

Saturday, October 18, 2003 – 1:47 a.m.

I'm quite ashamed that I haven't taken the time to write in my journal in over a month now. I honestly have not had the heart to put down on paper all that was going on in my mind, heart, and life. Even though I know that writing would make me feel better, I've somehow always come up with one excuse or another to do something else in the time that I could have been devoting to writing. Since I haven't really written down anything that's gone on since my birthday, the most logical thing to do would be to start there and try to fill in the blanks.

I was very happy with how my birthday turned out. It wasn't a grand celebration by any means, but I had the people who mean the most to me there, celebrating my life. I had been sick two days before my birthday, and was just starting to feel a little better on my birthday, so I didn't have a lot of energy to expend at the party. It was a pretty laid-back party at Jackie's. Thrown together at the last minute (like everything in my life) by me, my best friend Alison, and Jackie. I had told everyone to arrive at 8 p.m., because that's what time Jackie said Joseph and Carrie would be leaving. Jackie didn't want there to be drinking and partying around the kids. I got to Jackie's around 7:00 to help get things ready. Then we realized that we didn't have any food or drinks. When Mike got to the party a little bit later, we went to the Food Lion to get the groceries we needed. Alison arrived not long after Mike and I got back, and began setting things up. Alison is always good at last-minute coordinating. That's one of her Scorpio gifts.

Before Alison got to Jackie's, I opened the present that Mike got me. He got me Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers. He knows how much I love Lord of the Rings, and it was the perfect gift in my opinion. His card, however, made me have a stark realization. It was a good card, but he had signed it "Your friend, Mike." I knew that we were nothing more than friends, and I had pretty much given up hope that we would be anything more than friends. But seeing those words on paper made it a reality in my mind and emotions in a very brief moment. Being the natural actor that I am, I completely masked any emotions of than complete appreciation for the sentiment of the card and the gift. The hundred other little voices and thoughts in the back of my head were quite different, though. I don't know if that is what set my mood for the rest of the evening, but it was certainly running through my mind quite frequently throughout the entire evening. Overall, the party went well, I thought.

The next day when I woke up, I had no energy again. I had to go to my boss' wedding at 7 p.m. and was having trouble getting myself motivated to get going. I tried pumping myself up with music, but that wasn't working. I tried positive thinking, but that wasn't really getting me going, either. I just didn't want to do anything. I didn't have the energy to get out of my chair. I knew I had to go, though. I had already ordered an Astrology compatibility report for Cathy and Mark, and had written some words of wisdom about love that I wanted to share with them. I wasn't able to get myself going in time to make the ceremony, but did make the reception. Once I got there, I was able to get around ok, but still didn't have much energy. It was as though I was "acting" my way through the entire evening. I left the reception around midnight and went home.

When I woke up Sunday, I had absolutely no energy to do anything other than stay in my room and watch TV and chat online. Though I had no energy, I was doing everything I could to resolve letting go of my feelings for Mike. Around 5 p.m. Sunday, the following Poem “Letting Go” came to me.

Letting Go

*I've come so far these last six months
The man that you once knew,
Has grown and changed and learned a lot
And gained some courage, too.*

*My greatest fears, I've faced them down
They haven't been so bad,
I've done my best to never frown
And try not to be sad.*

*I always try to find the good
In all things, come what may,
No matter if I think I should
Or what someone might say.*

*I've searched my soul to find a way
To forget how I feel,
I know that there will come a day
But only time can heal.*

*So now I'm faced with one more fear,
The fear of letting go
Of what I hoped to one day hear,
And what I'll always know.*

*I grant myself permission now
To move on with my life,
And let go of the hurt somehow
That's caused me so much strife.*

It was official. The poem was complete. I had expressed my emotions through words, and was determined that I would let go of what wasn't, and accept what was. Even though I thought I had worked through the emotions, there was apparently a lot more beneath the surface that I was not examining. I had felt horrible for most of the previous week, missing work 3 days because I had no energy to get dressed. I had no idea just how bad I was going to feel, until I woke up Monday morning. I went to bed around 4 a.m., and woke up at 8:45, nauseous and feeling like I was going to throw up. I lay in bed, trying to convince myself that it was just my imagination, but the nausea kept

intensifying. It wasn't long before I started having the warm feeling under my tongue, and knew I better get to the bathroom quickly or I'd have a mess to clean up. I had to be at work at 11:45 a.m., and had to call in sick, losing a double shift's worth of money, which only weighed heavier on my guilt. I didn't feel depressed. I just felt dead. I ached. I felt nauseous. My body chilled so bad my teeth chattered. I tried everything I could think of to make myself feel better. In retrospect, I know that it was my spirit ailing because I wasn't giving it what it needed, or acknowledge what it was telling me.

