

Conquering Terror by Feeling Terrified: How I Used Person-Centered Psychotherapy to Overcome My Terror of Performing

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Abstract

It took a long time of tireless searching to realize that freeing painful repressed memories would also free me from my fear of the stage. I began therapy in 2003 with Armin Klein and continued with his wife Grace in 2011, after Armin passed away. Armin and Grace Klein are therapists who embody Carl Rogers' person-centered values (Rogers, 1995). When I combined psychotherapeutic tools with Bach's "Goldberg Variations," I found my own strategies to uncover traumatic memories of my earliest years. How I have remembered what I felt as an unborn child, infant, and child is difficult to explain logically. My stage-fright disappeared when I realized that when I stepped on stage I re-experienced exactly how terrified I felt of being born to my mother. At that very instant I also lost forever my terror of every person I met. Before therapy, I was a person who stumbled frightened and blindly through life. By remembering extremely early trauma, I am now a person who feels within a huge radiant sun that sheds warm brilliant light even on the darkest corners of existence.

Keywords: Stage fright, child abuse, Johann Sebastian Bach's "Goldberg Variations," Person Centered Therapy, Spina Bifida.

Biographical Statement

I was born in Utrecht, Holland to German parents and moved to the United States when I was nine. My interest in the harpsichord began when my father built me a Zuckerman harpsichord kit. His gift made me want to know everything about the art of harpsichord playing, which led me to study at the Conservatoire National d'Aix en Provence, at the University of Pennsylvania, at the Conservatoire National de Region de Lille, and at the Juilliard School.

I am currently working on my "Goldberg Project," which consists of my CD of the "Goldberg Variations," and two books: "Bach and the Goldberg" and "The Goldberg and My Self." I perform in Germany, France, Mexico, and the United States, and I appear on TV and radio broadcasts in Mexico.

Because I wanted help with stage fright, I became a client of Armin and Grace Klein at the Center for Human Encouragement in Rochester, New York. Now along with Grace Klein, I am facilitating a workshop on performance anxiety. I also use a person-centered approach to direct a baroque ensemble at the Summer Music Institute at the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester.

Prologue

Comment from Grace Harlow Klein

I am deeply touched by the journey Josephine has been on for these many years – the last four of which I was a companion for her. It is amazing to read her clear account of what was a continually changing, deeply painful, confusing, and chaotic world of her experience. I have never seen a person with such perseverance, creativity, and drive. She found and created tools to help her go deep inside after the missing feelings.

I am amazed by her growth drive and the role of Bach's music in saving her life. Her imagination and intellect gave her what she needed to survive – and heal – along with the deep connection she felt with Armin – which she spontaneously recalled at times in her journey. It was delightful to hear his warm, open responses which were so meaningful to her. And sometimes, it felt as if he was still there with us in the library.

When I went to listen to Josephine play in her studio, I immediately recognize the power of her music to give her access to her feelings. It was at least double the intensity of what she could access in our library. When she began to speak, I drew on my experience in the International Person-Centered Forum—that people be encouraged to speak in their original language in order to share their feelings more freely. When Josephine began to speak in Dutch as she played, surprised, as she explained that it was Dutch, not German, the intensity of her feelings doubled again—and she accessed the pain and rage she felt. I was amazed and touched.

Through all of the work we did together, Josephine was not comfortable with me, which I understood and accepted and sometimes even reminded her that it was not a requirement that she trust me. I am a woman, the same gender as the source of her pain. I continued to be open and empathic and flexible as her awareness of her experiences continually changed, deepened, and became clearer. But Josephine accepted some of the things I offered and was most creative in developing the tools that allowed her to do the work that has freed her. She recorded all of our sessions and when she wanted to play her recorded music, together we brought one of Armin's stereo systems into the library and she put it together to use it. We were a good team.

As a therapist, there were two things I struggled with. The first was to suspend disbelief when Josephine was accessing her earliest feelings. That she could remember things from infancy and earlier, I told myself that she was drawing on all of her experiences to find the meaning that held her experience together, to gain congruence, to find the truth about her life. That was the easy part. And when she opened

the document to learn the truth about her brother, Benedict, it all made sense. Much harder was about empathy. While I am comfortable with my own pain and therefore able to be open to the pain of my clients, the depth of Josephine's pain, the abuse she experienced, and the depth of abandonment she felt was overwhelming. When she cried out, at times, that no one could accept or understand her pain, I tended to agree with her. I felt humbled by this acknowledgement. Rogers' notion of empathy, entering into the client's experience "as if" it were my own was tested. And yet I never once doubted my ability to stay with her, so strong was her sense of the journey she was on.

I am happy for Josephine in her new found enjoyment of life and look forward to working together in our workshop "Beyond Performance Anxiety," drawing on both of our experiences. will live on in our hearts. We dedicate this modest review to her and those influenced by her. We encourage readers to see <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/pressdemocrat/obituary.aspx?pid=176173816> for a formal obituary and information to contribute to a scholarship fund to more easily allow people to participate in expressive arts.

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Just as dreams are not logical, the way I experienced my childhood was not logical. Children's minds are not logical, minds of infants and unborn children are even less logical. Yet as my therapist Armin Klein used to say: "They may not know much, but they know exactly what they feel." My childhood experience was particularly chaotic because I rarely felt loved. Love is simple, but pain is complicated. I

could not understand the pain I absorbed from my parents, so my experience seemed extremely chaotic and confusing. As a result, even my feelings were complex and illogical. And as Armin would say, I felt “a whole lot of things.”

Before I started therapy, everything I knew about myself fit in a short paragraph. My parent’s families had lived for generations in Königsberg and Breslau, Germany. Because of World War II, they lost their homes forever and suffered extreme hardships. In 1958 my parents married and in 1960 my brother was born. In 1962, they had a child, Benedikt, who died in infancy. Shortly before I was born in 1965, they moved to Utrecht, Holland. In 1968, my uncle died in a car crash, and his widow and baby son moved in with us. In 1975, we immigrated to the United States. Around 1968, my father, who loved all the great classical composers, built me a Zuckerman harpsichord kit, which made me want to know everything about the art of harpsichord playing. I always searched for great teachers and took every workshop I could with the most famous harpsichordists. At my parent’s insistence, I studied at the University of Pennsylvania. One day a friend said: “you are playing music all the time, why do you not study music?” So, I switched my major from bioengineering to music. I married a Mexican composer I met there, with whom I eventually had two sons. After receiving my BA in Music, I was offered scholarships to study musicology at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale. It mystified even me that I turned down those opportunities and got a MM at Juilliard instead. Juilliard opened the way for countless performance opportunities but I could not enjoy them, because it felt so difficult to perform in public. For instance, I could not sleep a whole month before my senior recital. My teacher suggested I play with the music, but I insisted in playing the full-length recital from memory, which made it so much harder for me. After Juilliard, I performed little and mostly took care of my children.

Before therapy, now I know I felt nothing at all, and I worked hard to suppress my anger AND my anxiety. Since childhood I experienced stage fright and memory lapses. On stage, I had trouble

relaxing and playing the music as I did when I was by myself. When people were watching me, my fingers would feel like lead and often I would suddenly freeze and have no idea what note to play next. I tried giving lots of concerts and I tried Madeleine Bruser's method (1997) to help me to relax to create the perfect performance from memory, but I never could. Although my parents were violently opposed to psychotherapy, I tried it, because I could not think of anything else that might help me get on stage and play that perfect performance.

