. My mother said to me 'This is your teacher Miss Lowes'. She shook my hand and said to me 'What's your name?'

I was stuck straight away and started to stammer, trying to tell the teacher my name. It was impossible, as she took me by surprise. My mother came to my rescue and said 'His name is Hunter, but unfortunately he has a very bad stammer, otherwise he is all right.' I like the last bit.

Miss Lowes looked a bit stunned because I had a stammer. She said to my mother they would see what they could do to help me. She then started to ask my mother what caused the stammer, and what effect it had on me. She had seen at first hand how the stammer affected me.

Miss Lowes then took me by the hand and led me into the school building - while my mother made her way across the school yard to the single iron gate, which led out into a lane that went down into the village.

I was first shown the cloakroom where I was told I had to leave my coat, Wellingtons and baggage. Miss Lowes then led me into her class room, where there were 35 small wooden desks with small iron framed chairs which had wooden seats.

Because of my stammer, Miss Lowes had already started to treat me differently from the other children. She said to me that because I had a stammer she would give me a desk in the middle of the front row opposite her own desk, where she could see me and keep an eye on me.

As the classroom was on the flat, all the desks and seats were on the same level. Having my desk at the front of the class meant I couldn't see the other children if I started stammering, and the other children couldn't see my face when I was pressing trying to get the words out.

What Miss Lowes had in mind having me sitting in the desk straight in front of her I don't know. As I would stammer no matter which desk and what row I was sitting at. She would probably be thinking that if she had to come to my rescue, she wouldn't have so far to walk.

For the first three months or so I was only at the school in the mornings. This was the normal practice for new beginners. I walked home at lunch time every day on my own. We lived about a kilometre or mile from the school,

My mother took me to school every day for the first week, then I made my own way there with some of the other children which I met on the way.

The first year at school was fairly easy. We were first taught the three R's. Miss Lowes gave us all our first reading book, which she asked us to take home and practice reading the words on the pages we had covered at school.

There were about 25 mixed children in the class. Miss Lowes had time for each and every one of us at the reading lessons, or any other lesson.

She would sit with the children in the most need of help. At the reading lessons Miss Lowes use to sit with me and go over and over the words with me. For instance if the words on the book page were THE BIG DOG. Miss Lowes would get me to say with her THE BIG DOG. As we said the words together it wasn't too difficult.

If however I did start to stammer trying to say the word. Miss Lowes would stop me and ask me to try again. However after one or two more tries at the word and I still couldn't get it out, she would say just leave it and we'd try another word.

While this was probably a great help to me at the time, it was avoiding the problem. Miss Lowes probably felt uncomfortable with me when I was stammering. She certainly didn't know how to deal with me when I stammered. Many times when I was stammering, she would stop me, and get another child in the class to take over and say the word that I couldn't say.

I can remember this incident very well: I had been at school for several weeks, when Miss Lowes told me the headmaster at the school wanted to see me the following Monday morning. My mother said there was nothing to worry about, as the headmaster was a very nice man and he would just be wanting to see me, as he saw all the new children when they first started at the school.

I didn't know it at the time, that the headmaster didn't see every new entrant when they started at the school. He wanted to see me specially because I had a very bad stammer.

When Monday morning came around, my mother walked me up to the main school building for 9 o'clock. As we walked into the building we met the headmaster going into his office.

'Ah,' he said 'Mrs Adair, is this your son Hunter?' He then asked me to come into his office with him. He thanked my mother for bringing me up to his office and she turned and went out of the school building making for home.

As we both entered the headmaster's office, he went behind his desk and told me to stand in front of his desk.

In his office was a young lady sitting in the corner, she was to be the first teacher I would get when I moved up and joined the main school building in two years time. The headmaster had asked her to come along to see what she thought of my stammering. I didn't know this at the time.

This is what happened. The headmaster said, 'Well Hunter my boy, I hear you have a very bad stammer.' I nodded my head. The headmaster said again, 'I hear Hunter you have a very bad stammer, yes or no.'

I tried to say yes, but couldn't get the word out and I started to stammer. After a few moments the headmaster said, 'Come on boy spit it out.' When I couldn't, he finally said alright then shut up and stop stammering on.

The headmaster was getting very irritable with me stammering on. He hadn't come across a boy, or girl with such a severe stammer before, although he had been teaching for over thirty odd years.

The headmaster was a man getting on for about sixty years old and had a lot of experience with people. He was also short of patience, as I was to find out throughout my school years. He asked me a few more questions and told me to nod, one way or another if I couldn't get the word out.

He then asked me could I tell him what day of the week it was. I said it was Monday without any trouble, as I could say it without breathing in, or out.

He then asked me what day followed Monday. Ah very difficult as I couldn't get started speaking and started to stammer, until the headmaster said 'Shut up boy stammering on there.'

The headmaster then turned to the teacher sitting in the corner and asked her what she thought of my stammer. The teacher said he certainly has a very bad stammer, but she thought the school could possibly help me to stop stammering.

Little did this teacher know there was nobody at the school, who could help me very much with my stammer. Some teachers thought they knew what to do, but when they were faced with me stammering in front of them, they would let me go on for a few seconds, then tell me to sit down.

The headmaster sat and looked at me for a few moments then said, 'I don't know what we are going to do with you boy, but we will try and knock this stammering out of your thick head while you are at my school.' He then said 'Go back to your class room and I shall see you in a few months time.'

The first two years at the infant school weren't all that difficult, as my first teacher Miss Lowes and my second year teacher were quite helpful and didn't put much pressure on me when I started stammering. They both used to tell me not to worry and don't bother trying to say anything that was difficult. I felt this was the time the school should have been trying to teach me how to control my stammering.

When I moved up to the main school building in my third year, I knew this stammer I had would cause me a great deal of trouble. For the first time I was pretty worried about how the other 200 + children in the school would treat me.

In the main school I soon found out it was the real world, as I wasn't sheltered the same as I was in the infant school. The boys and girls in the main school were from about 8 years old, to 15 years old.

I sort of crawled into my shell when I first went up to the main school. Some of the older children spotted my stammering and they pounced on me like a hive

of bees. I acted a bit like a weakling and some of the sharp boys and girls were after me.

You will all have heard about bullying at school. Well my own situation wasn't that I was being bullied as much as being tormented and harassed because of my stammer. At times I was harassed something awful, with the mocking, punching, kicking, pushing and shoving I got.

Morning break and lunch break at the school were the times when I would get mocked, tormented, pushed, kicked or shoved and cornered by certain children until I started stammering for them.

Sometimes if one of the teachers saw that I was being cornered in the playground and being harassed by some of the older children, they would come out of the school and break up the party. However some children were soon back tormenting me.

One or two of the older girls at the school were often much worse at tormenting me than the boys were. I can remember one sly girl who used to make my life hell at every opportunity she got. She used to get me up against the school wall in some corner and spread her hands out onto the wall to stop me from escaping. Then she would start mocking me by stammering in my face, and asking me questions to get me on stammering. If I didn't start stammering for her, she would slap my face, pull my hair and kick me in the shins.

This girl used to come from nowhere when I was in a corner, then she would try and get me to repeat words after her. When I didn't or couldn't, she would punch and kick me until I started stammering. It was horrible. When this girl was trying to force me to start stammering, she used to inflict pain on me to get me to stammer. I many times couldn't start stammering and she would inflict more pain on me until she got some response, or she had me yelling with pain.

Another trick was she used to steal my 10 o'clock sandwich when she could. My mother used to wrap me a slice of buttered toast every day, which I took to school and ate at the 10 o'clock break, along with a third pint of milk which we were all given at the school each day. Most children brought something to eat every day and had it with their milk, although some children kept their milk and had it with their lunch. We collected the milk from a crate in the class room, as we were going out for our 10 o'clock break. This girl used to wait and watch for me coming out of the school door during the morning break, then she would pounce on me and steal my toast. She would say, 'Give me that toast you stammering git.' Many times she would also steal my milk as well.

One of the teachers used to know about this girl, mocking me and stealing my toast and milk, along with anything else she thought I had. If for instance she saw me eating an apple, she would come over to me and just pull the apple out of my hand and run away with it.

The teacher that knew the trouble I was having with this girl was called Mr Small. He hadn't much patience with my stuttering either. If for instance he

caught anyone dreaming in his class room, he use to break up bits of the black board chalk and throw a bit of the chalk at them and tell them in a sharp voice to pay attention. Mr Small used to tell me to kick this girl in the shins where it will hurt her when she started tormenting me. The girl had been in Mr Small's class but she had moved on up through the school. Mr Small knew the girl well and told me several times that she was a real terror.

When I moved into Mr Small's class, he was very quick and sharp and thought nothing about giving anyone, boy or girl a sharp clip across the back of the head, or hitting them with a bit if chalk. Mr Small was a good teacher, but he had very little time for me stammering and holding up his class.

When it came to the reading lesson, each one in the class had to read out loud two or three paragraphs from a book we were learning from at the time. Mr Small would ask the first boy or girl at the end of the front row, to stand up and start the reading. Then each boy or girl in turn stood up and started reading until Mr Small told them to sit down.

When it came my turn to read, Mr Small used to say 'Right Adair, get reading.' Sometimes I could start reading without much trouble, it all depended on what letter the first word started with. I many times got a start reading, then I would come to a word which may have started with the letter S, and there I was stuck. I would then start stammering until Mr Small got fed up listening to me stammering. He would say to me in a sharp voice 'Sit down Adair and stop stammering on boring us all.'

Mr Small had little time for me in the class room when I started stammering. He sometimes used to fling a bit of chalk at me and tell me to shut up. All the children in the class were treated the same. He used to push on with the lessons and couldn't stand anyone holding up the class.

Yet sometimes at the end of the day. Mr Small would ask me to stay behind as he wanted to see me. I used to think to myself what have I done now and would I get a clout across the ear.

Most times when Mr Small wanted to see me on my own, he used to try and tell me how to defend myself in the school yard. He knew quite well that sometimes a group of children would surround me in the playground and they would start mocking and tormenting me. Some children were very brave in groups, but not so brave on their own. I used to get pulled, pushed and punched until some parts of my body were black and blue because I had a stammer.

Mr Small used to tell me to kick those tormenting me, hard in the shins with my boots and that would stop them. This showed Mr Small was concerned about me in the playground. He knew most days I had a rough time in the school yard, from at least one older boy or girl.

One day I did kick a girl older than myself, in the front of the leg and drew blood, because she was mocking me and slapping my face trying to get me to stammer. I was reported to the headmaster by the girl's teacher and brought before him. I was severely belted on both hands and across the bottom for

using violence in the school playground. The headmaster asked me why I kicked the girl. When I tried to tell him what this girl was doing to me, I started to stammer and the headmaster couldn't wait until I got the words out, which may have taken all day. He just told me to bend over his desk and the beating started.

On one hand Mr Small was telling me to kick out and defend myself at any boy or girl mocking or tormenting me, yet when I was caught doing this I was punished for it by the headmaster.

This made me retreat from groups of children. I many times used to stand on my own in the school playground, watching for the children I knew harassed me. I would move around the school yard to try and be on my own and to try and keep out of trouble.

Mr Small would never have thought of discussing with the headmaster the harassment I was getting in the school yard by some of the older boys and girls, because he wouldn't like the headmaster to think he was trying to favour me.

There were ten teachers in the main school building, seven woman and three men teachers. I very much doubt if they ever discussed my stammering at their coffee break, as they all treated me differently and none of them really knew what to do with me. Some of the teachers kept away from me as much as possible, as if I had some sort of disease, while other teachers did try to help me in their own sort of way whenever they could.

One teacher in particular did really try to help me as much as she could in her class room. For instance when it came to the reading lesson, and it was my turn to read, I would stand up and the teacher would come over to my desk and start reading with me. She would start the reading and ask me to follow her. Although the teacher helping me with my reading took the pressure off me a bit in the classroom, it really didn't help me much with my stammering, as she did most of the reading.

First thing every morning the teacher used to call the school register. She would call out your name and you had to say 'Here'. When she called my name out and I couldn't answer her, she would look up to find me stammering and say, 'I see you are here Hunter.' I would then stop stammering.

One teacher I had really frustrated me, sometimes more than some of the children in the school playground. For instance when it came my turn to read she insisted I took my turn. I have stood stammering for half an hour before this teacher stopped me and told me to shut up and sit down.

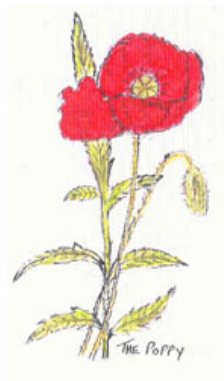
This teacher also had a habit of trying to say the words for me. If for instance I was talking - or trying to talk - to someone and she was present, she would say the words for me. Most times she got the words right, but she sometimes only got some of them right, and this was very frustrating. If I was trying to ask this teacher something and got stuck and started stammering, she would say the word for me. If she said the wrong word then I would have to try and say 'no', and often this was very confusing.

Although my days at school were fairly happy, I didn't really get much help from any of the teachers to control my stammering. Some teachers were quite supportive, while other teachers were pleased when I moved on out of their class because of my stammering.

The male teachers had less time for me than the female teachers because of my stammering. Mr Small the teacher gave me some good advice from time to time, but he also gave me a rough time in his class room.

I am also pretty sure the headmaster thought I was putting this stammer on at times to get what I wanted. I wish I had been able to do this. But I really didn't know how to control my stammer when I was at school.

Later in life the 'silent pause' was a great help to partly control my stammering. I will say more about this in a later chapter.



### CHAPTER 3

#### IN MY TEENS

We all pass through a stage in our lives as teenagers, where we move on from being children to enter the big world and become an adult. I can well remember when I was 15 years old, an old man once told me I was all the man I would ever be.

When I was moving into my teens, the world was a much different place to live in than it is today. We had pressures on us, but the teenagers today are up against many different types of pressures than we had. Everything seems to depend on education and training today as the workplace is so highly technical.

We used to have spots the same as today's teenagers. Jobs were difficult to get when I was in my teens, but not as difficult as they are today for many young people, although there are many more opportunities today.

To add to my teenage problems, I had this very bad stammer to contend with and I can tell you it caused me some embarrassing moments.

Most of my school pals used to collect in groups in the summer evenings and at the weekends, to play football or to play kick the can, or just to lark around.