The next four days were complete misery, dealing with the physical symptoms of not having any energy, and feeling worse than any flu I had ever had. I was also dealing with the emotional feelings of guilt (both to my employers and to my creditors) for having to miss work. I was already behind in my bills from missing so much work in June when I found out I was HIV+. Because I had missed a whole week's work, Sonny said that he was only going to schedule me a couple shifts at the end of the week, but that if I felt better, I could pick up shifts. I remember telling my boss Cathy when she called Thursday to find out what was going on how guilty I felt for not feeling well enough to work. She said, "don't feel guilty. That will just make you sicker." And I guess it was, but I couldn't help but feel guilty. I was doing everything and I wasn't feeling better.

Thursday night, I was online chatting in the HIV+ room, and met Gregg from Denver. At first, I wasn't sure what to think of him. He responses were very short. Yes. No. Maybe. Those are usually clues to me that the person is either busy or not interested in talking with me, so I asked which it was. No better way to find out than asking directly. He told me that he had a bad day at work. Instantly, I replied, "Wanna tell me about it? Maybe I can help." I always try to live by the philosophy that the best way to solve your problem is to help somebody else solve his. We chatted for a couple hours Thursday night, and he told me how he had just found out he was HIV+ in February of 2003, and how his mother (whom he was very close to) had died in August of the year before. He said he didn't really have any close friends that he could talk to, and none of his friends or coworkers knew he was gay. I did what I could that night to try to lift his spirits, and help him see a different perspective. I even gave him my phone number and told him if he ever needed someone to talk to, he could call me, anytime.

I was supposed to work Friday evening, but I still didn't feel well. I conjured up enough energy to get dressed and actually go into work, but then as I was walking through the lobby of the building, Sonny, the server manager, said that they had already covered my shift. I told him that I couldn't let myself stay home, and even though I still felt like shit, I had to at least try. He said that he couldn't imagine what I must be going through. As I fought back the tears in my eyes, I told him, "It hasn't been easy." Since they had already covered my shift, I took it as a sign that I needed to go home and rest. I went into the restaurant just to see everyone, because I hadn't been to work in since the Wednesday before, when I first got sick and went to the doctor's. I thought I had a sinus infection. At least that's why I was on the antibiotics. It was very hard to put on a smile when I saw my coworkers and managers. I gave Cathy the doctor's notes, and they said they were trying to cover my shift for tomorrow. I told them I hated to lose another shift, but I

didn't figure I was going to feel well enough to work on Saturday, even though I hoped I would. At this point, I honestly didn't care about work. I just wanted to feel better.

I woke up Saturday to my phone ringing at 10:15 a.m. Erika was calling to see if I was "coming to work." I told her that Joann had said they were trying to cover my shift. I just assumed they would. She said she "didn't care about that." She "just needed to know if I was coming to work today or not." I told her that I didn't feel better, so I guess I'm not. She said "fine," then hung up. I was disheartened that she didn't have more compassion for what I was going through, but just disregarded it and went back to sleep. A couple minutes later, Cathy called from her cell phone, wanting to know if I could make it to work today, that they were short on people, and had already covered 6 of my shifts in the last week and a half. I told her that I would try. It was everything I could do to make it through the shift. It is not easy masking a happy face for my guests when I feel the way that I did that day. I had to carry my trays with both hands, when it's normally an ease with one. But I made it through the shift, and when I got home around 6 p.m., I logged online and Gregg said hello. We had a really good conversation, and around 10 p.m., he asked me to call him. We clicked immediately on the phone, finding similarities about our personalities, and talking about everything from political issues like Abortion and War to relationships and dating. Our conversation was so intense that it lasted 10 ½ hours. When my cell phone battery went dead, he called me on my landline phone, until its battery went dead, only to call me back on my cell phone which had charged. After we finally gave up for the night, we made plans to talk later Sunday evening. We talked on the phone Sunday night for 6 hours, not once having any awkward moments of silence. We had even talked about meeting in person. Gregg wanted me out there instantly, but only because he thought he could fix a problem he isn't ready to fix.

When I woke up Monday morning, I began to feel better. Even though I wasn't completely back to normal, I was at least feeling better than I had been feeling. I wasn't scheduled to work, so I just took the day to relax and recuperate. We were forecast to have a hurricane hit our area on Thursday, but I wasn't really worried about it. I knew it was going to come our way when they first showed the hurricane on the news. I had even told my friend Evan, who is a meteorologist at one of the local TV stations, in August that I thought we were going to have a hurricane in September.

On Tuesday, I was talking to Pat online, telling her about Gregg, and how much we had hit it off, and how I wanted to go fly to see him as soon as I could come up with the money to get there. To my surprise, Pat offered to give me the money to go. I couldn't wait to tell Gregg when she offered. I was so flattered that my best friend Pat would offer to give me that kind of money, and especially since it was just to meet some cute guy in Denver. I thought, "How can I rationalize spending \$200 on a trip to go see this guy when I needed that \$200 to pay my mortgage and other responsibilities?" Also, it's very out of character for me to accept that kind of money from a friend, for whatever reason.