I began my therapy in 2003 with Armin Klein. When Armin passed away in 2011, I continued with his wife Grace Harlow Klein and concluded my formal therapy in 2015. Armin and Grace Klein are therapists who embody Carl Rogers' person-centered values (Rogers, 1995). From this perspective, humans have a remarkable capacity for self-healing and personal growth. This inner "growth-drive" ultimately leads towards self-actualization, or achievement of ones' highest potential. Person-centered therapists use genuine, empathetic, nondirective, and unconditionally positive approaches that are both empowering and motivating.

With the Kleins' guidance, by combining person-centered therapy with Bach's "Goldberg Variations" I have ceased to feel terrified of performing, and in the process I have remembered and processed an incredible amount of my childhood in Holland, and discovered heavenly bliss in my daily life. I also learned from Armin and Grace that all the emotions I hated having – annoyance, anger, fear, and shame – all covered some childhood pain that would have killed me if I had not buried it deep away. Although it lay in the deepest recesses of my psyche, this pain continued to haunt me in my nightmares and continued to create havoc in my daily life. Armin and Grace helped me to develop my own understanding of the events in my life in order to liberate me from them, to strive for growth, and to self-actualize as a performance musician.

Armin would say: "Anger is useful. It is an opportunity for growth." Anger showed me where I had to dig to find the pain. Grace recommended, "stay with the pain." When I managed to stay with the

pain, not only would I remember some horrendous thing about my childhood, afterwards I would feel much better and would suddenly I would have some incredibly wonderful childhood memory. Grace also taught me that if you block one emotion, you block all your emotions. In therapy I experienced vividly how I had not only blocked out the pain as a child, I had also blocked out the joy and happiness of my childhood as well as the ability to feel even the good emotions my present existence. By feeling every detail of my earliest pain, my life is now filled with exciting projects and upcoming concerts. I am now thrilled to be with my husband and in awe when I see whom my sons are becoming. No one told me to remember my childhood, nor did I want to remember, but it has helped me so much.

Though my life is so much better now, and I have no fear of the stage, I still have memory slips and I emotionally shut down when I play Bach's music. I suspect I will discover all the details of my pain, which my memory slips hide, by doing just what pops into my head. Right now I have a strong desire to organize into a story all the snippets of my past I have remembered, and I feel like combing this work with playing from memory, the music I love most—Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" (Bach, 1722.) From many positive experiences of going along with my inclinations, I believe this work will help me to feel the pain hidden by the memory slips and when I find the words to describe it, I know all sort of amazing things will happen. I am hoping that it will enable me to share with others the full extent of my love for my family, for my self, and for the music I love most dearly.

In the first weeks of my therapy I felt astounded that Armin said to me: "You really love music! Why don't you just play?" I had not even realized that I loved music. Armin encouraged me to dare to play recitals from memory of parts of the "Well-Tempered Clavier." Before those recitals I suffered fewer sleepless nights, but I still annoyed my husband with my anxiety and I had many memory slips in the performances. But I felt deeply fulfilled afterwards. It felt even

better when I saw Armin's tears of joys when he congratulated me after my first recital.

Even before therapy, when I practiced music I always felt better. Even then, I had moments in performing where I could express exactly what I felt and do full justice to the music. But most of the time I suffered intensely as I performed, which made stepping on the stage nearly impossible for me. But the power I had felt on stage, made me desperate to never stop going through the agony of performing. I used to joke that I would sell my soul to the devil to get on stage. It turned out that to perform painlessly, I did have to descend into my personal hell.

Life Drive

I remember in my boyhood, the bin in which we stored our winter's supply of potatoes was in the basement, several feet below a small window. The conditions were unfavorable, but the potatoes would begin to sprout—pale white sprouts, so unlike the healthy green shoots they sent up when planted in the soil in the spring. But these sad, spindly sprouts would grow 2 or 3 feet in length as they reached toward the distant light of the window. The sprouts were in their bizarre, futile growth, a sort of desperate expression of the directional tendency I have been describing. They would never become plants, never mature; never fulfill their real potential. But under the most adverse circumstances, they were striving to become. Life would not give up, even if it could not flourish.

I feel much like this potato, which Carl Roger's described in "A Way of Being" (1995), that lies in a dark basement yet grows a long twisted stem towards even the faintest glimmer of light. For years my therapists Armin and Grace Klein provided me with rich fertile soil, so at last I could flourish. But now I realize that even before I met them, I used everything available inside me to try to heal myself.

Before therapy, I did not know I had suffered childhood abuse. I had hidden my pain in my obsession to publically play the most difficult harpsichord pieces from memory, which were all written by Bach. No one wanted me to neither perform, neither play from memory, nor play Bach. I believe my life drive pushed me to perform from memory the music of Bach because deep down I knew that performing this music would help me not only to survive, but to thrive in every aspect of my life.

Neither Armin nor Grace ever told me what to do to perform more easily, but rather gave me the freedom and the support to discover this on my own. At first I felt extremely frustrated. I wanted Armin to give me a magic formula, because I did not know what to do to help myself. But I did not give up, even when I felt that I was getting nowhere, because Armin was such an extraordinary person. I have never met someone who could enjoy people and life like him. I felt deeply understood by him, because I felt he loved everything about me. For instance, when I hated myself for being angry, he would raise his arms joyously and say: “Now we are getting somewhere. You are frustrated about something and the anger will give you the energy to change it.” I loved when he told me there is no good nor is there bad, nor is there right or wrong, because I had always felt I was wrong and bad. This has also helped me to have more empathy for others. But he still would not tell me what to do in the hour I sat with him. He would say: “You’re in charge!” This was extremely difficult for me.

Once Armin asked me what I remembered of my childhood. I thought: “What does this have to do with anything!” But because he was so kind to me, I wanted to try and answer the best I could. I answered that all I remembered was playing with my friends on the street, but I remembered absolutely nothing that happened in my house. He said, “Oh” and that was the end of that.

Another day Armin sat with me in silence for one whole hour. This led to my first traumatic childhood memory. I had discovered the power of Freud’s free-association, but eventually I could not say what had come into my head— I felt too embarrassed. But I also learned

how important these words were, so I was determined to say them. Armin just sat there with my silence for a whole hour until finally I burst out crying and managed to say: “I am locked up. There is poop everywhere, she hit me! It can’t be true.” Armin was so kind and accepting of the horrible words that I could not stop crying and I cry even now years later thinking of his kind sad face as he comforted me.

Cross-Writing

One day, Armin suggested that I write. He said that I might be surprised by what I write – and I have experienced the truth of this in so many ways. At first I only wrote what Armin said on scraps of paper. But eventually his commented inspired me to discover what I call “cross-reading” and “cross-writing.” Using free association (Freud & Bonaparte, 1954), I wrote down whatever came to my mind while playing Bach’s “Goldberg Variations,” a long and complicated keyboard piece (Bach, 1741). The “Goldberg Variations” are constructed symmetrically, beginning with a peaceful and delicate Aria (Williams, 2001). This base line drives 30 variations of the theme that follow, with each third variation being a canon. The non-structural variations in the “Goldberg Variations” are mostly fast, light, and airy like the wind, and they are also frivolous, thoughtless, and extremely virtuosic.

As I was combining free association with practicing this difficult music I suddenly realized that each specific variation always produced the same set of words. I had the feeling that each variation opened up the feelings associated with a specific traumatic childhood memory. I wanted to prove this to myself so I read everything I had written over the years for each variation. I called this cross-reading. I was astounded that I did indeed use a separate set of words consistently for each variation, no matter what was going on in my daily life. I also found they connected me consistently to a particular memory. In addition, when I made tables of the random words, I realized how deeply I felt the whole structure of the “Goldberg

Variations.” I wrote in detail about these discoveries in my book “The Goldberg and My Self,” which I wrote after Armin died in the years 2012-2013(Gaeffke.)

