

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

Freedom

***Piano Basics
Foundation News***

Editor

Karen Hagberg

Layout

Teri Paradero

Translators

Chisa Aoki
Teri Paradero

Production and Distribution

Linda Nakagawa

Send Articles to:

Piano Basics Foundation
67 Shepard St. Rochester NY 14620
kh@hagbergsuzuki.com
585-244-0490

Memberships / Subscriptions

Linda Nakagawa
242 River Acres Drive
Sacramento, CA 95831
916-422-2952
g.nakagawa@comcast.net

Next Deadline: December 31, 2019

By Haruko Kataoka

Newsletter, Special Issue No. 28

July 20, 2019

Translated by Chisa Aoki and
Teri Paradero

Edited by Karen Hagberg

The word freedom is a wonderful word. When you have freedom you can do anything you desire, without outside interference, full of happiness, feeling as if you could fly cheerfully in the sky. By our very nature, people dislike the feeling of being hampered by having freedom taken away.

Foremost is the problem of daily practice. When students go to their weekly lesson, the teacher will show them how to fix a problem passage and assign it as homework to be practiced with repetition every day. Then back at home both parent and child carry out the assignment. Parents care so much for their child that they earnestly try to focus on good practice. Parents become enthused about telling their child to do this or that and end up asking for too much.

If a child is laid back or perhaps a quiet type, such pressure would greatly restrict that child's freedom. Parents, however loving their intention, are so fiercely focused that they are not able to see how they are affecting their child.

If human beings are denied their freedom, they are not able to demonstrate their own strength and vigor. This not only pertains to piano practice. It applies to schoolwork and other endeavors. A conscientious, aware teacher or parent works with children without usurping their freedom, so over time they develop self-motivation and the desire to do it for themselves, with their freedom intact.

A nice, calm and laid-back student of mine joined us on a summer trip to America. Having been an only child until recently, he was overly self-critical of many things, so much so that he was never able to perform well in front of an audience. Despite such a history, once it was determined that he would come with us the concert piece he would be performing ended up being quite a difficult one. I was a little concerned, wondering if it was unreasonable for him to play a long, difficult piece considering the way he had been performing. Then, I mused that it would be fine. Everything can be chalked up to experience. So off we went.

To my surprise, he played with great ease, smoothly flowing, at the first concert in Atlanta. Until then I had never seen him perform that way and so well. In the absence of his parents, he was on his own and experiencing freedom for the first time. When we got to Sacramento, he gleefully told me, "Sensei, I really love

practicing on my own! I can practice so much better without my mother." I feel that he taught me how freedom allows people to be content and peaceful.

However, I have to caution you at this point. For this student to go to America and experience freedom, to be able to perform with ease and to enjoy himself, he had previously to have practiced very hard every day with his diligent, strict mother. Sometimes people mistakenly cheapen freedom into merely basking in pleasure. I have a feeling that there is a fair number of people who think they are free doing whatever they please, whatever primal desire drives their behavior, while being unaware of the negative effect they may be having on others.

Letting children practice when they want to and skipping it when they don't want to is just spoiling them and making them selfish. The result is a person who is unable to develop the attitude necessary to live earnestly as a human being. Good, natural technique must be learned on a daily basis and the building of that foundation leads to being able to reap the joy of genuine freedom.

In other words, for any endeavor, readjusting along the way is important. We need the sensibility and sensitivity to stop just short of affecting the freedom of children negatively. We must carefully observe them to achieve balance between letting them exert effort with

perseverance and letting them preserve their freedom.

Aren't we the happiest, after toiling and enduring hardship, when we can finally reap the joy and the ease that come with freedom? It is my hope that through the

study of piano, children can be nurtured to become human beings who are cognizant of what freedom truly is.

Memories of Pam Smith (1948-2019)

by Kathie Sheeley

My dear friend Pam Smith influenced me as a teacher & inspired hundreds of her piano students. When I enrolled in the Atlanta Suzuki Piano Apprenticeship program in 1999, Pam was one of the teachers. I learned to play the Suzuki repertoire from her and spent many hours observing her teaching students. I was amazed by her creative, patient, and loving teaching style. For many more years, I continued to learn from Pam while we both taught in her wonderful home studio. She was my role model, and I am trying to teach in the way she taught me.

