

VICTOR: A JOURNEY THROUGH FEAR TO HAPPINESS



Hilde Tinkl and Barbara Thima

I think I had demonstrated that the human being was an ear in its entirety, but it is the phylogenetic evolution of all species that leads us to identical conclusions. In fact, all living organisms are engaged in a dynamic which takes place through a network destined to transfer information. Therefore, nothing that is in rapport with the vibratory world could exist without exercising an action on the whole human body.

—Alfred Tomatis, *Écouter l'Univers*

Hilde Tinkl

Hilde was born in Vienna in 1958 and is married with two children—Bernhard, born in 1985, and Gregor, born in 1988. After a pedagogic study, she spent ten years teaching at a general secondary school. Since then she has also been active working with children in several institutions in her spare time.

Hilde started a Tomatis® program in 1993 due to her own hearing problems and her son Gregor's severe handicap. Convinced by the effectiveness of the Tomatis® Method, Hilde completed a Tomatis® consultant training program in Paris and Germany in 1995, and opened a Tomatis® center in Vienna in the same year, which she leads together with Barbara Thima. In 1997 she opened a second center in Salzburg, in collaboration with her colleague Carla Sommerauer.

Hilde is a founding member of the International Association of Registered Certified Tomatis® Consultants, and she can be contacted at **www.tomatis.at**.

Barbara Thima

Barbara was born in Vienna in 1974. As a student, she worked in a youth center, giving lessons in English, German and mathematics to pupils between the ages of eight and 15; she also spent time taking care of children with special needs. While studying educational science and special education, she was required to complete work experience in several institutions. Consequently, she discovered the Tomatis® Method, and started working in Hilde Tinkl's center in 1997.

Barbara completed her Tomatis® consultant training in Germany in 2001, and she now specializes in depression, pregnancy, prenatal experiences, and children and their families. She also began studying to become a psychotherapist in September 2010.

Barbara is married with two children—a son born in 1996, and a daughter born in 2000.

CHAPTER 6

Victor: a journey through fear to happiness

Victor was two years old when he first came to our center with his mother. His father was Austrian and his mother was Egyptian, and although she spoke German very well, it was with a strong accent. His speech therapist had told his mother to speak only German (his father's language) with him, as being exposed to two languages may have been confusing him. Victor had great difficulties in speech and language and could not speak either Arabic or German clearly. But there was another reason they came to see us. Victor struggled with very severe hyperacusis—every noise frightened him, and he would react by hiding behind or near his mother and crying or shouting. This caused difficulty at home, because he could not bear the noise of the washing machine, kitchen appliances, or even the sound of someone stirring a pot. When his mother was cooking, Victor had to be taken to

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another room and the doors had to be kept closed.

When Victor entered our center, we immediately noticed the instability of his motor skills. Our waiting room is a hall, which is about nine meters long and two and a half meters wide, and Victor was unable to walk from the front door to our room without touching the wall. He required more than a meter's space on either side of him, because he walked like he was drunk. His mother was exhausted and distressed, her daily life was enormously restricted and she desperately wanted to talk to her son in her mother tongue, but had been forbidden to do so. She saw that her child was suffering and stressed, but felt helpless to aid him.

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We immediately told her to talk to Victor in her native language and explained to her why she should do so. As Tomatis® practitioners we often recommend that parents speak in their mother tongue, as it is common for them to have limited mastery of their second language in terms of pronunciation, grammar and accent. This can result in a child learning a distorted version of their second language, which has the potential to compromise his or her way of learning. In this case, it would be preferable for Victor's mother to speak in Arabic to help him learn Arabic correctly, and for his father to speak in his own mother tongue, which was German. In this way, Victor would be exposed to both languages and be able to learn both at the same time, using the right channels and proper characteristics of each language. Because the ear is completely developed by four and a half months gestation, we start to learn our "mother tongue" during prenatal life and it is therefore more comforting for us than any other language. We also can express ourselves better emotionally in our mother tongue, which is very important for the mother-child bond. Once Victor's mother began speaking to him in Arabic, they both began to feel better.

For the Tomatis® training we used a belt that we put around Victor's waist, which consisted of a small board with two bone conductors on it.

This board touched his spine and the music was transmitted to the bone conductors through the Electronic Ear. Victor was very shy and afraid of new situations, so his mother stayed in his treatment room and listened to her program simultaneously with her headphones. We started with non-filtered music for 30 minutes, as this was the maximum amount of stimulation that Victor could tolerate.

After the first two days we started to see enormous changes. Victor was able to walk straighter and did not bump into things as often. On the third day we were able to increase to two 30-minute sessions each day, adding slight slopes in the filters of the high- and low-frequency range. When five days (eight 30-minute sessions) had been completed, Victor's mother came into our center crying—she told us that he had walked up the stairs by himself.

We also noticed that his speech prosody had changed; his voice now contained more melody. Although he was speaking Arabic and we could not understand his words, it was clear that his voice contained the same tonality of his mother's language. This also corresponds to the first Tomatis® principle: that the voice can only reproduce what the ear hears or processes. Changing the way Victor was processing sounds produced immediate results in his voice and tone. His sounds became clearer and he started using sound groups for special people and objects, using more sounds and words every day. After ten days his mother told us that he did not react the way he used to in the presence of noise and he even stayed in the kitchen when she was cooking. Spending time with other children was also less stressful for both mother and child and overall, the whole family situation was much more relaxed.

After a break of four weeks we saw the family again. Victor was talking in two-word sentences in both languages and everybody was

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able to understand him. His motor skills had improved greatly and he appeared well balanced—he could play on a swing or a slide without feeling anxious, could jump on one leg, was playing with different objects and was less fearful of noises. If a sound was too loud, his mother could easily calm him with words. The second and third intensives of Tomatis® training also consisted of two one-hour sessions a day and we were able to use higher filters and more slopes in the

low- and high-frequency ranges.

Two years passed before we saw Victor again. The family was under stress once more—Victor had been talking in both languages, had stopped experiencing difficulty with his motor skills and his hyperacusis had become non-existent. But a few months before returning to our center, his mother had given birth to a baby girl and Victor's old difficulties had resurfaced. During the pregnancy Victor had been fascinated by his mother's belly and was looking forward to meeting the baby, but over time he slowly stopped talking again. We initiated the Tomatis® training again, but felt we needed the support of a child psychologist to help us look into the family's situation. The psychologist discovered that Victor was intellectually gifted. He could write his name and other words backwards, but only if someone held his hand: he was not able to hold the pencil and guide it over the paper without assistance. It appeared that his refusal to talk and the regression in his motor skills indicated an emotional reaction to the birth of his sister. We continued with the Tomatis® program and also recommended occupational therapy for additional assistance, and Victor made good progress once again.

We wanted to share Victor's story because so many families become afraid in the face of what looks to them to be a "regression." But these instances are hardly ever actual regression—what is more likely is that growth is occurring, and the child is reapplying old coping strategies that outwardly look like regression as they work through this new

process. In Victor's case, he was going through a stage of emotional development that needed to catch up with his motor and speech development, and the birth of his sister had acted as a catalyst for the rebirth of his sense of self. This was an enormously healthy process for him and absolutely necessary for his continued independence. It was important that his parents returned to the center to discuss these changes, and it is vital that parents be involved in the process as it unfolds. The counseling in this case, as in many other cases, made all the difference in this family continuing with Tomatis® training, which allowed Victor to make great progress forward.

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