

Intimate and Declarative

By Carole Gauntlett

I'm on my way to cross off items from my everlasting list and watching the Windsor Gardens scene of walkers. Some are attached to dogs who are either pulling or straggling. Others are walking with healthful purpose. Still others move with a mighty effort, following doctor's orders. And then my favorites: a retired couple strolling hand in hand, one talking and the other smiling, the calm and peace that people wish for on birthday candles and shooting stars.

As I see it, holding hands is an intimate pose. In public, it's a declaration to the world that there is more to this relationship than friendship. If you take her arm as you cross the street, you're taking care that she won't fall. If instead you take her hand in yours, you want her never to fall.

Take a look back at hand holding in your life. Your first high school crush, when all you worried about was that your hands would sweat. But you reached out anyway because you were ready for that public commitment and private intimacy.

Later, with just the right person, announcing nonverbally to the crowd that this hand belongs to my chosen one and I hold it dear.

Small, warm children's hands are held to keep them safe and close, reassuring them that they are loved and have nothing to fear.

Nothing is better for draining away deep anxiety than the intimate flesh of another's hand, be it that of a loving friend or relative, a beloved hospice nurse or even a stranger who reads your fear with compassion and reaches out.

And then there are these couples I spot every now and then, clasping hands to reaffirm that for this day at least we are still together and intimately bound one to the other.