
gay writes: the essays
2000-2001

july 8, 2000

On July 11, 2000, I mailed the following rebuttal to the editors of the Fort Collins Forum newspaper. It is a response to an editorial that appeared in the most recent issue.

While I am not providing the text of this editorial on gaywrites.com for copyright reasons, I will say that my words are presented not just for these editors but for anyone who uses God and the Bible to dehumanize others. I feel you can read and understand this composition without the context of the original.

It is not often that I choose to react to another author but it is important that young gays hear another opinion. For me, remaining silent this time was not an option.

I feel Jesus Christ had the best protected feet of anyone who has walked on earth because he actually walked in other people's shoes.

Today, I read an editorial in the Fort Collins Forum (Volume 3, Number 9, July 6, 2000). My eyes saw words that spoke little of

tolerance for views, thoughts and beliefs outside the writer's own. This man walks only in his own shoes and seems to know what God knows...and wants.

I appreciate the man who has enough self-esteem and courage to speak his beliefs. Conviction can serve one well, but I would have favored hearing this man's truth in his own words; without hiding behind God. Further, I am fearful of what it means when someone states (twice, no less) that he will stand against those who do not interpret his God as he does.

I don't know if or how much God talks to him, but perhaps I am hearing God's song differently. I expect it is rewarding to receive cheers and applause by repeating all of the key conservative phrases of the day and applying them to unnamed individuals like a herd of cattle. Before we deem anyone godless, might we say "Hello," shake their hand and learn about their life first? Of course not! They might convince us that they too are human or that the voice of God they hear is just as valid as our own. Better to keep them anonymous by referring to "those" people. It's much easier to overcome them if they have no humanity. This is how hate kills love.

Reflect back, for a moment, to the August 7, 1998 bombing of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Terrorists, following orders of someone who no doubt has great faith in God, killed Americans for being Americans. Simply by being born in the United States, one can be a victim of that foreign leader who knows he is right to stand against Americans to the point of killing them. If caught in this crossfire, it would matter little whether you are heterosexual, married, church-going, and God-fearing. He hates you because you are merely an object--a thing--in his eyes. So easy it is to hate a thing. So easy to kick, bash and murder tomorrow's garbage.

Such reification is a dangerous state to achieve. When we fail to see the value of each human, to at minimum ask our neighbor who he or she is, we become less human and much less God-like ourselves. Did you notice how I have not once mentioned whom from the Forum I am rebutting? I, too, find it creepy not to be acknowledged by name. Yet this is the very thing that the writer did to me in his article by including me in one of his many classifications. You see, I am different from him. I am gay. Homosexual, if you prefer. Even though I try daily to be a good human, even though I respect my human brothers and sisters, and even though I give back to my human community, I cannot be recognized as anything but homosexual. I am simply not a part of the author's community and he must stand against me.

Knowing that someone is standing against me, I suppose I

should anonymously sign this letter from “A Homosexual.” It would seem safer that way. But I won’t. I, too, have hope that people will choose acceptance over rejection; love over hate. At the very least, maybe someone will learn a little more about me so that I remain human in his or her own human eyes.

Those shoes just don’t fit the way they used to, do they Jesus?

Mr. Editor: I have a sincere suggestion. I ask that you use my name in substitution for “homosexual” the next time you write about this topic. Then, as you stand against me, you will have a specific target--whether you know me or not.

january 6, 2001

[Some personal names in this essay have been changed to protect identity. Names in public domain have not been changed.]

Prologue

Scream 2 opened in Fort Collins on December 12, 1997. I asked my friend Behroz to go see it with me.

Behroz, then 16, and I both lived in Fort Collins, but we met—of all places—in Boulder at a traditional spaghetti dinner held every Tuesday night. Mostly, we talked on-line in the gaycolorado chat room on IRC, but on this night we decided to go to the film.

Tickets for the 10:00 showing sold out, so we spontaneously purchased tickets for the midnight screening. Behroz phoned his mom to tell her of the change in plans. She asked for my phone number and then called me. I dreaded what was coming. Throughout the conversation, Behroz’s mother reminded me that her son was a minor. She wanted to know what my intentions were. I felt accused and helpless. How can one prove innocent intent when one is already deemed guilty by default? After all, homosexuality does include the word sex. I remember calculating, on the spot, the number of months it would be until Behroz turned 18 so I could be his friend without the stigma of being some sexual pervert.

In hindsight, I should have addressed my feelings right then. My anxiety about spending time with a gay minor should have been a strong clue that I feared my own image. With Behroz’s help, I learned how to be a better friend in spite of his mother’s opinion of me.

But, my image... My image today is no longer my own private fear. It has evolved to distrust on a wider scale.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation exists to bridge the gap between our expectations and eventual reality. From the minute we are born until the very second you read this, we have many hopes for what is supposed to happen and then we must reconcile with the real world. So much suffering takes place in between. Maybe healing begins when we open our eyes, see the void and cry at how wide it has grown throughout our lifetime.

As I came out of my closet, I admit I was pretty self-centered and I cared little about activism or being an activist. My life back then was no one's business but my own. I wanted a relationship so badly that everything else took second seat. One of my gaps was this fruitless pursuit of "him." And "he" was most always my junior in age. When I was 29, I dated Ben who was 18. At 32, I met my last true boyfriend Brett, 19. I pursued many relationships with younger men and, even though they didn't last forever, they were successful because close friendships were borne of each one. By the time I turned 36, I had ended my dating life. I wised up. I finally figured out that love, for me, is in the friendship. With this conclusion, my selfish cycle was broken and a new community service attitude took over.

Having already been through the worst of the coming out process, I created an expectation that I could help others through theirs by being there with them. I stepped more boldly out of the closet through my writing. I sought out organizations where I could help others more directly. Through my involvement with the Fort Collins PFLAG, the two Colorado State University GLBT organizations and the community-at-large Lambda Center, I wanted my name to be associated with good citizenship. I continued to make connections with young gay men. Some, like Behroz, became fast friends. Never did I think I could fail in my attempt to make positive contributions to the coming generations. But, I have.

Since November, I have been informed of two separate occasions where my presence at a gay-related event was an unwanted distraction because young males were there. The first input I received immediately followed my facilitation of a PFLAG meeting on campus. I took the news very hard. Then, a close friend tells me that my appearance at the Community Pride Picnic last June was not at all welcomed for the same reason.

I felt I was becoming a role model—especially for the young gay men in Fort Collins. I thought I was considered approachable

and safe. But, I blew it. I confess to “slipping” on my personal resolution to not date anymore. My most recent fall was with Dave, a 21-year-old I met before Thanksgiving (who has since disappeared from my life completely). There were a few others before him. By making poor choices, I can see how my critics would disbelieve the inward changes I tried to make in my life. Now, in this light, my public actions are interpreted as insincere and I have alienated many in my own gay community. Throughout the local grapevine, Jim Farmer is the “sexual predator of young men.” This is not my truth but, then, I am not who I think I am. I am how others see me. I have a new gap to reconcile.

My first step is to offer an apology to those I have harmed or distressed through my reputation. I am hurting too, but my first duty is to accept responsibility for the fear I created. I am sorry. I understand that I cannot keep invading local gay groups when there are men here who are afraid of me and consider me a threat. I am doing the only thing I feel I can under the circumstances. I am pulling back. I won't give up the friends I have, but I can no longer pretend to be “one of the boys.” Until I can fix the flaws that have created such disgust, I will avoid public functions where my attendance could serve to deter youth from attending. When PFLAG members speak on campus, I will not be there. When I chat on-line, I will give fair warning about my past. When the Lambda Community Center members meet in February to select a new Board of Directors, my name will not be among those considered as originally planned. My work in the gay community will continue, but more privately so that people can choose whether to be exposed to me or not.

Reconciliation is not easy. It involves choices. I could have chosen to barge ahead and “show” everyone that I am not this dangerous gay animal I am purported to be. But, to what end? The cost of isolating more gay youth, just to make a point, is too high. As long as we remain an invisible community, we mustn't—in our constant drive to prove our humanity to the world at large—forget to take care of business at home. I had blind faith that I was being a good ambassador for all gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. I never paused to gauge what the youth of our community thought of my representation. I am thankful that my friends told me the truth about what they were hearing. I know it was awkward having to be my mirror. I promise to never put them in that position again.

