

Steve's Story

What the Tomatis Method did for me

By Steve Smith

My name is Steve. Sharing about the Tomatis Method and what this did for me is both a joy and a challenge. The Tomatis Method is unique. The Tomatis Method is holistic. The Tomatis Method is based on science, yet there is an element of art involved. Knowing how best to help any particular client is a case by case process. This is exactly what appealed to me about this

treatment. I was in need of direct help, suited towards my peculiar condition and circumstances. I did not want a magic pill. I wanted treatment and a means of doing something to contribute towards my own health and ongoing rejuvenation. The Tomatis Method provided me with all of this.

I wish to share my story first, and then share in general how the Tomatis Method works. My role in the Tomatis Method is one of someone who entered into the treatment with mixed feelings. I was infused with hope from the testimonies I had heard and read, the most vivid of which was from my fiancée. Given this, I could not shake a lingering skepticism based on the novelty of the system. I did not want to get my hopes up too high and the way the Tomatis Method works, though this can be explained in clear terms, remained a bit of a mystery to this layman. How can higher frequencies and Mozart's music help someone to heal? The Mozart I saw in the movie, "Amadeus," did not look that healthy himself. Prior to receiving the treatment and receiving results, I vacillated between thinking the Tomatis Method was either brilliant or far out.

I was fast approaching my 39th birthday when I suffered the blow that would eventually lead me to Paul Madaule and the Listening Centre in Toronto, Ontario. I was introduced to the Tomatis Method in timely fashion, when I had suffered enough and my mind was open towards seeking professional help.

On May 3, 2001 while driving home along the coastal highway from a clinic in Honokaa, Hawaii back towards Hilo, Hawaii on the Big Island, my wife of a little less than three years lost control of her car approaching a bridge, veered towards the other side and hit a car head on. She died on the spot. I was in shock, capital letters S H O C K. I couldn't believe it. Dana, a lovely Filipino psychiatrist, 9 years my senior had exited this world even more suddenly than she had appeared in my life in 1995. She had pulled me out of my parents' home, given me love and affection, and helped start me on a path of believing more in myself. She was my first true companion. Before her, I had had nothing but sporadic encounters. We had become close within a few years of knowing each other. She was my best friend.

Dana and I shared an interest and involvement with the spiritual side of life. I believe that God spared me the proverbial "Why?" question. Nor was I tormented by thoughts I could have in any way saved Dana. I accepted that she was gone. What remained was an aching "What?" question, as in "What now?" or more specifically, "What do I do now?"

The "What?" question would torment me for over a year and a half. I could not see any way out. I had lost my rhythm. This is a subtle point to communicate, difficult to convey to anyone who has not had to walk this path. We take our rhythm for granted, just as we tend to not appreciate our health until ill health or pains come along. Rhythm is what gets us up in the morning, enables us to get through the daily challenges and rise to meet them again the next day. I had worked for years prior to moving to Hawaii in the beginning of 2001 to join Dana. Dana's job as a psychiatrist had brought us there. I under-

stood rhythm. I was blessed for years with an ability to carry on, and even improve here and there.

Women have always played a major role in my life. I moved back with my folks after Dana died. I did not return to work. My mother wanted me to. She tried to push me. I was helpless. I could not function. I did not totally fall apart. I took nature walks. I rode my bicycle. I hung out with a local meditation friend in the area. She and her husband reached out to me. I owe them a lot. The irony was, I did not feel the gap in social life until I returned to my home state of Maryland from Hawaii. The Hawaiian folks are a bit slower paced. They kept me company the 6 weeks I lingered in Hilo after Dana's death.

Life felt unbearable. The energy drain on my system was tremendous. I did not have much to look forward to. My mother's occasional pushing me to get a job or check out school again always felt piercing to me, because I lacked the energy to respond positively. I had faith deep down that something or someone would come along to help me turn my life around, but "What?", "Who?". I was hurting. Finally, in September 2002, for the second year in a row, I traveled to Delhi, India to see my meditation teacher there. I can see him in the States, but India is special, more concentrated. I joked I was checking into the Delhi clinic.

