

The Touch That Speaks A Thousand Words

by Judith Parker Harris

It was early morning in the West L.A. manicure shop, yet already it was bustling on this warm, summer day. The Vietnamese girls were filing, buffing and polishing away while they chattered in their native tongue. One older, heavy set woman in a colorful muumuu watched her manicurist speak, although she couldn't understand a word. A gray-haired gentleman sat by the window reading the latest gossip in PEOPLE Magazine. He refused a cup of coffee, helped one of the girls scotch tape a sign to the wall, and generally minded his own business.

Suddenly the older woman began to cough. Business went on, the chatter went on, and so did the woman's coughing. It grew more persistent. Finally, her manicurist, Debbie, set aside her phone for a minute and asked, "Are you okay, Edie?" Edie's cough continued.

My manicurist offered to get water. Another manicurist rushed over to open the door and allow some fresh air into the already close room.

But then, the gray-haired gentleman slowly got up, came over and rested his hand on Edie's shoulder. Her coughing began to decrease. He waved away all the offers of help. He removed his hand, only after her coughing stopped, and then went back to his chair, reopened his magazine and resumed his reading. They never looked at each other.

The man quietly waiting in the chair was Edie's husband, Evan. After a few moments passed, he again got up and walked over to Edie, simply to check on her one more time. This time he bent over and looked into her eyes. She looked back at him, nodded and smiled. He was satisfied. He walked back to his chair.

It's underrated in this country -- a hand on the shoulder. In fact, it's now cause of suspicion, suspension or even arrest if it is perceived that you have touched the wrong person, at the wrong time, in the wrong location -- even if you have the right reason and the right intention. A touch, a simple loving touch can calm a savage cough, ease a frightened heart, soothe a raging temper, comfort a lonely soul. Unfortunately, touch has become something to fear, to think twice about, to withhold. We have grown out of touch with touch from lover to lover, friend to friend, mentor to mentee, teacher to student, doctor to patient, or stranger to stranger in need. Yet, we all search in some way for connection, which is so beautifully communicated through touch.

I drove home from my manicure listening to talk radio. The topic was how difficult it is for men to love ordinarily beautiful women because of their constant exposure to extraordinarily beautiful women. One caller asked, "Why do we worship beauty instead of the soul?"

The host posited that more and more women and men are putting off, or even avoiding, marriage all together because they are waiting for someone more -- more wealthy, more accomplished, more beautiful, more handsome, more more.

But Edie and Evan had more. They had the comfort of a simple touch that said, “Breathe, my darling, and you will be all right.” They had short hand for years of being there for each other. They had a touch that spoke a thousand words, touch that pierced the external shell of extraordinary vanity and went to the heart of remarkable being, touch that communicated from soul to soul.

Those who have worked hard to nurture a relationship, to struggle through the ups and downs, to stay together through the ebbs and flows of being a couple, know that passion is wonderful, but the comfort of a hand on the shoulder is divine, the comfort of someone’s hand who knows you. Touch can send a message straight from one heart to another. It can slow the pulse, regulate the breath, and let the other person know that they are not alone.

Thanks to Edie and Evan, I am reminded. I listen for my soul mate’s breathing in the middle of the night. I wait for his return from wherever he has been. I know his cough, his sneeze, his sigh, his step, his smell, his touch. And when his hand is on me, it is the most beautiful hand in the world speaking volumes from his heart to mine.

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