

RANDOM ACT BY A PEER SPECIALIST Part 1 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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RANDOM ACT BY A PEER SPECIALIST Part 2 by HOWARD DIAMOND

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 began 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. Stay tuned for Part 3.

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RANDOM ACT BY A PEER SPECIALIST Part 3 by HOWARD DIAMOND

HOLLY'S FAMILY AND A NEW MYSTERY CASE

Everybody tends to follow the Holidays distinctly. Why is this any different for Holly? This day Holly Stephens, Peer Specialist is meandering through the aisles in the local department store and deciding what to buy for others. She has a short list of six, which does not include her mom and dad plus her older brother, Andrew. Her mom and dad live down south and her brother's place of residency is unknown. In most years, her brother was probably galivanting somewhere in the European Countryside. Holiday time is separate for Holly and Andrew. Wherever he is, he will connect with his sister.

For Thanksgiving day and weekend, Holly spent time relaxing at home, listening to music, without her phone or watching TV. On Sunday night, she realized there was a message. It was her Director, Taylor Thompson who left a message to call him back even if it is Sunday night. Weekend was officially over. When she phoned him, she was informed that one of their client's was raped and her young son was killed. No names were given yet. The police department have been investigating since around 6 pm. Taylor also said he would meet her at 9:30 AM at the Hunter Mental Health Center where they both work.

That night Holly tossed and turned trying to figure out who this was. HMHC has many clients that fit this, but without more information, she cannot come with an answer. Finally, she fell asleep after 3am and woke up around 7am to begin her new day. She showered to feel better for her day ahead. As scheduled she met with Taylor and they discussed what transpired last night. Taylor is 6 feet 4 inches, about 220 lbs., short wavy light brown hair with a few gray ones for good measure and often tanned but is naturally olive skinned and is out in the sun when he can.

Around 10am, Taylor got buzzed by his secretary, Steve Washington, who is 6 foot 2 inches with matching dark brown hair and eyes and stated there was a call from the police. Senior Officer Alex Grey informed Taylor that the victim has two business cards from both Taylor and Holly. In addition, she has a concussion and barely remembers what happened or her name. Currently, she is sedated and is in Room 303 at the Lake Town Community Hospital. Holly phoned the hospital and found out that the visiting hours are from 10am to 12pm and 3pm to 5pm. Chimes in the hallway signified it was 11:00am and Taylor and Holly proceeded to the hospital.

MYSTERY SOLVED, WITH MORE QUESTIONS

Taylor and Holly arrived at the hospital and met with Senior Officer Gray who said that he will escort them to Room 303. At the elevator, Nurse Kim Randall stated that Room 303 has police protection, so the visitors had to provide IDs and had to be fingerprinted. Nurse Kim walked with everyone to Room 303. On the way she stated the patient does not know who she is or what actually happened or that her son is dead.

Slowly, Taylor and Holly walked into Room 303. The person in the bed was heavily bandaged, so it was hard to see who it was. Nurse Kim entered the room and mentioned that the doctor will be removing some of the face covering this afternoon. The lady in the bed began to speak. She said that her pain is slightly better and she was happy to hear that will be less bandages on her body. She went on to say that she knows she is in the hospital Room 303, the Nurses are Kim and Amy. I want to get better and her doctor said that I might go home soon, wherever that is.

By the time Taylor and Holly came back, Nurse Amy stated most of the bandages were removed from her face. Everyone entered the room and the visitors reintroduced themselves. The woman said she remembered each and was glad they came back. Despite some facial scarring, she said she was in less pain. Suddenly, Holly thought she knew who was the person in the bed. Holly blurted out the name, RUTH HAINES!

Ruth Haines was put in the hospital computer. Lots of information was there, so copies for all to share. Eighteen pages came through and the doctors tried to see if that was indeed Ruth Haines. Two days later, it was determined that Ruth Haines was the lady in Room 303, however she did not know this herself. Today is December 4. With the help of various staff members, she began to recover from her physical wounds, but her recall is not where it needs to be and she is not almost ready to be discharged.

A new unit in the hospital was found and she can move on December 9. This unit is on the fourth floor specializing in trauma and memory work and seen by a therapist twice weekly and see a psychiatrist as needed. Over the next few days later, Ruth started to remember pieces of her life. One session she said her name to her Nurse Kim. On the 5th, she had an appointment with her therapist who coincidentally happens to be Jane Frederick who Ruth was seeing at Lake Town Mental Health Clinic, but she does not remember any of those encounters yet.

MORE QUESTIONS FOR HOLLY, NEW BEGINNINGS FOR RUTH

December 6 and the 7th, she recalled some of her recent past. On the 7th, Ruth mentioned to Nurse Kim that she was walking aimlessly throughout Lake Town, one cold night and arrived at a clinic. But that is where this recall stops. A couple of days later, Ruth was in the new unit, Room 415. Ruth was delighted with her visitor on the 10th. Of course, it was Holly! That day Ruth had a major breakthrough. Ruth recalled that she had someone named Holly helping her, but she

does not recollect much more. Holly was going on vacation to see her folks from December 17 and returning on January 2nd or 3rd.

During the next few weeks, Ruth and Jane met every other day and gradually her memories were coming back. Holly made Ruth aware of the good opportunity for her to take days away. It is the thirteenth and Holly after work went to the local department store to pick up a gift for Ruth. She bought an item that Ruth had at Generations Respite. The following day, Holly brought this to the hospital for Ruth.

Upon arrival, Holly ran into Officer Grey, who had just left Ruth's room. He was there to ask more questions of Ruth about the day of the rape, but she stated very little. Also, Officer Grey was no closer to finding out who raped her. When Holly proceeded to Room 415, Ruth was not there. One of the unit nurses told Holly that Ruth was getting another MRI of her head to see if there were any changes. After the MRI, Ruth will be taken to see, Jane her therapist and will not return for two hours. Then Holly left the gift on the night table beside the bed and left the hospital for home.

Not seeing Ruth gave Holly an opportunity to return to the hospital. It was around eight o'clock, after regular visiting time, Holly walked into Room 415 and started talking with Ruth. Before anything else, Ruth thanked Holly for the gift and the two hugged. They talked for almost an hour. Ruth was getting cold and asked Holly to close the window on the other side of her room. When Holly walked back to Ruth, she was shivering. A few minutes later, Ruth began bursting out with lots of information about her life. Suddenly, she recapped the night she was last this cold. It was a new beginning for Ruth and many more questions for Holly.

Sessions with Jane became more productive plus exceedingly beneficial as Ruth was recollecting items of her past. However, she still did not relive the night she was raped, ever being pregnant or giving birth. Patience was going to be needed, but Ruth thought it was a new beginning.

Over the next few weeks, Holly went to see her parents where there was a nice surprise waiting for her. It was her brother, Andrew. They spent lots of time together. One night, Andrew informed everyone that he will be staying near his parents for the following year. Also, he will make plans to see Holly much more often. Everyone appeared to be happy, but in Holly's mind there were more questions.

This was an awkward year with plenty of ups and downs. Ruth was starting to remember her life, but it is a new beginning. Holly, Senior Peer Specialist, was still working with her Director, Taylor Thompson and Officer Alex Grey to unravel the mystery of who raped Ruth and killed her son, Gabriel. "Mystery creates wonder and wonder is the basis of man's desire to understand."

Stay tuned for more of Random Act By a Peer Specialist: Part IV