

Former Monk Greg Mooers Teaches the 'Art of Listening'

By LAURA WITSENHAUSEN
Associate Editor

The simple but rare act of being listened to profoundly can give people great insight and clarity about their lives. That is the essence of Palisadian Greg Mooers' work as a personal coach and teacher in the "Art of Listening."

Palisadian Andy Jacobs, for example, was feeling stuck in his life five months ago and went to see Mooers.

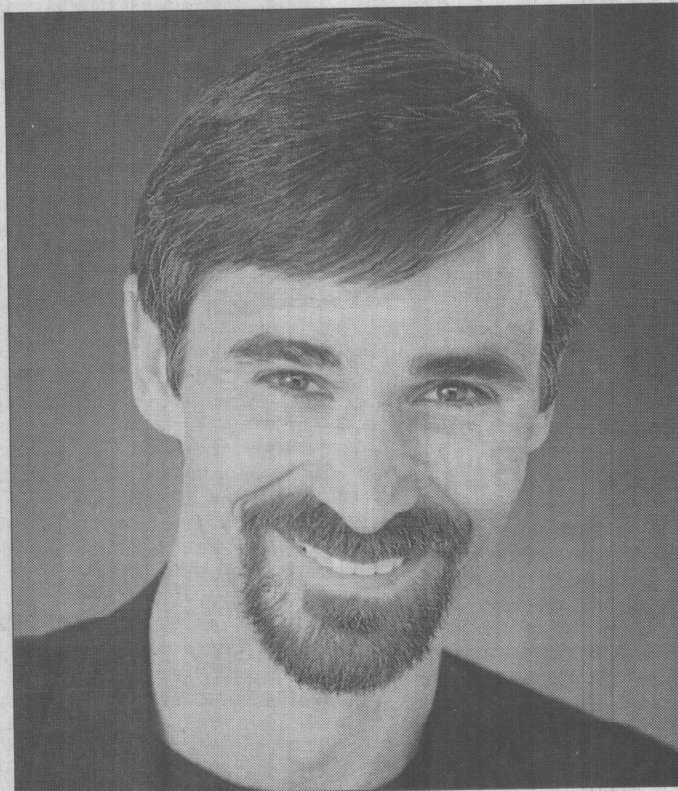
"I was not going where I wanted to go professionally, my relationship of 3-1/2 years didn't seem to be going anywhere," Jacobs recalls. "I talked to Greg for a couple of hours and it turned my life around. We spent two hours together. I went home, I asked my girlfriend to marry me, I left my job as a personal trainer and got back into financial services. The most profound thing that happened is I found a belief in myself that I had lost."

Mooers asked Jacobs questions about his life, probing into his favorite books and films and what he liked about them, for example, and shared back what he heard Jacobs saying about himself. "None of these were his words, they were my words. He just restated it and asked me if I agreed with it," says Jacobs, who, with Mooers' help, was able to identify his most cherished virtue, loyalty.

Mooers, 40, grew up in New Jersey and after graduating from the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, he went to work for Intel. Eventually, he started his own company, designing custom database management software for chiropractors and doctors. Based in Dallas, the company was a success, but Mooers says his epiphany came when he glanced out his window and saw a building with someone's initials on it. He realized that this symbolized the pinnacle of success on the road he was heading, but that it wasn't what he wanted. To the question, "What is it I want?" his answer was "I want to know my soul." To that end, he began to make a spiritual search through meditation and prayer, which led him to a Self-Realization Fellowship monastery in 1988.

"I've always thrown myself into things," Mooers says. He committed himself to monastic life, taking vows of chastity, simplicity, obedience and loyalty at the SRF Church in Mt. Washington, near Eagle Rock.

The monks gave him a new name, Gary, and he spent 10,000 hours in silent meditation over his eight years in the monastery. But after seven years there, he began to experience a longing to make a greater contribution. "I was forcing a



Palisadian Greg Mooers, a former Self-Realization Fellowship monk, teaches "The Art of Listening."

