
gay writes: the essays
1999

january 22, 1999

My quest for love defined continues. With Ben, the love has always been there—I'm more open to expressing it as our friendship ages.

It is rare for someone who knows me well not to have met Ben. Of all the men who have shared a piece of my life, Ben is the one who forgives my independent, sea captain nature and yet harbors my soul when I need to port. Apart, we are not far. Together, we bond into revolutionary charm. There is love in our friendship.

By now you have read the story of how I met Ben. A better story is how we continue to “be” together. The significance of love in a friendship is downplayed in our society because males are assigned a certain lot of qualities which, on purpose it seems, does not include love beyond a superficial nod. In the gay community it is often awkward to speak of love between two guys outside of a primary, committed relationship. Even when sexual love is discussed, we clamor for the right word to describe the object of affection: partner, boyfriend, mate, husband, lover, significant other. No one can decide which description is

politically, or otherwise, correct. It is no wonder we opt out of telling our friends we love them. I'm driven to dispel this notion that gay male friends cannot share a loving nexus.

The origin of love in a friendship may be impossible to trace. It is almost like asking, "Why are you friends?" I think I first realized that Ben was a special caliber of friend when we were thousands of miles apart: he in Denmark and me here in Colorado. Surprisingly, the building blocks of our friendship were put into place over the internet. If not for e-mail, it is all but certain that our friendship would have fizzled to an acquaintance level for all time. For the first nine months of 1993, we had already demonstrated laziness in sustaining any attachment. We began our correspondence that September and, ironically, the ice broke as winter swept south into both of our northern hemispheres.

At this point, the story is better told through our words at the time. With Ben's permission, I'm presenting some of the messages we traded as that long year drew to a close. The passages show evolution; how the small talk died and we exposed ourselves as if for the first time. Possibly, our special oneness was cemented here.

To Ben on Thursday, November 25, 1993:

Hey, it's been a while since I checked in. I've missed a couple of Saturday "reports." I had this week off and it has been cold. High today was 13 degrees. It snowed earlier in the week and the cold has kept it around. College Ave. is still pretty snow-packed. Sort of like last year when I came to visit you in Littleton during Thanksgiving break. Except it was warmer last year. The Dallas Cowboys played Miami on TV today and it was snowing in Dallas even!!! Crazy. Miami won the game on a last-second field goal--I am sure you wanted to know this.

I just got home from Thanksgiving dinner with my parents and realized I hadn't written to you for a while. I hope you are having a nice Thanksgiving abroad—did you celebrate it?

Love, Jim.

From Ben on Wednesday, December 1, 1993:

Well, we have snow here too. About a week ago we got five inches or so, and consequently the hill in back of the hojskole has been reduced to a sheer piece of ice from ceaseless sledding. This is reportedly more snow than Denmark has had in four years, but that makes me feel right at home. There is a possibility for snow again this evening, the first of December. I guess it's been a little while since I got on the system last. OOpps! heehee. I've been a little busy. I've been reading a lot of Danish for my environment class, and I always have that omnipresent American course work that's due in Finland next month if I get bored.

About the dark reality I HAD made for myself, it drew to a close last year sometime. I suppose most other people would call this coming out or something like that, even if on a very limited level, but that seems to be a

term the community uses quite a bit. It has other connotations which I am not binding myself to accept.

I guess that about wraps things up. I sort of forgot our real Thanksgiving, I didn't remember it until the day was upon me. But the Americans had our celebration earlier this month in Fredensborg.

Have a good week(or two) hehe.
benoit.

To Ben on Wednesday, December 1, 1993:

You mentioned coming out and it made me do some thinking. You're right, the term has lots of connotations. Most of them scary. It is hard to accept the harsh reality of it. Especially if you think about it too hard. Even now as I think about "fitting in" I get worried that I never will. I guess I am very traditional. I think love is more important than sex and togetherness and "one-ness" is the most powerful feeling I think someone can have--to know that no matter what happens to you there is always someone who you can turn to and who will be there. Perhaps this is fantasy, I hope not.

It is time for me to be honest again, because I have been thinking a lot about this, too and I want your perspective. I have been going to alliance meetings and to the bar occasionally and have been meeting different people. I seem to always compare to you and you always win. Does that make sense? I don't know whether to go out and continue to meet people or wait until you come home to sort out things with you face to face. I am obviously coming from a different angle than you because I am 30 and very much tired of this whole "scene" business. There is way too much attitude and unconcern for relationships and it gets old. My biggest fear is that I might meet someone and then you would come home and I would have to tell you that. Although, maybe you want that to happen so the pressure would stop. (And I really hope there is no pressure--because I truly, truly do not intend for there to be, I just don't know how to deal with this without involving you and believe me I have tried to keep this to myself for a long time now and it isn't working.) I don't know what I am asking here if I am asking anything at all really. If nothing else, please take all of this as a compliment. You are one of the coolest guys I have ever met. You are open to good communication and you communicate back. When I ventured forth on my "dark reality" journey, I was 22 and you started at 18 which has to be a lot more difficult and in a lot more ways. Yet you are more stable and together than people I know who are 10 and 20 years older than me! Okay, I am just running on and on now. I pretty much said what I wanted to and I feel guilty because I keep harping on this issue of you and me and you find other things to talk about when you write.

Hey, the last thing I ever want to do is wreck our friendship, so if I need to back-off, just say so. I won't be offended, I promise. At least I know there is someone who knows what I think and feel deep down inside and for that I am grateful.

