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We raised five children in the little village of North Bennington, Vermont. We started off with four daughters and much later produced one son. The small town of North Bennington had a little library, as well as Power's Market (which had excellent meats), The Catamount Bank, and Percy's. We went to Percy's to buy our Bennington Banner, but whenever we entered the store we first took a deep breath and held it for the entire transaction, to avoid the stench of dogs, cats, cigarettes, old newspapers, darkness, dirty floors, and dead food. One whiff and I would have suffered a major migraine headache! I still remember the smell with my mind's nose. Once outside the store we gulped in clean air.

Around the block was the North Bennington High School; the college was up the hill, where Rein rode his bike to school up the back driveway. Things were handy and cozy for us in our little village, and it fit us perfectly.

Rein had come to the United States with only \$2.00 in his pocket, and I came into the marriage in debt for \$5.00, owed for a library book I had failed to return before graduation. The money stretch hung heavy on us. We even considered canceling our subscription to the Bennington Banner, yet we needed to read and learn about our new little town too.

At first we lived in a crowded alley behind Power's Market, in a garishly furnished upstairs apartment that had only two rooms and no piano. The edge of the small bed in the bedroom came right up to the skinny brown doorframes, which meant we had to *lunge* into bed through the doorway!

One evening, sitting together on the bed and dangling our legs out the bedroom door, we were discussing the future. Rein said, “Rosamond, you know the family is the first form of government.”

I did not disagree, but I was surprised at his total earnestness. I kept thinking about that heavy statement long afterward. Somehow, Rein seemed to have a handle on life before we even began. I honored him for his experience; after all, he was seven years older and had more knowledge about life. Thinking back, this seemed to be a forecast for how we would steer our lives forward: *the family is the first form of government*. A profound idea, in fact, his statement grew on me over time and became a leitmotif for our future.

I was thrown into the fray of faculty life at Bennington College after having been a student for four years. I went from saying “President Fels” to a more friendly “Bill.” Rein had the nickname of “Van,” but I changed it because I couldn’t imagine introducing him publicly as Van van der Linde.

My student nickname was no longer suitable, so I went from “Rowie” to the more dignified “Rosamond.” It took a few years for everyone to revamp our names: behaviors mark the brain like indelible ink. Rein and I were both highly popular with the faculty in general, so it was worthwhile for people to untangle our names.

When we needed a larger space, we moved into a fully furnished house along a dirt road out in the countryside. We rented this house from Stell Andersen, a local concert artist famous for playing the Grieg Piano Concerto in A Minor. Now we had room for my Steinway M grand piano, which had been kept at my parents’ house, and I could go back to practicing all the Bach Inventions.

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When our first baby was born, we knew she would be a musician from the start. She was so small, we dressed her in doll's clothes. She had dark brown hair and beady brown eyes, and she was curious and inquisitive about the world around her. She could reach a third on the piano from thumb to pinkie. We named her "Rosamond," after my paternal grandmother and me — but one doesn't call a tiny baby of five pounds such a long name, so we nicknamed her "Polly," after my mother, and she has been known by this name ever since. Little did we know that we would need several more girls' names!



Polly teaching herself piano at 9 months old

Pregnant again when Polly was just seven months old, I was ready to give birth in the coldest month we'd ever known, January 1961. On my birthday, Rein and I were standing outside looking at Mars with our binoculars when my water broke — and froze immediately on my leggings. Tasha Tudor was born one minute after my birthday. She was blond, also with a musical streak: both babies were

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born singing at the top of their lungs! But Tasha had a completely different composition – placid, less serious about the world, happy-go-lucky, large and strong. She was able to reach a fifth on the piano *at birth*. Now my work at home became a Two-Part Invention.

