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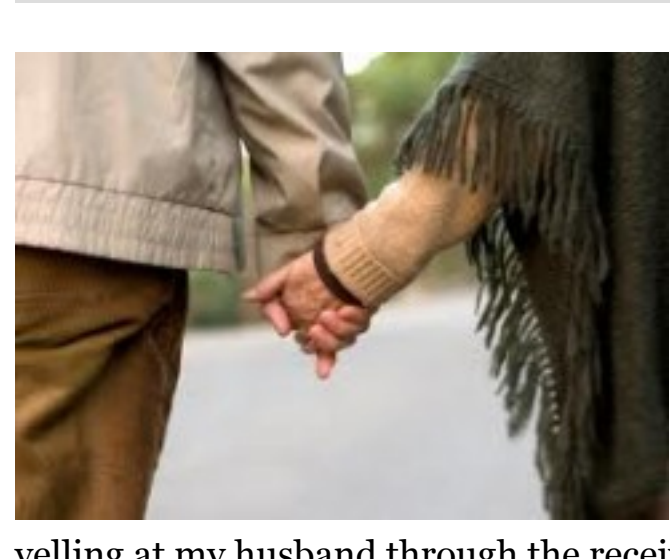
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Holding Hands

by Alison Grambs



A few months ago I was walking home from work along a side street of Manhattan. Casually strolling towards me was a distinguished man and woman who looked to be in their mid-seventies.

They were holding hands. I was holding my cell phone.

They were quietly talking to each other through matching warm smiles. I was not-so quietly yelling at my husband through the receiver.

The casual pace with which this couple strolled suggested they had not a care in the world. I, on the other hand, was feeling burdened by every care in the world as I ranted into the phone about whatever debacle had occurred in my life that day.

As the couple drew closer, gradually closing the gap between us, the path became too narrow to accommodate all three of us, and soon we were entangled in that awkward step-to-this-side-step-to-that-side dance New Yorkers get stuck in when trying to politely share a confined space. Toning down my fury long enough to acknowledge present circumstances, I shimmied to the right to give the pleasant couple room to pass. They simultaneously stepped to the same side, indicating I should pass. I waded them on with insistence, as if to say, You seem happy. I'm miserable. Please, go first. The kindly couple, however, remained fixed in place, more than happy to give me first passage. I nodded appreciatively, eager to resume my ranting to my husband on the phone, and moved forward.

My efforts were soon thwarted, however, by another oncoming pedestrian, this one wearing a coat so bulky she instantly swallowed up the entire physical space I was hoping to pass through. Soon, what seemed like an onslaught of additional passers-by were scurrying around the couple and me on both sides. There was nowhere to go. We were positively stuck in place. Once again, our impromptu threesome found itself shifting back and forth in what seemed like an endless waltz of "step to the left/step to the right" maneuvers, the couple holding hands throughout it all.

A quick study of the area and a solution became apparent to me. If the couple could just break hands for one moment, I could pass through the middle and get on with my life. A rolling of my eyes... an audible grunt... I wanted to do both, for everything about our silly situation suggested pragmatism take precedence over romanticism. But this couple made it clear they were not letting go of each other's hands for anything. And for reasons unbeknownst to me at the time, I simply smiled and stood there in wait.

It got me thinking about how often my husband and I have been in similar situation, holding hands on the street, only to suddenly find ourselves caught up in a clumsy dosey-doe with someone approaching from the other direction. How often, in such situations, my husband and I err on the side of practicality, momentarily breaking our physical connection so that some stranger can shave maybe, oh, six seconds off his or her travel time.

Suddenly, such pragmatism seemed all wrong.

We've been married for over a decade now. Some of those years we held hands a lot; and some, not so much. There have been stretches during which we've felt incredibly close, and our physical interaction reflected that. Yet, like most marriages, there have also been stretches during which my husband and I have felt a bit disconnected. Work stress. Family stress. Money stress. Emotional stress. Life just has a way of getting in the way of holding hands.

And that is so very, very wrong.

