Title: Forgetting Caused by Suppression/Avoidance: “Where Did Kindergarten and First Grade Go?”

September 28, 2026

Greetings all,

Just a quick note to let you know about another case study that I have just updated and re-posted from our kclehman.com website: “Forgetting Caused by Suppression/Avoidance: ‘Where did kindergarten and first grade go?’” (Available as free download from the “Case Studies” section of the Resources page: https://www.immanuelapproach.com/case-studies/)

As an appetizer, I have included one section of the case study (below).

Blessings,

Dr. Lehman/Karl

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III. Where did kindergarten and first grade go?: The first step in my journey of resolving this trauma around not being able to read due to having dyslexia was discovering that my explicit autobiographical memories for being in the classroom during kindergarten and first grade were totally missing.[1]

During a visit to my parents over the Thanksgiving weekend of 1999, Mom and I were sitting in their living room and discussing the “I’m too stupid” case study. She commented “That really would have set you up for feeling stupid when you couldn’t read because of your dyslexia. I can’t imagine it wouldn’t have affected you when other kids had to read your math problems for you.” She continued to talk about my years at Oakton grade school, describing how she and Dad had become concerned that my reading was so far behind my other skills, but that the teachers wouldn’t take them seriously because I was not a problem in the classroom and was doing better than some.

Over the years Mom and Dad had often mentioned my dyslexia, but I never really took them seriously when they spoke about this as something that might have been traumatic. The memories I had about being dyslexic included going through testing at the Northwestern University psychology department, and some vague talk about a reading disability. They said I would not be good at science and math, but I

[1] Note that this step of recognizing that my explicit autobiographical memories were missing was not a necessary step for healing. Recognizing that memories were missing was helpful in directing my attention to any triggers around kindergarten, first grade, and dyslexia, but I could have eventually gotten to healing for the underlying trauma without this step. With our current Immanuel Approach principles and tools, Charlotte could have just coached me to focus on the triggers, ask Jesus for guidance and help, describe whatever came forward, lean into connecting with and focusing on any new pieces, and then keep repeating this cycle (that is, asking Jesus for guidance and help, describing whatever came forward, and leaning into connecting with and focusing on any new pieces). Becoming aware of the missing memory content just happened to be the first step in my journey, and provides a good case-study for illustrating the phenomena of lost memory due to prolonged suppression/avoidance.

never understood this since these were my favorite subjects. The whole thing never really made sense to me, so I mostly ignored it. These memories didn't feel scary or upsetting, and when Mom and Dad would imply that my dyslexia could have been a significant trauma, I would think inside, "I don't remember feeling like my dyslexia was traumatic–by some fluke or the grace of God it just doesn't seem to have affected me."

On this occasion as Mom began her comments about my dyslexia, I responded internally with my usual "I know you think my dyslexia was important, but it just didn't seem to affect me." But then I began to feel strange as she described more and more of the details from kindergarten and first grade. Eventually I blurted out, "I know you and Dad think the dyslexia stuff affected me so much, but I have no memory of anything you're talking about." As soon as the words were out of my mouth, I thought. "My gosh, it's true. I don't remember anything she's describing." I almost said something like, "Mom, you know I never went to Oakton. I went and stood in the playground before school started for a couple of days and then they transferred me to Central." I had the strange experience of cognitively realizing that this wasn't true, even as it felt so true that I almost spoke the words. Prior to this conversation I had always felt like I had only gone to Oakton for a few days before being transferred, even though I knew I had been there for all of kindergarten. During this conversation, I argued with Mom that I had certainly been transferred to Central for first grade, and I didn't fully believe that I had gone to Oakton for the two full years of kindergarten and first grade until Mom found my report cards and I read them myself.

I have (and have always had) many clear memories of grades two through five. I can remember thousands of details from Central school – from the playground to the library to gym class to drum lessons. I can remember my classrooms – the layout of the windows, chalk boards, fish tanks/animals, student desks, door, and teacher's desk. I can remember the names and appearance of every teacher at Central – including the gym teacher, the music teacher, and the kindergarten and first grade teachers that I never had myself. When Mom recently found my report cards from grade school, I had even correctly remembered the spelling of my second grade teacher's name.

And when I thought about it carefully, I realized that I could remember (and had always been able to remember) many of the ***non-classroom*** details from my kindergarten and first grade years. I could remember walking to Oakton school, including many of the houses along the way and the bully that used to chase and frighten me. I could remember the candy store we would stop at on the way home and the size, color, cost (five cents), smell, and taste of the fireballs we would buy. I could remember playing in the snow at the side of the street by the corner of Oakton and Ridge. I could remember the playground. I could remember the small wooded area on the edge of the school property. I could remember the place just inside the school doors where they sold war bond stamps.

In contrast, at the time of the initial conversation with Mom I could not remember a single minute of time inside of a classroom at Oakton school. Two years of classroom time were completely missing, except for one very vague memory – a single image – of what I think is my kindergarten or first grade classroom. I had no memories of my kindergarten and first grade teachers. I couldn't even remember their race or gender. My parents tell me that my kindergarten teacher was a white woman, <u>and that she was a dwarf</u>. I have no memory of this. You would think that if I could remember the sex, race, age, height, body type, complexion, hair color, hair style, usual dress, and name of my second grade teacher, I would have at least an image or two of a kindergarten teacher who was a dwarf.

I have had many clients comment "There can't be something important in here that I just can't see and/or remember – I'm <u>sure</u> I could feel it." It still feels very strange and striking to me how unaware I

was of all this missing autobiographical memory. When something is missing, you don't see it. Somehow I always thought I would be able to feel the hole – that I would be able to tell something was missing, as if you walked into a room and there was a large hole in the floor. Instead, it feels much more like walking into a room and not seeing a coffee table. Unless you were aware of other evidence/information that there had been a coffee table/should be a coffee table, you would never think/feel "The coffee table is missing." My subjective feeling was something along the lines of "There can't be something in here that is really important but that I can't see. *I live in here – I can see/feel perfectly well that there is NOT a big hole in the living room floor*. I would certainly be able to feel it if a bunch of important memories were missing."