

# Hands

**David Roustio**

Cover photo: Beulah and David Roustio

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David Roustio

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*"Hands hold the power to create, heal, and connect us to one another in ways words often cannot."*

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*"Hands have their own language."*

*Simon Van Booy*

## **Prologue: Hands**

In a world where words dominate, a silent language speaks volumes without needing speech. Our hands, the versatile extensions at the tips of our arms, possess the ability to convey a wide range of emotions, commands, and sentiments through gestures that can be both subtle and bold. From signaling someone closer with a simple wave to celebrating a triumph with a resounding high-five, hand gestures form a universal language that transcends cultural boundaries and linguistic differences.

The intricacies of non-verbal communication can bring comedic charm hidden to any conversation with a flick of the wrist or a playful wiggle of the fingers. We use our hands as tools to express ourselves in ways that words alone often fall short. We also use our hands to demonstrate frustration and anger.

We are saturated with constant noise and chatter, nonverbal communication through hand gestures emerges as a silent yet potent method of conveying our thoughts and emotions. Our hands act as the conductors of an unseen orchestra, orchestrating the symphony of our interactions with finesse.

Envision a friend across the room, catching your gaze and beckoning you with a subtle curl of their finger. Without a single spoken word, you grasp their invitation and move toward them. The "come here" gesture transcends language barriers, speaking volumes in simplicity and sincerity.

Conversely, the "go over there" gesture can equally effectively guide someone toward a specific direction or location. Whether it involves pointing towards a landmark

or subtly encouraging a friend towards the dance floor, this gesture showcases our ability to communicate precisely and clearly without needing verbal communication.

The "stop" gesture symbolizes safety and caution during moments of urgency or peril. By raising a firm hand, we signal others to pause, assess the situation, and proceed with care. This simple yet impactful gesture underscores the universal comprehension of non-verbal cues in navigating potentially risky situations.

Our hands are not mere appendages attached to our bodies; they are instruments of expression that transcend language and cultural barriers. Through gestures like "come here," "go over there," and "stop," we tap into the power of non-verbal communication, fostering connections and conveying messages with eloquence and grace.

In the dance of human interaction, hand gestures add flavor to our conversations. From playful insults to sassy silences, let's explore the potential of our hands in social settings.

**Fuck You!** The gesture that requires no words to convey its message. The raised middle finger, a symbol of defiance, can serve as a lighthearted means to tease a friend or colleague. Of course, context is crucial here –this gesture also demonstrates hostility.

**Hush:** Sometimes, words are superfluous when a simple hand gesture can suffice. The index finger pressed against the lips in a "shh" motion can quiet a noisy room or silence a talkative companion.

**Peace Sign:** In a world fraught with chaos and discord, the peace sign remains a timeless emblem of hope and unity. Whether used genuinely to promote harmony or in jest to diffuse tension, this two-fingered gesture can lighten the atmosphere.

**The High Five:** As humans, we possess an inherent desire to connect with one another, to share moments of elation and celebration. And what better way to express that bond than through hand gestures that transcend linguistic and cultural divides?

**The Fist Bump:** Fist bumps have become a popular and casual way to greet or congratulate someone, offering a hygienic alternative to handshakes. They often celebrate small victories, show camaraderie, or acknowledge each other's presence with a quick, lighthearted gesture.

The art of utilizing hand gestures for communication extends beyond mere words. Our hands can convey emotions, intentions, and humor in ways that language alone cannot.

From the welcoming gesture of "Come here" to the playful banter or expression of frustration of "Fuck you," our hands enrich our interactions with depth.

Navigating social scenarios with humorous hand gestures can lighten the atmosphere and foster connections with those around us. Whether silencing someone with a touch of sass or promoting calm and harmony with a peace sign, our hands can communicate volumes without verbal speech.

Study your hand gestures, and witness how your interactions are more vibrant, enjoyable, and connected.

## **Holding Hands**

Holding hands is a language of its own. More than a simple gesture of affection, it triggers a cascade of physiological and psychological responses that contribute to our well-being. When we clasp someone's hand, our body reacts in several ways, leading to comfort, reduced stress, and enhanced connection.

One of the most significant responses to holding hands is the release of oxytocin, often called the "love hormone" or "bonding hormone." Oxytocin is produced in the hypothalamus and released by the pituitary gland, playing a crucial role in social bonding and trust. This hormone promotes feelings of closeness and emotional intimacy, making us feel more connected to the person whose hand we are holding.

Holding hands helps mitigate the physical effects of stress, leading to a calmer and more relaxed state.

Physical touch, including holding hands, can decrease blood pressure and heart rate. Holding hands activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for the "rest and digest" response. This helps to counteract the "fight or flight" response driven by the sympathetic nervous system, leading to a slower heart rate and lower blood pressure, contributing to an overall sense of calm and relaxation.

Holding hands can also have analgesic effects, helping reduce pain perception. This phenomenon is partly due to physical touch's emotional support and distraction. Studies have shown that couples who hold hands during painful procedures report less pain compared to those who do not. This is believed to be a combination of the emotional bond and the body's natural pain-relief mechanisms being activated.

Holding hands fosters a sense of emotional bonding and security. This physical connection can strengthen relationships by reinforcing feelings of trust, love, and mutual support. Holding hands can deepen emotional intimacy and promote unity and partnership in romantic and non-romantic relationships.

Research has found that when people hold hands, their physiological responses can synchronize. Their heart rates and breathing patterns can align, promoting shared experience and empathy. This synchronization can enhance feelings of connection and emotional attunement, helping us feel more understood and supported.

Beyond the physiological responses, holding hands also has psychological effects. It is a nonverbal communication conveying empathy, solidarity, and reassurance. In moments of joy, it can amplify feelings of happiness and celebration. It can provide a tangible source of comfort and security in times of sorrow or fear.



Holding hands is a universal gesture that transcends cultures and languages. It is a simple yet powerful way to express many emotions and intentions. Whether it's a parent holding a child's hand to provide safety, friends clasping hands in solidarity, or partners intertwining fingers in love, this act of touch is a fundamental human behavior that enhances our emotional and physical well-being.

Holding the hand of a grieving person is a powerful act of compassion and support. With physiological and psychological effects, this simple gesture can significantly affect the person offering comfort and the one receiving it.

When you hold the hand of someone grieving, your body releases oxytocin, known as the "bonding hormone." Oxytocin plays a crucial role in social bonding and helps foster a sense of connection and empathy. This hormone can help alleviate loneliness and isolation for the grieving person, providing a comforting sense of togetherness and emotional support.

Grief often triggers elevated levels of cortisol, the body's primary stress hormone. Holding hands can help lower cortisol levels in the griever and the person offering support. This reduction in cortisol can alleviate some of the physical symptoms of stress, such as muscle tension, headaches, and fatigue, thereby calming.

Holding hands is a nonverbal way of expressing empathy, care, and solidarity. This gesture can significantly enhance the grieving person's sense of support and security. It reinforces the message that they are not alone in their pain and that someone is there to share the burden, even if only

for a moment. This can be incredibly reassuring and help mitigate feelings of abandonment and despair.

I invite you to visit the hands impacting my life in this book. Hands of healing, comfort, and even those that caused harm. I will share very personal experiences with the hands of others, some very tragic and others of joy and profound connection.

Through these stories, I aim to illuminate our hands' diverse roles in shaping our experiences, offering solace, forging bonds, and leaving lasting impressions on our hearts and souls. Join me as I recount the tender moments of care, the trials of adversity, and the enduring power of human touch that have defined my journey.

*"The hand expresses what the heart already knows. Hands have their own language."*

*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*



**Earl and Beulah Roustio**

## **One: Mom's Hands**

Mom's hands were adept on the piano and in the kitchen, where she was a master chef and an impeccable hostess. When she planned a party, her hands brought her vision to life. She would create an array of finger foods that were as beautiful at look to as they were delicious. Her buffets were legendary among our friends and family, each item meticulously crafted, each display artfully arranged.

Yet, it was in her home-cooked meals that her hands truly worked their magic. These meals were more than just sustenance—they were a source of comfort and joy, a way to bring our family together around the table. Each dish she prepared was infused with love, and each recipe was a testament to her care and attention. Her hands transformed simple ingredients into something extraordinary, something that nourished not just our bodies but our spirits.

Some meals are etched in my memory, their flavors as vivid now as they were when I first tasted them. One of these is hamburger stroganoff. I can still see her in the kitchen, her hands moving deftly as she prepared the dish. The rich, velvety cream sauce, poured generously over tender noodles, was a comfort food masterpiece. I've tried to recreate it many times, following her recipe to the letter, but it always tastes different. It could be the ingredients; perhaps it's the technique, but I believe the hands made the difference. With their unique touch, her hands brought warmth and depth to the dish that mine could not replicate.

Her stroganoff wasn't just a meal; it was a manifestation of her love for us, a tangible expression of her desire to care for and nurture her family. Every bite was a reminder of her

presence, her hands working tirelessly to make our home a place of warmth and joy.

Mom's hands were her instruments, both in music and in life. They brought beauty and comfort to everyone they touched, creating memories we always carry.

Her music might have impressed those who heard it in public, but it was the private concerts, the moments when her hands played just for us, that we treasure most.

Her cooking might have delighted visitors, but the meals she prepared for us, her family, brought true comfort and joy.

In many ways, I am trying to carry on her legacy, to use my hands to create and care. Whether attempting to play one of her favorite pieces on the piano or recreate her famous stroganoff, I am reminded of her hands and all they accomplished. Though I can never match her exactly, I hope that through my own efforts, her spirit continues to live on.

Her hands were her gift to us, and they continue to give even now. Though I can never truly replicate the magic of Mom's hands, I am grateful for the memories they created and the love they expressed.

Her hands have been a source of comfort and reassurance from my earliest memories. When I was a child, whenever I felt anxious or scared, my mom would rub my head gently. Her fingers would weave through my hair with their soft touch, massaging my scalp with a tenderness that only a mother could provide. Those moments were magical as if her hands could transfer her calmness directly into me. It was her silent way of telling me everything would be alright.

This simple head-rubbing became our unique connection, a ritual of love and care. I can still recall the feeling vividly—the soothing sensation of her fingers gliding over my head, the faint scent of her lotion lingering in the air.

The world around me would disappear in those moments, leaving us in a bubble of peace and security.

As I grew older, our connection evolved but remained just as strong. We developed a habit of holding hands, extending that childhood comfort. It wasn't just in times of distress; it became a part of our visits. Our hands would find each other naturally. It was our silent language, expressing love and support without uttering words.

My mom's hands were a study in contrasts. They were soft, almost velvety to the touch, yet perpetually cool. Even in the height of summer, her hands retained a gentle chill, like a cool breeze on a warm day. This contrast became more pronounced as she aged. The softness remained, but her hands began to show the signs of time. Her skin grew thinner, and the veins became more prominent, winding like delicate blue rivers under the surface.

Holding her hands in her later years was an intimate experience. I could feel the subtle pulse of her heartbeat through her fingers, the rhythm of life flowing beneath her fragile skin. Something was profoundly moving about that sensation—feeling the essence of her being through such a simple touch. It was a reminder of her strength and resilience, even as her body grew frail.

Towards the end of her life, our hand-holding sessions became even more precious. We would sit together in her bedroom, often in silence,

just enjoying each other's presence.

Sometimes, we would watch TV, letting the background noise fill the space while we held hands. Other times, we would sit quietly, no words necessary. The warmth and connection we shared in those moments were enough.

Her bedroom became a sanctuary where time seemed to stand still. The familiar hum of the television, the soft rustling of sheets, and the gentle pressure of her hand in mine created a sense of tranquility. Despite the circumstances, there was a sense of peace in those moments. It was as if our hands were a bridge between the past and the present, connecting us to all the memories we had shared and the love that bound us.

Her hands told a story of love, care, and countless sacrifices. They nurtured, comforted, and held me through life's ups and downs. Even as her life drew to a close, those hands continued to be a source of strength and solace for me. They reminded us of the unbreakable bond we shared that transcended time and space.

Since her passing, it is those hands I miss. The absence of her touch leaves a void that no one else can fill. I find myself longing for the simple act of holding her hand, feeling the softness of her skin and the gentle throb of her heartbeat. It is a profound loss, one that I feel deep within my soul.

