

**TERESA CAN READ**

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# Teresa Can Read

*When we adopted Teresa, they told us she was deaf. Fortunately, they were wrong. But her listening skills had not been properly developed during her first year of life, and she was having severe learning difficulties. A remarkable method of stimulating the muscles of the middle ear has changed her life.*

*Diane Fuller*

**W**e adopted our daughter Teresa in 1977, when she was 11 months old. We were told that she was deaf due to nerve damage and would never hear sounds softer than loud drumbeats. She already had a hearing aid and some familiarity with sign language. After Teresa had been with us for a week, I began to suspect that she could hear.

I phoned the social worker and timidly asked, "If I tell you Teresa is not deaf, will you tell me you are going to take her back?" Of course, he answered, "No!"

Things were definitely looking up. Hearing tests proved that her hearing was normal. Furthermore, because some of our other children had experienced severe reactions to milk and food additives, we had switched to a wholesome family diet and, in the process, acquired a few acres of land as well as some livestock, including two milk goats. Teresa's deafness, according to the tests, had been the result of an allergy to cow's



Photos courtesy Sound Listening & Learning Center, Phoenix

milk, not nerve damage. And miraculously, her "chosen" family did not use cow's milk!

## Hearing without Listening

Although Teresa was no longer deaf, her listening skills had not been properly developed during her first

year of life. Consequently, her speech was several years behind that of her peers. By the time she began school, she had severe learning difficulties.

As the years passed, it became clear that Teresa could not understand verbal commands and could not remember the names of colors or the letters of the alphabet. Even so, she had a great sense of humor and appreciated subtle incidents, especially those with visual cues. And despite the cruel teasing and rejection she experienced at school, she had a lovely personality and was nearly always cheerful and polite. As a result, when she was in grade 7, she was asked to work part-time after school in a group home for mentally and physically challenged teenagers. While working with these youngsters, she showed great sensitivity and compassion.

Still, Teresa's listening and speaking skills remained severely compromised. And for her, reading was a nightmare—how she hated it! Even with exceptional remedial teaching at

school and hours of help at home, she was reading at a grade 2 level in grade 8. That was the year we learned about C.A.L.L. (Center for the Advancement of Listening & Language) in Regina, Saskatchewan. Having heard that the center successfully treated many types of learning disabilities, Teresa was eager to see what could be done for her. Her father and I told her that such a trip would be out of the question—the center was over 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) away, and testing and

sical case and an ideal candidate for the Tomatis Method. We arranged for testing the following week.

The testing showed that although Teresa's hearing was normal, her auditory selectivity and discrimination skills were either blocked or stalled at the three- to four-year-old level. She was unable to understand the sounds within the voice range because the muscles in her middle ear were not working quickly enough. In fact, these muscles were reacting at half the speed required by

would change from a "dull, black-and-white monotone" to a "technicolor" tonality. She was indeed an ideal candidate for the program.

We decided to let Teresa try the Tomatis Method, and so began a year-long course of treatment. We also began to learn more about this fascinating method and about Dr. Tomatis, the genius behind it.

### The Tomatis Method

Born in 1920 in France, Doctor



treatment were very expensive. Propelled by a great desire to read, Teresa offered to contribute to the effort the \$1,000 she had saved from her job. How could we refuse?

In early November 1990, I phoned C.A.L.L. for details about the program, hoping to determine if it could even benefit Teresa. We were asked to forward completed questionnaires, along with school and medical records, to Dr. Bob Roy, the clinical psychologist in charge of the program. Dr. Roy responded by informing us that Teresa sounded like a clas-

normal listener. Thus, she could not understand what she was hearing because people were speaking too quickly for her. No wonder she was having such difficulty with language!

The tests also showed that Teresa had a very well-balanced personality profile and a healthy disposition. Dr. Roy told us that if she completed the program, we could expect her to become more spontaneous, assertive, and self-confident; as she developed her listening skills, we would see an improvement in her language skills; and her voice

Alfred A. Tomatis is a ear, nose, and throat physician specializing in hearing and language difficulties. Over the past 45 years, he has refined a way to stimulate the muscles of the middle ear and thereby enhance the development of listening, language, and communication skills. In the process, he has designed specialized equipment, including an "Electronic Ear" that accentuates and diminishes different frequencies of sound, stimulating the muscles of the ear to improve their response to a wide range of sound frequencies. The

improved response to sound appears to generate improvement in a number of other areas: attention span and concentration, bodily control, eye contact, mood and spirit, as well as listening, language, confidence, self-expression, posture, and energy level.