This may sound petty to some, yet the truth about what helped drive me back to Delhi in 2002 was that I was sick of spending so much time on the Internet trying to meet someone. I had been doing this not long after Dana died. I could not bear being alone. If this sounds disrespectful to my departed spouse, I have another joke to cover this. The Internet is a great place to go nowhere slowly. I had met a few women online, and fewer still in person. I made one new friend in Maryland. That was it. I was not in danger of remarrying on the rebound. I had to wait years to meet Dana. Her loss was devastating. I knew the odds of my recovering any time soon were slim.

Delhi has been a refuge for me for years. I wanted to go there to get away from the Internet, to focus on my soul, to settle my mind and hopefully tap into some inner peace and rejuvenation. Meditation may not work overnight, but this is still the best natural medicine I know. Naturally, having gone to India to get away from talking to women on the computer, I met someone in person! Wow. Unbelievable. I was so surprised. Not that I hesitated, mind you, once I realized how special she was.

Athanasia entered my life out of the blue. She was engaging from the start. A fiery Mediterranean woman, from the cradle of Western Civilization in Athens, Greece, Athanasia - or Sissy as she prefers to be called - grabbed me from the moment of our first encounter. I was struck by the way she paid attention to conversation. I was more struck, when in response to my off-the-wall request to autograph a book for me, she took her time, thought about what to say, and then wrote me a sweet note before signing her name. Love at first site? I'm not sure, but I sure was smitten. I was a hungry pup, and I had met someone whose soul appeared as deep as she is gracious. Besides, I did not have anything to lose. In my own, stumbling, awkward way, I made my move and let her know I care about her through little notes. Though shy about all this at first, eventually Sissy responded. This crazy American won her over through his persistence. Thankfully, some events are inevitable.

I give Sissy tremendous thanks for my rejuvenation. She inspired me with her warmth and beauty. She kicked me in the butt with her direct admonitions. Most importantly, in connection with this sharing, Sissy is the one who recommended to me that I check out the Tomatis Method. She knew about the Tomatis Method firsthand. She had gone through the basic treatment and a few booster sessions in Athens.

Sissy is dyslexic. Her depth is born out of her own suffering. Sissy is 7 years my junior, but I have often had to defer to her wisdom.

The exact circumstance when Sissy recommended that I look into the Tomatis Method came in January 2003, a couple of weeks after she visited me in the States during the holidays in 2002. Sissy was upset by my behavior. I still could not function. The initial intoxication of the relationship had already worn off, and she was compelled to speak out about my state of being.

Thank goodness! Having Sissy be the one to tell me about the Tomatis Method was great. Sissy's spirit and energy impressed me. I was already more receptive than usual to an idea coming from her than I would have been had someone else suggested Tomatis.

I wish to be clear about the fact that as of January 2003 I had not sought out any sort of professional help. The most I had done was sit in on a couple of hospice led sessions on grief aimed specifically at younger widows and widowers. These had their merit. With a good facilitator, a grief group can be helpful. However, this was not enough.

I resisted professional help because I could not see what counseling or drugs could do for me. I lacked energy. I never heard anyone recommend counseling or Prozac on the basis that they could facilitate energy regeneration. I have since discovered how helpful good counseling can be once you have energy. I had mentioned to Sissy on the phone that I was thinking about getting counseling when she suggested I check out Tomatis. I was grabbed at once when I read about the Tomatis Method. Here was a method that made sense to me. Admittedly, I had cultivated over the years a greater than average respect for holistic methods. Regardless, what I read about the Tomatis Method commanded my attention because of the amount of scientific research Dr. Tomatis and his successors brought to the fore in explaining how this method works. More vitally, what they are talking about fit my story very well.