As soon as I told Gregg that I had the money to fly out there, his “right now” attitude changed to a “uh oh” attitude. His first response when I told him was literally “uh oh.” He realized that by my coming out there, he would have to face he is an HIV+ gay male. His personality immediately changed tones, both on the phone and online. His walls of protection were now pushing me away. I could feel it, and even told him he was starting to push me away. He denied it, of course.

On Thursday, September 18, I woke up around 8:30 a.m. from nightmares about the weather. I was apparently tapping into all of the fear from the approaching hurricane. When I awoke, my neck was tense, but I was energized. Even though I had only had a few hours of sleep, I was wide-awake. Storms always fascinate and invigorate me. I watched the storm for most of the day through my bedroom window while I chatted online. I even went down to the oceanfront during the peak of the storm with Nancy’s camcorder to record the waves and all of the damage. There were a lot of downed power lines and poles. Trees were toppled over in people’s yards, and branches were down in the road everywhere. I wasn’t the least bit afraid when I was down at the oceanfront. Compared to dealing with the fear of being HIV+, a hurricane doesn’t pack much of an emotional punch. Amazingly, we were one of 5% of the Hampton Roads area that never lost power during the storm. I told everyone that it was no doubt all the positive energy that we were flowing. I never even had any damage to my house. Not even one lost shingle or yard ornament blown away. I never lost my cable or Internet connection, either. I consider myself very fortunate, but also know that I played a part in creating my reality during the storm.

That night when I talked to Gregg on the phone, I realized that he was draining my energy. I hadn’t given up on him, though. He no longer seemed to have any interest in meeting me, even though he refuted the fact that he didn’t. Our conversations on the phone seemed to become more strained by the day. Where we once couldn’t run out of things to talk about, we were going in circles talking about the same redundant, superficial things: Mostly how lonely he was, and all the other problems of his world. It was hard for me to accept that Gregg suffers from the “poor me” syndrome, and refuses to believe that he is the creator of his world and experiences. I knew that I couldn’t continue the relationship at that close of a level, though, because his negative energy would soon sink my ship of hope. I love to help people. There is nothing that gives me greater pleasure than knowing my wisdom and advice can help someone to change their outlook on life, and Gregg certainly needed a change of perspective. The only thing I cannot stand is someone, who complains about a problem, and is given a solution they know will fix it, only to completely abandon implementing the solution to fix the problem, continuing in their state of misery. When I try to help these people, I begin to feel like I am beating my head against a brick wall, and there is only so much of that I can stand before I stop.

I became extremely frustrated that nothing I was doing was helping Gregg to change his perspective, so I thought that maybe if I wrote a poem, it would inspire him and help. A forced poem is never as easy to write as an inspired poem. It’s sometimes hard to tap

into the energy flow that is needed to write a poem, but nonetheless, I was able to write the following poem, “By Your Side.”

By Your Side

*When I met you one week ago,
I felt so dead inside—
My spirit had sustained a blow,
My ego had no pride.*

*I had forgotten who I was,
But you made my heart glow—
And forget all my many flaws,
“You had me at hello.”*

*It didn’t take me long to see
How special that you are—
The many things that you can be,
Though inside you are scarred.*

*It breaks my heart to feel your pain
And know I can’t save you—
Just know that there will come a day
When you won’t feel so blue.*

*Until then, by your side I’ll be,
Patiently here I’ll wait—
Hoping you soon will also see
That you create your fate.*

I sent the poem to Gregg as soon as I was done writing it at 7 a.m. on Friday, September 19. I wondered all evening what he would think of the poem. What would his reaction be? I got home early on Friday because there was an imposed citywide curfew at 9 p.m. When I got home from work Friday night and logged online, he never mentioned the poem. I couldn’t believe that he never said thank you. I thought, “He must not have read his mail yet. Surely he would say thank you.” We talked on the phone before we went to bed Saturday morning, and after a while of talking to him on the phone, I asked if he got the poem. He said, “yeah, I got it.” That was all he said. I was crushed! I had poured my emotions out in a poem in hopes that it would at least make him feel better, and here he didn’t even say thank you for my effort. Like usual, I never said anything and pretended that everything was completely fine. Inside, though, I had completely shut off any hopes that my relationship with Gregg would ever be more than a friendship. He obviously did not want to change. He was happy being miserable, and I certainly don’t need anyone like that in my life. I wasn’t going to completely rule out a possibility of a friendship, but I knew that he could never hold the title of my “boyfriend.” Being the optimistic soul that I am, knowing that I was once again being disappointed in my pursuit

for love, I tried to find the things that had happened that I was grateful for. I knew that Gregg coming into my life was for a reason, and that there is good in everything that happens. It's just my job to find the good in it. I knew that the poem that I had written was good, so I decided to submit it to Poetry.com for their \$1,000 contest that I had seen a banner ad for a few weeks earlier. I had already submitted "Angel Without Wings," and I figured two poems gave me twice as many odds of winning the much-needed \$1,000. On Sunday, the 28th, I received the following email from their website.

