

## Gregor

I was asked to go to the children's ward in a Zürich hospital to give lessons to a 13 month old who had fallen 7 meters from a window. Gregor had broken his right leg and hit his head.

The nurse who referred the family to me was present for the entire first lesson. Before I saw the child in the hospital, the nurse and I had spoken in English about how the child had the accident, what medical procedures had been done, and that he was medically stable enough for me to work with him. His spine and neck were stable, he was off medication, and the doctors had said that they had done what they could. From their point of view, it was a matter of waiting and seeing how much functioning he would recover on his own. The suspicion of brain injury was first told to the mother after our first lesson. Before giving him a Functional Integration movement lesson, I knew there were no objections to him having movement lessons for medical reasons. The mother knew that I had talked with the nurse, the nurse was there with us, and I felt I could be most useful if I could first calm the child's nervous system by gently starting to work with him, as described in the case study.

The loud crying that I heard from the elevator came from him. He lay on his back screaming with both legs suspended in the air above him. He was not moving except for his right hand. His mother stood to the right of the bed on his right side. I joined her and said who I was. I looked at Gregor and said "Nancy" and pointed to my self, and I said "Mama" and pointed to her. In my broken German I told him "Yes I know, it is not good when it hurts so much and you can't move". He followed me with his open left eye as I spoke and he stopped crying. His mother also started to breathe a little easier. As he looked at me I noticed his left hand lay on the bed next to his left ear and it was tightly closed. The right side of his head was bruised and his right eye was mostly closed.

I started working with the part of him that he could move. I gently touched his right hand and began to open it and point to his mother; then I closed the fingers and opened them again and pointed to me. I said both of our names. I continued to work with his right hand and thought about how the gentle movements of the hand can calm the excitation of nervous system. I thought of different studies that I had read that show the incredible plasticity of the brain. That first lesson I only worked with his right hand and arm. He was quiet the whole lesson and the mother could sit down in the chair nearby and rest. After the lesson, I learned that she had just talked with the doctor and had been told that the hemorrhaging near where he hit his head may have caused injury to the brain. The doctors were very concerned that after a week in the hospital, he still showed no signs of moving his left hand and leg. I also learned in detail how the accident happened. Both parents were at home, she had been in the room with him, the window was ajar, she left the room for a few minutes and he somehow climbed up and out of the window.

During that first lesson, I had noticed that his right side moved more than his left while breathing. I placed a hand on his ribs on the right side and then on his left side. My idea was to bring his attention to these parts of himself to make his breathing easier. He responded well to the quality of touch. The combination of making contact with him, talking, and touching in this way did bring about a change in his breathing, and he moved his eyes more easily to the right to see his mother. But he still didn't roll his head. At the end of the lesson he looked at his mother on his left for the first time since the accident.

When I came for the second lesson his legs were no longer up in traction. I felt that I could begin to bring his attention to how he could shift his weight without his being completely frustrated by the fact that his legs were fixed. At the beginning of the lesson he still showed no signs of knowing that he had a left leg or hand to move. I put my hand under his low back on one side and then the other, and he responded to my touch on both sides. From above his head I placed my fingers on either side of the spine just below his head. The muscle tone on both sides of his neck began to be a little more supple. I had his mother go to his left, very close to him, and I gently indicated how he could roll his head to see her and be closer. Soon I moved over to his left side and he began to roll his head on his own and to reach with his right hand to grab my hair. I guided him to shift his weight to the left side of his back while he rolled the head and reached over the "midline". Then I had his mother go to his right side, and I continued working along his ribs and neck to support him to roll the head right and to even out the muscle tonus with my touch. I helped him to feel how he could turn from his low back on the left side. I placed his left hand on his chest and soon he opened his left hand to reach for his mother's hair over the "midline". My feeling was that his left side existed for him again. The coloring in his left hand changed. I needed to support his arm so that he could hold it on his chest, but by the end of the lesson, opening his left hand and going over his midline became easy from this position. I felt that he would regain full use of his left side. I thought about the FI lessons that are given to people who have lost a hand and have phantom pain. Christina Merz at Schweizer Paraplegiker-Zentrum uses a mirror box so that the person can imagine that they see the missing hand. When they can look at the mirror image and move the hand as if it were the missing one, the brain seems to make sense of the chaos and the pain can stop.

I came in the room for the third lesson and his right eye was open and his left hand was less tightly closed. I used his mother again and during this lesson he began to be able to move his left hand to reach for her with very little support from me. Once or twice when he began to reach over the midline with his left hand, I gave him support from under his chest and his back. I helped him to feel how to roll to the right while reaching with his left hand. Both eyes and hands were completely open when I left.

I gave him a total of four lessons in 1 week while he was in the hospital. The family lives some hours out of the city, so regular lessons after he left the hospital weren't easy to arrange, and I also didn't feel that they were needed. He had a couple of months of physical therapy after they went home, and the family came to me once during that time. I could feel or see no trace of the asymmetry that he experienced right after the accident.

From the parents' perspective, our lessons together made a big difference for Gregor. From my perspective, I experienced that the gentle and step-by-step approach of this method helped his nervous system to quickly recover his full functioning. At thirteen months of age, the brain has an incredible plasticity, but there is no way to know how he might have been without the lessons.