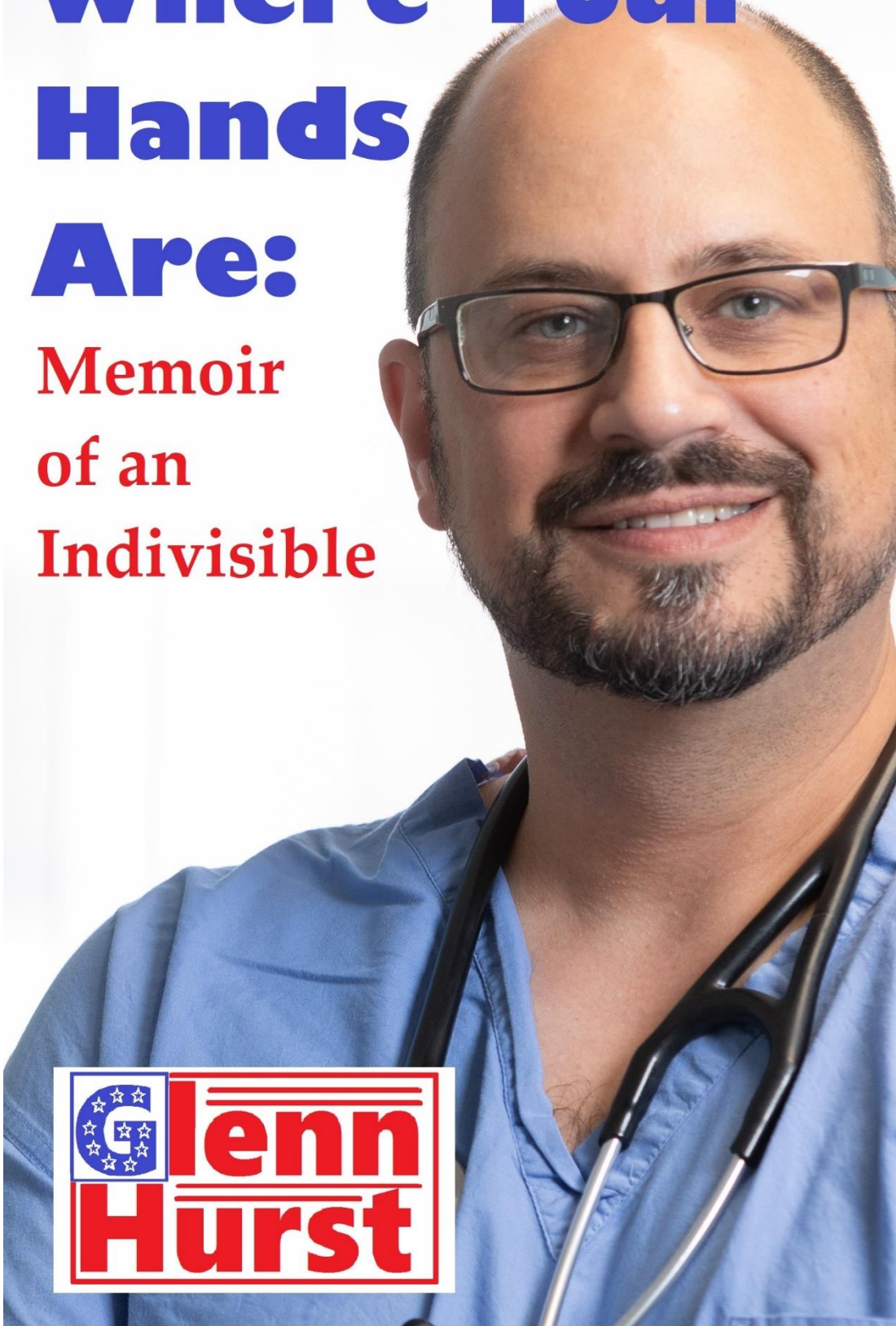


Where Your Hands Are:

Memoir
of an
Indivisible



Where Your Hand Are:

Memoir of an Indivisible

(Preview Chapter)

By

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“We don’t pray for justice, son. We pray for mercy.”

-Bonnie Hurst, my mother

Dedicated in memory of

Tim Liszewski

&

Paul Ing

PROLOGUE – THE RISE OF INDIVISIBLE

My wife and I rubbed restless sleep out of our eyes that Wednesday morning. It was the day after the 2016 general election. I knew we had some hard news to share with my 8-year-old daughter, Tierney. For her, election night had started out rough and, obviously, it got worse. Tierney is an activist of her own kind. She is bright, thoughtful, and tender-hearted. When she wanted to change the world, she opened a lemonade stand. The price at her stand was affordable, to get your drink you just had to compliment someone; say something nice about them. Then

your drink was complimentary. At her age, I do not think she appreciated her own pun, but it unintentionally demonstrated her sense of humor as well.

She has a fabulous video of the local police officer who stopped at her stand, then called his wife and serenaded her in front of the neighborhood. He had a nice baritone voice we could hear from the porch while he unashamedly serenaded her through his phone. He was perfectly matched for the spirit of Tierney's activism. This is a child who uses her gifts for the benefit of others. She is concerned with justice and equality for others and always before herself. She would not be rewarded well for this on election night.