Dear Terry,

Imagine your poem featured on an entire page to itself . . . Over the past several months, we have been reviewing the thousands of poems submitted to us, as well as examining the poetic accomplishments of people whose poetry has appeared on the Internet and in various editions released by other poetry publishers in America and Europe. After an exhaustive examination of this poetic artistry, The International Library of Poetry wishes to feature an entire page devoted exclusively to the poetry of Terry Holliday in a collection of new poems written by the Best Poets we have encountered. Congratulations on your accomplishment, Terry. Your poetry will be featured along with a distinguished group of just 200 of the Best Poets that were selected to participate in this special project.

And that's not all. To honor the accomplishments of this elite group of talented individuals, we have established a separate contest with over \$3,500.00 in prizes to be awarded among you. You will automatically be entered into the final competition, but you must submit a new unpublished poem on the enclosed entry form. Prizes will be announced by December 31, with an anticipated publication date of January 2004.

The Best Poems and Poets of 2003 will be among the finest quality books we have ever produced. Every aspect of publication and design will convey the quality craftsmanship and attention to detail that will go into the production of this special edition. This coffee-table quality book will be printed in two colors on fine-milled paper and will feature a highly detailed, full-colored cover, and quality typography throughout. And best of all this special edition will feature an entire page devoted exclusively to a new, unpublished poem by Terry Holliday!

*Before going any further, Terry, let me make one thing clear . . . you were selected for publication on the basis of your unique talent. **The new poem which you will submit for this edition** has been accepted for publication because your previously published poetry sparks the imagination and presents the reader with a fresh, unique perspective on life.*

We believe you to be one of the most interesting poets we have encountered, so we wish to feature your artistry in this special edition and make this special prize money available to you and the others who have been chosen for publication. You should be aware that you are under no obligation whatsoever to submit any entry fee or subsidy payment, or to make any purchase of any kind. Of course, many people do wish to own a copy of the publication in which their artistry appears. If you would like to order a copy, please see

the enclosed material for special discount information. As I mentioned above, your poetry will automatically be accepted into this special edition, and as soon as you submit your new, unpublished poem, it will be typeset for publication and entered into the final competition of the contest. You will also receive a typeset "Artist's Proof" of your poem for your review prior to publication. And let me assure you, your poem remains your property -- The Best Poems and Poets of 2003 is copyrighted as a compilation. This means that you retain all rights to your own work of art.

Terry, Please Enter Your Poem Right Away!

In order to make our scheduled publication date, you must submit your new poem as soon as possible. Your poem must be original, it must be 24 lines or less, and it must be written by you as one of our Best Poets of 2003. (Since you have been specially selected for the quality of your poetry, if you use a pen name you must certify that the poem you submit was written by Terry Holliday.) And, if you wish to order a copy of The Best Poems and Poets of 2003 at our special pre-publication price, please also complete the enclosed order form (you are under no obligation to order anything).

*Terry, you also have the opportunity to include some personal information about yourself and your poetry in this elegant edition. In this way, readers can gain a greater awareness about your motivations, the meaning poetry has in your life, the story behind your poem, or your personal or philosophical point of view. Your biography will be printed on a page by itself, directly across from your poem--**you will thus have two full pages in the book devoted exclusively to you and your artistry.** And although we must charge a nominal fee for this service, you are under no obligation to include this information. Your poem can be published without it if you wish. Please see the Artist's Profile for further information.*

Again, congratulations. The Best Poems and Poets of 2003 promises to be the most exclusive collection of poetry we have ever published. We feel you have a special talent and we believe your poem will add to the importance and appeal of this edition. Your contribution to this project is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

*Howard Ely
Managing Editor*

P.S. Terry, you should be genuinely proud of your accomplishment. You have been selected to participate in The Best Poems and Poets of 2003 because of your unique vision. It is our pleasure to publish fine poetry such as yours in this historic volume. And, if you decide to order a copy, we are so certain that you will love the quality of the edition and the way your poetry is presented, we can proudly offer an unconditional iron-

clad guarantee. If for any reason you are dissatisfied, your money will be promptly refunded.

I knew this was the same thing that my mom had been selected for a year earlier, and was so excited and flattered that these authorities on poetry were complimenting my work by wanting to include it in their book. I couldn't wait to tell everyone that I knew. I wanted to try to flow as much positive energy to winning the \$1,000 and being recognized for my work, so I knew I'd have to get as many people as I could to be excited for me. I didn't know what poem I was going to submit for the book. I knew that whatever poem I chose, I wanted it to convey who I am as a person. I wanted the message in the poem to powerfully convey my personality, integrity. I thought about the poem I had written for my mom's birthday, but something about it didn't feel right. Though I was proud of the poem I had written for my mom, it didn't seem like it was the one I should submit.