Love, Jim.

From Ben on Wednesday, December 15, 1993:

I have a special talent, curse, whatever you wish to call it, that most

people tend to see in me what they want to. Perhaps it is something which I learned to cultivate over the years to chameleon myself. Regardless, I seem always to get close to people without them getting nearly as close to me as they think. I have been working on shedding this aspect of myself, but I think when we were together, it still came very much into play. I should not win when you compare me to other people at the bar. I think there are too many things that you don't know about me to make an effective comparison. To some extent I feel that you have filled in what blanks I left when I was still half in my cloaked mode. I don't think that stable is a word I would use to describe myself now, let alone last year. Additionally, I am not who I am when I left. When I left for Denmark though, I was not who you first met, if that makes any sense. It does to me. Dynamism was one thing that I needed to survive the twists of fate which always seem to present themselves or, example, this letter alone attests to the fact that I am willing to risk more confrontation than before. I don't know what the threshold of this will be. It was only Sunday that I suggested to myself that I could view non-confrontationalism, something I always felt victim to in high school, living up to the expectations and appraisals of others: chameleonism, through another word...cowardice. I am not attaching any of the social connotations to the word. It simply seems to apply to my former situation. Lately I have noticed: that the confrontation and conflict are inherent in the world. Not necessarily bad, but a part of it. So, in regards to: I just don't know how to deal with this without involving you. I wouldn't expect you to not to involve me. It is probably not possible to solve solo.

I think there is a balance between the consideration of self and others and confrontation and non-confrontation as there is a balance in all things, but I still have no feel for that balance. But I know it wasn't where I was before I started the process. In my attempt to find it I very likely will incorrectly step on toes, but it is better than living always at the impressions of others, I think. (Oh and sorry if they are your toes. hehe.) Are you using me as an excuse to escape the scene? (Oh great.. another wandering paragraph.. where will it strike next?) I don't know how different your perspective is based on age, but something seems to hint of this. I won't guarantee that I won't meet someone over here, I don't see why you should. And even if I don't and you don't, I don't know what will happen when I get back.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!
benoit.

To Ben on Saturday, December 25, 1993:

I wanted to give some thought to your mail, instead of writing down the first thing that came to mind. First, though, Merry Christmas!

What you said in response to my Dec. 1 message pretty much hit home for me. What you say is true. I think I do use you to escape the scene here. Not physically escape it—I still go out and get involved in local activities here, but to escape the scene on a more emotional level—not wanting to play the games that people play. I think age does play a part in this—not that I am older, but because I have been out for almost 9 years now and have yet to have a relationship that lasted longer than 3 months. And, when I see my peers having long-term, permanent relationships it sort of hits me hard. I don't mind being alone--in fact I like it most of the time as I really am an individualist and a loner at heart. Always have been. But, companionship and love aren't so bad either and it would be nice to experience these things on a more on-going basis. It is easy to

become stagnant as a human being if you only have yourself to rely on to “bounce” things off of and it is impossible to learn compromise when one gets their own way all the time by being alone. Plus, I think romance is fun too. Simple things like eating dinner together means so much more to me than hopping in the sack. So, you’re right. It is easier for me to remember our good times and yearn for more of them than to face reality that it is my responsibility to grow up as a person and understand that the scene is the way it is and probably will not change anytime soon due to societal circumstances. So, to this end in regards to you, I will work on making our friendship stronger and I will let the past be the past.

Love, Jim.

Ben and I continued to write each other until he left Denmark in May for some Euro-travel before returning to the States. It follows that our friendship grew stronger after his return—not just because we were closer in physical proximity, but because both of us knew we had a peerless connection and we were determined to build upon it. Although Ben met his now-longtime boyfriend, Rich, he still made quality time for me. Whether we went running together, or just sat and watched movies, we bonded permanently.

I don’t think either of us has ever taken the other for granted, but Ben’s graduation from Colorado State University seemed to arrive so much faster than his return from Denmark. Now it was May, 1997, and Ben was packing for a job in California. This time, he was leaving for good.

I was sad, but I tried to keep perspective. It was time for Ben to move on. The decision to go to west was hard and he was leaving behind family—including Rich—and many other friends. I came to realize that the new era we faced was not to be feared because we had done this before and so much good came from it. Even though many of my childhood friends had moved away, only to become distant memories, I knew Ben and I would not dissolve. For me, there was a dawning that no matter where Ben was on this earth, I would be with him just as he is with me.

“Forever” turned out to be “summer” because, three months later, Ben returned to Colorado and found work in Denver. Not knowing this in advance, we coped by e-mailing and calling. This time, we didn’t have to find our friendship—it was there in force.

From Ben on Thursday, July 3, 1997:

Ok, well.. I miss you. I would call you right now If I thought you would be home, answer the phone, or not be in bed yet. But any one of these could be true and I had a spooky dream three nights past with vampires and money anxiety about credit cards, so i will spare my already astronomical phone bill.

Don’t blow off any fingers on fire works on the 4th of July.
Sigh... i miss you.

love,
bingo.

To Ben on Friday, July 4, 1997:

You are a special guy. I miss you too. I think I have been trying to block just how much I miss you out of my mind, but it is hard when I go running and think that it might be a long time before you are again at my side doing it with me.