The money was tight; our paltry budget drove us to search in our bureau drawers for loose quarters to buy canned baked beans to feed our young children. Rein's mathematics job was not working out mathematically, so I needed to go to work while caring for two babies. This would provide a better income than teaching private piano lessons at home. I began to understand the reality of a meager piano teacher's income. I secured a job at the hospital in the physical therapy department, a job for which I was never formally trained and never liked. I was reminded of my polio days and the agony of those physical therapy sessions. I still taught private piano lessons after my job at the hospital.

I thought it would be a wonderful experience for our children to grow up bilingual, since they were first-born Americans of a Dutch father, so I took it upon myself to learn Dutch. The children were so small that Rein didn't say much about this idea, but later he said, "Oh no, we can't have them speak Dutch. English is the going language, and they live in America after all."

I answered, indeed they live in America, but they can use Dutch when they go to Holland and they will be able to speak to their Oma and Opa in their rightful tongue. Besides, bilingualism was surely a plus. I knew he agreed that, as parents, we were responsible for the education of our children at home as well as at school. I continued Dutch studies on my own, with a book called *Hugo's Teach Yourself*

Dutch. Rein helped me with pronunciation, but otherwise left me to study the book alone.

I loved languages and felt the affinity between foreign languages and music. Rein sensed a connection between mathematics and music. We often discussed these correlations.

Rein's parents' only words in English were "Hallo" and "Telefoon." Only by speaking Dutch could I communicate with all my new Dutch relatives. Rein never thought it possible that the children would learn Dutch — but I was the one at home with the children, in charge of their baby talk. As they grew a bit older, Dutch superseded English. When their Dad came home, they greeted him in his native tongue, screaming "Papa's thuis!" (Daddy is home).

In 1960, we took Polly and baby Tasha to Holland to visit their grandparents, and Polly spoke Dutch exclusively to her Oma and Opa. Her first baby word was *koe* (cow), and she only wanted to eat *kip* (chicken). She played with some Dutch children who became her friends for life, and my daughters later returned to Holland to visit them.

In our little rented house in North Bennington, the two girls slept upstairs. The stairs were steep, and the rooms were so small that Rein could not stand up under the roofline. One morning Rein and I went upstairs to wake the girls, then three years old and one-and-a-half. We heard them singing Dutch songs together! Pleased and proud that our babies knew how to entertain each other, we opened the door. The entire room had been festooned with the finest, prettiest, most delicate white: floor, windowsills, beds, and babies. Naked except for their diapers, the two children were completely covered. Even their hair was pure

white. Only their piercing eyes, brown and blue, showed through.

“We *white!*” they screamed in Dutch, as we stood assessing the situation: baby powder everywhere! Astounded at the mess, we nevertheless joined the fun, laughing along with them. In the end we told them they couldn’t go to nursery school because it would take them all morning to clean up. They didn’t mind. We left them up there with the huge vacuum cleaner and some damp rags. We could hear them singing, “All the ducks are swimming in the water” — in Dutch:

Al de eendjes zwemmen in het water,
Zwemmen in het water, zwemmen in het water.
Al de eendjes zwemmen in het water,
Fol de Rol de Rol de Re!

J disliked the hospital job and decided to look for a job in music. There was an opening to teach music in the rural schools in Bennington and the surrounding areas, at the elementary level. These were still the days of the one-room schoolhouse. I had to drive to six different schools: some in the mountains, one out on Burgess Road, one on Chapel Hill, one on Route 7 (where MacDonald’s is now), and one at the Old Bennington Schoolhouse, now a private home. Each school had grades one to six, and I taught music to all grades at the same time. Each school had up to forty kids ages six to sixteen, all in my music class; Music instruction covered all children, and I was responsible for discipline as well. Some of these students had been held back for years. There were no special services for disabled children in the ’60s, and there was no

mention of special education. Some of the older students already had beards and changed voices.

It was very difficult to create a music program when you saw the children only once a week. And times were hard in Vermont. The little rural schools were filled with pale and frail children, often having had no breakfast, wearing short-sleeved cotton dresses in the midst of the fiercest winters I have ever known. The sight sent shivers down my body.

