

# BORN TO DEAL WITH APD

JACK KATZ

*Many individuals with weaknesses in Auditory Processing face a variety of communication; social; and academic difficulties. There are innumerable untold stories of the trials and tribulations of Auditory Processing deficits in real life. This is one such story of Jack Katz. His inspiring story is a true testament of what the others may experience too.*

## IN JACK'S OWN WORDS

- **Early Otitis Media (OM):** I had significant numbers/duration of bouts of early recurrent otitis media. Although I was an early walker, I was quite a late talker (that makes sense with lots of bouts of OM). The first month of life is the worst time to start OM and the first 3 years are the second most harmful period.
- **Tonsillectomy and Adenoidectomy:** At 3 years of age I had a Tonsillectomy and Adenoidectomy (T&A) as that was the only treatment for recurrent OM. Back in the 1930s OM was thought to be a benign condition so it would have to be quite severe to warrant this surgery.
- **Academic Problems:** I had poor grades in school, as well as, poor speech and language (consistent with OM). Fortunately, they did not teach reading until 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in those days. I was awful at it. I can just imagine how difficult it would have been, if I was taught to read in kindergarten, as they do now.
- **Repeated a grade-held back:** At age 12, I had a heart condition that prevented me from going to school for 3 months. Instead of rejoining my class after that, they kept me back, so I repeated 6B (the second half of 6<sup>th</sup> grade). That turned out to be a help, as I was a bit more mature than the other kids. But I was frustrated as a C/D, and occasional F, student. I believed that I was "mentally retarded". Teachers often kept me in, to tutor me, when the other kids were on the playground (I likely needed the break more than most of them). I became the class clown to manage my own feelings of frustration at school. My proudest moment was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade when the teacher tried to explain to us why you had to be born in the US to be President. She said, "Of course, you have to be born in the US, what do Italian people eat?" (She was expecting all to say spaghetti, as if that was a reason not to be president.) I yelled out, "American Cheese".
- **Class Clown and Mr. Cohen:** High School was very hard for me and to deal with my frustration I remained the class clown. When I was 15 years old I learned that you could quit school at 16! When I told my parents that I planned to quit, they were heartbroken. A few weeks later my father told me that, "Mr. Cohen wants to speak to you." My father was a housepainter and Mr. Cohen was also a painter who often worked with Dad. "Mr. Cohen wants to speak to me?? Why??!" He said, "I don't know, just speak with him." Mr. Cohen told me that he heard that I wanted to quit school. I said yes, I'm not getting anywhere, I'm not learning, there is no use for me... Mr. Cohen said it was too important; you have to get a H.S. diploma. So, I gave my

reason again. After going back and forth for an hour, I realized that he would not let me alone, until I promised him that I wouldn't quit school. So, I said in frustration, "Okay! I won't quit school!" as if I was doing him a favor. Imagine, a 16-year-old with no skills, and poor speech, poor language, with extremely poor reading and spelling going out in the world.

- **An Attempt to Help Me:** My grades got a little better in the last 2 years of H.S. In those days there was no Speech Therapy or Remedial Reading help. As a senior, I finally had my first remedial class, perhaps for those with speech problems. The teacher was a regular English teacher, so I don't know how much training we received.
- **Miss Carlin:** Miss Carlin was my English teacher. She had us write a composition about ourselves and from this she would give us an idea of what field we might go into. I wrote that I was lazy, I liked people and I liked variety. When she returned the paper, she wrote something, in big letters, at the top, but I did not know what it said. When my brother came home, he told me the words were, "Speech Correction". I asked him, what was that? He didn't know, but he knew someone who was going into that field. I called her and it sounded good enough.
- **Affirmative Action:** Somehow, I began to think about college and Miss Carlin's suggestion must have given me a push in the right direction. A very important influence was that my brother was in Brooklyn College and he loved it. Our parents could not afford college but it cost only \$5.00 a semester to attend. I took the entry exam and that score was averaged with my high school GPA. Fortunately, they had fewer males than females, so BC reduced the admittance grade for males (affirmative action)! For that reason, I made the cutoff by 0.25 points. This was yet another stroke of good luck to get me to APD.
- **Brooklyn College and Mr. Able:** At BC I was asked my major. I told them Speech Correction and immediately they told me that I couldn't, because my speech was not good enough (Brooklyn accent, foreignisms from my parents and likely distortions from OM and any other APD influences)! They said that I would have to take 3 (non-credit) classes to improve my speech before being admitted to that major. The first 2 'classes' were supposed to be therapy, but the students who were giving the 'therapy' did not know what my speech problem was so they mostly showed me around the department etc. Fortunately, the third one was an actual class that was given by "M:i:s:ter A:ble". He e:lon:gated sounds and syllables as he spoke. It was awful to listen to him, but at age 20, I first understood that words had little parts to them. Because we did not have phonics in those days and my poor, slow processing, I never learned that on my own. I am grateful to M:i:s:ter A:ble, to this day. I assume that he did not speak that way, ordinarily, but he knew, back then, that it would help us to improve our speech (and now we would say auditory processing).
- **Dr. Cox:** The next semester I began my speech and hearing courses. The first one was phonetics that Dr. Cox taught. This opened up a world for me. From having such limited understanding of what words were made of, to have them so boldly presented was a gift. Dr. Cox exaggerated, not quite in the same way as M:i:s:ter A:ble. Instead he held on to sounds and spoke loudly. Despite my poor processing going in, I got a B in the class, because I learned so much.

