

Conversation with a Piano

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Roberto was waiting for the delivery of the soon-to-be heaviest object in his house. After the truck arrived, the movers first unloaded a dolly and two ramps. They knew too well not to lift the 500-pound object even for a moment. The movers finished their job quickly and left. Roberto immediately open the lid and the fallboard, sat on the bench, and started to play the piano. It was an unimaginable scene for him, until this moment. And it was only the beginning.

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Roberto's interest in the piano started about three years ago. It was a sort of accident involving two new developments. The first was that he prematurely left his job as a college professor. Due to downsizing, his department was closed. As a tenured professor, he was offered two options: to teach general education courses related to his area or to become an administrator. But neither option attracted him. In addition, he was increasingly concerned about the current state of education. Many students were interested only in good grades. Many teachers were using grades as a means to control their students. Luckily, his home mortgage had just been paid off and his wife was still working. So, he decided to quit and enjoy his practically-retired life.

At about the same time, Roberto's son, Santiago, started to play the alto saxophone in his school band. Santiago certainly enjoyed the experience. But there were times when Santiago played only the *required* amount of time to practice, twenty minutes a day. Roberto wished that Santiago would practice because he likes it and not because it is required. Roberto started to think about what he could do to address this point.

Roberto thought he could show a good example for Santiago by playing a musical

instrument himself. Of course, nobody told or asked Roberto to do so. In addition, secretly for almost half a century, Roberto had always wanted to play one particular piece of music on the piano. That was Claude Debussy's *Clair de Lune*. He had never really practiced the piano or any musical instrument. So, he knew it would be a formidable project.

At that point, Roberto had absolutely no idea how much he could accomplish. He was also well aware of his unemployed status with no income. So, he was reluctant to spend a penny for this unpredictable endeavor. Luckily, they already had an old portable electronic keyboard. At least, it had the piano sound and touch-sensitive keys. So, that was useful. Also, he knew that *Clair de Lune* couldn't be played without a sustain pedal. So, he made one by himself using cardboard paper, aluminum foil, sponge, and junk electrical wires. But most importantly, he had a strong determination *not* to take any music lessons. Most people would say that is not the right way. But for him, it didn't matter. He even thought that this project was more like a "parody" of playing the piano. There was no seriousness involved in this project. So, he just downloaded a free music sheet and started to read and practice it. Truly, there was no cost involved specifically in this project.

Thanks to the basic music education in school, Roberto was able to read the music all right. But it would be a lie to say that he was comfortable with a lot of flats involved in this music. He proceeded very slowly, deciphering notes one by one. It took him almost half a year to be able to, more or less, "play" the first eight measures. He probably spent only a few hours a week for most of this period. But eventually, he was spending a few hours almost every day. With repetition, his fingers were able to remember all the movements in this part. For him, this was the first major accomplishment involving a musical instrument.

Roberto was so happy about his accomplishment that for a moment, he thought about stopping right there. But he became curious and moved on to practice more. After all, there was no cost involved and he had time. There was nothing to lose. The next section of the music was more challenging with a lot of chords. Initially, it was daunting for him to hold, say, nine keys at the same time with the both hands. But after several more months, he memorized the first twenty-five measures, just before the arpeggios starts. He was still playing slowly and made mistakes here and there. But if other people had happened to hear what Roberto was playing, they could have recognized what he was trying to play. The rest of the music involves a lot of arpeggios and seemed too difficult for him. So, again, he thought he could stop right there.

Then, Roberto's family had a summer vacation, visiting their relatives. There, Roberto noticed a practically-abandoned Kawai upright piano. It worked but was obviously out of tune. He learned that it had not been tuned for more than thirty years. However, the natural sound of the piano was so fascinating. So, he spent a few hours cleaning the old piano and started to play what he knew. The key touch was so much different from his portable keyboard. He felt as if he had to start all over. Since his portable keyboard had only 61 keys, there were some notes that he couldn't play. With the real piano with 88 keys, he was able to play all the notes in the music for the first time.

After returning home, Roberto wanted to continue working on the project on a full-size keyboard. So, he bought a least-expensive Yamaha digital piano with 88 keys and a decent sustain pedal. This was the first significant expense involved in his piano practice, although it was a fraction of buying even a used acoustic piano. Reflecting on the time he had already spent on the old 61-key keyboard, he was confident that he would make a good use of this digital piano. By this time, it was impossible to stop him. He was hooked.

