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5-15-2016

## Music as Medicine: An Evocative Bi-Autoethnography of Surviving Divorce

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### Recommended APA Citation

Fung, A. S. (2016). Music as Medicine: An Evocative Bi-Autoethnography of Surviving Divorce. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(5), 884-898. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2016.2124>

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## Music as Medicine: An Evocative Bi-Autoethnography of Surviving Divorce

### Abstract

As a musician-researcher of Chinese musicians' journeys, I was confronted with stories that led me to interrogate my own worldviews. As my identity shifted in this experiential process, I became an autoethnographer by serendipity. Autoethnography is storytelling that blurs the boundaries between humanities and sciences, expressing lived experience in novel and literary forms, depicting stories and including authors' critical reflection on their lives and writing process, with the purpose of transforming self and society. This evocative autoethnography explores the phenomenon of divorce, in reference to my personal experience and another musician's lived experience interpreted through my understanding as a participant-researcher. This project integrates autoethnographical and phenomenological approaches in the analysis of two intertwining narratives. Two overarching themes will be explored: music as medicine, and divine hope in healing. Musicking and our Christian faith had transformed us from heart-brokenness to survival. I draw on multiple intersections to theorize about these two tales from two generations. This is the essence of autoethnographic research where theorizing takes different forms and can be engaged through multiple points of contact and streams of processing. The retelling of our stories captures something alive, and challenges biases associated with divorce and predicted by cultural norms. Our bi-autoethnography is staged-storied-scholarship that is therapeutic and embodied. It incorporates evocative texts, dramatic narratives and musical presentations that combine to communicate our inner-worlds to others who might share a similar experience. This study explores new directions in finding authentic selves through qualitative inquiry with the creative use of multimedia in autoethnographic performances.

### Keywords

Evocative Autoethnography, Divorce, Musicking, Divine Hope, Storytelling, Narrative

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### Acknowledgements

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Lily and my two children for simply being themselves. Their courage to overcome adversities has inspired me to continue my work researching about life. I want to thank my supervisor for making the article more succinct to enable the flow of storytelling.

## **Music as Medicine: An Evocative Bi-Autoethnography of Surviving Divorce**

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*As a musician-researcher of Chinese musicians' journeys, I was confronted with stories that led me to interrogate my own worldviews. As my identity shifted in this experiential process, I became an autoethnographer by serendipity. Autoethnography is storytelling that blurs the boundaries between humanities and sciences, expressing lived experience in novel and literary forms, depicting stories and including authors' critical reflection on their lives and writing process, with the purpose of transforming self and society. This evocative autoethnography explores the phenomenon of divorce, in reference to my personal experience and another musician's lived experience interpreted through my understanding as a participant-researcher. This project integrates autoethnographical and phenomenological approaches in the analysis of two intertwining narratives. Two overarching themes will be explored: music as medicine, and divine hope in healing. Musicking and our Christian faith had transformed us from heart-brokenness to survival. I draw on multiple intersections to theorize about these two tales from two generations. This is the essence of autoethnographic research where theorizing takes different forms and can be engaged through multiple points of contact and streams of processing. The retelling of our stories captures something alive, and challenges biases associated with divorce and predicted by cultural norms. Our bi-autoethnography is staged-storied-scholarship that is therapeutic and embodied. It incorporates evocative texts, dramatic narratives and musical presentations that combine to communicate our inner-worlds to others who might share a similar experience. This study explores new directions in finding authentic selves through qualitative inquiry with the creative use of multimedia in autoethnographic performances. Keywords: Evocative Autoethnography, Divorce, Musicking, Divine Hope, Storytelling, Narrative*

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### **Meeting Lily in a Summer School**

In January, 2014, I received a scholarship to attend a Summer School for Choral Conductors and Piano Accompanists in Melbourne. I met Lily on the first morning and noticed her straight away because she was one of the first participants who volunteered to play a prescribed piece. Lily spoke confidently before she began; she finished with a smile and looked calm throughout. I admired her bravery and was impressed by her talent and composure. Gradually Lily and I became friends. I talked about my work as a secondary-school teacher of music and Chinese, and about being a research student. Lily showed great interest because she struggled to learn Mandarin in high school. Apart from our common passion for music, we were both experienced accompanists for church choirs, and shared similar life experiences as Asians living in multicultural Australia. Although I am about the age of her mother, Lily related to me as a friend. On the last day I invited Lily to be a participant in my research about the influence of Confucianism on music learning among the Chinese Diaspora. Adhering to ethical requirements, I gave her the Explanatory Statement and Consent Form and waited to hear if she was interested in being interviewed.

### **From the Interview to the Current Project**

A few weeks later I interviewed Lily. She disclosed to me the most traumatic events she had experienced being a child growing up in a fatherless household as a result of her parents' divorce more than a decade ago. Empathetically I related her lived experiences with my divorce; her heartache was transferred to me and I felt a stabbing pain in my chest as I simultaneously relived my divorce journey. I later sent Lily the interview transcript for approval and I remain in contact with her. One day I began to write her story. While brainstorming and sketching the rough skeleton of this paper, I recalled Lily's beautiful face, her tall and lean build, her deep and gently spoken voice, and the sounds and movements of her piano playing. I relived her story in my mind. Although we both have separate lives, I felt nostalgic as if I mentally met her again at the many cross roads that we shared.