Epilogue

In 1998, I met Behroz's mother. I saw firsthand how uneasy she was around me. I became defensive and it showed. I'm still angry

with myself for this behavior. In retrospect, I was trying to out-hurt her; to prove that I wasn't some deviant lusting after her son.

To Behroz's mother: If you ever read this, I am truly sorry for not being more compassionate. For what it's worth, recalling our brief time together has helped me a great deal in recent days while I've sorted out the issues of my character.

To the mothers of my friends: Please be assured your sons are safe with me. I will never abuse the boundaries of friendship.

january 11, 2001

Today, the Reverend Fred Phelps' (as in: GOD HATES FAGS) Westboro Baptist Church group from Topeka, Kansas was on campus at Colorado State University. The picket was apparently to protest the treatment of a fraternity and sorority penalized for their involvement in the 1998 Homecoming scarecrow incident following Matthew Shepard's murder. The Reverend Phelps was not among his followers.

Hearing that the group was coming, I thought back to my long trek to Casper, Wyoming on the day of Matt's funeral. Not even 27 months has dulled the memory of standing with my friend Brian in the church line in the falling snow. And, now, the return of the hate that was also present.

Some people feel that the best approach, in dealing with this sort of hate group demonstration, is to ignore them and not give them an audience. This view is based on the premise that all they want is attention. While I believe attention does liven their protest and spark more verbal assault from them, I feel that they don't show up just for attention. I'm convinced, as my friend Connie noted before this event, that the group is breeding the next Aaron McKinney or Russell Henderson. They are out spreading their message in hopes of making hate attractive to others. Others, who will do their dirty deeds for them so they can take the high road and never be directly responsible for murder.

This is why I felt it necessary to be present today--to show another side and let it be known that, as scary as hate is, fear will not keep me from facing hate. I started gaywrites.com because, after Matt's death, I chose to be more openly gay for those who, for whatever reason, cannot be at this time. I stand by that decision.

Remember those Angels who circled the Phelps group at the Laramie murder trials in an effort to mute their hateful message? Such courage gives me hope and drives me to do better in my own quest to bring some peace to humanity. Still, what I did today was so very minor in comparison to past bravery I have seen. I have a long way to go; I have still have fears to face.

The image I held with me today as I stood on C.S.U.'s plaza, was that of my 18-year-old friend Joe sitting in his afternoon class at high school less than four miles away. When he is my age, will we have seen the end to such hatred? Being an ageless trait, I suppose not. But in the here and now I want my gay friends like Joe to be safe and I will give of myself, as much as it takes, to see that they are.

So, that is why I saw hate today in person.

And, why hate saw me.

february 14, 2001

I've never done this before. I am writing this essay "live" on Valentines night, February 14, 2001. I am writing until I finish and then it goes up on the website as a completed product—even if it isn't so complete. This will be my raw thoughts on...whatever. Only you will be able to tell me if this experiment worked.

Romance blooms this time each year. For many it is a time to refresh a lasting love. For some it is just another day. For others it is an anguishing reminder of repeated isolation.

For most of my life, Valentines Day has come and gone without romance if you base the definition on hearts, flowers and candy. I ask: Is today just another day of the year?. Does it have to be? Maybe it can be an occasion to remember past romance and to pay respect to those who have passed into, and perhaps out of, our lives and left with us that special moment we will never forget.

I remember the night back in the 80's when I was surprised to find a bouquet of roses on my doorstep. My friend Jim B. had left them to express his feelings about me. Jim and I never got together and I am not sure why. I suppose I was more of a

player than I have ever been willing to admit. But, right then I felt breathless and never again have I received flowers. I bet Jim remembers too and, it might hold even more memories for him than it does for me. That is the magic of romance.

As I think about this, it comes to me that romance is rarely romantic in the moment it happens. Once in awhile you spark with someone and it is the best feeling in the world. You want it to last forever. It can't, of course. Normally, it takes putting together all of the faded pieces of memory before something becomes sentimental and treasured. The cliché of not knowing what you've got until it is gone applies here.

Romance is not limited to a special person either. It can be that memory of taking a junior high field trip to the University of Colorado campus and being excited to see the library. Then, being sad when it was time to go because there was still more fun to be had playing on the elevators. That's a day I'll never forget because there was a shadow following me. My dad was up for a promotion that would take us away from Loveland, Colorado to Chicago, Illinois. It could have been one of my last memories with the friends I grew up with. My dad turned down the job offer so he could keep his family in a safe place. A sacrifice I will always remember through the romance of that day-long journey to Boulder.

I believe we cherish romance because it is elusive. If one could have it every day, it wouldn't be appreciated as much. And, we would all like to believe that Cupid shoots us at the same time he pulls the trigger on that significant other. Not true. I could sit and list every romantic event I could think of and probably only a small fraction of the others involved in my memory would consider the same moment as special for them. They may not even remember it at all! Heartbreaking only if you solely rely on others to enable your happiness.

All of this is to say that expectations for today are so very high. We want with all our soul for it to be an important day; one that we can always tell stories about. When this fails, we add one more layer to our jaded persona. We frown and dismiss Valentines as a meaningless exercise in frustration—something invented to frame our loneliness for all to see.

Stop for a second. Instead of throwing a dirty glare at the couple who is free to kiss in public on the sidewalk because they are straight, could we be thankful for love? Can we recognize that the alternative is something that we defend against to no end?

I'm happy today. I am remembering a Valentines Day two years ago when I did have a special time with a special guy. I

wonder if Jeremy thought about me today? [Evidence that it is hard to break the habit of wanting another to recognize our own personal remembrance.] If so, he probably remembers it differently. See, Jeremy had a bad cold virus that day. So, hot chocolate and bed would probably have been the order of the day had we not kissed while playing Truth or Dare on Valentines' Eve and sealed the deal for a date on the 14th. I cherish 2/14/99 for what it was—one great day in the life of me. No matter how many pages I turn on the calendar, it will always remain unique and unrepeated.

When you awake on Thursday and read my words here, ask yourself if Wednesday, 2/14/01 doesn't seem a little more extraordinary in retrospect than while you were living it. Yes? Now that is romance. Hold it close and smile real big.

may 17, 2001

On May 21, 1965, my Grandpa Farmer died. This is for him, and for my Dad.

Dear Grandpa,

I'm writing to you today because your son is dying. My Father. Never have I faced anything so difficult in my life. I love him very much and with each trip to his bedside, reality grips my heart in a vice of feelings that are beyond what words can convey. I am slowly saying goodbye to the man who gave me life.

It was dreary and rainy today when I visited the cemetery. I sat in my truck and saw Dad's waiting gravestone behind yours. Surrounding, were the many other gravestones belonging to strangers. It struck me hard that there is no room for me. I started crying when I imagined someone, someday tossing my ashes into the sky so that only the wind would ever know I existed.

This isn't the first time I have cried lately. I wrote a letter to Grandma a few years back. I told her then that I had long ago stopped crying; thinking I never would again. That changed the night Dad told me he had months, maybe weeks to live. And the tears still flow. I cried when the last gasp of winter passed through Colorado and I recognized that Dad will never again see falling snow. I wept the night Dad gave me back a bronzed replica of Blue, a horse originally carved by his uncle—the wooden one I kept on my dresser as a boy. I never knew Blue was a real horse with a real name whose birth Dad witnessed as a

young man.

Other stories are coming to me for the first time, which explains why you have been foremost in my thoughts these recent weeks. I don't remember you. I want with all my heart that I could, but I was barely two years old when you passed away. I was your only grandson and I guess we spent lots of time together after my birth. I learned for the first time that you asked for me to visit when you were dying in the hospital all those years ago. It must have been hard leaving me behind when I was still so new in your life, but I'm happy to know I was there for you when you were sick. Now, I visit Dad like I visited you. He sleeps a lot and it gives me time to think. I realize I am the same age now that Dad was when I was born. I wish he could have had me around for more than just half his life. It doesn't seem long enough.

