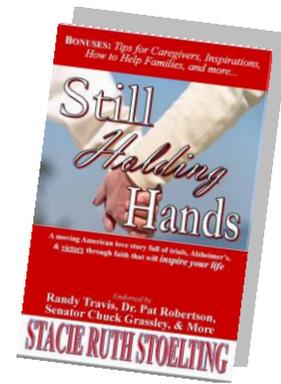


Excerpt from
Still Holding Hands
By Stacie Ruth Stoelting



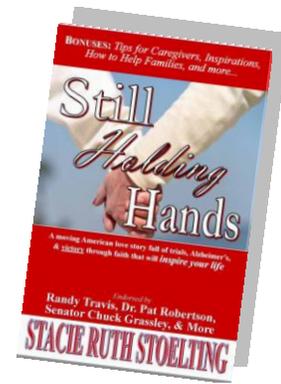
Ray sat down on the curb. His forehead was bloody, his hands were forming thin scabs encased with dried, chilled blood, and his body shook from the mid-December cold.

“Whoever put me out here was stupid!” Ray uttered and shivered. He folded his arms to get warmer. At times, a car would go by with an individual who was either too afraid or too uncaring to halt and help him.

At about this time, a familiar old brown car began circling about the sleepy town with a familiar person driving. Of course, it was Ruth.

Adrenaline pumped her heart and thumped it unmercifully. Her bloodshot eyes echoed the pain and fear from the depths of her heartbroken soul. Snow was falling at an increasing rate thus requiring her windshield wipers to begin squeaking into action. The streets were beginning to become slick with a coat of ice.

Excerpt from
Still Holding Hands
By Stacie Ruth Stoelting

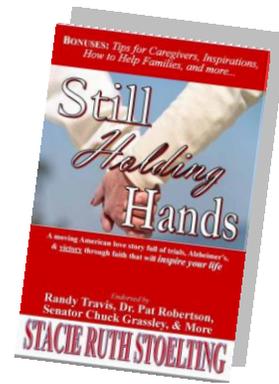


*Ruth had no coat on just like her insane father!
Insanity causes insanity, at times. Even the clothes she
had sleepily slipped on were not appropriate for the
cold weather!*

*A pink T-shirt, old black jeans, and clogs were not
destined for thirty degrees Fahrenheit! Thankfully, she
had not cleaned out her car; next to her laid a blanket
that she had snatched up at a garage sale. Slowing the
car to a mere five mph, she tediously wrapped the
blanket around her shoulders with one hand while the
other hand steered the brown, long, old, vehicle. Only
then, she continued on with her desperate search.*

*She scanned the streets and sidewalks making
every attempt to be deliberate and conscious of even
the minor details. If she saw a scrap of litter, it could
be Dad's handkerchief! If she saw a teenager
delivering the early morning paper, it could be Dad! A
tree stump could be Dad piled on the ground. Every
little questionable scene caused her car to slow down.*

Excerpt from
Still Holding Hands
By Stacie Ruth Stoelting



She came to a stop sign and bent her head (with brown, bed-messy hair) onto the steering wheel. She stopped and prayed an urgent prayer:

“Please, God, don’t let Daddy get hit.”

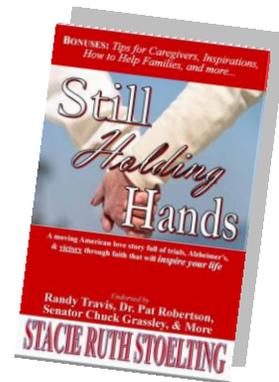
She decided to turn right. It was nearly three blocks away from home.

“How could a man, who barely gets up the stairs at night, manage to go this far by himself, no less!”
Ruth said to herself as she tensely gripped the steering wheel harder until her knuckles became white as bone.

In her frightened state, she whipped around another corner sliding slightly on the ice paved streets.

She abruptly stopped to a standstill. For there, adjacent to her right hand, sat a dismal figure whom she still called “Dad.”

Excerpt from
Still Holding Hands
By Stacie Ruth Stoelting



*Her search stopped. Even the snow stopped.
But, Ray's pain and bleeding did not stop.*

Ruth pulled over about five feet behind her dad. Wildly, she practically leaped out so that she, too, became a part of Ray's tragic scene and mental turmoil. Then she made herself calm down. Her fearful state would only cause him to become more afraid. She approached him calmly and steadily. Her blanket, still disorderly wrapped around her shoulders, blew like a brown flag in the wind.

Faced with an unbelievable situation, Ruth handled it well. She began with the perfect words whose strength fought the wind's.

"Hi, Dad. Let's go home."

"Yes, let's," Ray chattered as Ruth swung the blanket around his almost-hypothermic body. Ray was heavily leaning on her shoulder while tightly grasping her hand. Then, the daughter led her father to the car as they together fought both the disease and the cold wind.