

# Sound as the key piece of the puzzle in the journey of my recovery – my fight back into a second chance at life

By Heike Sy

Following a serious car accident that put me in a coma for several weeks, I awoke in the Leezen Clinic – an acute care clinic for early rehabilitation and an interdisciplinary rehabilitation center. The sounds of the singing bowls helped me find my way back to life.

## Prior History

My name is Heike Sy, economic engineer and management expert. In November 2005, I was working for a recreational vehicle company near Hannover. On this fateful November 5, I was traveling in my Ford Mondeo on business. In just a few seconds, my entire life changed. I could not control the car on the wet and slippery road, it began to swerve and turn around. Without braking, I slammed with the driver's side into a tree. During the crash, my head landed in an awkward position and, as a result, my brain did not get sufficient oxygen. I was intubated by the emergency physician in the helicopter that airlifted me to the University Clinic of Hannover.

I did not find out about what happened thereafter until much later: through accounts, newspaper reports that mentioned something about speeding, etc. I had driven the curvy country road many times. In all kinds of weather. But I was never able to drive fast there.

Several days after the accident, I was transported to the HELIOS Clinic in Leezen, so I would be closer to my sons. The coming months there were a painful, horrible experience for me. The initial diagnosis was: severe head/brain trauma, grade 3, left hemiparesis. The pain was extreme. Often, I cried out involuntarily, even though I was told to be quiet by "nurse Ratched" in her sensitive way. Coming out of the coma took a very long time!

I faced a long, hard battle to relearn everything. But I did not know that for a long time. I just wanted to get out of there. Fast! That was my hope. Johannes Messner once said:

*"Every great hope gives renewed strength."*

*The soft tones have a soothing and pain-reducing effect.*

Photo: „Schweriner Volkszeitung“





Photo: „Schweriner Volkszeitung“

*Still today, 10 years after my accident, the singing bowls provide relaxing moments.*

## **My strong determination: getting back to MY LIFE!**

Minor injuries to the forehead and small pelvic fractures healed during the coma. I thus "slept through" the worst pain. The deep coma lasted approx. seven weeks. Seven weeks that are missing from my life. In the beginning, I was nourished via a feeding tube. Only after those seven weeks did I begin my very S L O W return to my life. My hearing had improved a lot by the end of the coma, but my vision was not yet clear.

I was therefore able to hear two people busy with cleaning duties in my room. One of them said: "Ok and here ...?" The other replied: "Come on, she's not going to make it anyhow." Aghast, I thought: "Help – they are talking about me!" I wanted to cry out instantly "But I'm still here – can't you see that?" The door slammed shut and I was alone again. Alone with only my fearful thoughts. My surroundings appeared dark, blurry, nebulous. My brain began to function, and confused thoughts arose. "What is going on here, where are my sons?" Again I dozed off. From one scattered dream to the next. One dream led me back to a beautiful former time, my time at sea. Flight to west Africa, landing in Mauritania. The ship was off shore. From afar, I anxiously spotted the open side entry. NO WAY! I can't do that! "No problem!", I heard someone say in the launch bringing passengers to the ship. "There are two guys there that grab everyone and pull them in. Watch the waves and JUMP."

Yes – those guys grabbed me. With energy to spare! I fell, slid through the hallway, and landed directly at the feet of the chef. "Oh – you must be my new boss. But laying at my feet is really not necessary!"

Later I asked myself, why such dreams from a time so long ago? To this day, situations that left a strong impression on me come back to me. After my accident, I could not speak for a long time. The musculature of my mouth felt stiff, numb. Communication began through blinking with my eyes, later followed by small gestures. Gradually, I could perceive more and more. Everything had to be learned anew. Daily training in washing and dressing myself was exhausting!

My partner had to bring me soft laced shoes that I wore in bed to prevent foot deformity. In many books and movies, the story goes: "He/She is back ... wake up, open your eyes", everything is back to normal ..., NO!

Unfortunately, that is not how it is. But I so wanted to come back. Into MY life. It was depressing to be dependent on the help of others. WHEN? I hated the words TIME and PATIENCE. Later, the word time had a new meaning for me. I once read a text by an unknown author entitled "What is time". The final sentence was:

*"Live every moment you have consciously!  
Because it is precious."*

## Encounter with singing bowls – the pain becomes less

The desire became stronger, the impatience greater. I started exercises and therapies in a wheelchair, which I still needed at the time. Then, one day, there it was on the SCHEDULE: music therapy. YES. Music and singing! Those had always been the BEST parts of my life. Full of anticipation, I rolled my wheelchair to the appointed room. The music therapist began playing a song on the piano. Of course – I knew the song and wanted to join in. HOWEVER, I was shocked. No clean sound, I could not get enough air to breathe. The harder I tried, the stiffer my oral muscles became. Nothing worked, time to quit. NO. Ms. Becker, the therapist had a better idea! – A Peter Hess® sound massage with singing bowls!