I decided to write “The Goldberg and My Self,” because I wanted to share these discoveries. But what astounded me most was that when I cross-read—for example the nonsensical ugly words like I had “father,” “love,” “hit,” invaded violently,” and “death.” words connected with variation 3 (canon at the unison) —whole phrases and bits of stories would suddenly come to me. I would retrieve even more details if I rewrote those words every time they came up in my notes collected for a specific variation over many years. I called this cross-writing. Now I understand that when I cross-read and cross-wrote those crazy words I collected, I could truly begin to stay with my pain, because I kept reading or rewriting the same word that gave access to a particular pain. Doing this, I would cry more than I ever had before.

Also now that I have probably all the details of the stories the variations connected me with, the words do not seem nonsensical anymore. For instance, the memory variation 3 connected me with the following: in Spain at the age of two I told my “father” in front of my birthmother that I “love”d him, and she punished me violently and sexually for it (“hit” and “violently invaded.”) I nearly died (“death.”) Bach’s music saved me then, as it did many times in my early life. After I realized these kinds of details, I no longer have those words come to me as I play the variations.

The act of using cross-reading and -writing to transform chaos into snippets of stories gave me enormous relief. I would cry and remember my childhood instantly, no matter what was going on in my reality. As the memories came streaming in by the truckloads, I felt proportionally calmer in my daily activities. I did not expect that it would help me heal, even less so that it would help me to discover who I really am. But it did.

The process felt like magic. As I uncovered enormous pain from my childhood not only would I suddenly feel happy for the first time in my life, I had not even realized what real happiness could feel

like. Also things in my daily life would become easier. For example, I often felt furious when I heard my husband's footsteps on the stairs in the morning. I began cross-writing, all the jotted down thoughts I had collected over years when he came down the stairs. This is how I remembered that one morning my mother had once come down the stairs and hit me with an iron pan because I tried to make pancakes for my young cousin. Then my cousin disappeared, and I thought he was dead. I thought I had killed him because I tried to feed him. By cross-reading and cross-writing for many years and thereby widening the path to my past, I also discovered that I hated myself even more because I thought I had killed him on purpose, to protect him from my birthmother's horrendous abuse. Luckily my cousin did not die, and I did save him. He moved back to Germany. Later I realized she forced me to sexually abuse my cousin, and I felt desperate to save him from the pain I believed would condemn him for eternal death in life. That is what I felt her abuse did to me. I could see no way out except to have my birthmother really kill him with the pan.

I believe this horrendous pancake story lay behind the fury I felt towards my husband. After re-experiencing even just a part of the memory, I no longer felt furious when my husband came down the stairs in the morning, and no longer hated myself for being angry with my husband. Instead of being angry, I was now free to enjoy my husband in the morning. I have experienced such transformations in my daily life many times; these transformations were intensely motivating for me to continuously go into the most excruciating pain.

Freeing an artist from anger and fear has been described as akin to blasting through blocks (Cameron, 2002). To use cross-writing to go into my pain feels exactly like that. I believe as a small defenseless creature, I had blocked out the excruciating pain I experienced with solid rock miles thick. The width of the rock is in proportion to how defenseless I was: it hurt more the less capable I was of defending myself. Accessing my repressed pain felt exactly like blasting through these blocks of anger, resentment, resistance, and fear. To blast through my mile-thick blocks hurt so much it felt like it

shattered my soul. But it was always easiest to access my pain when I combined cross-writing with the music that had soothed me all my life.

Taking Music Into My Therapy Sessions

With Armin I used very little music in our sessions. Only after he died I became able to put words to the pain Bach's music connected me with. When Armin must have known he was dying, he asked me whether I wanted to continue my therapy with his wife, Grace Harlow Klein. I answered in a resounding "No!" She reminded me too much of my birthmother, who was also very successful in her career. So I stayed with Armin until a week before he died. By then I knew free association worked best for me. To be able to remember my childhood, I had to be able to tell her very painful and very embarrassing things. I never trusted her so easily as I trusted Armin, but I was so desperate to accomplish my goal that I told her whatever came into my head. It helped that we both missed Armin. When we were together in his library, it was easy to imagine Armin sitting there with us. It also helped that she never acted towards me like my birthmother. Most importantly Grace always let me do what I wanted, which distinguished her from my birthmother who violently opposed anything I wanted. I liked best working on my own on "The Goldberg and My Self." I appreciated that I could share my discoveries with her, but frustrated that I felt she wanted me to write using standard rules of writing. Because the language just flowed out of my pen as I wrote "The Goldberg and My Self," it is a deep expression of my self, and I still realize more about myself everytime I reread it. This article has been corrected by many editors and I am glad that I was able to let them do this. It means that I have put words to much of my pain that caused me to write in my particular way.

At some point Grace introduced the idea of making space for oneself. Up to that point, my harpsichord was wherever there was space in the house. With Grace's help, I put my foot down and claimed a space in our house just for my music and myself. I called it my

studio. It is not only wonderful to have a space for my music; it has also become an extension of my experience at Armin's library, where he and Grace helped so many clients gently enter into their pain and heal. Now my studio is also a special space where I feel safe to go deeply into myself through music and through writing.

When my studio was ready, Grace agreed to come to my house so that my therapy sessions would consist of me playing harpsichord while I said whatever came to mind. I wanted to find out what words came to mind as I performed. Performing for Grace proved very helpful, since I felt nearly as terrified as in a real performance. But I also felt comfortable enough to speak out loud as I played.

The moment I started to play for Grace, the words that came out of my mouth connected me instantly to my early childhood. Early in my therapy with Armin, I also invited him to my house to have our therapy session as I played harpsichord. I sensed these sessions were our most important therapy sessions. I cried a lot and felt a lot better afterwards, but I did not understand why I cried. After having opened myself to my inner world through cross-writing and many years of therapy, now playing for Grace I quickly realized the music led me to much earlier feelings than I had ever accessed in Armin's library. I also would cry much more than in the sessions with Armin, because now I knew how important it was for me to cry. Now I also knew instantly why I cried.

I also wanted to get the more details of the memory by collecting the words that came out of my mouth as I played in several musical sessions. This proved difficult, because when I listened to the sessions, the music would drown out the words. So I tried writing down the words just after I played. However, the moment I stopped playing, I could not remember the words. This showed me how deeply I am touched by music, and how it feels like a dream. When you wake up from a dream, you also have difficulty remembering what you have dreamt. I felt the same when I could not remember my words after I stopped playing. I also realized why I had never been able to control what I thought or felt as I played. Just like it is impossible to control a

dream with conscious thought, I could never use conscious thought to change how I felt when I played music.

It also became clear to me that I made mistakes or had memory slips during performance not because I was stupid or lacking in preparation, but because as I played I could not help but feel what happened to me long ago. I also realized that as I performed I felt what I experienced as an infant. In my sessions with Grace in my studio, I had a wide and open doorway to these extremely early feelings so that I might understand what I had felt way back then. Only then would I be able to play without fear, when the little infant within me ceased to fear her birthmother.

Music and My Mother Tongue

One day during my musical sessions, Grace suggested that I speak my mother tongue as I played. I assumed I would speak German. I had grown up in Holland, but my family always spoke German. To my amazement the language that came out of my mouth while I played was Dutch. I asked myself why my mother tongue was Dutch when I played music.

