

The Story of Quilting for Caroline

First, all people are welcome to participate in Quilting for Caroline. If you feel someone would empathize with this story, or you empathize yourself, you are welcome to participate in this story or pass this story along.

If I have personally asked you to be part of this, it is because you have impacted my life in a way that makes me feel you have empathized towards me, and you have done this in a way that felt like natural giving from your heart in order to meet my needs at that time. As it is, I am truly grateful, from the depth of my heart, to have had each one of you in my life - for to have no one who offers empathy is to lack the most basic need in life.

I need to say that my fear of receiving no empathy in return is what makes this hard for me to ask you, the reader, to give me empathy. But this is the only way. For one has to first ask for empathy, and it is only when it is given in response, and one receives it, that one can also give it to others. Recognizing this process, I need to reach a place where I can truly give to others from the heart, and so that is what I need from you in order to follow this path. You are showing me how to empathize more fully with others through empathizing with me.

Most importantly, I acknowledge that each of you has inherent freedom to not take part in this, to change your mind part way through, or do anything else you personally need. I respect that you have this freedom, and furthermore I ask that you only participate in this process if you feel you can truly give naturally from your heart to meet this, described as “with the joy of a child feeding a duck”.

That is a quote from an incredibly valuable lens through which to view this story. That lens can be found in this video by Marshall B. Rosenberg, the founder of Non-Violent Communication. This is the link to that video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7TONauJGfc>

This project is about Empathy as defined by how I now interpret the concept of Empathy due to watching the above video. Here is my interpretation of the word Empathy, coming from where I am in my story: I feel that Empathy is one of the most meaningful needs we all have. Importantly, our ability to give Empathy is, deeply and often tragically, tied to us being able to meet our own needs of Empathy. In the interest of fostering deeper capacity within myself for Empathy, I need to invite people to take part who feel they can empathize in a way that is true, natural giving from their heart. If I personally asked you to be a part of it, it is because I believe you can do that. I also invite you to empathize in whatever way you need or are able, either by drawing, making a story, sending in a recording, filming a video of something you've done or are doing, or anything else that meets you where you are able to empathize.

In this context, what is important is to recognize there is no time constraint on the creation of this album, and that however long it takes for you to empathize is however long it needs. The project will never be complete - it will be constantly evolving as more and more is received and

given with true empathy from the heart. Over time, I envision this to be a multi-faceted collection of expressions of empathy. I envision a collection that can travel from place to place, inspiring and fostering more and more empathy between each other and the world.

I need to give some context of the 2 tracks here that are the foundation of the music of Quilting for Caroline. For me, it feels that the entire process of creating this album was done in the space of Empathy.

“Quilting”: in this first song, I empathize with what I recognize to be a universal truth; that, on a relatively constant basis, our lived experiences contain moments where we are asking, either others or ourselves, for Empathy. The deep sadness that inspired Quilting was my realization that so rarely is the Empathy given to us in a way that is natural giving from the heart, that if it is we often cannot see it, and that it is often given instead by ourselves or others in a way that harms and perpetuates the cycle of not being able to meet our need for Empathy.

The lyrics of Quilting are about this:

*Tell me about the little things
And all the joy your heart sings
Or all the pain the past brings*

*Tell me about the little things
And all the bells your heart rings*

*All of your mending is done
Patchwork to fade in the sun*

*Tell me about the little things
Threading your needle with heart strings*

*Chasing for nothing all of your mistakes of the past
Going in circles how long do you think you will last
Talk to yourself while words cut through like sharp broken glass*

*Have years passed since you've been loved?
Have years passed since you've been loved?
Have years passed since you've been loved?*

It is titled Quilting because of the human need of piecing things together through Empathy. In my family, that is exemplified through the act of Quilting. I see that tradition as a metaphor. I see all of us as threads, strings that need to be held together, woven into the fabric of our connections. What accomplishes this weaving is the act of giving empathy from the heart. To that point, all the quilts in my life feel that they have been given to me naturally from the heart,

which speaks to me of the pureness of this tradition. Included in the song is the light rustling of a quilt my grandmother made, recorded while I wrapped myself in it, feeling the true empathy it gave me. That is the background image of this page on my website. Other sounds include dried tallgrass, wool knitted slippers and other fabric. The guitar part is pieced together like a quilt, with sometimes 12 guitars playing the same line, only slightly differently. It was pieced together by playing the same musical fragment for sometimes 20-minutes at a time, and then cutting up that long piece into smaller and smaller fragments, putting them on top of each other. Each one has a slightly different nuance of empathy, as all things do.

