A photograph of two people holding hands in a grassy field at sunset. One person is in a wheelchair, and the other is standing. The background shows a bright sun over a horizon, casting a golden glow over the scene.

**Inspirational Stories & Words from
the disAbilities Community**

**Living in a
World of
Possibilities**

Mona Freedman, RN

Copyright © 2011 by Mona Freedman, RN

Cover design and book layout by Beth Anne Bloom.

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author. The only exception is by a reviewer, who may quote short excerpts in a review.

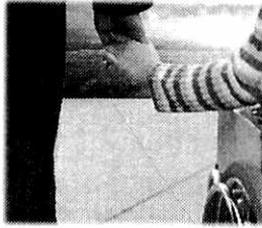
Mona Freedman, RN
Executive Director and Founder
Caring Communities
Visit www.caringcommunities.org

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: November, 2011

ISBN - 978-0-9847465-0-7

PUBLISHED BY:
MILESTONE MEDIA GROUP
5360-E Enterprise Street
Eldersburg, Maryland 21784
www.milestonemediagroupinc.com



*Find 'em and Keep 'em:
What Attracts and What Sustains*

As a dentist, I will always remember my first special-needs patient. I will also always remember my first girlfriend, my first job and my first home. What attracts me to a job, a relationship or a neighborhood has very little to do with what keeps me there. Attracting and sustaining forces have very little in common.

In the summer of 1974, I was left alone with my first special-needs patient. This was a 17-year-old deaf girl in Rochester, NY, and I was to remove her impacted wisdom teeth. Through my face mask, she was unable to read my lips. Wearing sterile gloves and surgical gown, I was not allowed to break sterility to write to her, and found myself despairing of how to ask her to open wider or to turn her head to the left. My inability to communicate with this young lady was the impetus for my learning American Sign Language.

Then there was the 32-year-old with Downs Syndrome who cried as I pulled out an infected tooth. When the tooth was out and we released the protective Velcro restraints, she placed my hand onto her face, and smiled as her teary eyes whispered, "Thank you."

Lesson learned: people communicate in different languages. If you dropped me off in China and asked me to open wide, I would not understand you. Restraining or shouting at me would not necessarily make me comply if I didn't understand what you were saying. I have learned that people with autism or babbling young children

may know exactly what they are thinking, feeling and saying, even when I don't "get it." It is from these patients that I have become patient myself, by taking the time to learn to communicate with them. In these encounters I am the challenged one, because it is I who don't understand what they clearly mean to communicate.

What I learned from my special-needs patients is a sensitivity and heightened awareness that I cannot experience in any other situation. There is no glossary or dictionary. It is a nonverbal and intuitive empathy that each patient continues to teach me. I have also learned that a gentle touch on the shoulder, direct compassionate eye contact, and a calm voice go a long way to reassure and relax those who do not speak my particular language.



Dr. Harvey Levy & Shuli Friedman

The constant excitement of problem-solving, discovery and often-success are what sustain me after 40 years of working with those who I consider my special-needs teachers and mentors.

To the deaf teen, the lady with Downs Syndrome, the infants, the geriatric and the autistic people I met in my office, and to all others who followed: I am grateful for the lessons you have taught me. I hope I have learned to serve you well. I hope I have been a good student. Your kindness, your tolerance, our explorations and successes together are much of what sustains me.

~ Harvey Levy, D.M.D., M.A.G.D.

Dr. Levy practices dentistry in Frederick, Maryland
www.drhlevyassoc.com