

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*

Piano Basics Foundation News

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Morals

By Haruko Kataoka

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter

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I always dreamt that if I should become a mother, my children would learn to play piano or violin. I imagined how delighted I would be hearing them perform when they became accomplished. They would also learn to ski and climb mountains. How wonderful it would be to enjoy the holidays together in nature. I imagined too having children who did very well in school without complaining about studying.

When I finally had children, however, I discovered that harsh reality is not quite the same as my dreams. Although I felt I put in a lot of effort despite my workload, I was not able to devote the kind of time necessary to teach them all the things I had imagined. Facing the truth of my situation, I wondered what would be the most important ability one would need to become a valuable member of society.

I concluded that this one most important ability is having good manners: to be able to greet properly, i.e., "Good morning," "Goodnight," "Hello," "Goodbye;" when someone treats you with kindness or when receiving a gift, "Thank you;" when you make a mistake or when you have wronged someone to be able to apologize immediately, "I'm sorry," or "Pardon me."

Manners are very important in society where many different types of personalities gather to live together in close proximity. If people live heartlessly, doing and saying whatever they please, the world would not run smoothly. Through the use of manners, people accept one another and demonstrate respect. Manners serve as the cushions with which society functions smoothly.

I used to also repeat over and over: "People who think only of themselves are human trash;" "When you receive something, share it with those around you;" and "It's not all about whether you get good or bad grades in school, please be kind-hearted and considerate."

As 10 years, then 20 years passed by, when my son was living alone as a college student in Tokyo, I started being concerned all of a sudden. I said to him "Please don't ever forget "Thank you" and "I'm sorry." He replied, "You know, there isn't anyone who says they're sorry like I do, if you go around saying you're sorry so easily these days, you can lose out!" Though I was startled by his feisty reply, I was happy to know that what I had taught him was still alive and well in him.

A problem occurred when my daughter was in the final term in sixth grade. It was the coldest time in the winter (for several days the temperature was below -10° C). Every morning she woke up and sighed, "Ohhh, we have outdoor gym class! You know how cold it is?" She whined about how one could freeze to death, yet they would have to be outside with just one layer of gym clothing for a whole hour. Eventually, she came down with a fever. She was home from school for a week, but her fever had not subsided. So I went to her school to speak to her homeroom teacher and I explained her situation. When I went back home to tell my daughter, she was furious with me and I was reprimanded, "Mama, I'm not the only one, you know. All my friends are saying they are freezing to death, too. How could I be the only one staying indoors!?!? Don't you always say so yourself that people who think only of themselves are human trash? There's absolutely no way I'm going to be the only person staying in the classroom." This was another incident that reflected the upbringing I had tried so hard to provide.

Lately, watching a securities fraud scandal reported in the media, I can't help but feel like

I'm watching a bunch of people with no morals whatsoever. The prevailing attitude is that if it is financially profitable for themselves, it doesn't matter how it affects others. When a newscaster commented, "We must insist on moral behavior

from them..." a guest speaker, a college professor, responded, "That is not possible, they do not possess any morals..."

After all, it is like basics in piano, to acquire human morals they must be taught faithfully and properly to children by their parents at a very young age.

School Year Begins

Way back in February most of us probably thought that by September we would be at the start of a normal school year. As educators throughout the country struggle with mandated precautions, parental fears, our own fears, this season already seems difficult and complicated.

We bring you, therefore, another installment of Covid Snapshots, sharing our various thoughts and solutions, hopefully inspiring each other through this unprecedented time. Strangely, after my first call for submissions before our July/August issue, I have received no new communications. Possibly many teachers take the summer off? But now, as you face the challenge of the 20/21 school year, you all must

have more to share. So I ask again for your thoughts, solutions, anecdotes, photos, etc. As you hopefully can see in the following pages, sharing our experience is uplifting and inspiring. It appears, sadly, as if it will be some time before this pandemic is over. Send all submissions to my email: khagberg1943@gmail.com.

On another topic, we have not yet heard from the teachers in Japan regarding their February workshop or the 10-Piano Concert originally scheduled for spring 2021. Of course we all realize that future plans cannot be made at present. We will keep you all informed by email if there is any news on that front.

Throughout this time it is important to be a stable presence in the lives of our students and to provide them with the gift of music, a gift that has sustained people in the midst of crisis from the beginning of time.

