

The Legacy of Giving—IFSHT President's Lecture

Do you believe in fortune tellers? I never used to believe in them, but on December 26, 2003 at the urging of a young friend with whom I was traveling, I found myself in Jasilmer, India listening to a fortune teller advise me about my future life. At this time, I was contemplating whether I was ready and able to take on a nine-year commitment to serve as President-Elect, President, and then Past-President of the International Federation of Societies for Hand Therapy (IFSHT). It seemed like an enormous commitment.

As the fortune teller had requested, I told him the date, time, and location of my birth. He consulted his astrological charts and for a long time looked at and gently stroked the palm of my hand before proceeding to advise me. I told him absolutely nothing else about myself. His advice was to take on the leadership role I was contemplating because I would gain far more than what I would be asked to give.

So if you ask me NOW if I believe in fortune tellers, I might just say yes, because I have indeed gotten far more than I have given. The gift of knowing many of you and enjoying our professional camaraderie as I have traveled the world to represent IFSHT has enriched my life many times over.

No one does this alone. Without the support and love of my family, friends, my staff, the IFSHT executive board, and therapists around the world I would not be here today. Thank you for the privilege of serving as your president.

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GIVING

The title of my talk, *The Legacy of Giving*, is inspired by Mrs. Evelyn Mackin, the first president of IFSHT, who contributed to the beginning of many important events in the world of hand therapy. We are thrilled that Mrs. Mackin is here with us today. Throughout this lecture listen for one of Evelyn's favorite phrases: "Pass it On," as we explore the legacy of giving.

The definition of legacy is defined in the dictionary as "money or property bequeathed to another by will" or "something handed down from an ancestor or a predecessor or from the past." How do we define what is important to pass on in our legacy of hand therapy?

As Pericles, the famous Greek statesman and orator who lived 495-429 BC said: "What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others." We can define legacy most easily by what we give to our family, which we hope is carried on for generations who come after us. In addition to money and tangible assets, we also give our values, principles, and dreams for a life well lived.

As parents, we automatically give not only our love and guidance to our children, but we also pass on genetic characteristics that create an undeniable lasting legacy of who our children are. In our many hours spent with our children, we hope to provide them with the morals and ethics that allow them to make good choices throughout their lives. We encourage our children to explore and discover their skills and we encourage them to focus on their schooling so they have the knowledge to combine with their skills to be successful. We hope for our children all those things that fall outside of our lifetime reach.

In addition to our family, we also leave a legacy in the work we do. We



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encounter the same opportunities to pass on our knowledge and skills and dreams to the next generation of hand therapists as we have with our family.

Historically, one's chosen occupation was a life-long identity. Work knowledge and skills were passed from generation to generation by long apprenticeships where the seasoned expert served as a mentor and guide. Manual hand skills were passed through generations not by study questions and exams, but by repetitive practice with a skilled mentor standing by for direction, advice, and support.

I would like to explore what we can create as our legacy of giving and most of all discover how we can widen the scope of our legacy in our work world of hand therapy. This one simple concept from Maya Angelou, the noted America author and poet sums it up: "When you learn, teach; when you get, give."

I once worked with a therapist who remained an avid student, reading and studying many hours on her own to better understand how to treat patients. Sadly, she saw the information as hers alone, rarely being willing to teach or mentor others. Somehow I think she feared that sharing what she learned and understood would diminish the value of her knowledge. What my colleague did not know was that when you share what you know with someone

else, you develop a deeper understanding of it yourself, so you actually gain far more than the person with whom you are sharing. It seems to me that we all have an opportunity: when we understand something we have a chance to share it with others and deepen our insight.

One can categorize this act of sharing information as volunteering. We are doing something of our own initiative that is not required of us and for which we are not paid. Volunteering actually creates many advantages for us. Allan Luks in the late 1980s identified the phrase "helper's high," which describes the rush of endorphins the body releases during and after performing an act of volunteerism.¹ As we know, endorphins are the body's natural pain killers, released when we experience great pleasure. Luks identified a direct link of good health with volunteering and giving time. Another investigator, Fried, demonstrated that older individuals who volunteered had significantly increased physical, cognitive, and social abilities when compared with those who do not volunteer. She determined that volunteering can actually slow the aging process!² Other research has shown that volunteering prevents risky behaviors in teens, and can help increase academic success in teens already considered at risk.³

You may think that volunteering requires you to be the sole initiator of communication that connects us. But really what I am talking about is being the connector, not the sole source.

