

Hear and Now By Sara Auster
End Well Symposium, December 6, 2018

Start of Transcript

[Crowd Applauding]

Hi. Hello. I'm gonna have just a little Mr.-Rodgers moment.

[Crowd Chuckles]

If you wanna take your shoes off, you can. We're gonna be here for a second. [Taking Shoes Off] Yeah. No takers on the shoes-off? I've been here all day [Chuckles]. Okay, we got one. All right I'm gonna get right into it. That's me, I'm the little one, on the left.

I was **[00:01:00]** seven years old, home alone with my two older sisters when my oldest sister Jeniffer, 14 at the time, had her first grand Mal seizure. This is only one of the many memories that stands out to me for my sister's journey. Over the next couple of years, she spent a lot of time in hospitals mostly and this meant that my family spent a lot of time in hospitals, which meant a lot of long car rides to and from hospitals and in my family, that means singing at the top of your lungs. We also brought a Walkman with tapes. Remember those? **[00:02:00]** of Jennifer's favourite artist because music was always something that brought us together. It offered a moment of joy even if only for the the length of the song.

As a young child adapting to my environment, I began to find different kinds of ways to stay occupied in those hospitals. I made sculptures and instruments using really whatever I could find: feeding tubes; medical tape; plastic urinals, bedpans? And use all the things [Chuckles] They wouldn't let me near these ones **[00:03:00]**. I would make up songs to the beeps and clicks of the monitors and machines. And I was using art and creativity to transform my relationship to the space and bring new meaning to the materials and places that we often associate when someone's dying.

My sister died on July 8, 1989 after a two-and-a-half-year battle with lupus cerebritis. As a young artist, I began making work with a medical team inspired my sister's life, illness and death using x-rays and old photos to create an interactive and multimedia work **[00:04:00]**. That's a feeding tube.

I continue to pursue my career as an artist. Now I'm making large scale installations with photo transfers, sound, creating spaces where other people could come and connect to their own memories of loved ones who passed.

Well fast forward 2002. I'm working as an artist like on my way to making it as an artist to New York City and I was awarded a space grant, that's a subsidised studio space to make my work and it was right on 42nd street. So I'm working in my space — I know it's so cool! [Laughing]. I was working in my space late one night and I started **[00:05:00]** to hear a loud banging sound which is not uncommon in New York City... for those of you who has never been there. But I soon came to realise that that banging sound was the floor giving way beneath me. Before I had a chance to react or realise what was actually happening, I fell about 15 feet from my studio on the second floor down into the first floor. That fall left me with a broken back in four places, lots of soft tissue damage and worse, temporary paralysis. So I'm in a hospital now. I'm laying in a hospital bed for about two weeks on a morphine drip and most of what I heard was "You are so lucky **[00:06:00]**!" ... "This is great! You'll be just like Frida Kahlo!" But let me tell

you something. Pain and a broken back is not as glamorous as Salma Hayek makes it look. [Crowd Laughing]

And there's so sly here because I wouldn't let anyone take pictures of me in the hospital, not in my best moments. I was released from the hospital with a brace for my hips to my chin and a prescription for morphine and percocet, but no prescription for physical therapy and certainly not psychotherapy. My neurosurgeon said — I'll never forget this — if it hurts, don't do it. Okay [Laughing] This is me. Standing. Sitting. Breathing. Putting clothes on [00:07:00] and just lay, make it for the rest of my life [Chuckles].

So you can imagine my frustration but this is what set me on my own personal quest to heal my body and mind. See I knew there'd be a technical thing so I'm just like going here [Laughing]. So you name it, I tried it. It's like a team of people all of my determination and will, and over a decade to finally live a relatively pain-free life. And every time I felt relief, I needed to know more, so I explored. We used modalities. I explored them with an openness and curiosity as a way to understand and make sense of what [00:08:00] was happening. It was a way for me to connect. Just like seven-year-old Sara exploring the materials... which is hard because I'm not really woo woo New Age person, says the girl sitting behind the bunch of crystal balls not the floor with no shoes on. [Crowd Laughing]

So I spent over a decade of studying several different types of massage therapy, body work, traditional Chinese medicine, yoga, meditation, psycho acoustics and sound therapy. So the more I work with sounds, the more I understood that if I accepted sound as vibration, knowing that vibration touches every part of our body and our being, then of course sound is not only heard through our ears but [00:09:00] through our entire bodies. And I had a Dr. Mitchell Gaynor to thank for that. Anybody who doesn't know who that is, you can look him up. [Chuckles]

So sound, that's my medium. Not only as a form of creative expression, but most importantly a way to pull space for others so I began facilitating sound baths. Sound-baths [Chuckles] as a way to combine my life's experience as an artist and survivor of trauma and my diverse studies in complimentary and alternative medicine practices.