Some evenings I used to go to the neighbouring farm when I came out of school, especially in the summer evenings. At the farm I was on my own with the farmer and the housekeeper. My stammer didn't really cause me all that many problems because there weren't many people around. There were times however when I would be trying to tell the farmer something and I would start stammering and just couldn't get the words out. The farmer used to tell me to shut up boy and stop stammering on. The farmer has since passed away a long time ago.

The farmer had very little patience with me when I started to stammer. When I wanted to tell him something and I started to stammer, he would just walk away from me and get on with his work, which many times left me standing like an idiot. This meant I never had much of a discussion with him, because he wouldn't listen to me stammering on, he just walked away. This gave me a terrible problem, how on earth could I communicate with the farmer?

I developed a method of talking to the farmer, which seemed to work out most times. When I wanted to tell him something I would work out how I could tell him using as few words as possible. When I had thought out what words I was going to use. I would wait and pick my moment - then I would tell the farmer what I wanted to say, without taking a breath. I would probably tell the farmer something like, 'The hens have been shut up', or 'The cows in the back byre have been fed', or 'Will I feed the horses?' I would try and say these short sentences without breathing in or out.

If after telling the farmer something and he returned with a question which required a Yes, or No, I would either nod, or shake my head. However if the farmer wanted more than a Yes, or No, then I would most likely get stuck and



start stammering. The farmer would look at me for a few seconds then walk away.

When something happened on the farm, which the farmer should have known about at the time, I couldn't tell him because of my stammer. It would only be a waste of time me stammering on trying to get it out. It may be several days later before I picked on a few words that I could say to tell the farmer what had happened. I very often never told the farmer things I should have done. I may have spotted a sick cow, which he didn't spot and I couldn't tell him because of my stammering, so the cow suffered.

Although I was with the farmer more or less all the time when I was at the farm. We sometimes went for long periods without ever speaking to one another. The farmer did most of the talking, as he knew he wouldn't get a great deal of response from me without me stammering on.

When reps, or other visitors came to the farm to see the farmer, I used to go and hide in the barn or in the hay shed until they were gone, in case I had to talk to them. The farm was a good place to get away from seeing and meeting people.

The housekeeper at the farm was a real bitch, she was the worse person I ever met. She was horrible to me and my stammering - she used to call me a 'stammering b\*gger'. This lady has also passed away many years ago.

If it wasn't for the farmer being quite good to me, and me enjoying being at the farm, I would never have gone over there.

The farmer would often ask me if I was coming over to the farm the following Saturday, I would either say yes or shake my head meaning no. If for some reason I couldn't go to the farm on the Saturday because something had cropped up. The housekeeper used to blow her top the next time I went to the farm.

The housekeeper would come out of the farm house next time I visited the farm and she would go for me something like this: 'Where the hell were you last Saturday, you stammering b\*gger, when you say you are coming over to the farm bl\*\*dy well get yourself over here.'

If I tried to tell the housekeeper why I couldn't come over to the farm on the Saturday, I would nearly always start stammering, trying to get the words out. The housekeeper wouldn't listen to me anyway, she just use to tell me to 'waken my stammering ideas up and don't bl\*\*dy well come back to the farm.'

Even at tea time at the farm, the housekeeper used to tell the farmer he should kick my 'stammering a\*\*e across the fields back home.' I wasn't at the farm many full days - just in the afternoons, or in the evenings.

At tea time the farmer never said very much, when the housekeeper got on her high horse and was laying down the law. The farmer just carried on with his meal. He used to give me a bit pocket money for helping him.

The housekeeper sometimes asked me to do a few odd jobs for her on the

farm, like cleaning out the hen houses, or feeding the hens and collecting the eggs. She could be quite charming when I did these jobs for her.

As far as my stammering was concerned, neither the farmer or the housekeeper had a clue how to deal with me. The housekeeper would sometimes ask me at tea time how things were going at school. I may get started telling her, then I would probably start stammering until the farmer would butt in and say 'shut up and get on with your tea.' The housekeeper would never pursue her question after the farmer had told me to shut up.

Most teenagers start looking at the opposite sex, I was no different and also looked at the young girls running around, but because of my stammer I didn't have a regular girl friend like some of the other boys at school of my age. I tried to keep mainly to the company of boys.

There were normally a country dance or two arranged at the school every year by the teachers. Although I enjoyed country dancing very much, I never wanted to go to these dances because of my stammer. My mother and some of my school pals used to encourage me to go along with them to the dance. Some of my pals used to call at our house to make sure I went along with them.

Some of my school pals had girl friends and they used to meet outside the school. They kept with their girl friends all evening at the dance. The young boys like myself with no girl friends kept together in a group. Apart from one girl, I could never pick up the courage to go across and ask a young lady if she would like to dance with me. I used to stand at the back of the school hall behind all the other boys and watched the dancing.

The dance normally kicked off with the Bradford Barn Dance, and we all had to get a partner and get on the floor. I used to be very fond of a girl at school who was about my age, though she wasn't in my class. I would go over and take this girl's hand for the Bradford Barn Dance. I would maybe manage to ask her how she was keeping, or something to that effect without stammering. This girl used to talk to me and I used to reply by nodding, or by shaking my head to her. Although I felt quite relaxed and comfortable with this girl, I did normally manage to talk to her quite a bit without stammering. I used short sentences which I could say without breathing in or out, it was always a quick snappy sentence.

I was always glad when the Bradford Barn Dance was over, as some of the girls used to chatter away to me as I was dancing with them. I couldn't reply to most of them because I couldn't get the words out, before I had to move on to the next partner in the dance. It could be quite embarrassing at the dance, as many of the girls weren't in my class and they didn't know I had a stammer.

The school dances were run a bit different from other dances. After the Bradford Barn Dance was over, the boys had the first choice of one dance, then the girls had the choice of the next dance and so on. I only picked out this girl I liked for one or two dances during the evening. The rest of the time I use to stand away at the back of the hall behind the rest of the boys. This girl used to pick me to dance with her an odd time.

When I knew the ladies' choice was coming up I used to go to the toilet. But with every other dance being a ladies' choice, I couldn't keep going to the toilet every few minutes, as one of the teachers would be asking me what I was playing at. I used to try and hide behind some of the other boys who were all eager to get picked up at the ladies' choice.

My confidence in my teens was shattered because of my stammer and I didn't know anyone that could help me with it. I missed going to many social events, just because I knew my stammering would certainly let me down and embarrass me and the people that might want to talk to me.

I sometimes used to meet one or two of the girls on the street who were in my class. They knew all about my stammering, as they were used to my performance in the classroom. The girls in my class all reacted to me and my stammering in different ways. Most of them would try and help me where possible by saying the words for me.

If I happened to be on my way to visit a pal of mine in the village and I met one of the girls in my class going shopping, she might stop and start talking to me. She may tell me she was going up to the bakers at the top of the village for some bread, she may ask me where I was going. I had to think very quickly what to say, that's if I could get the words out. If I couldn't tell her I was going to see one of my pals, I might manage to say to her 'anywhere' and she might then say to come and walk up to the shop with her. I might not get to see my pal that day just because I couldn't tell the girl where I was going, and I might spend the rest of that day in the girl's company.

I very often walked miles and miles and ended up in places where I had no intention of going, just because I happened to meet some boys or girls, and they invited me to go along with them. I couldn't tell them where I wanted to go because of my stammering, and I found myself trailing along with them.

I can remember one Saturday, I was supposed to meet three of my pals at a bus stop in the village at 1.30pm, as we had agreed to go and see a football match in the Town which was about eight miles away. A few friends and I used to go to a few football matches every year, which meant a bus ride there and back. This particular Saturday afternoon I was on my way to meet a few of my pals at the bus stop to go to the match, when I met a few girls coming along the street. They were all in my class at school and were going to help at some junior school sports, in the public park behind the main school building.

Before I got to the girls, I could hear them saying, 'Here's Hunter coming, he will help us at the sports this afternoon.' When I got up to the girls, two of them got me by an arm each and said, 'Hunter we need you this afternoon,' as they turned me around to walk with them. When I tried to tell them I was going to the football match in the Town, I started stammering. One of the girls said to me 'Shut up Hunter and come along to the school sports with us.'

I gave in and went along with the girls to the sports, only because I couldn't tell them I was supposed to be going to a football match. I had a good afternoon at the sports, helping the girls with the food and the tea for the school juniors. I worked for the girls in the background, washing cups and

plates so that I wouldn't need to meet and talk to anyone. Most of the teachers at the sports knew me and knew about my stammer. At the end of the afternoon the girls gave me some tea with a few sandwiches, which made up a bit for me missing the football match.

When I did get to a football match with my pals, I used to give one of them my money for the bus fare, and the money for the entrance to the football ground. I then just followed on behind them. On the way back from the football match to the bus stop, some of my pals might call into a shop and buy some sweets. I used to stand outside and wait for them coming out of the shop.

Some nights quite a few boys and girls used to collect beside an old oak tree. The tree was just at the edge of the village, and was a great meeting point for us all. There were two grass fields behind the tree and in one of these we had many a good game of football. When we were playing football there was very little time for talking to one another, although there was plenty of bawling and shouting at one another, to pass, or cross the ball. I used to keep quiet and just play away. I very much enjoyed playing football, and it meant I could get stuck in and know I didn't have to speak.

In the summer nights we would many times play football for hours at a time, with two teams of about eight, or nine a side. It was great fun and gave us all something to do which we enjoyed. Stammering never entered my head when I was playing football and it made me relax.

I used to be quite good at football when I was at school. I was selected several times to play football for the local junior team, which was like a county team. I played at 'Left: Back' for the junior team. Again I just used to play, and never spoke to any of the other players in the field.

Both football teams used to change together in the same room. I used to keep at the back of our own team in the changing room, in case one of the other team players started talking to me, as they didn't know I had a stammer.

At most away football grounds where we played. The families of the home team used to put on tea, sandwiches and cakes for the visitors, in the club house, or in a hut after the game.

I had quite a job trying to keep in the background so that I didn't have to speak to anybody at these away football matches. I could normally keep with some of our team. The team manager told the rest of our team personally about my stammering. He told them to help me where they could.

I can well remember one embarrassing situation at one of our away football matches. We were playing Maybole on the Ayrshire west coast.

After the game it was into the changing room which was one half of the club house, the other half being where they held the club meetings and where we had a sit down tea. I was coming from the changing room behind two of our own players. We were just passing the kitchen where half a dozen ladies were making the tea and sandwiches.

One of the ladies thought she recognised me and came from behind the

kitchen counter and grabbed my arm and said, 'O – Hello, Tom. I didn't know you played for a football team.' I tried to push the lady's hand gently from my arm and tried to tell her my name was not Tom. But before I could get the name out I started stammering. The lady was partly shocked as she grabbed my arm again while I was stammering away trying to tell her I wasn't Tom.

The harder I tried the worse I was getting. One or two of the other ladies also came out of the kitchen and stood watching me stammering. I was beginning to sweat with all the pressure I was putting on myself trying to talk. When one of the ladies happened to say the boy has a very bad stammer, she took my other arm and said to come along to the table and sit down beside my friends. Saved by this good lady.

The first lady, that thought I was Tom, kept looking at me while we were having tea. After tea I saw her talking to the team manager and he put her right who I was. Before I left the club house she came over to me and said she was very sorry for embarrassing me, as she honestly thought I was Tom, a friend of her youngest son.

I never ever thought that anyone should feel sorry for me, because I had a stammer. All I really wanted was to find someone that could help me and advise me how to cure it.

Another thing I used to do in my teens was to go with some friends to the local pictures, which were held in one of the village halls. One or two people used to travel round the villages with cowboy and comedy films and a projector. The equipment would often break down, but that was all part of the entertainment.

I used to make sure when I went to the pictures with a friend that I gave him or her my money to pay me in. After the show we would normally finish up at the village chip shop. Again I would give my friend my money and he or she would buy the chips for both of us. I had several pals that would just automatically ask me for my money when we were out and they would pay me into the shows, or get me sweets, or chips. They didn't do this to help me but to save them from waiting about for me, if I started stammering.

I enjoyed my teens very much. But I would have mixed more with the girls if it hadn't been for my stammer, although I was very friendly with several girls of my age and saw them quite often.



## CHAPTER 4

### MEETING PEOPLE

Have you ever seen someone coming towards you in the street and you wanted to avoid meeting them for various reasons? Maybe it's because they are chatter boxes and you couldn't get away from them once they start, or it is someone that pours all their troubles out on you, as if they were the only one with troubles.

This situation may only happen once or twice a year to normal people. But to me it was a regular thing trying to avoid people every day, in case I had to try and speak to them.

Anyone reading these notes will think I was like a hunted fox trying to avoid meeting people and trying to survive at the same time. In a way it was a bit like that. Where I could avoid meeting people I did.

At the school, however, I couldn't easily single myself out altogether from several hundred other children. But I did try and keep myself to myself as much as I could. I would slip into a quiet corner in the school yard when I could find one and watch the other children playing.

Some of the school toilets were outside the main building and when I was getting harassed, or I wanted some peace and quiet, the school toilets were about the only place where I could hide and be alone. The school janitor, or caretaker used to have a look into both the boys and girls toilets during the morning break and at the lunch break to try and catch any children smoking, or to check they weren't damaging the school property. I was caught out several times in the school toilets by the janitor, and he tossed me out of them and told me to get into the playground. I was hiding from the children that were tormenting me.

The morning break at school was about half an hour, so I couldn't really go anywhere in that time. I had to stay in the school grounds and I tried to keep myself to myself.

When I was very young my stammering didn't keep me from mixing in with other children at the school, as I didn't think anything about it then.

As I moved up into the main school, some of the children started harassing me. I then began to take notice of my stammering and this is when I started trying to avoid other children and adults. What a job it was. When I had been young, even after school and at nights I just used to mix in with all the other children around me and we many times played for hours at a time together. My stammering never seemed to bother me and it never entered my head. At the main school, however, my stammering was brought home to me by the other children. I often felt like running away from school, but I didn't seem to have any place to run to.

At the lunch break at school we had an hour's break. I many times would take my cold buttered toast to my grandmother's in the village and eat my toast with her, that's if none of the other children had taken it from me beforehand.