### **From Theory to Practice: Symbolic Interactionism to Autoethnography**

Theoretically this study employs Symbolic Interactionism to see self in terms of its direct relationship to various segments of social life. The "self" arises in social interaction through symbolic communication involving a process of definition or redefinition (Blumer, 1986; Mead, 1934; Yep, 2002). Identity is negotiated, formed, maintained and modified through our social interactions. Einstein (1949) regarded the intuitive mind as a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant, but we have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift. I believe my ongoing interactions with Lily, my intuitive response to her sorrow, and my later projection of her experiences onto mine with my two children, who are also victims of my divorce, warrants in-depth investigation. I want to use the creative and scholarly voice of autoethnography which connects my heart with my head, to engage my readers in the exploration of the commonality and difference of the two tales, and at the intersections of various ethnicity, spirituality, education, occupation, location, gender, age, sexuality, parenthood, class, marital status, disability identity positions known as intersectionality (Allen, 2010; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Boylorn & Orbe, 2014).

Autoethnographers as researcher-practitioners write lives and make personal experiences meaningful and scientific, blurring the boundaries between humanities and social sciences, expressing concrete lived experience in novel and literary forms, depicting local stories and including authors' critical reflection on their lives and writing process (Antikainen, Houtsonen, Houtelin, & Kauppila, 1996; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; McIlveen, 2008). Autoethnography is "cultural in its interpretative orientation ... and autobiographical in its content orientation (use personal experiences) as primary data" (Chang, 2008, p. 48). Autoethnography is a cultural practice (Bochner, 2012) in which we invite readers into our past and present, our thoughts and feelings, and our critique of diverse sociocultural phenomena. Evocative autoethnography texts are intensely personal that feature "concrete action, emotion, embodiment, spirituality... can appear in poetry, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. The workings of the self are expressed emotionally, physically and cognitively" (Ellington & Ellis, 2008, p. 448); it impacts upon the sensemaking of the reader with such aesthetic style of text where the researcher must be able to write well and truthfully (Ellington, 2001; Boyle & Parry, 2007). My project gives voice to two previously muted and marginalized stories, and instigates discussions about the intersections of personal and intra-cultural standpoints. It allows the researchers to critically use introspective lenses to better understand who we were, are and may become. Autoethnographers can approach their self-analysis either as ethnography or phenomenology. In the latter the researcher studies "a phenomenon rather than a 'cultural practice' [thus] it would be auto-phenomenological rather than autoethnographical" (Gruppetta, 2004, p. 1). Autophenomenology is an offshoot of

autoethnography in which the researcher is both researcher and participant in his/her study of a particular phenomenon (i.e., divorce in this case), subjecting his/her own lived experience to rigorous phenomenological analysis (Allen-Collinson, 2011).

Critics of autoethnography have described this method as soft-research or me-search that is atheoretical, ungeneralisable, and self-absorbed (Atkinson, 2006). Such criticism is based on traditional assumptions about what counts as scientific scholarship and the production of knowledge (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). Orbe (2005) maintained that theorizing takes a variety of forms and can be engaged through multiple points of contact and streams of processing. This retelling and reimagining of stories captures something alive, fluid and current and cannot be regulated to rigid conceptualization of what is or is not scholarship. Everyday theorizing is a natural human process (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014).

### **Creating Novel Ways to Finding Selves: Data Collection and Analysis**

This is a potentially challenging project, which demands spontaneity and craftsmanship in staging intertwining vignettes and juxtaposing evocative storytelling in multiple timeframes and spaces to reveal the impact of divorce on the two broken lives and the power of music and faith in healing. Autoethnographic performance is the only method in qualitative research which provides me with the freedom to express my inner-world in relation to Lily's in staged-storied-scholarship. Methodologically, the data of this study are derived from my interview with Lily which I analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA "explores in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world ... the meanings particular experiences, events, states hold for participants" (Smith & Osborn, 2009, p. 53). The interview was transcribed and sent to Lily for modification and approval. The data included my subsequent email correspondences with Lily and my recollections and interpretations of my/our lived experiences. A number of significant themes emerged and the overarching themes discussed in detail.

My autoethnographic performance is staged-storied-scholarship that incorporates evocative texts, dramatic narratives and musical presentations that combine to communicate my inner-world to others. This includes my original and evocative poem:

***The Pain of Divorce***  
*It's my pain, and*  
*It's her pain, and*  
*It's the pain we both hated.*  
*It's the pain that bonded our friendship.*  
*It's the pain that stigmatized our lives.*  
*It's the pain that transformed us.*  
*Storytelling liberated our bondages.*  
*Musicking freed our souls.*  
*Divine hope healed our hearts.*

I also created a video performance of my composed song *Surrender* with original lyrics reflecting the shared experience of divorce (discuss later). Our stories expressed in a stream of consciousness (enacted through poem, video and music) reveal personal and cultural realities that can be understood through narrative interrogation. Human beings are storytellers; and all forms of communication are best understood as stories (Fisher, 1987). Storytelling is alive and can be restorative; it liberates and reflects a search for healing (hooks, 1989). In this project, I explore multiple intersections as I theorize about these two intertwining tales from two different generations, and two themes will be explored: music as medicine, and divine hope in healing.