Is the DC job still open? Could you still get it? I think if this is possible, you should just go for it. I don't like to see you unhappy. I have always thought you had a good gut feel for things. I also know you have an undying stubbornness for loyalty. It is a wonderful trait, but you need to be loyal to yourself too and if this isn't working then get out. You know I am not saying that so you will come home...you should go to DC if that is still an option. It is important to me to know you belong somewhere and that people treat you right. You are too cool to be wasted on people who are dull and unresponsive to your personality. Even guys should see that you are not the run-of-the-mill individual.

love,
Jim.

From Ben on Sunday, July 6, 1997:

I will be back in a week! (only to jet off to Norway again) I wonder what sentiments for Europe will once again awaken when I am over there. Hmmmm. Was that just a phase during College, or do I genuinely love Europe? I don't know for sure. maybe it was only fun as a student.

Yes, the D.C. job is still open. I would have to act this week though, and tell them that I am coming. And then I would have to start right after Norway, which might be tricky since I don't know how to get my car out there. Maybe you should drive it out for me! :)

Anyway, I don't know if that's the proper action, or if I should just hang out in Denver. In any case, going to draft a resignation letter for here, assuming that I will have to put that I'm leaving in writing. I will wait until Tuesday to tell them, I think. If I do follow this course, I will feel bad about closing the door on this thing. There probably could be good to come of it if I stuck it out here. But I don't know that I am gaining that much by being out here.

Many of my fears and disappointments with this place were cleared up when we had the monthly staff meeting. There seemed to be a little more direction, and there was talk about software rather than isolated tasks. I have yet to see any of the software I am supposed to end up working on! However, there are still no women, I still don't have an apartment, I haven't (intentionally) formed too many friendships.

It was good to talk to you on the phone! Yeah! Sigh. I could definitely go for a run with you right about now too.

hast!
benoit

To Ben on Saturday, August 30, 1997:

I started a "Ben" archive of emails sort of like I did when you left for Denmark in '93. But you didn't stay in SF so we won't have another volume of work to publish when we get old!! You will just have to move somewhere else now! OK, those are bad ideas, we have to move together.

J.

A palm reader once told me that my lifeline has a fork. One prong leads to long life and the other to a premature end. A moment in time...a choice...would determine the course. Whether I believed in such "fates" beforehand is irrelevant because, once told of this turning point, I began anticipating when the big decision would come. I hardly gave a thought that it may have already passed. I'll never know for sure, but I feel a life without Ben was the short road. If I die today, I won't be wanting. I can only say this: If you love a friend, tell him. You will discover infinity in your heart for doing so. I have.

february 20, 1999

Thirty years ago today, on February 20, 1969, my mom's father passed away. It has me questioning who, besides my mother and her sister, even remembers him? I will carry his name, Fred, to the grave with me and even I don't know who he was. The one impression I am left with is from my infancy. He yelled at me on a short stay in Hannibal. That's it. I didn't like him. So, here I sit wondering who knew my grandfather through his life. Who was it that had the chance to be his friend, to really know and like him? All are gone, just as he is. Thirty years after I die, who will remember me? Will it be a good memory?

My first contemplation of death came sometime around the time Grandpa died. I don't remember exactly when (although maybe it was brought on by the fact that Mom was away at the funeral), but I remember the instant. It was dinnertime and I had asked my Dad something along the lines of what it really meant to die. He told me. This didn't strike me until later that same evening, when I was on the steps of our porch. Darkness crept in at the same time that I realized that my life, just like everyone else's, would end. And, I froze. I couldn't go up the stairs. I couldn't go down. I stood. I stood until a distraction took me away from that bad place to other, more childlike thoughts.

As a grownup, you learn to displace thoughts of death in order not to become locked in place like the frozen boy of yesteryear. Coping with death is still a challenge, especially as one ages. We

find ways to distract ourselves from the inevitable. American society has built us a lifetime plan to follow; complete with lots of routine so that we don't have time to think about dying. Men, for example, are to grow up, play football, graduate high school in the top ten, go to college, get a career job, get married, have children, plan a family vacation every year, attend the high school reunion every 10 years to benchmark progress and, finally, retire. Maybe somewhere along the way you can buy life insurance and a plot of land at the local cemetery, but you cannot die until you've been retired a good long time. If you believed this to the nth degree men would never die...just retire.

It's not so much the perpetuated pattern that dampens living but the mindless trek one takes toward death. To illustrate how ingrained the American Dream is, consider how jolting it was when I came out. The rubber stamped lifelong plan that you thought you saw on my forehead wasn't really there. I'm someone else. A someone who isn't following behind in line like the other good boys. Did I not "die" in your eyes? Did my past and future, as you had constructed it, not change in an instant from a perfect yellow brick road into a foggy, nondescript asphalt street?

From my perspective, I came out to get closer to you. As someone who always felt disconnected from the mainstream, I eventually hit upon the realization that I exist as an individual with independent thought. Not because I chose to be odd, but because I am odd. And, if I am unique, so is everyone around me. I can see you as a beautiful, one-of-a-kind creation and treat you as such. Ironically, one doesn't have to be gay to do this. It helps if you feel different from the majority because you can more easily discern the pieces of the bigger mosaic; however, it is not a requirement.

If you desire to halt the routine that keeps you from seeing the fragile humanity you could be embracing, you have to stop coping with death and start practicing it. You will die. Make a real difference in a friend or loved one's life right now. Imagine that today is the last day you can make that difference. For you there is no waiting until tomorrow or until retirement. You'll be too late and all history will have of you is your picture in a few ratty yearbooks and a vague memory that you were probably the one most likely to...do something.