I only knew one of my grandmothers. This was my mother's mother. She was a very small frail person, who lived in a small stone cottage at the top of the village. The cottage had a flag stone floor and a wooden oak front door. There was a big square flat stone outside the front door of the cottage, which my grandmother used to scrub until it was spotless. She also used to put white curls with chalk around the edges of this scrubbed stone, it was quite nice to see how she did it.

If one of the other children at school happened to steal my toast from me at the lunch break, before I could get out of the school yard. My grandmother would make me some cheese on toast, or she would give me some home-made bread and jam.

I always felt quite relaxed at my grandmother's. She never kept asking me questions, she just let me speak when I felt like it. Because of this relaxed atmosphere I could manage to talk to her in bursts and stops and tell her many things, without putting a great deal of pressure on myself. My grandmother was a kind marvellous old lady. I never really appreciated what a good friend she was to me until after she died. Her cottage was a place where I could go and find security and peace.

Some mornings I would go to the school an hour or so earlier, with three or four other boys to help the school janitor distribute the crates of third pint bottles of milk round the various class rooms before the teachers and the children arrived at the school. Walking to school in the early morning suited me quite well, because I could walk to the school with boys I knew and I wasn't pressured or taunted. The school janitor used to tell us what crates of milk had to go to each class room. One of the other boys and myself would work together and take the crates of milk to some of the class rooms.

Apart from trying to avoid some schoolchildren, I also tried to avoid adults as well while I was at school, which was very difficult.

After I left school I was pretty happy in some ways, because I hadn't all the schoolchildren and teachers to meet every day. However in many ways when looking back I had a lot less problems at school with my stammering than I had when I came out into the big wide world. When I first left school, many new challenges faced me and my stammering.

One of the first challenges I had was when two or three older boys I knew very well in the village were going to a dance the following Saturday night at Butlins Holiday Camp, at the Heads of Ayr in Scotland. They asked me if I would like to go along with them.

I didn't really want to go to this dance and shook my head at the boys. They said 'Come on Hunter, you are a man now' and that I should do what all young men do. My mother had bought me a suit with long trousers the year before I left school and I hadn't worn it very often. I did eventually agree to go to the dance with them after they pressurised me and called me a chicken. I managed to say O.K. I would go to the dance with them. The father of one of the boys had a business in the village, and the boy said he would get a loan of his father's car to take us to the dance.

Butlins holiday camp was about twenty miles away and we had all arranged to meet at the local village hall at 6 o'clock on the Saturday night. When Saturday night came around, there I was standing at the local village hall with my smart suit on and my clean shirt and tie, along with my highly polished black shoes. When the car arrived, the other two boys and myself were waiting outside the village hall, and we all piled in and set off heading for Butlins holiday camp.

Butlins used to hold a dance every Saturday night throughout the year, in a large decorated hall which was just outside the entrance to the main holiday camp. I was dreading this dance and was worried all the way to Butlins, in case I would meet people and embarrass them if they tried to talk to me.

When we arrived at Butlins, I kept behind my pals as we went into the hall. At the pay desk I handed over more money than what it cost to get into the dance. This was because I knew the girl taking the money would say to me that I had given her too much money, and she would give me the change. It meant I didn't have to speak.

I collected my change and then followed on behind my pals into the ballroom. It was a lovely place. Quite a number of young people were already in the ballroom and the dancing had started.

I was looking around to see where I could stand and hide, to keep out of the girls' way. Because I was looking around, I hadn't heard the next dance was a ladies' choice. I suddenly felt a tap on my shoulder and this pretty young girl asked me if I would like to dance. I was taken completely by surprise and managed to say 'yes', and before I knew what was really happening I was up on the floor dancing a quick-step with this young lady. She did all the talking, and with the noise of the band I managed to half say 'yes', or nodded my head to her questions.

When this dance was over I sort of managed to thank the young lady, and quickly made a beeline to try and hide myself behind most of the rest of the young men, who were standing at one end of the hall. None of my pals had got picked up for this ladies' choice, and they were straight at me as soon as I came off the floor. They said to me what had I got that they hadn't, 'you sneaky sod' they said, and who was that smart young girl that was crawling all over me? They didn't mean what they said, as this was the sort of talk that went on among us when one of us clicked with a girl, or was seen talking to a nice looking girl. I never heard the end of this from my pals all night, I was called all the lucky sods and all the creeps under the sun.

I stood at the back of the hall most of the rest of the night. I could see this young girl who asked me to dance with her, looking over at where I was standing many times during the night, and my pals kept encouraging me to get her up to dance.

As the evening was going on and the dancing was in full swing, I did manage to pick up enough courage to go and take this young girl up for a modern waltz. I didn't ask her to dance, because I couldn't speak, I just walked up to her and took her by the hand and sort of nodded my head, and we were on



the floor.

Again I let her do all the talking, I had to as I couldn't speak. She didn't realise I had a very bad stammer. The questions she was asking mostly just needed a 'yes', or 'no'. She asked me if the boys were my pals, and did I come here often. The dance hall was pretty packed that night. All I had to do was either say 'yes', or 'no', if I could, or shake or nod my head.

On the way home from the dance, the car driver said what's about us going for fish and chips and a bottle of lemonade. I thought they might do this after the dance, so I had plenty of money with me for fish and chips and a soft drink. When we arrived outside the chip shop, the boy driving the car said he would get one bottle of lemonade and he asked one of the other boys to get a bottle of lemonade as well. The driver said lets all get fish and chips. I stood behind the other boys in the chip shop, to see what they were all getting. They all got fish and chips along with the two bottles of lemonade. When the girl asked me what I wanted I managed to say 'chips', no way could I say 'fish and chips'. I would have started stammering embarrassing myself and everyone else in the shop. One of my pals said to me while we were eating our chips in the car, 'Do you not like fish Hunter?' Before I could get anything out, one of the other boys piped up and said 'Of course he likes fish you twit, he can't say fish and chips'. Nothing else was said on the matter.

There were one or two people in the village which I always tried to avoid whenever I could. One was a lady, if I could call her that, who was much older than I was and used to mock me every time she got me by myself. This lady was a real thorn in my side from time to time. She may spot me coming, before I could see her, and she used to go out of her way to make sure that she would bump into me on my own. Then, when she got me on my own, she would say things like, 'How's your stammering today?', or she might say 'Come on let's hear you stammering so that I can get a good laugh.' When playing with a group of boys I might happen to see this lady passing by. If I got separated from the group, there this lady was, ready to prey on me again. She haunted me like a ghost.

There were other people also in the village that I always tried to avoid, mainly because of the remarks they would make to me when they were passing me by in the street, or when they could get me on my own. They used to call me a freak, or they might say to me I should have been drowned at birth. These are some of the charming things that were said to me. Some people I know meant what they said. What's that saying: 'but for the grace of God.'

The people that used to mock and harass me always seemed to be able to get me on my own. The ladies and girls were very often worse at mocking me than the men and boys were. Some of the ladies and girls used to snigger in my company. I could tell they were mocking me, or making fun of me. I can tell you it wasn't very pleasant at times in a certain company.

This type of silent mocking was very hurtful. If I was in a company of mixed people, sometimes I would find one or two in the company sniggering at each other. What they were really doing was having fun at my expense. Nobody else in the company would know what the others were sniggering about, but I

did. In most cases it was the ladies or young girls that were the culprits for harassing me like this. I used to know some of the people that did this sort of secret mocking, and who always tried to make fun of me when they were in a company.

This sort of silent mocking at me in company did embarrass me and hurt me something awful and made me feel most uncomfortable at the time. I kept my feelings to myself and never turned on anyone for mocking me. I just tried my best to keep out of their way. My father used to tell me to keep my cool and I shall win the day. Good advice, but at times it was very difficult to go along with this advice.

I sometimes was invited to a party, or to a friends house and didn't know other people had also been invited to the house until I got there. This could be a situation where both boys and girls were invited to the house or party and I could find myself in among a group of them, and the silent harassment would start.

I couldn't go and hide in a friend's toilet all night, so I was sort of forced into the group. Many times when I was invited to a party I didn't go because of the mocking I might get. Most of my friends got to know that if they told me it was a party I was invited to I wouldn't go, so when they invited me to their houses they never told me what it was for, I only found out when I got there.

When I was with a group of boys and girls, one or two of the girls might start making fun of me, by first bumping into me, then they would start sniggering. I could tell quite easily by their eye contact what they were up to. If I left the group and went to the toilet, as soon as I returned they would start again. The so-called innocent girls in groups were the worst at this. They never said anything to me, but their actions by pushing, shoving and bumping into me and their giggling soon told me what they were up to. I used to try very hard to keep well clear of groups of girls whenever I could, and didn't give them the chance of making fun of me.

When I left school I went to the agricultural College at Auchencruive near Ayr in Scotland to study milk and animal husbandry. We worked on the College farm between the lectures, in groups of four in shifts. They had about 100 dairy cows at the College farm, which had to be fed, milked and looked after twice a day.

There were 16 students in our group, 12 boys and four girls. We had several lectures to attend each week, and we also had to work on the farm or in the fields so many hours each week. The farm work was set out for us, so I couldn't really avoid anyone at the farm, because we worked quite closely together.

In the lectures the teachers soon got to know not to ask me a question, because they knew they might be waiting all day for an answer. At the same time they made sure I understood what they were talking about. For instance if some of the other boys or girls couldn't understand a question, they would ask the teacher to explain it further. The teacher would always finish up by asking me if I fully understood the question. The teacher would say to me,

'Hunter, just nod your head if you understand.' Throughout the lectures the teachers used to check with me that I was with them, and I hadn't missed anything. I had nothing to say at the lectures, but I always had plenty of notes to take. Sometimes one or two of the teachers would ask me to stay behind. They would talk to me and try and give me as much help as they could. We had mock exams from time to time, and the results showed I was with them, as my results were up with the top half dozen in the class.

The farm or field work was set out for each group of us. We soon decided in the group who was doing what, and we then got on with the work. When I knew what work I had to do I had no reason to contact anybody. We had a book in the farm office where we had to enter any faults we found, or if we had any sick animals on the farm. The farm manager could always be contacted if we came across an emergency. There were very few regular staff on the farm. The students like myself did most of the farm work, and we had a good working arrangement among us all.

When I first started to work for the Milk Marketing Board in 1958, in the north of England, I didn't need to avoid anybody because I was flung right in at the deep end, stammer and all. Over the 30 years that I worked for the company, there were a few people that I tried to avoid whenever I possibly could. At the same time I had a great working relationship with most people, and I thoroughly enjoyed working among them and working for the company for all those years.

As I got to know many business people over the years, most of them accepted me for what I was. Others wondered why the Board employed someone like me, with such a bad stammer, and some of them had little confidence in me to start with.

I had some critics in the Board which I did try to avoid whenever I could. Some of the Board critics had little say in the company affairs, and I just pushed on and ignored them.

But the critics I had in the business world who really mattered to the Board were a different kettle of fish. I did really set about trying to convince them that I was the right person for the job and they could rely on me and trust me. As the years passed over, I made many friends in the business world and among the farming community, and I still have many of these loyal cherished friends today.



## CHAPTER 5

### GETTING A JOB

I have always been interested in farming and the countryside. It's sort of in my blood and I can't do anything about it. This interest I have has nothing whatsoever to do with my stammering. However working on a farm, or working out in the countryside, was a good place for someone like me to be with a very bad stammer, because there were very few people to talk to.

I didn't let my stammering dictate to me what I was going to do with my life. I followed what I was interested in, and I have enjoyed every moment of it - although my stammering did bring a lot more ups and downs in my life than what most people would have in their lives.

There is a true story of a young boy who had a very bad stammer. He went to work on a farm as far out in the hills and moors as he could find, so that he wouldn't have to meet people. It appears that the stammer this boy had affected him so badly that he just wanted to shut himself away from everybody, because his stammering embarrassed him so much.

My stammering didn't affect me to this extent, although I many times felt very much inferior, especially when I was in the company of certain people. Some people could make me feel inferior in their company, and some people set out to make me feel inferior.

Because of this interest I had in agriculture and the countryside, my life was to be geared along this road.

When I left school I had hoped to get a job with the Scottish Milk Marketing Board, at their Renfrewshire Cattle Breeding Centre, at Paisley in Scotland. However, there were no vacancies at there when I applied. At the same time I also applied for a position with the Cattle Breeding Centre of the English Milk Marketing Board, at Penrith, in Cumberland, in the north of England. There were no vacancies there either at the time.

I worked on a farm for a short time on a free-lance basis. I also worked with an agricultural haulage firm for a short time, until a vacancy came about at one of the two Cattle Breeding Centres. The bits of jobs I had for a while didn't really bother me and my stammering very much, as I was working quite a lot of the time on my own.

Every morning I was waiting for the post to arrive hoping to hear from one of the Milk Marketing Boards' Cattle Breeding Centres. I kept meeting some of the staff from the Scottish Cattle Breeding Centre from time to time, and I kept asking them were there any vacancies yet. I really had set my mind and heart at working there. Things never seem to work out as you plan them, do they. I could see myself working in the Scottish Cattle Breeding Centre at Paisley, among the bulls, and working with the other members of the staff and among a great variety of farmers.

A few months passed by, then one morning a letter from the English Milk

Marketing Board arrived in the post, inviting me to the Penrith Cattle Breeding Centre for an interview.

How on earth was I going to cope with this? Would my stammering let me down?

My interview was arranged for the following week in the afternoon, which left me with plenty of time to travel down to the Cattle Breeding Centre. I had been worried before I got the interview, but now that one was arranged for me I felt both sick and worried all the time for the next week.

On the day of my interview, I was up with the larks, got washed and dressed and was on my way to England about 7 o'clock in a new Morris car which my mother had just bought. I stopped in Dumfries on the way for a bit of lunch.

I arrived at the Cattle Breeding Centre about ten minutes before my interview. I parked my car beside the office and walked into the building. There I met a girl in a white coat. She said 'You must be Hunter Adair, welcome to the Cattle Breeding Centre and I hope you will enjoy working here.' A great start I thought.

This girl made me feel very relaxed on my arrival at the centre. After she introduced herself, she showed me around the laboratory. Then, before I knew what was happening, the girl took me into the Manager's office where the centre Manager and the centre Vet were sitting.