Musicking and my Christian faith had transformed me from heart- brokenness to survival and spiritual revival.

Freire (1970) argued that we are oppressors at the same time that we are oppressed. We suffer from and participate in our own oppression. Morella-Pozzi (2014) explained such terrible dichotomy of “feeling in some way wrong just for being herself,” while “struggling for recognition, acknowledgement and acceptance” (p. 187). In this project, I want to challenge the hegemonic presumption about “bad things result from doing/being bad.” I propose that “while bad things can happen to all; we emerge as better and stronger persons after surviving adversities.” Both of us endured a lot of pain connected to divorce; these common experiences bonded our friendship. *Divorce changed everything*, we were emotionally traumatized, socially stigmatized, and relationally alienated, as well as being misunderstood, mistreated and marginalized by society. I/we went through the classic stages of coping with trauma: denial, anger, depression, negotiation and acceptance. By giving magnified voices to our muted past, this autoethnographic account intends to acknowledge the power discrepancies, inequities, prejudices, anger and insults that were present. I do not take for granted the responsibility and opportunity to present our stories. With honesty, humility and transparency, I hope to bring greater understanding about divorce awareness to society; as well as to “enhance existing understanding of lived experiences enacted within social locations situated within larger systems of power, oppression and social privilege” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 4). In the following, I will examine the aftermath of my divorce and the rebuilding of my new life, in reference to Lily who grew up in a single-parent household.

### **Lives Before Divorce**

Before my marriage ended, I considered myself one of the luckiest women in the world—a happily married housewife, mother of two children, homemaker who could maintain a prestigious career as a home-studio music teacher. I weekly taught Chinese at community language schools. Mostly, I taught music at flexible hours, did household chores as I liked. I could shop to my heart’s content if I did not mind the lack of privacy by the presence of two needy children. We had a joint bank account and were financially comfortable. I was not bombarded by household bills because my then husband looked after all the family finances and he would drive if we went out as a family. I loved to be a hostess, cooking and serving fancy meals, playing music and telling jokes to entertain family and friends in my well decorated home. Although I believe I am a reasonably intelligent woman, I had developed a lazy habit of relying on my then husband to make decisions for the family; I became co-dependent to be someone’s wife and some children’s mother, nurse, chef and chauffeur. Slowly and silently, without noticing it consciously, the former “I” was camouflaged into the routine business of everyday life and I sadly lost my individuality.

Lily is a second generation Melbourne-born Chinese with parents originating from Taiwan. Both her maternal and paternal grandparents still live in Taiwan. Lily was socialized into a middle-class home with two professional parents— her father is a scientist with a PhD in Botany, and her mother an accountant. As a child, Lily spoke Mandarin at home and went to weekend language schools to learn Chinese. Both parents exercised an authoritarian parenting style that was critical about every aspect of Lily’s intellectual, physical and personal development. She was lectured by her mother and mildly beaten by her father if she misbehaved. Lily’s maternal family was Christian and Lily and her mother often went to church choir rehearsals as well as going to Sunday services together. Although not a Christian Lily’s father was, happy to send his only daughter to a Christian school because he believed “Christian schools make better people.” Lily’s life before her parents’ divorce was simple; she

remembered routinely going out with the family and being disciplined by her father. There was a lot of interaction, and ongoing communication within the family walls in the old days.

### **Divorce Changed Everything**

At the beginning of 2004, by discovering my then husband's extra-marital affair with his secretary, my marriage gradually came to an inevitable end. I was thirty-nine, my son was eight and my daughter was only four years old. My entire world— my work in studio and language teaching associated with financial security, the physical home linked with sense of safety and belonging— and my mental equilibrium which was the emotional attachment to my most trusted partner collapsed beyond repair. At that time, the only thing that kept me on the right track was the *hope* of quickly finding a job to fill my empty days; I did not want to remain confined to the house which was full of memories of a once happy family. I also resented the fact that I sacrificed my career for the sake of being a wife and full-time mother; and life repaid my loyalty to my then husband and children with betrayal of trust. I was very angry, angry with myself, and furious with the world. I had kept the secret of the ongoing affair from my extended family and friends for almost two years because we were seeing marriage counsellors with the hope of repairing the damage. Exposing my then husband's unfaithfulness was considered unwise in case he later came home.