If there is a heaven, and if my grandfather lives there, he is likely discouraged that I remember him as the man who yelled at me. Had he known that I would carry that image of him around in my head for thirty years, would he have acted differently on my short stay over at his house? I'm dropping these wayward feelings about my Grandpa today. I don't want people to classify me

solely based on my connection to the word gay; thus, I can no longer label him based upon on a single memory.

Children and grandchildren are not in my life's outline. My passing will cause a dead branch on the Farmer family tree. If your reaction to this statement is negative then you may be buying too much into societal expectations for men. I am okay with it. Explore your biases and then think about your own legacy. Whether you are following the artificial beliefs laid out for you or not, please let coming death point you toward compassionate living in the here and now. Death is natural and life is too precious to plod through like a zombie. Don't regret in heaven what may be your last day on earth. Kiss your grandchildren for me.

march 15, 1999

I chose the Ides of March to introduce the theme of how gay men often make "Caesars" out of our friends in the community. When Caesar was stabbed by those sworn to protect him, it spoke volumes on that society's state of affairs. Our society, the gay community, struggles with similar conspiracies and ill allegiances that befell Rome in 44 B.C. Perhaps ours are not fatal, but the wounds dig deep and forgiveness soon becomes just a word.

There are moments in my past that I am not proud of. One, in particular. I carry with me the knowledge that I toyed with real lives and made decisions that were selfish and cruel. It is a miracle that the two individuals involved remain my friends to this day.

I first saw "him" at a meeting of the campus gay/lesbian group. It was the first meeting of a new semester when attendance was always at a peak. People always came to see who else might also show up. I was still young enough to have many student-aged friends, so I was there too. Only one guy drew my attention on this day. A freshman. "TIM," his nametag read. I liked his nose. I've always considered it Tim's best feature even though he feels it is a curse. But, on that day, we were not destined to meet. At the end he dashed out and disappeared—seemingly, for good. I went to many subsequent meetings thinking he might return. He never did.

Craig came into my life about two years after the Tim sighting. It was the dawn of summer that year and we immediately began dating. Craig worked on campus and we got to see each other frequently. The dates we had were fun. We went to movies and

hung out. Then, came our Denver date.

The bright summer day held promise. I picked Craig up at his apartment and we drove the short distance to Tim's residence hall so I could finally say hello. Craig had frequently talked about his best friend Tim; however, this Tim was an enigma. He was always mentioned but never seen. I began to wonder if this guy existed. Indeed, he did. Tim worked at the main desk on weekend afternoons and it was good a time as any to finally meet him. I was strangely excited as we approached the desk from a blind angle. Who was this Tim? Had I met him before and forgotten? A few more steps and there he was; the beautiful boy from ages ago. How could he have been so well hidden all this time? I was starstruck again.

So began my dive. The romantic notions of this guy-I-never-got-to-meet-the-first-time were foremost in my mind. Never mind that Craig was a great guy and easy to be with. Tim was suddenly the God-figure. It didn't help that word got back to me that Tim liked me too. In my heart I knew I could never date Tim. He was out of reach. I could never lower myself to play the same games that I had witnessed countless other times among gay men. Unfortunately, my head didn't rule. My heart said Tim, and it wasn't long before I was breaking up with Craig. Never before had I felt so much pain coming from someone I had been close to. I knew I had stabbed him deep.

Miraculously we managed to remain friends in spite of what I had done. But of course Tim hadn't been mentioned at all throughout our breakup. I kept those feelings to myself since my head had managed to somewhat take over at the last minute. Even after Craig and I split, I realized that Tim was still as far away as he had ever been. Still, I couldn't shake the feelings. So, on a July evening following a "just friends" get together with Craig, I finally spit it out that I would really like to get to know Tim better. This time Craig didn't show me the bloody stab wounds my request caused. I now know that by not leaving the subject alone I cut him deep again. I couldn't let the notion of being with Tim go no matter how much damage it caused to Craig. Finally, I got what I wanted. A chance to talk with Tim on the phone. And, we clicked.

So, on a hot July 31, my first date with Tim was in his dorm room watching a re-run, Ken Olin-directed film Doing Time on Maple Drive starring William McNamara as a young man coming to terms with being gay. Craig watched it with us and, in front of him, Tim and I held each other close. We were together for four months—my longest relationship ever. When he and I split after Thanksgiving that year, we drifted apart. Despite the fact that Tim and I don't get to talk very often, I still hold him very

dear to my heart. Just as I do Craig.

It has always been hard for me to forgive myself. I'm not sure I am ready to do so with this particular case. Granted, time softens memories—even bad ones. I'm not sure why Craig forgave me for all of this hell I put him through. I know that even after he showed such great support of our relationship during that TV-movie date, he and Tim had problems in their friendship. It kills me to know that I almost ended a friendship that began two years prior when two freshmen met and, daily helped each other through the harshness of being gay on a conservative campus. I sought love at any cost and it resulted in the most unloving thing I have ever done.

Craig wrote this to me last month, "I just wanted to say that I truly value the friendship that I have with you. Your writings are inspiring. You are one of the most beautiful people on the planet. I wish everyone was as caring, thought-provoking, and tasteful. I am glad that I had the opportunity to date you at one point in our lives. You have touched me in many ways."

Craig, I'm going to try to live up to these words. Thank you for still believing in me. Maybe through some of the trauma I caused I also managed to sift in a little heart. It's hard for me to imagine that I did.