Let me digress for a moment. Being part of the older generation who can remember the world without computers, and not wanting to be left behind in the current social networking world, I recently read a book entitled: *Trust Agents-Using the Web to Build Influence, Improve Reputation and Earn Trust*.⁴ This book describes the mechanism of social networking that creates "trust agents": individuals, who by virtue of their connections and communication, are perceived by others to be trustworthy experts. What I found most interesting in this book is that gaining recognition as a "trust agent" is as dependent upon drawing in the opinions and experience of others as it is initiating original communication. In their words: "One important

point of being a trust agent involves understanding that no one person has the full answer any longer." Part of what you do as a trust agent is realizing that "everyone else has great ideas, that they are professionals, and that they have angles you have yet to consider."⁴

So the question is how can we become "trust agents" in hand therapy? Unfortunately, we have limited empirical evidence we can share, but we are rich in experiential learning. If we are to strengthen our profession, we not only need to continue to seek empirical data, but we must find ways of developing more "trust agents" within our profession. We are hungry for individuals who seek out the ideas of others and share those ideas and nurture further exploration. Imagine for a moment the collective knowledge of hand therapy within a large lecture hall of hand therapists. If we could somehow capture the information in everyone's head in an organized manner, we could create the most useful book about hand therapy ever written.

I envision this 8th IFSHT Congress as an opportunity for all of us to become "trust agents" in hand therapy. The first step is creating greater connections among us. To begin this process, I request you leave this meeting with the name and e-mail of a hand therapy colleague whom you did not previously know and establish e-mail correspondence about your work and life. It would be my hope that it is someone from another country. How many of you have a business card with you? If not, there is a white card in your seat. If you are willing to participate in this idea, take a moment and write your name, city, country, and e-mail address on this card if you do not have a business card. Now start passing your business card or the white card in any direction until you get a card that belongs to someone you do not know. If we keep doing this for a few minutes, most of you should be able to end up with a card from another country. Do not exchange cards with someone, but pass your card one direction and receive a card from the other direction. Okay; pass it on. Each of you now has one card with the name of one person to contact. And another unknown person has your card who will contact you.

These are not the same individuals, so from this exchange you have potentially gained contact with two hand therapists you do not know. Yes, we all have busy lives and this will take some time and initiative, but remember: there are more advantages to you than it will ask of you. Human nature is such that not all of you will follow-up with this. If you find it awkward to write to someone you do not know, I suggest the starting point for your first correspondence be about this meeting and what information you found valuable. In addition to our card exchange, I would like to offer some thoughts on other ways we can pass it on.

Consider attending the annual meeting of a national hand therapy society or a regional federation meeting of the European, North American, Asia-Pacific, or South American Societies. On the IFSHT Web site (www.ifsht.org), you can find a listing of these meetings and also on the *IFSHT Update* page that is published in both the American- and the British-based hand therapy journals. The *IFSHT Update* is also distributed to our member country delegates to pass on to their members.

Look for the universities around the world that offer a focus on hand therapy education and seek out the published theses of those who have done special study on a subject of interest to you. Who better to discuss a topic with than someone who has focused on that subject? A thesis is an in-depth exploration of a subject related to hand therapy and this in-depth information is available from no other source. What a rich but sadly underused resource of information.

Visit a clinic. I have been fortunate to visit many clinics throughout the world and have learned that even though we may do things somewhat differently, we usually end up with similar results. Just as there are often many different surgical procedures for one diagnosis, there are many ways to approach rehabilitation of the hand. But the quest for all of us is to be more precise and focused with our research to determine which variable makes a difference in the outcomes for our patients. Being exposed to a totally different way of doing things often opens our eyes to



FIGURE 1. Some of the hand therapy journals around the world: L to R: UK-based Journal, Japanese Journal, U.S.-based Journal, and Dutch Journal.

possibilities that we have not previously recognized.

How about the idea of identifying a sister clinic? Sister-Cities International is nonprofit citizen network that seeks stronger ties between United States and international communities. Why could we not do the same between hand therapy clinics? On the sister-cities Web site one may apply for a sister city. Perhaps this can be a future project of IFSHT if there is

sufficient interest among our member countries. It would be a great mechanism for learning how a clinic in another country cares for their patients.

Consider contacting an author. Perhaps, you have a question that an article did not fully answer. Or perhaps you simply want to know more about the subject? Those who have taken the time and effort to publish eagerly welcome an inquiry

about their work. By contacting the author your questions can be answered and you can connect with the source of key information. The author always has much more experience and information than can be put into the publication.

Perhaps, your choice for broadening your hand therapy horizons would be to volunteer on an overseas trip with a group of other health professionals. The opportunity to

experience the practice of your own profession in an unfamiliar environment with a totally different set of tools and circumstances pushes you to examine the core of your practice and question why you are not more creative and resourceful on a daily basis at home. I have never spoken to anyone who went on a volunteer working trip who did not experience the "helper's high" and come home wanting to go again.

