

The Tan Car

By Jon Feucht

Copyright © 2003 by Jon Feucht
All rights reserved. This book, or parts thereof, may not be reproduced
or publicly performed in any form without permission

Foreword

I was born in June of 1977 with Cerebral Palsy; however this book is not about my disability. It's about my life! I grew up around the marshlands of Wisconsin, which is something I will always treasure all of my life. This was written during my undergraduate years at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. It's about everything in life that I couldn't figure out through talking about them. My writing is much more than for entertainment, it's truly how I figure out life. I hope you can see my passion for my life and the natural world around me.

Dedication

I want to thank:

Alison Townsend- for making me see that I did fit into my English Minor.

My parents- for instilling a really strong work ethic and a heart of gold.

Everybody that I mentioned in this book.

*Lastly but surely not least, everybody in Waupun and Whitewater, Wisconsin.
This book and all my future books will be for you.*

Part I: Fingers of Life

I use a computer to do all of my written work, a wheelchair to get around, and a communication device to communicate. However, my best and most trusted tools are my two index fingers. They have always been right there at the center of every thought that I got across to people, every written word, and they are the stars of the journey that is called my life.

I can't remember the first word that they pointed to or which finger actually pointed to it (I think my left one because I am left handed). I don't know when they first started to realize they had a bigger job to do than pushing up glasses, giving the #1 sign, and pulling the triggers on preverbal guns. I know they are business partners with my mind because every time I have an idea they are always eager to get it out.

Ah, my fingers, long bony sticks on the end of my hands. There is nothing really special about them; they aren't too fat or too slender, they are just there. They look innocent enough, being fingers and all, but they have taken life of their own and they are taking my life on wild journey with a very bright future.

They have typed countless papers, e-mails and letters. When I get tired they say, "Come on you lazy bastard, we need to make you a life." I get back to work, realizing they are right.

My fingers typed many essays for scholarships but they just won one. I know they could have done better. They made up for themselves years later when they secured a professional internship at Temple University. It was to work at a program that taught disabled people how to communicate with communication devices. It was there that my fingers learned what the meaning of their life would be; they were meant to do this work as long as they lived.

Being in the inner city of Philadelphia, helping people learn how to communicate, being scared because you are in a very bad part of the city was truly rewarding experience. While we were there, my fingers and I saw ghettos, crime, parking lots with barb wire along the top of fences, and church-going people. Even though I was scared of my surroundings, my fingers worked brilliantly for the entire trip. They helped so many people learn how beautiful communication is, made people laugh constantly and fell in love with the joy that comes from doing something meaningful with life. To teach people

to say hello to somebody or to show them how to tell their parents they loved them is somebody amazing and brings tears to your eyes.

I think it's important to know the history of my fingers, to understand fully the journey that we are on. They kept a B average through middle and high school; they slid themselves across a smooth board pointing out words, making sentences, and got me through life by communication. They never really wanted a sophisticated communication device because they thought everything was going well. Why change? They couldn't see how frustrated people got because they didn't always want to read what they were pointing to; they also never knew how independent they could make me if they had a communication device. They did try communication devices when they were growing up, but none really worked for them. Once they got to college they got a wake up call. They realized they needed something when people out right told them that nobody wanted to read them all of our lives. They got to try to a communication device called the Liberator our second year here. I am not sure what they were feeling the first day but, we kind of knew that we were on to something big.

For a long time after I got my first communication device, I would go to bed and dream about I'm life before that time and how differently it would have been if I have had a Liberator while growing up. Every morning my fingers would wipe the sweat and tears from my face; reminding me that it was just a dream and everything was all right. This went on for months. I don't know about my fingers but I had a rough time accepting that I could have had this communication device long ago. My fingers helped me to communicate with my dad that I needed to do something. They saw that I needed to go back to my high school and just show off my communication. So we went back and just talked with some of my old teachers. I did not let on about my dreams or thoughts. Somehow, it brought closure to our past and my thoughts. The dreams subsided since then.

They are in love right now with the communication device; we always wonder how we got a long without it all the years before. They love dancing across the keyboard typing at will whatever my brain tells them.

About three years ago, after my fingers found out that they work the communication device really well, they discovered they could do anything in life. They were getting tired of the computer science major that we were in. Sometime in March of 1999 we made a collective decision to get out. One morning we got up and felt like we had nothing to get up for. That thought really troubled us because we had always loved

life. We went to our programming class. The professor was talking about binary trees. We knew right then that somehow we needed to walk out without looking back.

My fingers grabbed the joystick on my wheelchair and we slowly went out of the room. I am sure the professors must have thought that I was just going to the bathroom and then I would be back. However, that was not the case. I don't remember where I went from there, but I did have a calm feeling even though that my fingers made me leave something I lived a long time for. That day I eventually ended up at Disabled Students Services and, as always, my fingers told them what we just did and they were very supportive. They said they did see me more as a people person instead of working behind the computer.

My fingers and I switched my major to psychology and went into the summer just trying to find ourselves. We really thought about leaving Whitewater all together. We knew without question that we wanted to help people with speech disabilities, and we thought there was no way we could do that here.

We sat around thinking things over until July. We really got down on ourselves thinking about what we wanted to do. My fingers were busy looking up different schools that might work; my heart told me that somehow I wasn't going anywhere. July came, and with it came the single most important idea of my life. I with the help of my friend, my fingers and my mind created the concept of the Authentic Voices of America camp for children with communication devices. I know that my fingers knew that they were on to something enormous and they were back on track again.

For a couple of weeks after that my fingers worked hard, getting down ideas for the camp to get a basic idea of what it might look like. The Dean of the graduate school helped my fingers over the next year to plan this camp. We checked out other camps around the country that were similar to the one we wanted. We looked at what they did, how successful they are and how many campers they took.

One of the things that my fingers and I did in preparing for this camp was going to different programs like the one we wanted to start. As I mentioned before, we went to a program in Philadelphia. My fingers wanted to go just to get practice with working with disabled people. My fingers loved the experience that they received out there. I can admit now that somewhere between my brain and the tips of my fingers were a feeling about how effective I would be working with other people with speech disabilities. Once I was out there a couple of days, the people knew that I was very good at doing that type of work.