I know I will die. Each of us knows this truth. But when we inch toward it day by day, as Dad is doing now, there must come with it a horrible dread of unfinished experiences. I will go forward, but I grieve as Dad reconciles the unknown milestones to come in my life that he won't be witness to.

We go through life leaving our mark on others. Dad has. I'm touched that Bob, a boy who walked with Dad to school, was able to contact and correspond with him via email before Dad became too ill to sit at his computer. The very fact that Dad even wanted a computer still leaves me in awe. He bought an Apple IIe back in the 1980's thinking he could use it for his work correspondence, but he never gave up his typewriter. Yet, that old computer never sat idle—I used it daily and that was thanks to Dad who insisted that I take the very first typing class offered at school. I remember him being quite annoyed when I told him it wasn't a seventh grade elective. I had to wait another year to enroll. To think what doors he opened for me by giving me that push.

Do you remember that old-school typing phrase: "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country?" Dad taught it to me. Back then, it was just something to type, but for him as a teenager it was very real. I've never asked Dad much about World War II. I know he was stationed aboard the U.S.S. Stanton—a destroyer escort. Dad gave me one of the dogtags he had to wear. Every soldier had two and Dad told me that this was because if a man was killed in the line of duty, one tag could be placed in the mouth for identification and the other given to the commanding officer. I'm grateful Dad's tags came home around his neck. Your son is the bravest man I know Grandpa. I'll never be the man he has been, but I am his son and I will do my best to make good in the world in my own way.

Summer is coming and Dad, if he could, would be planting his gardens and barbecuing and doing all the warm weather chores he has always loved. It is his favorite season. One year, though, I remember how weary we grew of the daily heat. As long as I live, I will never forget the scorching August of 1983 when he and I sweltered in lawn chairs beneath the shade of our backyard trees. Day after day we complained, all the while enduring it because our dachshund loved the warmth of the hot sidewalk on her tummy. Being hot was worth it just to watch her sleep in blissful warmth. The memory means even more now because I can hold it close to my heart at a time when I so deeply need to.

A lot of bad things have happened to me since Dad told me of his cancer back in October. I made and lost two friendships and may never completely understand why. Besides the guy I dated briefly at Thanksgiving, I mourn the loss of my 18-year-old friend Joe who let me be his “older brother” for awhile. Perhaps this is just a manifestation of the great transition time I am in. Or possibly it is the constant feeling that I am becoming more and more alienated from the gay community here. In less than seven weeks I was assigned, then removed from the mission of reviving the local Lambda Center organization’s website. I am not sure what this evolution all means right now. I am numb, but mostly sad. As spring brings newness to those around me, I’m stuck fearing other losses I may cause.

Soon, sooner than I will be ready for, Dad will live on only in my heart and mind. Someday, I will visit him at his gravesite. I will cry and tell him how hard it is to be brought into this world and then be left behind, so incredibly alone. There is an overwhelming desolation about this, but it is paired with strength in knowing Dad has prepared me well for his passing. I will make it.

Keep watch over Dad...and me. I will continue to do my best to make you as proud as those days when you would show me off to our neighborhood, knowing you were responsible for such a tiny creation. If I could have a grandson, I would do the same. I would take him to the store and tell anyone who would listen that he was mine—a Farmer boy who would change the world just by being himself. And, if fate came to pass so that he couldn’t remember me, I would want him to someday learn that there was no safer place than in my arms—as I was in yours.

You gave me the finest father a boy could have, Grandpa. I love you so much and even now I will not say goodbye because I need you there for me always. Forever down the road I will need Dad too. I am thankful for those needs. It is what love is.

Would you please tell Grandma I cried? She should hear that I

became a man—a complete one.

I'll leave you with this, an entry from Dad's journal about his own grandfather—your Dad: "I remember seeing Grandpa Farmer once. He came to our house when we lived in Rock Island, Illinois. The thing I remember most about him was his beautiful blue eyes. He was a quiet man and very kind."

My Dad was never a grandfather, but he would have been everything he wrote about his Granddad and everything you were for me.

Love always,

Your grandson,

Jim.

My grandfather, Lou Farmer was born on October 27, 1897 in Libertyville, Iowa and died of cancer on May 21, 1965 in Yakima, Washington.

may 25, 2001

Edward Jack Farmer
October 22, 1925-May 23, 2001

Below is the remembrance I read at my father's graveside services on Saturday, May 26th at Loveland Burial Park, Loveland, Colorado.

When I was a boy, I was sometimes permitted to look inside Dad's big metal storage cabinet in his basement office at our home on Allison Drive. Of course there wasn't anything at all interesting inside, but you know how snoopy kids are. Yet, there was one thing he kept in there that never ceased to bother me. It was his personal copy of *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller.

My father was a salesman and for him to have a book with that title scared me. You can imagine the thoughts it conjured for me as it sat there, daring me to open it.

I never did.

On Wednesday, May 23rd, 2001, my father died. Why—now—do

I remember that book? Perhaps, like all of us here today, I am left with thousands of these memories that Dad created just by being here. Every one of those moments is ours to keep in our hearts. And, sometimes—without even knowing it—we will share Dad’s voice with another who needs that strength he gave each of us.

These past weeks have been the hardest of my life, but I will cherish the last days, hours, minutes and seconds with Dad more than any that had gone before. One afternoon, when he and I were alone, I found the courage to ask him some things I needed to know. Honesty was always my father’s most valued trait, and that’s all I wanted—his truth. It was almost as if he expected my questions that day and his compassionate answers left us both in quiet peace.

Lying in bed toward the end, Dad felt great sorrow knowing that he would soon leave us behind. But, as someone who always knew the right timing for everything, he was ready to go. To the end, Dad lived life his way—with principle, bravery and love. If the death of Edward Jack Farmer, a salesman, has left this legacy, then there will never again be a finer salesman. There will never again be a finer man.

That book no longer scares me. You wrote your own life story and you provided well for your family. We had a nice house with a big yard, and good neighbors and friends. Given the choice, you would have spent less time on the road but I guarantee you were never far from home. You were first and foremost a family man and that is why saying goodbye is so hard for me to do. I’ll never again stand in our driveway to welcome you back from a long trip.

Dad, you were, and always will be, the greatest father and I will cry for you often. I love you.

Afterthoughts and notes:

My remembrance of Dad may inaccurately imply that he was employed at the time of his death. In fact, he retired in 1988 from his sales representative position.

From his obituary:

Edward Jack Farmer, 75, of Loveland, died May 23, 2001, of cancer, at home. He was born October 22, 1925 in Burlington Iowa to Lou and Gladys McCleary Farmer. He married Anna Belle Farmer on September 20, 1950 in Hannibal, Missouri. He was a sales representative for a University Textbook Company. He moved to Loveland in June, 1966 from

june 17, 2001

Today is Father's day.

Yesterday I bought a Father's Day card for my Dad who will never be able to read it. I am not sure why I picked it up in the first place. I was at the card store looking for Thank You and Birthday cards and there it was—the card. I read it and put it back. I walked around the store. Then, I went back and it became part of my stack to purchase.

Arriving at home, I set it aside because I wasn't quite sure what exactly I would do with it. I started writing thank you notes to those who donated to the local Hospice chapter in honor of my father and it came to me that I would give the card, with a special note inside, to my mother today when I visit her for a family dinner she is having tonight at home. It decided it would be another remembrance of my father.

Under normal circumstances, I would never share a personal letter to anyone but the individual it was intended for. But, from the day I found out my Dad was terminal and I began crying after he and I got off the phone, I promised myself that I would do whatever I could to help others who may go through this same grief. Therefore, I am going to share with you the words I wrote my Mom today.

I cried a lot while composing my message, because there is so much love and grief that have come together into one mass of hell for me. Each day gets a little better, Sometimes, though, I am shocked and cannot believe that I have overlooked or maybe even minimized the grief others have felt when they have lost a loved one. I have never considered myself insensitive, but I have come to realize that through my own bereavement process I have missed many opportunities to say I am sorry to those who have lost someone special. I regret this very much.