People make mistakes and, if they are lucky, can atone for them. Sometimes life does not allow you to. Did Cassius and Brutus make a mistake? History will never know what would have happened if Caesar hadn't been put to death that fateful March 15. My story is more than a lesson to be shared or a warning to be heeded. It is a call to action for each of us. As a snapshot of a broader gay lifestyle that has become all too common, I ask: Is it better to blindly accept the damaging behaviors in our community because "It's just the way it is," or is it more wise to start setting a new standard for all of our relationships? I was the lucky one. I got to keep both Tim and Craig in my life after this mess. More importantly, they found a way to keep each other. Please take an inventory of your values before you act irresponsibly. You will save yourself a life-changing regret.

april 23, 1999

Arriving home from running errands and finding a voicemail from my Mom wishing me happy birthday made me smile. Having previously decided to spend the day all by myself, it was good to hear her voice. I am one of those people who guards their birthday pretty close. My family always remembers

and my other family, work, never forgets either. My third and fourth families, gay friends and PFLAG friends, know about the birthday but many tire of hearing me lament about how old I am getting to the point that today is truly no different from any other since I am constantly aging in their ears.

My birthday surprise this year was a subtle, yet significant redefinition of the role I have played in my many families. Surprising, because I thought I had this figured out. The simple spark that started me thinking was the realization that even without children, I am a father. I assume that role in so many of the things I do: work relationships, friendships, even within my own family to some degree. Those who know me may not at all be shocked by this view, but it hit me from out of the blue today.

Forever, it seems, I perceived myself to be the “big brother” in my relationships. The guy who looks out for his younger brothers. In real life I have no sisters, so the women in my life have always been “the women.” This is where I should have realized that I am a father and not a brother. Without intending to sound sexist, I feel most good fathers have strong women in their lives, because they help men reach beyond their maleness to a place where children can prosper. Still, this is not where my realization came from. Instead, it flashed at me when I combined two seemingly unrelated facts. First, I am a loner who values this above almost everything and, second, I am the head of many households without really being an emotional part of any of them. I stoically father from a distance. It occurs to me that this is a typical, American father pattern.

With a new perspective, comes a new look at responsibilities. Am I really the dysfunctional father as alluded to? How would I know? If I look to my own Dad as a point of comparison, I see a reflection. Even though he was a father long before me, he looks pretty much like I do. Dad traveled for a living and was absent from the home more than he was there...at least between September and May when school was in session. Being the self-sufficient boy back then, I didn't need a daily Dad. In fact, he could have been gone more and I would have liked it—for no other reason than I was the little man of the house while he was away.

My real brother turns 30 in 18 days and I expect that sometime before he reaches my age today, he will be a father himself. Of all the Farmer men throughout our genealogical history, he is the best prepared for that role. In my pseudo-father role, I have always been there for those who need me. Having the wherewithal to answer those needs is my gift. Joe Farmer has a better one: he reaches out. Every pore of his body is directed toward the anticipation of need. Furthermore, he is receptive to

someone else giving to his needs which fully completes the cycle of love necessary for any family. I am appallingly selfish this way. I live my life day-to-day not wanting to be encumbered by attentiveness. I enjoy accolades as much as the next person, but I have to be absolute in-and-of my own being.

Discovering my father-like resemblance is revealing in other ways. I couldn't have lived with my brother for 17 years at home and then for another 9 in our apartment if I had simply acted as the older brother. When I tell people that Joe and I lived together all those adult years, it almost never fails that the return response is "I could never have done that with my sibling." Thus, it stands to reason that my controlling selfishness and his openness made a comfortable synergy that neither one of us understood nor cared to question. I am so happy that he was born with the right formula to actually raise a child. My blueprint will hopefully make me a good uncle.

Dissecting into my core even further, I wonder where in my past I began to subjugate my own need for outside "help." Why did I begin to selfishly protect my own territory? Looking back, this may have been seeded those thirty long years ago when Joe was born. No longer the only child, I resisted sharing everything with him. I put aside lots of space for myself. Perhaps this is what happens when a husband must share his wife with a newborn. Those men who can apportion are probably more present in the lives of everyone in their family. My proclivity for space grew when I felt hints of "the knowing" that comes long before a child understands he is gay. It is a protection from the harsh world that I will not give up. Curiously, this huge pocket I use to buffer invasions paves the way for me to spill open my life when I write. Who else would put into words the inside workings of their head and then share it with everyone...including strangers? Then again, and be honest here, who among you hasn't asked yourself whether you really know me? I'm certain even my immediate family has speculated on this more than once, so you aren't alone. I'm always the shadow and never the man.

In the end, of course, my undoing will come from my distant fatherhood persona. The appearing cracks have already caused much of my gay social life to seep away. Anymore, nearly 100% of the free-time attention I devote to others goes to my two closest friends who don't see me as their father. That, alone, makes them perfect in my eyes, but true equals as they are, I still keep them at arm's length. I work everyone else in when I can or when I feel like it. It sounds so rude to put it that way, but this fact about me can be summarized as rude, so I call the kettle black. My last act on this planet will be to die alone and you now know that this will be the truth no matter how many people

happen to be surrounding me at that moment.