Dr. Tomatis began his work by focusing on the disorders of opera singers and musicians. He soon discovered that his techniques ameliorated other conditions as well, including a wide variety of learning disabilities, brain dysfunction, autism, hyperactivity, depression, stuttering, dyslaterality, and some auditory disorders. In time, individ-

uals who studied with him formed treatment centers specializing in these techniques.

Today, there are over 200 accredited Tomatis centers worldwide, primarily in Europe. Over the past decade alone, more than a dozen centers have opened in North America [see Sidebar]. All Tomatis centers are professionally directed by practitioners in either medicine, education, psychology, speech and language therapy, or music therapy.

Treatment need not be confined to these centers. In fact, one of the most exciting applications of the Tomatis Method is in the school setting.

School-based programs bring together groups of children with similar types of learning disabilities to spend time each day listening through headphones to classical music, mostly Mozart. While listening, the children work on puzzles, play games, and engage in other passive activities, hardly aware that their middle ear muscles are being exercised. Very soon, their listening skills begin to improve. Gradually, their reading, writing, and math skills improve as well.

In the 1970s, several schools in Canada began using the Tomatis Method. Although the results of trials held in these schools were encouraging, the method was not recognized by mainstream educators. And whereas parents of children enrolled in these programs responded with enthusiasm, they were unable to fund the costs of the trained personnel and specialized equipment that were needed. Consequently, the school programs have been discontinued. Canadians grieve the loss, convinced that countless years of frustration and suffering by children, parents, and teachers alike can be avoided by ensuring the wide availability of this method.

The future, however, looks promising. With continuing progress in Tomatis technology, more advanced, automated techniques may someday allow the method to fit into the budgets of many Canadian schools. In addition, some school systems in the United States have shown interest in the Tomatis Method. The hope is that these schools will successfully adapt the method to the school setting and mother it to maturity.

#### Teresa's "Sonic Birth"

Teresa began her sessions at C.A.L.L. by spending two or more hours a day for 7 to 10 days every two months wearing earphones and listening to "scratchy" music on the Electronic Ear. For the first part of the program, she listened to Mozart and to a recording of my voice made earlier, while I was reading her a story. Through the wonders of Tomatis, this recording, like the music of Mozart, was "filtered" until the only perceptible sounds were the high-frequency tones reminiscent of those Teresa had heard prenatally through the amniotic fluid of the womb.

## How the Tomatis Method Helped Me

*Teresa Fuller*

I failed grade 1. I couldn't understand what the teacher was talking about because I had lots of learning disabilities. I had a lot of learning assistance.

In grade 8, I was reading at a grade 2 level. I felt dumb and no good. I was teased a lot because I wasn't smart like the other kids, and I felt so bad.

When I went to the Center for the Advancement of Listening & Language in Regina, they gave me a listening test to see if they could help me. They said they could help me and started me on the Tomatis program. I listened to scratchy Mozart music and my mother's voice, which was so scratchy I didn't know who it was. While listening to the music through earphones, we were allowed to play board games and cards and to draw. It was fun. The people were nice there. Every time I went, they tested my listening to see if I was better.

In the last few months of the program, I repeated words and sentences through a microphone every day for half an hour to help improve my voice. At home, I had reading exercises to do out loud every day to help my listening. I still do the exercises.

When I finished the program, I noticed lots of changes. My voice

was clearer. My writing was better, and people could read it! I could open up to people. A year after I finished the program, my reading was at a grade 7 level. Before the program, I had been able to read Dr. Seuss books, and now I can read novels. I could never read novels before!

Before when I was talking to people, I was scared because I would always mumble. People talked too fast, and I couldn't understand what they were saying, so I had to say, "Pardon me, I didn't hear you." I am not so scared to talk to people anymore. It is great to talk to people. I have improved so much in my schoolwork and my friendships.

Even though the Tomatis Method costs so much money, to me it was worth it. If I had a child with a learning disability, I would do everything I could to help. I would want to take my child for treatment by the Tomatis Method.