The Manager introduced the Vet and himself to me, then he started to tell me all about the centre, how many bulls they kept at it, the area they covered and the number of staff they had at the centre. The Vet then started to tell me about the art of artificially inseminating cattle with semen, collected from the bulls at the centre.

Both the centre Manager and the Vet soon discovered there was something wrong with my speech. The centre Manager said to me, 'Have you got a bad stammer Hunter?' I managed to reply and say 'Yes, very bad.' The Vet quickly replied to the Manager and said his stammer won't affect the job if we offer him one. From then on the interview went quite well, since both men directed the interview so that I hadn't much to say, but just to listen.

After about an hour, I was pretty sure both men had made up their minds about me, because the coffee was brought into the office, by the girl that first met me at the Cattle Breeding Centre, and everyone was so friendly. After coffee both men got up from their chairs and walked over to the map on the office wall. They showed me the area the Centre Inseminators covered, and told me how many dairy farmers there were in the area etc.

Both men made me feel very relaxed, and I could somehow manage to talk to them. If I thought I was going to start stammering, I just stopped and waited a few minutes, then I would try and start talking to them again. It seemed to work.

I had a tour of the Cattle Breeding Centre by the head stockman. He was also very friendly and he also quickly found out I had a stammer. Again he tried to

make me feel at ease and I could manage to ask him questions about the management and care of the bulls at the centre. It kept about 30 pedigree bulls, and I spent over an hour among the bulls with the head stockman. Again if I thought I was going to start stammering, I just stopped and waited a few moments, then tried to start speaking again. I seemed to be getting better at talking as I became more relaxed.

Before I left for home that evening, the Vet invited me along to his house for some tea. None of the staff at the Centre put me under any pressure, they were all so relaxed and friendly which made my interview and visit very successful, and they had all found out that I had a speech defect.

I must have put on a fairly good show at my interview, because within a fortnight they offered me a job at the Centre. This was firstly to help with the management of the bulls, and to help with the collecting of semen from the bulls. I also had to have a training course on how to artificially inseminate cattle.

I accepted the job, which was to be my first real job. I would have to move away from home and move South. I would also have to find lodgings somewhere. I wasn't worried about working at the Centre. What concerned me more was how was I going to find lodgings and what would some strange people think of me.

I had arranged to start work at the Centre on the 1st December 1958 at two o'clock in the afternoon. That morning I was up sharp and got all my bits and pieces together. My mother helped me to pack my case and off I set in the car. I was still worried sick as to where I was going to stay that night.

When I arrived at the Cattle Breeding Centre in the afternoon I had nothing to worry about, because the staff had already arranged lodgings for me with a lady whose husband had worked at the Cattle Breeding Centre and he had since died. His widow took in any new staff coming to work at the Centre that had no accommodation to go to. She still wanted to keep in contact with the Centre, as her husband helped to set it up and he worked there for many years.

I was very concerned about what they would think of me at my new home. I was introduced to another member of the staff at the Centre who was also lodging with this lady and her two young daughters.

The Centre Manager had told all his staff I was coming and that I had a very bad stammer. He also told them to help me and not to hassle me. I met the rest of the 20 odd staff over the next few days.

I stayed at the Centre for the rest of the afternoon, meeting different people and having a good look around the place.

A local farmer also happened to be in the Centre that afternoon having a look at the bulls. The bulls were all chained up in individual stalls in the byre. The farmer was talking away to me, telling me which bulls he liked best and the reasons why he liked certain bulls. I listened and said nothing. Then suddenly the farmer turned to me and asked me where I came from. I just managed to

say I came from Ayr in Scotland, then I started to stammer. I just couldn't get any more words out. The head stockman came to my rescue and helped me out. I felt really embarrassed with myself, stammering in front of this farmer and making such a fool of myself. The farmer didn't seem to be affected by my performance, he just kept on talking away to me, but he didn't ask me any more questions.

One thing I used to do when I was stammering in front of people was to put one of my hands in my pocket, and rub my thumb very hard against my fingers while I was trying so hard to get the words out. I many times had very sore fingers at the end of a stammering session. I didn't know I was doing this with my fingers, until after I had finished stammering. I then felt my fingers very sore.

About six o'clock that evening at the Cattle Breeding Centre, some of the staff had started leaving for home. The colleague who I was going to travel with every day back and forward from our lodgings to the Centre, said to me 'Come on, Hunter, lets go home for our tea.'

The lodgings were only a few miles away from the Cattle Breeding Centre. I was worried sick about meeting the landlady and her two young daughters. My colleague told me all about the landlady, along with her faults and her good points and what she would expect of me.

When we arrived in the yard of this large old farm house in the country, the landlady was standing at the back door of the house waiting for me to arrive. She gave me a very warm welcome indeed. She invited me into her house to meet her two young daughters who were both under 10 years old, and went to the local country school. The landlady had the tea ready for us. She said to me, 'Leave your case in the hall a moment and come up stairs with me and I will show you your room before we have tea.' We both went up the stairs and I was shown into this fairly large room, which had a big oak wardrobe, a hand basin and two single beds in it.

The landlady had asked me upstairs just to get me on my own. When we entered the room the first thing she said to me was, that she knew all about my stammering and I hadn't to let it bother me. She also said she had told her daughters about my stammering and it wouldn't bother them. I felt quite relaxed after this.

When we were having tea, I could sense they were all wanting to ask me questions. But because they all knew about my stammering, it was the landlady who was asking me the questions. She would ask me a question like, did I come from Ayr, and did I look forward coming to work in England. I just had to answer her with a 'yes', or 'no', if I could.

As the weeks and months passed over, I became very good friends with the landlady and her two daughters. I many times would start stammering as I was trying to tell them something and the girls would say to me, 'Tell us later, Hunter.' This was their method of stopping me from stammering.

The girls didn't seem to be as embarrassed when I was stammering as their

mother was. Their mother didn't really know how to deal with me when I was stammering. She would look at me and say, did I want a drink of water, or a cup of tea. This would stop me from stammering, as I had to reply to her, one way or another. She many times started walking away from me when I started stammering

My stay with this family was very enjoyable and we had many ups and downs together. The two young girls were a treat to live with, they very much enriched my life during the time I stayed with them.

Although this family I stayed with were warned in advance of my stammering, I still had the big wide world to face, with a whole lot of new people and new situations in front of me, I would somehow have to learn how to cope and deal with them.

I travelled back and forward to the Cattle Breeding Centre nearly every day with my colleague living at the lodgings with me. I worked part of the time at the Cattle Breeding Centre helping the head stockman, feeding and cleaning out the bulls and collecting semen from them. Part of the time I also travelled around the farms with some of the field staff learning how to inseminate cows with the semen, which I had helped to collect from the bulls. This service is known to the farmers as the A.I. service.

I sometimes also had a day out with the Centre Vet. We either visited some local farms, or we visited the cattle market at Penrith, or the Ministry Investigation Centre which was nearby. The Vet came from Ireland. He was a very easy chap to get on with; him and I became very good pals.

If I started to stammer while I was with the Vet, he would say to me 'Take it easy boy, there is no rush to tell me now.' He would then hand me a cigarette and we would both have a smoke. The Vet was a very warm person and always tried to put me at ease and get me to relax. When I travelled out in the Vet's car, we talked about Ireland, or Scotland. The Vet spoke very quietly and slowly, and because of this I found I didn't start stammering very often when I was with him. He was a joy to be with and he helped to make my work at the Centre very enjoyable.

The Vet was in charge of the bulls and their welfare at the Cattle Breeding Centre. He also supervised the training of the Inseminators in the field. He had many rolls to play at the Centre and in the field. In general he looked after the technical side of the business.

The Centre Manager sometimes also asked me to go out with him, to visit one or two of the Cattle Breeding sub-centres. There were six sub-centres in the north of England. The Centre Manager was in charge of all the sub-centres and the staff, he also appointed all the new staff. It was quite a big job he had. He also had all the cars and equipment to see to, as well as looking after all the administration at the main Centre and at the sub-centres. We would normally visit one sub-centre in the morning and one in the afternoon. One sub-centre was over one 100 miles away.

The Centre Manager had been in the army, and that meant discipline was the



order of the day. I didn't mind the regimental discipline it kept everyone on their toes.

You either liked this Manager, or you didn't. I quite liked him, although I didn't always see eye to eye with everything he said and did. He was a very kind hearted man and would have helped anyone if they cared to ask him. I am sorry to say that the Centre Manager has passed on.

The Manager didn't have as much patience with me and my stammering as the Vet had. I have seen me trying to tell him something and I would start stammering. The Manager would say to me 'Come on man, spit it out, I haven't all day to wait.' This only made things worse and made me feel uncomfortable. I normally just stopped stammering and shut up.

This is a short story which I would like to tell you about, that actually happened with a bull while I was working at the Cattle Breeding Centre.

There were very strict rules at the Cattle Breeding Centre, that we were never allowed to hit the bulls, as they could be very dangerous. We always had to treat them with respect. The bulls were not stupid and could remember the people that were good to them. One morning this particular Ayrshire bull was being exercised in the yard at the rear of the Centre. The bull had a brass ring through his nose for leading him with either a rope or a wooden pole, or with both. The head stockman was exercising this bull. He had a long wooden pole with a hook on the end, which was clipped onto the ring on the bull's nose, he was quietly leading the bull around the back yard next to the hay shed.

This particular Ayrshire bull was very very dangerous. Somehow that morning the wooden pole and hook became detached from the bull's ring in his nose, which left the bull free. The bull started pawing at the ground with both his front feet, and he started snorting and bellowing with his head down at the stockman.

The stockman, as cool and calm as anything, quietly walked into the hayshed followed by this very noisy dangerous bull. The stockman then lay down flat on the ground in the hayshed, as this big heavy brown bull came up to him and put its head down over the stockman's body. The stockman just put his hand up, and caught the bull by the ring in his nose. This very experienced stockman with bulls got up onto his feet and led the bull by the ring, back into the byre, and tied him up by the neck with the chain, none the worse for his ordeal.

A very brave thing to do with a very dangerous bull. Most people including myself, would have run like hell out of this bull's way in any direction, as long as there was a fence or building between me and the bull.

As I started getting out more from the Cattle Breeding Centre and meeting different people, I was never the first to speak to anyone. I normally let strangers do all the talking and I said nothing unless asked to.

Being away from home, having a new job and having to live with strange people was not very easy for me, especially with me having this very bad stammer. Somehow I managed to cope not too badly and have done pretty

well for myself.

The weekends were a bit of a drag, although I had to work some weekends at the Cattle Breeding Centre. On a Saturday night I used to go to the pictures on my own. I gave the girl at the cash desk more money than what it cost to get into the pictures, to stop me from trying to ask her how much does it cost, as I would only start stammering. The girl used to say I had given her too much money and she would give me the change. This is how I used to cope with the pictures and I didn't have to say a word.

Most of my colleagues at the Cattle Breeding Centre were married. On my weekends off I used to try and visit places where I didn't have to speak, like the pictures, or I would maybe go to a country dance and stand away at the back. The social side of my life was very difficult among strangers to start with.

I spent some three or four happy years at the main Cattle Breeding Centre and at the sub-centres, before I was promoted to the Regional Office at Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, as an Assistant Regional Officer for the counties of Northumberland and Durham. I then had to start all over again and meet new people, get new lodging and face all new situations. My stammering hadn't improved a great deal by this stage in my life, and it was many times very very embarrassing, as I didn't know where to put myself when I started stammering.



## CHAPTER 6

### VISITING SHOPS

When I was a young boy growing up with a very bad stammer, the stammer affected me in many ways. Nobody ever knew the problems I was having and the effects the stammer was having on me.

Going into shops was one of the most difficult tasks I had. I didn't like it at all and avoided the shops if I could help it. It didn't always work out like that, as I wanted to be as independent as the rest of the boys and girls of my age, and I sometimes forced myself to go into some shops.

There were no supermarkets when I was growing up in the 1940's and 1950's. All the country village shops were service over the counter, and you had to ask for what you wanted. There are still many country village shops today which have service over the counter. Most people I know still like the personal service you get in these small shops. You don't get the variety of food that you get in the big supermarkets, but you normally get quality service in the small shops and they will get you anything they haven't got. You may have to pay slightly more in the village shops, but the personal service you get compensates for the higher food prices you may have to pay.

If you have a stammer you can walk into a supermarket today and purchase £100 worth of food and more without ever saying a word to anyone. Shopping in the big supermarkets is no trouble to anyone that has a stammer. You can walk in, pick up a basket, get what you want and pay at the cash desk on the way out. You never need to utter a word.

Another place I know where I could go and spend a lot of money without ever having to speak, is a cattle market. I could spend thousands of pounds with a nod of my head, or the movement of my finger. Then I'd go into the office and point out from the catalogue what I have bought and write them out a cheque, and I wouldn't need to say anything.

Going into large picture houses was not as easy to deal with, because there were maybe two or three different films on at the same time and only one cash desk. This means I really had to try and tell the cashier what film you want to see. I found there were ways however to deal with that. I could look at the local newspaper and was most likely to see the picture advertised which I wanted to see. Then I could cut out the picture I wanted to see, take it with me to the cash desk, and point the picture to the cashier. She or he would tell me how much it cost to get in. This saved me having to try and speak.

Another way of getting into these picture houses without having to try and tell the cashier what film I wanted to see was to look around the foyer of the picture house and I might see a leaflet lying around advertising the different pictures being shown in the different theatres. I could take the leaflet to the cashier and point to the picture I wanted to see. In most cases the cashier would ask if that's the picture I wanted to see. All I had to do then is nod my head and he or she would tell me how much it costs. I could hand over my money and go in.

If it's a single picture house, then the problem is much easier. I could just hand the cashier more money than what it costs to get into the pictures. The cashier may say I have given her too much money and she would give me the change. I didn't need to say a word, then just walk straight into the pictures.

Most single, double, or treble picture houses now show the amount of money it costs to get into each theatre. Before going up to the cash desk, one can sort out the right amount of money and just hand it over to the cashier, along with a leaflet of the picture one wants to see.

Having to go into a shop for a message was always a nightmare for me, especially when there were other people in the shop. If my mother was looking for one of us to go up to the village shop for a loaf of bread, or something else, I would stay out of the house until I knew one of my brothers or sisters had gone to the shop, or until I knew the shop was closed.