When teachers from Japan came to Atlanta to present week-long Master Class workshops, Pam and her husband Mike were their hosts. Pam prepared delicious meals for them and saw to their every need. Many other Workshop teachers from around the United States have stayed at Pam's and enjoyed her generous hospitality. Pam was a writer of three books, a book club leader, a water aerobics teacher, a scuba diver, a gourmet cook, baker of amazing, creatively-designed birthday cakes, a world traveler, and a talented photographer. She lived life deeply with enthusiasm and vibrancy.

Pam was one of the founders of the Atlanta Area Suzuki Piano Association (AASPA) and a tireless advocate of our Graduation program at Spivey Hall and the many workshops and concerts we have presented. AASPA now has the Pamela Newton Smith Memorial Fund which honors her legacy & will provide many scholarships for Suzuki students. Donations may be made through their web site (atlantasuzukipiano.org/donations), or with a check made out to AASPA in Memory of Pam Smith mailed to: Atlanta

Area Suzuki Piano Association, 1740 Hudson Bridge Road, Suite 1134, Stockbridge, Georgia 30281.



Kathie Sheeley(L) with Pam Smith after a student recital in January, 2014.

No Responsibility—No Excuses

By Karen Hagberg

From Matsumoto News

Volume 2, number 2, November 1989

According to long-standing child-rearing principles popular both in Europe and North America, children are seen as miniature adults from a very early age. Rather than being held or carried by their mothers they are physically separated and put in their own rooms, in their own beds at night, and in playpens and strollers during the day. They are fed formula in place of mother's milk.

Suzuki Sensei did not invent the idea that children bear no responsibility for their actions, but he used it to revolutionize music pedagogy.

After physical separation is forced on western babies, we then begin to expect them not to act like babies. We believe they can be trained and disciplined to behave well, especially in the company of adults. It is not uncommon in the West to hear parents scolding babies for childish behavior—insisting that they keep still and quiet, for example. When babies get a little older, parents often say, “Don't touch,” rather than allowing toddlers naturally to explore their environment. At mealtimes small children are expected to learn manners and not to make a mess with their food. They are taught to dress and bathe themselves. In all areas they are treated as if they are responsible for their actions, and all actions are labeled “good” or “bad” by the adults around them.

When these western children begin piano lessons (usually not before the age of six or seven), they are expected to take full responsibility for the success or failure of the endeavor. As the parent does not attend lessons, children are left to establish an independent relationship with the teacher, to understand weekly assignments, and to carry out daily practice in a room alone by themselves, away from the family. Most young children, even those who love music, cannot bear up under so much responsibility, and when they quit taking lessons they are considered simply to have been untalented.

The idea that young children are miniature adults seems never to have reached Japan. Babies are rarely physically separate from their mothers or some other adult, and they are allowed to exhibit childish behavior without being scolded or corrected. Suzuki Sensei did not invent the idea that children bear no responsibility for their actions, but he used it to revolutionize music pedagogy. He wanted his students to learn to play the violin as effortlessly and as unselfconsciously as they had learned to speak Japanese. Children are never pressured to

take responsibility for learning their native language. They do not have to be told to practice it. When placed in the right environment they just learn it without being aware of what they are doing. The process is completely natural and without effort.

Most teachers of the Suzuki Method are familiar with this theory from having read Suzuki Sensei's writing. In an effort to create the right environment for the student, we require parents to attend lessons and we teach them to coach the daily practice at home. This is just the beginning, however. The process breaks down whenever we as teachers, in conjunction with parents, fail to accept full responsibility for the learning process, whenever we allow the responsibility to shift onto the child, if only briefly. Those of us raised in western culture tend to bestow responsibility onto children with such ease

Suzuki Sensei...wanted his students to learn to play the violin as effortlessly and as unselfconsciously as they had learned to speak Japanese.

and force of habit that we need to pay special attention to this issue.