I wasn't worried about it. I knew that it would come to me. I wasn't going to force it. I had been working on a poem in my head for a couple weeks anyway. I just kept getting bits and pieces of the message. I knew that the message was "don't give up." Then on October 2 around 3 a.m., it just began to flow.

Don't Give Up

*On days when my spirits do sag,
I try to find the things
Within my life that make me laugh
And help my spirit sing.*

*Some days that's harder than others
But still it is my task,
If what I want is my druthers
I only have to ask.*

*We are not brought into this life
To share burdens alone,
We are the ones who cause our strife
Just so that we can groan.*

*Our happiness is ours to choose
But that's not done with ease,
What fun it is to sing the blues
But who does that then please?*

*We have to learn to find a way
To make our spirits fly,
So that our hearts are never swayed
Like eagles flying high.*

*We must not give up on ourselves
Find strength in little things,
And help others to love themselves:
The wind beneath their wings.*

Every time I write a poem, I send it to my best friend Pat, to get her response. I always use her as a sounding board for my writing.

Hey Pat,

I knew it would come to me when it was time. Now that it's written, I know it was partially inspired by my cousin Carolyn. Her birthday would be tomorrow, October 3rd. The last line in the poem is what makes me think so. At her funeral, the song that her sister Jackie wanted to play was "Wind Beneath My Wings" by Bette Midler. I kept telling Nancy that Carolyn was trying to talk to me. She had been on my mind a lot the last couple of weeks. I draw on her strength a lot and talk to her when I'm having bad days. Even though she's not here, I know she still hears me. Anyway, I just wanted to send you the poem. This is the one I'm going to submit for the book. If I am to leave one legacy in life, it's to love life, and don't ever give up. I can't think of a more fitting poem to go in a book that someone may read 100 years from now.

I hope you're having a good day. You're in my thoughts.

I love ya,

Terry

I submitted the poem to the International Library of Poetry with the following Biography to be included opposite my poem in the book:

Of all the poems I've written, this one is the first to express my incredible love for life. We all have our crosses to bear, and I certainly have my share of challenges; but if we look closely, we can see the great perfection in the world as it exists. My wish is that this poem may inspire in you the great joy for life that I try to live and share with others. Of all the things I've ever learned, the greatest of them is to love. May you find peace in your heart.

Monday, October 27, 2003 – 2:00 a.m.

I don't know that my poem and words of wisdom will ever truly touch someone with as much power of emotion as it was written, and I don't guess that really matters. In the end, if it touches one person's soul in the slightest way, it was a success. I have noticed that over the last few months, and certainly since Friday the 13th, I have begun feeling a

greater calling to serve humanity in a larger way than I previously have been. It's not that I am feeling stagnate (though some days I wonder), it's just that now that my health is less uncertain than before, I don't want to rest on my laurels. I am by no means giving up hope that this disease won't kill me, but the part of me that has always been fascinated by death, has now had to deal with the fact that we all die. I've never really been afraid of dying. I suppose on some level I intuitively know what happens after we die, and know that the Ultimate reality is far greater an experience than I could ever have here on Earth. Even when I tried to kill myself back in 1998, during that entire process, not once did I fear death. In fact, I loved death more than I loved the life that I was living. The only difference now was the fact that I had attracted yet another one of my greatest fears of my life, HIV. I have faced more great fears in the last year than I ever have in my entire life that I can remember. Looking back over the past 12 months, I have to congratulate myself for handling the experiences I had with the integrity and courage that I displayed. Naturally, being a critical Virgo, I can always see ways that things could have been better; but then my optimistic Sagittarius personality quickly reminds me that everything happened exactly the way it was supposed to in order to teach me the lessons I needed to learn. Only once we face our fears can we then live unafraid. While I have not lived every fear I've ever had, I must admit: the fears I had were much more frightening in my mind than in reality.

The last month has been my most creatively fertile period that I can remember. I have written 9 poems since my birthday last month. Considering I have only written 21 poems over the course of a year and a half, I'd say that's pretty significant. I know that a lot of it has to do with the International Library of Poetry wanting to publish my poem. It gave me confidence that I actually do have a talent, even though people had told me before. Now that someone of authority told me, I could believe it. And even still, with each new poem that I write, the doubts of excellence are always there. I will proudly show the poem to my closest friends first to get their reaction, and if they like it enough, then I'll share it with other people as well. It's not that I don't love the poem myself or think that it is awesome in my eyes. I know that it is. I created it. I'm just never really sure how magnificent of a creation it is or might one day be.

On October 3, I wrote the following poem, "Stairway to Heaven."

