

# I carry you all with me

I carry with me my mom. She passed on her passion, her love of reading and gave me the gift of my little sister. I see Mom in my sister's eyes. Mom also passed on the abuse she suffered from her Jim Smith, her stepdad. I give her the gift of grace and carry on the message of peace and nonviolence in her memory.

I carry with me my dad. He's the only person who's been there my whole life and he's still with me today. He taught me to love movies as a child and even wrote a screenplay that's in the Library of Congress. Dad, you carry my whole life story in your heart. So, I give you the gift of a blank page and a co-writer for your next screenplay. Let's create together.



## A crooked path forward

By Dustin Dandliker

This series is a first-hand account of the struggles and successes of overcoming trauma, mental illness, addiction, homelessness and more.

I carry with me pastors and teachers. Ron Stump taught me heaven has challenges, like mountains to climb and rivers to swim, and that no human goes to hell. Ron Clark awoke in me the call to social justice balanced with social grace.

I carry with me "The Archangel, Kevin" and "Junie B. Jones." Kevin was my ethics professor. He taught me to constantly refine my behavior and character to be consistent with my ultimate goal. June was my academic advisor, my first counselor and the first person with whom I shared everything. I give them both the gift of a well-lived life; a life of reconciliation

with God, other people, the non-human world and, finally, with myself.

I carry with me poets and prophets. I carry with me Jeremiah, who stood on the walls of Jerusalem and mourned its fall; "a man of constant sorrow" whose hope lay in the restoration of his city. I, too, mourn my city and pray the epidemic of addiction in Portland will end soon. And Rumi, who wrote, "You suppose you are the trouble but you are the cure." Rumi, you are both poet and prophet. I give you the gift of my own



ILLUSTRATION BY KAT DAVIS

verse and prophecy:

*Every moment is a memory.  
Every memory is a lesson.*

I carry with me drunks, liars and thieves. In 1996, an anonymous thief gave me a way out of addiction. I was in jail at 17, facing robbery charges. That brother set me on the path to freedom.

And in 2012, I faced burglary charges. While in jail, I met a Jewish skinhead, a Russian anarchist and a Texas heroin addict. Chops was a S.H.A.R.P. (Skinhead Against Racial Prejudice). He taught me strength isn't in muscles alone but also in my mind

and in my writing. To Chops, I give the gift of shabbat shalom. S. taught me peace is an anarchist's best friend. From him, I carry the gift of order out of chaos. J., the Texas heroin addict, taught me sorrow inevitably gives way to joy if I'm willing to wait for it. To him, I give the gift of a second chance at recovery – and a third, fourth or even 77th chance. Whatever it takes.

I carry with me the staff and peers of my treatment center. First, my brothers in recovery. R., Dios te bendiga y gracias por su sabiduría. Z., thank you for reminding me that the pentagram often disguises itself as

a crucifix. S., who recycles everything for more than its original worth, you're a Dumpster-diving Einstein. Show us how to cancel the apocalypse. C., keep calm, carry on and never surrender to pessimism or addiction. J., sparkle on, Sparkly Bitch, and never apologize for who you are; you are beautiful. J., keep making bold moves on the chessboard and in your hustle (a legitimate hustle this time). J.2., speak up against oppression; even if you talk quietly, your voice will echo louder and louder over time. T., hug your kids the next chance you get and you'll make a little memory that makes a big impression. C., let go of the life you expect and take hold of the life God put in front of you. J., tear down the walls of your prison and use the pieces to build your heaven.

L., you took me in and locked my nightmare out. I carry your example of motherhood in recovery; the one I never got when I was a child. Thank you for passing on your grace and for nurturing tolerance in the next generation. B., I carry your fearlessness. I give you the gift of the can I propped on my doorknob to alert me to danger. D., you advocated evidence-based practice and never compromised with addiction. I., because of you, I carry an ever-opening mind and live one breath at a time. Dr. Judy, I carry with me many griefs and you let me lay them all down in your office.

D., I carry the dreams you gave me of a future in education and service in the Peace Corps. J.G., I carry my grand-sponsor's and my great-grand-sponsor's numbers, just in case. J., thanks for your overtime and double shifts. M., thanks for talking to my dad about the Catskills. He really needed a friend while I was away. I carry your relapse prevention techniques.

I carry you all with me: Mom and Dad, pastors and teachers, poets and prophets, drunks, liars, and thieves, staff and peers. Thank you. Because I carry you with me, I have strong shoulders and a full heart.

Carry me with you, too. Carry my love and reason. Carry my wisdom. Carry my quotes and poems. Carry every memory of me. And if I stumble, help me up and we'll all carry on together.

Now, those reading this who are willing to do so, please think of the ones you carry with you. Your life is what it is because of them.

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