

## **RANDOM ACT BY A PEER SPECIALIST Part 2 by HOWARD DIAMOND**

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### **HOLLY SEARCHING FOR RUTH**

Part One ended with Holly Stephens, Peer Specialist and her Peer Supervisor, Steffie Green, concerned about one of the individuals they were working with. Her name is Ruth and is eight months pregnant. She was staying at a respite, named Generations Lodge Respite managed by Marty Sinclair. Inexplicably on March 29 Ruth left Generations and now two weeks later, April 12 no one has heard anything.

Although Steffie and Holly were not directly working with Ruth, her case was miraculously still open. Miracles do happen! Therefore, Holly gained the opportunities to use work time to assist in the search for Ruth. Each day Holly spent at least one hour in search mode. With the assistance of Generations and her contacts, Holly has made numerous phone calls and met with people to discuss finding Ruth. To this point there are no leads and if like magic, Ruth disappeared.

Although Holly tried to stay safe, she went to places that often had a history of bad instances. Steffie gave the okay to Holly to explore certain areas to look for Ruth. On April 14, Holly went to a neighborhood known for drugs and alcohol, a place where she ventured before. This time was different. Holly's antenna and radar were in full force as she walked around the back streets, but no sign of Ruth.

### **ACKNOWLEDGED BY HER DIRECTOR**

Around two weeks later, on April 27, Steffie received an email from Marty concerning Ruth. Before reading the entire message, she printed it and wanted the ability to share with others, especially Holly. Steffie went down the hall and read and discussed the email with Holly. Steffie read the email aloud which included that on April 24, Ruth gave birth to a son, named Gabriel, five pounds, five ounces and were both in good health. Also, they were pushed ahead on the Lake Town County's wait list for a low-income housing unit.

When and if they return, Marty stated that they probably will be able to return to Generations, pending new physicals. What everyone was still troubled by is, whether they are safe where they are currently residing. In the email, there was no mention of where Ruth gave birth or where they were. A few days after, Ms. Carlson invited Holly and Steffie to the next Board Meeting scheduled for May 12 and they will be sitting at the dais table. Gladly, both the ladies confirmed with an enthusiastically dramatic, YES!!

### **BOARD MEETING WITH A SURPRISE**

This week, Steffie had her weekly supervision with Holly on May 10. No word was heard from Ruth and they both were very concerned. An update was given by Holly stating that she rechecked the hospitals, various shelters and a wide assortment of other places, without any success. Also, the Board Meeting was two days away and Holly mentioned that she apprehensive because she never attended such a gathering.

During the board meeting, Michele Carlson stood up and before the members of the board and other distinguished guests talked about a brave young lady who went out of her way to help someone else. Her name is Holly Stephens, Certified Peer Specialist from the Wellness Academy. On February 9, she saved a life and possibly two because the woman was pregnant. Then, Ms. Carlson reached in the drawer of the podium, pulled out a plaque and asked Holly to come to the stand. At that moment, Michele presented Holly with the plaque for her work as a Peer Specialist. Holly is a dedicated and strong advocate for others in need and more importantly a fine lady. She is the embodiment of what a Peer Specialist giving peer support is meant to be.

Moments later, it was Holly's turn to speak. She said she was very nervous and very uncomfortable. After some encouraging words from her supervisor, Steffie, Holly began speaking. Initially, she thanked the Board, Ms. Carlson, Supervisor Steffie and her peers at the Academy. Then, she made a small joke about winning the Oscar (Academy Award) but tried to remain focused on her brief speech. Holly concluded, by blurting out in her typical humble flair, that I was only doing my job. Finally, Ms. Carlson remarked, and what a great job it was.

Before ending the Board Meeting, Ms. Carlson had a special surprise for Steffie and Holly. In the rear of the room, there was lot of stirring around with plenty of commotion. Due to the fact the Board and Ms. Carlson were getting perturbed, they wanted to investigate. With no warning and the help of two other Peer Specialists, the back doors were flung open. Beyond those doors were a mystery lady slowly meandering to the podium.