In a sense, practicing the piano was a therapy for Roberto. After leaving his job, he was feeling isolated and even somewhat disoriented. The loss of his prior status was definitely a factor. In addition, his wife was always busy with her job. So, Roberto naturally felt lonely and piano practice was a good distraction. He even imagined the new digital piano as a wife substitute.

Also around this time, Roberto came across a few YouTube video clips of self-taught adult violinists. One young lady practiced violin basically on her own. In two years, she was playing the instrument very well. At least, Roberto thought so. This was very inspiring.

Roberto enjoyed the benefit of being able to play the full-size digital piano at any time with headphones. He moved on to the rest of *Clair de Lune*. To his own surprise, he was able to memorize the rest of the music in several weeks. But he played it at a snail pace. He needed about ten minutes to play the entire piece, while a typical performance would take about five minutes. By this time, about one year passed since he started to play the piano.

As he continued, Roberto got faster and faster. In several months, he was able to play the piece in about five minutes. The sound started to become more or less recognizable. While he gained the speed, the accuracy was not there yet. But the most difficult aspect was to highlight the melody and play the arpeggios in the background. It was particularly difficult because the arpeggios called for a fast left hand, which he didn't have.

Several more months past and another summer came. Again, Roberto's family had a vacation with the same relatives. So, he had the chance to play the old Kawai upright piano again. This time, he had been practicing with the full-size digital piano with a more realistic key touch and sound. So, he was much more comfortable than the previous year. But compared to his digital piano, the acoustic piano was still quite different. He again needed to adjust to it. But he certainly enjoyed the sound and the key touch of a real acoustic piano. During the same vacation, he also had a chance to play a baby grand piano at a friend's house. Gradually, his interest in acoustic piano was building up.

After the vacation, Roberto continued to practice on his digital piano. Now, he was focusing on how to highlight the melody. He recorded his practice and compared it to the performance of well-known pianists. Although his recording still sounded very rough in comparison, he actually felt very good about what he was able to do. After about two years, he was playing his dream music piece on the piano ... sort of. It didn't matter to him that it was the only song he was able to play.

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By this time, Roberto's son, Santiago, too had been playing the saxophone for two years. Santiago had been using a free rental instrument offered by the school. Congratulating his persistence, Roberto and his wife decided to buy Santiago a personal instrument. Roberto started to search for a decent used instrument on the craigslist on the Internet. After several weeks, he found a posting of an almost new sax at a reasonable price. So, Roberto bought it for Santiago as a holiday gift.

While searching for a sax, Roberto also saw a lot of sale postings of acoustic pianos. Some of them were free. Of course, he was well aware of the cost of moving and maintaining an acoustic piano. In addition, virtually all of the free acoustic pianos had serious issues. For example, there were missing strings, heavily misaligned key tops, missing dampers, broken pedals, etc. Even Roberto could tell that it would cost an unpredictable amount of money to fix them. But when he saw one posting, he was intrigued. It was a free vintage baby grand piano by Lester. He had never known the brand. Actually, he only knew brands such as Steinway, Yamaha, and Kawai. There was no visible damage and it looked ready to play. As in many other similar cases, the seller was downsizing and could not keep the piano.

After leaving his job, Roberto was more in the mode of downsizing his possessions and never wanted to add large objects. So, wanting an acoustic piano, much less a grand piano, was contradictory. He was also aware of the recurring cost of tuning and maintenance. Nevertheless, his interest was escalating. So, he quickly checked their living room and identified a possible space. He asked his wife about the possibility of getting this piano and she did not object. So, he responded to the ad. It was just thirty-five minutes after the posting.

There was no response from the seller that day. So, Roberto's hope was fading. After all, getting an acoustic piano had never been in his plan. But the next day, he got a phone call from the seller. The seller asked Roberto a few questions, including Roberto's idea of moving the piano. Roberto had already checked the possible cost of moving the piano by a piano mover. The seller said that he would check with the actual owner of the piano. There was no more phone call that day. But the next day, the seller called again and asked Roberto if he is interested in trying the piano himself. It turned out that the seller received a lot of responses. Roberto was the third but the first two respondents were turned down by the seller. The first respondent thought he could move the piano all by himself with his van. The second respondent would "haul" the piano in a horse trailer. So, Roberto turned out to be the first to mention professional piano movers. Roberto agreed to visit the seller with his family the next day.