Karen Hagberg, Editor

COVID SNAPSHOTS

Total Shutdown

By Linda Nakagawa, Sacramento, California



Ready for in-person lessons: Linda Nakagawa with plexiglass divider made by her nephew between her two pianos

I am a very fortunate person. For over 35 years, I have had the opportunity to teach children how to play the piano through the method of Suzuki Piano Basics. I've always been passionate about learning *how* to become a better teacher.

Being a “dinosaur” in the 21st century is quite challenging but extremely rewarding and educational. And then suddenly, the passion in my life was taken away. For fear of Covid-19, I decided to close my piano studio on March 13th. It was not a difficult decision, but it was an extremely sad and lonely one. I even began losing my enthusiasm for caring for my vegetable garden and using the fruits and veggies in my kitchen.

However, having extra time on my hands, which I have never had before, allowed me time to reflect, ponder, and contemplate. I heard that many teachers jumped right into continuing lessons through Face Time, Video, and Zoom etc. I felt bad that I was not diligent enough to enthusiastically offer that to my students. I give those teachers a lot of credit for trying to continue to service their students, but because of my “dinosaur” DNA, I did almost nothing for my students. Despite my failures to offer remote lessons, I hope that they will return when I am ready to start up again.

Music is *tone*. It is *tone* that touches the heart. I cannot imagine teaching Suzuki Piano Basics without the one-on-one human interaction with the children. I learn so much from them.

COVID SNAPSHOTS (cont'd)

Reaching Our Elders in the Time of Covid

By Juliana Lee, student of Judy Wely, Campbell, California



Juliana Lee with Easter cards for senior citizens

I am a junior in high school. In our studio we regularly visit retirement homes and perform for the residents. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unable to have recitals.

I read in the news that residents across the country are extremely lonely, especially since visitors, including family, are not permitted at this time. Knowing that residents are grieving contact with their families and struggling in isolation, as well as missing our regular visits to these nursing homes, I had the idea to create a virtual recital. I asked the students at the studio if they were interested, and they were more than happy to participate.



Ready to re-open with plexiglass shield:
Judy Wely's Studio, Campbell, California.

I contacted various nursing homes and sent them a compilation of videos of us playing our recital pieces with a small message from each student included. In addition to the virtual recital, various students created hand-made cards during the Easter season to send to nursing homes.

Being in quarantine is a difficult experience, but I am blessed to be able to spend it with my family. I cannot even imagine what these seniors are going through, but I was thrilled to hear that I, along with my peers was able to make their days just a little bit brighter.

COVID SNAPSHOTS (cont'd)

Making the Most of Virtual Lessons

By Patty Eversole, St. Charles, Missouri



Patty Eversole Studio: setup for remote lessons

I began my transition to online lessons at the beginning of March. It took a few weeks of adjusting to technology and figuring out what seemed to work best, but lessons are proceeding well. I've set up an overhead webcam as well as a side view webcam, so that I can demonstrate as needed for my students, as well as model as a teacher. I'm including photos of the studio set-up, the view my students have of me from their computers, and the view I have of them.



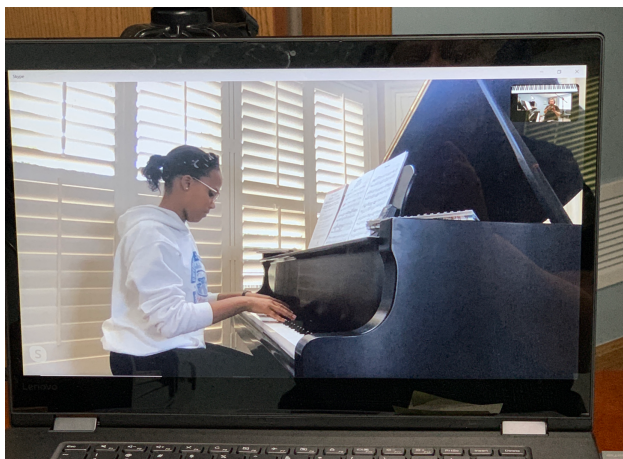
Patty Eversole Studio: Student's view of teacher with overhead view of keyboard.

I use Skype for my lessons. Skype has a much better sound compared to Zoom. Many came for the audio and video setup.

As a teacher, it takes much more energy to teach online, and I was losing my voice by the end of the day. A good quality gaming headset has helped me to hear the students better, and also has allowed me to speak in a normal voice. The audio is obviously not ideal, however, we are able to work on reading, theory & learning new repertoire. I have recently set up a drop box for students to upload videos of their playing, so I can have a more realistic sound to evaluate. Online lessons require a lot more “hands on” assistance from the parents during lessons, since I cannot make physical adjustments to my students.

