

# **RANDOM ACT BY A PEER SPECIALIST**    Part one

by HOWARD DIAMOND

## ***THE INITIAL CONTACT***

On the night of February 9, several years ago, it was one of those biting cold, sub-zero evenings when thirty-one-year-old Holly Stephens prepared to leave her job as a Peer Specialist for the Wellness Academy in the small village, Lake Town. The time was shortly before 8pm and she was preparing to leave after a long and exhausting day. Looking through a window, Holly could see that it was dark, and she heard the howling of the wind banging against the lit lamp posts. Also, she noticed the snow was falling heavily plus blowing in a sideways direction as if all the elements of the weather were moving and defying gravity.

As she grabbed her heavy jacket and her two sets of keys, Holly thought she perceived some noise down the corridor and thought she saw someone entering the front door of the building. Holly was right! In the lobby, there was a security officer with a young lady who stood shivering and shaking, while blowing on her hands that were frozen from the cold and wind. She was also pregnant. Never one to ignore someone in need, Holly started the conversation by introducing herself to the woman who said her name was Ruth and admitted being with child. At this moment, Holly got two chairs from the security guard. Ruth agreed to sit down and talk. Then, Holly practiced relaxation exercises with Ruth to try to calm her down and give Ruth some peace of mind as she was getting away from the inclement weather outside.

## ***GENERATIONS LODGE***

Now, Holly wondered how this happened? Ruth explained that she had turned twenty-six, was over seven months pregnant, homeless and the unborn child's father had abandoned her a few months prior. Earlier in the day, her landlady threw her into the cold as Ruth had not paid rent for two months. After walking the streets for what felt like hours, she had stopped inside to take a load off her feet and warm up. Once again, Holly thought out loud, how could anyone do this to another person, especially to someone with all these needs, including having little money, with a

child and having nowhere to go? Then, Ruth softly said she was used to this as she had been in and out of housing for five years.

According to Holly's thinking, no one needs to get accustomed to what Ruth was currently going through. As a Peer Specialist, Holly had many resources at her disposal. With Ruth's consent, she texted her Peer Supervisor, Steffie Green for advice. Then, Holly and Ruth looked through Holly's laptop and figured out what might be best for her. There were local hotels and motels, but they were either expensive or rundown and in sleazy areas of downtown. Finally, Holly thought a respite might be a possible viable option.

When Steffie returned the call, Holly informed her of Ruth's issues. Steffie agreed to phone local respites and see which ones were available. While they were waiting, Holly and Ruth continued to talk. Ruth said she had two older siblings who both overdosed from drugs. Neither of them had any children. Furthermore, her father died when she was three and her mom passed around eighteen months prior.

A little time later, Steffie called back and informed Holly that there was an opening for Ruth at Generations Lodge. All the details were set up and good news it was about half a mile up the road. It was about 9:15PM so before leaving the building, Holly assisted Ruth in making an intake appointment at Laketown Mental Health Clinic which is located conveniently across the street from Generations. An intake for Ruth was scheduled for 9:30AM the following morning.

Then Holly drove Ruth to Generations and made sure she registered, got settled and was somewhat comfortable. Senior Staff Member Marty Sinclair was there and welcomed them to Generations. Marty gave them a tour of the house. Fortunately, none of the other residents were asleep. Along the way, Ruth met each of the residents as they walked with Marty back to the staff office for necessary paperwork. Ruth was given a new set of clothes, toiletries, and a package that included a comb and brush. There was a small smile on Ruth's face, and she thanked Marty for his help. A meeting was arranged at 11:30 AM the next day so Holly could assist Ruth with other services. At around 10:00 PM, Holly left Ruth in the good hands of the workers at Generations.

## ***THE CONNECTION CONTINUES***

The next morning, Holly drove to Generations Lodge and spoke with Marty who said that Ruth was very nervous last night. However, in the morning before going to her intake appointment, Ruth mentioned to the other staff that she was doing okay. Ruth walked in and said she was uneasy because of being in different surroundings. Her intake appointment was superb, and she talked with her new therapist, Jane Frederick. Plans were made for four weeks where Ruth agreed to see Jane twice weekly and further visits would be determined. Also, Steffie called Marty and they decided that Holly would see Ruth an additional three more times during her stay at the respite. Both Ruth and Holly were very happy with these arrangements.

It was a nice day about 40 and there was about three inches of snow. For today's plan was taking Ruth to the local pantry and then Holly would help Ruth decide on what services could be available to her. Holly proceeded to go with Ruth to the pantry where Ruth picked up some food and toiletries. In addition, she picked out an assortment of clothes plus they found a couple of maternity outfits and two pairs of shoes. Then, Holly returned Ruth back to Generations. Upon getting back to the respite, the two ladies finished the Peer Specialist forms. Another meeting was scheduled for next week on Wednesday February 17 at 10:00am.

At their February 17 meeting, Ruth stated she was settling in and being more assertive with her needs at Generations Lodge. When they called Social Security, they were able to stop Ruth's check and have it sent to her temporary address and as of March, her check will automatically be deposited into her new bank account. Next week, Ruth has an appointment with her GYN and someone from her respite will travel with her. Also, she has a follow up with her psychiatrist. Holly had Ruth sign a form and they made a new visit for March 1 at 11:00am.

During February, with the help of Jane, Ruth was becoming more talkative and starting the first week in March she will be attending a weekly Pregnant Without Partners Support Group. Also, during their March 1st meeting, Ruth informed Holly that her GYN said she was relatively healthy plus her baby inside was doing well and still ready for birth on or around April 18.

During their last probable visit on March 16, Holly and Ruth completed paperwork. While working on the documents needed, the ladies began to cry. Although both were in tears, Ruth was able to tell Holly how she felt. She spoke about how she enjoyed her talks with Holly and how she was able to express her feelings to her. This is something Ruth had not done with anyone for many years. Before Holly left, Ruth thanked her for being an understanding Peer Specialist and a great person. When Holly reached the front door, Ruth walked over to her and began to hug her, and they cried together for maybe the last time.

### ***RUTH DISAPPEARS***

Almost two weeks later on March 29, as Holly arrived inside at the Wellness Academy, Steffie left a message that asked her to come to her office at 11:00am. Holly confirmed the meeting. When Holly knocked on Steffie's door, Steffie asked Holly to close the door and sit down. Both ladies were drinking tea. As Holly was getting comfortable, she saw that Steffie looked sad and concerned. Earlier today, Steffie received a phone call from Marty from Generations. He explained that Ruth had apparently packed a bag with some food and clothes plus she apparently left Generations Lodge for parts unknown.

Both Steffie and Holly were upset and got depressed by these new developments. Several minutes later, Steffie and Holly composed themselves. Also, Steffie tried to assure Holly that she did nothing wrong and was a big help to Ruth and her unborn child. For a moment, Holly felt like she was going to cry, but she did not. They ended their meeting with the hope from the popular idiom, "*To leave no stone unturned*".

Stay tuned to: "Random Act By a Peer Specialist"

Part two will be posted in about a month

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