Meanwhile, I live. And, I have work to do even within my own limitations. I was born in the Chinese Year of the Hare which we celebrate again this year. Having lived by rote through three complete cycles of the Chinese astrological calendar, it will be challenging to alter course now. My philanthropic tendencies, although still in “remote” mode, are growing. Unless disease or the ever-increasing violence of the world claims me early, I feel I may contribute more to my many families in the next 12 years than what I have mustered in the past 36. As I age, I think I will progress in my fatherhood—if only because I know my Dad becomes a better father with each passing day. I’m sure he shares my criticism that Dr. Benjamin Spock left blank all of the chapters that would have helped us master some of this before now. Don’t expect the perfect book from us either. The author you will want to read is Mr. Joseph Jack Farmer in about 20 years. Guaranteed.

april 24, 1999

We all learned how to write an essay sometime during our schooling. I had many English teachers who taught this subject matter and each of them would now be shocked at how many proper techniques I have discarded along the way. But, that’s me—the rulebreaker. I don’t like convention, especially when it suits me not to like it.

The most important sentence in every essay is supposed to be the thesis statement. From there you can build a case by documenting evidence and supporting what you think. My essays, of course, bend this little rule until it is a twisted mess. Through my writing you invariably will discover that sometimes I make several thesis statements, I will occasionally make the statement at the end, often in the middle...once in awhile I leave it out altogether. I call many of my “stories” essays. It is my work so I suppose I can do what I want, but today I will try to conform. I will even announce my thesis statement (which of course you are never supposed to do, so again I am being me). The thesis of this essay is: Gay men should be put to death on their 40th birthday.

No, this essay is not a rip-off of the plot from Logan’s Run or any number of other science fiction explorations into population control. Yes, this essay is a non-fictional exploration into some thoughts of an aging gay man. We know there are those out there who would like to see gays systematically exterminated, but our country won’t even let someone who is dying be put to death

(see Jack Kervorkian). Behind my thesis is a dark reality that few of us gay men willingly admit. Whether you are straight or gay, I ask that you not so readily dismiss this essay as a complete folly. There is dark truth here. Think about it, and then reject it.

It is no accident that this theme follows my birthday by one day. I decided, against my original plan, to venture out last night and an event at the local gay dance club led me to see things just as they are; something my Buddhism hobby stresses but I often forget. My past karma caught up with me in a way that I learned a lesson that staying home would have denied. To recap: My friend Patrick argued effectively to get me out of the apartment. He generously picked me up and drove me to the Tornado Club. I visited with many friends and met some new people. I was also on a minor mission to find out who sang a club mix I wanted to eventually purchase on CD. All-in-all I was doing okay until I forgot one little thing: Dr. Jeckyl shouldn't transform.

In my younger days, I was a snob at gay clubs. I was pretty normal outside of the gay scene, but put me into a place where I could be seen as a sexual object and suddenly Mr. Hyde would show up. One foot inside any bar would cause me to become very aloof. I wanted the other guys to notice me...to envy me because I was young and could wear cute clothes that showed off how slim I had become once I started paying attention to my body. Moving away from home and coming out of the closet gave me new energy to remodel myself into a more physically attractive package than I ever was in high school. Of course this went to my head. I constantly tried to impress on the other men that I was "it." Few were fooled because I always went home alone. Most would snicker and tell their friends I was "that virgin boy" who had never had anal sex. There is a gay pecking order and even if the outside world puts gays down collectively, you better be at the top of your game within the culture or you get mowed over even worse. Given the chance, there are few things in my past life that I would change. Dropping that 1980's conceited façade would be one of them.

So, there I was last night, changing back into my former, smug self. One of the new men I met, Erick, had brought his digital camera (he apparently goes everywhere with it) and was using it's tiny viewscreen to show off the many pictures he had snapped. He paused on the photo of a very cute guy whom I decided I must meet. At least two people had already expressed shock that I wasn't in my twenties, so why not believe the hype? I would introduce myself and ask this guy out. It helped when Erick mentioned that the guy in the photo "said I was cute too," before dashing away to summon my object from the dance floor. Sure enough, not two minutes later the guy from the image was walking by and joining a little entourage of blond boys admiring

each other's tans and muscles. In the meantime, I had become engaged in a new conversation and wanted to finish it, but while talking I kept close tabs on what was happening. Soon, all five of the groupies turned to look at me. I took this as a good sign. Gay men are not at all subtle when it comes to checking out other men and then immediately gossiping about them. Besides, they were LOOKING at me and I felt transported back in time. This was my cue to go say hello. I broke away from my conversation and walked over to him. Seconds before I got there he acquired the digital camera and began taking a picture of the blonds. It took him forever and I just stood there while the others stared at me like some unwelcome interloper. Little did I know, I was exactly that—unwelcome. I eventually managed to shake the guy's hand but he refused to make eye contact with me. After letting go, he turned away and I just stood there. One of the blond guys must have felt a little awkward because he piped up, "Let's all go dance," then proceeded to stay seated as if he, in reality, had just said "Let's just sit here!"

I have been rejected before, but this was different. I was rejected, not just because I'm older and less desirable. Instead, I was being rejected because I tried to introduce myself to myself. Somewhere in time, I blinked, and now I'm the one who stares longingly out onto the dance floor at the cute Jim Farmers who are unattainable—a deserved twist of fate. While this may elicit a giggle and a back slapping "Aw, come on" response, I am not laughing. Because, you see, gay men ARE put to death at 40—even 36.