Photo: Rob Cohen

lifestyle that wasn't best for my temperament," he says. However, he felt committed to the process. "I came here to give my life to God. It's not mine to take back. It's not optional."

But sensing his conflict, an older monk clarified his thinking and said, "A bird should not say, 'I will be a dog.'" The monks invited him in one day and asked, "Why are you being so stubborn? Out in the world would suit your temperament more."

When he entered the monastery, he heard a voice say, "Welcome home." The same phrase came to him when he left in the spring of 1996.

After leaving the monastery, Mooers spent time traveling around China, Japan and India. "It opened up possibilities of what was in the world for me"—and who. At a seminar in Hawaii, he met interior designer Bobi Leonhard and he proposed on the second date. Three years ago they married. The couple live in a custom mobile home in Tahitian Terrace, above PCH, that she designed with ocean views from each room.

In searching for what he wanted to do next in his life, Mooers studied experiential psychology, working with young children with disabilities and families of at-risk teens.

This work led him to the belief of "how listening invites others to blossom."

"I really listen to people, so they can show up," Mooers says. "I'm

going to be somebody for them and hold them to a higher standard." Once they gain clarity through this process, he helps them lay out plans for them to take action.

In addition to his private practice with individuals and couples, Mooers lectures, gives workshops and works with corporations. He also films a TV show, "Life-Camp," for Channel 77.

"What stands in the way of listening is knowing. The first thing is to say, 'I don't know' and open up to all the possibilities. Volunteer for not being right."

"You can take a stand for what you want and still listen to a person without violating your own commitment. People don't listen because they are afraid."

Mooers helps clients identify their own commitment in the form of their highest virtues. Examples are loyalty, integrity, compassion, honesty and freedom.

"Human beings are virtue containers," he says. "When people make a virtuous contribution, they are satisfied and fulfilled. The highest virtue of each person is something they'd live and die for. It's what gives you anger or goosebumps. It's your dealmaker and dealbreaker. Once you identify your commitment, you can

make decisions based on that."

When working with couples and organizations, Mooers helps people see how their virtues relate to one another. For example, the person whose highest virtue is 'loyalty' and a person whose highest virtue is 'freedom' may not get along.

Mooers also has a spiritual sense of what anger is about. "The soul is intolerable when it is blocked from making a contribution. It says a deep, spiritual 'No. It's not going to be this way.'"

He guarantees clients a new reality after four months. For about half of his clients it's a career change. "Usually, clients fire me early. It's the best day of my life when my clients fire me. I show them how they can get their own answers, how they can stand in the spotlight and tolerate their own power."

In addition, he helps clients get over what he calls "tribal," or self-defeating voices. "We are all born into tribes that say, 'no,' 'don't,' 'sit down and be quiet,' and then go to school where we hear, 'fit in,' and 'don't stand out.'"

When he asks people where they feel their life is on a scale of 1 to 10, in terms of satisfaction, well-being and a sense of fulfillment, most people say they are a 7. "That's because with a 10, the tribe asks: 'Who do you think you are?' I never let myself get below 9.5. When I catch my mind head in other directions, I say a real firm 'No. I love my life!' I say it out loud and immediately kick into doing tasks that affirm that. It's a question of constantly telling myself who I am and where my life is going."

Mooers helps clients identify their negative voices. "Identify the voice and separate it. It's not my voice, it's a habit and a trigger."

Palisadian developer Linda Thompson has been seeing Mooers to deal with grief. "The feeling of not being able to move forward has gone away," she says. "He helped me see why I was born, what the theme for my life is, what I was meant to do almost on a cellular level."

Mooers has continued to be active at the SRF Church since leaving the monastery, and has continued his meditation practice which has deepened as he has learned to listen.

He will be teaching a class in "Empowering Relationships" on Wednesday, August 28 at The Biz 1223 Olympic at Euclid in Santa Monica, 7 to 9:30 p.m. Cost is \$50, with a 25 percent discount for Palisades residents. Contact 230-9949.