*Teresa Fuller (18) loves music of all kinds, from techno to Mozart, as well as sports, boys, and the telephone. For the past four years, she has been working with children with disabilities, and she hopes to continue working as a caregiver after finishing grade 12 this coming June.*



Because of the changes caused by both the filtering and the Electronic Ear, she did not know she was listening to my voice.

Over the months, the muscles in Teresa's ears were re-developed until she was ready to experience what is called the "sonic birth." To facilitate this event, the recording of the mother's voice is gradually "unfiltered" so that the sounds once heard as if conducted through the prebirth medium of water are eventually heard as if conducted through the postbirth medium of air. One memorable day, Teresa heard the scratchy high-frequency sounds fade, and the sounds of my true voice take their place.

After experiencing the sonic birth, Teresa suddenly began asking me questions about her birthmother and birthfather. She was very moved to learn that her birthmother not only had severe learning disabilities, but spoke little and was unable to read or write. Knowing from personal experience how difficult it must have been for her birthmother, Teresa smiled and said, "Oh, then she

didn't give me away because she didn't want me!" Then and there, Teresa decided that when she grew up, she was going to find her birthmother and take her to C.A.L.L. to be helped with *her* learning disabilities too. Teresa's attitude toward her adoption shifted as well. A happy child, she had never been outwardly negative about her adoption; now, however, she seemed more content.

The sonic birth, we learned, often brings about feelings of well-being, an increased alertness to surroundings, and an enhanced desire to communicate. Angry outbursts may also arise as the child unleashes past frustrations, after which a greater closeness develops between parent and child. The listening problems of many children, especially those who are adopted, result from the emotional trauma suffered upon separation from their birthmothers. And the sonic birth helps heal this trauma.

The sonic birth was an exciting milestone for Teresa. Immediately, she began to notice changes in her intellectual and social life. She had

been the butt of many children's jokes and, unable to understand their rapid speech when they insulted her, would ask innocently, "What do you mean?" Now things were different. One day, Teresa came home from school and gleefully announced, "One of the boys was teasing me, and I just turned to him and said, 'Why don't you grow up?' He was so surprised! He got all flustered and didn't know what to say!" How right Dr. Roy was when he told us Teresa was going to become "a force to be reckoned with."

#### Teresa's Linguistic Birth

During the second part of the program, Teresa practiced speaking through a microphone while listening to herself on the Electronic Ear—activities designed to foster an improvement in speech. Dr. Roy explained what we might expect from Teresa upon our return home this time: "She will become more aggressive and argue with you more for a while, but it is necessary for her to go through this"

and "she may be angrier" or "very tired and sleep more than usual" or "have more vivid dreams that she recalls more easily."

After each subsequent visit to Regina, my husband and I did notice little differences in Teresa. She

seemed more "with it." We did not have to explain things several different ways for her to understand what we meant. She began to look and act more confident too.

We noticed changes in ourselves as well. At C.A.L.L., while the chil-

dren attended their sessions on the Electronic Ear, mothers and fathers were invited to the parents' room to relax and participate in a group version of the Tomatis Method. Here we met other parents facing similar challenges with their children. Listening to the Tomatis-style music of Mozart, we learned of the suffering present in other families. We also shared our mutual joy at having finally found something that was helping our children. And curiously enough, the "scratchy" music was helping us too. My husband and I commented that either the stress level was decreasing or our ability to handle it was increasing. Other parents, meanwhile, were noticing a stark improvement in their language skills, balance, and posture.

All the parents I spoke with agreed that Dr. Roy's predictions for their children had been accurate. Most parents also found that sharing their frustrations with others provided enormous relief. Those who participated in the individual and family counseling part of the program were especially pleased. Mothers and fathers of children with autism, hyperactivity, learning disabilities, and behavior problems found the counseling and encouragement extremely helpful.

As a family from out of town, we also took advantage of the hospitality and generosity of the staff at Martha House, just around the corner from the center. There, as parents and a child associated with the C.A.L.L. program, we were offered room and board at very reasonable rates. Many deep friendships have grown from those days of living together at Martha House.

Altogether, we visited Regina six times between November 1990 and September 1991, when Teresa completed the program. Her "closing day" instructions were to read out loud for half an hour daily to stimulate her listening. Since then, Teresa has returned to C.A.L.L. twice for a "booster." She may return again if the need arises.

