

Friday, August 29, 2003 – 12:51 a.m.

It doesn't matter much where we go in this world; if the company we keep doesn't feed our spirit, we may as well be sleepwalking. I was reminded of this again sitting here in the living room of Brian's friend Joseph's house, in Silver Springs, Maryland.

I had come up to meet Brian, who lives in the Ozarks in Missouri. I met him in the HIV positive room in Gay.com shortly after finding out I was positive. We had an intellectual connection online, and were able to talk about things on an esoteric level, but we never really had any in-depth conversations on the phone. I told my friend Tracy before I left her house this afternoon on my way here that if my intuition was right (which it usually is), I didn't see this going any further than meeting as friends (although I knew he wanted more). Still, I figured no matter what the reason was for my coming here, I knew that I said yes for a reason.

This all made me re-experience the memory of when I met a guy named Robert, from New Jersey, who was the very first gay person I had ever met in person (that I knew of). When I was in college, I began having a greater curiosity about my sexuality, and used the one source for exploring it I knew: the Internet. I have always been attracted to computers, even at an early age, so I was always in the computer lab at school for one reason or another. Late in the evenings when there weren't so many people around, I would log into this chat room online. I was totally naïve to the "labels" in the gay community, and had no idea what a "bear" was. I probably at the time figured it was a sports team from that area, because God knows I'm ignorant to the world of sports. Regardless, I started talking to Robert, who said he was 36, 6'2," "Football player's build," with salt & pepper black hair. I didn't ever see a picture of him, and didn't have one to send him at the time, either. We eventually took our conversation offline and talked on the phone. Since I was very much trusted by the professors, they didn't mind if I used the empty offices when it was after hours. Looking back, I should have understood my power of intuition by listening to someone's voice. I instinctively know what the outcome is going to be by hearing someone's voice... especially the initial attraction. It's almost as powerful as looking someone in the eyes. I am able to see far greater things by their eyes than even their voices. Had I understood my intuition back then, I would've realized what it was trying to tell me; but I didn't.

After Robert and I talked on the phone for a few hours, he asked if I would be interested in coming to meet him in Philadelphia. He said he'd pay for me to fly there, and we'd stay in a luxurious hotel in downtown Philly. The adventurer in me jumped at the idea. The risk-taking Sagittarius personality of mine wanted to experience something new, to take the chance. Something happened during that conversation and we lost connection on the phone. I was at school and didn't have his number at the time, so I waited for him to call me back in the office. I should have taken that as another sign that my intuition was trying to tell me something. I just dismissed it and figured he'd eventually call, email me, or find me online again. A week later, I was chatting in the same chat room and he said hello to me. I asked him what had happened, and told him I was disappointed that he didn't call me back. He gave me some lame excuse, and I accepted it, because I was still

interested in having someone fly me to Philadelphia. Since I lived in West Virginia at the time, I knew there was nowhere near that I could fly out of, but it just so happened that the Accounting Club in college was planning a trip to the Federal Reserve that Friday. Since I was going to be in Richmond on Friday, we figured I could stay the night in Richmond by the airport, then fly up on Saturday and spend the day in Philadelphia. He called US Air and made the reservations for my round-trip ticket from Richmond to Philadelphia.

After I had said goodbye to my classmates and Mrs. Kennedy (my Accounting professor), I left the Federal Reserve and headed towards the airport. I checked into a motel by the airport and called Robert later that evening on his toll-free number. I remember feeling as though I was acting my part on the phone with him, and telling him what he wanted to hear, instead of what I was truly feeling and thinking. There was just something about his voice that made my stomach nauseous, but I tried to intellectualize my emotions and intuition, hoping they weren't right. I figured I had to at least take the chance. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained" was my motto in life at the time. I wanted to explore this part of my sexuality, and here was an opportunity staring me right in the face. Other than the risk of going to a city I had never been and meeting a total "stranger," there wasn't much risk involved. He was going to pay for the flight there, buy anything I needed, and there was the great chance that maybe I would fall in love with this person. Even though I didn't think there was going to be any physical attraction (from what I heard in his voice), I never let him know that I thought so. Before we hung up the phone, we had phone sex (my ultimate acting), and I distinctly remember telling him, "I might not be able to keep my hands off you when I get in the car at the airport." That just seemed to intensify his desire for me even more.