When I saw my mother coming hunting for one of us, I knew fine it would be to go to one of the shops in the village for something that she herself had forgotten to buy that day. If I got my eye on my mother before she saw me, I would sneak away and hide, until I was confident she had caught up with one of my brothers or sisters to send to the shops. I many times stayed out in the pouring rain for hours just to try and avoid being sent to the shops.

When I eventually went into the house after my mother had been looking for me, both my mother and my father would ask me where had I been and didn't I know they were looking for me to go to the shop for them. I would say I was out playing with my friends and I didn't know they wanted me. Little did they know I was keeping well out of their way in case they sent me to the shops. It is a dreadful thing to admit that I many times had to tell my parents little white lies to save me from being sent along to one of the village shops. I didn't really enjoy telling my parents lies, but it was much easier to do this than to get myself embarrassed standing in a shop stammering in front of people.

If a neighbour happened to come into the shop while I was stammering, I would get myself into such a state and would many times turn and run out of the shop without getting what I had been sent for. I would go back home and tell my mother the shop hadn't any. My mother would say they had, as she had seen them in the shop that morning. I may have been sent for a bar of soap or some type of food. My mother would then send me back along to the shop to get what I was sent for in the first place.

One particular shop I used to get sent to was a small general grocers shop. They kept everything you could imagine, from bunches of fire kindling sticks to safety-pins. I hated going into this shop, because the lady that owned it knew all our family and she knew all about my stammering. The shop was several hundred metres away from our house. It would take about 30 minutes to go to there for a message and get back home without any delays. It sometimes took me well over an hour to get a message, depending on how many people were coming and going from the shop.

I sometimes used to stand outside the shop front window. The shop window was near to the ground and the lady serving in the shop could see anyone

standing at the window. If there were people in the shop, I used to stand at the shop window until the shop was empty. I sometimes would stand outside the window for an hour or so, before I would go in.

The lady in the shop had her own way of getting to know what I wanted when I started to stammer. She would say to me, did I want sugar, tea, butter, bread, soap, matches, or flour. These were the items my mother used to buy every week at this shop.

When the lady sometimes saw me standing outside her shop window for quite a while, she would come out by the side door and ask me what I wanted. If I started to stammer in front of her, she would tell me to go into the shop. If she then found it difficult to get to know what I wanted, she would go and get a pencil and paper, and ask me to write it down. When the lady got to know me, she would many times get me to write down what I wanted on a piece of paper if I started to stammer and couldn't get the words out. This was a great help to me.

I managed to tell my mother about this, and asked her if she would write down on a bit of paper what she wanted from the shop in the future. I could then just hand the paper over at the shop counter, no matter how many people were in the shop. This was a real breakthrough in communications at this shop. I have seen the shop packed with people, but as long as I had a note with the messages written on it, I just handed the note over the counter and it saved me from getting embarrassed.

I sometimes got caught out without having a note, if for instance a neighbour saw me running about and asked me if I would mind going up to the shop to get her a loaf of bread for the tea, and she handed me the money. I couldn't say to the neighbour, 'Go into the house and write me out a note' - because I couldn't get the words out anyway and would just have started stammering. I would maybe manage to say to the neighbour 'O.K.' and off I would go to the shop for her bread.

The neighbour may say to me she needed the bread in a hurry and would I not be long in coming back with it. When I got to the shop, I would stand outside the shop window and wait until the shop was empty before going in for the bread. It may have been over an hour before I got back with the bread. When I sometimes hadn't returned with the bread, the neighbour may have got hold of one of her daughters and she would send her along to the shop to see what was keeping me. Her daughter may find me standing outside at the shop window, and she would take the money from me and go into the shop and get the bread.

My mother might say to me, 'Hunter here's some money, go along to the shop and get me a bag of sugar.' I would say to her, 'A note'. I could say 'a note' much easier than I could say, 'Give me a note first please.' My mother used to say it's only a bag of sugar she wanted and I shouldn't need a note for that. Little did she know that getting one article in the shop was just as difficult as getting two or three articles - because I had to speak and this was the most difficult part of it. I couldn't get my mother to understand this.

When I hadn't a note for the shop, I was back to square one, stammering and stuttering on. I seldom could ask properly for an article in a shop. For instance, I couldn't say, 'Could I please have a bag of sugar.' I just used to say 'Sugar'. The shop keeper would know by how much money I had whether I wanted a small or large bag of sugar.

Before I had the note system working when sent to the shops: if I had three articles to get such as tea, salt and sugar, then I had to think what was the best way for me to ask for these three articles. I had a difficult job starting to speak with a word beginning with an S, so I would probably say 'tea salt sugar.' It was very impolite just to walk into the shop and say 'tea, salt and sugar.' The word 'please' never came into it, as I just couldn't handle the word 'please', as well as having to ask for the articles I wanted.

Not that I didn't want to be polite, because I very much did. My father was a great one for teaching us good manners. He used to tell us, 'Always be polite to other people, no matter how impolite they are to you.' This is the philosophy I have always tried to use all through my life, being polite to other people. I always try and be polite with everybody I meet, and I am not easily upset by people who are rude to me.

Some shop assistants that I came across were very rude to me, either because of my stammer, or because I used to ask directly for an article without saying 'please'. When this happened it could be very embarrassing and was very hurtful. They didn't understand what I was going through. I had to bite my tongue many times when some people were having a go at me, because they thought I was rude, or trying to be funny. The fact of the matter was I couldn't talk to everybody in a polite manner, because I couldn't get the words out and I may have sounded abrupt to them. But I had no intention of being rude, or abrupt to anybody.

Going into chemist shops used to be a dreadful experience. It was nearly all young girls that were serving behind the counters, and most of the goods were either in glass cases along the sides of the shops, or in shelves behind the counter. I had a dreadful time in chemist shops. Whatever I wanted, I had to pick up the courage and ask for it. Nowadays it's very much easier, as you can get nearly all the things you need by picking them up off the shelves and paying for them at the cash desk on the way out. - except for prescription medicines from the doctor which you can't pick up off the chemist shelves, rightly so. You don't need to speak in the chemist shops today.

My father used to send me up to the chemist shop in the village, for razor blades, or some rat poison. You could buy rat poison in the fifties and sixties over the counter in a chemist shop, without having a Ministry permit. Nowadays you need a permit from the Ministry of Agriculture before you can buy rat poison, and you need to tell them what you want it for. It is not easy to get rat poison. We hadn't many rats around the out-buildings. But from time to time during the winter, some rats would come in around the buildings looking for food. The harder the winter was, the more rats there seem to be around.

There were two young girls serving in the village chemist shop and the chemist himself. He normally served in the shop at lunch time when the girls

were having their lunch break. I hated going into this chemist shop, even with a note. My father would never give me a note when he sent me for a message. He would just tell me to get on and get his message. My father never made any difference between me and my brothers or sisters. When he told us to do something we had to get on and do it.

The girls in the chemist shop always seemed to be so young and they were always sniggering and giggling. This made the situation for me very difficult, as I always thought they were sniggering at me. I wasn't often sent to the chemist shop during the week. It was nearly always on a Saturday, or during the school holidays. I would many times stand outside the chemist shop until lunch time, when I knew the young girls would be away for lunch. Then I would go into the shop and get the chemist to serve me. When the chemist asked me if he could help me, I would try and say 'razor blades', or whatever I was sent for. If I started to stammer aloud and couldn't get the words out, I would sometimes put my hand up to my face and make a shaving action. The chemist would then say to me 'You want razor blades'. I would then nod my head, or say 'yes' if I could.

If for instance I happened to get one of the girls in the chemist shop to serve me, she would be every bit as embarrassed as I was, and this only made my stammering worse. Because I used to worry before going into the chemist shop as I knew I would start stammering, sure enough I would start stammering. The chemist at times had to come to my rescue. The girls in the chemist shop never tried to help me, Probably because they didn't know what to do. They would look at me when I started stammering and say what did I want. I wasn't sure if the girls were sniggering at me while they were waiting for me to tell them what I wanted. These young girls in the shop were always giggling when anybody came into the shop. It was an awful experience going into this chemist shop. I many times felt like bursting out crying, but doing this would only have embarrassed me all the more and the girls in the shop.

Going to see the Doctor on my own wasn't all that difficult. The family Doctor was old fashioned and was really a nice chap. I would sit in his waiting room until it was my turn, then the Doctor would come out and say to me 'Come along Hunter.' When I was in his surgery, he made me stand behind his desk at the side of his chair. The Doctor would then ask me what was the matter. If I then started to stammer trying to tell him what I had come to see him about, the Doctor would say to me 'Stop my boy.' The Doctor would then wait a few moments by fiddling with some of the papers on his desk. Then he would say to me now Hunter my boy, point to me what I had come to see him about. This is how he got to know what was wrong with me. The Doctor was always very good with me, I am sure he spent more time with me than he did with any of his other patients.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE TELEPHONE

Speaking on the telephone can be the most difficult thing to do if you happen to have a stammer. I had to learn how to cope with the telephone when I started working for the Milk Marketing Board, as the telephone was one of the tools needed to do the job.

When I was promoted within the Board in 1965, I started working at the Board's regional office at Gosforth near Newcastle-upon-Tyne. I was supplied with a car and a briefcase and the boss told me to go and find some work to do.

Later when I bought my own house, I had the telephone installed, as I was based at home and worked mainly from home, although I was in contact with the Regional Office on a regular basis.

The telephone was now an essential part of my work and I had to use it. This meant I really had to learn from the start how to speak on the telephone. It was a new and most difficult experience. I had many dreadful days to start with, and often felt like jacking it all in because of my stammering.

I was called into the Regional Office to work from time to time, when they were very busy. Most of the work was in the marketing office, and was mainly all telephone work, dealing with the milk coming in from the dairy farms in the north of England. The fresh milk from the farms went straight into the city dairies. There were all sorts of problems cropping up with the milk and the transport. Farmers, hauliers and dairy managers were on the phone every day, as well as a great variety of business people connected with agriculture or education. There were another two young people working in the marketing office, a young boy and a young girl. The marketing officer was a man in his middle fifties; he had his own office next to our large office and he was in charge of all marketing and transport problems. I wondered to myself how on earth am I going to cope with the telephones in this busy office, with three telephones ringing all day, when I couldn't even speak properly to anybody. It was a frightening thought and experience.

When I was first appointed to the Regional Office at Gosforth, I had to find some lodgings. I was recommended to go and see a farmer and his wife near Hexham in Northumberland. They were willing to put me up as they had a spare room in the farm house

The farmer and his wife were getting on a bit. They were a very quiet private family with two sons. The farmer's wife was a lovely person, she seemed to understand all about my stammering. She sometimes used to give me a nudge with her arm and shoulder and tell me not to worry about my stammering as we would get along fine. The farmer's wife was a good baker and cook, she used to make a super rhubarb tart. When she got to know I loved her rhubarb tarts, she would always make them once or twice a week for tea throughout the summer. Her rhubarb tarts were delicious. I still love rhubarb tarts, my wife is an excellent cook and baker of all types of fruit tarts.



The farm was a good friendly home and the farmer's wife looked after me very well. If I started to stammer in front of her, she used to start laughing at me and tell me to spit it out. I used to start laughing myself, and somehow while I was also laughing I was able to talk to her without stammering.

The two sons at the farm were just about the same age as myself. The older boy had chest problems and found it difficult breathing. He couldn't work and was about the farm all the time. The younger boy worked away from home, at the local cattle market, which also owned the farm. The farmer himself worked away two or three days a week at the cattle market, this was probably in his agreement when he got the tenancy of the farm. The rest of the week the farmer worked at home rearing cattle and sheep. The farm was all down to grass.

In the evenings the meal was always ready about 6 o'clock and we all met up then. Some nights after the evening meal we would all play cards, other nights the boys and I would be out around the farm shooting rabbits, depending on the time of year. Most Saturday nights we went to the pictures in the town.

My stammering wasn't a great problem with the two farm boys, as I used to wait and speak to them when I thought I could, and this normally worked. On a Saturday night when we were going to the pictures, I used to give the older boy my money for the pictures and for the chips afterwards. The younger boy could be quite cheeky with me at times, if I started stammering. He used to say to me in a sharp voice, 'Either tell us, or shut up.' I used to shut up.

They had a telephone at the farm, but I never used their phone very much, because I was out all day. The office would sometimes leave a message at the farm for me. I never gave any of the farmers the telephone number of my lodgings; they always contacted me through the regional office, until I bought my own house and had my own telephone.

I stayed with this farmer and his family for a few years. Then I bought a house of my own in a small village called Haydon Bridge, which was right beside the River Tyne in Northumberland. When I moved into the house on my own, the Milk Marketing Board installed a telephone for me. I could now get the farmers to contact me direct at home.

The first time I was called in to help at the regional office, I thought to myself 'Here goes, I am out of a job.' I thought I won't have a job by the evening, as I would never be able to cope with the telephones ringing all the time in the office. I set off very early the first morning I was going into the Regional Office. I thought I would get into the office before anyone else arrived, so that I could practice using the telephone talking to myself.

The cleaner was the only one in the office when I arrived. She said to me 'You are bright and early this morning, Hunter.' I said to the cleaner I wanted to do some work before anybody else arrived. Little did she know I just wanted to practice using the telephone by myself. There I was sitting at the desk I thought I would be using, talking away on the telephone with nobody on the other end. It was great, I could imagine a farmer on the other end of the phone, complaining about something. And there I was, with all the confidence

in the world advising him how to solve his problem.

There were about 30 people working in different departments in the Regional Office. I was just playing around with the telephone when I thought I heard some of the staff arriving. At the same time one of the phones in the office suddenly started ringing. What a surprise I got, as this was the real thing. Should I, or shouldn't I lift the phone and answer it?

After standing listening to the phone ringing for a few moments, I thought I'd better answer it, as there was nobody else in the office watching how I would perform on the phone. I would have to get used to answering the phone a lot more with other people being in the office. I didn't feel very confident as I picked up the phone and managed to say 'Hello.' On the other end of the phone, it was the girl that worked on the office switchboard, she said 'Oh, it's you Hunter,' was I the only one in. I managed to say 'yes.'