Consider, for example, a scenario that happened often enough in my own studio. A mother and child arrive for a lesson and the mother tries to explain, before the child begins to play, why the child has not practiced and why she will therefore not play well. “I did everything I could, but she just refuses to practice the way she should. I don't know what more I can do.” At this point my impulse was to try reasoning with the child, to explain why she must practice correctly and to lecture on the importance of doing what one's teacher and mother advise.

In other words, I effectively created a team of adults who ganged up on the child, expecting her to take responsibility for herself and for the success of her piano study.

This is the way children can truly learn to be responsible for themselves, for their own lives.

Consider this alternative. What if I had taught the mother to say instead, “I’m doing something wrong. Practice didn’t go well this week. I need help finding new ways to do our assignments,” By shifting emphasis only slightly in this way, the mother takes on the responsibility for the poor practice and thereby becomes a team with the child, a team that is trying to carry out the teacher’s assignment. In Kataoka Sensei’s studio when mothers take blame children immediately jump to their mother’s defense—they want to help their mother do better in the future.

This is the way children can truly learn to be responsible for themselves, for their own lives. Conversely, when the parent and teacher together discuss the failings of the child, the responsibility is too great, and the opposite effect is achieved. The child soon becomes rebellious and distanced from the wishes of adults. This dynamic has predominated in recent generations of Americans causing severe generational separation. Young people are driven to take comfort among their peers in opposition to their parents’ generation which has been requiring from them too much responsibility.

Children are not held responsible for learning their native language. They are placed in the right environment and cannot help but learn it. Learning to play piano can happen in the same

The parents of Kataoka Sensei’s students are taught also to create a home environment in which the child will succeed in playing well.

way if the parent and teacher shoulder all the responsibility for providing the environment. In Kataoka Sensei’s studio, it is the parent who adjusts the chair and footrest before a lesson and who brings the scores and opens them to the correct pages and who provides anything else (an extra seat cushion, a Kleenex, a notebook) that might be needed before and during a lesson. So many times in my own studio I allowed a parent to complain to me that the *child* forgot to bring the right music or the assignment notebook or was otherwise unprepared. I was then expected to admonish the child for these shortcomings, to reinforce the parent’s abdication of responsibility by getting together with the parent to blame the student. Any child will eventually reject such treatment.

The parents of Kataoka Sensei’s students are taught also to create a home environment in which the child will succeed in playing well. The parents turn on the recordings, they make time for practice, and they closely supervise it. They are taught even to develop all of the child’s senses by providing a generally high-quality environment which will include good food, clothing with natural fibers, and aesthetic visual surroundings. Kataoka Sensei spends a great deal of time in lessons counseling parents in how to create this environment in which children can learn naturally, without even realizing they are learning.

Of course, everyone wants children to

But the best way to make this happen is to provide models by surrounding the child with adults who take responsibility, not by trying to force responsibility onto them.

grow up to be responsible adults. But the best way to make this happen is to provide models by surrounding the child with adults who take responsibility, not by trying to force responsibility onto them.

To this end, Kataoka Sensei also teaches parents never to offer excuses for anything: “We were so busy with her birthday party that we couldn’t practice.” “She was sick.” “We had houseguests.” Practice either occurred or it did not. The reason is irrelevant. If excuses are accepted by the teacher and the lesson progresses as if practicing had happened, the child learns that excuses absolve one of all responsibility—the opposite of what we want children to learn. This is not simply a lesson in the context of piano lessons, but in the context of one’s entire life. When a child arrives in her studio not having practiced, Kataoka Sensei simply carries out last week’s practice assignment at the lesson and re-assigns it for the upcoming week. She never scolds the child.

Whatever we learn in early childhood we know throughout our lives. As teachers we need always to ask ourselves exactly *what*

we want to teach our young students and then to carefully consider *how* these things may be taught.



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 13-17, 2020

Orange County, California

Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop

With Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura

Contact Rae Kate Shen, 909-794-9461

raekshen@ymail.com

August 2020

NOTICE: There will be no August workshop in the U.S. next year with the Japanese teachers because of travel difficulties caused by the Tokyo Olympics. Plan on Orange County in February!

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 (khagberg1943@gmail.com, 585-978-0600).

Suzuki Piano Basics Web Site and discussion group:

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