When Teresa started the program, she was having great difficulty with grade 2 reading. A year after completing the program, she was attempting grade 7 reading. Her math has also improved. Her self-confidence and ability to understand the spoken language are

## North American Tomatis Centers

### USA

Tomatis Center  
2701 E. Camelback Rd., Ste. 205  
Phoenix, AZ 85016  
602-381-0086

Tomatis Centre, Inc.  
55 Madison Ave., Ste. 400  
Denver, CO 80206  
303-320-4411

Tomatis Listening Center  
3901 Houma Blvd., Ste. 109  
Metairie, LA 70006  
504-887-6270

The Listening Center  
12800 Hillcrest Rd., Ste. 101  
Dallas, TX 75230  
214-404-8152

Spectrum Center - Tomatis Method  
4715 Cordell Ave., 3rd Floor W  
Bethesda, MD 20814  
301-657-0988

Tomatis Center  
3700 Mount Diablo Blvd., Ste. 300  
Lafayette, CA 94549  
510-284-8431

Tomatis Center  
135 Summer St.  
Amherst, MA 01002  
413-549-0901

Institute for Music, Health  
& Education  
PO Box 4179  
Boulder, CO 80306  
303-443-8484

### Canada

Center for the Advancement of

Listening & Language (C.A.L.L.)  
408 Broad St., Ste. 208  
Regina, Saskatchewan S4R 1X3  
Canada  
306-543-9951

The Listening Center  
599 Markham St.  
Toronto, Ontario M6G 2L7 Canada  
416-588-4136

### Mexico

Centro de Servicios Auditivos de  
Monterrey  
#2010 Pte., Col. Obispaño  
Monterrey, N.L., Mexico  
52(83)47-18-05

Centro Escucha Torreón  
Guadalquivir #406, Colonia Navar-  
ro  
Torreón, Coah., Mexico  
52(17)13-52-94

Servicios Auditivos del Centro  
Gijón #114, Col. Arbide 37360  
León, Gto., Mexico  
52(471)5-65-12

Centro de Estimulación Auditiva  
de Guadalajara  
Calle Terranoras #1440  
Col. Providencia, Guadalajara,  
Mexico  
52(36)41-45-58

Centro Tomatis del Sureste  
Calle 23 #160 X 6Y8  
Merida, Yuc., Mexico

### Panama

Centro Auditivo Tomatis Panama  
Avenida Cuba, Calle 4054  
Buena Vista, Panama City, Panama

much better. And she has a far more expressive voice. Still, it is difficult to know what she is ultimately capable of mastering. Teresa's determination to catch up on the educational opportunities she missed during her 14 years with a severe listening disability will be the deciding factor.

One thing is for sure: the positive effects that the Tomatis Method have had on Teresa's academic and social abilities are enormous. She has come a great distance from "the little deaf baby" we adopted 17 years ago. And now, at last, Teresa can read.

#### For More Information

*About the Tomatis Method.* Documentation of clinical research and practice by North American professionals. Available from Tomatis centers [see Sidebar listing].

Madaule, Paul. *When Listening Comes Alive: A Guide to Effective Learning and Communication.* Norval, Ontario, Canada: Moulin Publishing, 1993. A parent and teacher guide to preventing and treating learning disabilities, including at-home exercises to improve listening. Available from the publisher, at PO Box 560, Norval, Ontario L0P 1K0 Canada; 416-877-1254.

Tomatis, Alfred A. *The Conscious Ear.* New York: Station Hill Press, 1991. An autobiographic account, and the results of the finding that a primary function of the ear is to energize the nervous system.

*Note: Dr. Bob Roy cautions that although the Tomatis Method constitutes a significant breakthrough for listening-based language, learning, and behavior problems, it should not be viewed as a cure-all. Much research needs to be conducted before practitioners are able to fully understand all the mechanisms at play and who the best candidates for this treatment may be. Until then, a lengthy preliminary evaluation is of utmost importance.*

*Diane Fuller, a nonpracticing RN, (52) and her husband Roy have operated a group home for delinquent teenage boys, parented two teenage foster sons to adulthood, and provided boarding to single mothers. They also taught Natural Family Planning for 10 years. Diane and Roy live in Prince George, British Columbia, Canada, where Diane is studying to become a qualified homeopathic practitioner. Their four birthchildren and three adopted children with special needs range in age from 29 to 11.*