When I was three months old I spent several months in the care of a loving Dutch family. As soon as I was able to walk, I would escape my terrifying home to the safety of the houses of my Dutch friends. Also while we lived in Holland, my brother and I only spoke Dutch together. I had always thought it was because in World War II the Nazis had broken the dykes, which flooded the country and killed thousand of Dutch. Anything German felt extremely painful to many people, so my brother and I always tried hard to hide that we were German. I think that was part of it, but it was also because our German parents felt so painful. My brother also stayed as far away from the house as possible. To me my birthmother was a terrifying monster, so I searched for a mother elsewhere. I found many loving Dutch mothers who I have used all my life as role models. My mother tongue is the language of my real mothers: Dutch.

Sometimes in the musical sessions destructive German words came out of my mouth. These came up mostly when I was not playing. If they came up while I played, the music would break down just like when I have a memory slip. It felt like the full force of my birthmother's anger would descend upon me, and I would freeze.

Yet it surprised me how infrequently these German words came up in the musical sessions. My general impression in therapy had been that my birthmother dominated my existence and I could not get rid of her. But in the musical sessions, Dutch and my earliest feelings dominated. Just like music, Dutch was another way to escape from the terrifying anger of my birthmother. Long ago I had started what Armin had proposed at the beginning of my therapy. "We have to separate you from your mother!" At that time the little girl inside me was too terrified to speak. After a decade of therapy and much help from Bach's "Goldberg Variations" she finally started to speak, and it was in Dutch. All the horrific German words that I had heard my mother speak started fading into the background.

In therapy I also began to understand that my birthmother only had negative ways to cope with her pain, while my father showed me many positive ways such as music, learning, and reading. From this I began to understand why after playing music I would always feel just as good as after a therapy session, where with great difficulty I had remembered some childhood pain. Without making much effort at all I could release those repressed ancient feelings while playing or listening to music. In therapy, I searched for the voice of my past self. I did not have to search for it in music, because for me music IS the voice of my past self. It felt strangely comforting to discover that music and Dutch were the languages of my feelings.

I feel very grateful that Grace gave me the idea to use my mother tongue. Now I always rewrite in Dutch my words (that have now become phrases or even paragraphs) collected from diverse ways I use free association. When I write in Dutch many more details from my past flow out of my pen than when I write in English.

Performing the “Goldberg Variations”

After twelve years of intense therapy I was ready to apply my tools to my most fervent desire and what was most difficult to me: playing recitals of the “Goldberg Variations.” Once I felt no fear as I played the “Goldberg Variations” from memory for Grace, I tried next to play it for friends. I did not feel comfortable crying and speaking in Dutch as I played, so I free-associated before playing, let my pen flow across the page without thinking as I listened to the recordings of these sessions. Then I cross-wrote all the words I collected. This is how I remembered horrible things that happened to me when I was two and I tried to tell all the guests at a Sinter Klaas celebration at my house how my birthmother sexually abused me, by saying out loud she was a monster while holding my vagina. When I remembered many of the horrible things she did to me as a consequence, I felt no more fear playing for my friends.

I thought by now I would have no more fear of a real recital. But the ritual of real concert opened up much greater terrors in me. I had difficulty applying my tools to a public concert. So again I tried letting the pen just flow across the page without thinking the night before the concert, and afterward the concerts I would do the same as I listened to the recording. And then I would cross write all that I collected—for instance: rewriting over and over again every time the word “death “ came up. But before recitals, I would invariably forget to put on the recording machine. This felt like my birthmother still wanted to keep me from healing. I continued to feel so terrified that I could not sleep beforehand. Psychotherapy had shortened the number of sleepless nights, but the extreme terror before the concert remained unchanged.

By my third performance of the “Goldberg Variations.” I had realized that my terror was most acute directly before I stepped on stage. So I organized my concert so that I would have a full hour completely to myself in a private space. I did not expect that in that hour I would undo the terror that had plagued me my whole life. But in

that hour, after crying a lot, I realized that I felt the same terror when I stepped on stage as I felt at the moment that I was born. The terror I felt disappeared the moment that this thought came to me, and along with it huge changes occurred in myself.

The summit performance. The memories that provoked the greatest changes in myself happened during this performance at a retirement home aptly called “The Summit.” In the full hour I gave myself for reflection before the concert, I not only realized I was terrified of being born, I also felt completely frozen and like I might be eaten. These things mystified me, but I accepted them and cried a lot until I could imagine a new mother who was thrilled to have her baby be born. Grace had always recommended that I give myself what I want, but I could not do it until I had remembered every detail of what I think really happened. Before the Summit performance, what had happened just before I was born was not completely clear to me, but I knew I had been terrified my birthmother would eat me, so I could give myself exactly what I wanted most in the world: a loving mother who could not wait to meet me. So I pretended, as I walked on stage, that I was my fantasy mother who was thrilled to give birth to my past self. At the time I had no idea how much these thoughts would impact my life.

When I walked to the performance area, someone said: “I am looking forward to the performance.” I felt astounded when I replied: “So am I.” All of a sudden my terror of performing had disappeared. For the first time in my life I could not wait to get on stage. I also said to myself, for the first time in my life: “I do not feel afraid, not even of having memory slips. In fact I do not even feel the need to play from memory.” I did end up playing from memory. Now I felt completely different. When I had a memory slip, I would just go back to the beginning of the variation and go on. I had never been able to do that, before it would be like a broken record, I would keep getting stuck in the same place. Now suddenly I could make conscious decisions of what to do in my performance. I was no longer forced to re-enact my past pain because I had grieved it, remembered what it was about, and

given myself what I wanted: a mother who wanted me to be born. Also the next day I was astounded, because I realized that I no longer felt terror of all humans just from having figured out why I was so terrified of playing the "Goldberg Variations" from memory.

The Summit performance was also the first time I remembered pain I experienced as an unborn child. Afterwards it felt like floodgates had been opened. Without much effort, memories of what happened to me during that gestation period and at birth flooded into my mind. But to get to this point had been difficult.

With the help of the "Goldberg Variations" and my cross-writing tool, I blasted through the blocks hiding my pain, and brought all the unloved and abused parts of myself back to life.

To describe my childhood story, it felt like I had found my words in countless jumbled snippets of stories, words, and letters. To tell the story of my childhood pain feels like I am putting together an endless puzzle of tiny monochrome pieces. That is also what I had to do to survive the beginning of my existence. Using the power of Bach's music, I took all the shattered pieces of my soul to mold myself into a living creature. Though my soul was violently blown apart by painful experiences, I put it back together again and again. As a tiny creature I only had Bach's music and myself to survive. The following table shows only a few of the memories I retrieved using the power of Bach's music and my cross-writing techniques.

Overview of some of my Traumatic Memories

This overview (Table I) begins with pain I believe I experienced from when I was conceived to August of my second year, when my uncle's widow and baby son moved in with us. I elaborated on some of the trauma mentioned in Table I at the end of this article. It has been said that music and the preverbal years are connected (Noy, 1968). Because I retrieved all these preverbal memories with music, I believe this to be true.

From looking at the overview, I realized my least painful experiences were the physical and the sexual abuse. It was more painful to lose the little bit of love I had. It was even more painful when there was no music.

I have to believe everything that pops into my head is true to be able to work with the words and heal. I have remembered grotesque, horrific, and revolting things; and I have remembered many things I felt even before I was born. Although I knew I needed to believe the memories I collected to help myself, it took me a long time not to doubt them. After I had my first memory with Armin, I had said: "It can't be true!" Armin had replied: "It is true because you are crying," Those words, like so many others Armin said to me, still resound deeply within me and have proved profoundly powerful. Even the first time I heard those words, I thought that makes sense: no lie or fantasy could have made me so violently upset. In addition, I feel I could never have made up something like that because I had never consciously experienced anything like it. I have not even read books or have seen anything that came close to a child in a fury pooping all over a bathroom, even less a child that was beaten unconscious because she had done this.

