

Ask Lefty
by Betty Rogers

By Way of Introduction

Right Hand: Thank you for being there for me

Left Hand: *Hard not to be!*

I'm a writer by trade. English major, later got into grad school solely on the strength of my passionate letter of interest. Did "environmental p.r." for years for a state agency, then started my own consulting business where I did more writing. Then I ran a nonprofit for seven years. I was the entire staff so that meant *lots* more writing.

That job ended – 'combusted' is probably a more appropriate term – in mid-2003. Before it did, I was pretty desperately searching for help. That's when I first wrote with my left hand. Actually, it's more correct to say that's when I first wrote *to* my left hand. And it wrote back.

Despite keeping copious journals, I barely noted this experience. I mentioned reading a self-help book and remember that the author listed some questions to ask. Here's what I wrote in September 2002:

Right Hand: what do you want?

Left Hand: *Want to be loved Want to be joyful.*

RH: What are you feeling?

LH: *Edgy*

RH: What do you need?

LH: *To feel less alone, to sleep*

That's it. I didn't try writing to my adult self again for four years, until I casually mentioned it to a counselor I was seeing. I'd also told her the story about writing to my body and my body's response. I'd written that dialogue with my right hand so I didn't see a connection, but Somebody or Something did because I wrote both on the same piece of paper. Here's what my body told me in May 2002:

Neck, why do you hurt?

holding head up is hard now – duck down to avoid enemies/threats

My neck was in spasms at the time. The minute I gave it a chance to tell me what was wrong, *it stopped hurting*. Really.

At the very top of this same piece of paper I'd written, *Why should I want them to like me, when I already know I don't like them?* This may give you some indication of my devolved emotional state at the time. Thankfully, I've come some distance since then. And my left hand has guided me through the process.

A year later I had quit the NPO and was in extreme physical pain again. I wrote the following with my right hand in August 2003:

Arm, why do you hurt?
feel very responsible for livelihood – tired

Neck, what are you trying to say?
want attention, still threatened

Well, I thought, that was interesting and God knew I was worried about how I was going to make ends meet. But I'd been reading more self-help books and felt I was doing better with the "leap and the net will appear" concept. Then I thought about My Left Foot.

I'd broken my foot badly a couple of years before. I'd been in a walking cast and gone through several sessions with physical therapists. It still hurt a lot. I couldn't see how it could be related to my arm and neck, but I decided to try writing to it:

Foot, what about you? Why can't (won't?) you get better?
fear of moving

Why afraid? What afraid of?
being poor

Why can't you trust?
because you can't

That one gave me chills. I remember saying 'Whoa,' and staring at what I'd written. Again the pain abated.

In 2004 I was reading about the Inner Child, and there was another left-hand writing exercise. Tried it; it worked. I knew I'd tapped her when she wrote my brother's nickname, which we hadn't called him in 40 years. She's a happy little kid: wrote about her snail collection (we lived in an apartment in Germany and couldn't have pets, but I was determined and named the biggest snail Florence after my Mom). My inner child, who's about five, also bragged that she could blow bubbles and ride a 2-wheeler.

As I grew older, it became harder to impress myself. I got a lot of mileage out of these stories when I shared them with friends, but it was the counselor who suggested that I had a rare talent. By 2006 I'd been coasting along on home equity loans and temp jobs and contracts for three years while I frantically submitted resumes. I was also making and selling intricate, completely wordless greeting cards. In 2005 I'd taken a job where I

slogged through 70 hour work weeks for nearly three months before being told I wasn't fitting in.

I was so whacked out that my book group gave me money and the names of possible counselors. I chose Lisa, who said she'd never had a client who was able to do this kind of writing in the 20 years she'd been counseling. She advised that I try more of the left hand writing. So I did.

This book is about what got me to this point and what's happened since. *Ask Lefty* is what a friend tells me to do when I'm upset or seeking guidance. I'd been a little worried about "Lefty" sounding flip. I'd taught a class and gotten some feedback that led me to ask:

Right Hand: Interesting that class thought calling you "it" sounded bi-polar! Is Lefty ok/respectful enough?

Left Hand: *fine to explain it as shortcut/nickname. humor never bad if it's truthful*

RH: Really, I can't think of another name. If I give you a real name it'll sound even crazier.

LH: *they weren't being critical: just observant*

I hope this book will encourage others to use this amazing gift that we all possess. I'm grateful that I can do this work, although I disagree with my counselor: it's not a rare talent. I think it just took me a long time to stop being driven by my left brain, to stop withdrawing into myself because life was just too disappointing. Even though this work may sound very introspective, in many ways it's a reaching out to a higher power, a collective universe.

So much more powerful than wallowing in self pity and anger. So much deeper than being flip and shrugging off pain. Always, always helpful. Never, never judgmental.

"But you're a writer," people tell me. "I'm not good at writing. I couldn't do this." I've watched salespeople, arborists, engineers, bureaucrats, software developers, teachers, accountants and actors do this work. Anyone who's willing or curious or desperate enough to honestly try it will be able to do it. The main thing is to get past your left brain's judgment about how weird it is.

When I was having trouble getting this book started I asked why and my left hand wrote: *are you afraid of the attention it'll bring?*

Well, I *am* a little afraid because I'm kind of reclusive. I'm no Emily Dickinson or Unabomber: I just don't mind being alone. But this work is bigger than I am. It would be wrong to keep it to myself. So I've been giving speeches and workshops and personal sessions about it.

My left hand has consistently encouraged me to write and told me about the importance of going public:

ok to tell story: pretty compelling & it helps reinforce path & reason you're on it... trust power of what you're doing right this minute. your way of connecting to world, ultimately.

My left hand has also pointed out that I can't make anyone else do anything:

Try to remember all you can change/be responsible for is you. doesn't mean sharing isn't powerful, helpful, worth doing. what/how others use info is up to them.

I know that's probably a "no duh" issue to most people, but I'm still working on the concept. Here's another little dialogue from not very long ago:

Right Hand: I can't figure out why I feel so responsible for the whole thing.

Left Hand: *can you figure out you're not?*