

Suzuki
Piano
Basics
Foundation News

To facilitate, promote, and educate the public on the way of teaching and playing the piano taught at the Talent Education Research Institute in Matsumoto, Japan by Dr. Haruko Kataoka

Hardship!

By Haruko Kataoka

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To my father: Providing a home to live in, food to eat, opportunity to learn to play the piano. This is plenty enough for me to be happy. 5th grader.

This is an excerpt from "What You Would Like from Your Parents Now?" a feature from the March issue of the Matsumoto Newsletter by an elementary school boy. I was taken aback when I first went over the manuscript because I was of the opinion that children these days are usually so privileged beyond the basic necessities of food, clothing, and shelter that they have become mindless and heartless. This father must be so fortunate and happy to be blessed with such a wonderful son! I was curious to find out who this person may be.

About ten years ago, the father was in a very bad accident where he was thrown off a bridge. His neck was broken and he relies on a wheelchair ever since. There are four members in the family: mother, father, and two sons. The accident happened when the mother was pregnant with the second son. However, the couple was undaunted and continued operating the business they owned. Because the mother had her hands full with running the company and caring for the father, the older son began helping with cooking, cleaning house, and performing other household chores from the time he was in second grade. The father's paralysis left him limited to just barely being able to

press the keys of the computer keyboard. I was in tears listening to their plight up to this point. It is no wonder such a father would have such a son! Furthermore, what an incredible mother! Someone mentioned that her own father reported, "My daughter has impressed me so much these past ten years. She has never complained."

In spite of the feeling in Japan that we have slackened a bit these days, it is a wonder that there is this incredible family living right here in Matsumoto!

Dr. Suzuki maintained that people are the children of their environment. He would often urge parents to create a good environment for their children. This is so true. Being able to define what is good or bad is dependent on the kind of environment into which human beings are born and molds us into who we are to be.

When thinking of what a good environment entails, we have a tendency to define it as one that is comfortable or fun. The result of such an environment, however, is a spoiled child who becomes a weak human

being. We need hardship in our lives. Hardship necessitates that there be trouble, suffering, or struggle. We acquire the ability to ponder what is important in life from difficult experiences.

Critical of today's youth, adults think that their conduct is thoughtless, frivolous, and shallow. Looking more closely, we see that these children have been brought up soaking in a lukewarm bath, so to speak. Their misfortune has to do with not having become accustomed to immersing themselves in 'hot water' or, in other words, to be exposed to situations that routinely provoke thought or thinking.

For children, the home is their first mini-society. This boy has been immersed in his parents' hardship. Such an upbringing created the maturity that enabled him to write to his father with optimism and gratitude. No doubt, he will become a strong and confident young man with the gift of empathy.

I am told that if anyone should visit his father at work, they are always greeted with cheer and smiles. I pray this family will keep up its wonderful work!

So everyone, let us endeavor to be a little more spirited and determined about being strict, and to provide opportunities for hardship. For children to begin learning about struggle, we may have them use their bodies. Let us face this task by giving them physical activities that are close at hand like chores at home or practicing piano!

To the Editor:

October 12, 2017

QUESTION:

Karen, Thank you for your recent newsletter article "On Reading Music."

Please identify which edition(s) you recommend of the Czerny *Recreations* and the subsequent Czerny collections: Peters? Schirmer? Kalmus? Others?

Thank you.

JoAnn Hoyt, Suzuki Piano of the Palouse, Moscow, Idaho

RESPONSE:

Hi JoAnn,

You ask a very good question.

The Zen-On publications in Japan produce an extremely beautiful edition of the Czerny etudes, and these are the ones Dr. Kataoka used. I used the Schirmer edition to illustrate my article simply because their cover reproduced better, and I knew that the Japanese editions are available only in Japan.

Sorry to say that I have not compared the other editions. I returned from Japan 27 years ago with a supply of the Japanese scores that I augmented on several subsequent trips to Matsumoto so that I had enough

for myself and my students for the remainder of my teaching career.

However, if I needed to get another edition, I would trust Peters to have produced a score that is aesthetic visually and that has consistent editing.

It is so important that you and your student are working from the same edition, so that all the instructions, fingerings, ornaments, and notes are *exactly the same*. Reading means faithfully following what is written there. If a teacher has a different edition the student will conclude that such details are arbitrary or unimportant. Mature musicians may ponder these vagaries, but students learning how to read should be spared such gray areas!

Karen

For Teachers and Parents

Although we, from time to time, print a notice reminding those of you who have videos of workshop lessons taught by Dr. Kataoka to send them in for digitalization, we know there are those of you who still have not done it. Is this the year you clean out your garage, attic, closet? Your videos are decomposing every day, even those on DVD. The only way to save and preserve this archive is to have them digitalized.

And teachers, you may know of families whose children had lessons with Dr. Kataoka years ago and who have videos of their lessons. Please ask those families to share their videos as well.