The first impression of the piano was good. There was nothing wrong visibly that Roberto could tell. When he played it, though, he felt that the keys were a little heavy and the sound was not really like a grand piano he had in mind. But everything was working: all the keys and three pedals. And it's free and he is not a concert pianist. So, he thought that there was nothing to lose, except for the moving cost. He thought that the moving cost of a few

hundred dollars was acceptable. He took some photos, measurements (4 feet 10 inches), and recorded the serial number (82680).

The owner got the piano some time ago from someone she didn't know. So, she knew basically nothing about the piano before then. She even didn't know how old the piano was. While Roberto was examining the piano, the owner's family was actually examining Roberto and his family. In the end, the owner seemed happy that Roberto was genuinely interested in the piano and would take good care of it. Roberto was so grateful for the seller and the owner. After coming home, Roberto immediately arranged a piano mover.

According to some on-line information, the piano was made by the Lester Piano Company in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which seemed to be a respected manufacturer. It was once endorsed by the Philadelphia Orchestra but went out of business in 1960. While browsing on the web, Roberto also read about the limitations of small grand pianos like the one he is getting. People strongly discouraged to buy grand pianos smaller than 5 feet 5 inches. This is because the string length would be shorter than tall vertical pianos and that would compromise the sound quality. Roberto initially thought that any grand pianos would be better than vertical pianos. So, this was a little disappointment.

Roberto was curious about the age of the piano. He was unable to find the information online. But with the help of the Pierce Piano Atlas at a local library, he was able to find out that the serial number of the piano corresponds to the 1922 production. It was almost a century old.

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Now that Roberto has the piano, he could play it at any time. But he didn't want to bother his wife or son too much. Even when Roberto was alone with his wife, she was usually too busy working at home. So, he would normally practice on the Lester only when he was alone. He loved the experience and sometimes even wished his family was away more often and longer. Still, he could use the digital piano with headphones at any time.

As Roberto started to practice on the Lester, he had to agree with the generally negative comments about smallest grand pianos. The sound was rather harsh. It didn't have the warm, rich sound of a concert grand piano. Since his digital piano had the recorded sound of a concert grand, he was able to tell. In addition, it was rather difficult to play softly on the Lester; the keys were unresponsive when he tried. So, he had to live with these shortcomings. However, it was free and a great-sounding piano would cost a fortune. It was still acoustic and the sense of actually engaging the grand action and hearing the sound of real strings were delightful.

Since the piano was dusty, Roberto started to clean it thoroughly. He vacuumed, first with a regular attachment, then with a flexible latex tube to access hard-to-reach areas. He also used micro fiber and an assortment of brushes. Of course, a hundred-year-old piano

wouldn't look like new. But it looked all right after cleaning.

Next, Roberto started to search for a piano tuner. He easily found several potential tuners in the area. During the search, he also stumbled upon a few web pages that describes how to tune a piano. If he can tune the piano by himself, it could save a lot of money. A very attractive idea for an unemployed person. So, he ordered some essential tuning tools: a tuning lever, mute kit, and a few books. He also found out an interesting comment on-line. According to it, about ninety percent of piano sound complaints will disappear after proper tuning.

Roberto was fairly optimistic about the idea of tuning the piano by himself. He is a kind of person who would experiment with various things. He felt easy also because the piano was free. Nothing to lose. Another reason for his optimism was that he wouldn't be too picky about the tuning quality. But the most encouraging part was that he found a really helpful web site.

The method shown on the web site was a simplified one. First, Roberto tuned the notes in the middle octave using an electronic tuner. Since there are three strings for each note, this step involves only the middle one. After muting the side two strings, he detected the pitch of just the middle string by the tuner. The tuner tells if the sound is flat (lower) or sharp (higher). He then turned the tuning lever on the relevant turning pin so that the correct pitch was obtained. Of course, there are subtle techniques involved in turning the lever. He consulted several web sites and books and got the basics.