I had seen these in the music room and thought they were decoration. Because they are so beautiful. I enjoyed learning about the materials the bowls were made from, their origin, and the way they work. Unfortunately, I do not recall what each bowl was used for. Curious – I wanted to try this approach, to immerse myself in this technique. What a surprise! The effects were soothing to me, so astounding. Incomprehensible.

Two singing bowls were at my feet, a third was placed on my painful leg by the therapist. With a felt-covered mallet, the bowls were repeatedly tapped. Listening to the sounds with my eyes closed, I absorbed the tones. It felt as though the soft sound flowed directly into my injured leg.

Flowed soothingly and softly vibrating through this body part, and then exited again. In this process, the pain was pushed out a bit. It felt as though these sounds, this tone that I could hear within me, lingered for a while and could still be felt afterwards. This meant that I could look forward to a pleasant two hours without painful aching in my leg. After several repetitions, I simply felt better. To my complete astonishment. Incredible that such a thing really works. Following sound therapy, I always had a session with a good psychologist who was very patient with me. She told me that my development was remarkable more than once. She sometimes saw me getting around in my wheelchair looking rather exhausted. But when I met with her after a sound therapy session, she always noticed more alertness, more vivacity in me. How is this possible? To the best of my ability, I tried to convey to her how the therapy with singing bowls seems to transmit a soothing power to me. Obviously, this was not just in my head, another person noticed the effects the singing bowls had on me. Ms. Becker kindly lent

me a singing bowl to take to my hospital room. I began working with it full of happy anticipation. However, I was DEEPLY disappointed that despite all my efforts, NOTHING happened. I had to learn that using the bowls myself – concentrating on the sounds, striking the bowl, listening, perceiving – that did not work for me. I only experienced the real effects if a trained therapist did these things for me. Sound therapy with singing bowls by Ms. Becker helped me regain my strength after the accident to find my way back to a second chance at life.

## My second chance at life – 10 years after the accident

Walter Reisberger once said:

*You have to look back to move forward!*

Now – almost ten years after this big turning point in my existence – the following question remains: What is left in my new life? Is it worth living again?

I answer that question with a big YES. Even though I did not survive the accident without suffering permanent damage. My hemiparesis will never go away. The persistent mild dizziness is a constant distraction. I try to ignore both of these as best as possible. I am no longer able to concentrate on an activity or subject for an extended period of time. Long breaks are necessary.

Unfortunately, I was unable to work! But my JOY of life is unbroken to this day! I have a therapy session every day. Sometimes they are strenuous, but they help me. Then I do what I never had time to do while working: creating satirical drawings for good friends. Then the most important thing: TRAVEL! Tours through Asian or African countries. Seeing these countries, learning about their history, experiencing the life of the locals, that is important to me. Whenever possible, even brief personal contact with these people.

I love that so much! My favorite trip with the most interesting experiences so far was a trip to southern India. Unfortunately, my dizziness put me in an unpleasant situation there. I needed help! In no mood to visit another temple, I waited outside. In the sun. Soon I noticed by strength diminishing. NO. Don't you fall on these stone slabs. Go sit down on the stairs. Get there alone? I didn't dare do that. But whom should I ask? The people rushing by did not look very trustworthy. A young Indian man headed in my direction. He looked a little like my son, well dressed in black

pants and a bright shirt. With my little bit of English, I asked him cautiously if he could help me. "What can I do for you, ma'am?" he asked. He took me by the hand and led me to the stairs, in the shade. I started feeling better immediately. I said goodbye gratefully – smiling, he wished me well. I told this story only to my treating physician in Hamburg. Shaking his head upon hearing my adventure, he asked, "Was it worth THAT?" Convinced of the joy of traveling, I gave him a resounding yes. "Of course it was – nothing happened ..." It won't be my last trip.

### What is important to me TODAY – in my new life?

Nobody can travel or be on the road constantly! There are other things that make life worth living, that provide joy. As long as I am able, I will continue to do what gives me pleasure, despite by "biblical age." Provided there are no further physical limitations. The advice of a psychologist has helped me. It is important to achieve small highlights every day, you just have to learn how to recognize them. It is also important to do something to stay fit. I should walk with the aid of a walker for at least one hour a day to stay mobile. Or do stretching exercises with my arms and legs. But to be honest, it is difficult for me to keep it up every day. Maybe every third day. Whatever happens next in my life.

It is important to me, to every person, to preserve the joy of living.

To me, the words by Astrid Meyer make a lot of sense:

*"Draw from the past,  
shape the present, and  
be open to the future."*



*Feeling the vibrations of an XL singing bowl rise from your feet is an extra special sound therapy experience.*