I often reflect on those moments. The memories of holding her hand are a source of comfort, a way to feel close to her even in her absence. I often close my eyes and imagine the sensation of her fingers entwined with mine, the familiar coolness and softness bringing a bittersweet sense of peace.

The hands I miss the most are more than just a physical presence. They represent a lifetime of love, care, and connection. They are a reminder of the bond I shared with my mom, a bond that remains unbroken despite her passing. And though I can no longer hold her hand in mine, I carry the memory of her touch in my heart, a lasting legacy of the love we shared.

In those memories, I find solace. They are a testament to the enduring power of love and a simple touch's profound impact. My mom's hands were a gift I will cherish for the rest of my life. And even though she is no longer here, the comfort and strength she provided through her touch remain with me, a constant reminder of the unbreakable bond we shared.

My mom had a way with her hands that was nothing short of magical. Whether dancing her fingers across the keys of a piano or preparing a sumptuous feast, her hands brought life and joy to everything they touched. To the outside world, she was an exceptional pianist, her music echoing in the halls of our home, in the church sanctuary, and in the rooms of nursing homes where she volunteered her time and talent. But to us, her family, her music was more than a performance—it was the soundtrack of our lives, resonating with emotion and memory.



Mom's relationship with the piano was profound. Her nimble and expressive hands could coax the most delicate melodies and the grandest of symphonies from the instrument. At home, she played for herself, her fingers dancing over the keys in a private conversation with the piano. These moments, often unobserved by anyone but family, were filled with a quiet intensity that made our home feel alive with her presence.

Her music became a shared experience in church, lifting the congregation's spirits. Her hands seemed to translate the emotions of her heart into a language everyone could understand. Though she was undoubtedly talented, it wasn't just the technical skill that impressed— but the emotion behind each note. People often remarked on how they could feel the music in their souls and how her playing made them feel closer to something sacred.

When she played in nursing homes, her hands brought comfort and joy to the residents. Many were lonely, far from the family and home they once knew. Mom's music, full of life and love, was a bridge to happier times, a reminder that they were not forgotten. Her hands told stories through music, stories that brought smiles to faces and tears to eyes, stories that made the old feel young again, even if just for a moment.

The final year of my mother's life was a time of transition. She had moved into a nursing home, a place where she could receive the care and support she needed as her health declined. Despite her challenges, her love for music and her bond with the piano remained steadfast.

Life in the nursing home was a mix of good days and bad days for Mom. Some days, she was vibrant and engaged, her eyes sparkling with the light of recognition. On other days, she seemed lost in a fog, struggling to remember even the simplest things. It was painful to watch, but even in her most confused moments, the piano was a beacon of clarity for her.

The nursing home had a piano in the common area. Mom often gravitated towards it, her hands instinctively reaching for the keys. The staff and residents alike would listen whenever she played, drawn to the remnants of her once-glorious talent.

During this time, I experienced one of the most poignant moments of my life: the last time I heard my mom play the piano.

On a spring afternoon, I visited Mom, hoping to bring warmth and cheer to her day. As I entered the nursing home and walked toward her room, I noticed Mom in the community room, sitting at the piano, her hands resting on the keys. She smiled faintly when she saw me, a flicker of recognition in her eyes. "Play something for me Mom," I gently encouraged.

She nodded and began to play. Her fingers moved over the keys, searching for the familiar patterns. The melody that emerged was halting, and some notes were missed or stumbled upon. Yet, despite the imperfections, there was a magic at the moment that words cannot fully capture.

As she played, I watched her closely. Once so sure and agile, her hands now moved with a tentative grace. She paused several times, her brow furrowing as she tried to remember the following note. Each time she found her way back, the music resumed with a delicate persistence.

It was a simple tune, one she had played countless times before. But that day, it was transformed into something extraordinary. The room seemed to hold its breath, the soft strains of the piano weaving a spell that bound us all in a shared moment of reverence.

Listening to her play, I was flooded with memories. I remembered her countless hours at the piano, filling our home with music. I remembered how her hands flew over the keys, confident and sure. And I remembered the joy and comfort her music always brought us.

But more than anything, I was struck by the courage and determination she showed in that moment. Even as her abilities faded, her love for music remained undiminished. She fought against the encroaching darkness with every note she played; I had never been prouder of her.

My eyes weren't dry when she finished playing. It was as if I were witnessing not just the end of an era but the essence of who she was—her spirit, her resilience, and her unwavering love for music.

When she finished, there was a moment of silence before I and a couple of others gave gentle applause. She looked up, seemingly confused by the reaction, but she smiled when she saw the tears in my eyes.

"Was it good?" she asked softly. "It was perfect Mom," I replied, my voice choked with emotion. It was absolutely perfect."

The sound of her playing that day still echoes in my mind. It wasn't the flawless performance of her younger years but the most beautiful music I had ever heard. It was a testament to her strength, passion, and enduring love for the piano.

Since her passing, I often find my mind in that moment, sitting listening to her play, trying to recapture the magic of that last performance. I feel her presence beside me. My fingers try to recreate the exact notes she played, and I find solace in the attempt.

The last time I heard my mom play the piano was a gift. It reminded me of the power of music, the depth of her love, and the indomitable spirit that defined her. It was a moment of connection that transcended the challenges of her final year. This melody continues to play in my heart.

Her legacy lives on in the music she loved. Those hands brought joy to everyone lucky enough to hear her play.



“On Thursday, June 8, 2023, Beulah Rose (Lancy) Roustio passed away peacefully with her beloved husband, Earl, at her side. She was 91 years old. Beulah was born on August 19, 1931, at home, to Erba Pauline (Harrison) Lancy and Ellis Louis Lancy in E. St. Louis, Illinois.

Beulah was a beautiful soul with a generous heart and giving nature. She spent her life in service to God and family. She was a talented musician, who started piano lessons at age 6, and was playing during church services by age 12. Beulah graduated high school in 1949 and received an engagement ring from Earl Lawrence Roustio Jr. as a graduation gift. They married on November 22, 1950 and were blessed with 72 years together.

In 1949 she enrolled in Belleville Jr. College where she majored in piano and minored in voice. In the 1950's Beulah worked as the private secretary to the State Tax Commissioner in Nebraska. When the family moved to Indiana she returned to school and became a substitute teacher in the Independence Hill School system and later in the Frankfort School System. When her children were older, she joined the sales team at Wesley Manor in Frankfort, Indiana.

Beulah was the central figure in the lives of her husband and their 6 children. She managed to juggle a hectic home life and support Earl in the role of pastor's wife. She was greatly involved in the inner workings of the church, lead women's

groups, counseled those in need, hosted numerous events, but was best known for her musical talents on the piano and organ. She could be found at the keyboard during every church service.

Beulah had a servant heart and an open door. There was always food and shelter for anyone in need. She loved to shop and travel, she loved to read, and she never lost a game of Scrabble.”



## **Two: Dirty Hands**

Our hands often get dirty, and I thought it would be fun to share a few instances when mine or someone I know had their hands in less-than-pleasant situations. Let me start with an experience many men have shared with me—the birth of a child.

I was in the room when each of my children were born. While it's a beautiful experience, the moments leading up to holding the baby can be pretty gross. With my first child, I was blissfully unaware that more than just a baby would come out of my wife during the process. Let's say there was goo and poo, and who knows what else escaping her. I was overwhelmed, scared, excited, and grossed out all at the same time. But despite the chaos, I was in complete awe of my wife and child.

My beautiful wife was strong and oh-so-ready to give birth. As the doctor announced that it was time to push, I eagerly took my place by her side, ready to support her. Little did I know, I was about to witness something straight out of a sci-fi horror movie.

The pushing started, and soon enough, the room was filled with sounds and substances I had never imagined.

There was goo—oh, the goo!—and it was everywhere. And then there was the poo. I looked down and saw my wife, a warrior in the throes of labor, and I thought, "She is amazing!" But also, "What on earth have I gotten myself into?"



As the birth progressed, I found myself in a surreal state of mind. One moment, I was holding my wife's hand, whispering words of encouragement while she looked at me, wishing I were dead. Next, I saw mysterious fluids that seemed determined to drench the doctor and nurses. Their hands were getting dirty, figuratively and literally, all I could do was watch in amazement.

I remember the nurse asking if I wanted to cut the umbilical cord. My immediate thought was, "What is that?" But of course, I agreed. I took the scissors with shaking hands and made the cut, feeling heroic and slightly queasy.

Our beautiful baby girl was here, covered in all the natural goo of birth. The doctor handed her to my wife, who held her with tears of joy in her eyes. When it was my turn to hold her, I forgot about the mess. My hands gently cradled this tiny new life and nothing else mattered.

Decades later, I was over the moon when my daughter announced that she was expecting her first child. As a seasoned veteran of three childbirths, I was prepared to offer sage advice, a shoulder to cry on, and warm and steady hands off support. Little did I know that this experience would come with its own set of comedic twists and turns.

The day finally arrived, and I found myself back in the familiar yet nerve-racking territory of the hospital's maternity ward at my daughter's request.

The atmosphere was a blend of excitement and anticipation, with my daughter clutching my hand, her partner nervously pacing around, and me, the seasoned pro, ready to support and guide her through the journey.

The room buzzed with activity as the contractions grew closer and more intense. Nurses flitted about like guardian angels, doctors came in and out with encouraging words, and my daughter's partner, bless his heart, grew paler by the minute. I chuckled to myself, recalling my first time in his shoes, but I had confidence he would pull through— after all, he had me for backup.

The moment of truth arrived, and the real action began. My daughter was determined, and the nurses coached her through every push. I stood by, ready to offer encouragement and my well-honed wisdom. Everything was progressing smoothly until we hit the infamous "poo and goo" part of labor.

***Thump!*** The baby's dad hit the floor like a sack of potatoes, legs, and arms sprawled in all directions. For a split second, the room was silent, save for the sounds of my daughter's labor and the beeping of medical equipment.

Then, one of the nurses, displaying remarkable professionalism, calmly stepped over him, gave me a nod, and invited me up to the front lines. "Looks like you're up Grandpa," she said.

I sprang into action. I was the seasoned pro with a mix of exhilaration and tenderness. And then, with a triumphant cry, my grandson made his grand entrance into the world. The nurse handed me the tiny, squirming bundle of joy, still covered in his arrival's glory. I looked down at him, my heart swelling with instant love that nearly brought tears to my eyes. As the nurse cleaned him up, I marveled at his perfect little features, wrinkled nose, and the soft tufts of hair on his head.

Once he was clean and swaddled, I passed him to his exhausted but radiant mother. The look on her face as she held her baby boy for the first time was a sight to behold. It was a moment of pure, unadulterated joy, made even sweeter by the unexpected comedy that had preceded it. "Did I miss it?" Dad asked, still woozy. I patted his shoulder with a laugh.

In the end, we were a team—a slightly unconventional but fiercely loving team. As I watched my daughter hold her baby boy, I knew this new generation was in for a lifetime of love, laughter, and the occasional unexpected twist. And it hit me: I'm old.



### **Three: Hands that Harm**

As I write this chapter, I feel a mix of emotions. Sharing this story is painful and liberating, but I believe it is essential. This is a story about a traumatic event that changed my life in ways I never could have imagined, at the hands of a stranger. It is about the aftermath of being assaulted and the short and long-term effects it's had on me. Ultimately, I learned how my life was transformed in unexpected and powerful ways.

The night started in a nightclub with friends, a scene filled with the pulsating energy of loud music and flashing lights. We were all just ready to enjoy ourselves, and the atmosphere was electric. People danced, their bodies moving rhythmically to the beat, and laughter filled the air. It was one of those nights that felt full of promise, a chance to let loose and create memories.

As we walked into the club, the bass from the speakers thumped through the floor, reverberating in my chest. The lights were a kaleidoscope of colors, darting across the room, illuminating people's faces lost in the music. We found a spot near the dance floor where we could feel the full intensity of the night. We ordered drinks, raising our glasses to toast friendship and good times.

For a while, everything was perfect. We danced to the music, the moment's joy reflected in our smiles. The DJ played great songs, and we sang along, shouting the lyrics over the booming speakers. The energy in the room was contagious, and I felt a sense of freedom and exhilaration.

It was one of those nights where the world outside the club seemed to fade away, leaving only the euphoria of the present.