Stairway To Heaven

*We all are on a stairway,
An endless, uphill climb—
All searching for a diff'rent way,
All in our precious time.*

*Our stairways lead to Heaven,
Wherever that may be—
It should not matter where or when,
That's half the fantasy.*

*From time to time we wonder,
About what to do next—
How we can get from here to there,
Leaves us feeling perplexed.*

*Often do storm clouds rumble,
But we must not forget—
We haven't ever made mistakes,
We should have no regrets.*

*Each choice in life that we make,
Is taking one more step—
Creating better worlds to live,
Until that word called "death."*

*But what if there's no Heaven
Atop this long staircase?
We need not worry until then,
We only need our faith.*

Whenever I write a poem, I always know that the message of the poem is more for me than anyone else who will ever read the poem. If nothing else, on days when I'm doubting who I am, I can always look back on the poem and know that I had the courage and inspiration to carry on before, and I will again. I never try to sit in my misery for too long of a period, because feeling good feels so much better. It's just so easy to get caught up in our worries so often that we start to feel good about feeling bad, and forget what it feels like to feel good about who we are.

On Tuesday, October 14, I was having a bad day. I wasn't feeling sad, but I had no energy or motivation to do anything other than sit in my chair and watch TV and listen to music. It was my day off, so I didn't really have to do anything, but I hated that I didn't have the energy if I wanted to. Finally, around 5:30 p.m., I was getting ready to take a shower and trying to flow good energy to get myself pumped up, rubbing my body and telling myself that everything was great, and that "I can create the things I want." I just kept riding the wave of positive thoughts and feelings as I showered, and when I got out, I sat down and wrote "Conscious Creation."

Conscious Creation

*The things I want I can create,
It is within my pow'r--
All I must do is concentrate,
Be in the here and now.*

*I know that I can find a way,
To stop the fears that come--*

*Just think of all I did today,
Not what is left undone.*

*I also must change how I feel,
To find the worth inside--
I know my talents are for real,
Though most I like to hide.*

*So what I need is confidence,
Belief in who I am--
And know that I am Heaven sent,
One of God's precious lambs.*

*So it is our God-given right,
To create all that's ours--
We must stop putting up a fight,
Doubting our divine pow'r.*

As I was emailing Conscious Creation to Pat for her review early Wednesday morning, I replied to the email she had sent me the day before with the subject line: "will you help me some day?" When I read it the first time, I thought "that would make a good line in a poem." I never thought about it until I saw it again, and then the rest came to me in a matter of minutes when I wrote "The Difference," which she obviously inspired.

The Difference

*Will you help me some day,
Will you be my best friend—
The one who cares when no one else,
Is there to lend a hand?*

*I will help you someday,
I'm flattered that you ask—
You've been a friend through thick and thin,
And through my toughest tasks.*

*I'll help you how I can,
However that may be—
Just listening to what you've planned,
And all that you can see.*

*I've always known you would
Spread your wings and fly high—
Above the town where you grew up,
Never questioning why.*

*The time has come it seems
For you to leave the nest—
You've found comfort in most your life,
Preparing for this test.*

*You will make a profound
Difference on this earth—
Just once you open up your eyes
To all that you are worth.*

I got the following reply from Pat:

Terry:

They're beautiful, and I'm crying! You really have a talent. I'm so glad we found each other.

Love you,

Pat

A week before, on October 7, 2003, I logged into the Durham/Chapel Hill chat room to see if I could meet any friends since I knew I was going to be down there for work in November. I always hope to meet great people online, but given my experience, I sometimes end up settling for average people. It's always nice when someone comes into your life and you instinctively know that you will never forget that person no matter where you go or how long you live. My conversation with Giosue (pronounced Jesueh) started off like most conversations online, talking about very superficial things. Unlike most of my conversations online, ours had depth. We talked about a lot of things that you don't usually share in a first conversation. I found out in the conversation that Giosue's birthday is May 10th. He's a Taurus just like Mike. In the course of our conversation, I could see many similarities to the way they think and their basic personalities.

We were both obviously very attracted to each other on levels we don't understand. Our emotional bond was almost instant, and the more we talked, the more we liked each other. I compared and contrasted my intense feelings for Giosue and Gregg in that -- while I was immensely attracted to both of their characters – and while the immediate attraction was that to help them in their situations, Giosue actually wanted help. The major difference between the two was that Giosue is HIV-negative, and he didn't know that I was HIV-positive. I felt so selfish for keeping it from him even though I knew I would eventually have to tell him. I hated to let go of that feeling of admiration, especially after I asked Giosue what he thought he had attracted me in his life to show him and he said, "I think it's to show me that good guys do exist." I felt such guilt for not telling him at that point. I had never anticipated that we would get as close as fast as we did. Everything that Giosue is was everything I had ever dreamt of and hoped to one day find in a man. If ever I had an ideal man, he would be it: from being an Italian hottie to his occupation as a teacher. I knew that it was going to break my heart when I had to tell him. Even though I know people who are HIV-negative date HIV-positive people,