I hope that my words to Mom make up for some of my lack of attention to what it is like to lose a Father or any loved one. In our gay community, sometimes the loss isn't through death, but by rejection. I guess what I am saying is that I will never again take lightly the emptiness of abandonment that comes from the separation of a loved one. No matter who it is, it hurts badly. There are risks to loving and death is one of them. Perhaps we each understand this in the backs of our minds, but until a day

comes when we find ourselves facing that truth, it seems so far away. Not today.

Dad: I miss you terribly and today is difficult, but it reminds me to never forget that you were my father and that who I am is a big part of who you were. You did amazing things during your 75 years on this Earth and I can only pray that I am able to accomplish part of what you gave the world.

With that, I offer the words I am giving my Mom today. May peace and love be with her and those of you who have shared, and continue to share in my personal pain and my day-by-day progress toward remembering the best of Dad's life.

TO MOM IN REMEMBRANCE OF DAD
JUNE 17, 2001
FATHER'S DAY:

Dear Mom,

Today is probably one of the most difficult days we will first face since Dad's passing—that it being Father's Day. First, know that I love you very much and hardly an hour goes by without my thinking of Dad or you. For the last few weeks, all I have seen is Father's Day reminders. It made me turn my head. But, yesterday, in the card store, I saw this card [*the Father's Day card I am giving Mom*] and I knew that if I hadn't already bought a card for Dad, had he still been alive, this is the one I would have chosen. I tried to always pick humorous cards that Dad would enjoy and maybe laugh at. This one seemed to do that for me. It made me smile and I knew it would have made him smile also.

Sadly, my heart is crying today because he is not here with us anymore. I am sure yours is also. Just know that I am always here for you. You have a strength I do not have. I don't know how you do it, or maybe you hide it well. But wherever your strength comes from it is helping me a lot and I appreciate it very much. As always you are the best Mom anyone could have. I love you so much. I know time will let us remember Dad for all the good things he did instead of the current memories that he is gone. Until then, we will make some good memories of our own—like spending time together as we have. Let's keep doing that. Meanwhile, take care of yourself and know that I am here.

With much love,

Your son,
Jim.

Please note that I have chosen not to include the contents of the greeting card in my essay. Greeting card designs and texts are copyrighted materials and, at this time, I prefer not to acquire copyright permission. I will say that the card was produced by THE SMILE FACTORY and is copyrighted by Recycled Paper Greetings.

june 24, 2001

As time passes, I will continue to speak of my father and my family. This is the fourth essay to detail some feelings I have had in regard to my Dad's death. It is not my intent to stall on this subject in my writings in the future, but my father influenced me so much in ways that I never knew or understood until he was gone. I know I will continue to realize such discoveries until the day I, myself, die. May today's essay find you and your family in good health and happiness. To those of you I know personally: I love you. You have helped me so much these past 31 days and I know that will continue. Thank you.

I remember the last time I kissed my father. I touched his hands, weathered and bruised from years of handiwork that he loved to do, and I bent over and gently gave him a kiss on his forehead. And then said, "I love you. Goodbye." Forever the remainder of my life I will wonder when I last kissed him when he was alive.

Perhaps I have repeated this often, but it is worth it again to say that when I learned my father was terminally ill, I promised I would do whatever I could to remember and help others who may go through the same thing. One of my best friends, Steve, lost his father suddenly to a heart attack in February, 2000. Knowing now what I do now, there is no way I could have imagined the loss, grief and pain he went through afterward. I did my best to make sure I was there for him, but now I wish I had been able to do more. I suppose we all feel that way when we see someone in such sorrow.

Steve and I have been out of contact recently due to both of our busy schedules. He emailed me Thursday and filled me in on his life. As I was reading his email, I cried because he reminded me that he was the one who put a white rose in my Aunt Joyce's room while she was staying at the hotel where he works to help ease some of her pain. It is a gesture I will never forget and will always appreciate.

Yesterday, was the first month's anniversary of my father's passing and over the course of this month I have kept a journal of feelings I have had. I am sharing excerpts of that journal here. For those of you who have lost someone close, it may be painful to read. For those of you haven't, I am not intentionally attempting to frighten you. Everyone's grief process is different. Never let anyone tell you different. I am simply fulfilling my promise to show you my personal progression over the course of this month with hope that the words help in some way.

May 30, 2001, a.m.

In the middle of last night before 2pm sometime I woke up with a start and my mind started thinking about what my Mom had said about there being room for me in their grave should I die alone. I had trouble falling back to sleep. I guess I just feel like I am grieving more than I should be for some reason.

May 30, 2001, later

My friend Gary came over this evening and we watched a movie. At the end of our night I asked him if anything scared him. He really couldn't think of anything and maybe was too tired to delve into it. So, I started talking about my current fears of what it means to be a man. I told him that ever since Dad died, I felt a part of my manhood was lost. That having him "behind" me, I always felt secure. Whether it was when I needed advice on cars, or financial help or whatever. I also said I understood that what Dad taught me would always be with me, but still...there was this vacancy. This knowledge that only Dad seemed to have—like when I had a single-car accident in 1991, during a snow-alert situation, and he knew that I had to file the police report ASAP and then who in town was the best auto mechanic to repair the truck to it's original condition. In fact, he helped financially with this too.

I kept talking to Gary and, of course, began crying throughout all of this discussion and wondering what it all meant. Why did I feel like this when in the 1980's there was this period of time when my Dad, for whatever reason seemed distant to the point I felt I had to be the "best boy" so that he might not be the way he was. I tried to absorb the brunt I guess—either by anticipating ahead or by pitching in when it seemed as if Dad was angry that no one else cared that he was doing all of yardwork. If the lawn needed mowing, I made sure this was done. If Dad was out watering the garden, as if he were mad that no one else was helping, then I went out and helped or took over.

The 80's, I also felt, was also a period of time I failed him in

college—especially having sailed through junior high and then high school with 3.88 out of 4.0 grade point averages. College, of course, was my pre-coming out period when I didn't yet call myself "gay" but I had a hard time coping to grips with why I was different. Through all five years of my college experience, I lived at home and commuted to school. Living at home meant I didn't have any "dorm" friends and so I mostly hung out with people I knew from high school or stayed by myself. I met a few people when I had a class and that was nice.

The best part of the 80's was getting closer to my brother who is 6 years younger. MTV [MUSIC TELEVISION] came out in 1981 and when Loveland got cable in 1982, our similar music tastes made us closer friends and we would watch MTV together for hours. Thus, things at home weren't so bad, but I spent more time doing that than studying like I should have been. Still, Dad and I had our "bad" times. My grades were poor the within the first 4 semesters and I had received a D and F in Physics and Calculus respectively. This quickly led to a change in major—which Dad also helped me do by guiding me through the process. Once again Dad was "Dad" helping me out. I made it to graduation in 1986—in 5 semesters, so it didn't put me back too far. However, following graduation, I got a library job—low paying at that. Another failure in Dad's eyes because he thought my business degree was worth more than some library position. Once I had the job, I found a way to move away from home in November, 1986 and Dad again helped out then by making sure that I had proper furnishings by helping me with a furniture purchase.

After I "officially" (face-to-face) came out to him in person in 1988 [NOTE TO READER: earlier essays document how he previously knew I was gay before this face-to-face talk], things got better between us. Plus, I really feel that those horrible 80's were his "mid-life" crisis time, so understandably, there was tension on all fronts. Coming out didn't mean we suddenly did more things together or talked about it, but there was just a better father/son relationship. Coming home—even the short distance to Loveland—was much more relaxing.

After this "talking out" of my issues with Gary—who listened patiently and quietly—I had a more extended crying spell. I looked at the spade I had borrowed from Dad for my own gardening this spring (it was sitting in the living room where Gary and I were talking). I borrowed it before he died (Mom made sure to ask him if it was okay and he said gruffly "of course" like he would ever be using it again himself). This started me crying a little harder because, again, Dad was so good at tools and workshop stuff. Things I have never had an interest in or cared much about. Again, Dad was the man.

