

Sunday, August 24, 2003 – 5:41 a.m.

A week has passed since I last sat here writing in my journal about the many emotions that I was experiencing. I had hit a rock-bottom point in my life and felt as though things weren't getting better, but still hoping they would. A lot has happened in that week, and things have gotten better, but it hasn't been an easy week by any means.

Monday started out well. Where I had been sleeping until I absolutely had to get up in order to get to work, I woke up feeling rejuvenated and raring to go. I had an excellent night at work, and met some very interesting guests from the UK. I could tell they were very evolved spirits and open-minded. I connected with them on a much higher level than I do most guests, and seemed to connect the most with Charlotte, who was celebrating her birthday at Chang's. I asked her if she was a typical Leo, and she said that she was. I spouted off some characteristics of Leo's, which then led me to telling her husband, their son, and his girlfriend their respective Sun Sign traits. During their stay, Charlotte told me I needed to check out a website called CoasttoCoastAm.com, because she thought I would really like it. She said that it was about paranormal things. The old Terry would have probably just discarded that suggestion, but now I don't take suggestions lightly, especially from people whom I connected with like her.

Later that night after I got home, I looked up the website and was scrolling through it, clicking on some of the various links. Then I happened to come upon a link from a previous show they had done, which led me to a website called the International Coalition for Drug Awareness. As I started scrolling down the page, I saw a link that said some anti-depressants could cause a small percentage of people to commit suicide while they were taking the medicine. Immediately it got my attention as I read on. It eventually led me to a website called Justice Seekers.com. This entire site is devoted to helping create awareness to our society about the dangers of adverse reactions to prescription drugs, and how the pharmaceutical companies do not divulge all of the information to us, or the doctors. After I read a letter on the website, I felt compelled to send them my story "Blessed Assurance" telling them about when I had attempted suicide back in 1998. Somehow, I knew that it was more than a coincidence that Charlotte had told me about the one website which led me to Justice Seekers' website. Unfortunately, the letter and story I sent was returned because the email address I used was no longer valid, but that didn't matter. The important thing was I had discovered this organization and realized that it was the medicine I was taking at the time that had caused my experience, not my "depression."

I woke up Tuesday morning at 10:45 a.m. when my friend Trina Gallop from work called. She said I had been on her mind and she wanted to invite me to hang out and go to lunch. I didn't hesitate saying yes, because I would have most likely just spent the day in bed, and I absolutely love Trina. She is good people. Just seeing her brightens my day and lifts my spirits. We went to Plaza Azteca for lunch (even though I knew the Mexican food would reek havoc on my stomach). I didn't care. Spending time with her would be well worth any discomfort I had because of the food. We spent the afternoon talking about a lot of different things, and got to know each other a little bit better. As soon as I

got home, I started to notice the effects the food was having on my body. I was also starting to feel drained emotionally and physically. Since it was my day off, I wanted to do as much as I could, and was planning on spending time with Tracy in Hampton since the last time I had seen her was when we went to South Carolina in June. She ended up having to do something else, so I spent the evening with another friend, Joey, who I hadn't seen in quite a few months. While he is a nice guy, the connection that we have is so mundane that I don't like spending a lot of time with him. He brought over a book called *Gay Astrology*, which I found to be an incredible book. I was hooked immediately and knew I had to buy it to give me a better insight into my relationships. It certainly had me pegged to a T, and everyone else I knew for that matter. After I spent the evening with Joey, I felt completely drained, both physically and emotionally.

I woke up fairly early on Wednesday, but because my dreams were so vivid, I decided to go back to sleep until I had to get up for work. There was certainly nothing I could do awake that would be more interesting than my dreams were to me. When I did wake up, I wasn't in the mood to go into work. I was suffering pretty badly from the Mexican food I had eaten on Tuesday, and didn't feel well emotionally, either. I thought about calling in sick, but was able to talk myself into going in. I had a very challenging night. By the end of my shift, I had such a terrible sinus headache that it felt like my head was going to explode when I bent over. I knew I had a sinus infection, because my glands were swollen, and I've had so many sinus infections I can just tell when I have one. I was hoping that I would feel better by the morning, but woke up at 8:30 a.m. on Thursday with bad diarrhea and an extremely lethargic feeling.

