

Stubborn Thumbs

Category: Hands

written by Joanne Clarkson | June 5, 2016

My maternal grandmother was a psychic medium. She read cards professionally and taught me card-reading when I was child. As a teen, wanting an intuitive skill no one else in the family possessed, I went to the library, checked out books on palm reading and studied them.

Throughout my working life, I kept this hobby to myself. Yet I used it both consciously and subconsciously; I believe nurses possess a clairvoyance born of compassion and the will to heal. We earn this through study and years of practice. Yet it is also a gift of heart and mind.

So I would often seek insight in my patients' hands. Gerda had thick, stubby thumbs—to me, a sign of stubbornness. So when I realized that Gerda hadn't taken the medications her doctor had prescribed and hadn't done her physical therapy exercises, I reached for her hands and ran a fingertip across her square palm. Within the map etched there, I saw hardship and suspicion coupled with fierce self-reliance. Her life hadn't been easy, but she had survived to the age of 84.

I realized that Gerda's care plan would need to be of her own making. "You know your body best," I said to her. "What do you think you need to do to fix this hip and get your walking back to normal?" Then I added, aware that this strategy would take extra time, extra patience: "Was there a point in your life when you had to walk a long way? When you were especially brave?"

Gerda looked up, and her faded blue eyes examined me closely, to be sure I really wanted to hear her story. Then she began: "When I was a small girl, the family came to America, but for several years I was left behind in Sweden with cousins. They made me work so hard..."

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