Second, for each note of the middle octave, Roberto tuned the remaining two side strings in turn with reference to the middle one. Playing a note while muting the right string will produce the sounds from the left and middle strings. Unless these are in complete unison, there will be "beats" (or the "wow wow sound"). Since the middle string had already been tuned by the tuner, Roberto turned the tuning lever on the tuning pin of the left string so that there is no more beats. He tuned the right string in an analogous manner.

Finally, the lower and higher octaves can be tuned with reference to the middle octave. Again, Roberto needed to tune just one string at a time. He started with the B immediately below the middle C. He muted the two side strings of this note and the two side strings of the B one octave higher, which has been tuned using the electronic tuner. When he played the two B's, he heard beats. So, he turned the tuning lever on the tuning pin of the middle string of the lower B. Then, he tuned the side strings of this B. Some lower notes have only two or one string; this makes the process a little easier. Eventually, he needed to tune about two hundred strings in total.

Roberto proceeded slowly and carefully. He spent a few hours a day and it still took several days. But eventually, he was able to tune the piano, at least to his satisfaction. He thought this much can be accomplished with normal hearing, a little knowledge of physics, reasonable fine motor skills, and a lot of patience. However, it was still quite difficult to tune the lowest and the highest notes. So, he left out several of those which he did not need to play.

After this, Roberto thought that the sound of the piano indeed improved. Each note now sounds purer and harmonies are more pleasant. However, Roberto had to admit that this process did not eliminate the harshness of the sound. Anyway, it now became evident that he could avoid the recurring cost of tuning the piano regularly. At this point, Roberto was convinced that it was the right decision to have obtained this piano.

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During this time, Roberto also borrowed from the library some books about piano in general. Among them was a book called *A Romance on Three Legs*. It was about the famous Canadian pianist Glenn Gould and his relationship with a particular Steinway piano called CD318. Roberto even didn't know of Glenn Gould and most of the things discussed in the book. It was a fascinating story. This led Roberto to see some YouTube video clips of Glenn. In one video clip, Roberto saw Glenn playing Aria from Bach's Goldberg Variations. Glenn was about fifty years old, just a short period before his death. Although Roberto never really liked Bach's music, feeling mechanical, this piece attracted him immensely. But more than the music, what struck Roberto most was the appearance of Glenn playing the piano. He was sitting so low and humming the music. To Roberto, Glenn seemed to be playing the piano to comfort himself. This image stuck with him permanently. But he couldn't tell why.

Roberto also read *Grand Obsession*. The author had a *really* "grand" obsession with a perfect piano for her. She even mortgaged her house to purchase an expensive piano, which sounded perfect in a show room far away from her house. However, when the piano was finally delivered to her house, it didn't sound as expected. She tried practically everything to bring back the sound she thought she heard in the show room. It was rather painful for Roberto to read the story. Actually, he couldn't finish the book. He felt that there was something deeply disturbing about the author. But again, he couldn't tell what it would be. Roberto felt that the piano is a mysterious instrument.

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Several weeks passed since Roberto's first tuning of the piano. He noticed there were beats for some notes. This is the sign that not all three strings for those notes are in unison. When he checked the middle strings with the electronic tuner, they all held the correct pitch. So, he tuned just relevant left or right strings to make them in unison with the middle one.

Over time, Roberto noticed that the same notes repeatedly became out of unison after a few weeks. He thought, "This is an old piano after all. It can't hold tuning very well." He suspected that certain tuning pins were loose. Since it's a free, old piano, Roberto was willing to experiment. After doing some research on the Internet, he bought a small bottle of pin tightener. Following the on-line instructions carefully, he applied the liquid and

waited for a few days. The pins seemed tighter.

But again after several weeks, the same notes became out of unison. By this time, the tuning process had become routine and more efficient. As he repeated this several times, he realized that there was a pattern. It was always the same strings that went flat. In particular, it only happened for the two and half octaves starting from the G immediately below the middle C, then upward.

Just out of curiosity, Roberto did an experiment. He set the pitch of those affected strings slightly higher. This way, he hoped, those strings might settle at an appropriate point, resulting in unison. However, the piano still became out of unison with exactly the same pattern.

Next, Roberto intentionally set some, but not all, of the stable strings slightly flat so that a different pattern could emerge. After several weeks, the piano still exhibited exactly the same pattern. That is, even the strings that did not go flat earlier went flat to *create* the same pattern of being out of unison. This is impossible.