Lastly, I settled down and I finally said that these were some of my fears right now and that I wondered if I, myself, could ever have been a father. I have been such a loner and in 16 years of being out I have never had a successful relationship to even begin thinking of living with someone, let alone going through the many hoops to adopt or find a surrogate. I'm just not sure. Being a man—that is my question and I will end the journal entry for now at that point.

June 2, 2001, early a.m.

In this past week, I have been able to see my mother on 3 days. This has been good because I can see she is holding up okay. This makes me feel happy, but it also makes me feel as if I am not holding up as well as she is because, again this morning I awoke at 5:15 a.m. and lay in bed just thinking. I thought about some of the things she and I spoke about during our times together this week, but mostly I let tears run off my cheeks onto the pillow until I decided it was silly and I should get up and just write for therapy.

My mother and I took a trip to Boulder on Thursday, May 31. She and I had talked about getting out of town and going shopping since last summer, but we never did because Dad was ill and wanted her around. And, she wanted to be with him as much as possible also. Toward the end it was almost as if Mom had become my father's "Mom," by caring for him as he grew sicker and sicker. This hurts me because I know how strong a woman my mother is, but to have to do this alone so many times (even though Hospice of Larimer County was there to do some of it for her), makes me admire her strength and love so much more.

At one of our lunches together, she and I had a conversation. I decided to ask why, when my father bought the gravestone for the cemetery, he did so with the intent that, should I want to be cremated and buried there with them, I could be. There is even room on the headstone for my name. My Mom had told me this on our Monday (Memorial Day) get-together at lunch. That was the day we were going to get out of town, but we decided to instead just stay in Fort Collins to avoid any dangerous traffic on I-25, etc. due to the holiday. This was the first I had ever heard of this gravestone business. Later, I decided I would talk to Mom about this. At lunch (on the 31st), I managed the courage to do ask, because I wanted to know how long this had been planned. That graveyard plot and gravestone was purchased long, long ago. My Mom basically said that she wanted there to be a place for me since I didn't have a wife like my brother did. I don't really remember her exact response though, because the thing that stands out most for me in this conversation was the fact that

Mom and I spent some time talking about the fact that I might not always be alone. That I might find someone who will love me and that we might sometime, somewhere share space together in a cemetery. My mom knows I am a loner and I know this too. I am always the first to admit that I need “my space,” but that can be achieved in a relationship through proper communication. Anyway, the bottom line is my Mom actually said to me that she feels I will be alone when I die.

I talk about dying alone a lot in my gaywrites writings. I, too, have felt that I will die alone, so this is not a new concept to me. I came to a realization at some point in my 16 years of being out of the closet that being gay can mean you will die alone. Technically, we all die alone. No one but ourselves can leave our physical body behind. Sometimes the thought of dying alone frightens me, yes. But most of the time I enjoy and have enjoyed my own space and dying alone may be a given.

On Friday, yesterday the 1st, Mom and I drove to Greeley to do paperwork that needed to be done following Dad’s death. Being that this was more of a business trip and since I had awakened at 6:00a.m.that morning, I was tired and probably less inclined to be cheerful or introspective. We spent some of the car ride and lunch talking about Dad. I now feel embarrassed that I asked her so many intrusive questions about Dad and her lives, but she has been worried about completing the many different tasks at hand that have to be done when someone dies. She spent most of Tuesday and Wednesday doing such paperwork: Either sending death certificates to the places that need to be notified or making appointments with those agencies requiring direct contact with her—much like the Greeley visit on Friday.

So, because she has been taking care of business so actively, I am satisfied that she is doing okay, but I was very aggressive in my approach to some of these questions regarding the personal business she was handling—maybe because of my early rise, maybe because it was the third day that week we had spent together, and maybe because I am touching on an anger phase of grief that I thought I was not going to have.

Perhaps the anger grew from my thoughts that my father felt I would die alone and never discussed it with me. I asked Mom, why, during all that time from the point of purchase of the gravestone did he not tell me I could be included in their plots when I die. She said that he had left that “talk” up to her and she didn’t think of it until after Dad had died. This is about when I started noticing I was being too assertive during a time she and I should be having fun together as mother and son.

My father and I had a good conversation about being gay before

he died and it is documented in my previous gaywrites essays, so I won't duplicate it here. Suffice it to say that he told me he knew I was gay long before my brother ever told him—which was even longer before I told him myself face-to-face in June of 1988. I guess I will never know now what he thought about being gay in terms of being alone and dying alone. I wish now that I had had the foreknowledge about the gravestone to have talked this through with him.

At this point, even though angry that this decision was made by him at a time when perhaps he hadn't had a chance to know me better as a gay man, I will reconcile this as an act of love. I prefer to feel that Dad was looking out for me (as always) and his generous offer to be buried with he and Mom—just as he is buried adjacent to his mother and father is an honor and one that I cherish a lot just thinking about it now. In fact, it is bringing tears to my eyes again that he planned things so well and so far in advance. He simply cared and wanted to do the right thing. But I wish—I wish more than anything in the world right at this minute that he knew that I would be alright in my life. I hope that he never lost sleep thinking that my being alone was a curse or some horrible fate that befalls someone gay. Before he died, he understood that I did not “choose” to be gay. In our conversation he made that clear. Some people just are. But, what that fully meant in his own mind, I will never fully know or understand.

I loved my father so much more than I ever told him and I am glad I told him I loved him through the days that he lay in that Hospice bed dying at home. A long, long time ago, before I ever came out to him (and perhaps didn't even fully acknowledge to myself that I was gay), Dad and I sat on our front porch at our house on Allison Drive—the house where I primarily grew up (age 6-23). We were sitting in silence enjoying a summer evening after sunset. Sometimes he would go out there to smoke before bed and I would go sit with him. These were some of the best moments of our father/son lives. I recall this particular night because I sat for a long time there thinking I needed to tell Dad I loved him. I wanted him to know this very much. And I did. I told him. And he said he loved me back and maybe, just maybe that was the moment in time when he realized I was different from other men.

I know not why I say that and maybe it is just me looking for answers where there are none. But my Dad was a smart man and I do love him for that and all the things he was in my life. I wish he was still here so we could talk some more. I guess, in a way, I will always “talk” to him and this is my way of saying to you, Dad, that I wish I knew you better. Your own life was filled with personal privacy and I am sure that is where I get that from in

my own life. I know how it feels to be alone and to enjoy that alone time. But never would I wish upon you the feeling that my potentially dying alone was your responsibility or duty to be sure I had a place to lie in peace. But, I thank you for doing what you did with the gravestone. I will revere that for the remainder of my life. Perhaps, as I think about it now, it is the greatest gift you have ever given me. If you are listening right now, I love you. I will never stop saying that and I will never stop meaning that. You were and are truly the best.

June 9, 2001, middle a.m.

Today was to be the make-up appointment where Mom and Jennifer (my sister-in-law) went to Cheyenne for their hair perms with my longtime friend Joe. Mom had earlier altered the appointment twice because she wanted to be with Dad. It turned out the first time was a day he was to go to the doctor and she always went with him to those appointments. I find myself thinking about this and about Dad and not really wanting to because I am afraid I will cry more. It has been about a week or so since I last awoke and had a crying spell caused by the emptiness of no longer having a father. In fact, there are days now where I don't think about it so much. So, today, there it is on my calendar that I was going to sit with Dad and keep him company today while the women were off enjoying themselves.

Mom called this morning, because she wanted to have breakfast with me tomorrow. She and Dad, in their retirement, occasionally used to do that—go out for breakfast. I realized after the call that I need to pay more attention to people other than myself. I should have been making plans with Mom before she called me to have to do it. I will have to make a better effort to consider her needs and make sure she is not feeling too alone during this time when we are all grieving.

I find myself removing Dad's name from different places that I used to store it. My phone lists all say "Mom Farmer" now instead of "Mom and Dad." I found another place this morning where I hadn't yet made that change and erased Dad's name.