My flight was supposed to leave around 9:30 a.m. the next day, so I went to bed pretty early. When I woke up, I was on top of the world. I was so excited to be flying in an airplane for the first time, going to a new city, and meeting someone new. When I got to the airport, I went to the US Air desk and told them my name. The lady at the counter told me that she had my reservation, but that the flight had not been paid for. I just figured that something had happened, and knew Robert was "rich," so I put the cost of the flight on my credit card, knowing he would reimburse me for the flight when I got there.

Once I got on the plane, my excitement grew. I told the flight attendant that it was my first time flying, and she was exceptionally nice to me. Right before the plane took off, she came back to my seat and asked, "Are you ready?" with a big smile on her face. When the plane took off, it was like a roller coaster ride as it jerks your body a bit from the force of the gravity. I remember looking out the window during the flight, in awe of the scenery below. It was a very brief flight, only 30 minutes, but certainly the most exciting part about the trip so far.

I stepped off the plane a little bit after 10. I knew that Philadelphia was a big city, but I hadn't anticipated the size of the airport. I had told Robert the night before what I had planned on wearing, and he told me what he'd most likely be wearing, too. I was

supposed to meet him outside where the cabs pick up passengers. It was a cold March morning, and very windy in the city of Brotherly love. I stood outside looking at all the people, wondering which one could be him. Robert was supposed to pick me up at 10:15, which was when my flight was scheduled to land. As 10:30 a.m. approached, I started to wonder if he was coming. Out of the corner of my left eye, I saw a man about 50 yards away walking towards me. I looked, then turned my head, because I wasn't sure it was Robert. At least I hoped it wasn't. The man walking in my direction was nothing like he had described himself to be. He was obviously overweight, and if he truly was 36, they had been a hard 36 years. He kept walking closer and I remember saying to myself, "Please, God, don't let that be him. Please don't let that be him." He eventually walked up to where I was standing and said, "Terry?" I said, "You must be Robert." We shook hands and he walked me to his car parked on the curb. It was an impressive car, something like a Town Car, but was certainly not that impressive to me, especially once I stepped inside. It looked as though he had thrown every soda can, candy wrapper, and piece of paper in the floorboard of his car. That was a major turn off to me, but not nearly as much as his physical appearance. It had to be apparent to him that I was nervous, and I was trying to send every signal I could that I was not interested, when he reached over and put his hand on my inner thigh. I thought, "Why had I opened my big mouth and said I might not be able to keep my hands off him?" When he touched my thigh, it sent a cringe through my body. He said to me, "If you're not interested, I can just take you back to the airport. You can stay there until your flight leaves tomorrow." My flight didn't leave until 2:30 p.m. the next day! I couldn't spend the night in the Philadelphia airport. This city was HUGE to me, coming from a rural farm community in West Virginia. Immediately after he said it, I instinctively said, "No. I'm just nervous." He kept rubbing my thigh, then grabbed my hand and put it on his inner thigh, wanting me to rub his crotch. Out of fear of not knowing where I would go, I played along.

He was supposed to have made reservations at one of the nicer hotels in the city, but as we were driving away from the airport, he told me that his secretary had forgotten, and he didn't have a chance to do it himself. He said we could drive around and see if we could get a room. We stopped at a few different hotels downtown, but he said there was some conference in town and they were all booked up. I stayed in the car while he went into the hotels, so I assumed he was telling the truth. I didn't really care where we stayed anyway. We eventually went back to the Embassy Suites near the airport. He paid \$180 cash for our room. As soon as we got in the room, he starts undressing, and encouraging me to do the same. I felt so dirty and ashamed, to even take my clothes off in front of someone who I was not the least bit attracted to physically, knowing he wanted to have sex with me.