Now is the time to downsize! Send off the videos and you'll feel lighter and less cluttered!

Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation is deeply grateful to Professor Kenneth Wilburn at East Carolina University who has been digitalizing videos of Dr. Kataoka's workshop videos at *no cost* to our Foundation. This project documents the history of Suzuki Piano Method for future generations.

So we implore our members 1) to view the Archive as it now stands, greatly improved from earlier versions (to view Archive, send an email request to Dr. Wilburn wilburnk@ecu.edu) and 2) to send in your videos! (Identify place and date as much as possible. Students will not be identified, and teacher lessons will not be included in the Archive.) Videos in any and all formats may be included and will be preserved. THANK YOU.

Send videos to:

Professor Kenneth Wilburn
History Department, Brewster A318
East Carolina University
East Fifth Street
Greenville, North Carolina 27858-4353

TO MEMBERS:

A gentle reminder to let you know that 2018 membership renewals are due November 30th.

Teachers with family memberships deserve a great big "THANK YOU."

It is extremely helpful if I can send each teacher's family membership in one envelope. It really helps with the cost of postage. Thank you!

Also, many thanks to those of you who contributed to the Bert Mayers Scholarship Fund. We currently have \$350. Teachers wishing to apply for a scholarship for an event in 2018, please contact Hannah Hall asap (correctthecause@gmail.com).

See you at the next Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop in Phoenix!

Linda Nakagawa, Treasurer

Choosing a Teacher

By Karen Hagberg

Original version published in Matsumoto News, Volume 1, no. 3, January 1989

About ten years ago I began teaching piano. In the beginning I did it as something extra. I had only a handful of students. I liked piano teaching, but my students were not doing well, and I didn't know how to help them.

I set out to find techniques which would help me be a better teacher. I joined organizations of music teachers, both national and local, and began to meet with other teachers and to attend their workshops and seminars. Although I had hoped to find ways to improve my teaching, but I just became confused. I heard talks by various clinicians and had discussions with my colleagues about methods, repertoire, and techniques, but I did not see that I was changing or evolving. I knew that some of my colleagues were good teachers, but somehow they seemed unable to impart this skill to others.

I encountered the general opinion that some people were talented and others were not, so if I weren't *already* a good teacher, maybe I just didn't have the talent for it. Also, it was assumed that one was lucky, as a teacher, to have one good (*i.e.* talented) student at any given time. If you were *really* unlucky, maybe you would have none at all. Piano teachers were somehow at the mercy

of fate regarding the quality of their students. You could be a wonderful teacher but still have a studio full of run-of-the-mill students. Much time among colleagues, I recall, was spent commiserating about our worst students.

I considered finding a teacher for myself, as it had been several years since I had had lessons. I was no longer practicing seriously. Somehow, I knew that my time at the piano was counter-productive. Whenever I practiced, my playing seemed actually to get worse. I wanted help with my technique, but I knew it wouldn't help to have a teacher push me into repertoire I couldn't really play, as so many other teachers had done. I didn't know any teachers who *would not* do that. Any piano teaching I knew consisted of working on repertoire that was beyond my ability, and the teacher would not suggest any new way for me to practice so I could improve.

Then I heard Kataoka Sensei speak at the first National Conference of the Suzuki Association of the Americas (SAA) in Chicago in May 1984. Previously I had, like so many other American piano teachers, dabbled a bit in the Suzuki Piano Method. I had attended a workshop and was considering using the Suzuki repertoire, which seemed good (although I couldn't imagine having students who could play Book 6. Truthfully, I couldn't imagine playing Book 6 myself!). But I was ready to incorporate whatever Suzuki ideas I found useful into my teaching, just as I always had tried to utilize all the other useful pedagogical ideas I had come across. I came to Chicago with an open mind and enthusiasm for whatever I would learn there.

There was some resemblance to other teachers' conferences I had attended: the sales tables with

various teaching aids and publications, the committee meetings, the political undercurrents, the reunion atmosphere. There was also Kataoka Sensei.

During a lecture she asked us to raise our hands if we had one or two good students. Most people raised their hands. Then she said that we cannot take credit for one or two good students; that they would play well even without us; that *all* our students must be good; that we must judge our teaching by our *worst* student. I thought about Michael Barrett and groaned along with everyone else.

Then she said that, although our goal is always to teach students to play better than we ourselves can play, we must learn to play very well indeed to become good models. We needed to make a study of tone production and the natural use of the body because, in fact, one's students will learn to play *exactly* like their teacher plays (more groans from the audience), and that incorrect practicing can, indeed, make a pianist become worse and worse.

She demonstrated some points on tone production, but I couldn't hear the difference between the good and the bad examples. She said we needed to train our ears to hear what kind of sound we are making before we can hope to change our own sound or to teach making a beautiful sound. Her own sound was very beautiful I thought, and her hands moved effortlessly over the keyboard.

At one point, she played the Paderewski *Minuet* in its entirety, and I remember wondering if she could teach me to play trills like that.