Each morning, I rolled up my two tots in their winter wraps, took them to nursery school, and brought Rein to his office at Bennington College, so I could have the car for the day to go to the schools. We had an old 1954 Buick which could not go forward unless it first went in reverse for at least half a mile, so this was the first task each morning before school. We backed out of the driveway, turned left — backwards — onto the dirt road, and continued in reverse for at least half a mile! After the backwards trip, only then would the car go forward. I'll bet the "Car Talk" brothers, Click and Clack, could not have diagnosed the problem with this car.

Driving into the mountains to those schools was a daymare, especially during the winters and mud season. I was often stuck and had to get out of the car and push it, holding the steering wheel. There were few people around to help you out and hardly any cars to be seen. It was the real backwoods.

On top of all those classes, I taught a few piano students at home. One teenage boy was going deer hunting and wanted to pay for his lessons with deer meat, which I accepted. Meat in general was expensive, and our freezer was now happily filled for the winter. Another student, Jean,

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was a young child with perfect pitch. Her mother rightly thought she was musical, but said she couldn't read music. This was easy. I had her listen to recordings of a Mozart Piano Concerto and afterward stuck the score in front of her. She got it right away. This student went on to compete in large piano competitions in the Northeast.

Once we invited the President of Bennington College, Bill Fels, and a few of Rein's colleagues for a dinner party. It was a wild winter night with snow whipping around the house, but cozy and warm inside. We enjoyed the company while Rein played piano for us. After the party was over, we ushered our guests to the front door — and when we looked out in the dark, the President's car was not there! We were mystified. Had someone stolen it? We drove President Fels home, and the next day in daylight we saw that his car had slid backwards down the icy driveway all the way across the street, and landed gently against a small willow branch. There was hardly a scratch on the car.

President Fels had a daughter Ann, and after our dinner party he signed her up for piano lessons with me. She bonded with our children, so we hired her to baby-sit at the tender age of ten. She was very smart and capable and a good pianist to boot. One day, while Ann was babysitting, Rein and I went to visit our composer friend Henry Brant and his wife. (Henry always complained about the bells that rang every hour at the Catholic Church; the bells bothered his composing.) We sat outside drinking lemonade, or something worse, and suddenly we heard the North Bennington fire alarm screaming from the firehouse.

I had a strange feeling and stood up to look in the direction of our house — yes, something was not right! A sleek grey curl of smoke was rising into the sky. I have a

third sense, called direction, and I knew that the fire was at our house.

“C’mon Rein, quick, get in the Buick!”

“Oh My God!”

We raced home, tearing along the berm on the side of the road because the road was filled with curiosity seekers. A fireman stopped us. “Hey, where are you going?”

“This is our house. Our children are in there!”

“No, your children are sitting in that farmer’s truck over there!” He explained, “The baby sitter got your children out first, then went back inside the house to call us. You should know she is a heroine. She knew just what to do.”

“Well, where is she? Is she safe?” We asked.

Ann, our young babysitter, was safe. She described the fire. It was in the barn near the house, started by bundles of hay, too green to be stored, that had been brought in by a farmer a week earlier. Ann said her first action was to get the children out of the house and to safety in a truck she waved down, and then she went back inside to call the fire department.

Our house was not on fire, but the barn on the property burned down to the ground. The firefighters of North Bennington stayed overnight to keep water on the house and prevent the fire from reigniting. We were relieved and very proud of our little baby sitter. Polly painted a picture of the fire the very next day at her nursery school, and the following day Tasha did the same.

Polly began kindergarten at that time. She wore her smocked “Polly” dress on the first day of school, with her name embroidered across the front so the teacher would know who she was. That dress had been handed down by friends in town, from one Polly to another, and we later passed it along to the next “Polly” in the world.

Around Christmas time, when Polly was in first grade, she ran home from school and said, “Mom, Dad, they want me to play the piano at school for the Christmas Concert!”