The events that transpired just seemed to make things even worse. He had told me that he had a "football player's" build, so I assimilated that with my brother, Marty, who played football. This guy could've been a linebacker for the Chicago Bears. And speaking of "bears," I got a harsh lesson that day of what a "bear" is in the gay community. While the definitions vary by person, Robert was someone who had little

regard for his health or body appearance, and hair everywhere. I know there are people who are attracted to that, but I am certainly not one of them.

It was all I could do to keep an erection while we were playing around. There was absolutely nothing about this guy that I found attractive, but found myself still going through the actions out of curiosity to see what it was all about. I wasn't able to kiss him on the lips, because to me, kissing is the highest act of intimacy between two people. His body left much to be desired, especially his genitals. To be diplomatic, if there had been a truffle's pig around, he would have lost his penis to the pig. Distinguishing it from a small mushroom was hard for even me.

After he had his orgasm and I had mine, I told him that I was really tired from the flight and wanted to take a nap (even though I was wound up tighter than a bail of hay). I just didn't want to spend time with this guy who was nothing he said he was and everything I'd hoped he wasn't. He eventually fell asleep beside me, and began to snore heavily. I rolled as far away from him in the bed as I could, and fell asleep a little bit later.

We woke up around 2 p.m. and he wanted to go out and see the city. I told him I wasn't feeling well, and didn't feel like going out shopping. He had told me he would take me shopping and buy me a new wardrobe. Apparently he had been able to throw his money around to get what he wanted, but his money meant nothing to me when it came down to my principles and integrity. There was no way I could fake having a good time with this person in public, when my natural instinct was to get as far away from him as I could, and as fast as I could. I tried to rationalize to myself that I only had to make it through one night, and that it wouldn't be that bad.

An hour or so later, he tried again to get me to go out and tour the city, but I told him I couldn't. He got stir crazy and said he was going to go out to some of the porn shops in the area. After he had been gone about 15 minutes, I got up and locked both of the hotel door locks and turned the radio up full blast and was dancing around in my room. Even though I wasn't having fun with him, it was hard for me to contain all of the excitement I was feeling from being in a new city, even though I wasn't impressed by what I had seen.

I decided to watch some TV, and lie down for a nap. There wasn't much else I could do, or that I wanted to do. Robert came back around 7:30 that evening, and woke me up, telling me some story about the FBI having been in the room while I was sleeping. He said that when he checked into the hotel, it alerted them because someone he knew in Florida had filed a missing person's report for him. I couldn't imagine how I would've slept through all of that, but didn't question him. I wasn't sure why he would've made up such a story, but I was every bit skeptical that he was telling the truth.

I had gotten out of the bed we had sex in and into the other bed in the room, because I had no intention of sleeping in the same bed with him that night. He must have assumed that, because he asked me why I had switched beds. I simply told him that I didn't want to sleep in the mess we had made. I tried every subtle way of sending him the message that I wasn't interested, but he obviously wasn't receiving it. He kept flirting with me,

making sexual advances, which only made me feel dirty inside. I tried to avoid having to reject him, hoping he'd just take the hints. He finally came right out and directly asked me if I wanted to have sex with him again. I told him, "No, I'm sorry. I can't have sex with you again." He asked me why. I told him, "I just can't." Again he pressured me for the reason and I said, "It's because you're ugly." Apparently no one had ever told him that before, either because they had different tastes from me, or they lowered their expectations in favor of his money. I couldn't. Not again. I wouldn't be able to respect myself if I did. But more importantly, I couldn't keep lying to him, leading him to believe that I was even remotely interested in him, because I wasn't.

My honesty and lack of tact, at 19, caused a lot of tension in the energy between us that night. We went to bed fairly early, sleeping in separate beds. I always sleep with music on. If I can't sleep with music on, I just don't sleep well, if at all. I don't know if he was being spiteful, or if he really couldn't sleep with music on, but that's what he told me. I didn't get hardly any sleep that night, not only because I wasn't listening to music, but also because he snored like a dozen lumberjacks.