Then I saw a videotape of Kataoka Sensei's student recital from the previous term. I felt then, and still feel now, that I would be happy to learn to play the piano as well as her average eight-year-old. She explained that the students on the tape were not especially chosen for the recording, but that *all* her students played. This was hard to believe, but there were so many of them that it had to be true.

I have had to ask myself, "What is a teacher? What is teaching?" I have come to the conclusion that in a context where it is assumed that some people mysteriously have talent and others do not, no real teaching occurs. In such a context, teachers relieve themselves of responsibility for their students by sitting back and simply noticing who can do things on their own and who cannot. However, within the belief that everyone can do it if taught and nurtured properly, and this is, I think, the sole most important revolutionary aspect of the Suzuki Method, the teacher *must* teach all the students to play well, or the teacher is not good.

Traditional clinicians and also Suzuki Method practitioners who have not been able to shed the ingrained concept of inborn talent, can be content merely to observe how things are in their studios. They fail to appreciate the power they have as teachers, and consequently are guilty of abusing this power by not exercising it at all. After years of not teaching, they learn not to teach.

When real *teaching* is going on, we are not sitting around complacent and self-satisfied. We are being constantly pushed and challenged to be and to do more than we ever thought possible. We are being shaken free of all kinds of comfortable structures: emotional, physical, social, psychological, which we build for ourselves for protection in life, but which keep us locked into our own safe, yet mediocre, world, a world

in which we avoid big challenges, fear total honesty, and refuse to relate to personal definitions of success and failure. *When* we experience good teaching, we cannot feel simply relaxed and entertained. On the contrary, we usually feel afraid, angry, defensive, inadequate, and a number of other generally uncomfortable emotions. The positive side, of course, is that we realize that it is only in this unknown and scary territory that real growth and change can occur.

A friend recently asked me if Kataoka Sensei gives me any idea of the amount of progress she feels I have made here so far. "No," I said, "she constantly compares us to Horowitz, DeLarocha and Glenn Gould, and all we know is that we have a long, long way to go." Although this may seem discouraging at first, the reverse is actually true. No other teacher ever mentioned *me* and those people in the same breath. It is actually very encouraging. Kataoka Sensei truly believes we can all learn to hear good tone and to constantly improve our ability to make it. *She never gives up on anybody.* In this regard, she is unique in my experience. It is the most encouraging teaching to which I have ever been exposed. I have never had more confidence in myself as a musician and, at the same time, I have never realized before just how

long a distance there is between myself and my developing comprehension of musical perfection. This may seem paradoxical, but it is not.

Kataoka Sensei is most demanding toward those who she sees are ready to change and evolve. When she is hard on someone here in Matsumoto, we all understand that this is a recognition of that person's readiness to take big risks, to walk in dangerous and sometimes frightening territory, and to make significant changes. Fortunately, we are all free to choose our teachers, or to choose to have no teacher at all. Choosing Kataoka Sensei is a bold step for any piano teacher to take, but it can be the beginning of real change and evolution in one's relation to the piano, to music, and to life itself.

Matsumoto News Republication: From September 1988 through January 1992, Karen Hagberg lived and studied in Matsumoto with Dr. Haruko Kataoka, the co-Founder of the Suzuki Piano Method and the founder of the Suzuki Piano Basics Method. During that time she published a newsletter with nine issues annually that was distributed to Suzuki piano teachers in North America and Europe. In addition to news of upcoming workshops and multi-piano concerts, each issue contained an article intended to share what it was like as a foreigner to live in Japan and to study with Dr. Kataoka and Dr. Suzuki.

Nearly twenty years have elapsed since the first issue of Matsumoto News: an entire generation. By popular demand we are re-publishing the articles here. They have been edited from the original, but they remain under copyright and may not be reproduced without written permission from the author.

Piano Basics Foundation Upcoming Workshops/Events

February 15-19, 2018

Phoenix, Arizona

Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura
Contact Gloria Elliott 623-466-7447
gelliott50@aol.com

August, 2018 (dates tba)

Louisville, Kentucky

Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura
Contact Bruce Boiney 502-241-5921
boiney@suzukipiano.com
www.suzukipiano.org

June, 2018 (exact dates tba)

Louisville, Kentucky

Louisville Suzuki Piano Basics Institute
Contact Bruce Boiney 502-241-5921
boiney@suzukipiano.com
www.suzukipiano.org

August, 2018 (dates tba)

Sacramento, California

Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura
Contact Linda Nakagawa, 916-422-2952
g.nakagawa@comcast.net

The events listed above are for the information of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation members and others. Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation does not endorse, sanction, or sponsor events.

To add or change items on this list and on the Suzuki Piano Basics website, contact Karen Hagberg hagberg-drake@juno.com, 585-978-0600).

Suzuki Piano Basics Web Site and discussion group:

<http://core.ecu.edu/hist/wilburnk/SuzukiPianoBasics>