“Oh my, how wonderful, what piece are you going to play?”

“Away in A Major!”

Rein and I looked at each other with a half-smile: Polly of course did not know the word “manger.” We could hardly hold it together.

Polly’s and Tasha’s piano lessons were in fact not going as well as I would have liked. I asked Rein for his opinion. He was encouraging. I wanted to keep their lessons upbeat and fun, maintain their interest, and have the lessons be something we would remember warmly. I wanted to create piano lessons that every child and parent would desire and *cherish* — unlike the lessons I had had.

Still thinking about the rhythm problem and other stumbling blocks, I knew I needed to step back to discover new ways of presenting concepts. The old-fashioned approach was not going to cut it. So I took a break from piano teaching to plan my counterattack. I needed to invent a new approach to help my young students understand how they could work out the rhythms.

Tasha had enlightened me on the rhythm snag. Of course you do *not* just count up to four and start again; that

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would be ridiculous. The idea of counting up to three, or four, or two, or six comes from the measures that are set up. Counting this way allows one to play in a group or big orchestra and stay together — to know where you are with the conductor and to have a sense of the first beat.

How about just counting the *value of the notes*? This new idea of mine was based on the quarter note rather than a whole note (as was traditional in music teaching). And I wanted to temporarily forget about the bar lines that always made everyone stop dead, especially adults. Some students felt imprisoned by these little boxes, the bar lines.

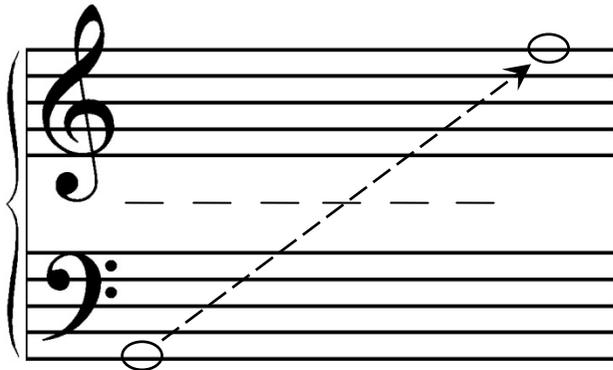
I began the lessons over again. But instead of calling Polly inside for her piano lessons, away from her friends in the neighborhood, I called her in along with the other children and taught them all for free, to try out my new ideas. I asked myself, why was it a joy to go to school in the first place? For me it was not the studies, it was my friends. Maybe piano learning would benefit from having *friends* in the class.

The piano lessons started working better. The children were more motivated: some were interested in scales, others composition or improvisation, some just loved the pieces we played, and others liked picking out tunes by ear. The process was infectious and caught the attention of all of them immediately. Whatever the topic, they all quickly learned from each other. It was a healthy type of competition, I felt. The students were pumped with enthusiasm. And they loved to see others in the class having the same piano troubles! I thought I had invented group lessons, but being in a tiny town in Vermont, what did I know. I only knew that I wanted to get the drudgery out of piano lessons forever.

I created games for them too. We played Simon Says, using musical intervals on a felt board, with felt notes for the children to move. Simon says, “go up a second”; Simon says “go up a third”; Simon says, “go down fourth”; *go up a fifth*. Screaming ensued if someone’s felt note moved even a flicker, when Simon did not say so!

I invented the Great Race to reinforce the intervals. This game used a felt board created by Jeannette, a piano Mom, that I used for years. One die was rolled to advance your note from the lowest bass G (in the bass clef) to the highest F in the treble clef, which was the finish line.

The Great Race



I made rhythm flash cards using the cardboard in Rein’s dress shirts from the cleaners; the children used wooden spoons to clack out the rhythm indicated. They had to say the counts out loud as we progressed. Choosing different tempos for this game made it all the more exciting.

