



CASE STUDY – “JENNY” LISTENING THERAPY

As based on the published works of Alfred A. Tomatis¹



Jenny, aged 72, had been trained as a musician. She had played piano and sung professionally from her early twenties in the club circuit and had been well known by the public and well-respected by her colleagues. By nature she had an out-going charismatic personality; and had been a handsome woman who attracted admirers professionally and socially. By the time she came to see me, she had not played or sung in public for nearly twenty years. She did not dwell on former glories, but she was apathetic and lacking direction in life. As she put it, “I was in the waiting room for God”. She had given up all activities, including playing the piano, even in her own home. Her reason for coming to me was a recommendation by a fellow musician who had undertaken the therapy herself for a totally un-related purpose, but felt that Jenny would benefit from the release of past anxiety and conflicts that the therapy can bring. Jenny reported that besides low energy; she had poor sleep, an unpredictable bladder and a deepening and croaky voice.

Her initial listening assessment showed that apart from the usual loss of frequencies in the upper registers that seems to be an inevitable part of the aging process, her selectivity² had closed down from 4000 hertz in both ears. Furthermore, the listening pattern in both ears began a sudden decline at 2000 hertz, which being in the language zone, indicated that communication was less than might have been expected, even to the point of being vague and inarticulate. In the right ear there was a scotoma in her receptivity to air conducted sound at 1000 hertz, which exposed the more sensitive bone conduction just at the point where communication begins. This would mean that sounds at 1000 hertz would be painful or annoying to Jenny. Her left ear also had exposed bone conduction below 500 hertz. As the left ear indicates the past, rather than the present; and 500 hertz is indicative of the lower parts of the body, this showed that there was a certain stress involved with the body image in the past that was affecting the present self image. It also indicates that the lower back is out of alignment.

Jenny undertook the full listening programme as described previously in this magazine. For the first part of the treatment she was told *not* to make music, even if the inclination took her! In the final week I could hardly keep her from the piano which I provide at the centre.

The final listening assessment shows that the closed selectivity has been raised in the right ear and has totally disappeared in the left ear. Generally the listening curves of both ears and both air-borne and bone-conducted sounds have been raised. Although the positive gain in decibels is not significant, the pattern and proportion is much better and the scotoma at 1000 hertz in the right ear is gone, leaving the exposed bone receptivity well and truly protected. In the left ear the bone conduction below 500 hertz is also now shielded by the more efficient air-conducted receptivity and it has facilitated a straighter posture. Although her listening does decline at 2000 hertz still, the sharpness of the decline is gone and there is a gradual incline rather than the sheer cliff face that existed before.

At this time, Jenny reported that she felt her ribs had lifted and indeed she did appear taller and straighter; and not the hunched little figure she had presented when she first came to see me. She reported a lot more energy and sounder sleep. Moreover she said that there had been an awakening of her senses of observation, being a delicacy and sweetness of perception previously unknown to her. Her bladder now functioned in a more regular pattern.³ Her voice has lost its croak and is certainly higher, more vibrant and more melodious. She reported improved concentration, attention and interest in her surroundings and the doings of other people again.

Six months on Jenny has written to me that the positive changes continue to multiply. In addition to playing the piano and singing again at home, she has played in front of other people for her own pleasure and has even performed in public! She has become more gregarious and increased contacts with friends and neighbours. She had formerly felt ill at ease with her son and his family and had virtually resigned herself to an informal estrangement. She is now able to initiate contact without the fear of being rejected and sees other avenues of contact opening up before her. She reports being unconsciously and naturally more articulate and coming out with words and long sentences that she had lost the sharpness of mind (and ingenuousity) to use in a

proper setting. She has now taken up line dancing and amazes the class (who are minimum twenty years her junior) with her ability to memorize and execute complex movements with seemingly little effort. In her own words, she “felt unattractive before”, but she now has enjoyed several flirtations and “this reminder that you can still be attractive at my age has made me more comfortable with my appearance”. She had always had a fear of heights, so much so that she could not sit in a theatre except in the parterre, but she reports that this too is a thing of the past and on a recent holiday she took a helicopter ride and rode on a chair lift, things which would have been unthinkable to her at any time in the past. Her old friends have described her as “more youthful, energetic, happier, calmer, relaxed...”. She is more grounded in her environment and the day to day realities of life; and this means she is more aware and receptive to the sensibilities of others. In terms of her music, she reports that she now has a greater appreciation of the sweetness of instruments and the way they are played. The discords are “more obvious too!”, but the sounds of the various birds calling at twilight, which she did not notice (hear? – listen to?) before have never been so good.

¹ Interested readers can find a short description of the Tomatis Listening Therapy in my previous article, Your Voice is a Barometer of Your Health in *Positive Health* . Issue 70, November 2001.

² “Selectivity” is the ability to distinguish higher and lower tones in a sequence.

³ I am making no claim for any direct link between listening and bladder problems – this is merely what Jenny reported to me at her final assessment.

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