

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*

*Let's Get Rid of  
Unnecessary Tension*

**By Haruko Kataoka**

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter  
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**Next Deadline: December 15, 2020**

We must think about ourselves when we are about to begin a task. This is not only about playing the piano. When human beings get ready to do something, whether we are studying for school or engaging in sports, the harder we work at it, the more tense our body becomes. We end up desperately struggling and getting burned out.

Without realizing the error of this approach, people with assertive personalities are content in knowing they have tried as hard as they can, while those with self doubt blame themselves, concluding that they did not try hard enough and must work even harder next time.

Take a step back and contemplate this process. What we should be researching is how to use our body in the most natural and efficient way. We end up focusing on the task at hand and forgetting what is most important, our physical body.

We live on a planet we call Earth which is part of the universe. I don't know the intricacies of natural science, but I do know that we are governed by the earth's gravitational forces. Within the confines of the laws of gravity, with our innate, natural condition intact, we can easily achieve balance by using the body's center of gravity and by relaxing the entire body without using unnecessary, stiffening tension.

Furthermore, it is evident that we are all able to master standing and walking without being stiff (of course, the style of walking is as varied as people are numerous). This is not the result of the sheer will power of mere individuals. We can move about easily when we work in conjunction with the natural laws (of gravity) and not against them.

When we go to do something, physically we must release 100% of tension and mentally we must concentrate 100%. However, the mental gets muddled up with the physical and it is very difficult to separate the two.

Physically release tension 100%? Some think it is not possible to perform tasks without tension.

But we can. Tension and stiffness impede our physiological movement by interfering with our life force. When the body achieves its natural state by releasing wasted, unnecessary effort, our life force enables us, with sheer concentration, to become freely mobile.

We should be aware of what we do with our bodies when we read a book for school, or when we write. In the world of sports, the breaking of records is dependent on the best use of the body. Therefore, athletes place top priority on researching how to train the body for ease and efficiency. Here is a wonderful excerpt from an interview with speed skater Hiroyasu Shimizu, a gold medalist during this winter's Olympics: "During the race, I think only about limbering my muscles. As I run, not even one of my fingertips ever straightens out. This attention on releasing tension in my fingers gives me results over 100% from just 80% effort. Relaxation is crucial."

All of you who play the piano, please observe your own ten fingers while you are playing. For instance, when you are using either fingers 4 or 5, are fingers that are not in use like fingers 2 or 1 sticking out or is your third joint sunken in? That is what is meant by unnecessary tension. This does not apply only to the fingers, it includes the rest of your body: raising your shoulders, sticking out your chin, nodding your head, or stiffening your back. Even skaters are careful with their fingers. We who play the piano must also be careful. Because the natural state is the absence of wasted movement, what is natural is beautiful to watch. In contrast, something unnatural is truly unsightly. To be able to enjoy making musical sound with ease so that you can

play Chopin, Brahms, or Beethoven, keep in mind that you must release any unnecessary

tension. Let us all embark on this research to achieve the most successful result.

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## ***From the Editor:***

Here we are in the ninth month of the pandemic, with no end in sight. Teachers continue to discover creative solutions to maintain motivation and hope among their students.

This year may have been what Queen Elizabeth would call an *annus horribilis* (the term she used to describe the year 1992 in which 3 royal marriages dissolved and a fire in Windsor Castle destroyed over 100 rooms) in more ways than one, and yet we continue to hear uplifting stories from our members. It is heartwarming and inspiring. Meanwhile, our students are progressing through their school year as best they can. High school seniors are applying to college, sixteen-year-olds are learning to drive, students at all levels are preparing to pass exams, they have all adjusted to remote learning and mask-wearing, and they are pursuing a social life as best they can with minimal physical contact with peers. Many have lost loved ones from the Coronavirus. We can assume that all of them fear the loss of loved ones.

Psychologists tell us that long-term effects from the virus and from simultaneous civil unrest will haunt many of our children for the remainder of their lives with symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

If ever there was a time when music and the other arts are necessary to soothe the human spirit it is now. We may not realize the effects we have on our students until years, or decades, later. Or possibly never at all. But when we read reports from former students like the one by Mary Frances Kastelberg in this issue, we see how our teaching manifests itself when our students have grown up and have gone out into the world. There are fundamental life lessons taught in arts education that are far more valuable than the facts learned in “core curricula.”

Never underestimate your importance as a music teacher, especially in hard times.