The crowd was a sea of people, each adding to the night's vibrant tapestry. Strangers became dance partners, and fleeting connections were made over a shared enjoyment of the music. It was a night meant for fun and laughter, a temporary escape from the everyday stresses of life.

But within moments, the situation turned sinister. What started as a typical night out with friends was about to descend into a nightmare that would leave lasting scars on my body and soul. I was assaulted.

I don't remember the actual assault and only have the memories that others have shared with me. Apparently, I had an uncomfortable encounter with a woman when entering the dance floor.

I was told that after I had been dancing for a few minutes, the woman pushed me from behind. I don't remember the push or the fall, but my friends later described it to me in harrowing detail. My forehead went directly into the cement floor, and chaos unfolded, with the club's security staff securing the scene and calling for help.

Interestingly, the woman who assaulted me, when realizing what she had done, went into compassion mode.

Unfortunately, she was intoxicated and not making good decisions, so she turned me over and started CPR. My breathing was okay though, so the actions of turning me over and trying to conduct unnecessary CPR could have added to my injuries.

I was taken to the hospital, and I would not wake up for days. The damage was done, and my care team thought I might be as well.

Doctors and nurses moved quickly at the hospital, conducting scans and x-rays, running tests, and assessing the damage. It was then that the gravity of my injuries became clear, in addition to cuts and bruising over my body and face; my skull was cracked. My brain was in danger because of swelling, so the doctors decided to keep me asleep.

My family was called in, and the doctors shared the sobering news that when I woke up, there was no promise that I would be the same person. There was a chance of severe disability, permanent brain damage, and the possibility of needing lifelong care. My family stood by me, grappling with the uncertainty of what the future might hold.

In those hours and days, as I lay unconscious, my loved ones were left to navigate a flood of emotions—fear, hope, despair, and determination. They held each other to the sliver of hope that I would wake up and defy the dire predictions.

When I finally awoke, it was a slow and disorienting process. The lights of the hospital room, the sterile smell, and the beeping of machines were my first sensations. I could see my partner's relieved yet anxious face, his eyes filled with tears and hope. The days that followed were a blur of medical assessments and cautious optimism. The initial fears of severe brain damage were not realized. Still, the road to recovery was going to be long and uncertain.

A day after waking from the haze of the hospital bed, I was greeted by two detectives. They arrived with solemn expressions, their presence a stark reminder of the incident I was desperately trying to put behind me. Standing at my bedside, they explained that several witnesses had seen me be assaulted and that it was up to me to decide whether or not charges would be filed. Because no police officer was present at the time of the assault, my decision was crucial.

It was then that I learned the person responsible was a nurse. My heart sank. I knew all too well the gravity of an assault charge for someone in her position. Having worked with nurses, I understood that such a charge would almost certainly end her career. Maybe it was the pain medication coursing through my veins, or perhaps it was the sheer exhaustion of it all, but when pressed for an answer, I said no. "We all have bad days," I murmured, my voice barely more than a whisper. "I don't want to ruin her career."

The detectives exchanged glances, their faces a mix of professionalism and surprise. My life partner Shawn stood silently by my side, looking frustrated. I could feel their disappointment, their unspoken desire for justice, but I simply didn't have the fight in me.

I didn't want to relive the assault in the cold, clinical environment of a courtroom. I didn't want to recount every painful detail or even see her face. All I wanted was to move on and focus on healing.

As the detectives left, their footsteps echoing down the corridor, I was left with a heavy heart and a mind racing with second thoughts. Had I made the right decision? Was I letting her off too easily? But deep down, I knew that my chosen path was the one I could live with. The road to recovery was long and arduous, and I needed to conserve my strength for the journey ahead.

In the days and weeks that followed, I often thought of that nurse. I wondered if she realized the impact of her actions and if she felt any remorse. Would my decision serve as a wake-up call for her, a chance to reflect and change? Could it could lead to better days ahead for both of us.

There was enough damage that my future was uncertain. How long would recovery take? Could I ever go back to my stressful job? What would the long-term impact be on my body, brain, abilities, and personality? These questions loomed large, casting a shadow over my days.

The doctors and therapists could only provide tentative answers. Recovery would be a marathon, not a sprint.

There were no guarantees about the extent of my healing or the timeline. Each day brought small victories and setbacks, and it was impossible to predict the final outcome. The uncertainty was one of the most complex parts to bare. My career, once a source of pride and identity, now felt like an insurmountable mountain. The high-stress environment I thrived in before seemed like a reality show. I had to confront the possibility that I could never keep the job I loved.

My brain, though spared the worst outcomes, still struggled with memory lapses, concentration issues, and emotional



volatility, and my personality changed. These challenges tested my patience and resilience daily.

Emotionally, the trauma had reshaped me. The experience left deep scars, but it also opened new avenues for growth and self-discovery. I learned to be kinder to myself and to others, to accept help, and to find strength in vulnerability. I evolved as I embraced these changes, becoming more empathetic and attuned to the struggles of others. The short-term effects were memory loss, pain, and constant tiredness. I was once active, but for a year, I needed naps every three to four hours. I struggled to keep up with friends and family and even to enjoy life. The fatigue was relentless, making even the simplest tasks feel insurmountable. The physical pain and tiredness were the least of my struggles though. The real battle was ahead.

Assault is a moment of intense violation, helplessness, and profound breach of safety and trust. In the immediate aftermath, my family was engulfed by a whirlwind of emotions: fear, confusion, anger, and a deep, overwhelming sadness. For me, my body and mind were in shock, struggling to process what had happened and leaving permanent damage—all of this at the hands of a stranger.

The effects of the assault were pervasive and debilitating. I found it difficult to sleep, and my sense of security was shattered; I felt isolated, ashamed, and profoundly alone, even though Shawn was with me at all times. The trauma affected my ability to function in daily life, impacting my relationships, work, and overall well-being.

With the support of therapy, loved ones, and my own inner strength, I started to reclaim my sense of self. It was not an

easy path, and there were many setbacks along the way.

However, through this process, I discovered the incredible resilience of the human spirit. I learned to confront and process my trauma, to rebuild my life piece by piece.

In the midst of my struggle to recover and regain my strength, there was a beacon of unwavering support: my boss, Tom. Tom was more than just a leader, he embodied the qualities of empathy, understanding, and genuine care that are often rare in the corporate world. As the head of the organization I worked for, he set a standard of leadership that went beyond mere management and into the realm of genuine compassion.

When he learned about my situation, Tom approached me with an open heart and a simple yet powerful offer: "Ask for anything you need to continue your job." Those words were a lifeline, a reminder that I wasn't alone in this journey. Tom's support wasn't just lip service; it was followed by concrete actions that made a world of difference.

Within days, a comfortable sofa appeared in my office. This wasn't just any piece of furniture; it was a symbol of Tom's commitment to my well-being. He understood that my recovery required more than just physical rest—it needed the flexibility to take short naps when the exhaustion became too much. That sofa became a sanctuary, a place where I could recharge and gather the strength to continue my work.

But Tom's support didn't stop there. Despite knowing that I wasn't functioning at the same level as before, he made the remarkable decision to keep my pay the same. This act of generosity alleviated a tremendous amount of stress, allowing me to focus on healing without the added burden of financial worry. It was an acknowledgment of my past contributions and a vote of confidence in my eventual return to total capacity.

Tom's actions went beyond the call of duty. He made sure my work recovery was manageable, constantly checking in and adjusting my workload to match my current capabilities. This wasn't about meeting quotas or deadlines; it was about recognizing my humanity and valuing my well-being above all else. In a world where productivity often trumps personal health, Tom's approach was a breath of fresh air.

Tom's actions taught me invaluable lessons about the true essence of leadership. It's not just about making tough decisions or steering the organization toward success. It's about seeing the people behind the roles, understanding their struggles, and doing everything in your power to support them. It's about creating an environment where everyone feels valued and cared for, even in their most vulnerable moments.

As I look back on that time, I realize that Tom's support was a crucial part of my recovery. It wasn't just the physical accommodation or the financial stability; it was the feeling of being seen and understood, of knowing that someone had my back no matter what. It gave me the strength to persevere, to push through the hard days, and to keep moving forward.

Tom's leadership left an indelible mark on my life. His actions were a beacon of hope and a reminder that authentic leadership is defined not by power or authority but by compassion and empathy. In a time when I needed it most, Tom's unwavering support helped me find my way back to myself, one step at a time.

This chapter is not just a recounting of pain but a testament to the power of healing and transformation. It is about finding light in the darkest of times and emerging stronger than before. It is my hope that by sharing my story, I can offer comfort and inspiration to others who may be facing their own battles with trauma. This is a story of survival, of finding hope and strength in the face of adversity, and ultimately, of embracing a future filled with possibility.

Even as I write this book, the long-term effects of my brain injuries continue to shape my life. While I have made significant strides in my recovery, the journey is ongoing. Memory issues persist; I can often remember events from the past but not from yesterday. Some of yesterday's memories will arrive in around a week. I rely on notes and reminders to navigate some tasks, which can be frustrating, embarrassing, and time-consuming. I may know the answer to a question, but when asked, the answer won't come out of my mouth. I go silent for a few moments while my brain sifts through the possible answers.

Some of the main things that still impact my memory were simple before. Names, for instance, are particularly challenging. Some names are easy to recall, while others won't stick. I often must practice and use cues to remember the names of people I know. Since I'm being honest, some of the most complex names for me to recall are those of my family, especially those new to our family, including grandchildren. Am I embarrassed? Yes. Can I fix it? No. I often need help remembering what I ate yesterday, birthdays, and occasionally simple daily tasks. But ask me what I ate last week, and I will likely recall it.

Emotionally, I have come to terms with the changes in my life. The trauma has left me more introspective and empathetic but also more anxious and cautious. Social situations can be overwhelming, so I fight that by accepting leadership positions, facilitating, hosting podcast, and accepting speaking engagements. At times, I still struggle with feelings of isolation even though I have plenty of support, family, and friends. Therapy has been crucial in helping me process these emotions and develop coping strategies.

Despite these challenges, I have found new ways to find joy and fulfillment. I have embraced activities that are less physically demanding but mentally stimulating, such as writing. Creative outlets have provided a sense of purpose and allowed me to express emotions that are difficult to articulate.

The long-term impact on my personality has been profound. I am now more patient and appreciative of the small victories. My priorities have shifted significantly, focusing more on personal relationships and self-care. This experience has taught me the importance of resilience and the power of hope.

However, these changes have also had their challenges. I've actually lost friends because of my personality shift. I've become more serious and take fewer risks, which has made it harder to maintain the same social connections. I am no longer the party animal I once was, and this has created a distance between me and some of my old friends.

Furthermore, my transformation has affected my professional relationships as well. A couple of my colleagues expressed concerns about my leadership style after I adopted a more patient approach with the staff. They were accustomed to my previous hardnosed, authoritative style, and they worried that my newfound patience and empathy might impact our team's performance.

Despite these difficulties, I believe the changes in my personality have made me a better person overall. While I may find it harder to make and keep friends and faced skepticism from some colleagues, I know that focusing on resilience, hope, and genuine connections is ultimately more fulfilling.

During tests meant to address injuries from the assault, something unexpected came to light. A blood test showed concerning results, hinting at the possible presence of cancer.

My heart sank as I faced the daunting possibility of a cancer diagnosis. More tests and scans followed, each appointment filled with anxiety and uncertainty. It felt like an unending maze of medical jargon and sterile rooms. However, after what seemed like an eternity, the doctors finally had a clearer

picture. I was diagnosed with Paget's disease. Paget's disease, the doctors explained, interferes with the body's normal recycling process, causing bones to become fragile and misshapen over time. It wasn't cancer, but it was a serious condition nonetheless. Thankfully, because of the extensive scans and tests following the assault, my condition was discovered early, allowing for prompt treatment.

The day of my first treatment was a mix of nerves and humility. The treatment involved a transfusion, and as I arrived at the hospital, I was directed to wait in a designated area with a group of other patients. One by one, each was called back before me. I watched as each person went ahead, feeling impatient and anxious.

Finally, it was my turn. I was led into a large room where more than a dozen patients were receiving chemotherapy and other treatments. The room was filled with the soft hum of medical equipment and occasional beeps from monitors. It was a somber environment, but there was also a quiet strength among the patients.

My treatment was short, compared to the others. I found myself in a unique position, being the last to enter and the first to leave. As I settled into the treatment chair, I couldn't help but notice the other patients.