The next morning when we woke up, I decided to go out into the Atrium to get breakfast. He told me to bring him a bagel back. I ended up getting some bacon, pancakes, sausage, and eggs. I figured I could eat my breakfast while he was getting ready in the shower, and still be back in time to give him his bagel. When I got back to the room, he was gone, along with his things, leaving a note on my bag that said, "Here's \$20 to get you back to the airport." I was floored that he didn't even bother to say goodbye to me. Then I started becoming afraid of what I was going to do. I had never caught a taxi before in a big city.

I packed up the last few things I had, and took a shower, getting ready to try to make it back to the airport. I didn't even know how far I was from the airport, or how to get there. Luckily, as I was walking to the lobby of the hotel, I saw a sign that said "Shuttle Service to Airport." I knew that's what I needed, so I waited for the next time they were leaving, and rode it to the airport. I was replaying the entire weekend over in my head, trying to understand the things that had happened, and trying to keep myself from being too disappointed that things hadn't turned out the way I had hoped they would.

As I boarded the plane to go back home, I realized that I had the same flight crew that I had going up there. I was pleased to see the familiar faces, especially since I had connected with two of the flight attendants. They asked me how my trip had been, and I told them that it was ok, but nothing spectacular and I was glad to be going home.

I drove home to West Virginia from the Richmond airport and arrived around 5 p.m. Not long after I had walked in the door, the phone rang. It was Robert. He said he wanted to call and make sure I had made it home all right. I told him that I had, and asked him why he had left without saying goodbye? He asked me, "Do you blame me after the way you treated me last night?" I said, "I guess not." However blunt I was, I thought he would have appreciated my honesty instead of acting like a little child who had their feelings hurt by the truth.

That was the last time I talked to Robert. I have thought about him many times, and usually when I'm telling this story to someone who is interested in knowing more about my life. As many times as I've told it, I don't think any of the details have been as vivid as they are tonight. In many ways, before I even came on this trip to D.C., I felt the same mixed feelings of risk and adventure and nauseating "knowing" that I did when I took the trip to Philadelphia six-and-a-half years ago.

As I was driving to Maryland this evening, I kept trying to intuit what Brian's personality would be like, and whether we would be compatible. He is a Sagittarius, and my Rising Sign (Personality) is also Sagittarius. However, while we both probably express a certain amount of flamboyance in our personalities, he is quite the effeminate homosexual. Since we hadn't talked on the phone for any length of time, I wasn't able to get an accurate assessment of his mannerisms. Even though my intuition had told me what was, I kept hoping for the possibility that it wasn't.

The directions Brian gave me were very vague, and I ended up taking the "scenic route" through rush-hour DC traffic, arriving at 7 p.m. Brian's friend, Joseph, who has lived in DC a long time, talked me through the directions until I made it to his house. As soon as I walked into the door and got a glimpse of Brian, it became obvious to me that what I had intuited was true. I just kept telling myself that I could still enjoy exploring the city, even though I wouldn't necessarily enjoy the company as much.

Joseph drove Brian and me to the Metro subway station and dropped us off. Brian had wanted to check out the monuments in the area, and walk down to Dupont Circle, which is a very heavily gay-populated area of the city. I didn't realize that we were going to be walking so much or I would have changed my shoes from my sandals to sneakers. I was more embarrassed to be seen with someone as blatantly flamboyant as his personality is. I was certainly not judging him as a person, because I think Brian is a total sweetheart. I just couldn't think of a polite and tactful way of letting him know that there was no sexual attraction on my part.

I have learned that I get very quiet and withdrawn when there is something very major weighing on my mind that I'm not telling someone. It's as though the security level of my thoughts and words was on full alert, making sure to pretend to be having fun, when the only thing I could think about was how much fun I'd be having if my best friend Mike was here with me instead. I kept wishing he would call me. Just talking to him would have been a saving grace, to at least have a familiar connection with someone I know and trust. He called me on my way up to D.C., to let me know how things were going. His grandmother passed away, and his family was planning to leave for Georgia Friday morning for the services. I just kept thinking about him and the times we spend together, and how much fun we have. I tried not to think about the things I don't like about my relationship with Mike, or the things I do not have with him. I had enough negative energy to deal with in not being able to be fully honest with Brian. I just focused on how Mike makes me feel, and doing that made me smile.