That night, we had gone to a friend's house to watch the televised coverage of the polls. We were at the home of a couple we had grown close to over the previous year. He was one of the surgeons at the local hospital where I did my outpatient procedures. His wife was one of the organizers for a Jamaican medical mission on which we had served that previous May. They were by no means "stuck in the 60's" but they had a comfortable, down-to-earth style that had certainly been influenced by the era. Their genuine belief in the importance of doing good works permeated their attitudes and behavior. There was no air of pretense about them at all.

Tierney was the only child at the watch party, a high risk for boredom for most kids, but she had become very curious about the election process that year. What could have been perceived as a punishment for another child, was an interest of hers. She was a Hillary Clinton supporter after Bernie Sanders did not win the nomination. No party splitting for this girl. She was aware that Donald Trump was running for the same office. She was not shielded from the media coverage of his behaviors; especially the BuzzFeed recording of his sexual assault confession. This had led to a few uncomfortable conversations and explanations that no parent wants to have with their 8-year-old child. We have never been shy about answering her questions

honestly and appropriately, but this felt a bit like serving her hasenpfeffer while telling her that there is no Easter Bunny. We sadly ticked away another loss of innocence, this time at the hands of a would-be president.

With the knowledge of his behaviors, along with the stronger pre-election polls giving the lead to Hillary, she was confident she was backing the right candidate. We were as well. We sipped soda and mingled with the others at the event. Many had been Bernie supporters but had put their support behind Hillary after the convention. As we discussed the ludicrous idea that a sexual predator would even remain in the race, the exit polls started to trickle in.

We all know how the night went, but its effect on my daughter was hard to take. She was like most kids; she was excited to win. This seemed like a sure thing before the precincts started closing. Of course, Trump initially had a slight lead in conservative enclaves. We expected that.

“Why is he winning?” she asked.

“This happens.” we told her, “The Democratic precincts will start closing soon. Just be patient.”

He continued to hold onto that lead as more states began reporting. She became worried about what that meant and by 10:00 PM she was deeply concerned.

“Why is he still winning?” she grumped sourly as she slumped deeper into her chair.

Now it felt like we were trying to convince her the Easter Bunny would miraculously come back to life.

“The news likes to make it interesting to keep people watching.” we reassured her, “They will try to make it look close, but just watch, in the end, Hillary will take the lead.”

After all, the west coast carried so much weight and the polls were just closing in some of those places, right?

“Were Florida and Michigan still in play? What about Pennsylvania?” I asked myself as I unintentionally misled my daughter.

We were putting on brave faces, but I did not feel as reassured as I tried to put on. It was a school night. There was no late-start for the kids who were staying up late to watch the democratic process unfold, so we excused ourselves and took Tierney home to bed. I tucked her in, reassuring her we would likely be celebrating in the morning. It was my honest assessment of the situation, but I sold the likely win a bit more than I believed in it.

She slept unaware of the restlessness in the neighboring room where I watched results and commentary long into the cold night. It was far too early in the morning to know what the actual time was when I became convinced it was over. Michigan fell; Hillary had never overtaken Trump’s electoral college lead. Debates had already started about what would happen if an appointed elector did not cast their vote for the winner of their state. There was speculation that a member of the college might not vote for him as a matter of conscience or protest because Hillary Clinton had won the popular election by 3 million votes. It was a straw to hold onto, but for now, I had a child to awaken who would want to know the outcome.

The look on her face the next morning was one of betrayal. She looked at me with eyes that said, “YOU FED ME THE EASTER BUNNY?!”

It was a difficult look to endure. I later heard of other children who wept at the news. Losing is hard. Losing to this was unfathomable.

“Who could have voted for him?” I wondered, *“Where were the mothers? Were there really women who thought this self-professed molester should be President? Is anyone safe anymore?”*

It was this moment that would be the deafening wake-up call that motivated me to action. The Indivisible movement, as it formed in Nebraska and Iowa was not part of an organized political garden. It was a response to the failed and antiquated federal electoral system that produced the most appalling leadership in American history; a leadership so abhorrent that people fell into the street in protest. It was more like wild fruit that sprouted unexpectedly in a desert of progressive disorder.

The Indivisible Guide was like manna in that desert. It nourished and energized a new generation of activists. It offered the flavor of action with the aftertaste of success as it codified the recipes taken from the Tea Party's cookbook. Together the scattered tribes of the disenfranchised came to the table and fed on the tactics that worked. The guide refined them into a concise plan for productive oppositions with a seasoning for everyone's taste. But first, we had to find it.

Within a month of the election, I would be offered an introduction to the Indivisible Guide. I found it like so many others; it was circulated to me via email or Facebook from some other victim of the election. It was being passed out like a life preserver to sailors on a sinking ship. Everyone must have one no matter how well they swim.

The authors of the guide summarize its' origins and purpose best:

“The authors of this guide are former congressional staffers who witnessed the rise of the Tea Party. We saw these activists take on a popular president with a mandate for change and a supermajority in Congress. We saw them organize locally and convince their own members of Congress to reject President Obama's agenda. Their ideas were wrong, cruel, and tinged with racism - and they won.