I know all of these feelings I have are normal. Grief is not a new concept in the world. But, for me, it is new. And I am smart enough to know that time will help; that memories that Dad lived will supplant the ones that he died. It is going to be a long hard road though. Harder now as I realize I am having a day where I feel the loss so strongly again. Tears are welling as I think of the moment Dad told me he had months or weeks to live. I cried so hard after that phone call on the evening of March 28. I know he never would have told me by phone had I not pressed for what the doctor had told him at his appointment, but I am glad I had the privacy afterwards to cry for the first time since I can

remember—probably when I was a boy.

I am also finding it interesting how others around me act. I know people are concerned and love me a lot, but the fact that “life goes on” is pretty apparent. I notice some are shy or afraid to approach because they don’t know what to say. I wonder back how I have acted when someone’s father or mother has died and I incorporated the information into my brain as a fact but nothing more. That will change.

As I close for now, I am thinking of the Showtime TV show *Queer as Folk*. A segment had the father of one of the characters dying of terminal cancer. One episode he was telling his son he was dying. The next episode had the son telling his father he was gay. Then, not long after, a show where there was a funeral--nothing in between. I so wish they would have explored that whole storyline better. I could add so much more detail. Granted, my Dad knew long ago that I am gay, but there are a lot of moments the show could have put into the story. If nothing else, to help someone like me know what it is like to hear the words that your father will die soon and then for it to actually speed toward reality. I stopped watching *Queer as Folk* after that. I would like to go back and pick up the missed episodes and see what else happened. Maybe they took a different grief route. I guess I will find out someday. Meanwhile, my grief goes on and I will write more later.

June 13, 2001, p.m.

Unexpectedly, my Dad’s childhood friend, Bob, the one who walked with him to school each day, called me. Somehow he had not received my voicemail I left informing him of Dad’s passing. I had to tell him the news by phone. It was perhaps the worst moment of this whole aftermath. I almost broke down crying right in the Administration Office [at work] where I happened to take the call. It was all I could to maintain my composure. I just wrote a note to Bob via email and I hope he takes it well. I told him I am gay and where to find the remembrance I read at Dad’s gravesite services. I want my words to help him. I believe writing them have helped me immensely since Dad’s passing but I find myself crying as I type the email and this entry into my journal. To think of my Dad as a kid walking to school is so sentimental to me because I remember the days I walked to and from high school. How my Mom would sometimes be watching for me to come home from a long day at school and how she would often help me fold newspapers for my paper route. I worry about Mom being alone and these thoughts all jumble together into one big mess of pain. I know things will get better with time and that happy memories will replace the memory of me touching Dad’s hand one last time at the funeral home and then kissing him on the forehead to say goodbye for the last time. He looked

so peaceful and I was happy that he was no longer in pain and anguish over having to live like he was living. I know he hated it. I just wish it hadn't happened so fast. I thought I had more time to talk to him or just sit by his bedside while he slept. This is so hard. I hope Bob is okay tonight and that he is able to be okay with Dad's passing. If he feels half of what I am feeling right now, I know he is hurting badly. Tomorrow is another day and I will take it as it comes. I hope Bob reads what I wrote and writes back. That would make me feel like I made a little bit of a difference and that it helps him come to closure since he was unable to attend the services in person. I have promised myself to help others and I will. I will make my Dad proud for the things I have accomplished so far and the things I will do in my life from now on. It is just hard taking those steps toward that end, but I will make it. Dad, thank you for giving me the strength to make it through this tough time. I never knew I had it in me to handle this type of sorrow...just know I am doing my best. I love you. Goodnight

June 14, 2001, p.m.

I noticed today that I rarely listen to music anymore. I thought about this for a bit and perhaps it is because in the weeks leading to Dad's death he used his satellite music station set on the easy-listening station to pass the time of day as he lay in his bed at home. The speakers were in the living room, so the volume had to be up a bit higher than normal. Always when I visited, the music would greet me as I opened the door and the sounds would make me feel at home. But, there was this one day. It was when Mom had to go to the store I and I was sitting with Dad as he slept. While she was gone the music was too much for me. I had to go into the other room to turn down the volume a couple of notches. Later, when Dad was awake he noticed he couldn't hear it and I quickly ran and returned it to the normal volume. I felt so guilty having turned it down in the first place but, for some reason, that day it was just too much for me. I personally don't listen to easy-listening music anymore and I certainly have nothing against it. In fact, when I was little I would listen to easy-listening radio to put me to sleep at night. Remembering that now makes me smile, but I am sad inside again tonight and smiling just doesn't erase that. It has been a long week and I am going to bed early so I can get to work ahead of schedule and get business done and over with. I guess work is something I can control since emotionally I am a runaway bus at times. On Sunday, Father's Day, Mom is having dinner at her house and I am happy that she has given permission for Gary to come with me. He has been so terrific these past weeks and months that I want to share him with my family under better circumstances than the last time they met him at the gravesite services. I want to write more about Gary later and I will. There are lots of things I don't understand about him, but maybe that is what life is about.

Learning about someone and loving them through that learning. I hope so. It gives me a sense that one day, long ago, perhaps Mom or Dad had these same thoughts as they got to know each other after they met in 1946. That is a happy thought, but I still want to cry and maybe I will go do that before bed. Tomorrow is a busy day at work and after that I may be able to reflect some more on where I am at and where I am going in my grief process. My last thought for today is that I hope and pray that I can maybe help someone else through their grieving process someday by what I, myself, am feeling and handling now. That would be a good thing. I would like that very much.

*END OF JOURNAL:
May 30, 2001-June 14, 2001
James Fred Farmer*

july 25, 2001

Although I started writing this piece back in July, I finally edited and submitted the "Soapbox" below to the Fort Collins Coloradoan on September 9, 2001. My last attempt to be published in this column back in 1998 was unsuccessful and, ultimately, this too failed to gain the attention of the Coloradoan editors. I'll keep trying...a new topic, a different day.

It hasn't been often in my life that I have so admired a person whom I have never met. That person is Mr. Adam Forest, your Youth Views writer.

For some reason, in this country, as people grow older, we become less willing to change our views and hence any young person's opinions become something of a whim without merit. I acknowledge that Adam does not reflect the current beliefs of everyone who reads his articles, but he reflects mine. Most specifically, I feel that he has opened the door for dialogue between straight individuals and gay individuals and has done so by being direct and honest about how he feels.

Sex is a bad word in our society. We shouldn't talk about it or think about it, let alone ever WRITE about it; however, each of us IS a sexual being. We each obtain pleasure through sex, but we act as if it is an addicting narcotic that can be performed only under certain conditions and guidelines. Being gay is more than

sex. Do some of you really walk around during the course of your day thinking about what gays did in bed last night? Perhaps I should judge you solely on what you have done behind closed doors throughout your life. Perhaps God should.

Adam is one of two straight (i.e. heterosexual), and courageous persons who have contributed their voices to my website, gaywrites.com. Each has agreed to let their works be read on the Internet together with their gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered friends. So, even though he is going to Stanford this Fall, I have high hopes and expectations that Adam continue to write and share with all of us his views—regardless of the fact that I may never get to shake his hand in appreciation. I think if you asked Adam, he would probably boil down his philosophies to the simple fact that we are all a family of humankind. Yet, not one of us is alike. There are billions of different people we can discriminate against on this planet. How much energy do you want to spend looking for ways to dislike or even hate someone rather than hearing their story and germinating love in your heart? If you prefer not to associate with someone gay, then don't. But, you will have a problem with that, because you don't even know who most of us are. You would be surprised to learn who amongst you is more than what you think.

Fort Collins has been an epicenter of hate over the last 3 years. Sixty miles north of here Matthew Shepard was beaten to death and, 60 miles south, teenagers were killed at Columbine. A friend of mine in Greeley nearly committed suicide and, had his Mom not set in motion a key set of events on the right day, his brains would have been splayed against his bedroom walls and ceiling. How much blood will it take before the Adam Forest's of the world don't have to stand up against bigotry and ignorance?

