



Institute for  
Excellence in  
Writing

Listen. Speak. Read. Write. Think!

info@IEW.com • 800.856.5815

## In Retrospect: Heroes of Providence

By Andrew Pudewa

From the time I could talk, I was begging for a violin. Or so said my mother. I don't remember, but the harangue must have been relentless because I began violin lessons at five years old with one of the few teachers in the area willing to experiment with Suzuki Method, newly arrived in America. Initially I learned by ear from recordings appropriately titled "Listen and Play." Daily practice continued, and in time I learned to read music and make my way through the books of the Suzuki repertoire. Although I attended a monthly group lesson with a few other students, it wasn't until junior high school that I really started to look forward to making music with others. Taking orchestra class in sixth through eighth grades and joining a string quartet with three other boys, I began to take pride and pleasure in playing, though practice always remained somewhat of a chore. High school, however, derailed me, and soon I gave up violin for the easier and more exciting world of war games. But destiny catches up.

While I never would have conceived of it at age fifteen or even eighteen, by the time I was twenty-one, I found myself attempting to teach violin to some children in a school attached to an organization for which I was working. To me it was clear that I really had no idea what I was doing, but I must have fooled some of the parents and their children; they thought it was going well. Intrigued at the possibility of a career teaching violin, I traveled to four one-week Suzuki Summer Institutes in a five-week period, during which I discovered one very important thing: If I really wanted to be like the best teachers I observed, I would have to go to Japan and learn from the best, as they had. So, I set out for Matsumoto, Japan, home of Shinichi Suzuki and the Talent Education Institute, with little preparation and much youthful overconfidence. Destiny had seized me.

Life in Matsumoto was different than imagined. While we had a loose schedule of daily group lessons, weekly master classes, and a few other sessions like music appreciation and calligraphy, my daily life was filled with practicing in crowded practice rooms, studying Japanese early every morning, training in martial arts when time allowed, and teaching English on the side, by which I could earn enough money to live simply but comfortably. At the core, however, was our sensei, Dr. Suzuki. Still young in his early eighties, he was a dynamo of vision and zeal. Gradually I discovered that he was as much a spiritual master as a music teacher, able to peer into the soul and love unconditionally, even while strictly chastising for insufficient progress. More than anything, however, he wanted us to see what he could see—the incredible potential of every child. At once

ancient and childlike at the same time, he impressed all who met him with his strange mix of mirth and wisdom, energy and tranquility, zeal and patience. Not only did he believe that every child could learn, he believed that every teacher could be a great teacher—even me. And destiny propelled me forward.

After almost three years in Matsumoto, I knew it was time to move on, tempted though I was to live there forever. Cobbling together pieces enough for a final recital, I accomplished the goal of graduation, embarrassed at my mediocrity compared to some of my Japanese friends but also proud that I had made it. At my ceremony, Suzuki called me “idea man” and exhorted me to “always remember ...” What, exactly, he didn’t say, though in my heart I knew. He was like that: enigmatic yet crystal clear. One teacher-trainee at a time, he was changing the world. The emperor of Japan designated him a “National Living Treasure.” He was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize. Now, eight decades after he began, there are hundreds of thousands—perhaps millions—of children around the world who are blessed to grow up playing beautiful music, and Talent Education (Suzuki Method) is without a doubt the most effective education system on the planet. Certainly, there is nothing else in existence that can train large numbers of average children to perform extremely complex music at a young age—and make it look easy.

However, it was never Suzuki’s primary goal to create legions of little violinists. His purpose was to prove one thing to the world: Any child could learn anything, given the right environment and the correct methodology. He simply demonstrated with violin. By the time I arrived in Matsumoto, he was in his eighties and had been teaching for forty years. Often interspersing philosophical mini-sermons in between music practice, he would inform us: “I must live to one hundred—people do not understand. We must work harder to make people understand ...” By the time I left in 1985, he was saying, “No, I must live to 110—people do not understand.” He was delighted by the efforts some made to apply the principles of Talent Education (or “Ability Development”) to other areas of learning and sponsored an experimental preschool in Matsumoto, where the children learned everything by “Suzuki Method.” Destiny had brought that vision to me.