She was dressed magnificently and had a pair of black gloves covering her hands. In addition, she had a long flowing dark veil and a mask over her entire face. Several minutes passed as she stood silently in front of Holly. Little by little, she removed her veil. In an instant, Holly was in shock as she realized it was Ruth behind the veil and the mask. Upon finishing, Ruth began to thank Holly for what the two of them accomplished during this past winter. She kept the talk brief as both ladies began to cry. Furthermore, there was one more item. Beyond the front of stage was her infant boy named Gabriel and Ruth brought him to the stand. As Ruth held him, there were three crying individuals. Shortly afterwards, the Board ended the meeting.

## **NEW CELEBRITY HOLLY**

After receiving the plaque from the board, Holly became sort of a celebrity as she was interviewed and pictures were taken by the local newspaper. Initially, Ruth declined being cross

examined or having to take any pictures. Afterwards, Holly said she was uneasy with her newfound notoriety. Later on, Ruth had reconsidered, and she reluctantly agreed to talk to the reporter. Over the next several weeks, Holly began to relax some, but her newfound fame did not come naturally for her. As for Ruth and Gabriel, they made a good impression on the guests, and definitely on the board. Many of them said that they will help by joining the committee in finding Ruth and Gabriel an adequate and safe place to live.

During that summer, Holly appeared to be noticed almost everywhere she went in town. At the bank, the manager was enthralled with Holly and wanted to showcase her with the article and photo posted on the wall near the teller station and in the branch manager's office.

Another day at the local supermarket, she was embarrassed when she gave her signature to a special needs child. Reluctantly, she accepted and made the kid smile from ear to ear and made the lad extremely happy. At the neighborhood picnic, Holly was introduced to the gathering crowd. Then the mayor asked her to speak. About thirty minutes passed, and she begun to tell everyone attending, what it means to be a Peer Specialist.

Being resilient made it easier for Holly to cope with her fame and her work as a Peer Specialist. There were feelings of despair and plenty of joyous times for Holly, but every time she bounced back, so she decided to stay at the picnic. An hour or so later, there was a raffle drawing and Holly was asked to pick out the winning ticket. Naturally, she accepted. More pictures were taken for the newspaper and to promote the community of Lake Town. Slowly, Holly was adjusting to her celebrity status, but she remained somewhat awkward.

## **HOLLY BEING RESILIENT**

September rolled in and during the next board meeting, everything changed and it wasn't good. Ms. Carlson delivered the news to the staff of the Wellness Academy. Despite the recognition of the exemplary Academy that saved a life, the board of directors in a majority vote approved the complete defunding of the Wellness Academy leaving everyone including Holly without a job at the end of the fiscal year, October 31. Also, the Lake Town county committee agreed unanimously. All funding cuts or closures were programs with little or no proven existing record. One life is not sufficient enough for any agencies' programs.

Several weeks later, on October 20, the Wellness Academy was honored by a notable guest. It was Holly who went down the hall and was shocked to see Ruth and Gabriel. Now six months, Gabriel was very fidgety, but he was quite fit. Everyone went back to the office where Ruth informed Holly and Steffie, who just came by, and with a big wide smile that she had received a voucher for housing. Not only did she get a voucher, but she found a place to live. This house was an upstairs in a two-family home halfway between Generations and Wellness Academy. Naturally, Holly was ecstatic for Ruth, but Holly told her the bad news of the closing of the Academy. In a few minutes, Ruth and Gabriel left the building.

By the end of October, it was getting harder for Holly, but her resiliency would help her get through. After the dust settled in a couple of weeks, Holly was looking again for a new position as a Peer Specialist. Ms. Carlson made time to give Holly good wishes and a bright future. By the end of the year, Holly was hired again as a Peer Specialist and became an integral part of promoting Peer Services around her county of Lake Town. Within six months, Holly was promoted to a higher position with her new agency. Once again this proves the accuracy of the often-used statement, "***No good deed goes unpunished***".

*Although this story is fiction, it was an example of what Peer Specialists can accomplish given the right opportunity and resources.*

**Howard Diamond is a Certified Peer Specialist from Long Island**