During this time, it was extremely agonizing for me to keep silent. The hours of the day seemed much longer than before. A few times while driving, I experienced serious disorientation and nearly had fatal accidents. I kept torturing myself by mentally rehearsing and playing back all the hurtful things said to me. The profound sadness was that I felt as if I was left out in the deserted wilderness under the scorching sun, being isolated and slowly dehydrated to death. My interpersonal relationships were fractured, and criticisms and misunderstandings continued to accumulate because of my prolonged silence. All of the following thoughts went through my mind a million times every day — I had to relearn how to manage my life with two children on my limited income because I had no previous savings apart from the funds in our joint account. I had to train myself to drive longer distances to re-enter the competitive workforce after a ten-year break. I needed to focus my energy and mental power on the present and future rather than indulging in the past with endless sorrow. I had no choice but to pick up myself from the rubble and rebuild a new life for my children and myself. *Divorce changed everything.*

Lily's parents were divorced when she was in primary grade four, and she had infrequent contact with her father afterwards. Lily missed seeing her dad and "wanted to prove to him that she was worthy for his love." Lily used music "as a tool to express her anger and bitterness; and to get her father's attention." Initially, after the divorce, Lily saw her father on weekends. Later, her father left Australia for a new job in China. Lily only had telephone contact with him from then on. Lily's mother also changed her behavior completely at home; she was less of an authoritarian parent and began to learn to interact with Lily on a warm and caring way. Lily explained:

Although my mum is a Christian, she used to compare me with my friends, wanting me to be as good as them or even beat them. Later I found out it was really common among Chinese people. I got really frustrated by that, and felt really hurt. In grade six, I had my first serious conversation with my mum— I said, "Please accept me as I am, I might not be good at everything, but I might be good at a few things, and please don't pressure me to be someone else because I am your daughter." Talking to my Asian friends, they never seemed to have that kind of conversation with their parents. I didn't know where that

came from. I saved myself from a few years of competitiveness. She finally accepted that “I am me.”

In grade six, Lily showed a degree of intuition that was not commonly present with children at the same age. After the heart-to-heart conversation with her mother, Lily reported becoming closer, and that both of them began to change their mindsets. Lily felt that her mother showed interest in her playing and she was proud of her; and that helped Lily a great deal. Lily wanted to enjoy the learning process, and achieve her personal best. Her mother seemed to accept Lily as she was and getting “A plus” was no longer the end goal for her only daughter. Lily believes that she has a precious relationship with her mother because her friends constantly fight with their mothers and do not talk at all. One positive outcome which resulted from the tragedy was that the family dynamics had altered; Lily’s mother related to Lily differently and more positively. But she missed having a male father figure to discipline her and to provide her with a sense of safety at home. *Divorce changed everything.*

### **Social Stigmatization**

Statistics show that the number of school children coming from single-parent families is on the rise across the globe (Cliquet, 2003). Although divorce is a common social phenomenon, it remains a social taboo (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 1999, 2000) which can affect the physical and mental well-being and interpersonal relationships of all concerned (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995). Often the ripple effect lingers on to impact negatively on individuals and the community. Lily did not talk further about being traumatized as a child. I respect her silence and do not intend to add further interpretations, mainly for ethical reasons. I must also protect the family secrecy and integrity of my children by leaving them out in the discussion of “social stigmatization,” although both of my children displayed some unusual inclinations and developed idiosyncratic habits as they grew. Thus, the following discussion on social stigmatization would be focused on “I” only.

Combining my ethnicity with my religious background, the complexities of the impact of divorce immediately intensified. According to the traditional Confucian familial hierarchies, a married woman’s utmost responsibility is to please her husband, and to bear and raise children at home. Within the household environment, the married woman must submit to her husband and all elderly members including the in-laws and extended families living under the same roof. She will not have a voice until she has satisfied the requirement of multiplying and extending the family tree, which is usually after the birth of her first child, and preferably a male child to glorify the family name. Even if the marriage were to be brought to an end by the husband’s unfaithfulness, a divorced woman was said to have caused the tragedy herself because she must have been a bad wife and mother. When I was separated from my ex-husband, my own father told me that it must have been my fault that I did not keep an eye on him (Fung, 2014). In other words, I failed to perform my expected cultural role: a submissive, housebound wife and mother who caters for the needs of everybody else in the household but herself. *Divorce changed everything; imposed cultural identity deepened the pain.*

Being a Chinese Christian made the situation even worse. In the rebuilding of my new life, I had once thought about the possibility of remarriage. Unfortunately, there were constant criticisms about me wanting to date men. I was told by my own brother that it was better not to get marry again in case it did not work out. Even though my Christian belief did not prevent remarriage my Chinese Christian friends recommended that I should proceed with great caution. They also suggested that “I should seriously consider staying single for the sake of the children” which meant further self-sacrifice. I was expected to remain single for the rest of my life, or at least until my children became independent. Dating too soon would reflect very

negatively on my character; self-sacrifice, on the other hand, was to receive the highest praise, glory and admiration. *Divorce changed everything; prejudice intensified the tragedy.*