Adam, thank you for your heart. You have made the Fort Collins Coloradoan readable and I am not just talking about your gay columns. All of your themes have made me think and I have new perspectives on topics that I didn't have before. That is the mark of a true leader. All the best in California and my website will await more great things from your pen.

october 15, 2001

For Cathy, again.

Just past 10:00 a.m. on Monday morning, October 15, I faced the duty of writing an e-mail to the hundreds of employees I work with at the Colorado State University Libraries to let them know

that a colleague had died the night before. Beginning at 6:30 a.m. that morning I had been telling as many people in person as I could. Word travels fast and it was finally time to put the news in writing.

I honestly hadn't expected two paragraphs to become a eulogy. But, I just couldn't send the message without saying what I felt. I needed to say a final, public thank-you to the person who supported me unconditionally and, daily, taught me what it means to have courage and look for sunshine. In my essays to date, I have never really spoken of work in any great detail, if at all. Being that we are at work most of our lives, one would think I could interweave something I learned from my workplace. I believe I am now educated in how much it hurts to lose someone who, despite facing the miseries of cancer, still inspired hope and smiled while doing so.

At Cathy's funeral services on Thursday, October 18, I was surprised when the pastor delivered a chronology of Cathy's life and, unexpectedly, included me by reading my words to the people gathered in the church. I was honored. But it goes beyond—it was an honor to have known Cathy, to have been given the opportunity to work beside her for 12 years, to have been her friend. My heart sang yet cried when I heard my remembrance read aloud. I realize that my tribute was the last gift I gave to Cathy. I thank her family for including me. I will cherish the moment forever.

Catherine Z. Harris
1949-2001

I began working with Cathy in 1989 shortly after she was hired at Loan/ Reserve that Fall. I was just promoting to a vacant Loan Desk supervisor position and even before I officially started, I remember Cathy coming to me in the staff lounge and asking me if I was going to be her new boss. As always, she was Cathy--100% positive and welcoming. Cathy and I probably got to know each other best as colleagues when she, too, was promoted to supervisor a couple of years later. Cathy's true leadership spirit emerged when she became supervisor over all the students in Access Services in 1993. She made the department a home away from home for each and every young man and woman she hired. Cathy watched each grow from their freshmen year through graduation. Many have come back to visit. Not once in the 5 1/2 years that Cathy fought her cancer did she ever consider giving up her job. This is where she belonged. I needed her and she was always there.

Cathy would want us to remember how she lived: In the moment, one day at a time. Some days better than others, but always present. Her name, her strength, her determination and her love will not fade from our department nor from those who knew her. To say I will miss her doesn't seem to be enough, but that is my truth. Things will never again be the same, but remembering Cathy's way will help as we go forward.

november 3, 2001

For Jed, I love you.

November 3, 2001.

Twenty-one years ago today, I was somewhere in the middle of my senior year in high school. Graduation was an eternal seven months away. I was cruising toward a final 3.88 GPA. School was so rote that the physics textbook I received on the first day of class went into my locker and never came out until the last day of school. I got straight A's in the subject. At the same time, my school friendships were remote; I went to school, I came home. My best friends were the adults on my paper route. I knew a big transition was coming: College. But, little did I know I was edging toward chaos; for in the coming years I would be invisibly tormented by the truth of my identity. I was this side of a lost soul.

Twenty-one years ago today, a boy was born. He was named Jed Marcus Rosenberg. While I was 17 years old with benign friendships, somewhere out there was this child who would come into my life nearly that many years later and plant a seed of friendship that continues to ripen each day. Now, my life is full. I have caring friends who helped me through the hardest year of my life. Around 2:00 P.M., this day, it hardened more. But, as with Cathy's death, this is not just about me. The knife stabs as deep, but families are crying from the depth of a pit I have known. I wish with all my heart that Jed's 21st birthday be a happy one, but I know it is shadowed by the walls of that hole. 1996-1999.

Geggy, as I first knew him in the gaycolorado room on Internet Relay Chat (IRC) was a happy-psycho kid who was fun to talk to. I have my friend Kyle to thank for connecting us online. Kyle worked at CompUSA right across the street from Jed and, through their association, I began talking online with the boy who was anything but.

Chat rooms back in the 90's were a lot more innocent than today. Some sex crept into conversations between people in the main, communal chat room, but it was much more likely to be the topic of choice when two men dove secretly into IRC's private chat mode. For me, private chat merely offered an alternative opportunity to meet "Mr. Right." Of course, I really only made friends this way, but they are the best. Thus was the case with Geggy. I seemed to relate well with young people, but Jed was young-young. I had never chatted with anyone who was openly

gay at his age. He was 16, in high school in Westminster and a man out of time in maturity. I could sense it then; I can see it now.

We traded photos and I shared with him my essays and we chatted when we could. Then, one day, either late in his junior year or the summer after, I logged in and saw Jed talking about leaving for Florida. I immediately sent him a private message to discover what was happening. He was going to live with his Dad in Florida for his senior year. I was sad, but I promised we would keep in touch. I kept Jed's email address but I guess it was hard for me to retain contact with a young man that I had never even had the chance to meet. Perhaps I almost let him slip away.

My memory falters, but I think chat brought us back together. Geggy had been replaced by Jedda and I knew it was him. Late in Jed's senior year we talked for the first time by phone. He was living on his own in an apartment arranged by his father. A teenager, living independently; managing his own life in a place far away from his Mom here in Colorado. This would change after graduation.

In May of 1999, I called Jed in Florida from a pay phone in Pingree Park—an area owned by Colorado State University where I was taking a week-long workshop. He was coming home. CU-Boulder had accepted him for the Fall 1999 term.

Jed moved back in late July. I knew we would finally get to meet face-to-face. My Internet and phone friend of two years would finally be “real.”

October 10, 1999.

I met Jed.

I was in Boulder visiting Ben for the day and had pre-arranged with Jed to meet him after he arrived home from work. Around 8:00 that evening, I drove to his address and Jed ran out of his dorm to meet me with a big hug. Our bond was sealed.

Jed and I talked for over an hour in his dorm room. He showed me his Bjork collections and the posters of her that covered the baby blue background on his walls. We surfed the Internet. We talked. Then, I had to drive home to be ready for the work week.

Both being busy people and living in different cities, Jed and I didn't have a chance to get together very often, but we made good efforts—sometimes spontaneously, and always fun.

September 24, 2000

Psycho Beach Party was one of the final events of the 2000 Boulder Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. I learned this on Saturday the 23rd and called Jed to see if he could go. He was free, so I ordered tickets online and I picked him up the next day. Before the show we caught up on events in our lives and Jed broke the news that his Mom had been diagnosed with ovarian cancer. At the time, there was no firm prognosis. I knew little of this type of cancer, but I silently hoped they had caught it in time. The movie started and we watched the schizoid adventures of Marvel Ann.

Still, life had instantly changed for one of my best friends and it hurt. Exactly one week later, my Dad informed me he had cancer and was on chemotherapy.

Life turned again.

May 8, 2001

Jed emailed me his final copy of the article he wrote about gaywrites.com following an interview with me for one of his journalism classes. I was honored to be his subject. The interview had been a few days earlier. Afterwards, we talked about his Mom. She was not doing well. Neither was my Dad.

May 25, 2001

Dad died on the 23rd and Jed wrote me this beautiful note:

Dear Jim,
I respect your letter, and I accept what you are going through. Although my mother is still with me, I know how you must feel. Jim, I am having trouble. I am not as strong as I thought I would be with my mother's disease. I know you are busy and are trying to get your life back on track. Whenever you have a moment, I need to talk to someone. I thought maybe you of all people could give me some insight and advice. I have a whole bunch of essays that I have written that are in the editing stage. This has been the only thing that has helped me other than my summer class which has taken up so much time. Write me back and tell me everything is going to be ok. Love, Jed

Jed was wrong. He has such great strength. My summer was internal Hell. I grasped for answers to why I felt the way I did and asked myself if I would ever get back to me again. I secluded myself from all but a few friends. I relied on work as a foundation to return me to normal. For Jed, summer was Hell too. I tried my best to stay in contact with him through the summer months knowing what he was facing. Even though his Mom's condition was close to the fore of his consciousness, he managed to continue in school and frequently told me of how he was helping his friends who needed him. Perhaps he thought

he was learning strength from me, but, in truth, it was he who taught me. Jed's gentle soul warmed my heart even though it was breaking again by feeling the pain he was in.