The girl then asked me to tell Mr Allison, the office supervisor, she wouldn't be coming in today, as she didn't feel very well. I said 'O K,' and put the phone down. When I put the phone down I thought to myself that wasn't too bad. But I didn't have much to say, the girl did most of the talking.

The next thing was, how was I going to tell Mr Allison the switchboard girl wouldn't be coming in today. After thinking about how to handle the situation, I decided to write him a note and leave it on his desk, and this is what I did.

When the other two marketing staff and the marketing officer arrived in the office, I stood in the middle of the office waiting to see which desk I was going to be using. The marketing officer said to me, 'Hunter, I want to see you in my office.' In his office he told me to sit down. Then he said, 'Now Hunter my boy, I know all about your stammering and I don't want to fling you in at the deep end with these busy phones.' He said 'What I would like you to do is to sort out some of the pins on the wall map, and answer the odd phone call.'

In the marketing office, one of the side walls was covered with a map. The map included the whole northern region, and measured about 5 metres by 5 metres. There were pins in the map for all the dairy farmers, hauliers and dairy companies, and the map had to be kept up to date. The dairy farms were all pinned on the map, along with the farmer's number. The job I got to do was to look through the records and take the pins out from the farms that had finished producing milk, and to pin the new ones that had started producing milk.

While I was up the steps working on the map, I was also close by the three telephones and could see how busy the office was. It seemed to be non-stop answering telephone calls. Later that morning the other two staff were on the phone, when suddenly the third phone rang. I came down the steps and went and picked up the phone. I managed to say 'Hello'. This farmer said 'Is that the milk board?' I said 'Yes.' The farmer then said his milk hadn't been collected from the farm that morning, could I tell him why. I said 'Give me your name and telephone number and I will ring you back, thank you.'

While I was on the phone, I was writing down all the farmer's particulars about

his query. When I put the phone down, I handed the piece of paper to the girl sitting at the desk next to me, and said to her 'This farmer's milk hasn't been collected today.' The girl said 'Right I will deal with it.'

No problems with the telephone so far, I thought this was quite easy. But my thoughts were soon to be shattered, because later on that afternoon I had a farmer on the other end of the phone wanting some advice, why his milk had such a poor keeping quality. I started having a sort of discussion with this farmer and I knew what I wanted to say to him. But I just couldn't get the words out and started stammering on the phone. I felt awful about this, and signalled to the girl sitting at the opposite desk to come and take the phone from me. She could see the stress I was under. The mess I made of that telephone call shook me to the core. I felt awful for the rest of the day. My two colleagues in the office said to me, not to worry Hunter as I would get used to the telephones.

The marketing officer was being kind to me by keeping me away from the telephones. He knew what would happen and he knew quite well I couldn't cope with the busy telephones. I dropped myself right in it by picking up the telephone. At the end of that day, the marketing officer popped into the office to see what problems had cropped up that day with the milk marketing and the transport. He then turned to me and said 'Hunter, how did you get on today?' Before I could get any words out, the other two marketing staff said he's had a good day and worked very hard. The marketing officer said he would ask me in again to help in the office. All the office staff and the heads of the different departments were all very kind to me, all the time I worked in the Regional Office

I went home that night really shattered. I felt sick, worried, depressed, and felt like putting my head in the gas oven. However, the mess I made on the telephone that afternoon turned out to be one of the best things I had ever done on the phone. The reason is that I couldn't sleep that night, and kept awake wondering how on earth was I going to overcome this problem. I couldn't turn to anyone for help, because I didn't know anyone that could help me. After spending most of the night lying awake thinking about my stammering on the telephone, I made two decisions which were to help me for the rest of my life.

I decided I was going to start speaking very slowly, when I was talking to people every day and while I was using the telephone. I also decided I was going to speak more quietly than I did, not that I was a loud speaker anyway.

When I got up the next morning, I started rehearsing how I was going to speak in the future. While I was driving to my first farm, I was saying aloud in a slow quiet voice, 'Good morning Mr [so and so]', over and over again while controlling my breathing. This slow quiet approach I had to people seemed to work, and it also worked on the telephone. But what a lot of hard work and self control it took to get it to work. I worked at it day and night. It took many months of self discipline and continual practice before I was using it automatically.

I tried to get to know the Christian names of the dairy managers and the

farmers when I was working among them. When I visited them I would hold out my hand and say 'Hello, Tom' or whatever their name was. This is how I introduced myself to them. I never introduced myself to the farmers and the dairy managers, as 'I am Hunter Adair from the Milk Marketing Board,' which is very long winded and I couldn't have said that mouthful anyway without stammering.

I didn't tell anyone what I was trying to do. However, the marketing officer noticed something different about me, when I was talking to him. He said to me, 'Hunter you are talking much slower,' was I trying to improve on my stammering? I said 'yes.' He said that was very good, keep at it. He said he would help me further by getting me some introduction cards printed. The cards would help me when I had to meet all the different types of business people during the course of my work.

The introduction cards were a great help to me. When I made an appointment to see people from the education establishment, or from the councils, or from the Ministry of Agriculture. I used to hand them my card and that told them who I was and what company I represented. It broke the ice for me very nicely.

I stuck firmly to my introduction to the farmers and to the dairy mangers. If I didn't know the farmer's first name, I would hold out my hand and say to him 'Hello, Milk Board.' The farmers seemed to like this sort of warm friendly approach, and I soon became very friendly with many of them.

I can well remember one day a gentleman in a striped suit from the personnel department at Head Office in Thames Ditton, Surrey was coming to have a day out with me around the farms, to see how I was performing. I sort of knew this chap, he was one of the men that interviewed me for the job in the first place. He was always very smartly dressed and looked and talked like a city slicker. He didn't really impress me when I first met him. The personnel officer had a very responsible job, he was in charge of all the field staff in England and Wales. He used to have a day out with the different field staff from time to time, just to get to know what the job was all about and to see how different people did the job.

I picked the personnel officer up at the Regional Office, one Wednesday morning about 9.30 and we set off around the farms. I had arranged to visit four farms in the morning. When I got to the farms I introduced myself and the personnel officer to the farmers in my slow quiet voice as I had practised. The farmers we visited in the morning were all very pleased to see me and the personnel officer. They all invited us into the farm house for coffee. While we were having coffee, I completed the business with them in what I thought was a very professional manner. I thought I had a very good morning.

I was shattered in the afternoon when this personnel officer said to me the only complaint he had with my work was my introduction to the farmers. I said to him. 'Would all the farmers have invited me into their house for coffee if they didn't like my approach to them?'

I said to the personnel officer that the farmers liked my approach to them. I

just couldn't say 'Hunter Adair from the Milk Marketing Board'. I just couldn't get this mouthful out without stammering, and would have been at the farm all day stuttering and stammering trying to say these words.

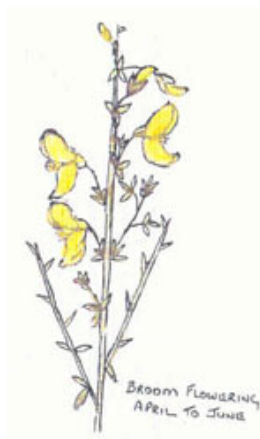
The personnel officer said 'OK Hunter, the farmers all seem to like you and that is very good for the company'. I got to become known in the company as the farmers' man, and was very well liked by the farmers and Board staff.

I also told the personnel officer that the telephone was very difficult for me at times and gave me many a headache. While I was using the phone I used to practice this slow quiet speaking day and night, with no guidance from anybody. I also tried to control my breathing at the same time. It was really very hard work and I also had the job to do.

In my early days at work I sometimes had to telephone a farmer or businessman about something that was very important to them, and I couldn't even speak to them when they answered the phone. I used to just put the receiver down and could have burst out crying, thinking I wish somebody could help me.

I was afraid of the telephone for a long time, until I had built up sufficient confidence where I could pick up the telephone and start speaking on it, without having to think about it first. Over the years I got more and more confident at using the telephone. It wasn't easy and I had a lot of tricky moments. But by sticking rigidly to my original plan and not letting anybody distract me from my method, my slow quiet 'hello' approach eventually paid off, and I could use the telephone just like any normal person.

Today I never think about the telephone, and just use it when I have to. However, I still use this slow quiet voice when I am speaking to people or on the telephone, as I very much aware of my stammering in the past.



## CHAPTER 8

### COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE

Most people communicate every day with one another and never give it a thought. But when you have a stammer, it is not so easy communicating with other people on a day to day basis.

I used to try and hide my stammer because of pride, as I didn't want other people to think I had a fault that made communicating with people very difficult. Funny animals we human beings. If for instance some people have a spot on their face or hands, they will do everything they can to try and hide or disguise it. They don't want people to think there is something wrong with them. Some people will do anything because of their pride. Having a stammer to me was just like having a spot on my face, I would try and hide it if I possibly could.

With having a stammer, getting the voice box to work smoothly all the time was my real goal. I was in a world of my own when I stammered and the battle I could have to try and control or overcome the problem was an uphill struggle.

I have many times been in among a group of people, at a party, or at a conference and have stood back slightly from the group and watched how easily they could talk to one another and communicate with each other.

I many times have thought to myself I wish I was confident enough to join in on the conversation, especially if there were some nice looking young ladies in the company. I just didn't have enough confidence to join in, and if someone in the group was about to draw me into the conversation, I would take a further step or two back from the group so that I didn't get involved as I would most likely start stammering. I was quite happy just to listen to the conversation in the company - because if I started stammering I would have embarrassed myself and everyone else around me.

The most difficult thing with having a stammer, I find, is starting to speak. I can't explain how difficult it can be just to get started speaking. The harder I sometimes tried to speak, the more difficult it got and the pain I was inflicting on myself was sometimes nearly unbearable.

It could be very embarrassing and difficult when I was standing talking to someone and then find the conversation suddenly came to a halt, because I couldn't say another word.

The reaction of some people varied a great deal when they were faced with someone stammering in front of them. They didn't know what to do. It was a most embarrassing situation.

I always looked at the person straight in the eyes when I was talking to them. If however I started stammering, some people would take a step back, others would look at the ground and some people would fidget about not knowing what to do.

I do understand very well how some people felt when they were faced with someone stammering in front of them, I know how I felt. I often wished the ground would open up and I would fall into a big black hole. I also knew pretty well that some people were very embarrassed when they were watching me stammering.

Some people were very good at diverting and stopping me when I was stammering, by making a joke of the situation or by changing the conversation. They would quickly start talking. While others who stammer might find this rather rude, I personally found it helpful because it let me relax and get my thoughts together again.

Most people were very tolerant with me when I was stammering. The few arrogant people I met when I was stammering were an education to me and I shall never forget them. It was useful to come up against these arrogant people from time to time, because it let me see what I was up against, that there were a few horrible people out there. I just listened to them and wondered, what would be the best way of dealing with these people.

I knew a few farmers over 30 years that were well known for being arrogant and rude, which I had to deal with. The women could sometimes be more difficult to deal with than the men and they all seemed to speak very fast and loud. This frightened some people from dealing with them. I had to deal with them, as I had no option. These people didn't frighten me, though they did concern me a bit when I had to deal with them. It was all part of my work.

It was while dealing with some of these rude arrogant people, that I first started to use my 'Silent Pause'. First of all let me explain what my silent pause is.

When I was having a conversation with somebody and I got stuck on a certain word and couldn't get it out, I would wait a few seconds, until the person I was talking to looked at me before I started speaking to them again. Sometimes after the pause I would use a replacement word that I found easier to say. Many times I did not need a replacement word as the pause enabled me to say the word I wanted to say. Pausing to get the other person looking at me and to catch my breath would help me get the word out.

It is a marvellous tool to use this silent pause, especially with the form of stammering I had. I could use it every day in the workplace, when I was presenting a talk or when I was on the telephone. Nobody but myself knew what I was doing,

I have seen and heard people that don't have a stammer using this silent pause when they were lecturing. Anybody can use it and it's very very effective when it's used properly. I had to practice and learn how to use it, and not think it is a cure for stammering, because it is not. It was a tool I could use with my stammer, to help me to communicate better with other people.

How I got onto using this silent pause was very simple. I had to visit this farmer one day. The farmer himself was very pleasant to deal with, but his wife was a loud, arrogant, rude, nasty person. She used to always come

dashing out of the farm house whenever I arrived at the farm and she normally tried to dominate the conversation, and mostly did.

This particular day I had to visit the farm because there had been something wrong with the farmer's milk payment. He hadn't been paid the correct amount of money and it was my job to sort it out. I went along to see the farmer to explain to him that it had been a clerical error that had got his milk money mixed up. But I had since put the matter right and got him paid the right amount of money. I was also going to apologise for the trouble it had caused him.

As I drove into the farm yard, the farmer's wife was out the house like a shot. She was straight at me about their milk money with her wicked tongue. She had a habit of going at me something awful, then she would turn away and look somewhere else waiting for me to reply to her.

If I waited for a few seconds before I replied to her, she would turn round and look at me again, wondering why I hadn't replied to her straight away. When she turned round to look at me, I knew I had her full attention and then I would quietly try and speak to her.

If the farmer's wife didn't like my explanation, she would let her tongue fly at me again. Then she would turn away and look somewhere else again. I would wait a few seconds again until she turned round to look at me, before I replied to her again.

This farmer's wife didn't really know what a great help she was to me. Because I discovered by using this silent pause and then by speaking slowly and quietly to her, she began to calm down and became less aggressive with me. It was like playing a cat and mouse game with her and she didn't know what I was doing with her.

It was this rude arrogant farmer's wife that I must thank very much for helping me to discover using the silent pause and for helping me along the road to stop stammering. When I discovered the silent pause worked very well with her, I thought I would try it out on the other rude, aggressive people that I came across in the course of my duty.

I had to practice and practice using the silent pause. It took a very long time before I could master it. I couldn't practice it on my own, it had to be while I was having a conversation with other people.

I practised using it with people that didn't always look at me when they were talking to me. I also practised using it when I was talking to groups of people at meetings who were probably getting bored with me talking to them anyway. I would use the silent pause to attract their attention again.

The aggressive, arrogant, rude, nasty people were the people I used as my training ground to improve on my silent pause. These people were always uneasy when dealing with me, some of them disliked me and some disliked the company I worked for. They thought the company and I were too dictatorial.