The sound is the most important aspect of our teaching, and it is difficult to work on that in virtual lessons. However, I believe that helping the parents work with their

children, and keeping the momentum going during this unprecedented time is valuable. There are so many things causing unease in our world right now, and music can provide harmony, stability, and peace for our students and families as we move forward.



Patty Eversole Studio: teacher view

Praise for Our Creative Teacher

***By Katie McKie, mother of Charlie Cathey
student of Jacqueline Graham, Augusta, Georgia***

As a practicing pediatrician, I am only too aware that COVID has turned the world upside down. So I should not have been surprised that piano was no exception. But who would ever have dreamed of a world where piano lessons are done on Zoom? When I was a Suzuki piano student all those years ago, online lessons would not even have been possible! We are so fortunate to have an amazing teacher who adapted quickly to these unprecedented circumstances and developed an online

platform for our lessons within just a few weeks after schools were closed in our area.

My son Charlie (age 6) has been able to continue his weekly lessons on Zoom, and I think it has been helpful for him to maintain this routine when so much of his regular schedule has been disrupted. He really enjoys being able to see his teacher on the iPad. His favorite part is playing interactive music theory games with her using an app called SproutBeat. His teacher even put

together a group performance class on Zoom in which all the students pre-record videos of their performances and watch them together online. Charlie loved getting “thumbs up” and “clappy hands” emojis after his video was played, and he was very happy when one of the other students commented that he seemed focused during his piece.

Our children are growing up in a culture that is already saturated with YouTube videos etc., so I think maybe the concept of video performances and lessons has not been as strange to them as it is to the adults in the crowd. Our performance class was held on Earth Day, and our teacher encouraged the

students to have an Earth Day cookout with their families and to participate in a photo scavenger hunt for natural objects. We submitted photos that we took on a walk around the neighborhood, and Charlie was so thrilled when our photos won the prize! It was really a highlight for him during the stressful early days of the pandemic, and he wrote about how happy it made him feel in his school journal. We will all be grateful when we are able to meet again in person, but for now I am so thankful that our teacher has been able to use technology (along with her amazing creativity and dedication to teaching) to keep us together in a time when we are physically distanced.



Katie McKie and her son Charlie Cathey
student of Jacqueline Graham



Jacqueline Graham, Augusta, Georgia with students

COVID SNAPSHOTS (cont'd)

The Gift of Time

By Jill Austin, Hillsboro, Oregon

I am one to believe in miracles. They are happening every day if we look for them.

During these past months of the COVID-19 shut down, it has been heartening to hear how others have experienced hardship and sadness, not only to survive, but even thrive. Many individuals and families have created new ways of doing life. Some started small plants in their windowsills that have exploded into farm-sized gardens. I saw 1000-piece puzzles like 'Butterflies of the World' magically wing their tiny bits together. One of my piano parents by her own admission, has become

quite the excellent cook. I know this because she brings us dinner once a week.

Here in Oregon, as in all other areas, our Health Club was shuttered. The lap pool closed and yoga classes ended. I needed a new routine and really missed my piano students. I thought, "Well Jill, what about this rare gift of 'extra' time? You had better use it wisely."

Fortunately we teachers had just participated in the Orange County February Workshop. We all had our lessons with the Japanese teachers and mine was recorded on my phone. The demonstration, the challenge, the homework—the clarity—it was all there. Well this was all very convenient and obviously the thing to do. I set the phone on the piano and practiced together with Sensei. Now

every day we do Twinkles, Down/Ups and the homework *together*.

Thankfully my own piano students have been open to doing Zoom and FaceTime lessons. Although far

from ideal, it has kept us practicing and I can see the improvement.

I look forward to my own daily practice. The process is quite fascinating, if not exciting, and the time has become a sacred thing of sorts.

Miracles do happen, they just often need a nudge.

Vicki Merley Studio Tucson, Arizona

A couple of my students after doing their trophy assignments for 60 days! Eli, age 8, was required to practice a little hands separately every day and to copy the first eight songs of Book 1 into a music manuscript notebook. Elora, age 4, learned all her Twinkles and is practicing every day. Their mom and dad are supervising during FaceTime lessons and daily practice and have been surprised how many times a day the kids go to the piano loving to practice and play.