September 12, 2001

Dear Jim,

I am so terribly sorry I haven't been in touch with you. With starting school and everything else I have been a wreck. I wanted to see if you were coming to Denver anytime soon. I need someone to talk to. At the end of the month I will be going to Kansas to take care of everything. She has only been given another month. I am so scared for her. Write me back if you can or call me when you get a chance. I hope everything is ok with you. Love, Jed

Jed and I never had the chance to see each other because he left for Kansas on the 14th to care for his Mom. Later, we talked by phone and I could tell he was exhausted and devastated by the hours spent in the hospital sitting with his Mom. Yet there again was this strength that shone through. His Mom had a particularly bad day and Jed knew he would get little sleep before he returned to her bedside to allow his sister to get away for some rest. A son who devoted so much love to his Mom in her final days, but never lost his gift of caring for others at the same time.

I was happy to hear that Jed and his Mom were able to talk during this time. Jed's Mom was so supportive of him after he came out. They were close. Still coping with my own loss, I felt so much grief for Jed as he faced his mother's terminal illness. She loved him so much.

Today was the last time I would talk to Jed until after his return to Colorado. His focus was where it was needed. I did the only thing I could do—send my love in cards, e-mail and voice messages. For me, it didn't seem to be enough. I wanted to hug Jed and tell him it would be okay. But, okay wouldn't be true.

October 10, 2001

Jed's Mom died.

Two years ago to the day, I met a man beyond his years in class and maturity. In Kansas, on this day, that man is far too young to be laying a parent to rest.

November 3, 2001

This afternoon I called Jed to wish him a Happy Birthday. Without knowing for sure that his mother had passed, my gut told me he was back home in Colorado. Jed answered and I knew. I never met Jed's Mom. I would have liked to. But, I have

Jed. What a beautiful man his mother gave to us. His sensitivity and kindness will make the world a better place to live. I'm convinced of this. He already has.

In this month of Thanksgiving, never have I been more thankful for a friend who would offer such love during the inhumane waiting game that cancer cast upon both of us.

Dear Jed,

I love you very much. You are like a brother to me and I know your grief is so very harsh. I would do anything to take that away. Please call me whenever you need to talk or want me to visit. I want to hug you now more than ever. I know you realize only you can forge forward from this moment, but I will do my best to be a friend who understands and is present...anytime.

Happy 21st Birthday. I've missed you.

Much love,

Jim.

december 7, 2001
second interlude : descent

*"Now it can be said that I am stalked by my own shadow."
--James Fred Farmer, interlude: July 7, 1998.*

The following piece of work is not happy. I advise a secure foundation before proceeding. The thoughts and feelings presented here do not flow gently nor are they intended to. Just fair forewarning.

Back in July, 1998, I wrote my first *interlude* with respect to the 6 years I had been writing essays. This was still eight months before gaywrites.com would come into existence and four years from the coming 10th anniversary next summer. I promised then that I would provide better insight into who I am by providing a depth theretofore unwritten. Have I succeeded? It is the reader's call, but I question whether or not my work has even been accessible. Success is not in how much you learn of me than it is how much you feel of me and can relate that back to your experiences. Again, only you know if that has happened anywhere along the journey.

* * * *

Before dawn today, I dreamt my father was still alive, but he was still dying. In my sleeping mind he had been resurrected only to be facing his end all over again.

The dream is a metaphor relating to my own current descent. I've changed. I am no longer me. Where once I was stalked by my shadow, now I stalk it; desperately trying to find my way back. That shadow was the devil I knew and now I am lost from it.

* * * *

What is solid ground? A myth. Trillions of atoms swirling together to make a density of matter that hurts if you fall on it. More than anything over the past three-and-a-half years, I have shown you the many times where I have met pavement. Does this mean I have given you a deeper vision of Jim Farmer? Once I may have answered, "Yes." Now, I'm not so sure. I believe I have to first know who I am before I can begin to present myself to others. I used to know who I was with damn surety. That was then.

* * * *

My favorite celebration in those not-so-far-gone days was Thanksgiving. I hated November this year and now I am stuck in December. I haven't been keen on Christmas since I was a boy and my present attitude betrays my disgust over having to get through a second consecutive holiday without acknowledging the loathing publicly. I'm going through the motions and walking a lonely path. Perhaps it is one tread by many gay men who are approaching or have passed the age of 40.

Yet, I know that age is not why I am displaced. Death has taken the wind out of me more than once this year. The roots lie therein, but the problem is unsolvable. I cannot go back. On a macro level, I understand that the elusive shadow I used to know will not be reincorporated into my life. There will be no restoration—it is gone forever. I'm questioning what it means to be gay. If one is a homosexual by science, as I believe, then the point should be moot. It's not. It isn't a matter of my not wanting to be gay—I don't have a choice. I've simply fogged out the humanity of my gayness.

* * * *

I don't see what I used to. Who you remember is not me. I can understand how confusing it must be for those who do not know what "being gay" means. I'm in that outlying camp now. The harder I tried to make a difference this year, the less effective I was. This coming February, I'm giving up my half of the reins of

our local [PFLAG](#) chapter. I no longer have it within me to help anyone. I'm concerned about what this entails for my writing. *Gay Writes* may start reflecting less and less of my gay entity. In fact, it already has. Maybe someday I'll relate to some new shadow and pull it from the night where it hides. Until then, I go forward—seeking first to mend a ruined heart and not cause any hardship on others as I do so.

* * * *

With certainty, I will remain alone until I die. I've said this before, but this year I tried to overcome that mindset. Yet, following Dad's death, I immediately faced another loss. I was shoved back into singularity by Gary just after Father's Day. I know asexuality is my delivered destiny. When your support person drops the floor from beneath, it is time to examine how life got so complex. The reconciliation of this trend of mine to stand independently from other gay men is clear: I do not give easily and the reward is receipt of less. This is one thing that has not changed about me--I am selfish. The shadow disappeared without taking with it the most damaging darkness.

In this *second interlude*, I cannot promise to show you more depth when already-shallow waters are drying up. I've not necessarily become a better person in the gap between July 7, 1998 and today. Should I have ended *Gay Writes* with that summer essay? It could very well have been more beneficial to stop than demonstrate eroding hopes with personal stories of evolving detachment and death since. But, it's there in black and white. My plain truth—albeit ugly.

* * * *

How I've changed since July 1, 1992 when I put my coming out story on paper and then shared it with others. Peeling away layers of my soul was healthy at the beginning and it served a purpose. Now, suddenly, the light shines through me. I wonder where I will be, if I will be, in 2012? Can I restore even a partial silhouette? With more bad times ahead than good, I'm doubtful. It is easy and cliché to say, "Time will tell," but I feel that is the best summation. I'll continue to pass through my tomorrows; possibly finding replacements for that which has left me.

Was it really me who had the grand illusion of changing a tiny piece of our world for the better? Reading my recent words reveals a heavy cynicism I used to think I was above. If I had a gift to allay fear, it is gone. Dad did this for me; maybe too well. Now that he is gone, I don't worry very much. Either I have learned it isn't worth it, or I just don't care. How sad if it is the latter, but time is already telling. My reach was too far. A more

reasonable goal to champion would have served me better.

* * * *

I draw my loose rambling to a close knowing that it is more intertwined than it first reads. Depressed? I'm being treated for this, but the impact of the text is nevertheless profound even for me. You may ask, "What can I do?"

Nothing. I fight inner war as I always have: By myself. Dad looms as the hero I can only hope to ever be. Like father, like son will never apply, but that doesn't mean I won't keep working, in some capacity, to become someone worthy of my family name.

Until the next *interlude*, remember me as I was. I'll be content if someone can still see that shadow.

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