Some of my Chinese church friends believed that *I was guilty* as in “bad things result from doing/being bad;” so they made a decision to distance themselves from me. Socially, I used to be someone’s wife in church and family gatherings, *divorce changed everything*. My identity as a single-parent no longer fitted the happy family gatherings. My single presence became a challenge. My family and friends neither knew how to handle me, nor wanted to learn how to support a broken family. The housewives talked about self-grooming, cooking, shopping, investment, holidays, church events, children’s education and complaints about their boring husbands. My divorce became the dividing line that marked our difference—housewife versus divorced woman, the outcast. The housewives avoided me; I never enjoyed gossip and small talk, but I had blended in before. After my divorce, they said little to me, perhaps to avoid sensitive topics and embarrass everyone. Some housewives became hostile towards me because they were not happy with their husbands showing sympathy for my young family. Having a single woman in their family gatherings became awkward; perhaps I might later become the source of their marital problems. I suspected that they used silence to eject me from their close-ended and selective social group. *Divorce changed everything; alienation is cancer.*

My world shattered again as if the divorce alone was not damaging enough for me. I was humiliated, unheard, ignored, and my pride and dignity taken. Instantly I realized I was friendless, without allies, and I remained paralyzed in a metaphorical pool of blood from the back-stabbing of my “so-called” friends. Perceiving my environment as threatening and hostile, I withdrew from further exposure to danger and ridicule. In my heart, I knew that my disappearance would make my church congregation feel less burdened; and I was right. I was disappointed with my church, but not my Christian faith. *Divorce changed everything; discrimination is a contagious disease.*

I was forced to invest my energy elsewhere, finding new ‘safer’ acquaintances who did not carry the burden of “knowing the former I/me.” A few years later, when I thought the impact of divorce was minimized by time, I found myself drifting back into the big black hole of depression. I recall an incident that really hurt me profoundly. I had a very close girl friend whose husband had died some years earlier, and who was planning to remarry. I was delighted that my girl-friend was able to find love again in her mid-fifties. I was so happy for her that I spent an entire day on a shopping spree to buy myself a dress to attend her wedding. Later, I was shocked to find out that I was not even invited. It was her wedding, my very dear friend’s wedding, a friend of more than twenty years, it was her wedding; but she abandoned me and wanted to have nothing to do with me. *Divorce changed everything*, I was not invited because I had a bad record in marriage. I consider that not only my girl-friend was guilty; the whole wedding planning committee was equally guilty. *Divorce changed everything; friendship did not stand the test.*

I complicate my predicament by adding age and gender to my ethnicity and religious orientation. It seems common for divorced men to remarry. For middle-aged women like me, remarrying is much harder. If I were to intersect these elements with social class, un/employment, single-parenthood, education, and dis/ability; my previously privileged life would dissolve into disadvantage. It was very difficult for me to find any kind of job after my long absence from the work force due to childbirth and child-rearing. I was a tertiary-trained school teacher but had never worked in Victorian government schools. I had also worked as a psychotherapist in hospitals and community organizations before, but my skills, my knowledge, my registration and professional ethics were outdated. Having been a housewife/mother for a long time, I lacked confidence and composure with a rather low self-image resulting from being abandoned by my husband. *Divorce changed everything; the work*

*force did not welcome middle-aged, middle-class unemployed divorced professional women after prolonged maternity and family leave.*

I was prepared to work in a shop or a factory but single-parenthood restricted the days and hours I could commit. I had to simply fit into my son's school schedules; and my four year old daughter had not even begun school. The first job I found was being a waitress working on the weekends at a big reception center around the corner from my house, since the children could be looked after by their father. Carrying heavy trays of dishes triggered former lower back injuries. In my twenties I was diagnosed with a slow degenerative condition classified as an invisible disability. In middle-age, doctors found osteophytes along my entire spine. But I continued waitressing because I had no other choice. Then I became a part-time kitchen assistant in a home economics classroom at a local high school. At this school I was offered my first teaching position as a music director because the principal heard my playing of a Mozart Piano Concerto during the end of the year school concert. I taught instrumental and classroom music, psychology and languages there for almost a decade. *Divorce changed everything; female middle-aged disabled single-parent had to work like a dog before a decent job arrived.*

The intersectionality of ten different identity positions adversely intensified the impact of divorce on my young family: Ethnicity, religion, gender, age, social class, marital status, parenthood, education, and un/employment and dis/ability. I was marginalized, misunderstood and mistreated by my former "so-called" friendship groups. My experience as a female divorced middle-aged Chinese Christian single-parent who was raised with middle-class privileges and being highly educated, combined with a physical disability and without a stable full-time employment resulted in a bigger crisis than simply divorce. Due to social stigmatization, discrimination and alienation, I became defensive and distrustful of others. I appreciated that some of my new acquaintances genuinely tried to help me but they lacked the experience and skills to be able to walk in my shoes. As long as I remained weak I was the subject of their charity. Being raised in a middle-class family and trained as a therapist, my arrogance and professional knowledge in counselling also hindered me. Suffering from this superiority-inferiority complex; I continued to navigate through uncertainties and confusion as I learned from my divorce experience. I believe that the damage of divorce to a family could extend, across generations because the psychological trauma that my children endured created a less than ideal childhood for them. *Divorce changed everything; non-visible pain lingers because socially stigmatized perception is reality for me.*