Another man who shared Suzuki’s zeal and vision was Glenn Doman, founder of the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential (IAHP). Blessed to find an interview between Dr. Suzuki and Dr. Doman, I immediately knew the next step on my path: Philadelphia and the IAHP. With that confidence I applied, was invited to come, and arrived in 1986 full of purpose. While the story of my three years of learning and working with brain-injured children and their families is much too long to relate here, let it suffice to say that under the mentorship of Glenn and his staff, my understanding of children, their brains, and how they learn deepened profoundly. Again, I was tempted to stay at the Institutes indefinitely, but family needs took precedence. Again destiny drove me onward.

Moving to be near my mother in Montana, I taught in a small school: English, music, P.E., and anything else needed. One of the teachers who had training in the Blended SoundSight Program of Learning strongly encouraged us all to travel to Canada that

summer and take Mrs. Ingham's course, a multi-sensory approach to teaching reading and writing in the primary grades. So, with the whole faculty (including my wife), we drove to the land of the midnight sun, four hours north of Edmonton, to a tiny little Vo-Tech school in Grouard, Alberta. It was there I met Dr. James Webster, author of *Blended Structure and Structure in Composition*, the core upon which IEW writing materials are based. Immediately I recognized Webster's approach as a kind of Suzuki Method for English composition—in other words, an effective, proven, common-sense approach to teaching writing. While a detailed comparison would be lengthy, allow me to give a basic overview.

The four pillars of Talent Education are: The Right Environment, The Right Period, The Right Teacher, The Right Method. When I walked into the Grouard classroom in the summer of 1990, I saw the walls plastered with word lists and reminder signs. Poetry memorization commenced on day one. Saturating the environment with what the students are learning is the first prerequisite for success. The BSS people knew and applied that well. Like Montessori, Suzuki, and Doman before her, Mrs. Ingham understood the power of the young mind to absorb and master language easily, while at the same time realizing that “it's never too late to learn.” Webster found that the same techniques used to help young students organize and present ideas on paper worked for older students who had not been taught—even at the university level. Just as Suzuki and Doman focused on training the adults who would work with the children, Mrs. Ingham and her team stressed the importance of teacher training, teacher practicums, and teacher-made materials. Webster required his trainees to write a complete composition for each of the nine units, using the full checklist—in nine days! All of them realized the tremendous power of a well-trained teacher or parent. And lastly, the methodology was a perfect match. Based on modeling and imitation, a sequential development of techniques, periodic review of composition structures, and an emphasis on mastery prior to progression, Webster's writing program was a near perfect implementation of Dr. Suzuki's philosophy of education. I knew that I had found something fully fulfilling my sensei's great desire—an application of the principles of Talent Education to an area outside music. This was my destiny.

In 1995, I founded the Institute for Excellence in Writing. Although he didn't quite make it to his projected hundred years old, Suzuki left us in 1998 at age 99. Glenn Doman lived to 93, passing in 2013, the same year as Mrs. Ingham, who was 101. Dr. Webster, 90, still lives in Vancouver, B.C., continuing to work on various projects for IEW, the newest of which is his history card game “Outmatched.” Others are still secret. Truly, I am blessed beyond words to have a small part in the legacy of these four great teachers. For better or for worse, I seldom play the violin (though I am tempted to go back to teaching it to my grandchildren in my rapidly approaching old age). However, I do feel more than ever “on task” for my four great mentors, working as best I can to bring the Structure and Style writing program to as many teachers and parents as possible so that many children will be blessed in learning not only how to competently express ideas in writing, but how to listen and learn, speak, read, and think well. Providence has been generous to me, and I am grateful.

**This article first appeared in the Spring 2018 *Magnum Opus Magazine*.**

info@IEW.com • 800.856.5815

---

© 2017 by The Institute for Excellence in Writing. The above article is available at IEW.com for your personal use or for distribution. Permission given to duplicate complete & unaltered.