I recently received a postcard from Suzanne Caraganias, a therapist who lives and works in Australia who was in Bhutan on a volunteer trip. IFSHT had donated a dynamometer, which she took to Bhutan. She wrote: "Just spent two weeks teaching in Bhutan and working at the main hospital. They were thrilled with the dynamometer and wanted me to say a big thank you. Expected about 25 at my course and got 112!!! Also got some donated money so set up a small hand therapy area and taught lots of low tech ideas!!" I can hear the endorphins flowing as she ended each sentence with an exclamation point.

Have you ever had a patient who needed to be referred to a therapist in another country? By visiting the IFSHT Web site you can access the e-mail address of the delegate of all of the IFSHT member countries and this contact may allow you to find a therapist in the desired country. Rather than just referring the patient, why not establish ongoing communication with the therapist, using the referral as an opportunity to open the door of professional communication?

One of the best ways of connecting with others and mentoring others is to publish. There are many hand therapy journals published, including the UK-based Hand Therapy, the Journal of the Japanese Society of Hand Therapists, the U.S.-based Journal of Hand Therapy, and the Journal of the Dutch Hand Therapy Society (Figure 1). If you are not able to share formal research in one of the official hand therapy journals, consider sharing a tip or suggestion that you have found to be an effective approach for a specific problem. There are many ways you can share information: A tip or suggestion can be a contribution to your local newsletter or distributed via e-mail to your colleagues. Emily Altman, a hand therapist in



FIGURE 2. Nelly Salas Basilio from Lima, Peru, (standing) recipient of the 2010 IFSHT Evelyn Mackin Award with Mrs. Evelyn Mackin at the 8th IFSHT Triennial Congress in Orlando.

New York City, writes a column for the Hand Section of the American Physical Therapy Association entitled *Seen in the Stacks* where she references articles of interest and provides a synopsis of selected articles. I often think how much she learns each time she does this!

As you write, additional questions come to your mind and the exercise of writing encourages you to question and think and discuss more with your colleagues. Every contribution you make will bring you more than you give. Any or all of these activities will increase your release of endorphins but most of all will create a connection that allows you to establish your legacy of giving as a hand therapist. We have so many opportunities to "pass it on" to other therapists.

I am reminded of a quote from Irving Kristol, an American columnist, journalist, and writer who said: "You have to know one big thing and stick with it. The leaders who had one very big idea and one very big commitment; this permitted them to create something. Those are the ones who leave a legacy." Of all of those who have stuck with hand therapy,

Evelyn Mackin is the one individual who has most inspired us to carry the international hand therapy torch forward.

In honor and recognition of Evelyn Mackin's legacy to IFSHT, it is my privilege to announce that a grant in her name has been established to sponsor a therapist to attend the IFSHT Triennial Congress. Evelyn asked that the award be given to someone who may not otherwise be able to attend and that the therapist "demonstrate a passion for the development of hand therapy in his/her country." After the establishment of this award, Evelyn wrote to the IFSHT executive Board and saying: "Since the beginning I have had a passion to reach out to therapists throughout the world with information on hand therapy. I am still filled with that same passion and excitement, so this award is very meaningful to me. It is my hope this award goes to that special person who will light the fire in others in their respective country." The first recipient of the Evelyn Mackin travel award to attend the 8th Triennial Congress here in Orlando is Nelly Salas Basilio from Lima, Peru (Figure 2).



FIGURE 3. Commemorative poster honoring Mrs. Evelyn Mackin; available from www.HandLab.com, with proceeds benefiting IFSHT. © 2010. Courtesy of Judy C. Colditz.

I vividly recall Mrs. Mackin's ASHT presidential address in 1982 when she said: "I envision a day when there will be an international federation of societies of hand therapists. I envision a day when the sun will never set on our profession." Twenty eight years later the federation is alive and well with 36 Member countries and a look at the world map proves that indeed somewhere in the world the sun is

always shining on hand therapy. Mrs. Mackin's legacy to us will endure through many generations of hand therapists to come through this organization and many other contributions.

What I will remember most of all are the final words of Mrs. Mackin's 1982 address: "Accept the challenges. Add your own, and pass it on!!" In celebration of Evelyn Mackin's legacy of passing it on and of this

8th Triennial Congress, a commemorative poster has been commissioned in her honor. This poster beautifully captures her phrase of "Pass it On," symbolized in this original artwork of an adult hand giving a string of pearls to a younger hand. We can assume they are the family pearls being passed down from one generation to the next. Proceeds from the sale of the poster will benefit IFSHT (Figure 3).

In closing, I would like to end with a quote from Nelson Henderson, whose son used the quote in his book about pioneering in Manitoba: "The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit."⁵ As we continue this 8th IFSHT Triennial Congress, let us remember this gathering gives us a wealth of opportunities to create a greater legacy of hand therapy by planting the tree of communication among all of us here.

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