I called in sick to work, because I knew that I was going to have to go get antibiotics. I didn't want to mess around with a sinus infection knowing my body was already fighting the HIV virus in my body. I wanted to go see Dr. Mahon, because I hadn't seen her since she left the Chimney Hill office back in April, and wanted to tell her I had HIV. I called her new office, but she doesn't work on Thursdays, and if I waited until Friday to see her, I'd had to miss yet another day of work, so I took it as a sign it wasn't meant to be. It was already weighing heavy on my mind that I was missing a day of work when my financial situation was extremely tight as it was. I ended up seeing Dr. Salumbides, who was one of my first doctors when I came to the area, but when she switched to the Urgent Care part of the office, I could no longer have her as my primary care physician. She routinely asked my symptoms and checked my ears, nose, and throat. She also told me that I needed to monitor my blood pressure, because it was 140/90, which is slightly elevated, but considering the amount of stress I had been under, I wasn't too concerned.

When I got home from the doctor's office, I logged online and saw Mike on. We had planned on hanging out when I got home from work that evening, and even though I was sick, I still wanted to spend time with him. There's not much that would keep me from spending time with him. Even though I've accepted the fact that we will probably never be more than friends, it seems that our friendship has grown stronger since Friday the 13th. He is much more open with me now about things in his life, and he's gaining a greater respect for my intuition and advice that I give him.

I took a nap after we chatted online, and woke up around 7 p.m. He called me around 7:30 and wanted to know if I wanted to go eat dinner. Even though I didn't feel well, I couldn't say no. I wasn't sure if I would be able to eat much (if anything), but I wanted to spend time with him nevertheless. We ended up going to the Ruby Tuesday that I worked at last year during this time. As we walked into the restaurant, I was reminded of how glad I was to have gotten a job at P.F. Chang's. It's not that I don't think Ruby Tuesday is a bad restaurant. Last year, I was very grateful to be working there, because it was at least an income (however little it was). It's just the two restaurants are in a completely different class. It was nice seeing some of my old coworkers while I was there, but only because it reminded me of where I was a year ago this time.

While we were eating, my phone rang. My friend from Missouri, Brian, called wanting to know whether I was still planning to go to D.C. next week to meet him while he was staying at his friend's house. I met him online back in June in the HIV positive room on Gay.com. We seemed to have a lot in common, and it was nice finding someone nice who was also HIV-positive, even if he did live half-way across the United States. I told him to call me back around 10 p.m., because I don't like talking on the phone in public places. I didn't want everyone hearing my business, and I didn't want to be rude to Mike, because I was having dinner with him.

After we left Ruby Tuesday, I decided I wanted to go across the street to Barnes & Noble to see if they had the Gay Astrology book. As soon as we got in the car, I handed Mike a cigarette (because he didn't have any, and I knew he wanted one). He laughed because I was apparently reading his mind, and said, "You complete me." I just laughed back, but inside had a feeling that he didn't realize just how well I did "complete him."

As I was driving across the street, my phone rang again, only this time it was Kate calling to check on me. She asked me what we were doing later, and I told her that Mike was planning on going to the Wave with his friend, Mike, whose ship was leaving the next day, and I was planning on going home because I had been sick all day. She asked if I wanted to hang out with her later. I surprised her by saying yes.

Mike and I went into Barnes and Noble to look for the book, but they didn't have it, so we browsed some of the other books in the Astrology section and a few other New Age books. Mike reminded me that he needed to go, so we left and headed back to my place. We said goodnight and hugged in the driveway, and then I went inside to get ready to go to Kate's house. I took a shower and changed clothes, just in case I was in the mood to go to the Wave, like Kate wanted. I was very shocked that I was even toying with the idea of going out considering how sick I had felt earlier in the day.

When I got to Kate's house, we talked for a bit, trying to catch up on each other's lives since we hadn't really talked in a while. It was around 11:30 and I asked her if she still wanted to go out, and she said she did, but needed to change clothes and get ready. I waited on her bed while she got dressed. We got to the Wave around midnight, and immediately I started looking for Mike in the bar.