I also created flash cards for another harmonic interval game, and after a few weeks of this little exercise these kids could recognize the intervals with ease. This was fun for them and me. How could intervals be so entertaining? The room came alive with anticipation, with little voices

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identifying intervals all at the same time: *fifth! second! eighth! sixth! seventh! fourth! third!* I could hardly turn the cards over fast enough.

I was happy to see how well the rhythm problem was easing up, with the new concept of the quarter note as the basic measurement instead of the whole note. I began to teach older children (four and older) using these ideas — making a game of it, naturally.

Using Quarter Note as the Value

Take one note and hold it down for one beat. That is called a *quarter note*.

As I point to the note, hold it down and count out loud.

 = 1 (Repeat many times to set a basic rhythm.)

 = 1, 2 (Hold as you count one-two)

 = 1, 2, 3 (Hold as you count one-two-three)

 = 1, 2, 3, 4 (Hold as you count up to four)

 (Hold down as you count one-*na*)

This worked well for ages seven to ten, and then I noticed it worked for students who were older, even teens — and then it was a success for adults and even for people who were my seniors. My teaching was based on experimenting, and this is how the school developed over the years.

I began to teach very differently from the way I was taught. When I began formal piano at age fifteen, the lessons

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were joyless, tedious, and rigid. Although I loved music and was sure that I wanted to become a musician, I was also certain I would never teach in such a manner. Everything seemed so guilt-ridden and paralyzing, and no one was able to explain *how* to practice, or *how* to teach rhythm, or even *how* to play the piano. What I remembered of my piano lessons was every sharp, flat, and musical rest; the negative, critical attitude; and the gaps in the presentation of sequential music learning. For that one reason I wanted to revise my teaching right away. To this day, I teach in spite of my teacher, and to spite her!

Now we needed more pianos. Rein and I went out to buy two matching Baldwin uprights that had been used for a few weeks at Tanglewood, where the Boston Symphony Orchestra resided in the summer. We set them up in the piano lesson room, along with the Steinway. This was an expense rather beyond our means at the time, but it was the small beginning of our little music school.

Someone up the street had a really old upright piano to give to us. Since the piano and bench were on wheels, we decided to roll them all the way down the street. Rein was in charge of steering the piano, and I pushed the bench with Polly on it, playing the piano as we rolled down the street, with Tasha dancing alongside. We and the neighbors were all screaming with laughter as we trundled down the hill toward our house. The neighbors, sitting on their front porches, had never seen such a parade or such a family. At home at last, with a great deal of effort, we tried to move the piano through the bulkhead and down the steps into the cellar. Our neighbors ran to our rescue, and we just managed to squeeze it down there alongside the washer

and dryer. Now our neighbors were truly getting to know us. And our children had yet another piano to practice on.

We scoured the landscape for secondhand pianos: Bennington, Williamstown MA, North Adams MA, and Hoosick Falls NY. We were not very picky about the condition of the pianos' exterior. We eventually learned a lot about the insides of pianos, how they worked, and what to look for in second-hand pianos. We became skilled as we gained experience; there were no books to use as reference. Larry Fine was not around yet. It would have been wonderful to have had the internet!

We went off to North Adams MA to pick up an old Milton upright. Some piano parents had helped us secure this piano and donated their open truck, hoping there would be no rain. With the piano on board, Rein and I sat in the back of the truck to steady the behemoth. When we stopped at a red light on Route 7 in Bennington, Rein flung himself onto the piano bench and began to wail on that instrument! People in the stopped cars were incredulous and opened their windows to hear the music. We got thumbs up from all the listeners — truck drivers, teens, seniors, and backwoods folk. It must have been an unexpected, light-hearted moment in the lives of people stuck in the daily grind of their work.

By now I have lost track of the comings and goings of pianos in our house. Each piano had its own life and personality, and its own particular sound, feel, and responsiveness. We owned an upright Milton, Vose, Netzow, Wurlitzer, Baldwins, Cable, Kimball, and Steinways. Most of them came into our house at around \$100 each. Somehow, these old friends had amazing stamina: they just didn't quit,