I'm not sure that I am comfortable enough putting someone at that risk, even if he was willing to take it. Still, I wasn't sure where my relationship with Giosue was going. During the second week of our conversations, which became increasingly longer each time, our tone turned sexual with questions of likes, fantasies, etc. It was killing me not telling him such an important part of who I am when we were discussing such personal things, but yet I justified that I would tell him in person, if we ever got to that point. I rationalized that if it mattered to him, surely he would have asked such an important question. But even though I rationalized, I had a tremendous guilt for not being completely open with him, especially considering how close we were becoming. I knew that it wasn't completely fair to him meeting without knowing, but I knew that our relationship could only go so far anyway.

We decided to meet on Sunday, October 19, 2003, at his place in Chapel Hill, NC. We had a vague idea of what we would do. We knew we were going to go to the South Point Mall in Durham, and maybe watch a movie. He wanted me to pick him up at 1 p.m. which meant I would have to get up at 8 a.m. and leave by 9 a.m. That might not sound early to most people, but to me, and on a SUNDAY! To my surprise, I woke up a couple minutes before my alarm went off, wide-awake and raring to go. Like every trip I take, though, I didn't get on the road when I anticipated. As I was getting in my car, I spilled my drink on me and had to go back in and change my clothes. I always laugh when something like that happens, jokingly saying that it's "God's way of telling me I shouldn't be on the road at that moment." Then my sarcastic side says, "Or you could just be a clutz." Either way, I can never seem to get on the road when I plan to.

The drive to Durham was nice. I could not have asked for a more gorgeous Autumn day to travel. The sun was shining and I didn't see a cloud in the sky for miles. The crisp air sent an invigorating energy through my body that always makes me reminisce of the falls of my past. I had lots of great thoughts on my drive down, even starting to write a poem for how Giosue made me feel. I knew that no matter what happened on our date, or how well it went, he was my "ideal man." My only plan was to have as much fun as I could, and just go with the flow.

After taking the scenic route in Durham and Chapel Hill trying to navigate to Giosue's house, I finally got there around 2 p.m. to him smiling standing in the driveway. Our meeting merely felt like a formality, as we immediately clicked into place, not once having an awkward moment. We drove to the mall and walked around, talking and looking at all the people. I felt so alive and childlike in my admiration for everything around me, and especially for Giosue. There aren't too many people who are exactly as they seem online or on the phone. Many people are very good at creating a façade that does not resemble their true being. I can usually see through most, but there have been some that have escaped me in the past. Giosue, on the other hand, is exactly what he appeared to be, and more. We spent the entire day together on Sunday. We went to Barnes & Noble and walked around looking at books for a while, then went to Maggiano's for dinner. I was not too impressed with the food, but I was there for the company. I was very impressed with the outdoor mall in Durham. As Giosue and I walked around, it felt as though we were on the streets of a city. We decided to go watch

Texas Chainsaw Massacre together. It was a toss up between that and Diane Lane's "chick-flick" Under the Tuscan Sun. I guess Giosue didn't want to be reminded of Italy, because I certainly wouldn't have minded watching a romantic movie with him. After all, the entire day felt so romantic, even though it remained on a platonic level physically. I never really get scared at horror films, although I will get into the intensity and occasionally yell at the screen "Run, you idiot! Run!" I was surprised that even in the most "scary" moments, Giosue remained completely calm and unaffected. Not even a flinch! Personally I don't understand how anyone can go to a horror film if they aren't going to let themselves be affected by it. Isn't that the point? They let us experience the character's fear so we can feel safe ourselves. Regardless, it certainly made me notice the difference in our emotional make-up. I figured it had to be that his Moon is in Taurus and mine is in Gemini. From what I understand of it, that makes his emotions much less turbulent and fluctuating than my own.

After we left the movie, we went back to Barnes & Noble for coffee and to look at more books. A bookstore is the only place that I can ever experience as much fun over and over again, because no matter how many times I go there, there will always be more and new books to look at each time. Giosue and I share that love for knowledge. The bookstore closed at 9 p.m., so we decided to go to Chapel Hill. We walked around where Giosue typically hangs out a lot, talking about any- and everything. Our day finally ended at midnight, as I hugged him goodbye and left for my 4-hour drive back to Virginia Beach. I wasn't tired at first. I was buzzing big time from all of the energy that Giosue and I had created. Buzzing so much that everything I thought of about him came to me in rhythm and rhyme. Luckily I had taken a pad of paper with me on a clipboard, and was trying to write down all of the thoughts that were coming to me. I was completely reliving the day over and over again in my mind. As exciting as it was, it was beginning to take a toll on my body. I got home around 4 a.m. and was completely exhausted.

Hey Sweet Friend!