While we were walking around, Kate ran into Clay, who is a Scorpio that comes into Chang's every Sunday. They've apparently known each other for a while. After we had walked around the entire place, I realized that Mike must have already left, because it was now 12:30. Kate was in the mood to dance, and Clay wanted to dance, too. Because I didn't want to be left standing alone, I went down on the dance floor, too. I was surprised that I had the energy to dance, considering how tired I had been earlier in the day. We stayed until closing, walking out with Clay, who commented about my license plate (SMRTAS5), saying "You're not a smartass." I told him, "Oh, I am. You just don't know me." Kate laughed and said, "Yeah, he is." Then I drove Kate home and dropped her off at her house.

I woke up fairly early on Friday, but because I had nothing I had to do that was better than sleeping, I slept until it was time to go into work. I debated all day as I kept waking up whether I was going to go to work. I knew I could call in sick for another day, but I would have felt guilty for calling in sick considering I had gone out the night before, even though no one would have known about it. I would've known, and that was enough. I eventually convinced myself that I was well enough to make it through an entire shift, so I went to work at 5 p.m. On my way to work, I was thinking about calling Alison, but for some reason didn't. When I got off work that night, I had a call from her wondering what I had been up to, and because I had been on her mind a lot the last couple of days. She was worried about me, and wanted me to call her. It was after midnight when I got the message, and I didn't want to call in case she was in bed.

Saturday when I woke up, I logged into Gay.com, and saw the screen name "pozbottomnva" in the room. Immediately I looked at his profile and said hello. There aren't many HIV positive people in the chat room in this area, and the ones that are, don't even have it in their profile. At first I wasn't sure that he was going to want to talk, because he was looking to hook up, and I had to be at work at 4 p.m., and certainly wasn't looking to get laid. I figured it was certainly worth a try. He seemed to be a nice guy... said his name was Jeff, and he lives in the Deep Creek area of Chesapeake. I sent him my pictures and he said he would send me his when he got home. He said he was at a friend's house. I still haven't gotten any pictures from him, so for all I know, he could be a fictitious person created for someone's pleasure of finding out who was HIV positive in the room. Regardless, the fact that he was interested in meeting, and hopefully becoming friends, was enough to build up my confidence and my feelings for the day.

I started getting ready for work around 3:00, because I had to be at work by 4. When I was in the bathroom, I heard a knock on my bedroom door. Ronnie said that my sister was here. I immediately thought, "If Dawn is here, Conner has to be with her. That lifted my spirits even more, because I had missed him so much and wanted to go home, but was keeping myself from going because of my HIV issue and my mom. I hurried up and got in the shower and ready for work, pumping my spirits up with the Moulin Rouge soundtrack. Having Conner here was all the more incentive for not going to work, but I couldn't afford to miss another day of work this week, since I took off Thursday to go to the doctor. By the time I had finished getting ready for work, Dawn had gone over to Jerry & Diane's. I walked over there before I went to work, and spent what few minutes

I had with Conner, him showing me the fish in their tank and their lizard babies. Dawn said they would be staying until Sunday, but said that she was going to leave when she got up and ready. She usually leaves pretty early when she comes down here, so I figured she'd leave early in the morning, or at least before I woke up on Sunday. I was still hoping that I would get to spend more time with Conner before they went back.

Saturday night was a pretty good night. Other than butting heads with Cyril about him being lazy, I didn't have much stress. I got home around 1:30 a.m. and logged online to chat for a while. There was no one in the room of interest to me, but then around 2 a.m. I got a private message from "reclaiming-self." He asked me if I used to talk to a guy from Richmond named Cyclist-27. I looked at the picture and immediately knew it was Jace, my friend who I hadn't talked to online in two years. I told him, "Yes, I remembered Cyclist-27, and that he was a Guardian Angel of mine I had lost contact with some time ago, but that he made a profound impact on my life." Then he said, "Hey Terry" and I said, "Hey Jace" and made my online symbol I always used when I talked to him, (*S*). He told me that his mother had passed away a few months ago, and he had just ended a two-year relationship with his boyfriend, and was in the process of re-establishing himself. I told him "If you hadn't given me this advice two years ago, now would be when I would tell you the great Native American proverb: The soul would have no rainbow if the eyes had no tears." He was impressed that I had remembered that. I quickly reminded him that I remember many of the things he told me, and can't tell him how many times I have thought of him over the last two years. Even though he wasn't in my life every day, the advice he gave me, and the way he made me felt stayed with me.