### **Musicking and Hope: Lives Transformed**

In March 2003, my mother passed away. I formed the *Sound of Joy Music Ministry* six months later and began composing musical works. My mother had played the most influential role in inspiring my musical life; and musicking (all forms of musical engagement including performing and composing) was my tribute to her and my way of coping with grief and loss. In four months, I completed four volumes of song collections, and these works were scheduled to be released in an overseas market. When I came back from my trip; I discovered my then husband's extra-marital affair. I was told that "my talent was initially attractive to him; but the same talent made him resentful because his career achievement was overshadowed by my success." I was blamed for *being myself*; I could do nothing about it. I continued with musicking as a way of escaping the heart-breaking reality of betrayal. In 2004, *Volume 5: A New Man* was published. It was written during the most testing time of my life when we were going through marriage counselling. Unfortunately, he did not have any intention of renewing our marriage or of becoming a "new man." Two years later, our divorce became final.

*Divorce changed everything*, including my desire to compose. I cried for three years, mourning the death of my marriage as in Chinese traditions. In hindsight, I knew our marriage had to end because I probably could not pretend to be a submissive woman for my entire life. There was no problem in our marriage for sixteen years when I played the correct cultural role. My mother's passing triggered the need for me to be "authentic to my true self" and I wanted to use my musical talent in composition to contribute to the world. I was guilty of wanting to be an individual. During a most unexpected Sunday service in September 2009, I heard the choir singing the theme song from my first published work *For You I Sing* released six years earlier; I could no longer contain my tears. Music is therapy and with a dose of my own medicine (by listening to my work being sung) my self-imposed imprisonment ended. I was not angry with myself anymore. I blamed no one for my misery and I was cured emotionally almost instantaneously.

With a renewed spirit and a divine hope, I began playing on the piano frantically after such a prolonged break. In three months, I completed three song collections: *Surrender*, *Healing* and *Rest* and they were published in January 2010. Six months later, in July 10, I launched these three books in concert in Melbourne where I played the piano, sang as a soloist and worked alongside two different choral groups. This concert entitled "From Surrender to Rest" was restorative for my young family because it marked the Sabbath Year of my divorce. Biblically, Sabbath symbolizes 'rest', the seventh year to rest after laboring for six years before. My daughter gave a speech about her experience being raised in a single-parent home, and being traumatized by the fact that she started school without a father. My son also took on an active performer role in this concert and played the flute to accompany one of the choirs in a couple of pieces (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GQih5WC-ME&feature=youtube>). This was the first time that my divorce story was told in public. I sang *Surrender* in my concert that portrayed my heartfelt pain and my recovery from divorce; my school colleague accompanied my singing on his Spanish guitar. I have chosen this song for my imagined performance because it identifies the concept of *divine hope* that led to the healing of my shattered life.

### *Surrender*

*On this rainy day I'm feeling blue, my heart wells up with tears that overflow.  
Then I hear my Lord whisper to me, "My child, I feel your pain."  
You are my Lord! You know me so well.  
Teach me to trust You, walk with You each day.  
Teach me to obey You without asking 'why.'  
Submitting to You is the best way to live.  
Letting You take control of my life, my confusion and fear disappear.  
I find power, I find peace of mind, I find freedom within.  
I am willing to surrender all to You, my true best friend.*

Human beings are greedy wishful thinkers. We have endless needs, wants, wishes and hopes. Psychologists differentiate needs from wants and from wishes. Needs are basic, we must have them for survival. Wants are something concrete we hope to have with some background knowledge of the ability of getting them. Wishes are more abstract, but frustration occurs if the wish is not realized. Divine hope is completely different; it is a hope directed at a higher power in the universe beyond oneself, bigger than the total sum of the best of all mankind. It is my surrender to and investment in this higher power that rescued me from endless self-doubt and self-imposed torture, as a result of being betrayed by my former marriage partner. I was set free having redirected all destructive thoughts and feelings into something productive as in musicking.

Musicking and divine hope transformed me and to finally found peace within myself. As for Lily, her musical journey was very different. Her parents decided she would learn the piano. Now she says that “music is very much her identity,” but she endured physical punishment from her father and her first Chinese piano teacher, coupled with psychological manipulation from her second piano teacher. After her parents’ divorce, Lily said that she used music as a tool to get attention from her father—the absent parent.

When I played something for him, he had no reaction, never any praise. Then he would ask, “Was it perfect? Did you have any mistakes?” He always expected me to be the best. He was the one who smacked me. I used to think I wasn’t good enough, later I realized that he just doesn’t like classical music. It made me feel quite hurt for a lot of years. In my music education, I tried really hard to be as good as I can to make him proud, because I wanted him to say, ‘Well done!’ I never heard him say anything good about me.