It is my hope that this Newsletter, as a vehicle for communication among our Suzuki Piano Basics community, will keep up our spirits as we continue to help the children of this generation navigate their way through this catastrophic time. Please share your stories by sending them in to share with the rest of us. If ever there were a time when we need each other it is now. Thanks in advance.

Karen Hagberg  
[Send articles and photos to me at  
[khagberg1943@gmail.com](mailto:khagberg1943@gmail.com)]

## ***COVID SNAPSHOTS***

### ***Gliding Through Mistakes and the Unexpected Curveballs of Life***

*By Mary Frances Kastelberg (former student of Karmalita Bawar)*



Pictured left to right: Karmalita Bawar, Mary Frances Kastelberg,  
taken by Elaine Kastelberg

Four years apart, my sister Amelia, and I grew up sharing many things, including a room, books, toys, and the baby grand piano that had been passed down from our relatives. Amelia started taking piano lessons at eight years old, and so the whole house would always hear the sounds of classical piano. We would fall asleep to the sound of Allegretto 1, moving on several years later to Gigue from the Bach Partita.

At six years old my mom overheard me plucking the keys in front of the piano, and immediately asked Karmalita, Amelia's instructor, if I could take lessons as well.

Suzuki piano lessons were a challenge for me in many ways. Time management, for one, but also becoming comfortable making mistakes in front of an audience shook my already established perfectionism.

Karmalita taught all of her students, even though it took me a while to learn, to push

through your mistakes with grace. She told us that if we keep going despite missed notes, wrong keys, and shaky hands, not drawing attention to them, people wouldn't notice the mistake at all. When they did notice, they were impressed by our ability to recover quickly, and with our heads held high.

Seven years have passed since I last took piano lessons. I am now working as a Medical Device Compression Consultant for a company selling a home therapy product for a medical condition called Lymphedema. I was diagnosed with lymphedema at age twelve, and my struggles with confidence and being in front of an audience skyrocketed. I continued to play piano, but it was only until recently that I realized the extent to which Suzuki, and our amazing instructor, Karmalita, taught me.

As I was preparing for a "virtual" in-service, due to the pandemic, I sent a Zoom invitation to the doctor's office to which I was presenting that afternoon. The meeting time had just begun, and there were technical difficulties. I felt my anxiety rush in and felt as if it was my first day all over again. I quickly regrouped and developed a "Plan B" as to how to present the information without video or any visuals to show the doctor and their team.

After I finished conversing with the doctor, he thanked me for finding a way to still share the information. I hung up the phone and felt that it didn't go so bad

after all. Then, the thought occurred to me that it was just like playing a piece you had practiced for hours, and forgetting the notes, thinking quickly, and recovering. I instantly called my mom and told her that I had just then truly realized the value of Suzuki and what I had learned from Karmalita.

It is no secret that music has immense value in multiple areas of human development. However, lessons we are taught in childhood and adolescence morph into tools we use throughout our lives. I had never thought that I would use the lessons I had learned as a child in my career. While I have always appreciated the experience I had taking piano lessons, I now have a renewed appreciation as I transition into the newest stage of my life.

# ***COVID SNAPSHOTS (cont'd)***

## ***Suzuki Piano Note-taking***

*By Carol Wunderle, Ormond Beach, Florida*



Carol Wunderle. Photo by Edward Dry

Dr. Haruka Kataoka Sensei asked teachers not to take notes in her workshops. She felt it was a distraction from grasping and recalling the larger message and what was being demonstrated.

Although this is an important concept for teachers who are learning by observing, Kataoka Sensei always asked the person who would go home and practice with the student to take written, teacher-specified assignment notes. And when she taught individual lessons to teachers, she herself would write down the assignment notes. Until now, I did this too, writing by hand in notebooks.

Note-taking can be a real challenge, in this age of Covid, when it is left up to the teacher in virtual lessons. The solution would not have been possible in 1983 when I began teaching Suzuki Piano to college students who did not have note-taking mothers.

Google Docs and Google Board, if you are using a tablet on the piano rack at the keyboard, with speech to text, is the saving grace! This discovery has revolutionized note-taking for me to say the least!

Google Board, or GBoard, is an app found on Google Play. It is a keyboard with speech facilitation by adding a microphone. When you speak clearly, your speech is written on the Docs. It saves you from finger typing if you are on a phone or tablet. After the lessons you can edit your notes on a computer where the link will be synced and automatically saved, updated, and sent to your individual students as desired upon exit. GBoard can be used as a default keyboard on any phone and Tablet.

