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# There's 'more than one way to do almost anything'

## Local educator who once lost use of her hands has message

By Susan Dunne  
Hartford Courant

Doe Hentschel spent her life in adult education, at SUNY, UConn, Goodwin University and Leadership Greater Hartford. Teaching is her life. But a memoir Hentschel recently self-published is about a period when she had a lot to learn herself.

"Look, Ma! No Hands!" tells the story of the time in 1986 when Hentschel's bike collided with a car. Hentschel smashed both of her elbows and lost the use of her hands for months.

At the time, Hentschel was preparing to move to Connecticut, to take the position as Dean of Extended and Continuing Education at UConn. Going through this transitional period with no hands taught Hentschel a lot of life lessons.

"I hope people take away an understanding that they are in charge of their own lives. That includes making choices of how to deal with what happens to you," Hentschel said. "You can make some choices that enable you to help live in a positive way regardless of what comes your way."

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## Hentschel

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Hentschel's book tells stories of logistical challenges she had while disabled. It also celebrates the friends who helped Hentschel through it. Each chapter ends with a lesson she learned by experiencing this disability. Those lessons can be applied to her situation, or to any situation.

One chapter ends with the lesson "Focus on the positive and celebrate your skills. There are lots of things that you cannot do, but that does not mean you are helpless."

Another ends, "There's always more than one way to do almost anything, and people like to do it their own way. If you want or need help, be grateful for however it gets done."

Hentschel published her book at Green Heart Living Press in Farmington. It went on sale in October, the month she turned 80. Hentschel is now narrating an audio book version.

She also is busy with Third Age Initiative, which she founded at Leadership Greater Hartford, and "Finding Purpose with Parkinsons," a Hartford Health Care support group she founded after she was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

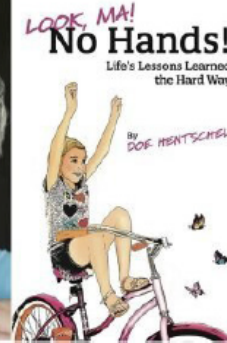
Hentschel, who lives in Hartford, talks about her her accident, what it taught her, her book and her philosophies on adult education. Responses have been edited for length.

### What happened on that day back in 1986?

I was starting a fitness program. There is some irony there. A friend of mine was a runner. I couldn't run,



Doe Hentschel wrote "Look, Ma! No Hands!," a memoir of a time in 1986 when Hentschel couldn't use her hands as a result of a bicycle accident. COURTESY



my legs were not strong enough. So I rode my daughter's bike beside him. He got way ahead of me. I thought I could catch up. I was going downhill fast. I ran into a moving automobile. I landed on the pavement.

### What happened afterwards?

For six months both my arms were in casts. For two years after that, my arms were in splints. I was told I could probably never use my left arm again. I had surgery but we discovered my left elbow healed in a dislocated position. We found this out five days before I was going to start my move. I postponed my start date at UConn to the middle of September. I ended up moving two days after surgery.

### What was it about this time that taught you lessons?

Well, I didn't have any hands. How do you live with no hands? What I tried to do was to make those lessons relevant to all of life. Even if nobody else who reads the book has to live with no hands, I hope the lessons

and attitudes will teach something about how to deal with things.

### Do you still think of that time as a time of learning?

No. I think of the time as a challenge I managed to overcome by learning. It wasn't focused on learning, but on problem solving. When things happen, you have a choice. You can run away and give up or figure it out. I am a figure-outer.

### Do hard times teach a person more than easier times?

Oh yeah. I think that's why we have hard times, why we get those cards dealt. You face challenges, you figure out, you learn what to do. It makes you resilient. Resilience comes with optimism because you believe you will be able to figure it out. You don't hide or run from challenges.

### Why did you write this book so many years after it happened?

I always told the stories. People said, you should write a book about the time you had no hands. I never

wrote anything until my Parkinsons diagnosis in 2009. I realized that that was the period of time that I had to figure out how to live life. The lessons I learned shaped the way I navigate this life.

### What do you hope people take away from this book?

I want them to think, it's like a jigsaw puzzle. When you're putting the pieces of life together, you don't know what the picture will look like. You find pieces along the way you didn't expect. When the jigsaw puzzle is almost done, I realize I love this life and it would not be this life if every one of those pieces weren't in it. The picture is coming together and I wouldn't want it to be any different.

### What is Third Age Initiative?

It's a model for engaging older people in the community. People who are retired, we invite them to look at what their skills are, their talents, experience, wisdom, passion. They work in groups to develop an initiative they are concerned about. Then they graduate. It is a springboard. We did an impact study and 75% of our graduates are engaged in the community more than four, five, six years later.

### Why is this important?

It is preventive medicine. It prevents the withdrawal and disconnect we see so often in older people. They will stay healthy if they are engaged. If they engage in purposeful work, not necessarily for pay, helping other people, that will contribute significantly to a sense of well-being.

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