“We believe that protecting our values and neighbors will require mounting a similar resistance to the Trump agenda -- but a resistance built on the values of inclusion, tolerance, and fairness.”

-Indivisible: A Practical Guide for Resisting the Trump Agenda

Those who were offered a guide went on to share it. Soon Facebook groups and pages using the name Indivisible were sprouting up around the country; each independent of the other. Some people associated themselves with multiple groups. In our communities, and I suspect across the nation, progressive groups and individuals that had not been working together soon found themselves comingled in Indivisible Groups.

In Iowa and Nebraska, it would start with the Women’s March of 2017. The march would provide the first visible measure of the substantial number of people who were ready to engage. 5,000 people were expected to march in downtown Omaha the day after the inauguration; 14,000 showed up. Similar results were reported in Des Moines, Kansas City, and St. Louis. The expectation of a few grumbling discontents was drowned by the echo of activated progressives being led by the Women’s March and carrying their Indivisible Guides in their smartphones.

I was not prepared for the overwhelming feeling of hope that came from the marches. I can be ambushed by my emotions which float close to the surface sometimes. For example, the first time my wife and I participated in the breast cancer walk, the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, I got surprisingly choked up. I was caught off guard by the supporters we encountered along the short walking route. We were encouraged along the path by local high school cheerleading squads stationed every 5 to 10 blocks. The squads were primarily teenagers and female. They cheered loudly for us walkers; much louder than necessary to keep a bunch of strolling families moving down the path. This should have made me chuckle because none of us

needed much motivation to just keep walking. None of us were at risk for overexerting ourselves. As a physician, I was 99.9% sure every one of us would make it to the finish line with no risk of shortness of breath or chest pain. So, it should have seemed comical as they cheered on our leisurely stroll.

My actual response to their cheers was a sensation like a knife turning in my abdomen. It was gut-wrenching. A lump formed in my throat and I became nauseated as I passed each group of cheerleaders. I know my face grimaced as I held back my emotions and if I had given in to it more completely, it would have been difficult to pull back. The overwhelming irony of these young women cheering for us as we were marching to fight an illness that would very likely affect many of them; it was too much to take. As I passed each group, I could only see the faces of future breast cancer patients waiting for their diagnosis and I feared their efforts to find a cure were in vain.

My experience has been that the American medical system is rarely interested in finding cures. It is disgusting how much more programmed it is to find prolonged treatments and management of disease with so little direction toward finding cures. Ongoing treatment is far more profitable than the eradication of a disease, and the American medical system is almost exclusively profit-driven above all else. These young women were just howling in the wind. Their innocence was heartbreaking, and our attendance was a ruse.

So, walking with my daughter and wife and 14,000 other people at the 2017 Women's March, with such passion against this President, was again an overwhelmingly emotional experience. This time I swelled with excitement and gratitude. The cheers from the crowd were a symphony of joy and power. The four-lane streets packed curb to curb as far as the eye could see

was overwhelming. It was a human ribbon pinned to the chest of our community, proudly proclaiming “Nevertheless, she persisted!”

There were magical experiences for the whole family that night. Tierney had made her own signs earlier in the day. It exclaimed:

“SPEAK UP. We are strong. I can do anything.”

As we mingled our way through the crowd waiting for the march to start, she encountered some of her teachers and their families clumped together, excited, and proud. Now was her turn for a life-changing experience. Every child has that moment where they realize their teacher has a life outside of the classroom. In this case, Tierney’s moment came as she witnessed teachers engaged in the community and addressing an issue of social justice, an issue that so personally affected her in the same way it affected her teachers.

Many of us would have moving experiences at the march. It would be the catalyst for so many actions in the early days of the Indivisible Movement. It was the tilling of the earth and we were the seeds scattered on the exposed fertile soil. We put our hope in the Indivisible Guide as an almanac to effective actions. It was the “Common Sense” of the new millennium.

Townhall meetings and public events, office visits, rallies, sit-ins, and coordinated calls were all identified as effective places to take defensive approaches against the Trump agenda and those who supported it. It was one thing to read about them, it would be a very different thing to put them into action. We would cut our progressive teeth taking actions that we had no personal proof would work. Here is where my skills as an activist would be honed. I would be challenged to expand my understanding of service, justice, faith, and liberty. New relationships would be forged, old ones would be laid to rest or hammered into unbreakable bonds. This was the period

that reshaped me from concerned-citizen to activist-leader. It was the passion and fire stoked in the Women's March that would launch us into the fray.

Over the next 2 years, I would assume an executive role in two of the most active branches of the early Indivisible movement; one in Nebraska, the other in Iowa. I would stand against hate in the most unlikely of communities. This would be the launching pad for the most successful, though losing, Democratic campaign for County Supervisor in Pottawattamie County in decades; my own. We would not chalk up victories in many of the individual skirmishes in which we engaged, but each one contributed to turning the public tide from overwhelming support for the Trump agenda to a Congressional wave of blue overtaking the US House of Representatives in 2018.

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