For those of you unfamiliar with Google Docs, as I was, the procedure is to have a tablet on the piano rack and a Google Doc for each student. The link for Google Docs is [docs.google.com](https://docs.google.com) which takes you to a sign in page to your Google account; then to the Docs. The Docs set up is similar to Word. You can create as many of them as you need with the option to share the link and/or give access of each individual Doc to the student or caretaker on every device. They are automatically saved and updated each time you exit. Activate speech-to-text when directing procedures and assignments to the students. The text will appear—not always perfect—

but you can easily critique it later in your synced docs on your computer.

Other great features allow you to add date hyperlinks which appear at the bottom in the margins on the left side in Document View. The dates can be hyperlinked for easy access to any lesson without scrolling. This can be done by selecting the date in the text; then clicking on "Format" from the top headings and select - 'Paragraph styles' - 'Match 3rd paragraph style'. The date you selected will appear in a list in the Document View page on the left side bottom on any device. [Note: It is easiest initially to take the notes in print view.]

For me, the use of Google Docs and Google Board for note-taking is amazing! A record is made of each week's lesson that can be easily accessed by teacher or student at any time on the phone, tablet, watch, or computer—whatever and all devices you have. Happy note-taking!

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*[Editor's Note: We all owe a debt to Carol Wunderle who, for decades by now, has worked tirelessly on our website, converting this Newsletter to the web format, transcribing Kataoka Sensei's talks, and editing Sensei's video lessons. Obviously, she is a computer whiz! If you have questions for her regarding this simple way of providing your students with assignment notes (which obviously may still be employed after in-person lessons resume) contact her at: [carol@pianopathway.com](mailto:carol@pianopathway.com)*

## ***COVID SNAPSHOTS (cont'd)***

***Patricia Pavlack in Her Studio***

***Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania***



Patricia Pavlack Studio: Group lesson on Zoom.



# ***COVID SNAPSHOTS (cont'd)***

## ***Piano Play-In in Philadelphia***

The Greater Philadelphia Suzuki Association held its first-ever Virtual Piano Play-In on October 17, Dr. Suzuki's birthday. Over 70 piano students and teachers registered for this online event. Our leader was Parker Van Ostrand from Sacramento, CA. He is 17 years old and a student of Suzuki teacher Linda Nakagawa. Parker did an amazing job of starting all of the pieces, and hearing him perform them all was a wonderful treat. Our program included pieces from all seven books of the Suzuki Piano School. Below is one photo from the gallery. In the photo, Parker is in the top line, 2nd from R as others

are listening or playing along with him. Teachers and students alike felt inspired while having loads of fun!  
Submitted by Carole Mayers



Screenshot of Greater Philadelphia Suzuki Association Virtual Piano Play-In on October 17, 2020 to commemorate Dr. Suzuki's birthday.

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## ***CHRISTINE ALBRO RECEIVES AWARD***



Longtime Suzuki Piano Basics teacher, Christine Albro, from Cary, North Carolina, was recently chosen as a co-recipient of the 2020 Ruggero Piano Teacher Merit Award. She will be sharing the honor and \$500 award with another member of the Raleigh Piano Teacher Association, Anne Scoggin.

The Ruggero Piano Teacher Merit Award has been presented annually, since it was established in 2010, by Richard and Deborah Ruggero, owners of Ruggero Piano Store in Raleigh. The award recognizes piano teachers who "demonstrate outstanding performance and dedication to their students, communities, and affiliated organizations."

Submitted by Emese Pedroza

## ***Attention Members***

Membership forms have again been included with this post. **Memberships postmarked by December 15 will be included in our 2021 Directory.** Please collect

your family memberships and send them along with yours to Treasurer Linda Nakagawa, 242 River Acres Drive, Sacramento CA 95831.

A reminder: please remit your families' \$25 memberships in a single check along with a list of

their names as they will appear in the directory (additional contact information for families not required). Families who wish to donate additionally to the various funds listed on the membership form may receive tax deductions for these donations. Those families

may write their checks directly to the Foundation and submit them along with their membership form directly to our Treasurer and will receive receipts for tax purposes.

Thank you for your continued support of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation and its commitment to preserving and furthering the unique teaching of Dr. Haruko Kataoka.