There was an elderly lady, frail and wearing a breathing mask, accompanied by a caring nurse. Her skin was thin and almost translucent, telling a silent story of battles fought. Nearby, a man in his thirties was tethered to his IV pole, busily working or texting on his phone, barely sitting for a moment.

The room was a blend of resilience and quiet determination. No one spoke, but the air was thick with unspoken camaraderie. My initial feelings of self-pity began to dissipate, replaced by a profound sense of gratitude.

As the minutes ticked by, I reflected on my journey. The assault that had initially seemed like a cruel twist of fate had inadvertently led to the early diagnosis of Paget's disease. I felt a deep sense of “lucky me,” realizing how fortunate I was to have my disease discovered and treated early.

When my treatment was finished, I left the hospital with a new perspective. My heart ached for my fellow patients, each fighting their own battles with quiet bravery. The experience had been eye-opening and humbling, a reminder of the strength of the human spirit and the unexpected turns life can take.

From that day forward, I carried a deeper empathy and gratitude. My journey through diagnosis and treatment changed me, leaving me with a new appreciation for life and the hidden blessings that come even in the midst of adversity.





#### **Four: Hands of Addiction:**

Larry arrived at the bar with friends, ready to make unforgettable memories. The evening started with a few rounds of drinks, some hearty laughs, and many toasts. As the night wore on, Larry's enthusiasm only grew. He challenged everyone to a round of tequila shots, claiming, "It's not a party until we've had tequila!"

By midnight, Larry felt no pain and had reached the pinnacle of his festive spirit. Larry, always one to enjoy a good dance, climbed onto a table, much to the delight and laughter of his friends and other bar patrons.

He began to dance with wild abandon, his arms flailing and hips swaying in ways that defied the laws of physics and good taste. His dance moves combined the twist, the moonwalk, and what could only be described as "the flapping chicken." Those around cheered, clapped, and egged him on, creating a raucous and joyous atmosphere.

He spread his arms wide and belted out, "God bless America! Land that I love!" His voice, although not in tune, was filled with genuine passion. He sang with all his heart, swaying precariously on the table, which groaned under the weight of his enthusiasm.

Security guards, who had been watching the increasingly rowdy celebration, decided it was time to intervene before Larry's performance ended in disaster. Two burly guards approached the table, but Larry was too immersed in his patriotic fervor to notice.

As they gently helped him off the table, Larry continued to sing, his voice echoing through the bar, "Stand beside her, and guide her through the night with the light from above!"

The crowd applauded, some even joining in the song, as Larry was escorted toward the door. "Hey, fellas, the party's just getting started!" Larry slurred with a cheerful grin, trying to maintain his balance.

Once outside, Larry took a deep breath and finished his song with a dramatic flourish, "From the mountains to the prairies to the oceans white with foam!" He paused for effect, arms stretched wide, before ending with a triumphant, "God bless America, my home sweet home!"

His friends stumbled out of the bar behind him, laughing and congratulating him on the unforgettable performance. Larry, with a lopsided smile, bowed to his adoring audience. "Thank you, thank you! I'll be here all week!"

We all know Larry, or maybe we are him in some ways. It's easy to get wrapped up in the moments seemingly made better by alcohol. Whether it's the liquid courage that helps us belt out karaoke songs we'd usually be too shy to attempt or the uninhibited dance moves that emerge after a few too many, alcohol can often turn ordinary nights into extraordinary stories.

However, these nights of revelry can sometimes blur the line between fun, foolishness, and danger. As much as we laugh about Larry's table-dancing escapades, it's important to remember that alcohol can lead to less humorous consequences. While Larry's tale is harmless fun, there are countless stories where the outcomes are not as cheerful.

Here is a TMI moment. I have struggled with alcohol abuse. In the past, my relationship with alcohol was far from healthy. I drank to get drunk, seeking escape at bars on the weekends. I believed I was having a good time, but there were a few severe consequences.

I was arrested, twice, handcuffed and placed into the back of police cars. Once for driving under the influence (DUI) and once for public intoxication. These were legal troubles, but the physical toll was equally harsh.

In addition, there were two separate incidents where I ended up in the emergency room due to injuries sustained from blacking out. Both times, I was walking outside intoxicated, and then I blacked out and fell to the ground, hands and face first.

These injuries were wake-up calls, stark reminders of the physical dangers of my drinking habits. But time has a way of dulling the sharpness of these lessons, making it easy to fall back into old patterns. I'm not proud of these events, but they laid the groundwork for a better chapter in my life.

Fortunately, the assault brought about a significant shift in my relationship with alcohol. My body and mental state transformed, and my brain injuries came with an unexpected blessing: I lost the compulsion to drink. It's as if the trauma rewired something within me, turning off the desire to become drunk. My hands would no longer reach for a drink. Today I dislike the taste of any alcohol, making it easy for me to turn away. I can drink, but I don't enjoy it.

I believe I am fortunate because alcohol is the only substance that ever attracted me; I've never had an impulse to try anything else. Others aren't so lucky.

I attended my first funeral for someone who died from alcohol abuse while in middle school. At the time, I didn't understand the impact drinking could have on the body overall. I loved the person deeply, and while I knew he drank every day, his drinking never negatively impacted me. Today, I only remember the good times and the funeral.

I recall playing in his yard, sharing meals at his table, and the occasional thrill of him handing me his empty bottle, allowing me to try the backwash. Those moments were filled with warmth and a sense of belonging. He was a kind and loving presence in my life; those memories of joy and connection have stayed with me over the years.

Unfortunately, I have attended several funerals for family and friends whose lives ended early because of substance abuse. Two in the past couple of years. In both cases, the people knew their substance abuse was impacting their health. Hospital visits, admissions, doctor warnings, and even begging from family couldn't drown out the overwhelming compulsions.

These experiences have painted a somber picture of the destructive power of addiction. Each funeral was a stark reminder of how insidious and relentless substance abuse can be, overtaking the lives of even the most cherished and loved individuals. The pain and helplessness felt by family and friends were palpable as they struggled to reconcile their memories of the person they loved with the harsh reality of their addiction.

In these moments of grief, I found myself reflecting on the nature of addiction and its hold on those we care about. The sheer force of the compulsions driving their substance abuse seemed to eclipse all else, rendering medical advice, heartfelt pleas, and even their own awareness of the damage futile. It was as if a silent, unspoken agreement was present at these funerals, where everyone knew, but no one needed to voice the cause of death. The loss was felt deeply, a collective sorrow shared by all in attendance.

These funerals also underscored the importance of compassion and understanding. Despite the frustration and heartache caused by their addictions, it was clear that the individuals who had passed were still remembered for the good they had brought into the lives of those around them. Their struggles with substance abuse did not define them entirely; they were still loved and cherished for the unique qualities and moments they had shared.

Addiction is a shadow that many of us live with, often lurking in the corners of our lives. It's not always the widely discussed addictions like alcohol, drugs, or gambling; sometimes, it's the subtler, less-talked-about dependencies that quietly consume us. These can be as varied as the people who experience them: food, sex, pornography, shopping, inhalants, and countless others. Often, we try something once, love it, and go back again and again, even when we know it's harmful.

What does any of this have to do with hands, you ask?

Unfortunately, hands can also be instrumental in the abuse of various substances, from alcohol to heroin. Understanding how these drugs are administered through our hands provides insight into the mechanisms of substance abuse. It underscores the importance of education and intervention.

Whether rolling a joint, packing a pipe, or manipulating a bong, the preparation and consumption of marijuana heavily involve our hands. Grasping the rolling paper, breaking apart the dried flowers, and lighting the end requires a level of manual dexterity that belies the casual nature of cannabis use. Our hands become extensions of our desire to

experience the euphoric effects of THC.

From crushing pills to preparing syringes, the misuse of prescription medications often involves intricate hand movements. Whether seeking relief from pain or chasing a euphoric high, people resort to methods of ingestion that require careful manipulation of the drugs. The familiar routine of swallowing a pill or administering an injection can quickly spiral into dependence and addiction.

The administration of illicit drugs like cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine is perhaps the most direct manifestation of hand-mediated substance abuse. Whether snorting lines of powder, preparing syringes for injection, or handling makeshift smoking apparatuses, the hands serve as conduits for the delivery of potent chemicals into the body. Each action reinforces the addictive cycle, perpetuating the destructive consequences of drug abuse.

Cigarettes, cigars, and vaping devices all rely on our hands to deliver nicotine into our bodies. With each flick of a lighter or press of a button, we ignite the tobacco or activate the vaporizer, preparing the substance for inhalation. The tactile sensation of holding a cigarette between one's fingers becomes synonymous with the act of smoking, perpetuating the cycle of nicotine addiction.



Inhalants, too, are a dangerous form of addiction, often overlooked in discussions about substance abuse. Our hands lift the inhalant bottle to our noses, and we receive a short-lived high. Unfortunately, the damage they cause can be long-lasting, affecting the brain and body profoundly. Addiction to shopping or gambling, on the other hand, may not directly harm the body but can devastate finances, relationships, and mental health.

The common thread in all these addictions is the search for something—a feeling, an escape, a moment of relief from the pressures of life. What starts as a coping mechanism or a source of pleasure can quickly spiral out of control, taking over our lives and dictating our actions.

Over time, chronic substance abuse can lead to more severe conditions. For instance, long-term alcohol use is associated with a condition called alcoholic neuropathy, which damages peripheral nerves and can cause pain, tingling, and numbness in the hands. This nerve damage can significantly impair the ability to use the hands effectively.

Certain drugs, notably those administered intravenously, can also cause localized damage to the hands. Repeated injections can lead to collapsed veins, infections, and abscesses, which can cause lasting harm and require medical intervention. Additionally, some substances can cause vasoconstriction, reducing blood flow to the hands and potentially leading to tissue damage or even necrosis.

The aesthetic effects of substance abuse on the hands can be equally concerning. Chronic alcohol and drug use can lead to changes in the skin's appearance. Alcohol, for example, can cause dehydration, leading to dry, cracked skin and an increased risk of infections. It can also exacerbate conditions like psoriasis and eczema, which can manifest on the hands.

Illicit drug use can also leave visible marks. Intravenous drug users often develop track marks, bruising, and scarring on their hands and arms. Some drugs, like methamphetamine, can cause severe skin conditions, including sores and infections, as a result of repetitive scratching or "picking" at the skin.

Anxiety and stress, common among individuals struggling with addiction, can lead to behaviors like nail-biting, skin-picking, and excessive washing, which can damage the hands. Additionally, the social stigma and shame associated with visible signs of substance abuse can further impact our mental health and self-esteem.

The impact of drugs and alcohol on our hands extends beyond the physical and aesthetic. Our hands are vital for communication and connection. They are used to comfort loved ones, create art, perform work, and engage in countless daily activities. When substance abuse compromises the functionality of our hands, it can have a ripple effect on our ability to interact with the world and maintain relationships.

Moreover, the damage to our hands can serve as a visible reminder of the broader health implications of substance abuse. It highlights the need for comprehensive treatment and support for those struggling with addiction.

Addressing the root causes of substance abuse and providing access to medical care, mental health services, and social support are crucial steps in helping regain control of their lives and health.

Family and friends can play a role in supporting someone struggling with addiction. The first step is to educate yourself about addiction, its effects on the brain and behavior, and the challenges of recovery.

Communicating openly and compassionately, without judgment, is crucial. Expressing concerns about their health and well-being while listening actively to their feelings and experiences can make a significant difference. Encouraging professional help by suggesting resources, helping make appointments, providing transportation, or accompanying them to meetings shows support and commitment.

It is essential to support the recovery journey with patience and understanding, as recovery is a long process with potential setbacks. Acknowledging and celebrating achievements, no matter how small can boost their morale.

Taking care of yourself by setting healthy boundaries and seeking support through groups like Al-Anon or Nar-Anon can help you maintain your well-being. Creating a sober-friendly environment by removing temptations from your home and encouraging healthy, substance-free activities can support their recovery efforts.

By working together, individuals and their loved ones can navigate the path to sobriety and a healthier, more fulfilling life.

First, educate yourself about addiction and its effects. Understanding the nature of substance abuse, its impact on the brain and behavior, and the challenges of recovery can help you respond more effectively. This knowledge allows you to differentiate between supportive actions and enabling behaviors.