Since the pattern was always the same, Roberto started to pay more attention to the pattern itself. For the affected notes, there are three possibilities. One was that the note was still in unison. The second was that the note became out of unison in a way only the left string went flat. The third was that the note became out of unison in a way only the right string went flat. Roberto is an engineer by training. So, his analytical mind kicked in. He wrote down the pattern as follows, where ‘L’ stands for the left string flat, ‘R’, the right string flat, and ‘_’ as unison.

LRLR_LLRL__LRLR_LLRL__LRLR_LLRL

Roberto could not believe it. This cannot be random. It is too systematic. Is the piano trying to communicate? The coding scheme is not a binary system; it is a ternary system. Since Roberto’s engineering career began with his interest in Ham/Amateur Radio, he immediately thought about the most famous ternary system, the Morse code. He translated the letter ‘L’ as a dot ‘•’, ‘R’ as a dash ‘-’, and the unison as a space.

•-•- •••- •-•- •••• •-•- ••••

“•••-” corresponds to ‘F’ but “•-•-” does not correspond to any alphanumeric symbol. So, he switched the dots and dashes.

-••• -••- -••• -••- -••• -••-

Roberto couldn’t believe this; it read “CQ CQ CQ”. This is a special code used by ham radio operators to address the listeners in general. He is a rational engineer with no interest in super natural phenomena. But the only conclusion he was able to draw from all these was that the piano was calling for Roberto’s attention.

Roberto was so excited that he didn’t pay much attention to the absurdity of the situation.

He tuned the piano completely and then intentionally broke the tuning in the way corresponding to the following signal.

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This means “GOT IT”. After several weeks, the piano settled in a new out-of-unison pattern. This time, the message was just one word, “PRUXENCIO”. Roberto was astonished even more than by the first message. This was his late grandfather’s name. Originally, the name was supposed to be Prudencio, a common name. However, when Pruxencio’s father went to the town hall to register his newborn child, he was unable to pronounce the name clearly due to heavy drinking. The busy official simply put down what he thought he heard. Now, there can’t be many Pruxencios in the whole world; maybe just one. Roberto started to suspect that this piano might know something about his grandfather.

After acknowledging this second message, Roberto waited for another few weeks until the piano settled with the next pattern. The new message was “TIED TO TREE”. This immediately reminded Roberto of his father, Máximo. Roberto heard that Máximo was tied to a tree by Pruxencio. So, Roberto was aware of the abuse Máximo received from Pruxencio. However, the new message was about Pruxencio, not Máximo, being tied to a tree. Then, did Pruxencio repeat the same thing to Máximo? Roberto started to imagine child abuse recurring in his family.

Roberto was not close to Pruxencio and had little contact with him before Pruxencio’s death a few decades ago. But he felt that the piano was trying to tell him something, something beyond this fact. Since this unusual mode of communication with the piano was extremely time-consuming, Roberto started to explore the topic on his own as well.

Why does the piano want to tell this? What does it know? How did it learn? Roberto contacted the previous owner of the piano to ask about its history. Unfortunately, there was little useful information. The only information was the following. The piano had been owned by a solitary old lady for some time. When she passed away, her distant family sold it.

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Around that time, Roberto got a phone call from the senior facility where his mother, Victoria, was living. After Roberto’s father, Máximo, died, Victoria was living there by herself. But due to her worsening dementia, the facility could no longer have her as an independent resident. She needed to move to a complete-care facility. When Roberto helped Victoria move, he found a box full of diaries written by his late grandmother, Luna, the wife of Pruxencio.

The diaries were mostly about the last days of Pruxencio and Luna. However, there were a few passages that went back to their early days. According to those, Pruxencio’s family did

own a grand piano! It was a prize won at a fair. However, they needed to sell it in the midst of the great depression. So, the piano could have “witnessed” how Pruxencio was growing up. There also was a description that the family also needed to sell some special radio equipment. Although not explicit, maybe Pruxencio’s father (or Pruxencio himself) was a ham radio operator. Then, the piano could have learned the Morse code. Roberto never heard of either of them being a ham. But he also remembered that his relatives said that Pruxencio had a career in some sort of technology.