But for a long time I did not believe the memories I retrieved were true. It would help when Armin's eyes would fill up with tears and he would say softly: "I am sorry." It also helped when he would sit up in his armchair and bellow: "I believe you!" However I could not believe it, because I wished it were not true. So I wanted to find concrete facts to disprove what I had so painfully remembered. I asked people in my family, and I got mostly my own pre-therapy "I don't remember." Whatever little information they offered, proved to me that the horrors of my childhood did happen, and absolutely no one said anything that disproved them. My father had collected many family letters. When I read them I felt incredibly sad to find so many facts that confirmed the feelings I had re-experienced in therapy. In fact, then and now, these letters only make me remember even more childhood pain.

Though I have struggled to believe them, I have to accept my memories as my truth. Only then can I feel the full weight of the horror of my childhood. More importantly, when I take my memories seriously I can give myself exactly what I need, for example a mother who is thrilled with my baby self. However the memories I retrieve are useful to me even if I do not believe they are true. When I re-experience these feelings and put words to them, no matter how true it is or is not, my ordinary life is transformed into heaven on earth.

Benedikt

Just after my performance at “The Summit” Grace gave me Martin Pistorius’ “Ghost Boy” to read (Pistorius, 2013). This story about a severely handicapped child who manages to find a way to speak made me realize I also had such a ghost brother who was trying to communicate with me. I had always heard that my birthmother had a baby boy born with Spina Bifida because she had had a cold during her pregnancy. Suddenly I felt compelled to read the medical report of my parent’s dead child. I translated the original report from the German into English and I looked up every medical term so that I could fully understand what my dead brother had gone through. The text of this letter can be found in Figure 2 .

While reading this letter, I was shocked to see that Benedikt was born with Spina Bifida three years and just one day before I was born. Since he was so sick, my parent’s told me they thought it best to leave him to die. The doctor’s had recommended that my parents never saw him. As I read Benedikt’s medical report, I instantly felt that he had refused to eat because my parents never touched or loved him. I concluded that because he refused to eat, he was too weak to undergo the operation. Since he refused to eat they must have put him on intravenous nourishment, because I know he lived several months. I thought I could feel how acutely he must have suffered alone and unloved, far from my parents. I believe that my parents must have made the painful decision to stop feeding him and let their son die

from dehydration months after he was born. There was no death notice for Benedikt in my father's papers, so I do not know when exactly my brother died or where he is buried. My father never ever spoke to me about him, my mother only a couple times.

After reading the doctor's report (Figure 2) for this second time, realized that my whole life I had believed that I only had one brother. Now, I felt acutely that I had two brothers: one living brother and one dead brother. All my feelings about my dead brother Benedikt poured out of me, and I could not stop crying. In the midst of my violent grief, I planted the largest and most robust rose I could find in memory of my brother Benedikt. I felt like I was shedding the tears my parents never allowed themselves to release.

My parents' reaction. Early in therapy, Armin once asked me what my parents felt. I said: "I don't know." He said, "But you do know because you spent so much time with them." Now I have figured out a lot about what they might have felt. I go even further than Armin. I believe in the beginning as a really small creature I had no feelings. All I had was the ability to absorb the feelings around me. Yet it still does not feel like I know what my parents or Bach might have felt. Instead, it feels as if I am their feelings. I include Bach, because I feel his music was my first real parent. Even now Bach's music has helped me sort out what are my feelings, what might have been Bach's, or what might have been my parent's feelings. Through this work I now have to deal with my feelings, which is so much easier.

My mothers' reaction. I believe that my birthmother felt she had caused Benedikt's sufferings and killed him because she had a cold during her pregnancy. I also believe that she thought she had killed him again when she agreed not to see him and yet again when she agreed to let him die by starving him. All my life I heard her say: "It is over, forget about it." But she would not let me forget about her pain. Deep down I feel like she killed me over and over again. She abused me so violently I have felt mentally handicapped by enormous pain ever since. I believe her unfelt pain drove her to handicap me because Benedikt had been handicapped. I feel she hurt me most

violently during the same months that Benedikt existed, because she carried him exactly in the same time of year as when she was pregnant with me and he was born almost on the same day. She re-enacted the tragedy of Benedict most exactly between the time I was conceived and up to the time I was three months old. I believe that Benedikt died around Christmas, because I believe she tried to kill me with a knife on the day that he had died three years before.

After those first three months, my mother contented herself with more subtle ways to make my life so miserable I would kill myself. Benedikt's tragic life and death lives on in my parents and creates havoc, just like their pain created havoc within me. Even now, when I recently told her I wanted no contact with her, my birthmother continues to try to find ways to attack me. I imagine the pain of Benedikt must be unbearable without her favorite coping mechanism – namely, hurting me. Unfelt pain creates a pressure cooker in a person. It either explodes and kills the person and on the outside it looks like suicide or a misfortune, or it has a release valve to let it cook forever at high pressure. I believe that hurting me helped my birthmother cope with her enormous amounts of unfelt pain and survive.

My father's reaction. Although my father had positive coping mechanisms, like music and learning, his unfelt pain also hurt me. My father prided himself in never dreaming and he always strove to feel nothing. Academic circles prized this highly and he flourished there. I believe he felt proud he could force himself to feel nothing about Benedikt. But because he never felt his pain, I had to feel his pain for him. I had to feel how he must have felt so helpless when he had read the doctor's reports and had to deal with everything in Benedikt's painful life. I had to feel how painful it was for him to make the decision to speed up the dying process of his son. I also believe that is why he just stood by and watched my birthmother abuse me and that is why he did nothing when she almost killed me.

However my father did everything he could for Benedikt. He brought him far away to the best hospital, he dealt with all the painful correspondence with the doctors, and he tried to advocate for his sick

son from afar. I think he also did all he could for me. Most importantly he gave his love of music, books, and learning. When I was two, he arranged for my cousin and his widowed mother to move in with us, which meant that my birthmother did not dare physically and sexually abuse me for several years. When I was nine, he moved us to the United States. I think he advocated for me, because once we were in the States I never again saw my birthmother's lover who abused me and she never abused me physically and sexually again.

I also believe that my father wanted Benedikt to be healthy. I know this because I exist. I exist because my father was desperate to have a healthy child to replace his dead son. I feel he thought it would make my birthmother be kind to him again. I wish he had other reasons, but in the end I had the chance to live because of him.

Memories from Conception to Birth

My parent's always fought, but I believe they fought incessantly once my father insisted on having another child. Although my parents said they felt nothing, all around me the first thing I believe I felt was their chaotic pain, loss, blame, and anger. Because these feelings invaded every molecule of my being, I was in chaos before I was even born. Then I felt my birthmother realize she was pregnant, and I believe I could feel how furious she was because my father had forced her to have sex. The fury and the pain augmented to an even greater pitch, I felt the most evil murderous hatred surround and invade my every atom. I also felt the extreme desire of my birthmother to tear me to shreds and devour me. My terror was so great I lost consciousness, just like when suddenly my mind goes blank while I perform and I have memory slips.

I believe when my birthmother realized she was pregnant my first recurring nightmare, which I call "Urdream I," was created in my mind. Before I went to therapy this "Urdream I" caused me many sleepless night. In the dream I am in endless black water feeling absolutely terrified. I also believe that my birthmother was terrified to

re-experience the pain of Benedikt when she realized she was pregnant again.