Open and compassionate communication is critical. Approach conversations without judgment, and express your concerns about the individual's health and well-being. Listening actively\*1 to their feelings and experiences without interrupting or criticizing fosters trust and shows that you care about their recovery.

Encouraging professional help, suggest resources such as therapists, counselors, and rehabilitation programs. Offer to help make appointments, provide transportation, or accompany them to meetings. These actions demonstrate your support for their recovery while ensuring they receive the professional assistance needed.

Setting healthy boundaries is vital to avoid enabling addiction. This might involve not giving them money, not covering up for their behavior, and not making excuses.

Clear boundaries help the individual understand the consequences of their actions and take responsibility for their recovery journey.

Support recovery by being patient and understanding. Recovery is a long process with potential setbacks.

Celebrate achievements, no matter how small, to boost their morale and motivation. However, ensure that these celebrations do not involve any substances or environments that might trigger a relapse.

Creating a sober-friendly environment is crucial. Ensure your home is free from alcohol and drugs and engage in activities that do not involve substances. Encourage healthy habits like regular exercise, balanced nutrition, and mindfulness practices like yoga and meditation. These activities can improve mental and physical health, helping manage stress and reduce the urge to use substances.

## **Need help?**

**<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/atod>**

## **Five: Hands as a Leader**

I've been a leader most of my working life. Yet, these deeply personal events reshaped my whole approach to leadership. I once was a no-nonsense supervisor, focused on adherence to rules and regulations. My priority was efficiency and, to some degree, control.

The assault was a harrowing experience that shattered my sense of control and security. During my recovery, I was surrounded by people who showed me immense kindness and support. Friends, family, and colleagues offered their empathy and understanding, helping me navigate through the trauma. This outpouring of compassion made me realize the profound impact of empathy and support on my ability to heal, move forward, and lead.

As I returned to work, I realized my perspective had fundamentally shifted. The assault experience made me more attuned to the vulnerabilities and struggles of others. I began to see my team as individuals with their own challenges and needs. This newfound empathy became the cornerstone of my evolving leadership approach.

My rigid stance had softened, and I recognized that flexibility and understanding could foster a more positive and productive work environment. Instead of merely enforcing rules, I began seeking to understand perspectives. I involved my team in every aspect of the decision-making process. This collaborative approach improved morale and led to more innovative and effective solutions.

Collaboration became a key component of my leadership style. I clarified that all voices were valued and that the best

solutions often came from a collective effort. This openness helps me build trust and a sense of community.

As I look back, the assault was a traumatic and painful experience. Still, it also became a catalyst for personal and professional growth. It taught me the importance of empathy, flexibility, and collaboration in leadership. It showed me that true strength lies not in rigid control but in the ability to connect with and inspire others. solutions often came from a collective effort. This openness helps me build trust and a sense of community.

I am focused on creating an environment where people feel safe to express their concerns and vulnerabilities. By sharing my own experiences and challenges, I encourage others to do the same. This transparency helps to break down barriers and foster a culture of mutual support and understanding.

The transformation from a hard-nosed supervisor to a compassionate leader is directly related to the damage to my brain. I realized leadership is about more than just getting the job done; it's about helping people grow and thrive—the same approach that others took with me during my recovery.

Today, I lead with a focus on compassion and understanding. I strive to create an inclusive and supportive environment where everyone feels valued and heard. I am no longer just a boss who enforces rules but a leader who listens, understands, and empowers.

The leadership journey is ongoing, and I continue to learn and grow daily. The assault experience and the subsequent transformation in my leadership style have profoundly shaped who I am. They have made me a better leader, and for that, I am grateful.

Adversity can be an influential teacher. Through my personal journey of trauma and recovery, I discovered the true essence of leadership—compassion, empathy, and collaboration. These qualities have transformed my approach to leadership and enriched the lives of those I lead. The evolution from a strict supervisor to a compassionate leader is a testament to the power of resilience and the enduring strength of the human spirit.

Leadership is a dynamic interplay of vision, strategy, and influence. Yet, one of the most transformative aspects of leadership often remains understated: empathy.

At its core, empathy is the ability to understand and share another person's feelings. It involves putting ourselves in another's shoes, seeing the world through their eyes, and responding with compassion and understanding. In my experience, empathy serves as a bridge that connects me with others, fostering trust, collaboration, and mutual respect.

When I embody empathy, I create a supportive and inclusive atmosphere. When my team members feel understood and valued, they are more likely to engage fully in their work, contributing their best efforts and ideas. This sense of belonging and appreciation significantly enhances job satisfaction and morale, leading to higher levels of



productivity and innovation.

Empathetic leadership also has a ripple effect on organizational culture. By prioritizing empathy, I set a powerful example for others to follow. This creates a more compassionate and collaborative workplace, where people support one another and work together towards common goals.

Such a culture enhances employee satisfaction and retention. It attracts top talent, increasingly seeking workplaces that value human connection and well-being.

Empathy has also transformed the way I handle conflicts and difficult conversations. In the past, I might have approached these situations with a more detached or authoritative mindset.

Now, I strive to approach them with empathy, seeking to understand the underlying emotions and motivations of all parties involved. This approach helps me to mediate conflicts more effectively, finding solutions that respect everyone's needs and perspectives.

In my leadership journey, I strive to embody the empathy that helped me heal. I make it a point to listen actively to my team, to truly hear concerns, and to understand their perspectives. This empathetic approach allows me to connect with them more profoundly, fostering an environment of trust and mutual respect. When my team members feel heard and valued, they are more likely to open up, share their ideas, and contribute fully to our collective goals.

My trauma has been a catalyst for developing an empathetic characteristic that profoundly enhances my leadership functions. I create an environment where individuals and teams can thrive by fostering understanding, trust, and compassion. Empathy has become a guiding principle in my leadership journey, enabling me to connect with others on a deeper level and to lead with authenticity and vulnerability.

Through empathy, I have found a path to healing and growth for myself and those I lead. Once symbols of my own struggle, my hands have become tools of connection and healing, helping me build a more compassionate and inclusive world.

My hands are more than mere instruments of action; they are extensions of my heart, mind, and soul. They hold the power to comfort, nurture, and create lasting bonds. My hands have been my constant companions throughout my life in a journey of caregiving, support, and shared experiences. This chapter reflects on how my hands have been integral in supporting individuals with developmental differences, and shaping the lives of those around me. \*2



Visiting legislators at the Ohio State House.

## **Six: Caring Hands**

I started my professional career as a corporate trainer. My job was to write curriculum and develop seminars and training classes for every level of employee in the company. It was a challenging and fun time; I loved going to work. I was one of the few people who got to spend time with everyone in the company, from the owner to the entry-level employees. This unique position allowed me to understand each team's diverse needs and strengths, making my role crucial and incredibly fulfilling.

Each day presented new opportunities to innovate and connect. I thrived on the challenge of creating engaging and effective training programs that could inspire and educate. Whether it was a workshop on leadership development for managers or a hands-on training session for new hires, I poured my heart and soul into every project. The satisfaction of seeing employees grow and succeed as a result of my training was gratifying.

Unfortunately, this vibrant career chapter ended abruptly when the company was sold to a national organization. The acquisition led to everyone being let go. The company I once knew transformed into a billion-dollar entity, far removed from the close-knit, dynamic environment I had been a part of.

Though it was a difficult and disheartening experience, it was also a pivotal moment in my professional journey. It taught me resilience and adaptability, and the skills I honed as a corporate trainer became the foundation for my future endeavors. Looking back, I cherish the memories of that time and the impact I was able to make.

While looking for a job after the company I worked for was sold, I was approached by the HR director for an organization that supports people with developmental disabilities, (hereafter written with my preferred word “Differences”). They offered me a position as a manager for a group home. I didn't even know what a group home was at the time. I went from being an expert to a complete novice overnight. Despite my uncertainty, I needed a job, so I hesitantly accepted the offer and embarked on a new journey.

I supervised, supported, and trained Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) as a home manager. These dedicated individuals worked around the clock to care for six residents, each with unique abilities and needs. The transition was challenging but opened a whole new world for me.

In this new environment, I witnessed the care and love shared between those being served and those providing the service. DSPs are not just caregivers but mentors, friends, and advocates for the residents. Their commitment and compassion are truly inspiring, and it wasn't long before I found myself deeply invested in the well-being of the residents and the staff.

Learning to manage a group home required me to develop new skills and adopt a different perspective. Every day was an opportunity to grow and make a positive impact. I worked closely with the DSPs, ensuring they had the training and support they needed to provide the best possible care. Together, we created a nurturing and supportive environment where everyone could thrive.

This experience profoundly changed me. It taught me the value of empathy, patience, and the incredible strength of the

human spirit. The bonds formed in that group home were unlike any I had experienced before, and the lessons I learned there continue to influence my life and career.

If you are unfamiliar with the role of a DSP, let me introduce you. DSPs are the unsung heroes dedicated to ensuring the health and safety of people with intellectual and developmental differences (IDD). Their work is as diverse and unique as those they support, requiring compassion, patience, and resilience.

At the core of a DSP's role is the commitment to enhance the quality of life for those they serve. This means supporting individuals in a way that promotes their independence, dignity, and inclusion in the community. Just like every demographic, the wants, needs, hopes, and dreams of people with developmental differences are unique to each person. Therefore, the level of support required can vary dramatically.

For some individuals, support might be minimal. These individuals may need assistance managing money, paying bills, or navigating public transportation. In such cases, a DSP might only need to spend an hour or two a week with the person, providing guidance and ensuring they are not exploited.

Others, however, require intensive support. Some individuals need 24/7 care, often with more than one DSP helping with almost every aspect of daily life. This can include administering medication, assisting with hygiene and toileting, preparing meals, and helping them engage in social activities. The goal is always to empower the individual, fostering as much independence as possible while ensuring their health and safety.

DSPs' work is intensely hands-on. Their hands are the tools that provide comfort, care, and connection. Whether gently guiding someone through a daily routine or offering a reassuring touch during a challenging moment, DSPs use their hands to make a profound impact. Their physical presence and tactile connection are integral to their role, making the abstract care concept tangible and real.

The work of a DSP can be both physically and emotionally demanding. It requires an incredible amount of dedication and flexibility. A typical day for a DSP can range from routine tasks to managing unexpected challenges. They might balance multiple responsibilities, from handling medical emergencies to providing emotional support during difficult times.

Many DSPs go above and beyond their professional duties to ensure the well-being and happiness of those they support. This often means being there during a crisis or need, even without compensation.

DSPs' compassion often shines brightly during holidays and special occasions. Many DSPs open their homes and hearts to those without families, ensuring they are not alone during these significant times. Hosting someone they support for Christmas, Thanksgiving, or other celebrations is common. DSPs and their families often go out of their way to make these guests feel like a part of their own family. They buy gifts, prepare special meals, and create a warm, inclusive atmosphere where everyone feels valued and loved.

Some DSPs even take their commitment further by inviting individuals they support to join them on family vacations. This act of generosity and inclusion speaks volumes about the deep bonds between DSPs and those they care for. Sharing such personal and joyous moments helps enrich the individuals' lives, offering them experiences and memories they might not otherwise have. Despite having spent more than two decades in this field, I continue to be amazed by the new and innovative ways DSPs find to enrich the lives of those they support.

Their commitment to improving the quality of life for individuals with developmental differences is unwavering, and their ability to adapt and evolve in their approaches is genuinely inspiring.



The stories of DSPs and their acts of kindness inspire us all. They show us what it means to honestly care for one another, extend a helping hand, and make a difference in the lives of those around us. Through their unwavering dedication, DSPs teach us that love and compassion are the greatest gifts we can offer in our professional lives and beyond.

In the world of DSPs, every day is a new adventure, filled with heartwarming moments, unexpected challenges, and, yes, occasionally gross but unforgettable stories.

### **Joe**

This tale involves a young man named Timmy and his favorite DSP, Joe, who navigates an unusual and rather messy situation with humor and grace.

It was a sunny Tuesday when Joe decided to take Timmy to his all-time favorite restaurant. Timmy, a lively young man with a penchant for hamburgers and fries, was bouncing excitedly as they entered the restaurant. Just as they crossed the threshold, Timmy signed to Joe that he needed to use the restroom urgently. Joe, a seasoned DSP with the patience of a saint and the reflexes of a ninja, quickly ushered Timmy to the bathroom.