Through the piano’s message, Roberto suddenly became aware of child abuse running through Roberto’s family. This was a truly new discovery for Roberto. He thought his life had been perfect. He had a relatively privileged childhood life with excellent academic and athletic records. His adulthood life had been successful too with both industrial and academic experience in engineering. He enjoyed his marriage life for more than two decades, without a child. But after his surprise son, Santiago, was born, Roberto started to feel some sort of uneasiness. It was hard to articulate what it was, though.

Now, Roberto started to suspect that his feeling has something to do with the history of inter-generational abuse. He started to read about childhood abuse. Along the way, he also learned about Attachment Theory, a branch of psychology concerning the impact of the child-caregiver relationship on later development. He especially appreciated the book titled *Becoming Attached* as a great introduction to the field. Then, he came to a surprise realization that his attachment pattern with his parents was “insecure.” In particular, he was able to identify his attachment pattern as “avoidant.” Children with avoidant attachment tend to ignore caregivers even when they actually want to cling to them. They will create a sort of facade to pretend that they were OK even without a caregiver. This pattern would result if the caregiver is controlling and dismissive, often also reflecting the attachment pattern of the caregivers themselves. That is, attachment patterns are carried over to the next generation, although there are exceptions.

As adults, people with avoidant attachment tend to generalize the relationship with their parents simply as “good” or even “great.” However, they usually fail to provide concrete examples. In fact, many such adults would say that they don’t remember their childhood very well. Their skills in developing intimate relationships are often not as good as people with “secure” attachment. Since “avoidant” adults crave for “unconditional” love not given by their caregivers, they often find some sort of substitute mechanisms. If the substitute is reading, research, athletics, etc., they may excel in those areas without major problems. If the substitute is alcohol, drugs, shopping, sex, etc., they may have a major problem. Roberto learned these things from books such as *In the realm of hungry ghosts*. In a sense, Roberto’s interest in “good” substitute accompanied with high achievements had shielded him from various damaging possibilities. It also shielded him from realizing that there was an underlying issue.

At this point, Roberto also thought about his relationship with his son, Santiago. Am I repeating the same pattern? Roberto hated when his father, Máximo, yelled at him. But Máximo never abused Roberto physically. Roberto was not physically abusive to Santiago

either. In addition, Roberto never yelled at Santiago. However, Roberto couldn't deny that he was still somewhat controlling using rewards and punishments in a subtle manner. For example, when Santiago somehow rejects Roberto, Roberto feels the need to revenge. Sometimes, Roberto was able to suppress such feelings. But occasionally, Roberto needed to stonewall Santiago as a revenge.

As for Santiago, he occasionally yelled at his parents. This reminded Roberto of Máximo and triggered some sort of retraumatization within him. Roberto thought that he was consciously suppressing his urge to yell because of his childhood experience. But he also thought that the same "yelling" gene may still be carried inside Santiago. So, Santiago may be prone to yelling and abuse as well. Roberto wanted to do something about it but didn't know what.

Now, Roberto thought that his piano fever was a newly-emerging skill of soothing himself, especially when his wife was unavailable. Until he started to practice the piano, there were other things that occupied him. Luckily, they were research and his job as a college professor. In any case, he now had to admit that his parents never *really* soothed him when he needed and that was *still* haunting him. For example, a lot of toys are no substitute for unconditional love. In general, children of a rich family are likely to suffer from attachment insecurity. This is because their busy but rich parents can leave their children with toys and nannies.

It was a sobering and humbling experience. For the first time in his entire life, Roberto felt pity for himself. There was a meaning associated with practicing the piano. And this particular piano "knew" Roberto's deep past and was trying to address it. Did this development change the way he played the piano? Certainly. Playing the piano became more like an affectionate touch. Reflecting the Newton's third law of physics, every touch Roberto made, there was an equal and opposite reaction. It became mutual.

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Then, Roberto recalled Glenn Gould. Why was Roberto so intrigued by Glenn's playing the piano just before his death? So, Roberto read several biographies of Glenn Gould, especially focusing on his childhood. Some authors suggested the possibility of Glenn Gould suffering from Autism Spectrum Disorder. However, Roberto was not particularly concerned with that aspect. He was more interested in Glenn's attachment pattern.