I don't know where we gay men learn to be youth-obsessed or why we prolong our obsession when it is obvious that our advances are soundly rebuffed with finality. Looks matter to me and I feel ashamed to admit this. It means I put a precondition on love. More than ever before, I feel ready to finish out my life alone. Just yesterday, before the club, I wrote of how my loner personality sustains the singularity I have forged for myself. Clearly, I lied because the veiled exception was that if some cute guy turned my head, I would reconsider. I made two mistakes last night. One was forgetting why I was out in the first place—to enjoy my birthday. The other was forgetting that age matters just as much to me as it does to the young gay men of today.

At this point I recognize that I am unable to justify my original thesis. The yin and yang of life serves to balance nature without artificial intervention. Young men know how to deal with trolling older men. Older men know better, but we still try to touch the hot burner longing for a different result. I'm satisfied that I have made enough points on this assignment to receive a passing grade. Any red marks I get will serve to add color to the pages.

The final spin on this composition is that I can still make fun of myself. It hurts, but I can do it. A day removed from my birthday, I can go forward with some new experience. I will finally begin to model decent behavior—no more Mr. Hyde. I will continue to appreciate youthful beauty as a fan. I recognize that anything more is plainly harassment. Happily, I will discard the bitter queen cliché of moaning about age since I am ultimately a loner. What is there to whine about if I finally accept this? Most importantly, I am grateful that I am not 15 again; trying to dream up a topic for an essay assignment which is due tomorrow.

april 29, 1999

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

It scares me more that we would rather deny reality before [*Violence couldn't happen here*] and after [*Columbine shouldn't have happened*] a horrific event than face the fact that it can and will happen again. The scapegoat cannot solely be the usual suspects: Violence on television and the availability of guns. The real underpinning is the human flaw that perpetuates a caste system in everything we do. We reek of it. Another young man, circa 1981-84, may have heard the same call of the dark that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold did a long time before they ever held a gun in their hand. This dim song is closer than you think. Look inside yourself as I take you inside of me.

Beginning late in high school and then continuing into college, I began to notice how different I was on a daily basis. I felt odd all the time. I hadn't found any niche to fit into. Throughout most of high school, I had taken a lot of pride in the work I did. I was a journalist for the school paper and worked as a paper carrier for the Loveland Daily Reporter Herald. Still, I was empty. When I graduated to college, I had the typical "You aren't in high school anymore" blues, but layered on top of this was a lot more than what other freshman faced. The first outward symptom appeared the summer after high school. I quit my job at the campus bookstore after one week—I hated the heavy lifting and the macho posturing. I felt lost and for the longest time afterward I wasn't able to find any work that made me feel like a contributor. I didn't know where to start and one question kept nagging at me: Who would have me?.

I continued to feel unsettled into my sophomore year. This

is about the time I began to listen to heavy metal music. The pounding beats and raucous lyrics suited me. AC/DC and Def Leppard quickly became my favorite bands. By then, Stephen King had also captured my attention and I began reading many of his books in quick succession; frequently neglecting homework to do so. Often, to quell my own fears, I would walk assertively to class on campus imagining that the heart of every person I passed was gripped in freezing terror—just like the evil Randall Flagg from The Stand. I was blackened inside and it seemed as if I was the only one alive who felt so exiled.

Eventually being able to attach the word “gay” to my estrangement and finding others who were like me helped heal much of this dark side. To this day, I still appreciate hard rock and I remain a King fan. Both are memoirs of how far I have come. Not once during my outcast phase did I ever consider hurting others or myself. Somehow, my soul was strong and I knew the answers would come.

I’m grateful to be a survivor, but I’m obviously not the best role model. My wish is that young people would, instead, follow the examples set by my two high school aged friends. Their courage surpasses anything I’ve ever summoned. Jed is a senior in Florida who suffers daily the taunts and threats thrown at him by thoughtless peers. He is blessed to have a heart big enough to encircle their hurtful words and use them to make himself a stronger and better person. Behroz, a senior here in Fort Collins, copes with similar, daily ridicule in his own loving way. Each is sensitive and beautiful beyond description. Amazingly, their commitment to school and citizenship grows stronger every day, despite this Hell. I question what warrants others to act against them so cruelly. We have seen what happens when young adults can’t properly assimilate the hate. Couldn’t and shouldn’t—we still don’t get it.

It’s unlikely the two Littleton men were gay. Nevertheless, they were cast out and neither found a healing path. I am sad that someone didn’t heed the warning signals before innocent children died. But second-guessing won’t bring their victims back. The two boys who turned killer found solace in each other. Whatever their commonalties were, they probably extended their lives longer than if they hadn’t met. It would have been tragic enough had their mutual suicide pact simply included themselves.

I don’t know what drove them toward April 20, 1999. With so many ways to feel alienated in today’s culture, it is pointless to speculate. No one will ever know and rather than casting steely eyes on their actions, we are better served by turning our gaze inward. Difficult as it may be, can we see that the most frightening aspect of the shootings may not have been the

event itself? In the hidden recesses of our mind dare we ask how much we contributed to their breaking point? I'm curious how adults who were cliquish in high school are reacting to Columbine. If you were "in," it is probably to this day hard to understand the "outs." Every effort was made not to understand them. They weren't important and never will be. Someone or someones must be at the low end of the totem—it's how things work. Having been there and, because our society as a whole remains intolerant, having stayed there—it is not so difficult for me to see how one or two individuals might snap and do terrible harm. It can happen and does.