Most of these aggressive people would never stand still and look at me for any length of time. They had a habit of coming straight up to me and getting what was bothering them off their chests. Then they would find something to do, like fiddling with something in their hands, or they would keep looking away from me for short periods.

This sort of behaviour from these people was ideal for practising my silent pause on. I worked hard on these nasty people, as they were so unpredictable, although their behaviour in many ways was very similar. They could never stand face to face and discuss their problems with me.

I hated the sight of one little nasty farmer who I had to visit from time to time. He used to say to me when I went to see him, 'What do you want, you stuttering idiot?' and he meant it. No matter who was with him, or where we were, this is the sort of thing he used to come out with, which hurt me to the bone. I wasn't that easily hurt, but he hurt me very much.

The highlight of this little farmer's nastiness to me was one Saturday night when another farmer had invited me along to a party at his farm. When I arrived at the farm, there were about 40 other people there having drinks. There were farmers and their wives, along with some business people who I knew and this little horrible farmer was there.

When I was served a drink. I had a look around and saw a few farmers with their wives, and some girls who I knew quite well. I thought I would join in with them as they all knew about my stammering. As I was shaking hands with this group of girls, the host arrived to top up the drinks and just at the same moment, this little horrible farmer appeared in the group.

He first looked at me and asked me what was I doing here. Then he turned to the host and said to him 'What were you thinking about inviting a stammering idiot like him along to your party, are you short of friends?'

The host just turned and went to see to some of his other guests. The group of girls I was with went silent and nobody knew what to say. I felt terribly hurt and quietly made my way to the farmhouse door and came home. I never heard another thing about that party. These are some of the unpleasant incidents that stick in my mind which I will never forget.

Over the years however I managed to earn a great deal of respect from some of these aggressive, arrogant farmers - and funnily enough I became quite friendly with one or two of them, where they started treating me with respect and kindness. But I still knew they were most aggressive to other people visiting their farms. My experience with these people always made me very wary of them, even when they were being kind to me. These people taught me what human nature was all about, and I am pretty sure it was they who helped me to overcome my stammering, because of the way they use to treat me.

As I was making great progress with my silent pause, I thought I would extend using it in my everyday conversations with people, and with groups of people. I even tried using it on the telephone.

I don't normally need to use my silent pause when I am having a quiet conversation with someone and they are looking at me all the time. In a situation like this, if I thought I was going to stick on a word, I would quickly think of another word which I could use and say and just carry on with the conversation.

The reason my silent pause is not effective with people standing talking and looking at me all the time, is because I have their full attention and I am pretty confident that I can speak quietly and slowly to them without stammering.

If however I was talking to someone while they were working, this was a different matter because I didn't hold their full attention. I could use my silent pause on them to great effect. I could even pause much longer with people when they were working, until they looked at me before I started speaking to them again. This was also great training controlling my stammering.

When I had to visit a farm, I would think to myself before I arrived at the farm, if this farmer, or his staff were people I could use my silent pause on. Sometimes when I planned to use my silent pause it didn't always work out, and at other times I had to use it, because I couldn't get the words out that I wanted to say.

Using my silent pause on the telephone was a very different kettle of fish than from using it while I was having a conversation face to face with another person. When I think back, I many times used the silent pause on the telephone not knowing what was happening, because I couldn't get out the words I wanted to say. Several times I had to put the telephone down, just because I couldn't speak on it - which was very embarrassing both for me and for the person on the other end of the line.

Over a period of time I found that using the silent pause on the telephone was much easier than when talking face to face with people. When you are listening to somebody on the telephone, they are either asking you, or telling you something, which requires a reply. When it came my turn to speak on the telephone, I many times used my silent pause before I replied. The timing on the telephone was more critical than when talking face-to-face. If the person on the other end of the line had to say, 'Hello, are you still there?', then I had got it wrong.

I had to practise using my silent pause very very hard on the telephone. Over a long period I did become quite efficient at using the silent pause on the telephone. I also stammered less on the phone as I had to concentrate very much at listening and sorting out how I was going to reply, which gave me less time to think about stammering.

Not that I got it right all the time on the telephone, far from it. But using the silent pause did improve my communication with other people, and the harder I worked at it the better I got at it.

In the course of my work, I many times had to give talks and lectures to small and large groups of farmers and business people on the developments in agriculture and on the E.E.C. agricultural policy. Giving a talk of any sort to

groups of people can be quite a frightening experience to some people. But when you also have a stammer, then it can be very frightening.

At the talks and lectures I gave, I mostly used visual aids, such as a projector and screen, or a flip board chart, which were a great help to me at getting the message across to the group.

I am not a good public speaker by any means and I am not afraid to admit it. However the more talks and lectures I gave, the more I became fairly good at holding the attention of my audience. I think I became fairly confident at public speaking which helped me a great deal.

In my work I had to prepare and lecture at five or six farmers' meetings a year. I was also often asked to speak at the various women's groups during the winter months. My lectures and meetings normally lasted for about two hours at the most, including time for questions from the audience. These meetings and talks were good places to use my silent pause, and I did use it to my advantage on many many occasions.

For instance if I was lecturing to a group of people, I might see some of the audience were getting restless, shuffling their feet and looking at the floor, or casting their eyes around the room in front of them. I would stop talking for a few seconds, when I was just about to tell them something that was important to them, or something that was interesting. I could then see the heads lifting up and all the eyes turning to look up at me, wondering why I had stopped talking. When I knew I had the full attention of my audience again, I proceeded with my lecture.

The audience didn't know what I was doing with them. I never ever told anybody what I was up to at these group meetings, and I became very confident at running them.

I couldn't use the silent pause too often. I had to pick the right moment and get the timing right. It was a skill I developed and I used it almost at every meeting.

When I was asked to give a talk to a small or large ladies' group, I would use my silent pause if I needed to. However, ladies' groups didn't let their minds and eyes wander as much as the men's groups did.

The silent pause I developed and used was not a cure for my stammering. I used it whenever I got stuck on a word and couldn't continue speaking. As I gained confidence at using the silent pause, I could control it whenever I wanted. The silent pause did eventually help me to overcome my stammering. I can now speak to groups of people, or use the telephone and I never think about stammering. The words just flow as if I never had a speech problem.

## CHAPTER 9

### GETTING PROMOTION

To most people, getting promoted at work is a step up the ladder and normally a higher standard of living, with the extra fringe benefits which normally go with the promotion.

I worked for the English and Welsh Milk Marketing Board for 30 years in the north of England. It was a large dairy farmers organisation, with a staff of around 13,000 people. The Board was set up in 1933, its purpose being to buy all the milk from the dairy farms in England and Wales and to sell the milk for the highest price to the many small and large dairy companies in England and Wales, or in Scotland. The Milk Marketing Board also provided other services for the farmers. It ran a farm management service, which the farmers had to pay for. It also kept a stock of high quality pedigree bulls and provided an Artificial Insemination service for the farmers.

During the 30 years I worked for the company I saw many changes. I saw some people working their way up the ladder in the company, who deserved their promotion when it came. I also saw people who were pushed up the ladder that didn't deserve promotion - but because their face fitted with some of the top brass they were promoted. Other people who I knew very well and who worked very hard and put in long hours for the company never got any recognition for their efforts; no matter how hard they tried, promotion never seemed to work out for them.

I hope I fully deserved my progress within the company when it came. I would be a fool to say I didn't deserve the promotions. Remember I had a very bad stammer, which I was battling with for years and was trying to control and overcome.

When I first joined the Milk Marketing Board at their cattle breeding centre in the north of England in 1958, I didn't know about all the other different departments within the company and about the other field jobs that the company had on offer. I had been working for the company for a few months, when I started to read about the history of the company and to see what jobs that might be available from time to time.

The two other jobs that took my interest were the Assistant Regional Officers who worked from the various Regional Offices throughout the country, and the Sales Development Officers who also worked from the Regional Offices.

The Board had about 70 Assistant Regional Officers working in the field in England and Wales, looking after and advising the dairy farmers how to produce good clean quality milk. They also looked after and arranged the collection of the milk from the dairy farms.

The sales people in the Region visited the dairy companies in the region to try and promote more milk sales. They also visited schools, bakers, grocers, coal mines, hotels and other establishments where they thought they could help to promote and increase the sales of milk and dairy products

The aim of both the Assistant Regional Officers and the Sales Development Officers, were very similar in a way. They were there to run an efficient business and service for the dairy farmers, that would eventually end up getting the dairy farmers a better price for their milk.

The Assistant Regional Officers job was the one for me, as my interests lay among the farmers. But how on earth would I ever get a job like that with having such a very bad stammer? Nevertheless I had made up my mind I was going to try and become an Assistant Regional Officer with the Board.

On one of my days off from the cattle breeding centre, I made an appointment to see the Regional Manager at Newcastle Upon Tyne to enquire more about the work of the Assistant Regional Officers in the Northern Region. The Regional Manager was a man in his middle fifties. He had worked for the company for over 30 years and had a great deal of knowledge about the company and about people.

When I entered the Manager's office, the first thing he would noticed when I started speaking to him, was that I had a very bad stammer. The Regional Manager must have thought something of me. The outcome of our meeting was that the Manager asked me if I would like to have a day or two out with one of the Sales Development Officers and one of the Regional Marketing Officers, when I had a free day. I accepted his offer there and then. The Regional Manager then gave me the name and telephone numbers of his two senior Sales and Regional Officers, who I had to contact whenever I had a free day off from the cattle breeding centre.

This was a golden opportunity for me to have an inside look at the other types of work the Board had to offer. Over the next six months or so, I had several days out with both the Sales and Regional Officers, and liked the work both of them were doing. After this I started applying for any sales, or Assistant Regional Officers jobs that came available throughout the country.

There always seemed to be more sales jobs available than Assistant Regional Officers jobs. I was to learn the reasons why later. Also there weren't all that many jobs available, they seemed to come in bursts. A few jobs would crop up then there would be nothing for months or years. There were even less Assistant Regional Officers jobs coming vacant. The staff that had these jobs seemed to stick with them until they retired, or they were promoted.

I had a few interviews in different parts of the country for a few jobs with the Board. But I am now pretty sure my stammering let me down at most of the interviews I had. Although I was given a great deal of encouragement to keep applying for jobs, I hadn't been offered promotion so far.

Then in 1964 things started to change for me with the Milk Marketing Board. During the spring of that year I was having a fortnight's holiday when the Head Sales Development Officer phoned me up and asked me if I could give them a hand down in Hull. They were promoting fresh cream at the time and were very short of staff with all the spring fairs and shows that were going on in the Region.

I said to the Sales Officer I was on holiday for the next fortnight and I would be very pleased to help them. 'Great', said the Sales Officer, 'we have plenty of work for you to do down in Hull.' So away I went with them down to Hull and spent several days with the sales team helping them to promote fresh cream.

Later that year I was asked to help them on various other milk product promotions in the Region. I also helped them at the milk race that year, which was coming into the Region.

My stammer never seemed to be much of a hindrance to me while I was working with the sales people. I was so involved with many different people and I never really had much time to talk to anybody, except to the sales staff.

Also later that year the Regional Officers were carrying out a large milk haulage transport survey, near to the Cattle Breeding Centre where I worked. The Regional Manager had already asked the Centre Manager at the Cattle Breeding Centre if he could release me for a fortnight to help on this transport survey.

I worked so many days going round in the milk wagons, taking details at the farms and the map references. I then spent the rest of the time at the Regional Office drawing up and tracing the survey routes and recording the time it took to collect the milk from each dairy farm. Again my stammering didn't really affect me a great deal, as I was mainly working one to one with different people. By using my slow quiet method of talking to them, I was handling and controlling my stammering pretty well and I wasn't under any pressure.

At the time I was working on the transport survey, I didn't know that the Northern Regional Office was going to appoint another Assistant Regional Officer. This had been on the cards for quite some time and I hadn't heard about it. The circular finally came round all the different departments advertising the vacancy for an Assistant Regional Officer at the Newcastle Upon Tyne Office. The work load had increased in the Region and Head Office had decided to appoint another Regional Officer.

I put my application in for the job and hoped for the best. There were 60 applicants for the job. When I heard this, I wondered how would someone like me with a bad stammer even be considered for the job.

Before the interviews were held, at Head Office in Surrey, the Regional Manager at Newcastle Upon Tyne asked me to come in and see him at the office. I didn't know it was about the job vacancy. The Regional Manager and I discussed the work of the Assistant Regional Officers. The Manager then asked me if I liked the work. I said to him I thought the marketing work which the Regional Officers did was more my cup of tea than the sales work, as I was more at home among the farmers.

The Regional Manager then asked me about my stammering. I told him what I was doing about it and how I used my silent pause, whenever I got stuck on a word. The Manager then said to me that should I be considered for the job, I would have to get further help with my stammering. He said it would be a big

drawback for me, as the job required meeting all types of business and professional people. I left the Manager's office that afternoon thinking 'Well I can say good-bye to this job.'

However, during the next fortnight, I was very surprised when I was short listed for the job along with another 11 people. The interview I had at Surrey went very well, and within the next fortnight I was offered the job.

I think I was offered the job because I was in the right place at the right time. The Regional Manager at Newcastle knew the great effort I was making to get my stammering sorted out and under control.

There were however some field staff with a longer service than I had with the Board, who were not very happy when they heard I had got the job and they hadn't even got an interview for it. That's what life is all about.

I soon settled into working with the team at Newcastle Upon Tyne. From time to time, I helped the Board set up other new services for the farmers. One particular service I helped set up was the farm management service scheme. This was a costing service to help the dairy farmers run their farm businesses more efficiently. I worked for about six months getting farmers to join this farm management service scheme.

When the farm management service scheme was finally launched, the Board offered me a job to stay working for this service. It wouldn't have been a promotion for me. This was a new service, which I had helped get off the ground, and the Board said I had done a good job for them. I declined their offer to work for the new scheme.

As I had also been working with the sales staff on and off for a long time, I was asked several times if I would like to come and work with them. I was told by one of the Sales Directors at Head Office in Thames Ditton, Surrey that if I ever fancied a job in the Sales Division, just to let him know and he would find me a job. I also declined this job at the time. But I always left the doors open in case I needed a move.

From time to time I was also asked by personnel department at Head Office if I would be prepared to move. I tried to get a higher position in the Northern Region, but I was informed by Head Office that I would have to move to get further promotion.

