

ANA LISA: A JOURNEY OUT OF SILENCE



Eve Wiznitzer

When my son who has autism was eight years old and doing the Tomatis® program in Toronto (Canada) Dr. Tomatis told me that, “he would come out of his silence” ... today my son lives on his own and speaks two languages fluently.

—Eve Wiznitzer

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Eve was born in New York, raised in Miami, Florida, and has been a resident of the Republic of Panama for 37 years with her husband and partner, Leo. She graduated from Tulane University with a love for learning and a double major in 1973. When her eldest son was diagnosed with autism at two years of age she began a new career to help him reach his greatest potential. She participated and studied with Glenn Doman at the Institutes for the Development of Human Potential in Philadelphia for five years while learning how the central nervous system develops in a healthy child and what was needed to achieve these same milestones in a hurt child.

Eve's next step of study and learning was training in the Tomatis® Method under the direction of Dr. Alfred Tomatis, with an incredible team of professionals from Canada, Mexico and Paris. She opened a Tomatis® center in Panama in early 1991 as a private clinic. Noticing that many families did not have the resources to participate in the program she then began the long process to receive non-profit status. For the last four years Eve has run a non-profit center, reaching the neediest people in the country. FUNDET-TOMATIS® provides orientation to each family, nutritional guidelines, sensory integration strategies which can be completed at home, and classes to teach families how they can best help their child.

Eve's son Alex, diagnosed with autism so many years ago, has been living semi-independently in Coconut Creek, Florida, for the last ten years in his own apartment. He speaks, reads and writes English and Spanish perfectly, and is her inspiration for everything she does.

You can find out more about Eve and FUNDET-TOMATIS® at:
www.fundettomatispanama.org.

CHAPTER 3

Ana Lisa: a journey out of silence

Mr. and Mrs. Hernandez brought their daughter, Ana Lisa, to our Tomatis® center to see if we could assist in her ability to develop language and improve her behavior and social skills. During the first interview with her parents, we learned that although she had been an unplanned baby, the pregnancy proceeded to full term without any complications. Ana Lisa weighed six pounds and six ounces at birth, and was delivered by caesarean section because she never entered the birth canal and was in a seated position. From a Tomatis® perspective, this is seen as a very important indicator, as the initial dialogue between mother and baby is established in the uterine world during pregnancy. It is preferable for the baby to enter the birth canal, as this provides optimum conduction, including bone conduction sound. Dr. Tomatis referred to this period in the womb as, “nine months in paradise.” Ana Lisa experienced an initial loss of this process, which we believe strongly affected her communication.

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Ana Lisa was able to drink from a bottle well and she did not present problems of vomiting, but was extremely active both day and night and had sleeping difficulties. Ana Lisa underwent testing through an encephalogram at four months of age, though the results of the exam indicated no abnormalities. Her motor development was noted as being quite advanced; she started to crawl at four months of age and was able to turn from her back to stomach, and stomach to back. She was walking at ten months of age and established right-hand dominance before her first birthday. However, Ana Lisa was sickly and suffered from colds and viruses every 15 days and was given calcium and vitamin B-12 supplements to support her health. Her parents did not see significant changes from this support, and Ana Lisa underwent surgery to remove her adenoids and tonsils when she was two and a half years old. Her health improved after this treatment.

She was brought to our Tomatis® center two months after the operation, and was at this time already receiving speech therapy three times a week, with minimal results. She was also participating in occupational therapy twice a week and a behavior modification program for an hour every day. Before her operation her frequent bouts of illness made it difficult for her to attend her therapies, but she enjoyed good health when she underwent her program at our center.

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During our first interview we learned that Ana Lisa was still using diapers during both the day and night. Her inability to sleep well at night may have been caused in part by not attaining sufficient rhythmic breathing, and also possibly indicated an underdeveloped neurological system. Ana Lisa exhibited sensory difficulties and it was determined that a sensory integration program would be of assistance to promote greater progress in all areas while doing the Tomatis® program. We also felt that the use of Gregorian chants would help Ana Lisa regulate her breathing and perhaps help her begin to sleep easier.