I believe that my father coped with the pain of Benedikt by playing without pause recordings of Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier." As Bach's music filled me in utero, I felt a music God who seemed to console Bach because he had lost so much: not only one infant like my father, Bach lost what seems like countless infants. Perhaps I felt this because I could feel how my father's sorrow melted away when Bach's music filled the house.

Bach's music, like Orfeo, also calmed the beast within my birthmother. I felt her heart rate slow down, and I was suddenly surrounded by the love Bach poured into his music instead my mothers' murderous hatred. Bach had created not only a God who consoled him; I believe he had also created a God who loved him. I feel Bach felt loved by music, just like I feel loved by his music. I felt Bach's music God was the father I needed who could console me, love me, and calm the storms that raged around me.

Near miscarriage. In many ways, I feel as if my life is a re-enactment of the tragedy of my brother Benedikt. In the early stages of her pregnancy, I felt my birthmother became so furious that she had to relive the pain of Benedikt that she actively tried to get rid of me. It was probably exactly in the month she had the cold when she was pregnant with Benedikt. I believe she smoked, she did not sleep, and she exercised violently. I felt my father's fury because he wanted a healthy child. And I experienced what felt like a clash of the Titans. Then there was silence., because I believe that she drove my father away violently. But I felt her become incredibly furious, because I believe she needed him to blame him for her pain.. Then the contractions started, and I felt once again that I would be torn to shreds and devoured.

I believe that my experience of my mother's miscarriage is the origin of the second part of what I call my "Urdream I." Just before I would wake up from this recurring nightmare, I felt ripples in an endless black ocean. It felt like a sea monster was moving in for the

kill. Any moment I would be shredded in its monstrous jaws and I would pass into its throat. I became frozen in terror and lost consciousness. Now I understood that this what I felt when my birthmother (the monster) had this near miscarriage (the ripples in the black ocean.)

At some point during the contractions my father must have returned. I believe that he must have felt so sad to stand by and watch another child die. I felt him turn to Bach's "Goldberg Variations" to console him, and I heard the music in a place between life and death. At that moment, I felt I had to go on living in terror because Bach music's God would be heartbroken if I gave up and died.

I discovered later that Johann S. Bach once had an extremely musically gifted son, Johann Gottfried Bernard Bach. He died tragically at the age of 24, just before Bach wrote the "Goldberg Variations." The family called that son "Der Windiger" - the one who is like the wind, or the one who is vain, frivolous, or thoughtless (Wolff, 1998, p. 369.) Many parts of the "Goldberg Variations" are fast, light, airy, frivolous, care-free, and thoughtless, just like Bach's son. The virtuosic variations are unlike anything Bach ever wrote, and I believe that they are homage to his playful son who had so recently passed. I believe he became obsessed with canons after his son's death (Wolff, 200, p.422-432) and included so many canons in the "Goldberg Variations," because for Bach canons represented the faithful following in the steps of Christ (Geiringer, 1966, p. 236.) Just before his son died Bach had tried to make him follow the ways of the faithful (Wolff, 1998, pp.167-9 and 200) I believe he never managed to steer him in a righteous path before his sudden death.

Even as an unborn child listening to Bach's "Goldberg Variations," I felt Bach's joy mixed in with an intense desire that his son come back to life. I also felt Bach's enormous sorrow that he could not help his dead son. I even believe I could feel Bach's agony that his son suffered in Hell. I think I felt these emotions, because in reality Bach's son was dead, and he could not bring him back to life no matter how light and lively his musical portrait of the "Goldberg

Variations” is, nor could he help his son follow in steps of the faithful no matter how many canons Bach wrote. I felt all the feelings associated with these events, because they were so similar to Benedikt having to suffer hellish pain and the helplessness my father must have felt. I felt Bach’s Music God was so sad that I was living in hell, yet I felt he was desperate to have me live regardless how much pain I was in. I felt understood and wanted. At least I pretended someone wanted me to live, so I stayed and I did not die.

Torn to shreds and devoured. When it came time for me to be born, again I felt the contractions and I was terrified of the monster shredding me to bits. The contractions were even stronger than before. It was more like my second recurring nightmare, which I call “Urdream II.” In this dream I am being chased in tight corridors of the birth canal by an unseen the monster towards a tiny hole. I had no choice but to go through the tiny hole and get devoured by the monster, my birthmother. Now again, I was absolutely terrified of being born, because I felt certain my birthmother would tear me to shreds and devour me the moment I emerged from the womb.

I believe this fear of being eaten is actually the deepest fear of my birthmother. Before I was born, I absorbed what it was like for my birthmother to starve as a child. I also know that her grandmother starved to death, and I know my birthmother had to condemn her own son Benedikt to starve to death. I have always known that my great grandmother and her daughter refused to leave their home in East Prussia and were caught by the Russians. The Russians, furious at the atrocities of the Germans, raped and starved any German they encountered. My great grandmother and her daughter, the youngest sister of my mother’s mother, were forced to make *Königsberger Klops* (a ground meat dish) from corpses they found. My great grandmother could not satisfy her hunger in that way and she starved to death. I heard these stories since I was little. Since my birthmother never went into the pain of her and her knowing as a child of her relative’s experiences with starvation, I believe this unexpressed pain created in her a fury that involved shredding humans to bits and eating

them. Often when she was sexually abusing me, she would literally threaten to tear me to shreds and devour me.

For a long time I was puzzled why at the Summit I had written over and over again that I was terrified specifically of BEING EATEN when I was about to be born. Now it helps me to say: "I believe my birthmother was absolutely terrified deep inside of being shredded to bits and devoured; that is why I feared the same. But those were her feelings. They are not my feelings." By putting words to my terror, I can also now feel sorry for my birthmother, who suffered so many incredibly horrible things.

Born

The following is what I believe happened after I was born. After coming into the world, I screamed desperately for the only thing that had loved me: music. Instead I felt them put me into the arms of what I felt was the monster of my nightmares. I felt my birthmother suffocate me with her enormous breasts and I fought screaming and kicking with everything I had available. It worked: she thrust me into my music-father's arms. As an unborn child, my father never spoke to me; he only played his recordings of Bach. So I thought my father was Bach's music.

When my father held me, he must have felt so relieved to have a healthy child. He held me tight so I could hear his heart beating happily. I thought Bach's Music God held me in his warm safe embrace, but this felt so much better because my father's human embrace was real. When I perform and the music feels perfect, I feel exactly as safe and loved as at that moment when I was born and put in my father-Bach's-music's arms.

Then I felt my father stroke my chin and my back to check that I did not have Spina Bifida like my brother Benedikt. I felt him marveling at my strength and health. I had felt the music touch my heart before, but now I thought Bach's music God had touched my skin and my whole being melted in pleasure. It felt like fireworks of

the most breathtaking beauty. Just like when everything works in a performance. When he kissed me because he was so thrilled I was healthy, I thought my whole soul intermingled with his and I felt strong and ready to face any hardships in life. It felt like I was filled with my music-God. I was completely one with him and this is why I was born. In performance I relive this. I struggle against all sorts of murderous thoughts and suddenly I am one with the music. I am not thinking, I become one with the music. This feels just as magical as it felt when my father kissed me the day I was born.

While he kissed me, he even cried. I felt how the nurses and the doctors were moved to tears at the sight of such warm love. I had felt consoled by music before, but now to feel his tears on my check, felt like my music God grieved for me with all his heart. On top of it so many people grieved for me too! It was the best moment in my life, when I felt people understood me and felt sorry for me. I could not shed tears as an infant and heal myself, but I was so grateful they were crying to help me heal. I also consider my performances best when I am moved to tears, and the audience is moved to tears.

