

# THE COMMUNIQUE

OCT | NOV | DEC  
2023

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PAGE **01**

SENSORY PROCESSING AND  
INTEGRATION:  
A CASE STUDY

PAGE **05**

HOW TWO PENCILS  
SAVED MY FOREARMS AND MY  
CAREER

PAGE **07**

PERSPECTIVES OF A  
CAREGIVER:

CO-OCCUPATION OF  
CAREGIVING AND  
WELL-BEING

PAGE **09**

DETERMINING THE "RIGHT  
FIT TECHNOLOGY"  
IN VOCATIONAL  
REHABILITATION

PAGE **19**

SENSORY ADAPTED DENTAL ENVIRON-  
MENTS (SADE) FOR ADULTS WITH IDD:  
A PROTOCOL FOR SADE AT A MIDWEST  
MEDICALLY COMPLEX FACILITY FOR  
PERSONS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL  
DISABILITIES

PAGE **23**

INTERVIEWING:  
EMILY DANIELS,  
OTR/L



Illinois Occupational  
Therapy Association

- PAGE 04** **President's Address**  
Beverly Menninger, MA,  
OTR/L
- PAGE 14** **ILOTA JEDI SIS**
- PAGE 16** **Legislative Update**
- PAGE 26** **About**  
The Communiqué
- PAGE 28** **About**  
ILOTA



## HOW TWO PENCILS SAVED MY FOREARMS AND MY CAREER

By Kenya Briggs, Inventor of FiTchucks

There's a feeling you get in the pit of your stomach — a combination of fear and dread — when it dawns on you that an injury could spell the end of your working life. The revelation might sneak up on you after dismissing the first pangs of discomfort as a fluke. "What the heck is that?" you think, and then you remember that you're young and invincible, or ambitious and busy, or too sexy for frailty, and you go about your business. In my case, the business was typing and the fluke was a small, dull ache in my forearms.

I was a project coordinator for a union of freelance writers in the late 1990's. Writing was my bread and butter, and typing the unsung hero of my trade. But I was in trouble; in just a few weeks the aching had grown more intense and, like a monster, it was following me home — my arms began to hurt while engaged in the mundane, like turning a door knob or lifting a pot of water.

And that's when the second shoe dropped. If I can't type, then I can't keep this job or any job in my skill set. How am I going to pay the bills? That sobered me right up and one by one, I began checking off the list of things I was supposed to do: I went to see my doctor, switched around my workstation to meet ergonomic ideals, and had the union buy me supportive equip-

ment, like a wave keyboard and ergonomically sound chair.

**BUT THE PAIN PERSISTED, AND I HAD A LOT OF TYPING TO DO. SO, IN A MOMENT OF INSPIRED DESPERATION, I PICKED UP TWO PENCILS, TURNED THEM UPSIDE DOWN, AND BEGAN PECKING THE KEYS OF THE WAVE KEYBOARD WITH THEM.**

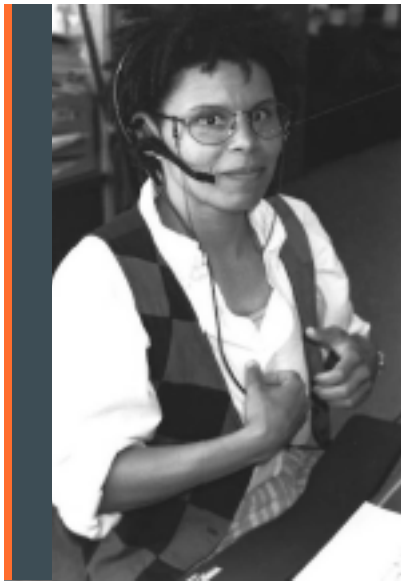
Friends, please don't fall off of your chairs when reading this... tapping the keyboard with those pencils was the only solution that worked! The moment I began typing with them my forearm pain vanished, and it immediately reappeared whenever I typed without them — ergonomic aids and physical therapy notwithstanding. My doctor suggested I patent the process, which underscored for me how difficult it was to resolve forearm pain for active typists. Without realizing it, I'd stumbled on a keyboard interface that shifted repetitive movements from my hands to my upper body and kept my arms in neutral position. And it totally saved my bacon (I mean this in a loving, vegan way).

My work life became more competitive about ten years later when I landed a job as a communications professional for The City and County of San Francisco. I was easily able to keep pace with my peers with my typing tool, which I'd improved

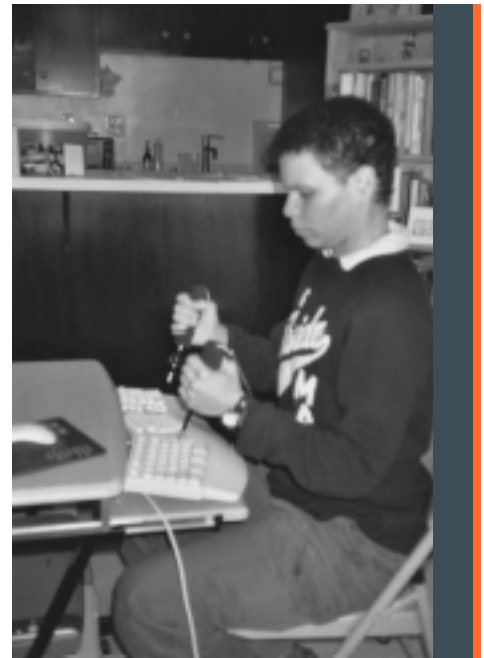
with foam hand grips (typing all day with my hands clenched around thin pencils was a little hard on my thumbs) and a neck cord. When I was promoted to the sole Public Relations Officer slot at the San Francisco Sheriff's Department, I used the tool to write about 40 press releases. This was only ten fewer than were written that same time period by the entire thirty-person communications team I'd just left. I was typing up a storm with zero arm pain, friends. Zero! And that was awesome-cakes.

The lessons I've learned from the development of my FiTchucks™ typing tool have informed my approach to other of life's "lemony" events. If something in my house breaks I'm much more likely to jury-rig a fix than to call a professional. For better or worse, that's my way — and its origins lie in cobbling together an alternative keyboard interface while organizing freelance writers some 25 years ago. Sometimes self-sufficiency means the difference between doing it your way, or not at all. That's how I see it, anyway. (And yes, I typed this article with FiTchucks! Learn more about them or buy them at: [FiTchucks.com](http://FiTchucks.com).)

Kenya Briggs is semi-retired and lives with her daughter in a righteous, renovated old barn in Western Massachusetts.



*Just another work day at the National Writers Union's West Coast office, approx. 1997. Around this time I began typing with pencils to avoid forearm pain.*



*At home showing off an early version of FiTchucks, approx. 2008.*



*FiTchucks, 2023*