

To hide it or not to hide it?

By [Becky Ramsey](#)

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I used to hide it. I'd put my hands in my pockets or behind my back and hope that nobody noticed. If I had to stand in front of the class and speak from note cards or read an essay, I'd bring a clipboard or ask if I could use a lectern for my papers, so that the kids on the front row wouldn't see my hands shaking and either try to comfort me—blabbing about how I just needed to imagine people in their underwear—or do side nods at each other to take a look at my hands, thinking I wouldn't notice. As if I didn't have eyes.

Mostly my tremor was just annoying. It didn't seem to matter if I was out-of-my-mind nervous or still-water calm, it'd pop up whenever it wanted to and still does. It's always there when I'm nervous, but it happens just as much when I'm quiet and even when I'm happy or excited about something, like last Sunday, when I was standing in the sanctuary in the middle of 19 fourth and fifth graders, getting ready to practice for our new acolyte dedication in worship. "WOW, Miss Becky," a child said, grabbing my hand. "Your hands are like butterflies! Shaky shaky shaky!"

The rest of the kids froze and looked at me big-eyed. Would this be embarrassing to me? Would I find her comment rude?

I laughed. "You're right!" I said, and held my hands out so everybody could see. "Watch!" I said, and they all oohed and ahed at the trembling. "Remember what I told you? It's how I'm wired. It's just part of being me. My hands have a mind of their own. They do it whether I'm nervous or not."

"Cool," someone said, turning upside down to examine my fingers from floor view.

"It's why I use a clipboard during worship," I said. "Or else the microphone would pick up every flutter of my bulletin."

The kids nodded and two or three started mentioning weird things their parents' bodies do, which I feared might lead us into dangerous territory (and besides, we really needed to practice,) so we went on.

I thought about our conversation afterwards. I wasn't always such an open book about my weaknesses and oddities. I'd always tried to hide my shaky hands until years ago when I started teaching chemistry to high school kids. Try pouring sulfuric acid into a test tube or lighting a Bunsen burner in front of 30 skeptical teenagers and see if you can hide shaky hands. It's best to put the truth out there, even when it's embarrassing. Then you're free! Then you don't have to spend all that energy hiding whatever it is. You can just be yourself.

But that's not the only great thing. While you're feeling free and being yourself, with your fingers shaking like tambourines for the whole world to see, other people sometimes decide to show you their oddities, too! And then you can be odd together! And nobody cares!

So we had our acolyte dedication and it was a beautiful Sunday, complete with lunch with our teachers and a Godly Play workshop, and finally I drove home to do my introvert thing—to crawl back into bed at 2 in the afternoon with my crossword puzzle and a cup of coffee. But before I could get in the house, a tree called my name.

I looked at this beautiful tree in my front yard, with its oddity: its hollow, just like the tree in *To Kill A Mockingbird*, the hollow that shows up in my dreams sometimes where I've hidden things in it, like gum and balls of twine and gold and jewels. And it occurred to me that this tree hollow has something to say about whether to hide or not to hide, about oddities and embarrassing scars.

Do you know how that hollow got there? An injury happened while it was just minding its business. Maybe it lost a branch in a storm or was struck by lightning or something else. And then to add insult to injury, a woodpecker or a fungus attacked it, hollowing it out. So what did the tree do? It just kept on living, letting a callus form around the opening, making a circular welcome mat for birds or squirrels or whomever might come to visit. Maybe X the Owl or a black cat with a white nose named Jack, looking for a better view of his domain.

I wonder if that's not what we do when we stop hiding our scars or embarrassments and let our fingers tremble at the world. When we stop hiding and let a callus build up a little, when we get brave and start sharing, we invite others to join us on our welcome mat, crawl into our hollow, and make themselves at home. We give them a place to be odd together, where no one cares and everyone can just be themselves.

Sure sounds good to me.

Originally posted at [Ramsey's blog](#)