Lily’s father set very high expectations and desired her to be the perfect child. This is consistent with the Chinese cultural value — “compelled to excel” and the Confucian concept of *guan jiao* (discipline) (Wu & Singh, 2004). Kong-Zi/Confucius (2010) asserted that “love without discipline becomes harm” and “it is the father’s fault if a child is not disciplined; it is the teacher’s fault if a child is not taught” (Kong, *孔子論語 Confucian Analects* [CA], trans. in Ames & Rosemond, 2010). Influenced by Confucianism, Lily’s father knew it was his responsibility to train and govern his daughter, to help her to find “*dao*”—the enlightened pathway unique for the child through the process of self-perfection. This moral cultivation combined self-striving and intellectual development with the higher importance placed on character building than academic pursuit (Chen, 2006; Li & Yue, 2004). Lily’s father never said anything positive or praised Lily, and this could possibly be explained by his influence of the Confucian teaching that “praise leads to pride, and a proud soldier is doomed for a lost battle” (CA).

It is traumatic for small children to witness and live through the divorce of their parents; the children sometimes feel at fault. Lily desperately needed to earn her father’s love with whatever she could do well, because her father no longer lived with her. Unfortunately, Lily’s father said nothing positive. This underpins Lily’s inability to accept compliments gracefully because she is not used to it. Although she said it hurt her, her father’s unresponsive behavior was a very powerful motivator to foster her desire for self-perfection. Lily wanted to succeed to correct her father’s impression about her being “not good enough;” she was longing to be accepted as a child cherished by the most significant man in her life. Lily went on to explain their estranged relationship:

At the start, he still lived in Melbourne. I saw him a little, then he moved to China. I have called him every week for the past fourteen years. When I called him to say I performed and got good grades, did eighth grade piano in half a year; everyone was proud of me, he said nothing. One time, he came to Australia... he drove me and my teacher to a concert. In the car ride, my teacher told him that I was really talented in music, and I passed the Associate Diploma of Music Performance at sixteen, she wanted to get a reaction from my dad, but he still said nothing; that hurt me a lot.

Finally, Lily could no longer accept her father’s non-reaction. She became angry and courageous. She asked her father, “Why is it that no matter how hard I practice or what grade I pass or whatever I perform for you, you never seem to be happy?” Lily expected her parents

to be supportive and encouraging; she wanted them to acknowledge her. Lily's dad explained to her when he grew up, he never had that. The only way to make it and survive is to be the best, that's "Chinese" too — "You can't be average" ... he did not want Lily to be easily taken advantage of, avoid trouble, stay safe and live long. He wanted Lily to have a better life than him.

Lily and her father were from different generations with different expectations. Lily was raised in Australia with Christian teachings that value human rights and loving relationships between family members; her father was brought up in Taiwan, and influenced by Confucianism (the root of Chinese culture). He believed that "the only way to survive is to be the best, and you can't be average." The daughter was concerned with the "process," whereas the father focused on "end results." Lily wanted to receive warmth, support and acknowledgement from her father, but her father rebuffed all invitations to speak or compliment, masking his emotions. Such unarticulated and fundamental differences presented major problems and exacerbated the already alienated father-daughter relationship. Accepting that her father was brought up in a different culture, Lily decided to forgive him after many years of bottled up resentment. Lily's attitude towards him and her music learning has changed. She explained:

I used to hate calling him and spent the whole week thinking what to say to him. I needed to make myself sound good, like giving a report card. After I forgave my dad, I genuinely missed him when he left, and I felt that I finally have two parents again. After that, I was thinking, 'Why do I play music now?'... I realized my passion is playing with other people— At high school, I accompanied the primary and secondary choirs, worship band, class mates. At university, I accompanied public exams for flute and viola students, and tertiary music students' auditions and competitions. Before, I played music to make myself feel better. Now, I don't have to play it for myself.

Slowly Lily adjusted her feelings towards her father. She was relieved to be free from her own bondage of anguish and hatred. Lily's defensive system melted down once she found out that her father still loves her. It may be argued that the "inner child" within Lily long deprived of fatherly care found *hope*. Lily said that she actually missed him when he left for China. Possibly in her imagination, Lily re-enacted her broken family becoming reunited. This new-found freedom liberated her from using music to create an impressive profile to disguise her insecurities; this in turn helped her to identify her true passion in "piano accompanying." Lily no longer needed to play piano to make herself feel better, but to enjoy music for music's sake as well as allowing others to shine in collaboration with her playing.

In her last visit to Taiwan with her mother, Lily had an emotionally touching experience with her paternal grandparents' family. Since her parents' divorce, these two extended families had no contact for many years. Lily's uncle— her father's older brother— invited Lily's maternal grandmother to join the paternal grandmother's family for an outing, so three generations of men and women did some sight-seeing during the day, and had a huge banquet in a fancy restaurant at night. Lily recalled her musical performance on that evening:

I played a traditional Taiwanese folk song and another song that my maternal grandma taught me. I played on the ocarina for my paternal grandma's family during dinner. People on my dad's side were reserved emotionally. They didn't say anything, but I think they liked it, they clapped. I was touched by my uncle's generosity that he went so far to do this for us. The restaurant would

have been very expensive. They are very hard working people; it would have taken much work to save so much money [for the banquet].