“For Caroline” is my own act of trying to empathize naturally, from the heart. Here I empathize through the piano, the place where I know how to empathize the purest. Initially, it was empathy given from my heart for a friend of mine, Caroline. Through the improvisation I started to recognize that I was empathizing with a need in myself, as well, which allowed me to empathize with her in the beginning. Following that, I began to realize that my empathy was speaking to a universal need, and I played for everyone, including you.

Throughout this track my direction of empathy is relatively clear and it feels mostly honest and from the heart. Sometimes, however, I fall into using the piano to empathize with myself and search for what I feel I need. When I recognize this is happening, I try to pull myself back in a non judgemental way, and refocus on giving empathy. This is a pattern that is common in my life, and my ability to empathize has expanded as my own needs have been met. I feel this is an honest attempt at giving empathy - often, we can give empathy only so much as we are able. At some point, we feel forced to turn inward and try to give ourselves the empathy we need. Here, we try to respond to the need that is in the way of giving the other person their need. This speaks to this fundamental truth: it is natural to give from the heart. I feel we are constantly trying to meet our own needs so that we are able to truly give to others.

I won't say where this happens in the recording, as I need for your empathy to be without the bias that would be created if you knew in advance and were thinking prior to empathizing. If you feel you can hear that I am empathizing with myself as opposed to Caroline, you have met my need of being seen as trying to meet my own needs.

That is, I feel, an accurate summary of the foundational music to this story I am inviting you to participate in. Now, understanding that context, I need you to listen to the song and the piano improvisation in an empathetic way until you feel in your heart the empathy I am expressing.

I need this because the amount that we are able to hear empathy (as it is expressed in all music) is directly related to the amount we are able to receive the empathy, or give the empathy, to ourselves. This means that first I need you to feel the empathy I have for you, in order for you to express that empathy back to me. In order for you to hear what empathy I have for you, you must give that to yourself.

After we create that empathetic connection between us, I invite you to empathize with the music

from your heart, and add yourself to it in whatever way feels truly empathetic to you. Again, you are welcome to add yourself in whatever way feels right to you, either by making a drawing, a story, a recording, or anything else. The only constraint is that I need the song to be me alone, and so audio recordings are only to be accepted if they are in response to the piano recording.

However, I need you to attempt to improvise your empathetic response as I have attempted to improvise on the piano. Two things here are important: the definition of [improvisation](#), and the definition of [empathy](#). These links lead to wiktionary articles where you can follow the etymological trail to the roots of both of the words. Below is what I discovered upon researching:

Improvise is derived from Latin [in-](#) (or not), [pro](#) (various meanings similar to “before”, see under Preposition), and [video](#) (to see, understand, etc., see under Verb). This means that to improvise is to come from a place and interact with the moment without seeing or knowing beforehand. To truly improvise is to be free from all that which may take us away from the experience in that moment.

Empathy is built from a term in Ancient Greek. To avoid confusion, I need to clarify that the English term Empathy is described as a “[False Friend](#)” of the [original meaning](#) in Ancient Greek. However, it is formed from ἐν (en, “in, at”) + πάθος (páthos, “feeling”). And so, when I say empathize, I mean that I need you to feel you are being “In Feeling” with me. This is not to feel forced into being “In Feeling” - it is only what you are able to truly empathize with based on the experiences you have had in your life. Upon thinking of this further, you are not required to have had the same experiences as I have had, but in order to truly be “In Feeling”, it is useful to have an understanding of the universal needs we all share.

I need you to attempt to empathically improvise through the lens of these definitions because anything that is preconceived is filtered. True empathy is from the heart, without any sort of mental, thought-based filter. It requires complete and total presence in the moment. This is something I try to accomplish every time I make music, either in empathizing with what I perceive to be others needs, or my own. It is challenging, but thankfully, when you try to give from the heart, it is always good enough. I need you to trust that I will accept any empathy that is given in response to Quilting for Caroline, but I need that it is not from a place where you feel forced, required, or should, expected to, pressured, demanded, embarrassed into, or anything similar. If you feel you can truly empathize from the heart as I believe you can, please add yourself to the story, using the button on my website page that contains my contact information. If you send anything, I need to know exactly what part you are empathizing with (i.e. 0:24-0:43 in track 1/2).

I deeply appreciate all of you for taking the time to consider this because it meets my need as a human to be given to and received by others. Thank you.

Keenan
June 18, 2020