Upon entering, they found two urinals, one blessedly unoccupied. In his characteristic enthusiasm, Timmy rushed to the available urinal, dropped his pants to his ankles, and, to Joe's mild horror, turned around and sat down as if it were a toilet. Before Joe could muster a diplomatic "No, not like that!" Timmy began relieving himself from both ends.

Joe stood frozen for a split second, contemplating the situation. The gentleman at the neighboring urinal looked at the scene, decided he had seen enough, zipped up faster than a speed demon, and fled the restroom without a backward glance—forgetting entirely about the sink and soap. Joe couldn't blame him.

Meanwhile, Joe sprang into action. His first priority was Timmy's dignity. He gently encouraged Timmy off the urinal and guided him to a stall where the clean-up operation commenced. If there were a gold medal for crisis management, Joe would have earned it right then and there. Armed with toilet paper, ample patience, and a mental note to wash his hands thoroughly later, Joe tackled the mess with the determination of a seasoned professional.

"Hey buddy, next time we'll use the stall, okay?" Joe said with a smile, trying to make light of the situation. Oblivious to the mishap, Timmy smiled back, enjoying the impromptu bathroom bonding session.

With Timmy clean and cheerful once more, they exited the restroom. Joe approached the hostess, who was already aware of the situation and eyed them with curiosity and trepidation.

"Excuse me," Joe began, "we had a bit of an accident in the restroom. You might want to send someone in to clean up. We're sorry about that." The host nodded, clearly trying to keep her composure. "Thank you for letting us know. We'll take care of it."

Joe gave a sheepish grin and headed for the exit with Timmy in tow. The plan for a delightful lunch out had been unceremoniously scrapped. They decided to have a picnic at home, sans public restrooms.

As they walked to the car, Joe couldn't help but laugh at the situation's absurdity. Timmy, always happy to share in a laugh, joined in, their laughter ringing like music.

Back home, Joe reflected on the day as they munched on homemade burgers and fries. Despite the chaos and the mess, moments like these made his job so special. Being a DSP wasn't just about managing daily routines and ensuring safety; it was about creating a space where dignity and humor coexisted, where even the most awkward moments could be turned into stories of connection and care.

Joe raised his soda in a mock toast. "To us, The best team there ever was."

Timmy raised his drink in return, unaware and unbothered by the day's earlier mishap. In the end, it was just another day in the life of a DSP—filled with unexpected turns, heartfelt connections, and plenty of laughs.

## **Clara**

Clara and Sam were supposed to bake cookies together as part of Sam's life skills program. Sam, ever the prankster, had a gleam in his eye that could only mean trouble. As they gathered ingredients, Sam suggested, with suspicious innocence, that they should wear chef hats and aprons. Clara, always game for some fun, agreed and dug out chef hats and aprons.

Little did Clara know that Sam had swapped the flour with powdered sugar. As they mixed the ingredients, Clara noticed the "flour" was a bit strange but shrugged it off. When it came time to knead the dough, it was like trying to mold a sticky marshmallow. Sam burst into laughter, unable to keep the secret any longer.

Clara, ever the good sport, laughed along with him. "Alright, Sam, you've got me this time. Clara decided they should proceed with their "super sweet cookies" and bake them anyway. While the cookies were in the oven, Clara planned her counter-prank.

As the cookies were baking, Clara told Sam they should decorate them with "magic sprinkles" that could change the cookie's flavor. The sprinkles were just regular colorful sugar, but Sam was completely convinced of their magical properties.

When the cookies were baked, they would not hold their form, but with care the cookies were moved to a plate for decorating. Clara handed one to Sam, he took a bite, and his eyes widened. "These magic sprinkles really work!

Every bite is a new flavor!" he exclaimed. This one is cherry! The last one was grape! Clara could hardly contain her laughter and finally confessed her prank.

Sam, ever the good sport, loved Clara's playful spirit, and said "you got me". They spent the rest of the afternoon enjoying their ridiculously sweet cookies and plotting future pranks on each other.

## **Jill**

Ben had a client named Jill, a gentle soul who had never experienced the joy of a birthday party. Jill had spent most of her life in various care facilities, where birthdays were often overlooked. Ben, with his warm heart and endless creativity, decided it was time to change that.

Jill's birthday was approaching, and Ben was determined to make it unforgettable. He started planning weeks in advance, gathering information about Jill's favorite things. He discovered she loved sunflowers, had a sweet tooth for chocolate, and adored the sound of laughter.

With help from his agency provider \*3, they planned an outdoor party in the community garden, which was Jill's favorite place.

On the day of the party, the garden was transformed into a sunflower paradise. Bright yellow and orange flowers lined the paths, and sunflowers of all sizes adorned the tables. A large banner reading "Happy Birthday Jill!" hung proudly between two trees. Ben had even arranged for a local bakery to create a stunning chocolate cake decorated with edible sunflowers.

Jill arrived at the garden, guided by Ben, who had kept the entire plan a secret. As they turned the corner, the sight that met Jill's eyes left her speechless. A chorus of "Surprise!" erupted from the gathered friends and staff, and Jill's eyes filled with tears of joy. She had never imagined such a celebration could be for her.

The party was a whirlwind of fun and laughter. There were games, music, and even a sunflower crown-making station where everyone crafted their own floral crowns.

Finally, everyone gathered around, singing "Happy Birthday." Jill made a wish and blew out the candles, her face glowing with happiness. Everyone could see how much this meant to Jill and felt a deep sense of fulfillment. Ben's thoughtful planning and genuine care had given Jill her first birthday party, and it was everything she could have dreamed of and more. He is a true DSP hero.



**Mark:**

Pete had lived a full life but had no family left. Over the years, Mark had become more than just a caregiver; he had become Pete's confidant, friend, and, in many ways, family. They spent countless hours together watching old movies and simply enjoying each other's company. As Pete's health declined, he moved into a nursing home. Mark knew that his time was growing short. Mark ensured Pete was as comfortable as possible, held his hands, and talked about all the fun they enjoyed together.

One night, as the sun dipped below the horizon, casting a golden glow through the window, Pete's breathing became shallow. Mark, sensing the time was near, sat by Pete's bedside, holding his frail hand. The room was filled with a serene silence, broken only by the soft hum of the oxygen machine.

Mark spoke to Pete in a soothing voice, recounting their favorite memories. He spoke of the time they spent fishing at the local lake, the laughs they shared over silly jokes and the quiet moments they enjoyed while listening to Pete's beloved jazz records. Pete's eyes fluttered open briefly, a small smile playing on his lips as he listened. "Mark," Pete whispered weakly, "thank you for being my family."

Tears welled up in Mark's eyes, but he maintained his calm demeanor. "I love you Pete."

A week later, at the request of the nursing home, Mark visited. Pete's breaths were faint and Mark held his hand, his presence a comforting anchor. Finally, Pete took one last, peaceful breath and quietly slipped away, a serene expression on his face.

Mark stayed by Pete's side for a while longer, honoring the man who had become such an important part of his life. He felt a mix of sadness and gratitude—sadness for the loss of his dear friend but gratitude for having had the chance to know him and be there for him in his final moments.

After ensuring Pete was at peace, Mark gently whispered a quiet goodbye. He then contacted the nurse and necessary people. In the days that followed, Mark organized a small memorial service, inviting the few friends and neighbors who knew Pete. They gathered to celebrate Pete's life, sharing stories, laughter, and tears. Mark spoke of the man who had touched his heart so deeply, ensuring that Pete's legacy of kindness and warmth would live on.

Though Pete was gone, his spirit remained a part of Mark's life. Mark continued his work with renewed purpose, carrying the lessons of compassion, friendship, and dignity he had learned from Pete. And every now and then, he still finds a quiet moment to watch the sunset and remember the times he had spent with his friend.



## **Zury**

In May 2019, Ohio was struck by a series of devastating tornadoes, leaving a trail of destruction. The storms were fierce and unrelenting, tearing through communities with winds reaching unimaginable speeds. Among the chaos, stories of heroism and quick thinking emerged, highlighting the incredible courage of individuals in the face of danger. One such story involves a DSP named Zury who acted remarkably quickly and decisively, saving the lives of those in her care.

As the tornado sirens blared, panic and fear gripped the hearts of many. In a small residential group home, Zury realized the gravity of the situation. The wind howled outside, and the sky had turned an unsettling shade of green. She knew that every second counted and, without hesitation, sprang into action.

She knew the protocol for tornado emergencies but also understood that being calm and collected would be crucial in ensuring everyone remained safe. She quickly gathered the people she was working with, her voice steady and reassuring despite the rising terror around them.

"We need to move quickly to the bathroom," she instructed, her hands guiding them urgently. She grabbed pillows from the couches and beds for some protection. The interior bathroom, without windows, was their safest bet. It was a small space, but it was their best chance for survival.

As they huddled in the bathroom, Zury positioned the pillows around them, creating a makeshift barrier against flying debris. She could feel the tension in the air, the walls vibrating with the storm's ferocity outside. Despite the fear gnawing at

her insides, this hero remained a pillar of strength for those in her care.

The sound of the tornado approaching was like a freight train, a roar that seemed to shake the very foundations of the house. The wind battered the walls, and the air pressure dropped, making breathing difficult. Zury held onto each person tightly, whispering words of comfort and encouragement.

Then, in a matter of moments, it was over. The roar of the tornado faded into an eerie silence. She took a deep breath and assessed the situation. Miraculously, the bathroom remained intact, but she knew they couldn't stay there. The house had been hit and was unstable.

"We need to get out of here," her voice firm but gentle. She carefully opened the bathroom door, peering into what remained of the house. The sight was one of utter devastation. The roof was gone, walls had crumbled, and debris was everywhere. Despite the destruction, her primary concern was guiding everyone to safety.

This brave and shaken DSP led the group through the wreckage with unwavering determination. She carefully forged a path, avoiding sharp objects and unstable structures. Her hands, which had just protected and comforted, now cleared debris and helped steady those who needed assistance. The street outside was chaotic, littered with fragments of homes and trees uprooted by the tornado's fury.

The group began to walk to safety. The journey was fraught with obstacles, but their resolve never wavered. Zury ensured everyone stayed together, moving as quickly and safely as possible. Her calm and composed leadership provided security

to those she was guiding.

Zuri's hands and actions undoubtedly saved lives that day. Her quick thinking and bravery amidst the chaos were nothing short of heroic. The tornadoes of May 2019 left a lasting mark on Ohio, but they also highlighted the resilience and bravery of DSPs.

Zury's story is a powerful reminder of the strength and courage that can arise in the face of adversity and the profound difference one person can make in the lives of others.

*"Direct Support Professionals are the heart and soul of our community, providing unwavering support, compassion, and dedication to those who need it most. Their tireless efforts empower individuals to live their best lives, reminding us daily of the profound impact of care and kindness."*

## **Seven: Tsakania**

I lost a good friend who had a boy named Shawn with autism. We became friends at a campground where both of us had a camper. Autism was the catalyst for us becoming friends since I worked with people with developmental differences.

Over time, our bond extended to our families, and we spent time together, creating memories I will always cherish. Shawn, his dad, and my family often traveled together, renting condos in Tennessee and even spending a magical week at Walt Disney World. These experiences brought us closer, and the joy and excitement we shared are moments I hold dear.

One of the most memorable experiences was our visit to Walt Disney World. Seeing Shawn's face light up when we entered Magic Kingdom was an exhilarating moment for all of us. The excitement was tangible, spreading like a wave through our group. Shawn, who was always open to rides and had visited other theme parks before, was particularly affected by the sights and smells of Disney. It was as if the magic of the place had a profound effect on him, heightening his senses and filling him with wonder.

Shawn is typically loving and cordial and has a playful side. He is a prankster and loves getting one over on whoever is caring for him. His mischievous nature kept us on our toes, and his laughter was infectious. One of Shawn's most endearing traits is his love for larger men, a preference that stems from his bond with his dad, who was a big man.

Whenever Shawn spots a larger man, he runs up to them, arms outstretched, his hands eager to give a good bear hug. Most of the time, these men are receptive, recognizing Shawn's disability and embracing the moment with warmth

and understanding.

During our trip to Disney, Shawn's behavior was the same. He would dart towards unsuspecting larger men, his hands reaching out in anticipation of a hug. To our delight, fellow guests at Disney were more than accommodating.