The Board produced a monthly magazine, which was sent out to all the dairy farmers in England and Wales. I was asked by Head Office if I would produce a magazine specifically for the farmers in the Northern Region. This was a pilot scheme, and if the farmers wanted a Regional Magazine then the Board would consider producing one every two months for each Region in England and Wales.

I got this magazine off the ground for the Board, and was the editor of the magazine for two or three years. Then the editor's job for the official monthly Board magazine became vacant and I was offered the job, which was based at Thames Ditton in Surrey. I was very interested in the job, but I loved the north of England and the people that lived there. So I also had to decline this

offer.

One job which I was offered and would have loved was to come and work in the personnel department at Head Office in Thames Ditton in Surrey. After a great deal of thought about moving south, my family and I decided against the move, as all our friends are in the north and Northumberland is a lovely county. The job I was offered was to meet the visitors coming to Head Office from all over the world. I would have taken them to meet the different heads of departments and the Board Directors who they had come to see. I would also have had to show some visitors around Head Office from time to time, such as school children, farmers and a variety of other personnel who were visiting Head Office on business.

Although when I joined the Milk Marketing Board I had a very bad stammer, I learned to control it over a number of years. Over the 30 years I worked for the company, my stammering didn't affect my promotional prospects all that much. It did a bit at the start, but over the years I was offered some top quality executive jobs which I turned down.





## CHAPTER 10

### CONTROLLING MY STAMMER

Controlling my stammer was no easy task, and took a lot of hard work and determination, over a number of years. The best way which I found to help me deal with my stammering was partly to set myself targets and goals, such as what practice I would do each day on the 'Silent Pause', and to stick to these regardless.

Another thing that helped me to control my stammer was being promoted into a job where, if I hadn't done something about my stammering I couldn't possibly have done the job. I had a lot of telephone work to do every day, and it would just have been impossible to use the telephone properly if I didn't do something about my speech.

The mess I made one day on the telephone in the Regional Office, while I was trying to talk to a farmer, really knocked me for six. I felt awful about the mess I had made of myself, and decided to do something about my stammering there and then. This incident on the telephone shattered my pride and self esteem to the core. I still think about that dreadful day yet.

Another thing that sank home to me and made me do something about my stammering was being promoted to Assistant Regional Officer in the Northern Region. The Regional Manager who promoted me said that I should try and get some help with my stammering, as it would be a great hindrance to me when I had to meet all the different business and professional people in the course of my work.

At this stage I never had any help or proper advice about how to control my stammering. I was left to try and do something about it myself. I was helping myself by controlling my breathing, and by using my slow quiet method of speaking along with the silent pause whenever I thought I had to. I was gradually making progress and was stammering much less, but didn't realise it.

When the Regional Manager at Newcastle Upon Tyne office advised me to get some further help with my stammering, I didn't know who to contact for help, or where to start looking for help. Then one day, when I was in Newcastle Upon Tyne, I thought I would call at the Royal Victoria Infirmary Hospital and enquire if they had anybody, or if they knew of anybody that could help me further with my stammering.

The lady on the enquiry desk at the Hospital was very helpful. She said yes, there was a lady in Gosforth who was a speech therapist. She took patients at home privately, and also ran an adult evening class at the Hospital once a fortnight for speech therapy. She gave me the name, address and telephone number of this lady at Gosforth.

This was great news. When I went back to the Regional Office that afternoon, I told the Regional Manager about this lady. He said to give her a ring now and see if you can make an appointment to see her. I thought about this for a

short time, then I thought why don't I go along and see this lady, as her house was only two or three streets away from our Regional Office.

I told the girl on the office switchboard I would be out for a short time, and if the Regional Manager asked where I was, tell him I had gone to see a lady. He would know where I was. I jumped into my car and drove round to the address I was given at the Hospital, to see this speech therapist. When I arrived at her house, I sat in my car for quite some time before I could pick up enough courage to go and knock on her door.

Eventually I went and knocked on the house door. The door was opened by this tall slim lady. I had rehearsed what I was going to say to the lady. But when I met her I completely forgot what I was going to say to her.

The lady invited me into her house and asked me to sit down. She asked me if I would like a cup of coffee, and I said 'Yes please.' She went through to the back kitchen and made two cups of coffee, and then came and sat down on the chair opposite me.

As soon as the lady sat down she asked me what she could do for me. I slowly and quietly asked her if she could help me with my stammering. The lady said to me what's wrong with my speech. I slowly said to her sometimes I find it difficult starting to speak, and at other times I get stuck on a word and can't get it out and I just stop speaking.

The lady said she could see what I meant, and she thought she could help me with my stammering. She suggested I should have two or three sessions with her privately at her home first, then she thought I would benefit by joining her adult speech therapy group at the Hospital. The evening group, she said, had eight people in it, three young girls and five men aged between 20 and 30 years old. The lady said she couldn't do justice to groups of more than ten people; with groups of less than ten, people gained more from the group as she could spend more time with each patient.

I arranged to call at her home the following Wednesday afternoon at 2 o'clock for my first hour's speech therapy session. At this first visit, I told the lady what I had done so far about my stammering. I told her how I started to speak more slowly and quietly, and how I used this silent pause. I also told her how I tried to control my breathing.

The lady thought I was doing the right thing by speaking much more slowly and quietly. But she had a laugh about my silent pause, as she had never heard of anyone with a stammer using the silent pause.

She asked me to give her a demonstration how I used the silent pause. She told me to tell her aloud my name and where I worked and what my job was, and to demonstrate to her my silent pause. When I started to tell her who I was and where I worked, in my slow quiet voice, the lady was looking at me. Then she suddenly looked away at her front window as someone was passing by. At that moment I stopped speaking. The lady turned and looked at me again wondering why I had stopped speaking. As soon as she looked at me I started speaking to her again.

The lady said to me 'Very good, I see what you mean by using the silent pause.' She then said to me her evening group would be very interested in the way I used the silent pause, and would I explain to the group when I joined it how and when I used it. She said there would be no need to use the silent pause, if and when I managed to overcome or control my stammering. She said using the silent pause was only another way of trying to control my stammering. But there was nothing wrong in using it, while I was trying to get my stammering under control.

At my first speech therapy session with the lady, she concentrated on this slower and quieter method I had developed when speaking. She thought this would be the answer to me dealing with my stammering. I was on my way to control and overcome my stammering before I met this speech therapist, and I didn't know it. I thought with some help from this lady I could overcome my stammering much quicker. Any help I could get to deal with my stammering was great.

She asked me to try and practise speaking much more slowly than I was speaking. She said to just breath naturally and try speaking slower. She then handed me a sheet of paper which was full of short sentences typed out. These sentences began with words which I had found difficult to say in the past. But with using my own slow quiet method of speaking, I could handle them fairly well. I did however get stuck trying to say some of the short sentences, and this is what the lady wanted to see for herself.

The short sentences on the sheet were such things as 'I was walking in the park with a friend today'; 'Some people will be away on holiday this week'; 'Tomorrow is Friday and I will be attending my speech therapy class'; 'How did I manage with the telephone today?'

The lady asked me to practise saying these short sentences out loud in a much slower voice than I had been using. Every spare moment I had the following week, I was saying aloud in a much slower voice 'I was walking in the park with a friend today', over and over again.

I didn't find these exercises too difficult, as I had been speaking much more slowly anyway for a long time, though not as slowly as the lady had asked me practise speaking. I even tried speaking very much more slowly to the staff in the office, and when I was using the telephone.

I had several weekly visits to this lady's home, and my speech did become much easier the slower I was speaking. As the training sessions progressed, the lady gave me some more sheets of paper with much longer sentences typed on them, and asked me to practise on them out loud as often as I could.

The lady said my speech would speed up and become normal, once I could handle words beginning with S, T, H, M, and P, but it would take a long time. I told her I was speaking much better after the half dozen training sessions with her.

I did ask her if breathing exercises would help my stammering. She said with some people they do, but in my case I should just breath normally and not try

and rush to start speaking.

The speech therapist told me part of my trouble, as with many other adults and children who stammer, was that we are all in far too big a hurry to get out the words we want to say. If we relaxed more and started speaking in a much slower quieter voice this would reduce our stammering. She told me I seemed quite relaxed anyway when I was speaking. This, she thought, had come about when I had started to speak much more slowly and quietly. I agreed very much with her and told her that I used to get so keyed up and tensed up before I was going to try and speak to people. I told her I many times found I couldn't speak a word without stammering.

I did find I was making great progress by slowing down my speech. I also found at my speech therapy sessions that I was reading out longer sentences to the lady much more easily, and I found it much easier starting to speak. However I am pretty sure now that when I decided on my own a long time ago to speak much more slowly and quietly, that this was the beginning of me getting control of my stammering and eventually helped me to overcome it.

The speech therapist was very good and helpful, but she just helped me with the fine tuning which I needed to deal with my stammering. I am also sure I would have overcome the stammering myself, the way I had developed speaking. But it would have taken me much longer. The therapist was a great help to me as she gave me more confidence and she helped me to control and overcome my stammering more quickly.

After about two months weekly private sessions with the speech therapist, she said to me she would like me to join her evening group at the Hospital, starting the following Friday evening at 6 o'clock. She asked me if I would prepare a 10 minute talk for the group, on how I started to try and control my stammering. I said to the speech therapist, I would be very pleased to do this, and that I would prepare my talk over the weekend. I hadn't met any of her group before and didn't know if their stammering was worse than my own.

Over the weekend I prepared my talk for this group. I thought I would better prepare more than a 10 minutes talk, just in case the group wanted me to go on a bit longer. I thought I would also include the silent pause in my talk, and use it if the situation arose. I could then explain to the group how and when I used the silent pause.

I happened to be working in the Regional Office the following Friday, and I told the Regional Manager about the progress I was making with my stammering. I also told him I had been asked to give a 10 minute talk to this group of people who all had some sort of stammer, or speech impairment. The Regional Manager said he had noticed a great improvement in my speech. He thought I should continue with this lady and her group, and he hoped the talk I was presenting to the group that evening would be very successful.

The Hospital was only a 15 minutes drive from the Regional Office, and during that Friday afternoon I shut myself in an empty office and rehearsed my talk for about two hours. I was pretty confident I wouldn't make a mess of my talk,

I was also going to use this much slower method of speaking when I was presenting it.

About 5.30 that Friday evening I jumped into my car with my talk in my brief case, and set off for the Hospital. The speech therapy class was held in an outbuilding just off the main Hospital building. When I arrived there were two young girls sitting together at this big round table. I found myself a seat at the table just opposite them, nothing was said. A short time after this, the rest of the group started arriving in dribs and drabs. Nothing was said by the men either as they sat down. The speech therapist was the last to arrive and her first comments were 'Good to see you all,' as she took her seat at the table.

I was a bit anxious while I was sitting at the table waiting to present my talk. The speech therapist introduced me to the group, then she turned to me and asked me if I was ready to present my talk. She said I could stand or sit, whichever I preferred. I decided that if I kept seated I would be at the same level as the rest of the group and it would be more relaxing.

I opened my talk nice and slowly and told the group who I was, where I worked, the type of work I did, how long I had been stammering. I also told them a bit about the silent pause I used. My talk went fairly well. I only once had a bit of a hesitation with a word which started with an S, but I soon found a replacement word and carried on with my talk. The 10 minutes I was allocated soon flashed by.

I then asked the group if there were any questions they would like to ask me. Little did I know that the speech therapist had already told all the other members of the group, the previous week, that they had to ask me a question each relating to my stammering, or about my work.

The first question came from one of the young girls in the group. She asked me if my stammering had affected my friendship with the young girls. I had to say yes to this question, as my stammering made me shun clear of the girls whenever I could.

The group meetings normally lasted for about two hours. But with all the various questions I was being asked, we were all still sitting round the table three hours later. I was really amazed at the different types of stammering the other group members had. The speech therapist had to help some of the group members with their questions, because they just couldn't get the words out. She let them stammer for a bit, then she intervened and helped them with their question.

I thought I had a bad stammer, until I met up with this group. They were mainly all intelligent people in the group. There was an accountant, a doctor, an artist, students and people from all walks of life. So there were a fair cross-section of the general public with a stammering problem. Some of the group members had been attending the group meetings for about a year. Each member was at a different stages of their treatment with their stammering. I could see this as it came to each member's turn to ask me a question.

I stayed with the group for several months, and the more I stayed with them the more I was convinced of the value of this very slow quiet method of speaking. Some members couldn't start speaking slowly, they would have to work hard at it. Other members had to practise relaxed breathing before they could get a start to speak.

I thought some of the group members were in far too much of a hurry to try and start speaking and they got themselves into all sorts of problems with their stammering. I continued to speak much more slowly when I was with the group members and I was making very good progress. When a question was sprung at me by one of the group members or the speech therapist, I could usually reply to it without much trouble.

I am very grateful indeed to the speech therapist and to her group members, as they taught me a great deal about stammering. There was always a very friendly atmosphere in the group, as we all had the same aim, to try and overcome or control our stammering.

Now let me just go over the points which I am sure helped me to overcome my stammering and I believe may also help other people who have a stammer. I now speak at the normal speed, just the same as anybody else and you could never tell I once had a very bad stammer.

- Don't be in too big a hurry to speak, no matter how urgent the situation is, and try and relax before you start speaking.
- Speak very slowly and quietly, and breathe normally. Try and start to speak with words you normally find easier to say.
- Practise aloud to yourself speaking very slowly, whenever you can. It took me about two years working very very hard on this slow quiet method of speaking, before I controlled and overcame my stammering.
- Never interrupt anybody who is speaking to you, even if you know what they are telling you is wrong. Wait until they have finished speaking, before you start speaking, then you can correct them.
- If you think using the silent pause (Chapter 8) will help you, practice using it with your friends to start with. This also takes a lot of practice, before you will become efficient at using the silent pause.
- Don't let anybody fluster you, or upset you when they are talking to you, even if they happen to be in a group of people.
- Someone in the group may try to mock you, or poke fun at you. Relax and reply slowly, quietly and politely to them. You will win the day and get the admiration from the rest of the group.

- The main key point for me to control or overcome my stammering was: Speak very slowly and quietly. This is a skill you will have to learn and practice.
- Set yourself targets on how much practice you will do each day, and keep at it.