Initial assessment

A developmental scale questionnaire, which includes gross and fine motor control development, sensitivity to touch and textures, visual development and vestibular questions, was completed by Ana Lisa's parents for this initial process—Mrs. Hernandez is a dedicated full-time mother, and Mr. Hernandez works as a supervisor. We use this for comparison with what we observe in the therapy room, and also to indicate progress with each visit. This type of questionnaire also provides us with an indication of the parent's perception of their child, and what they believe the significant areas of developmental delays are.

During the initial assessment we noted that Ana Lisa did not babble or use language. She was very active and easily distracted and spent a significant amount of time focused on repeatedly opening and closing the windows. We also observed that she had great difficulty maintaining eye contact. Her pediatrician had recently mentioned that Ana Lisa may have been exhibiting a few autistic traits and her parents were advised to complete a full neurological evaluation. Mrs. Hernandez was unfamiliar with the term “autism” and so her search began.

We decided to implement the Tomatis® program for Ana Lisa, specifically targeting improving her language skills and her ability to pay attention. We also wanted to provide her parents with information regarding other activities that could be beneficial for her. Considering the types of difficulties that Ana Lisa had, we decided to complete a very slow program in order to give her time to relax and become more grounded, providing her with a greater foundation to open up her listening. Our goal was to improve her sleep patterns and decrease her irritability by reducing her stress and tension. We also decided to alleviate the effects of Ana Lisa's birth experience by using a high-pitched filter on a recording of her mother's

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voice to re-create the sounds of the prenatal environment, which can assist in relieving stress and anxiety. From the outset of our treatment program we planned on delivering a longer program, with a fourth phase to provide the necessary time to work through the “sonic birth.”

The importance of a good diet

It is our experience that the children arriving at our center all need to have healthier diets and we strongly encourage all families to begin a diet

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that limits processed foods, colorants, nitrates, chemicals, additives and sugar. We also recommend that they try a gluten-free diet for six to eight weeks, as we have noted over the last 20 years that it has a tremendous impact on children diagnosed with ADD, ADHD, autism and Asperger syndrome, as well as children who struggle with challenging behavior and impulsivity. We ask all the parents to try the gluten-free diet so that we can observe any and all changes in behavior due to the elimination of wheat and gluten, and about 80 per cent of the children we see respond positively to this diet.

Working together

In our efforts to inform and teach parents we also give the families various tactile-sensory exercises, vestibular exercises and sensory integration exercises that can be easily incorporated into their daily routine.

Behavior modification ideas

All parents are given guidelines to implement new “rules and regulations” to assist in establishing them as the authority figures in the home. Because we want to negotiate a platform through which children learn that they

cannot receive what they want through tantrums or negative behavior, we also assist parents with ideas that will support their children in new and novel situations, preparing them to react to more positive behavior. We also recommend that they use calendars to provide predictability and routine in their child's life.

Parents are advised to decrease their children's television-viewing time and use of computer and video games, as these have a hypnotic effect and are in many ways addictive, reinforcing exactly what we are aiming to change. Our goal is to have the children become more active, playful and communicative. Research is also indicating now that the extremely low frequencies and electromagnetic fields affect the way information is received in the brain—it's possible that the electronic fields surrounding us are scrambling messages sent to us. We live with 60,000 satellites, radio and cell phone towers sending signals and interfering with our thinking. We can only imagine how sensitive children become in our environment today as they are bombarded by these high-energy waves.

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Beginning the therapy

During the first week of therapy we observed that Ana Lisa was a very fast learner. She adapted quickly to the headsets, and although she often knocked them off she allowed us to put them back on. While listening to the music we worked on her fine motor skills and sensory systems by doing puzzles, coloring with crayons, painting, tearing paper, using glue, making paper balls and playing with clay. Her reception of these activities became easier as the program progressed. During parts of her program we used flash cards to work on receptive language and useful daily vocabulary. We used a large Marsden ball as we worked on her vestibular exercises. We

helped her to build with blocks on the floor and worked with her on the floor applying various tactile, sensory and balance exercises. When Ana Lisa got upset during her first intensive she would throw herself, or whatever she had in her hand, onto the floor in anger. While listening to the children's songs her facial expressions became much happier and she began to try to sing along. Each day, Ana Lisa received two hours of listening stimulation. Over time, our little one began to listen to the instructions of the therapists and was more cooperative; when she got upset she was able to settle down faster and continue playing with another game or toy. She actually began to enjoy the tactile exercises of painting with her hands (or on her hands) and working with glue, and she easily completed many puzzles that were age appropriate.