One particular moment stands out vividly in my memory. We waited in line for a ride when Shawn spotted a large man a few steps ahead. With his signature gleeful shout, he ran up and hugged the man tightly, his hands gripping the stranger with pure intent. The man, taken by surprise at first, quickly softened and returned the hug, his hands providing genuine affection and comfort. The surrounding crowd watched with smiles. Shawn chose to continue in the line with this kind man until reaching the ride. It was a beautiful reminder of the kindness that exists in the world and how a simple act of love can bring people together, even strangers.

Shawn's playful pranks and spontaneous hugs were a highlight of our trips. His ability to connect with people in such a pure and joyful way was a gift that touched everyone he met. Whether pulling a harmless prank or sharing a heartfelt hug, Shawn's hands always find a way to make every moment memorable. His laughter and love were infectious, spreading happiness wherever he went.

Reflecting on these memories, I am reminded of Shawn's profound impact on my life and those around him. His ability to find joy in the simplest things, loving nature, and playful spirit continue to teach me much about what it means to truly live and love. Despite his challenges, Shawn embraces life with an open heart and an unbridled, inspiring enthusiasm.

Our trips and shared moments will always hold a special place in my heart. They are a testament to the power of love and friendship and the incredible bond that can form between people, regardless of their differences.

Shawn's dad, Tsakania—known affectionately as Tas—was remarkable. After our trip to Disney, he was diagnosed with cancer and approached me with a request that profoundly changed my life. Tas understood that, given my experience in the field of developmental differences, I would be well-equipped to advocate for and support his beloved son, Shawn. Knowing Tas' depth of love and care for Shawn, I agreed to become his guardian. Tragically, soon after his diagnosis, Tas lost his battle with cancer.

Taking on the role of Shawn's guardian was both an honor and a heavy responsibility. I knew Tas's trust in me was rooted in his hope for Shawn's future. When Tas passed away, I knew I had to help Shawn navigate this heartbreaking loss in the gentlest way possible.

I didn't try to explain to Shawn beforehand that his dad had died; it was too complex for him to understand. Instead, I planned with the funeral home to bring Shawn when no one else was there, allowing us to face this moment together in privacy.

The day I took Shawn to the funeral home was one of my most challenging days. As we walked inside, I felt the weight of the situation bearing down on me. I couldn't predict how Shawn would respond, but I knew that he needed to see his dad one last time to begin to grasp the reality of the loss.

We walked together to the casket; Shawn was excited to see his dad. His face lit up with recognition, but his expression changed as he reached out and touched Tas' cold hand. The realization that his dad was gone slowly dawned on him. Shawn stood next to the casket, holding his dad's hand, a rare and poignant moment of understanding.

For nearly an hour, Shawn remained there, holding Tas's hand, a quiet sadness enveloping him. He didn't become mad or break into tears as I had feared. Instead, he stood in silence, occasionally glancing at me with a look of sorrow.

Sometimes, a tear would roll down his cheek, and I could see how broken he was. Shawn was trying to come to grips with the biggest tragedy of his life, and I was there, feeling utterly helpless but deeply connected to him in our shared grief.

As I watched Shawn, I felt a mixture of heartbreak and admiration. Despite the pain, he showed strength in that moment. His gentle holding of his dad's hand, quiet acceptance, and the occasional tear spoke volumes about his love for Tas and his struggle to understand his absence.

This moment was a turning point for both of us. For Shawn, it was the beginning of a long journey of healing and adjustment to life without his dad. It was a reminder of the depth of my responsibility to him. I was not just his guardian in legal terms; I was now the person who needed to guide him through his grief.

Tas' trust in me was a testament to his love for Shawn and his hope for his future. As I stepped into this role, I carried with me the memory of that day at the funeral home—the day Shawn lost his dad, and we both faced the reality of our new lives. It was a day that shaped our bond and reminded me of the incredible strength and resilience within Shawn. Together, we began to heal, holding onto the love and memories that Tas left behind.

For the first time, I found myself in a position where I wouldn't simply support DSPs; I would need them. Shawn had become the owner of his dad's house and expressed a strong desire to continue living there. I had to interview and hire an agency to manage Shawn's daily care and home to honor his wishes and meet his needs. This experience gave me a newfound appreciation for DSPs' critical role in the lives of individuals with developmental differences.

I have spent years working alongside DSPs, advocating for them, and supporting their professional development. I understood their challenges and the immense value they brought to their work. However, this was the first time I was on the other side of the equation, relying on them to provide the care and support Shawn needed to thrive in his home.

Finding the right agency and DSPs for Shawn was both daunting and enlightening. I knew how important it was to find individuals who were skilled and competent, compassionate, and would understand Shawn's unique needs and personality.



One of the most significant moments in this journey was when I met the first DSPs who would be working with Shawn. Seeing their genuine interest in Shawn's well-being and eagerness to understand his preferences and routines was incredibly reassuring. They took the time to learn about his likes and dislikes, his communication style, and the small details that made a big difference in his day-to-day life.

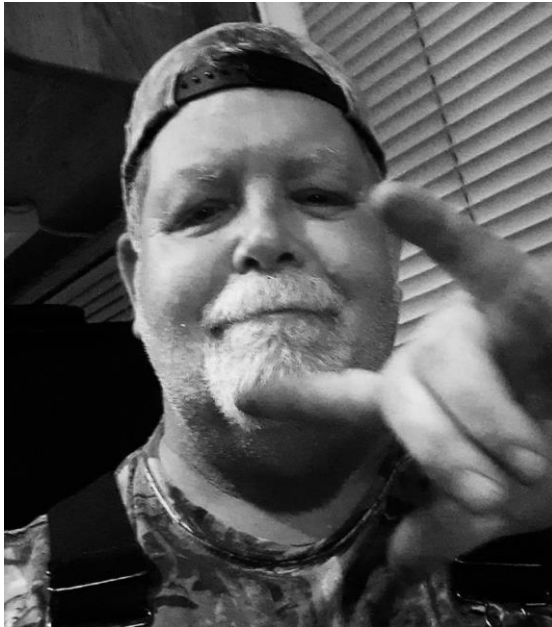
As I've observed DSPs interact with Shawn, my appreciation for their work has deepened. I watch as they patiently guide him through his daily routines, using their hands to assist him with tasks that range from personal hygiene to preparing meals. Their hands-on support is about completing tasks, building trust, and fostering a sense of security for Shawn.

The value of DSPs took on a new and deeply personal significance in my life. I see firsthand the impact they have on Shawn's happiness and well-being. Their dedication and compassion are evident in every interaction, and it is clear that their work is not just a job but a calling. While I had always supported and advocated for DSPs, experiencing their care from a guardian's perspective gave me an even stronger appreciation for their incredible work.

Navigating this new role also brought its challenges. Sometimes, I must address issues or concerns, ensuring that Shawn's needs are always prioritized.

Through these experiences, I gained a greater understanding of the complexities and demands of the DSP role. I've learned to trust the hired professionals, relying on their expertise and judgment while actively overseeing Shawn's care.

This journey reinforced the importance of teamwork and collaboration in providing the best possible support for individuals with developmental differences. It highlighted the need for ongoing communication, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to Shawn's wellbeing.



Tsakania (Tas) Goodpaster  
1959-2023

Tsakania "Tas" Goodpaster, 63, of Greenville, Ohio, passed away early Thursday morning, May 4, 2023, at his home, surrounded by his family and friends.

He was born on November 13, 1959, in Muncie, Indiana, to the late Charles and Mildred "Betty" (Gossitt) Goodpaster.

In addition to his parents, Tas was preceded in death by his baby sister, Jeannie Flynn; his sister, Cynthia Barber; his brothers, Mark Goodpaster, and Tyrone Goodpaster; and his nephew Michael Brooks.

Tas was a 1977 graduate of Union High School in Modoc, Indiana, where he forged and has managed to maintain several long-lasting friendships throughout the years. He had many interests and hobbies. He loved being outdoors, hunting, fishing, camping, boating, and off-roading. He loved taking his son cruising on a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, going to auctions, collecting antiques, and watching NASCAR.

Tas is survived by his children, Chassidy, Belinda, and Shawn, his grandchildren, great grandchildren nieces and nephews.

A special Thank you & acknowledgement to EverHeart Hospice, the Cancer Association of Darke County, as well as to Tas' longtime friends, Jim and Teresa Thompson, Melissa "Mel" Bowman, and David Roustio for their time, assistance, love, and dedication to both Tas and the cause.

## **Eight: Helping Hands**

### **Airline workers**

Airports are fascinating places, full of people in transit, each with their own story and destination. They can also be places of great stress and tension, as I discovered one particularly hectic morning.

I was at the airport, a standby flyer, waiting for my chance to board a flight. The air was thick with anxiety as several passengers, clearly frustrated, berated and argued with the gate agents. The original flight was supposed to depart the day before, but weather conditions had made it unsafe. The rescheduled flight was intended to leave at 5:30 AM, but by the time I was given my ticket around 7 AM, the departure had already been delayed. Now it was 9 AM, and another delay had just been announced.

While I sat and observed, I saw the gate agents trying their best to explain the situation and help the passengers, but their efforts seemed in vain. The passengers' anger and impatience overpowered any calm and rational explanation attempt. Their frustration was understandable, but their behavior was not productive. They shouted, gestured wildly, and hurled insults, their hands embodying their rage and discontent.

As the delay stretched on, the gate agents were called to assist at another gate. Upon their return, they were immediately surrounded by the same angry passengers, now even more inflamed. Demands were made, insults flew, and the situation grew increasingly tense. Airport security had to step in to restore some semblance of order.

When the flight finally began to board, the scene remained chaotic. I and those who had expressed their anger so vocally were left standing, not called up to board. Their outbursts had not served them well. Once everyone had boarded and the area around the gate had cleared, I approached the counter.

"I realize the flight is full," I said calmly. "Who can I speak with about rescheduling my flight?" The gate agent, visibly frazzled, looked up at me. "Were you on this flight?" she asked. "Yes, but on standby," I replied, handing over my ticket. She began to type into her computer, then used her hand to signal a coworker not to close the door. With a quick gesture, she retrieved a ticket and handed it to me.

"Here you go," she said, a hint of relief in her voice.

Her simple hand gesture had bought enough time for my ticket to print, allowing me to board the plane. As I walked towards the gate, I reflected on the power of our hands. The angry passengers, whose hands had slammed, fisted, pointed, and raised in rage, were left behind. My quiet patience had paid off, and a gentle hand gesture had held the door for me.

In moments of stress and frustration, it's easy to let our emotions control our actions. But sometimes, a calm demeanor and a gentle hand can accomplish more than anger ever could. The hands that help soothe and signal can change the course of our day and perhaps even our lives.

This experience at the airport was a reminder of the silent power our hands hold, a power that goes unnoticed until it's no longer available.

## **Hospice Workers**

In the quiet, dimly lit rooms of hospice care, where the final chapter of life is often written, the hands of hospice workers play a profound and often understated role. These hands, tender and skilled, bring comfort, dignity, and peace to those they serve, and their impact is immeasurable.

Margaret was one such hospice worker. With decades of experience, her hands had become instruments of compassion and care. She often said that the essence of her work was not just in the medical tasks she performed but in the human connection she fostered through touch.

One afternoon, Margaret was assigned to a new patient, Mr. Jameson, a retired schoolteacher with a sharp mind and a failing body. His family had been reluctant to admit him to hospice, clinging to the hope of a miraculous recovery.

When Margaret first entered his room, she could sense the tension and fear that filled the air.

Mr. Jameson lay in his bed, frail and weary. His eyes met Margaret's with a mixture of curiosity and apprehension. She approached him slowly, her hands folded gently in front of her. "Good

afternoon, Mr. Jameson,” she said softly. “My name is Margaret, and I’m here to help you in any way I can.”

He nodded, his lips forming a weak smile. “I appreciate that,” he whispered.

Margaret’s hands moved with purpose as she began her work. She checked his vitals, adjusted his pillows, and ensured his comfort. But it was when she took his hand in hers that the true essence of her care became evident. Her touch was warm and reassuring, a silent promise of support and understanding.