I hope you had a good trip back! It was so nice to be with a sympathetic, sincere, understanding friend! And you have also all this new agey philosophy about life that makes sure that you never run out of things to say or to disagree with. You apply your thoughts systematically. It really looks like you walk your talk, and that is wonderful. If all the people who read self help books actually acted upon them, we would all have a much more positive, optimistic outlook on life. And you do! I do not agree with all the thing you believe in (palmistry, tarots, astrology have more to do with hocus pocus than fact to me), but I do believe in the power of positive thought. I believe that believing in ourselves and being optimistic does bring good to our lives.

But, in the end, it is not even this thing that we share that makes your company so pleasurable. It is your tact, your ability to listen without interrupting (I am still working on that), your laid back behavior, your genuine interest in people.

Sweet Terry, the scars you have on your wrists are a proof that your spirit is strong and won't leave until it is ready to do so. It is great that you look at them and think "I survived!". I am so happy you did, and, I am sure, so are your friend and all the people that you have touched and you will touch in your life.

Because of that "fall" you have started a wonderful journey of discovery and I hope that your spirit will always stay strong. I know you have a lot to give. I was feeling good, and nourished, as I stepped into my room. My roomie even said "You look great! Look at your face!". I guess he could see the peace and comfort that I had felt.

I hope you sleep well. It is ok to recharge your batteries for longer than 4 hours, you know? Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Giosue

Since I didn't get to sleep until 5 a.m. on Monday morning, I slept until I had to go to work that afternoon. The entire evening, I had the thoughts and feelings of the poem I had started writing on my mind. I could not concentrate at all on what I was doing at work, and hated that I had to be at work when I wanted to be home finishing the poem. When I got home, I logged online and started talking to Giosue. Since he had addressed his email as "Hey Sweet Friend" I knew that he obviously only had intentions of being a friend, yet I had to express my feelings that I had for him, even if just in a poem. I had already told him that a poem had started coming to me on the way down to Chapel Hill, so I had to finish it. I always equate the creative process of poetry to giving birth. Once the water breaks and the idea and words begin to flow, I have to keep pushing until the feelings are expressed. Monday night when I got home, I started working on this poem, that I titled "My Perfect, Ideal Date."

My Perfect, Ideal Date

*You are ev'rything that I want
And know I cannot have—
How can this feel right in my heart
But in my mind be bad?*

*I've dreamt of you a thousand times
The man I'd want to date—
The visions I had were so clear,
Surely, this must be fate.*

*I am falling head over heels
Your smile makes me sublime—
Your company I love to keep,
There isn't enough time.*

When I'm with you I want to be

*The best man I can be—
And always choose my high ideals,
Like trust and honesty.*

*You want to know if I can see
Just what the future holds—
I see so many diff'rent things
Though some things can't be told.*

*But rest assured that come what may
Whatever we create—
When I met you, a dream came true:
My perfect, ideal date.*

As soon as I finished the poem, I sent it to Giosue, and he said it was intense. He was very flattered by the poem, and thanked me for sharing it with him, but I knew that now that I had given it to him, I had to tell him I was HIV-positive. I could not let myself get any closer to him emotionally without him knowing something that was as character defining as this. I wasn't sure what his reaction would be, but seeing how Texas Chainsaw Massacre didn't make him flinch, I figured he should handle it ok.

I told Giosue how I had always feared that I would become HIV-positive in my pursuit for my ideal man, only to meet him AFTER and him be HIV-negative. My life has always had an ironic twist to it, and it still proves to be true. But just like my fear of becoming HIV-positive, my fear of meeting my ideal man and him being HIV-negative wasn't as bad as I had feared. Giosue said, "I can understand why you do not say that right away, Terry. I don't think you should feel guilty if you do not engage in some sort of sexual contact with the other person. The other person only needs to know if you are going to be intimate." I was so relieved to hear him say that. I told him that I felt guilty because I should not feel ashamed of the fact that I am HIV-positive. He told me not to feel guilty about telling anyone. That it's my personal business. I told him, "I know. I would not tell a perfect stranger my business, but I felt guilty for not telling you." He asked, "Because we shared so much?" I said, "Yes, and because of how much I like you." I couldn't believe how vulnerable I felt at that moment. When I began to cry, seeing how compassionate he was being, Giosue told me that he wished he could be here to give me a hug. I wasn't crying tears of pain. I was crying at relief that I had just experienced one of my greatest fears, yet here I sat, completely ok. Giosue started comforting me, telling me that it was ok, and it made me laugh at how this person I had spent 2 weeks trying to uplift was now trying to lift my spirits. I quickly picked myself up and stopped crying, focusing on what I did have instead of what I didn't. But still, I was faced with dealing with the fact that Giosue's and my relationship would only go so far. It could only be so much to me, and I would have to accept whatever it did become. Whatever it does become, I know that I will never forget him, and hope that he will always be a friend in my life.