In the book, *Glenn Gould: The Ecstasy and Tragedy of Genius*, there was a detailed description of Glenn's childhood (it also became obvious that the author of this book had his own attachment issues). Glenn's mother was extremely strict about his sitting posture and even his taste of music. She was very controlling. Although Glenn had an intimate relationship with her, he also had inner rage. Glenn even had a hidden desire to kill his mother. But Glenn managed to have sufficient self-control as well and was able to avoid such a tragedy. When his mother was dying at a hospital, Glenn never (or at least rarely) visited her, mainly

because of his fear of germs. But later, he regretted. Glenn certainly had avoidant attachment pattern at least with his mother. The relationship with his father was not so clear. They were not as close and Glenn was furious when his father re-married after his mother's death. However, Glenn also carried the special chair made by his father to every piano performance. While distancing from his father, Glenn was still attached to the chair.

Probably just once in his whole life, Glenn was involved in a serious romantic relationship with a married woman with children. This did not go through. This must have been disastrous to Glenn. So, playing the piano was most likely the only way Glenn was able to soothe himself. Even though Roberto never met Glenn or even heard of him until recently, he made a sort of special connection to him. In a sense, he "understood" Glenn and his music.

A different aspect of insecurity can be seen in the book, *Grand Obsession*. The author's obsession must also have been the consequence of her attachment insecurity. Roberto thought that such obsession was unhealthy. Roberto secretly thought that many musicians were insecure and that they needed music to soothe themselves. He also read somewhere that musicians tend to suffer from mental illness more so than non-musicians. Or, Roberto thought, it may be the other way around. It may be that people with a variety of mental conditions, including attachment insecurity, seek music as self-medication.

One critical point is that most people are unaware of Attachment Theory, much less their own attachment patterns. So, Roberto thought that people with insecure attachment should be able to benefit from understanding Attachment Theory. That is, this knowledge could be a starting point for these people to resolve their issues. As for Roberto, it was still not at all clear how to overcome attachment insecurity. This hidden deficiency is deep inside him and repair, if possible, would require something deep as well.

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Several weeks passed. Again, the piano became out of tune. This time, Roberto knew what was happening and thus was able to decode the message right away. It was just "REPLACED". Roberto felt that he needed to know more about the piano and so searched on-line for some clue. On a web site he had never visited before, he learned that his Lester piano was *Lester Style 80* with ivory key tops. But wait a minute. The key tops are *not* ivory. Although the previous owner said that they were ivory, Roberto knew that they are *fake* ivory, i.e., plastic. So, the key tops could have been replaced.

When Roberto searched on-line about ivory piano key tops, one image caught his eyes. He had seen something like that. It was a photo of a necklace with the shape of a piano key top. According to the description, it was made of ivory.

Although forgotten for many, many years, Roberto now recalled an old incidence. While in an elementary school, he became close to one girl in his class. She was wearing a necklace

just like the photo. One day, Roberto saw the girl talking with another boy. Roberto thought that she was attracted to the boy and became furious. Later, he secretly took the necklace when it was left near the girl's book bag. Then, he destroyed the necklace and never spoke to that girl.

Roberto wondered, "does the piano know this?" Unlike the case of Pruxencio, there is no way for the piano to have seen what Roberto did. This is a deep, darkest secret of Roberto, which nobody else knew.

This recollection was exceedingly painful for Roberto. It was something he had conveniently forgotten. How come he did such an awful thing? Should he find the girl and apologize? He was not sure if that would be helpful at all. He thought he would never be able to resolve it. So, he came to think that the only possibility he can seek would be: to accept the pain, rather than forgetting it, and make the best out of it. Although he didn't know how, he certainly started to think about it. In a sense, he had become humbler after learning his own attachment insecurity.

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Roberto thought that the piano was cruel this time. He didn't appreciate it at all. However, after several weeks, the piano again sent him the same message, "REPLACED". Maybe, Roberto's past was not what the piano intended after all. There may be something else. But he had no idea.

One day, just out of curiosity, Roberto stopped by a local piano store. He played a few Steinways. This opportunity strengthened his impression that his piano still sounds too harsh and its keys are terribly unresponsive to soft touch. So, when he gets home, he searched on-line for how to address these issues. Some procedures seem rather complicated and involved. But he was motivated. It's an old piano. There is nothing to lose. He then found a book that seemed really helpful. Since it was rather expensive, he requested an inter-library loan.