But it was not true. No one understood how much I suffered in the womb, how much I suffered being born, and no one could possibly understand it now. I was completely alone in my sorrow as I am alone now in my grief for my terrified unborn self. But my madness saved me again and I could imagine that people—my audience—loved me and grieved for me. This feeling helped me to survive my hellish childhood. All hell broke loose the moment my birthmother suddenly came out of her shock to see her husband love his newborn more tenderly than he had ever loved anything else.

In her diary, my mother wrote that my father was laughing and she said: “Stop laughing so stupidly!” I believe I felt her fury to see his happiness, and I felt her tear me out of his arms. My whole being was suddenly flooded by her murderous hatred. It felt like the delicate being I was constructing in my father’s arms was blown apart by an atom bomb. I let out earsplitting screams. She pushed me so hard against her breast that I passed out.

I relive that moment every time I connect most deeply with the music, and suddenly everything goes blank. I cannot remember the music and my mind shuts off, just like when she suffocated me at birth. But I survived that and countless other attempts of my birthmother to kill and to maim me. I never stopped trying to get into music's arms, so that I could relive one of my happiest moments. It kept me alive as a tiny infant, toddler, and throughout my life. I have remembered many good things of my father, but I also have felt my despair that from the moment my birthmother tore me out of his arms until I was two, and I melted his heart with my declaration of love, he hated me because my birth had not made his wife as loving and happy as was when her first child, my living brother, was born.

Infancy. Until I was three-months old I fought furiously to live. However I believe that my birthmother fought just as furiously to get me to die. I believe she was just as frustrated that I would not die, as she was torn apart that Benedikt just would not die. Finally on the day that she had made the verdict that her son should die, she took a knife and nearly killed me. My terrified screams brought in a kind neighbor to save me. She carried my bloody body to the hospital and I did not see my parents for months. I believe my birthmother was institutionalized, while my father stayed home to work on an important presentation. From the hospital my father took me to a kind family, the Provilys, who loved baroque music. Now whenever I play baroque music I feel the wonderful calm of that time. But at first I wanted to die, because it had become completely clear to me that my parents did not want me to live. Then at the Provilys, I heard Bach's "Goldberg Variations" and I again answered its plea that I should go on living.

After my baptism, at seven months, I returned home. By now I had figured out that to survive I had to want to die. My birthmother was a sadist; when I wanted to live she tried to kill me, and when I wanted to die, she made sure I survived. I believe that she continued to want to hurt me as much as she felt I hurt her, but did not want to go again to a mental institution. So instead of physically hurting me, she concentrated on sexually abusing me. It was perfect way to hide her

insanity: no one even noticed how the sexual abuse gave me enormous pain as I lay there without being able to scream or to fight back, and no one notices how it still kills me without me physically dying. Even now, it seems to me people prefer not to know about sexual abuse, and prefer to pretend it does not exist. That is what everybody around me did when I was young.

Finally while vacationing in Malaga Spain, when I was two, I finally found words to say what I felt: "Daddy, I love you, I want to marry you!" I got exactly what I wanted when my father bent over, hugged and kissed me, and called me his dear little Josephine. But because my birthmother punished me so brutally for it, I was terrified of ever trying to love again. I am still struggling to love others. After Malaga my father never touched me again. But I had touched my father's deeply buried heart. He liked me after that better than anyone else in the world. But I was too afraid of him to understand this until he was dead. I contented myself with music's magical arms to comfort me. They are there, but do not touch me, just like my father's arms.

Conclusion

Armin used to say that only the bravest people come to him. Now I understand him completely since I am able to feel every detail of my pain. I have never met anyone as eager as me to go into their pain. But for me it has been well worth it. Since writing this paper, I have recovered many more horrible memories of my first and second year. As a result I have received great consolation in remembering many wonderful things about my interaction with my loving grandfather (my father's father). I also just realized that I felt great with Armin, because he loved books and music like my father. I think of Armin telling me when I felt afraid and hurt by another, "They are just fighting something in themselves." My birthmother must be fighting a whole lot of things within herself. All she made me suffer has nothing

to do with me. I find it incredibly sad, because she could not tell me about it in a different way.

After the “summit” of my therapy, I realized that I had not only been crippled and blinded by my terror of performance; my earliest experiences had crippled and blinded me in every aspect of life. Just by remembering and feeling my pain, and putting words to the pain as I remember it, suddenly I felt I could see and take action like other people. It felt like I had been blind and suddenly I could see a wonderful new exciting world with endless opportunities. It felt like I had been crippled and suddenly I could walk. I feel so joyous of my newfound movement that I cannot stop jumping and doing cartwheels. I do not know anybody who is happier than me.

I also suddenly felt no need to have regular psychotherapy sessions anymore. My past ceased to force me to do things I did not want to do. Suddenly an endless calm replaced the countless hurricanes within me. I feel like I have re-entered into life after living for fifty years in limbo. Just as I chose to have the “Goldberg Variations” help me resurrect as if I was reborn in therapy, I chose to live when I felt Bach’s pain in his music. Though sometimes I feel anger, fear, or anxiety, I now think: “Oh. Behind those feelings is something incredibly painful from my past. I can feel those emotions without acting them out instantly. I can choose to explore them now, later, or do nothing at all.”

Armin used to say even before I had any memories: “It is a miracle you survived.” Now I can say to Armin: “Yes, it is a miracle that I could adopt Bach’s music and get the love I needed from the music to survive a birthmother who wanted me dead. But it is an even greater miracle how I have learned to live gloriously by making the most of music and the most of my therapy. But it would have been so much easier if my parents simply could have loved me.”

Then again, if I had had no childhood pain, I would never have met the two most extraordinary people in my life: Grace and Armin. Thank you Grace and Armin for giving me companionship in the most painful and the most extraordinary journey of my life.

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Table 1. *My traumatic memories*

FETAL AGE	ACTUAL EVENT	WHAT I FELT
IN UTERO		
0	I am conceived	12. TERROR: So much hate and pain I nearly die
1-2 months	Parents become aware of pregnancy	8. SAVED: I am surrounded by music Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier"
2-3 months	Near miscarriage	13. TERROR: Clashing of titans, no music. A sea monster will devour me. I am too terrified to remember the music. I nearly die
	My father returns	9. SAVED by The "Goldberg Variations" played by Wanda Landowska
6 months	My parents visit their parents in Germany	6. LOVED My father's father loved me. Everyone shames and ridicules him. He never loves me openly again 11. SAD: No music, no grandfather loving me, I nearly died.
	My parents return to Holland	11. SAVED by Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier"
9 months	The contractions for birth start	

FETAL AGE	ACTUAL EVENT	WHAT I FELT
BIRTH		
First 10 minutes	Birth September 5, 1965	<p>13. TERROR: Enormous breasts are suffocating me!</p> <p>2. DIVINE HAPPINESS: My father’s arms. I believe I am in music’s arms.</p> <p>INDESCRIBABLE PAIN: my birthmother rips me out of my father’s arms.</p>
Next 30 minutes	In nursery, just after birth	<p>4. ANGER: Screaming non-stop for my father’s arms.</p> <p>14. DISMAY: my father inquires after me but I feel how he now despises me, because I did not make his wife happy. I am dying. No arms, no music, and no love. I am dying. A nurse tries in vain to revive me with love and food. She finally understands I want music.</p> <p>10. SAVED by Bach’s b minor fugue from the “Well-Tempered Clavier I.”</p> <p>It does not feel as good as my father’s arms, but at least I feel loved. I feel SAD I have to make do with that, but at least it does not despise me.</p>
0-9 years	My Father Works 1966-1975	<p>SAFE: I felt safe from the attacks of my birthmother, because she never attacked me in his presence. He never touched me or came near me but he always played music on his stereo while at home. So I felt music kept me safe.</p> <p>FRIGHTENED: But much of the time there was no father to play the music; he often traveled to conferences, to lectures, to colleagues in Germany, and to do research India. I believe this is how he coped with the horrors of family life. But when he was gone, my life was horrific.</p>