We hold onto our smart phones... we hold onto our grocery bags... we hold onto our key chains... we hold onto our Starbucks coffee cups. But how easily we let go of our lover's hands. Such a simple gesture, containing such a powerful message. And yet, it is often one of the first things we sacrifice in this modern world of multitasking.

So, it was with awe that I observed this couple before me on the street, unwilling to break their bond, even for just a few seconds. I suppose some New Yorkers would consider such a couple annoying, maybe even selfish. How dare they hold up traffic just because they're in love! But to me, what they had was enviable. Although I'll never know the details of their personal circumstances, I imagine couple had been together a long time. I imagine they had worked hard to find each other in this world - and worked even harder to beat the odds and remain a pair when so many other pairs were breaking in half around them.

I think of the widows and widowers I've known who can no longer hold hands with their spouses. Twosomes that turn into onesomes, parsed either by tragedy or romantic failure, forced to downgrade from a two-cup coffee maker to a single-cup coffee maker. No hands to hold.

It's a gift of sorts, I suppose, to be able to hold the hand of someone you love. To intertwine fingers, press palm to palm, squeamishly embrace the sweatiness of each other's skin on a hot day, or rub skin against skin to create warmth on a cold one. Holding hands is a silent way of telling someone that you've got their back. Such a simple gesture. So seemingly inconsequential in the grand scheme of the things; and yet, as integral to a relationship as talking, hugging, cuddling, kissing, or even making love.



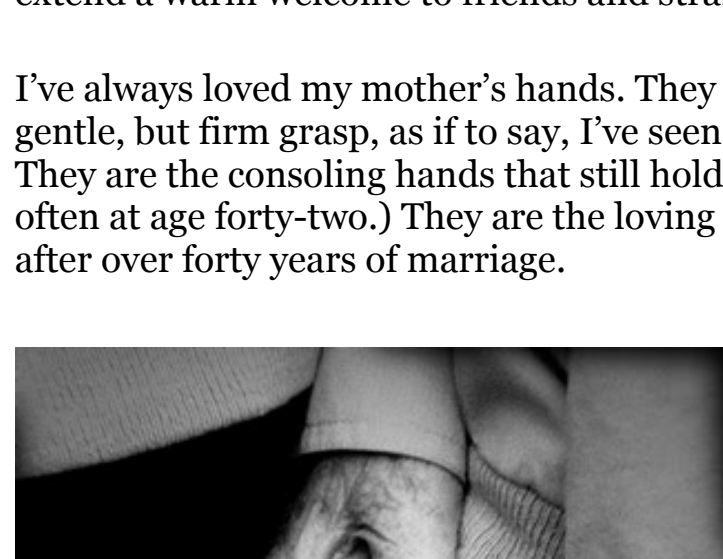
Holding hands is often the first experience we have in our lives with physical intimacy, and just as often, the last. As newborn babies freshly transplanted from the coziness of the womb, it is the stabilizing touch of a parent's fingers intertwining with our panicked tiny ones that softens the shock of the new world. Likewise, for those of us facing the end, it is the comfort of a loved one holding our quivering hand that sends us off into the beyond without quite so much fear. Hand holding is the casual squeeze between two acquaintances on a date that signals, yes, this could lead to more. It is the hand of a friend in need being held by the hand of a friend ready to serve that need. It is the healthy comforting the sick, the strong leading the weak, and the old guiding the young.

Yes, the holding of hands is all of these things... if we let it be. I remember when I was little, walking with my father along the intimidating streets of New York, my diminutive hand tucked deep inside his manly one. Sometimes my dad would slow his stride for me, and sometimes, it was up to me to just find a way to keep up, even if it required that I sort of job alongside him like a Secret Service agent in a Presidential motorcade. No matter how difficult doing so proved for me, however, I absolutely would not let go of my father's hand. If his pace quickened, so did mine; if his pace slowed, mine did as well. And as far as I was concerned, any feisty New Yorker getting annoyed about not being able to pass, would simply have to go around us. Sure, I'd arrive at our destination drenched in sweat, my little heart beating under the weight of little palpitations. But I'd arrive there as part of a team, and that's all that mattered.