Over the next few weeks, Margaret’s hands became a lifeline for Mr. Jameson. She used them to administer medication, change dressings, and perform routine tasks, but their greatest power lay in the moments of human connection. She would hold his hand as he shared stories of his teaching days, his eyes lighting up with memories of the students he had inspired. She would gently massage his hands and arms, easing the pain and tension that gripped his frail body.

One evening, as the sun set and the room filled with a soft golden light, Mr. Jameson’s

condition took a turn for the worse. His breaths became shallow, and his family gathered around, their faces etched with sorrow. Margaret was there, her hands steady and calm.

She sat beside him, taking his hand in hers once more. “It’s okay, Mr. Jameson,” she whispered. “You’re not alone.” As he grew weaker, Margaret’s touch remained constant, a beacon of comfort in his final days. She comforted and informed family of every change in his condition. Her hands, so skilled in their work, served Mr. Jameson in his last days.

The hands of hospice workers like Margaret are more than just tools of their trade. They are vessels of compassion, carriers of comfort, and symbols of human connection. In the quiet moments of life’s end, these hands hold the power to transform fear into peace, pain into comfort, and loneliness into love.



Margaret left Mr. Jameson’s room that evening with a heavy heart but also with a deep sense of purpose. The hands that had served him were ready to bring the same care and compassion to the next person in need, continuing the silent, sacred work of hospice care.



In our daily lives, we often cross paths with restaurant workers, store clerks, janitors, and many others who play crucial roles in keeping our world running smoothly. These individuals, often working long hours for modest wages, are the backbone of our communities. Yet, too frequently, I have witnessed them absorb abuse while simply doing their jobs. It’s a stark reminder of how easily we can forget the human behind the service and how much we can improve in showing respect and appreciation for the hands that serve us.

Consider the server who brings our meals with steady hands,

the store clerk who helps us find what we need with patient hands, or the janitor who ensures the spaces we inhabit are clean and safe with diligent hands. These workers often endure long hours, challenging conditions, and a lack of recognition. On top of this, they frequently face unwarranted hostility and impatience from customers.

I have seen servers berated for slow service during a rush, clerks criticized for out-of-stock items they have no control over, and janitors treated as invisible while performing their essential duties. These experiences are not isolated incidents but part of a broader societal trend of undervaluing and mistreating the hands that serve us. The hands that serve us are often met with harsh words and unkind gestures when they deserve our respect and gratitude.

Reflecting on these observations, I realize that kindness is a powerful tool we can all wield. While it may seem insignificant, a kind word or gesture can have a profound impact. It can turn a stressful day into a more bearable one and remind workers that their efforts are seen and appreciated. The hands that serve us daily deserve our utmost respect and gratitude.

I'm trying to hold myself accountable. I know I can do better to be kind and respectful, even when I'm frustrated or in a hurry. It's easy to lash out or be dismissive, but it takes strength and empathy to choose kindness, especially in moments of inconvenience. Our hands, which can easily express anger and frustration, can instead offer gestures of kindness and understanding.

Simply acknowledging the presence and efforts of workers can make a huge difference. A smile, a thank you, or a few kind words can go a long way in making someone feel valued. Understanding that delays and mistakes happen, we can replace frustration with patience and offer understanding. Everyone has bad days, and a little empathy can go a long way. Respecting the personal space and efforts of workers means avoiding making unreasonable demands and understanding that they are doing their best within the constraints of their jobs.

If tipping is customary, do so generously. I once was a server and was often given nothing or a \$2 tip on meals costing over a hundred dollars. Where I worked, servers paid more than the bill. So, if the bill was \$100, I paid \$103, and the extra was given to the greeters.

I always leave a 30% tip as a way to show appreciation for the hands that deliver good service. When we receive excellent service, we can take a moment to provide positive feedback. Letting a manager know about a job well done can benefit the worker in tangible ways, including potential promotions and recognition.

I commit to making these changes in my own behavior. By doing so, I hope to set an example and encourage others to follow suit. Kindness should not be an exception but the rule in how we treat those around us, especially those whose hands work tirelessly to serve us

It's easy to overlook the human element in our hurried lives, but we can all do better. After all, kindness always seems to work, transforming ordinary interactions into moments of genuine human connection. Our hands have the power to uplift, support, and honor the hands that serve us every day.



## **Finally, The Marvel of Hands**

Have you ever stopped to think about just how remarkable our hands are? It's easy to overlook these incredible tools ready to help us navigate the world. From the dexterous fingers of a concert pianist dancing across the keys to the steady hands of a surgeon performing a life- saving operation, hands are central to our everyday lives in ways we often take for granted.

Imagine the hands of a chef skillfully chopping vegetables and meticulously plating dishes, transforming raw ingredients into culinary masterpieces. Or think of the hands of a potter, shaping a lump of clay into a beautiful vase, each motion deliberate and precise. These hands create and comfort, their movements an extension of the heart and mind.

Hands are our primary means of expressing affection. A tender caress, a comforting hug, or a reassuring pat on the back convey feelings that words sometimes cannot. They can speak volumes in a language all their own. A wave can signal a friendly hello, while a thumbs-up can convey approval and encouragement. Even when our mouths are silent, our hands continue to communicate.

The versatility of hands is astounding. They build towering skyscrapers and delicate birdhouses, write epic novels, and make simple grocery lists. Depending on the task, hands can wield finesse or brute force tools. They can create art that moves the soul or fix a leaky faucet that saves the day.

Of course, hands can also cause harm. They can destroy as quickly as they create, reminding us of the dual nature of their

power. The same hands that can soothe a crying child can also strike out in anger. It's a humbling reminder of our responsibility to use them wisely, for good rather than evil.

Hands are not just tools for action but also instruments of learning. We explore the world around us through touch, from a leaf's texture to a sculpture's contours. As children, we learn by reaching out, grasping, and feeling the world with our fingers. This tactile exploration continues throughout our lives, allowing us to connect profoundly with our environment.

In moments of new life, hands play a pivotal role. They guide newborns into the world, cradling and caring for them from their first breath. These hands nurture and protect, offering warmth and security in those early moments. They are the baby's first contact with the world, a tender introduction to the sense of touch that will become vital.

Yet, for all their importance, how often do we truly appreciate our hands? We use them constantly, without a second thought. They are always there, ready to assist, rarely drawing attention to themselves. It's easy to forget how much we rely on them until we face an injury or temporary loss of use. Suddenly, the simplest tasks become monumental challenges, and we gain a newfound respect for these unassuming appendages.

Our hands are remarkable for their physical capabilities and the lifeblood that flows through them. Watching the intricate network of veins under the skin reminds us of their vital role in our circulation.

This connection to our hearts is literal and symbolic, as our hands often act as extensions of our deepest emotions and intentions.

So, the next time you marvel at a pianist's swift movements or feel the comfort of a loved one's touch, take a moment to appreciate your own hands. Think of all they do for you, day in and day out, without thanks or recognition. They are always there, ready to help, create, comfort, and communicate. Our hands are integral to our everyday lives, silent partners in all we do.

Let us give them the gratitude they deserve, these incredible instruments shaping our world and experiences. With every handshake, every wave, and every act of creation or compassion, our hands remind us of the power we hold within us, quite literally, at our fingertips.

*"The future is very markedly in your hands, its value and its moral standing in the world and among ourselves. If you will take the power you have and use it, I have no fear of the outcome of the future."*

*Dwight D. Eisenhower*

At the start of this book, I shared how my mom would caress my head as a child to calm me. Near her death, the role changed, and I would caress hers. As I did, she would close her eyes and relax her hands. The power of our hands goes unnoticed until the experiences they bring are no longer available.

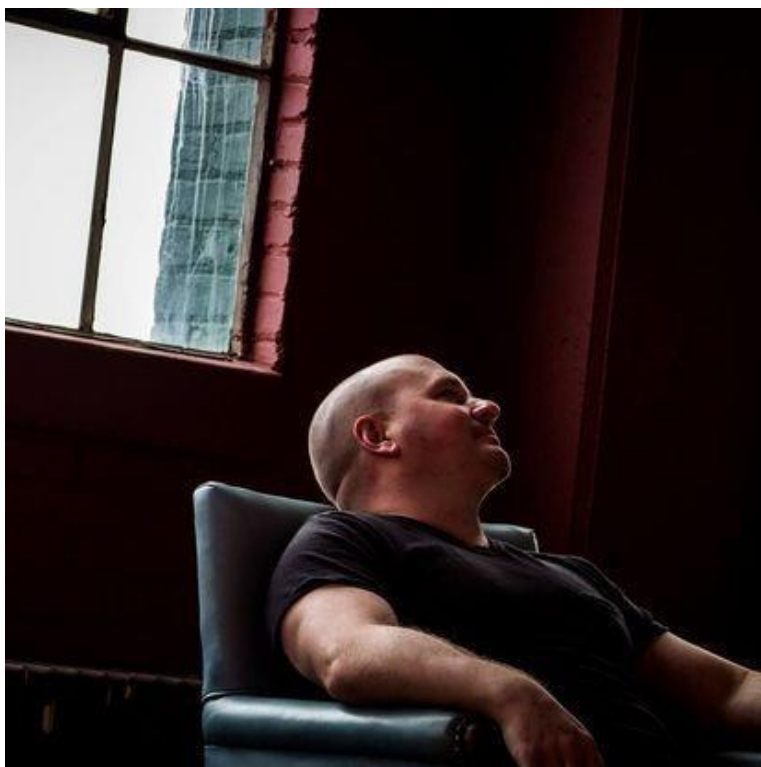
Mom, I love and miss you.





David Roustio is a native of Frankfort, Indiana. He is a father of three and has an ever-expanding group of grandchildren.

His work in Ohio as an agency leader, DSP Spokesperson, and political advocate, have been instrumental in advancing support for individuals with developmental differences. He is dedicated to sharing stories that heal and inspire.





This book is dedicated to:

**Beulah Rose (Lancy) Roustio**

8/19/31 – 6/8/23

**Special thanks to**

**Kristy Harbour**

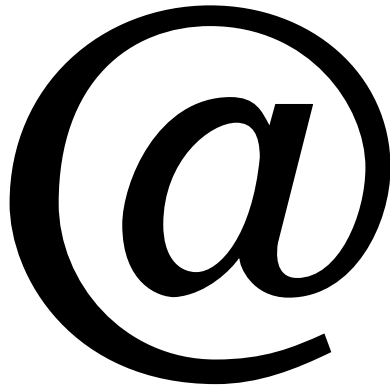
Your kind and tough words, suggestions and laughter helped bring this book to life.



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**Coleen Beasecker**, my friend, and pastor, you have guided me through both good and tough times, always giving me hope. There have been days when, without you, I would have lost hope, sanity and the communion wine.

**Shawn Valentine** my partner for over a quarter century. Thanks for all the laughter, your bigly support and for never reading any of my books. You will never know I gave you a shoutout.



Reach out to David.

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\*1 **Active listening** is the practice of preparing to listen, observing what verbal and non-verbal messages are being sent, and then providing appropriate feedback for the sake of showing attentiveness to the message being presented.

Active listening is listening to understand.<sup>[2]</sup> This form of listening conveys a mutual understanding between speaker and listener. Speakers receive confirmation their point is coming across and listeners absorb more content and understanding by being consciously engaged. The overall goal of active listening is to eliminate any misunderstandings and establish clear communication of thoughts and ideas between the speaker and listener. By actively listening to another person, a sense of belonging and mutual understanding between the two individuals is created.

The term "active listening" was introduced in 1957 by Carl Rogers and Richard Farson. It may also be referred to as reflective listening.

Active listening is being fully engaged while another person is talking to you. It is listening with the intent to understand the other person fully, rather than listening to respond. Active listening includes asking wide-eyed questions such as, "How did you feel?" or "What did you think?".

\*2 **Why replace “Disabilities” with “Differences”?** The intention is not to minimize the significance of disabilities but to address the negative connotations associated with the word. Everyone has unique intellectual abilities and different skills and knowledge. For instance, some people have three doctorates, while most don't even have one.

The term “Developmentally Disabled” is assigned to millions of people who function just as well as, if not better than, those without the label. Every brain is unique, and acknowledging these differences rather than focusing on disabilities can promote a more inclusive and positive perspective.

\*3 **Provider/Provider agency.** These are companies who provide support for people with Developmental Disabilities/Differences.

Some concepts of leadership in “Hands” came from David’s book: Leader? Boss? Both? This easy-to-read book is designed for people new to management and leadership.