This may work again. Hah! It did. It's not upside down. {Referring to Picture 00:09:45}

When I started facilitating sound master, about five to seven people each time, maybe some would come back, and can bring their girlfriend because it's really cool but another brought his sister going through chemo. And another brought their son who suffered from anxiety [00:10:00] or a best friend with insomnia and as the group grew, I realised this was bigger than I thought.

That sound not only brings us together, it's a way to connect. It's not only around joy and happiness but pain and suffering, too. The connections were building and out of those bonds, togetherness and community. But a sound bath is not only a way to access a moment of peace and rest; it's a space for healing.

The groups grew and grew and I — it took me to some interesting places. Like in my hometown, Oculus. Bound from New York City. {Showing Pictures} In Madison Square Garden. Museum of Modern Art. Just a couple of venues in New York City, like theatres, is it [00:11:00] coming? Maybe the thing got it. Or there we go. Go back. Hospitals. And you get it, public schools, we're not advancing [Chuckles]. There we go! Public schools. This is an alternative public high school in New York City but also Paris, Morocco, the Sahara Desert, various board rooms around the world. Yeah I just threw my goals in conference tables now.

And now, here. I said yes, we're doing it! You guys wanna do it? Oh you guys said yes when I didn't even ask you to. Okay! The only way it's gonna work is if you put your stuff down. So you already got a picture of this and me on stage, it's fine. We're good and there's like 20 **[00:12:00]** cameras here. So you can check it out later. You're all gonna look really beautiful. I So you put your stuff down... some of you already have your shoes off. Put both feet on the ground. Yeah, yes! This is gonna be relatively painless for those of you who have experienced it [Chuckles] And I'm going to invite you to close your eyes, if that's available to you. And if not, just don't look at me. Just look down [Crowd Laughing] Coz I'm not performing. It's not a concert. This is for you. So you can close your eyes. You can look down, whatever's comfortable to you, let your hands rest anywhere that feels comfortable. Be comfortable. It's the only thing you have to do **[00:13:00]**. And everybody has their eyes closed, nobody's looking at you. You can be comfortable without judgment. So let's take three breaths together but first I want you to find your breath so just notice and become aware of the air moving in and out of your nostrils. And the breath that we're going to do three times together, I will explain it to you. And you can listen before we do it. It's going to be a long inhale through the nose, I'll count for four counts and then a long exhale through the teeth, like a *th* sound, just listen. You don't have to see me. Listen. {Making Sound} Okay let's do it one. Two. Three. Four, exhale. And one more time inhale one, two, three, four and exhale **[00:14:00]** Just release back to the natural breath and out through your nose. And any thoughts that come in and any remnants and any talks from the morning, any memories, just allow them to come. Soften your receptive. All you have to do here is listen. Not just with your ears but with your whole body **[00:16:00]**.

{{Varying Sound Vibrations Playing from 00:16:25 to 00:25:40}}

Keeping your eyes closed, I just want you guys to bring awareness back to your breath...feel how and where your breath is moving in your body... So we're gonna take a full breath together, in through the nose, let's do it. Inhale and exhale with a sigh **[00:22:00]**. And we all have our eyes closed, so you don't have to worry about the sound that you're releasing. Just really give a sigh like you've been here all day long. Hold breath in... and sigh. Oh my god, yeah that's better [Chuckles]. Okay now on the next exhale, we'll do it all together when we inhale together, we're going to release one long extended hum, closed mouth. Any tone you choose, it doesn't have to match mine. Whatever feels comfortable for your voice, think about it. Listen. Let's inhale together. Exhale with a hum. Good let's do it again. Inhale...and again... and again. Okay so you can stick with that hum. You can stop it really, this is optional or you can open your mouth to an *aah* sound. Like this... [Aaah]. Okay **[00:24:00]** we're not singing, we're sending our voice — so this might be helpful, pause for a second, and think about someone you love and we're gonna send the *aah* Inhale... [Aaaah]. Amazing let's do that again. Inhale... and now bring it back to a hum. Just two more in your own pace. Place your left hand on your heart and your right hand on top of your left. Let your hands be soft on your body, feel your breath, feel your heartbeat **[00:26:00]**. Now keeping your hands on your heart, this is gonna be the hardest thing I'm gonna ask you to do, just gently start to open your eyes, hold your hands there if you can, and with your hands on your heart, try to look to one side and then be aware. If you accidentally make eye contact to somebody, please don't look away quickly [Everybody Laughing] And so, you're **[00:27:00]** free. You can release the gaze. Thank you.

Just a moment of gratitude for the ways that you show up, and all that you offer, and how you move in this world. I'm very grateful. So you can see that listening facilitates a little bit of connection [Chuckles] within us as individuals but it also has the ability to bring us closer in our relationship. So it might help, too. Like everyone else's that we don't wait til' the end to feel this, to feel connected and quiet. So I just hope that we can continue to explore with an

openness and a curiosity and that we continue this exploration together. I thank you for listening.

[Crowd Applauding]

End of Transcript