I was born with a cleft palate. I had delayed speech development. Though a good student throughout public school, I struggled in college keeping up. I got tired. Eventually I dropped out altogether. I never planned on going back. I rationalized to myself that college is not for everyone, despite the potential I once demonstrated to myself and others. How strange after so many years of working a modest administrative job, marrying and suffering a great loss that all these issues would reemerge so forcefully. I used to hate classical music. I mentioned the movie "Amadeus." When this movie came out, I had to force myself to see it. You can imagine my surprise to discover years later that there is a healing system that relies primarily on the music of Mozart. A side benefit of doing the Tomatis Method is a renewed appreciation for good classical music.

The readings about the Tomatis Method grabbed me in other ways. The philosophy behind the treatment made sense to me based on my studies over the years about systems of meditation. Meditation emphasizes the power of the attention. The Tomatis Method points out that many disabilities are listening related. A trauma can throw you off track. The ears play a key role.

Listening is different from hearing. I never thought I would discover a healing system that so closely mirrors what I believe. This is what inspired me with hope. One thing led to another, and I took a trip to Toronto, Canada to be treated by the Tomatis Method.

Along with the listening to the higher frequencies, counseling is employed to help someone integrate the effects of the sounds. For the first time in my life, I can say from experience that professional counseling can be helpful. I would look forward to speaking with the director of the Toronto clinic, Paul Madaule. Paul would not just sit back and say nothing and let me do all the talking. He would listen and then

suggest ideas whereby I could help myself. He was an active listener. Paul never hesitated to tell me something he thought I needed to hear. You need to finish what you start is one of the things he said to me. Along with this, he radiated a calm assurance that things would get better.

Active voice exercises are given after the initial listening phase. The voice takes over where the electronic ear leaves off. The voice becomes fuel for self-regeneration. With Tomatis, it's all in the ears and listening and the voice. In the ears there is life. Sounds are healing. Higher frequency sounds recharge the brain. Sounds can help someone who is lost, helpless, inarticulate, confused to regain a sense of organization, energy and purpose.

A Tomatis practitioner is someone who relies on observation of verbal and nonverbal communication along with a listening test to assess a person's ability to listen. After this initial assessment, an active program of listening, via a device called the Electronic Ear is used to stimulate the inner muscles of the ear. Music of Mozart is filtered. The effect of the music

being filtered via the electronic ear is to work out and strengthen the inner muscles of the ear. Counseling is employed to help someone integrate and process the effects of the sounds, and move forward in a positive direction. Once the listening ability of the ears has been restored, via active voice exercises, the individual can become his or her own Electronic Ear.

Dr. Tomatis once said: "When the ear has been properly trained you have such an amount of energy in the cortex that you can be fully conscious. You can leave your boredom. You become active, then, but for another as well as yourself. To put it another way, we can give someone a lot of energy by this method, but it's not so that he can sit comfortably at home with his pipe by the fire, keeping it to himself. It's so that he can distribute it at large. That's the only place there's happiness, and the only reason for making this listening training available. We're in a body of humanity, and that body must be served by all those who can."

Natural questions that arise in one's mind about the Tomatis Method are what kind of results can one expect, will the results be noticeable and when can one expect to see results? I cannot answer this for anyone else. Thankfully, my experience is clear. I know what results I have experienced as a result of the Tomatis Method, the results are tangible, and I can pinpoint when I started to see the results clearly. I will share about these in reverse order, because I feel fortunate that I know so precisely when the results became noticeable.

I can communicate my experience, but only someone who can relate to my prior condition will empathize directly with this sharing. Remember, I was in a fog prior to doing the Tomatis Method. I had lost my rhythm. I was taking walks, hanging out with close friends in the area, and meditating. I was basically surviving, not living. Life felt unbearable. I did not have much

to look forward to. I felt like a needle stuck in the groove of a record (those antiquated devices that preceded CDs and I-Pods). That groove was the past. Nothing I tried thus far had lifted that needle back into the present. The record was not playing forward. This is a strange state to describe. Anyone who has suffered a shock has most likely experienced this state, at least temporarily. The trouble in my case was that this effect was enduring.