Even before getting the book, he learned how to remove the keyboard and action from the cabinet. This much wasn't so difficult for an engineer. It was a funny feeling to see this highly intricate part of the piano coming out just like that. Then, he noticed something odd. There was a number carved in front of the action. It looks like a serial number. But it was different from the piano's serial number. Was this action be a replacement? If so, Roberto guessed, the action must have been replaced after the piano was sold by Pruxencio's family. The piano's message, "REPLACED" became significant.

If the piano's action had been replaced, there must be a lot of consequences. Would it be a normal thing to replace the action? Does the piano sound and respond the way it should after that? Once the piano maintenance book through inter-library loan arrived, Roberto started to investigate.

The first thing Roberto found was that harsh sound is often due to old, hardened hammer felts. And the felts can be softened by needling. Even though he didn't have any special tools, he thought he could try this with his wife's sewing needles. After removing the action, Roberto carefully needled the crown of a few hammer felts, just several times for each hammer felt. After re-inserting the action in the cabinet, he was able to confirm the improvement. The needled notes did sound mellower.

However, needling hammer felts with a household needle was rather tiresome and even painful to his fingers. So, he ordered a special piano voicing needles. With this tool, he needled the shoulder and then the crown of all the 88 hammer felts. It took days but the result was amazing. The harshness disappeared completely. Although the piano still didn't sound like a Steinway, it now sounded sufficiently sweet and pleasant to hear.

Now, Roberto had a stronger sense that the piano had been suffering with the replacement action. In a sense, it must be like having an organ transplant. Without proper adjustments, it won't work well. No wonder, it sounded harsh.

Feeling good, Roberto started to examine the action itself. He noticed that the "blow distance" between the tip of the hammers (at the stationary position) and the string is about 1/2 inches greater across the board than the standard space described in the maintenance book. This must have been the reason the piano did not respond to soft touch very well. At this point, Roberto was convinced that the action had been REPLACED. He thought he could resolve the piano's issue.

Roberto tried to adjust the blow distance with a household pliers. But due to the limited space in the action, it was almost impossible. So, he again ordered a tool called capstan regulator for that purpose. He carefully adjusted the blow distance more or less to the standard dimension. Then, he also applied powder lubricant around the balance pins, which hold the keys in the middle. Again, the result was amazing. Just like the pianos he played in the store earlier, his piano now responds to soft touch reasonably well.

Even after all these, Roberto still heard the piano squeak, when the damper pedal was depressed. He explored the pedal assembly and searched for the source of the squeak. He applied powder lubricant to various places. When he did this to the pitman, which links the pedal assembly with the action inside the cabinet, the squeak stopped. At this point, he felt that the piano finally stopped complaining.

Roberto spent a lot of time, tuning, regulating, and voicing the piano. He now had an intimate relationship with the piano. He was so grateful to the piano for opening his eyes to his own attachment insecurity and providing him with a means to soothe himself through playing. At this point, Roberto tuned the piano completely and then sent the message "THANK YOU."

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Since then, the piano was able to hold tuning very well. Of course, it required tuning at the turn of each season, just like other “well-behaved” pianos. Even when it went out of tune, there didn’t seem to be a specific pattern any longer. So, the Morse “conversation” between Roberto and the piano came to an end. It was never observed or confirmed by anyone else. And Roberto kept it to himself.

However, it’s not that the conversation between Roberto and the piano ended. Their “communication” continued as Roberto kept playing just one piece of music. And there must have been a reason why he liked the romantic *Clair de Lune*, not more forceful *Für Elise*. Since Roberto didn’t have any close friends, the piano became one, if that can be considered “friendship.” This was a significant development because unconditional relationship (even with a piano) can be the safe haven to address attachment insecurity. In fact, Roberto’s relationship to other people started to be more meaningful as well.

As the time went by, Roberto started to feel that his piano sounded better and better. In fact, he secretly thought that the piano sounded like a concert grand. But we don’t know if this was true. Toward the end of his life, Roberto completely lost his normal hearing. Nevertheless, he was still able to “hear” the piano. Of course, he never told this to anyone else.