- **Processing Improving:** Because of the attention I had to pay in speech classes and in providing therapy, I'm sure that gave me auditory training and provided repetition. So surely, my auditory processing and speech improved and set the stage for further improvement.
- **Thank Goodness, On-Condition:** My grades were on the poor side at the beginning of college and got better and better with courses in my major. They got especially good when I got engaged to Irma. However, when I applied to grad school, only 2 would accept me, but "On Condition". I had to demonstrate that I could make it. The first summer session was great, and immediately got me off "Condition". I had a number of great professors who taught me so much. After one semester, Dr. Mange told me that I was an "enigma", I knew so much about some things and so little about others. That sounds like LD or maybe CAPD (which were not known, back in the '50s).
- **Dr. Mange:** A monumental day in my professional life was in Dr. Mange's, Articulation and Voice class. As he was discussing articulation, in passing, he mentioned that there was a skill that both those with articulation and reading problems couldn't do. Then he continued his lecture without telling us more. I was dumbfounded, how could there be articulation problems (that's muscles of the mouth) and reading (that's vision), be related to difficulty on some task?? So, right after class I went to his office and asked him, what was that skill? He told me about Phonetic Synthesis that he was researching. He tape-recorded words and then cut out the transitions between sounds and connected what was left of the word. I was fascinated and he asked if I would like to help him and I jumped at the chance.
- **Phonemic Synthesis:** When I got my M.S. degree from Syracuse University, I obtained a job as a Speech and Hearing Therapist, at 3 central schools. I thought, wouldn't it be great if I could test my articulation-kids with Phonetic Synthesis, but of course, I could not make such a complex test, so I made up my own version (not knowing that some people knew of that procedure and called it sound blending). I just said each sound separately and called it Phonemic Synthesis. It was great, 16 of the 17 youngsters failed the test miserably. The 17<sup>th</sup> child had no trouble with it. She just had intra-dental-S difficulty. Dr. Mange was correct! All 16 of the students were also being seen by the reading specialist. This was the beginning of my venture into Auditory Processing Disorders.
- **Dr. DiCarlo:** Dr. DiCarlo, my major professor at SU had told us, if you are working with a patient who has a problem it's your job to figure out how to help him. I had 16 students with PS problems, now how was I going to help them? All I could think of was to turn the test into a therapy. I was amazed how fantastic it was. No doubt, having no phonics in those days and no speech or reading therapy, in that rural system where education was not very highly regarded, contributed to the dramatic results. I offered my services to work with entire the first-grade class for 30 minutes a week to provide auditory training. The results were great and did the same with the kindergarten class the next semester.
- **Switch to Audiology:** I had my choice of Ph.D. programs and chose University of Pittsburgh. When I wanted to pursue a study of Phonemic Synthesis for my dissertation, I was nearly laughed out of the department. At that time the department was in love with Carl Rogers, a psychologist who championed non-directive counseling. Also, everything was caused by

psychological problems (e.g., professionals believed that Autism was caused by bad mothers). After that I decided to either transfer to another university or just switch to Audiology from Speech Pathology. That's what I did.

- **SSW:** In 1960, an audiologist asked me to replace her for a month when she was on vacation from Pitt. One day at the hospital, an ENT doctor asked if I heard of the work in Germany, where they were using hearing tests to assess brain damage. I was dumbstruck, we had learned that you could not assess levels above the VIII N with hearing tests, and he was talking about the brain! Later on, he read the 2 paragraphs from a journal that referenced the work of Matzker in locating temporal lobe lesions. The last line said that unfortunately, if the person had a hearing loss, the central tests would not work. Before I realized it, I said, "Why not use spondees?". (People with hearing loss find spondees much more audible than monosyllables at the same intensity). That night, feeding our son at midnight, the idea of the SSW test came to me. The SSW and PS are still important APD tests.
- **APD:** In 1965, in the early days of Minimal Brain Dysfunction (now known as Learning Disabilities), we turned our attention from site of lesion to a new field of Auditory Perception (now APD). I added speech-in-noise to my central battery because so many of the children complained about background noise.
- **Speech-Sounds and OM:** Shriberg and Smith (1983) showed the errors that those who had early OM made (e.g., adding the H-sound at the beginning of words and confusing M and N sounds, etc.). Around that time, I realized that I had suffered from APD. After I read, Shriberg and Smith, I realized that it could have been due to my early experience with OM. I had no knowledge of what speech-sound errors I had as a kid.
- **Back to the Beginning:** Finally, when I turned 72, I noticed that I made the same OM error as the child I was working with. One-by-one I continued to miss more words over the next few weeks. Interestingly, they too were OM errors. Eventually, I started giving myself therapy and then again after a few years when OM-errors and others showed up. This validated my assumption of what my early OM errors had been.

Think of how many of these big and little chance factors/people, that led me to deal with auditory processing problems, all my life, in a variety of ways. Mr. Cohen, Ms. Carlin etc. that I mentioned as well as, family members, professors, and patients that I did not mention, all influenced my journey. The work with those who have APD is revered by those of us who are involved in it. This is because we know the great need, of those affected, and importance of our efforts to help them.

*This is a story which can be told and retold by many others with the same issues. Although Jack had many serendipitous events that kept him going, many others may not have the same luck. The story is indeed a great testimonial for early intervention. Wait and see should never be an option for those with APD issues. The foundational problem remains the same whereas the cracks just show up at different places at different times or may widen and deepen at the same place. APD just doesn't go away with time.*