The trigger point where I noticed something had changed within me is not so important, yet worth sharing. I had returned to Maryland from the Listening Centre in Toronto, Canada in early May, 2003. That was my second visit to Canada. The basic Tomatis Method treatment is given in Canada in two 15

day sessions. In my case, Paul Madaule only had me do the passive part of the program which involves listening. I did not receive the active exercises which comprise the “active” part of the Tomatis Method until February, 2004 when I had a booster session in Athens, Greece during the course of visiting my fiancée, Sissy.

Paul did not assign me the active sessions in Canada, because he felt I was not ready. I am sharing this detail as an illustration that the Tomatis Method is part art as well as science. As someone who has taken a liking to the active exercises, I became slightly annoyed in retrospect that Paul did not give them to me from the beginning. By the time I was shown how to do the active exercises I was hungry to incorporate them into my life. Most likely, then, Paul was right in holding back from having me do them in Toronto. The Tomatis Method is not like allopathic medicine. There is no “1 pill fits all” mentality.

Towards the end of May, 2003 I was looking in the local Sunday edition newspaper and saw an article about jobs and computers. This inspired me. I began checking around about the local computer schools in Maryland. This is not the point! I WANTED TO LIVE AGAIN ... YES, THAT’S THE POINT. The computer training idea was the excuse to get moving again. I received counsel down the road that let me know that my timing in thinking about computers was not the best. I was not attached to the idea. I did not have a passion for computers. What stimulated me was rediscovering a passion for living, period.

Forgive me if I lack words to describe what happened to me, what turned over in my mind or my spirit. The Christian faith speaks in terms of rebirth. In a way, I had a rebirth via doing the Tomatis Method. This is a subtle science, though, and I wish to be clear in sharing about this. I am convinced that health is natural. Sadly, when we lose our way, this notion about health being natural is very difficult to conceive as being possible for us. I began to become a believer again via my own experience.

My recovery via the Tomatis Method and other means at my disposal has been gradual yet steady. Some would contest the gradual part. Since completing the Tomatis Method, which includes a couple of booster sessions – in August 2003 in Toronto, Canada and in February 2004 in Athens, Greece - I have gone through a series of steps. First there was the search for something to do in the summer of 2003. This took me to various computer schools and even back to Hawaii where I pursued the idea of owning a small business. Finally, I got on a more definite track thanks to the kindly and informative intervention of a caring job counselor in a neighboring county’s re-employment center.

The job counselor steered me into an accounting and bookkeeping training program which included a component of learning about medical coding along with a one month training session in learning basic computer applications. I believe that one’s recovery is intimately connected with practicality. My job counselor helped me secure funding to cover most of the costs of this training. During the course of this training, I discovered something else that is most likely attributable to having done the Tomatis Method. My mind was clear. I was able to process information well. I began the training in medical systems and coding in November. I had the computer training in January.

After the computer training, I took a month off and went to visit Sissy in Greece in early February 2004. While there, I had a booster session in the Tomatis Method where I was finally given the active exercises. I was ready. I began incorporating the reading-out-loud exercise into my life as soon as I returned to Maryland in late February. I have not been perfect about doing this daily, yet I have been consistent. The results of doing the exercise are more difficult for me to recognize than the results of doing the initial treatment with one exception. Reading out loud is a wonderful study aid. I can read anything

out loud. I often use this technique to jump start any reading I need to do. Oh yeah, during the course of doing the bookkeeping part of the training in March 2004, I got inspired to check out whether my old college credits still count. I am currently taking classes in my first full semester at the university as I write this.

What I have discovered is not new. God helps those who help themselves is a common saying. What I have found reassuring and refreshing is seeing how this spirit works through others. I feel that way about Paul Madaule and the good folks at the Listening Centre. I feel this way about my job counselor and the friendly staff at that re-employment office. There are means available, even in this day of age, that can be utilized to help you if you are willing and able to do your part.

