

When I was 14 years old, I discovered speech!

Julien



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When I was young, I stuttered. It was not my parents fault, it is not hereditary, it has nothing to do with the level of intelligence, and it is certainly not by laziness!

Stuttering is a disorder of the synchronization of hundreds of muscles, in the cheeks, jaws, of the tongue, control of the vocal cords, rib cage and diaphragm. All these muscles are controlled by a totally unconscious part of the brain, allowing our body to modulate the sound of our vocal cords to make syllables, sentences, and speeches and sometimes even "argue" with our children.

As young as I remember, I provoked the mockeries of my fellow men. All the remedies were useless, remonstrance of my mother, those of the schoolteacher (Mrs Corriveau), the laughter of some of my brothers and sisters, right up to the coin under the tongue, a remedy proposed by my grandmother Marie-Anne. At the age of 13, when I departed for boarding school, my problem was worse than ever. Not only I could not speak but my self-respect was zero... Certainly not a way to enter adolescence!

Towards the end of my first year in college in Champlain, Qc, one of my professors not much older than myself, he was hardly 20 years old, took me under his wing and offered to help me.

"Frère René", even if he had no training on the subject of stuttering, turned out to be my Saviour! He did a lot of research, and based on the sounds which caused me most problems, found texts of diction to practice. Very bright of him!

He organized a special internship for me alone, at the head office of the community in Terrebonne Qc, and in August came with me for three weeks of intensive work, He made me recite texts of which the majority of the words began with letters "pa" or "po". This kind of text is used for training theatre people.

What Brother René did at the time is almost a matter of genius. By instinct, he applied three principles of what even today is very badly understood or not known at all. To allow a person who stutters to improve his language, he has to master three things:

1- Establish a rhythm of flow of the word: *when I sing or when I read a text aloud, if I am alone I have no problem. I can recite a book of five-hundred pages without ever stumbling over a word. As soon as I am conscious that a person is*

listening, I jam. The problem vanishes if I speak at the rate of a real click, like that of the metronome or an imaginary one, generated by my brain.

2 - Listen to the sound of my own voice, or the echo phenomenon: *At the boarding school, every lunch, one of the students read into a microphone, a literary or religious text. Brother René managed to convince me to try reading a text into the microphone of the empty dining hall, except for him. He asked me to concentrate on the echo of my voice, reverberated from the walls of the big empty room. I had no problem!*

3 - The obligation to read a difficult text in front of a public: *happy with the results of my readings with metronome and those in the microphone of an empty room, Brother René asked me, not to try but to succeed in reading a text at noon in front of a filled room. I remember having read non-stop for a whole hour. I especially remember the incredible relief that I had felt. From then on, I was unable to stop reading into the microphone; I was always a volunteer...*

A long time ago, I lost track of Brother René, I would have liked to tell him how much his brilliant work helped me.



More than forty years later, one evening of December, I am a master of ceremony at an evening celebrating the end of a big project of which I was the director. Up at the microphone, while thanking each of my work teams, I have a heart pinching remembering Brother René and in front of a full house, tears come secretly into my eyes...

*Amitiés,
Julien*

NOTE: Sadly, I learned recently that Brother René died in 2011.