I wanted to tell him about my being HIV positive, but knew that it would be a lengthy conversation, and it was late and I knew he wouldn't be online long. I told him there had been a lot going on in my life and that things were the toughest they'd ever been, but that I was the most emotionally prepared to handle it as I ever could be. Then I asked him when his birthday was, because now that I'm all into Astrology, I just had to know. He told me it was 3/15... a Pisces. I told him, "Pisces... I should've known." Now that I understand how I connect with people of the Pisces sign, I can clearly see how he displayed all of the same characteristics, and why he always brought out the best in me. We talked for a few more minutes, and I sent him my poem "Angel Without Wings." He said he really liked it, and that I was "quite the wordsmith." I told him that people tell me I have a "way with words." He told me that it was nice getting to see me grow up spiritually from a distance. He recommended I read the book "Narcissus and Goldmund" by Herman Hesse. He said that I was a lot like Goldmund in my search for spirituality. As I had figured, he said he needed to go to bed. I asked him what his schedule was on Sunday, because I wanted to talk to him on the phone so I could tell him I was HIV positive. I also wanted to tell him about my idea about the fundraising that I had started two years ago when I met him. I distinctly remember when he told me that the company that was sponsoring the event I was going to raise money for was under investigation for fraud that "Maybe I should do it myself." Now, even more than before, I am wondering if the nonprofit company that I founded last year wasn't meant to raise awareness and help find a cure for HIV.

Regardless, I knew that Jace hadn't just popped back into my life by chance, and just talking to him online put me on cloud 9. He awoke a side of me that I hadn't seen in a long time. I was beginning to have thoughts with such clarity. I also began to have memories of the past 6 years, and thoughts of people I hadn't thought of in a long time. I spent the rest of the night reminiscing, and trying to find out the significance of it all.

Sunday, August 24, 2003 -- 5:00 p.m. (approx)

I read one of my Astrology reports this past week that it was my job as a Virgo to find perfection in what is, rather than trying to achieve the "perfection" that I envisioned in my mind. Today, finding the excellence in the order of life was so abundantly clear. I went over to my cousin Jackie's house, as I usually do on Sundays, to hang out with her and T.C. Even when I'm not feeling myself, spending time with them always makes me feel good while I'm there. I suppose it's having the safety that only your close family can provide, and having an open line of communication with total honesty.

As I sat alone on their back porch listening to the radio, while T.C. was in the house, Matchbox Twenty's newest single, "Bright Lights," was playing. I started listening to the lyrics of the song, and trying to interpret their meaning to me in my life. It made me understand why Matchbox Twenty has so many hits. Every artist has a message that he wants to share with others, no matter if that art is a song on the radio, a photograph of a sunset, or a set of words on a sheet of paper. Each of those messages has a specific purpose, and rightly should be shared. Some artists, though, like Matchbox Twenty, have more widely accepted messages to share. This is apparent by the number of records they, or any other artist, sells. Matchbox Twenty may not be conscious to the fact their messages have greater impact than most artists, at least not while the process is happening. My guess is they have the same "buzzing" feeling of inspiration that I have experienced when I have written inspired stories or poems. It is clear to me today, that in the great order of things, our artists are the great messengers in our lives. Whether we open ourselves up to their messages, or are even conscious to those messages, we will continue as a people to appreciate, feed off of, and be inspired by them. This is how it is supposed to be.

"Artists" are not the only messengers in this life. All of us, whether we classify ourselves as an artist, has a message to share during their lives. Their story is their "Self" expressed through its experiences during their physical existence here on earth. As Oprah says, "Everybody has a story." I believe that's true. What then determined how many people that message would touch? Was it totally up to us to consciously create, or does the energy of the Universe, according to where we are in the world and the planetary influences at that time, have a greater role than I had been acknowledging. For example, last Sunday, when I was feeling the weight of the world on my shoulders, wanting to give in, I truly wanted to stop feeling that way, but every bit of positive energy I fed myself with didn't seem to lift me back to where I wanted to be. It did help when I wrote down how I was feeling, because for some reason, putting my thoughts into words helps me see the situation in a different perspective, which helped me see the "bright side." But even

still, until the planets changed alignment, I was simply masking my feelings to others. It wasn't until I woke up on Monday that I actually started to feel better.