I consider myself very lucky, because I was able to see that the vital part of this equation was the “able” to do your part. Prior to doing the Tomatis Method, I was not able. You have to help yourself on a fundamental level sometimes before you can seek further help or take on greater tasks. As I shared earlier, I discovered how helpful good counseling can be once one has energy. My experience with the Tomatis Method and the after-results have helped me see that there are solutions to every problem if one is brave enough to allow a glimmer of hope into one’s consciousness. Small ones lead to bigger ones.

The Tomatis Method got me started. Then I wanted to do my part again. That was the key. Every penny I paid for treatment has proven well worth it, yet once I paid for the Tomatis Method, I discovered there are free means of helping myself such as receiving the services of the re-employment office. I am lucky, too, to be in the United States where such services are available to practically any citizen.

In summary, the Tomatis Method helped revive me and provided me with tools with which I could continue my rejuvenation. While this is certainly true, this description is lacking. The difficulty is in expressing the intangible elements of how the Tomatis Method helps, what changes the treatment can give birth to. How does one easily describe in words the results of doing something that are surprising? When I first read about the Tomatis Method, I was infused with hope that this method could help give me a jolt of energy and lift my depression. I read testimonials, however, where the Tomatis Method helped those with learning disabilities or those overwhelmed with the idea of returning to school. The testimonials, while positive, sounded too good to be true. I did not wish to get my hopes up too far. A little jolt of energy would be welcome.

My initial skepticism is being continually revised as a result of my own experiences since completing the Tomatis Method. As I just shared, first I enrolled in a training program in bookkeeping and accounting and in the course of doing this, I was surprised at how efficiently I was functioning. My teacher and the administrator of this self-paced program remarked how I was among the top students in terms of speed and accuracy they had ever seen in this program. This gave me confidence. I explored the possibility of returning to college after a 20 year gap to finish a degree program in accounting. Anyone who knows me, knows that I often said I would NEVER return to ordinary university. Ask my mother!

What I read about in the Tomatis Method planted a seed in my mind that perhaps my exhaustion in the past while taking studies at the university level was due to lack of an ability to process well which the Tomatis Method could help adjust and correct as well as lacking tools to keep up this rejuvenation. I began taking credit courses this summer at my local community college. This is when I discovered that the reading-out-loud exercise, prescribed by the Tomatis Method and highly encouraged by Paul Madaule, is a very useful tool in terms of studying.

I can be feeling tired, or perhaps the material seems boring to me, but I can read anything out loud. I would certainly say that reading material out loud followed by another review of the material is an effective way of studying. I did well in my first summer course. In my second summer credit course, Public Speaking, I tied in a vote among my classmates for “Most Improved Speaker”. I have to believe that all the practice in reading-out-loud and getting used to my own voice helped me to get up in front of my classmates and deliver effective speeches. I was practicing, anyway. All I needed was some guidance and encouragement from my professor and to put in some effort, and I surprised myself by my performances at the end.

I would miss in terms of this sharing if I did not add a brief word about how much I still feel connected to the Listening Centre and Paul Madaule, especially. Paul may not have given me the active exercises, but his encouragement and insights received via email have been my greatest inspiration and strength to help me incorporate the reading-out-loud practice into my daily life. He gives his clear testimony to these exercises, too, in his wonderful book, “When Listening Comes Alive”. Paul has given me feedback on other matters, too, on several occasions for which I am also thankful. He has a knack of saying things in a way that helps get me on a positive mental track. One cannot pay for this kind of service. Paul offers this out of the goodness of his heart and his natural empathy with those who are willing to make the effort to turn their lives around for the better.

Paul has written me in email that I will continue to surprise myself. I tend to believe Paul because of all that has happened already. I am in the beginning stage of my first full semester at the university as I write about what the Tomatis Method has done for me. While I cannot predict the future, I have ample reason to hope based on what I have experienced thus far. My only regret about the Tomatis Method is that it is not more readily available. Once you realize what the method can do and how this works, you naturally think about all the people in your circle and beyond who could benefit from this wonderfully holistic approach to learning, life and rejuvenation.