Welcome back!

After a four-week break, Mrs. Hernandez reported to us that her daughter was using single words, such as *mama*, *mine*, and *tete* ("baby bottle" in Spanish). Amazingly, she was controlling her bowels almost totally! All the dietary recommendations had been implemented, as well as the other advice from the orientation. Her mother reported many things: that her daughter was now playing with a Barbie™ doll, was able to ride a tricycle, could walk down a staircase with better balance, and helped with getting dressed and undressed, which she had not done before.

Ana Lisa was very happy to return to Tomatis® to use the crayons, complete the puzzles, get sticky with glue and work with clay during her second intensive. This was a tremendous change since the beginning of her first program. During this second session of Tomatis®, Ana Lisa tried again to sing along with the children's songs, and while listening to the filtered recording of her mother's voice we could all see how hard she was concentrating as she tried to understand the words. Ana Lisa had managed to adapt to a full gluten-free and casein-free diet. Her behavior was less erratic and she was able to pay attention for longer periods of time.

Remarkable results

Ana Lisa turned three during her third intensive, and was going to preschool with a tutor by this stage. Mrs. Hernandez noted that she could take Ana Lisa to church, that she would play with the other children and was also tolerant when she took her to do daily errands. She commented that Ana Lisa now had a need to talk and that she had started using baby talk. Mrs. Hernandez had taken all the recommendations from our Tomatis® center very seriously—she had been completing a series of vestibular exercises every day, and was using a bathing routine that was provided during the first parent orientation. Not only had Mrs. Hernandez done everything we recommended, she had invented her own exercises as well. She told us that she would take her daughter to the kitchen and put something in the blender and then have Ana Lisa push the “on” switch—a great auditory conditioning exercise, which helped her overcome her fear of the sounds made by many of the appliances within the home. Additionally, the “big calendar,” an activity that they had done daily for several months, showed that she had learned her numbers rapidly.

Within the therapy room, Ana Lisa participated in all the activities and was attentive to the therapists, as well as the other children she was seated with. We were all very satisfied with her progress and asked Mrs. Hernandez to bring Ana Lisa for a fourth program, to do what Dr. Tomatis called a “sonic birth.”

Great success!

Ana Lisa took a four-week break before returning for her fourth program and by then

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her mother was completely satisfied with her progress. Amazingly, Ana Lisa was now completely diaper-free, using underpants day and night, and her mother said she did it all on her own. Mrs. Hernandez had not worked to achieve this goal by using a schedule of taking her to the toilet—Ana Lisa simply and spontaneously did not need her diapers anymore. At the same time she gave up her bottle and began to drink from a cup. She began to repeat words and the language therapist expressed pleasure at her progress. At this point, when Ana Lisa went with her mother to do errands she was more patient and was able to wait in line. She was also no longer isolated—she looked for other children and began to share with them. This is something we also worked on during her first three intensive programs in the therapy room, which is set up with tables where the children sit. Ana Lisa was learning to share her space, to take turns and to share the educational materials.

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At the beginning of the fourth phase Ana Lisa's mother was going to start occupational therapy with her as they continued with the behavior modification therapy. Ana Lisa's parents said that her tantrums were shorter and less frequent and that she was paying much more attention to everything. Because of all of these changes in their daughter, Ana Lisa's parents' relationship had improved dramatically—they were able to go out together as a family, and even go to the movies. Ana Lisa also responded excellently to the casein-free and gluten-free diet and her parents continued to be vigilant about maintaining it.

Ana Lisa today

When Ana Lisa began the Tomatis® program our goals were to open up her listening in order to improve her attention and ability to use language. Looking at the results after the first four intensive programs we found that

we had made good progress in both areas. Today, Ana Lisa is using short phrases and is more independent, often making her own decisions. And when her mother gives her instructions to do something she is very cooperative. Mrs. Hernandez says that her daughter is very much like every other three-year-old child, and her grandparents, relatives, friends and teachers agree. We strongly feel that without the dedication of Mrs. Hernandez, Ana Lisa's progress would have been less. In this respect Ana Lisa is a lucky little girl. Ana Lisa's family is very satisfied with her progress and they continue working with her daily. Our little one keeps growing!

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