



Hand it to Them

WE CALLED IT THE “LOSER CRUISER.” The “shame train” and “lack o’ pride ride” were backup terms of endearment for the 15-passenger van with the name of our college painted on the side, along with the school crest. It didn’t matter which name it was called, or how embarrassing we found it to zip through town in it, there was no getting around the fact that it was our only mode of transportation. Attending school in Santa Barbara, California, where land came at a premium price and parking lots were not in ample supply, parking permits were not available for underclassmen, meaning no wheels for the first two years. The school graciously supplied the aforementioned van that operated on a loop schedule, offering free rides from campus to the beach and downtown Santa Barbara, with multiple stops in between, running throughout the day and into the wee hours of the morning.

It was the loser cruiser that took my roommates and me to downtown Santa Barbara one Monday evening. As we came to our stop and piled out of the van, I was the last one out of the back seat. Grabbing the metal post between the front passenger door and the back passenger door, I held on for balance as I started to hop out onto the sidewalk.

I heard the thud before I actually felt anything. I remember thinking, “Why won’t my hand move?” I tugged, but it wouldn’t move and I couldn’t really feel it at all. It probably took no more than one and a half seconds to process, but when it did, I realized with horror that my left hand, specifically my fingers, which had curled around the metal post for support, had been caught when the front door had been slammed completely shut, which is why it was pinned in place and I couldn’t move it.

After some gasps of horror by the friends I was with, and hesitation of what to do, the door was opened, and my hand was extracted. There were some shallow cuts and minimal blood, but for the most part, it didn’t look too bad, and since I strangely couldn’t feel anything at all, I decided to literally shake it off and continue on with the evening.

The pain hit and grew worse as the evening wore on, and eventually we cut the night short to go back to the dorm and ice my fingers, which were hot to the touch, turning a rainbow of colors

and swelling heavily. The pain grew so strong that I couldn’t sleep, and by 9:30 the next morning, fighting tears, with my hand cradled like an injured paw, I walked out of English Lit halfway through class and walked down to the student health building. The doctor wasn’t in because he was only on campus three days a week, but a receptionist at the front desk said, “Ohhh... that looks *really* bad! I think I’ve heard that if you stab under the nail with a hot paper clip that helps relieve the pain sometimes. I can try it if you like?”

I pulled my hand back from the counter, backing away, while shaking my head no. I made my way back to my dorm, and in one of those moments of despair when you don’t know what else to do, I reached for the phone and called my dad, telling him about my hand getting smashed in a door, the nearly intolerable pain and the student health worker’s suggestion of stabbing under it with a hot paper clip to reduce the intense swelling and pain.

“Get someone to drive you to a doctor—right now,” my dad said, his paternal insistence echoing strongly from 1,200 miles away. “You need to see a real doctor—not one of those Civil War surgeons they have volunteering in the student health office!”

Heeding his advice, my neighbor Mark, drove me to Cottage Hospital in downtown Santa Barbara. The doctor who tended to me looked down at my now deep purple colored finger, which was swollen to well over twice its normal size and said, “I can’t believe you were able to sleep or eat last night with pain that severe. Let’s take care of that.”

Relief flooded over me as he looked at my hand and asked me questions. He recognized something was severely wrong, he had a plan and knew he could fix it. (Turns out the “stab it with a hot paper clip” suggestion wasn’t too far off from the actual treatment plan he used, although his version included sterilized tools rather than filthy office supplies, but it did involve piercing the nail.)

There is something so comforting about knowing there is someone who can help you – someone who has the education, training and experience to offer a solution. When it is a health or medical situation- something so beyond what most of us have knowledge of or experience in - a doctor is a welcomed partner in finding a solution.

Whether it is a crushed hand, a life-threatening heart condition, a chronic disease or a bout with the flu, finding a compassionate, skilled and trustworthy doctor who is at the top of their game is one of the most critical things we can do, for both our health and for our peace of mind. In an effort to make sure you don’t end up with a “Civil War surgeon” or a doctor that doesn’t come with high recommendations, we are sharing the Best Doctors in America® 2015-2016 Best Doctors list in this issue. This is a chance to celebrate 130 of Spokane’s best doctors, practicing medicine across 41 different specialties. We’ve really got to hand it to them, they are the best!

When I look at my left hand these days, there isn’t any sign of the severe crunch it got in the van door of the loser cruiser. Though I was sporting rather hideous looking fingers for a few months – one of the fingernails completely fell off and took almost all of spring semester to grow back – eventually the bruising went away and all of the nails grew back normally.

Life has a way of doing that – the bumps, bruises and cuts we get along the way heal, sometimes smoothly and sometimes leaving behind scars. It’s life saving, to heart and soul, when you do have a painful time, to have someone to help you along the way – whether it’s a doctor for the medical cases, or friends, family and loved ones for the rest of the times. One thing is for sure: with them by your side, you’ll never feel like a loser.

Happy reading!

Blythe