In the modest lower Manhattan church my parents attend regularly, there comes a time during every service that the Reverend instructs the congregation to walk over to one another and wish each other The Peace. I spend much of my time sitting in the pew dreading this meet-and-greet being forced upon me by a higher power. My mother used to be the same way - a bundle of nerves worrying about who among the crowd would welcome our hello, and who might shrink away.

But now, as the years have forced our family to cope with more downs than ups, I notice the enthusiasm with which Mom now approaches this opportunity to touch hands with her fellow parishioners. The woman runs Iditarod-like lengths throughout the sanctuary to extend a warm welcome to friends and strangers alike.

I've always loved my mother's hands. They are beautiful hands. Hands that speak with a gentle, but firm grasp, as if to say, I've seen a lot. I've felt a lot. I'm here if you need me. They are the consoling hands that still hold mine when I'm having a bad day (which is often at age forty-two.) They are the loving hands that still intertwine with my father's after over forty years of marriage.



Back on the sidewalk, a few more passers-by continued to hold our awkward threesome in place on that narrow street. And still, the couple refused to break grasp of one another. I admired the heck out of that. When the sidelines eventually did clear, our eyes met once again as the three of us tacitly acknowledged the humor of the situation we had just shared. Then I stepped far to the left to resume my phone call with my husband, and the couple stepped far to the left to resume their stroll.

In real time, of course, our interaction was little more than a fleeting moment that couple has most assuredly since forgotten. But to me, it was nothing short of mind-blowing. We should take more walks, I announced to my husband, no longer mad at whatever I'd been mad at. And Jesus, let's make a vow to not let go of each other's hands so easily from now on, okay? I thought to myself.

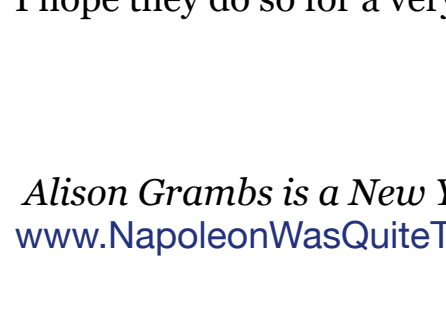
Hand holding isn't always easy, and it's certainly not always practical, especially in Manhattan. But we will do it more often now because it is nothing short of a privilege to have someone's hand to hold. Such a privilege should not be taken lightly.

As the couple passed by, and continued strolling down the block, I stopped to look back at them one last time and smiled. More pedestrians were coming towards them now, but they simply would not let anyone come between them.

Their hands remained tightly clasped.

I hope they do so for a very long time.

Alison Grambs is a New York based author and humor writer. Her website is www.NapoleonWasQuiteTall.com



- #3 **Melanie Holmes** 2014-04-08 17:13
My husband & I have been married 21+ years. We love to take nightly walks and hold hands. I don't see any other couples doing this, but that's okay, we don't mind being an "anomaly."
- #2 **Brenda Athanus** 2013-05-06 19:09
Great lesson, great story--thank you!
- #1 **Fredrica Duke** 2013-05-06 10:52
So great! So true! Thanks for sharing this powerful story. Me too, I want to hold hands more and not let go!!!

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Happy Thanksgiving!

Duckhorn Merlot
Veuve Clicquot Pink Champagne

Caviar Pie & Salted Crackers
Assorted French Cheeses & Sliced Apples

Perfect Roast Turkey
Smokey Sweet Potato Souffle
Mashed Potatoes
Green Beans with Almonds
Brussels Sprouts with Bacon
Corn Meat Stuffing
French Bread Stuffing
Apricot Jello Mold
POM Cranberry Sauce
Old Fashioned Cranberry Sauce

Pumpkin Pie
Deep Dish Apple Pie
Cherry Pie
Gingersnaps

Brandy & Coffee

Senator Biden's Favorite Oatmeal Raisin Cookies

- 1 cup shortening or butter
- 1 cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 3 cups old fashioned oats
- 1 cup raisins
- nuts (optional)