FETAL AGE	ACTUAL EVENT	WHAT I FELT
BIRTH		
<p>0-3 months</p>	<p>At the end of this period, around Christmas time, I am separated from my parents</p> <p>My birthmother reenacts Benedikt's life</p>	<p>1. TERROR: my birthmother tries to slowly kill me and handicap me like Benedikt, by neglecting me, starving me, throwing me down, suffocating me, and sexually abusing me. When I refuse to die like Benedikt after 3 months, She uses a knife to sexually abuse me. I feel like she wants to slit me open to tear my heart out and eat it.</p> <p>RELIEF: a neighbor hears my bloodcurdling screams and speaks up for me. My father cannot pretend nothing is wrong any longer. He takes over my care.</p> <p>3. DELIGHT: at last my father's arms. Even if he despises me it feels great. At least he does not hurt me and I feel safe.</p>

FETAL AGE	ACTUAL EVENT	WHAT I FELT
INFANCY		
<p>4-8 months</p>	<p>At the Provilys January-May, 1966</p> <p>A loving Dutch family takes care of me while my father works at home and my birthmother is institutionalized.</p>	<p>7. ANNOYANCE: I cannot love them; I hate all humans since my grandfather withdrew his love of my fetal self.</p> <p>7. SADNESS: No father’s arms, no music, I nearly die.</p> <p>SAVED: Glenn Gould playing The “Goldberg Variations”</p>
<p>8 months</p>	<p>Baptism May 29, 1966</p>	<p>THEY LIE! My parents stage a huge baptism to hide their pain and the havoc in their nuclear family</p> <p>LOVED by my whole extended German family, most of all by my grandfather.</p> <p>TERROR in my birthmother’s arms</p> <p>SAFE in my father’s and grandfather’s arms</p> <p>LOVED surrounded by Pachelbel’s Canon</p> <p>TERROR: On the pretense that I am tired (I do not stop screaming in her arms), my birthmother takes me back to her parent’s place. She severely physically and sexually abuses me to punish me for trying to reveal the truth by screaming whenever I am in her arms. Then she locks me in an ancient attic and returns to the festivities. Severely bruised and alone, I nearly die.</p> <p>SAVED: by remembering Pachelbel’s Canon</p>

FETAL AGE	ACTUAL EVENT	WHAT I FELT
MY TERRIBLE TWOS		
<p>2 years</p>	<p>I become friends with our neighbor's little girl, Suzanne, Fall of 1967.</p>	<p>TERROR: my father disappears LOVED: Every day I run out of the house to seek safety in my neighbor's Suzanne's house. Her father is a composer and the house is filled with music. He loves me and is concerned about me.</p>
<p>2 years</p>	<p>Sinterklaas December 5, 1967 My parents throw a huge party for the Dutch Santa Claus</p>	<p>DESPERATE: My birthmother promises me my father will come back and he will forgive me for being a bad girl if I memorize a long and complex poem for the company. It is as hard as memorizing the "Goldberg Variations" to play in public, but in the end I delight the company with my memorized poem. DESPAIR: I had done it to get my father to love me again. But all I got was a pat on the head and he was unimpressed. He even seemed annoyed when I declared the poem was for my father not for my birthmother. TERROR: My birthmother feels I humiliated her by saying in public: "She a monster! She hurt me," while I hold my vagina. Suzanne's father is the only person there who understands that I want my birthmother to stop abusing me. He confronts my birthmother about the abuse, so she calls him a dirty Jew, and I never enter his house again. SHAME AND SELF HATRED: My birthmother locked me up for several days, while severely abusing me. Among other things she starved me and forced me to eat excrement. SADNESS: No father, no Suzanne's father, and no music. I nearly died.</p>

FETAL AGE	ACTUAL EVENT	WHAT I FELT
MY TERRIBLE TWOS		
<p style="text-align: center;">2 years</p>	<p>My father returns to live in the house again before Christmas, 1967</p>	<p>SAVED: My father returns. Because my father loved to listen to Bach’s “Christmas Oratorio,” I feel saved by Bach yet again.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">2 years</p>	<p>Vacation in Malaga, Spain. Week of April 17th, 1968</p>	<p>TERROR: My birthmother violently fights my father because he wants to return home. BRAVE: Although I am terrified, because I believe she will kill him, I say to my father: “Daddy, I love you! I want to marry you!” HAPPINESS: My father hugs and kisses me, and calls me his dear little Josephine. TERROR: On witnessing this, my birthmother physically abused my father so severely that I thought she had killed him. She then abused me so violently that I nearly died on the cold tiles of that hotel. SAVED: someone in the hotel played the Bach’s St. John Passion SAD: My father and I avoided each other after that. We never again touched each other. I became terrified of loving until in therapy I remembered how I had loved him before she punished me in Malaga. Then I could love again.</p>

FETAL AGE	ACTUAL EVENT	WHAT I FELT
MY TERRIBLE TWOS		
2 years	My uncle dies in a car crash May 13, 1968	TERRIFIED: I answer the phone. When I repeat the words I heard: “Wolfie is dead,” my birthmother beats me senseless.
2 years	My uncle’s widow and baby son move to Holland to live with us	RELIEF: No sexual or physical abuse for a long while. Now every time someone dies tragically I feel enormous relief. LOVE: I felt my baby cousin saved me. I could love him and small children ever since, because my birthmother did not punish me for loving him.

Note: I have numbered the memories that came to me right after by performance of the “Goldberg Variations” at the Summit. The numbering shows that they came from my earliest times and they show chaotically they came into my head. The numbering also shows how painful the thought was to me. In my quest to remember, I experienced always the least painful thoughts first.

Figure 1: *Letter to my parents regarding Benedikt*

Dr. Christoph Gralka, Bad Kreuznach
Specialist in children illnesses, Badeallee 8

October 10, 1962

To the Central Medical Insurance Administration:

Response to your enquiry about the child, Benedikt Gaeffke, born September 4, 1962 in Bad Kreuznach.

The above named child was transferred to pediatrics at St. Francis on September 8, 1962. It was born at the birthing center of Nurse Martha Petschel in Bad Kreuznach. Because of the Myelomeningocele in the lumbar verterbrae, it was referred to Dr. Morgenstern at the University of Mainz Pediatrics Department. He was asked to examine it and determine whether to operate. Afterwards the child was referred to my department.

They could not operate the Myelomeningocele, because the child refused to drink and became so weak that it ended up refusing to eat entirely. In addition to the nutritional disorders, the child contracted bronchopneumonia leading to an inflammation of the lungs (oedema of the lungs.) Ileus-like symptoms lead to a more critical condition with temperatures up to 40 centigrade, frequent vomiting, and a complete refusal to eat. The original Myelomeningocele led to signs of paralysis in the lower extremities and a moderate swelling of the head. Although the sack of the broken spinal cord always stayed shut, at no point in time were there meningitis-like symptoms.

Therefore it is clear, that the aforementioned malformation neither the cause of the necessary hospitalization, nor does this malformation have to do with treatment of the existing symptoms.

Sincerely,