Through her uncle's kindness and generosity, Lily found closure in the reunion of the two extended families in Taiwan. The only link between the two families is their cherished grandchild—Lily. She was very proud that she acted as the mediator to this momentous event where she learned the songs from one grandmother, and presented them to the other grandmother. Lily chose to use the ocarina as the instrument for the banquet performance not just for convenience and portability but because it was her maternal grandmother's special expertise. Thus Lily symbolized the one grandmother reaching to the other family through their granddaughter, to mend a broken relationship and to achieve unity and harmony. The paternal family members did not show any emotion after Lily's performance, and she was not surprised by that. Rather, she could see where her father's habitual non-reaction to her playing came from. Such new found understanding further released Lily from her hurtful feelings and her misconceptions of her father. Lily was very pleased with the outcome of this overseas trip. Lily used music functionally to bridge the invisible gap between two alienated families.

From finding piano playing repulsive in her primary years to graduating with a music degree with flying colors, Lily said it was the *divine hope* in her faith that sustained her passion, and gave her the on-going strength to overcome numerous obstacles. Being a performer and an accompanist, Lily considers that there are parallels between her learning and her faith; and she elaborated on the transferable skills she gained through her work:

My life is music-based; my faith has motivated my learning besides music itself. I see parallels between playing music and my relationship with God. For accompanying, it is about making someone else look good and let them get the glory. Ideally, we are equal partners in the ensemble, but it is their needs before my needs. People ask me after I perform—how I did it with courage, smiling face and looking at ease. I have to say it is God who gives me the strength that I always appeared to be calm although I might feel anxious inside. As an accompanist, I need to get along with difficult people. I have learned the skill of compromise. This helps me in “friendship” too. I played about ten concertos for my fellow students in my second year. We always ended up being good friends.

Lily's own narratives showed that on-going music engagement had nursed her lost childhood back to health. Lily used music as a tool to get attention from her absent father in her childhood. As an adult, she used music to repair the brokenness of her extended family in Taiwan. To Lily, her passion in music was reinforced after she witnessed what music could do in promoting harmony in interpersonal relationships. She continued to use music in her career as an accompanist to gain friendship, and to extend her social networks. Lily attributed her success in music to her faith. *Musicking* and *divine hope* had transformed an emotionally angry, physically beaten, psychologically introverted and socially marginalized child from a fatherless household to a mature, confident and independent young adult professional.

### **Storytelling: Bondages Liberated**

We often present ourselves based on others' perception of us and how we see ourselves in relation to such perception. My autoethnography (integration of two stories: auto and ethno) reflects on the challenges of dealing with the multiple identities associated with divorce. I have interrogated my privileged and disadvantaged positions as they relate to ethnicity, religion,

gender, age, social class, marital status, parenthood, education, un/employment and dis/ability. On behalf of Lily, I resisted the distorted presumption about “bad things result from doing/being bad.” Using the narratives from the two journeys, I challenged the biased cultural views, negative stereotyping and categorization of human experiences linked with divorce. I used my/our lived experiences to protest against social stigmatization, inequalities, prejudice and discrimination. Human beings are complex individuals; just knowing someone is ‘divorced’ tells us little. The lived experience of each individual is unique as each person intersects with different identity positions within a given sociocultural frame. The implication of this study is that we must not make assumptions about anyone associated with divorce and coerce that person into any existing stereotypes. We should respect and value each person as a “one-and-only-history-event” in this universe; and acknowledge the fact that the experience of an individual can illuminate the general even in the smallest way.

I have demonstrated that while bad things can happen to all, we emerge as better and stronger persons after surviving adversities. This is done in relation to Lily’s own journey, a young adult surviving a traumatized childhood, and growing up in a single- parent home as a result of her parents’ divorce. I have pinpointed the fact that as life writers, we owe our stories to those whose lives intersect with ours; and ethical issues regarding confidentiality and consent for disclosure of information must be handled with sensitivity and sensibility. I have tried my best to protect the family secrecy and integrity of my children and Lily. I have presented two different lives of two generations in one city, juxtaposing and intersecting each other at various points in time and space. I have explored how the concepts of *musicking* and *divine hope* had transformed us from our brokenness to survival, to healing. Finally, I believe that story-telling has liberated us from our own guilt-driven and self-destructive imprisonment, because presenting our lives in multiple points of contact and streams of processing enables the discovery of our authentic selves. My imagined autoethnographic performance is therapeutic and embodied. It incorporates evocative texts, dramatic narratives, artistic installations and musical presentations that combine to communicate my/our inner-world/s to others who might share a similar story since there is commonality in human experience. Unfortunately, much of its rich content including the temporal, audio-visual, musical and artistic-speech-communication aspects are lost in the process of conversion to text on paper. This study values an existing direction in qualitative inquiry, that is, the incorporation of arts-based materials and multimedia in autoethnographic performances.

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### Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges Lily, who provided her story to this article and the advice of Dr. Jane Southcott, as well as the supportive editorial review team at *The Qualitative Report*.

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### Article Citation

Fung., A. (2016). Music as medicine: An evocative bi-autoethnography of surviving divorce. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(5), 884-898. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss5/7>

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