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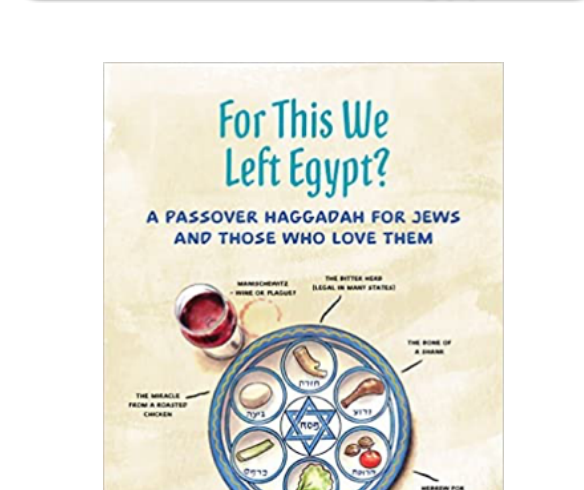
Favorite Things

The Barbecue! Bible

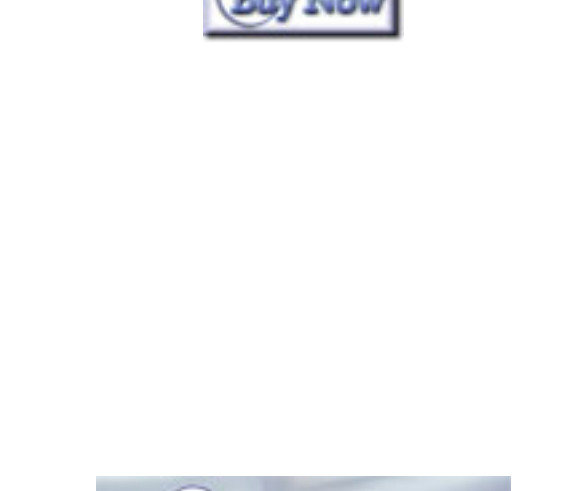


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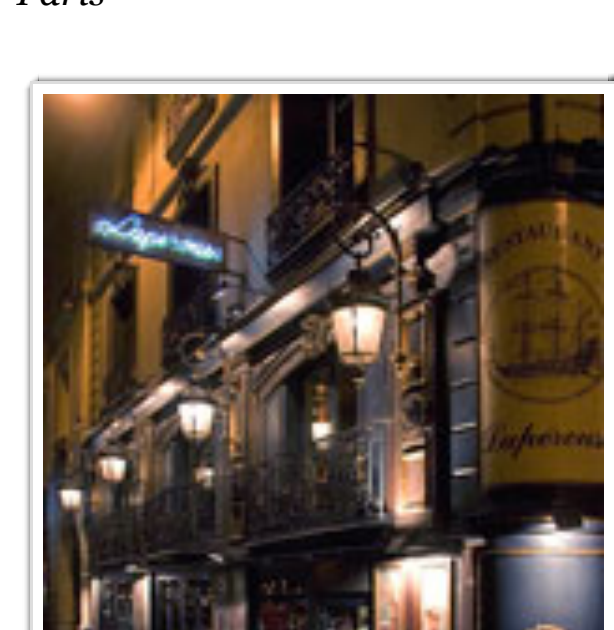


Restaurant News

Finding L'Astrance

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by **Alexander Lobrano**

An excerpt from "Hungry for Paris"



Some ten years ago, I went to dinner one night with no expectations. A London newspaper had asked me to write about Lapérouse, an old warhorse of a...

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Sous Village: Eating

Underground in Chicago
Chicago
by **Jessica Dixon**



Underground dinners. Do you know about them? Probably, I'm new to this: paprika still confuses me.

I first heard of this scene when eating at Elizabeth --an up and coming Chicago "farm to table"...

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"Breakfast at Berthillon"

Paris
by **Brenda Athanus**



When was the last time you ate something that made time stop and took you back to your childhood? Berthillon in Paris is a dreamy ice cream shop on the Isle St. Louis that will do just...

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A Visit to N.Y. Kitchen

Southern California
by **Lisa Dinsmore**



While we find ourselves in Santa Barbara wine country, also known as the Santa Ynez Valley, about every other month or so, I can honestly say I had never been to the actual town of Santa Ynez...

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- St. Felix Bar
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