

## Just Touch Me !

I am much older than I was once, yup I really do feel OLD. The rough sea of time has bruised my body; made my bones so frail. I do not have the strength to fight as I did when I was younger, so much has happened and I feel so very OLD. Skin that was once smooth and healthy is now shriveled beneath the hot sun and the weathered nights slept amongst the storms. That skin has become withered from the harsh icy winds of winter and the nights that were way to cold for my frame. My steps are no longer strong and sure, and it is not chronological age, it is all that has happened to me so I feel soooo OLD!!! Just getting from one place to another, or getting up from where I lay to "relieve myself" is a chore. The pains are greater now any my eyes barely see the paper cup that is before me. I might tip it over and spill some of the precious liquid, and often that happens. It is the only cup I am allowed to have. And often, at the times for the evening meal, I'm so very tired, weary from the efforts of the day. My hand in my pocket caresses an old withered note. The worn words say they love me, but there has been no contact for many years now, no attempt to reach out to me.

So here I am, amongst a veritable sea of humanity, and yet so profoundly and abysmally alone. Maybe they do not "love" me, maybe no one does. I have been in this "state of affairs" far too long.

Poker-faced and with stern words and actions; these strangers "minister" to what are my assumed needs. Impersonally, they perform those acts they feel are necessary for my physical survival, nothing more. To them, I am not a person, not someone who has hopes, dreams, ideals, has contributed and can once again contribute to the "greater good" of this community in which I now "reside"; but rather someone who has committed a great sin, a criminal if one would call it that, though no judge has done so yet. I have been reduced to a number, a bed number. Bed number 54 is sent to the nurse, Bed number 54 is given sheets and a blanket, duly recorded, and if the same amount is not given up again by morning at a certain time, boy will bed number 54 will be in trouble. Bed number 54, yesterday it was bed number 3 and before that it was bed number 97. What will my identifying bed number be tomorrow, if I see that day alive? Bed number 54 is called to get in line and bed number 54 walks down the hall to stand in line and then be given a prison-type tray that some stuff is slopped down. About 15 min after that, bed number 54 is told to hurry up eating, time to get out of there. Once again in a line, my bed number is recorded again (this time they took my word for it and I did not need to show a "slip" handed me by another one who only saw a faceless entity that was assigned 'bed number 54') and this time I am offered a towel to bath with, and the stern waring that if I do not return it on time I can be "banned". Bed number 54 hold tight onto that towel, you do not want to be "banned". Bed number 54 had to be shown where bed # 54 was, with much exasperation by the unfeeling "service worker". Bed number 54 is left alone, and for the moment, forgotten. This is not a "real" person, it is only bed number 54.

What have I done so wrong that you can not look me in the eye and see me. You only seem to see a blob, that is identified tonight as "bed number 54". Please, I plead inside but not daring to express the words outside, touch me. Just put your hand on my shoulder, or clasp my hand, look into my eyes and not past me. Touch my body somewhere and let me know I am still a part of this alive and pulsating world of human beings and not just an inanimate number for you to record, scrutinize and toss away if I "miss-step" somewhere. Let me know that those faded words on that crumpled up and many times folded and unfolded note in my pocket are actually meant by someone. Let me be "loved" at least for the moment, this second, by someone, and not be just the unappealing "bed number 54".

Nurse, as you give me medication, allow your sturdy fingers to press my trembling ones in reassurance. I am so afraid. What did I do to get to this position, this place. What crime did I commit that I now have lost my humanity and now am only "bed number 54" and that only until I "surrender" my bedding and towel and such in the morning. Then I cease to be bed number 54, and am even something less.

As you touch me, memories come back of a day, which now seems so far away, and a time when other hands clinging baby hands, raised in supplication were pleading for love. Your act will unroll the scroll of Time and once again I'll feel alive and like I had some love to give, that a child would cherish. Touch me!

Someone has said that "the endless monologues you hear are not senseless ramblings of disoriented minds." That person said that these are instead "the heart-cries of forsaken souls begging for remembrance". Sometimes it is just the "flicker" of an eyelash or "the remotest trace of a smile." That same person said they are instead "the wails of love-starved beings, pleading for a crumb of affection."

Look at me! Touch me! Interact wit me! I am not a criminal. I am a human, much more than bed number 54.

Won't you please just touch me. It has been said that "the miracle of physical contact will remove the thick crust of disappointment and disillusionment from a heart battered by unkind years. Number 54 will become a person again; a grateful" person, "alive --and Thankful!! I will soar beyond the pains and aches of life and face each days moments in peace. One person has said that when you touch me "trembling hands will grasp each such moment greedily, never letting go. This pain-torn body," feeling so OLD beyond the chronological years "will be revitalized with hope and purpose for when the heart is happy, the soul sings"

You will see the change, just touch me.

Grasp my hand in agreement. Hug my shoulder as a colleague. You'll see. Just touch me!

I am, have been, and can be; much, much, more; than bed number 54.

Credits:

This is adapted from the introduction to "*Reality Orientation for the Elderly*", 2nd Ed, by Kohut, Kohut, and Fleishman, Pages xiii-xv, © 1982 by Medical Economics Company, Oradell, NJ 07649 Which, in turn is a shortened version on a piece © December of 1975 by "*Crisis*", Crisis Publishing Company, Inc. (new address might be Mt. Hope Drive, Baltimore, MD 21215).