How long before we are able to wake up and read the morning newspaper without flinching? The answer is simple, but not easy. Only when each of us realizes that the monsters of the world aren't someone else—that they aren't two boys who went on a rampage—will we step into a brighter world. You and I are the demons. Inside each of us is a capacity to do equal harm without weapons. Every knife we drive home with our voice today is fuel for tragedy tomorrow. I am encouraged that some students in Colorado schools are taking vows and signing pacts to protect their peers; to not judge them or shove them aside as if they were non-people. Ultimately, the contemporaries of outcasts must make the difference.

Wear your blue Columbine ribbons over your heart and really feel the pain of losing 13 children to murder and then remember forever that the other two were lost long before Hitler's birthday. If Columbine is a lesson, then let's learn to rid ourselves of intolerance. Killing it is the only violence any child should ever witness.

may 2, 1999

One of my favorite places to rummage when I was a kid was the hallway coat closet. Besides the jackets and boots and board games stuffed inside, there was a boxy, leather carry case filled with my Mom and Dad's vinyl record albums. Granted, most kids scoff and snicker at their parents taste in music, but I was somehow drawn to it. Nat King Cole's soothing delivery was much preferred over the squawking voice of Big Bird on the Sesame Street records that were housed in the same place. Bert Kaempfert, Jim Reeves and Eddy Arnold also got lots of disc time on our enormous stereo. I think, though, Floyd Cramer was my favorite. I'm reminded of him today as I look back at February 14 this year. One of his tunes plays in my mind. Possibly it's because the last Valentines Day of the century brought me my "Last Date."

It is fitting to end my romantic inclinations on a day that I had always fantasized would someday be special. There I would be, sharing the day with a cute boyfriend who would get all wrapped up in the moment of Cupid and flowers and chocolate. I have been lucky enough to have two prior Valentine memories. One year, my friend Joe in Cheyenne helped by arranging for me to jump out of his closet with balloons scaring my friend Kirt half to death. Another year, Steve drove through a raging snow and ice storm on I-25 from Denver just to be with me on the 14th. Chocolates and dinner were involved that day. Neither Kirt nor Steve had ascended to boyfriend status and this makes the memories of those days different from what my heart wanted to experience.

This year was no different—no boyfriend on the horizon as a pre-Valentines party rolled around on Saturday the 13th. I didn't perceive myself to even be in the mood to meet a guy. I just wanted to enjoy time with friends whom I hadn't seen for awhile. And, I did. And, I met Jeremy. We huddled in the kitchenette of the clubhouse party room and talked about where we had been, where we thought we were going and everything in between. We would not be separated. Even at party's end, we helped Allen, the host, clean up and take stuff back to his apartment. Once this chore was completed, we still lagged behind for more conversation. Only 3:00 a.m. could finally split us and not for long either. I was driving back to Denver on Sunday to have my first date in a year...and it was The Day.

Because I am a romantic, I could tell you the progression of our day and it would sound very much like another day I once told you the story of. I would even venture to say that this was the second most romantic day of my life. Since this was our first date, there were no Cupids nor flowers nor chocolates. We went to the mall and then hung out at a coffee shop before deciding a movie was in order. While waiting for showtime, I got to meet his new roommate. She recommended The Hornet as the restaurant of choice for dinner and so we went. Soon thereafter, we were sitting and watching blue-haired Ryan Phillippe in Playing By Heart. A full day of simple togetherness—the best kind. Just like August 7, 1993, the day ended with a beautiful kiss. Now, as then, that kiss punctuated the end. It was the last time I saw Jeremy, because a phone call or two later the boy disappeared forever. If I hadn't kept the ticket stubs, I might wonder if had participated in the day's events at all.

This was my last date. Not because I am tired or bitter or frustrated beyond some imaginary breaking point, but because I retain the freedom of choice in making the decision. Let's face it, if I look inside (and if I am truly honest), my difficulty in

finding a mate has always been centered in my ego. I wanted to choose. I had to be the knight in white swooping in to woo the lonely man into my romantic universe. I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times that a guy approached me. You could even chop a few fingers off and still be ahead. Much of my identity has been centered in this not-so-subtle desire to control. Finally, life's lesson that you cannot manufacture love has sunk in. I prefer to leave the dating scene gracefully rather than be dragged from it as I grow less attractive.

Understandably, this will leave me with a cavity that won't be filled with silver. Everything I have written before now explains why. I can offer no more explanation. I've recently thought long and hard about my identity. Who is the Jim Farmer that others identify with and is this the same person I am to myself? I fear that I'm known as the gay guy who can't find or keep a relationship. Ironically the activist rallying call, "Why should it matter who I choose to love?" has almost never applied to me. In all the years I have been out, there have been more hours spent out of love than in. Does this mean I am not gay? Can someone be gay simply by saying that he is? Therein lies the educational challenge I will continue to tackle in the coming years. I want to demonstrate that love is more than a primary relationship and gay is more than intercourse between same-sex partners.

Jeremy, if you ever happen across these words, I hope you are well. You should know that in my mind I created theories as to why you vanished. The one that made me feel best had you returning to Sacramento; happily reuniting with your ex-boyfriend. THAT would have been romantic. Especially, if dating me helped you see whom you truly belonged with. This thought faded quickly because I somehow doubted our brief passing caused such a reversal. Life doesn't seem to work that way. Nevertheless, I will hold dear the special memories of our day together—I am still your friend wherever you are.

Three years before I was born, "Last Date" went to #3 on the American pop charts. Floyd Cramer was just 27 years old. I'm sure some variety reporter asked him what the title meant. Hopefully he didn't answer. For me, it's sufficient that it remains a haunting instrumental that tips a hat to romance while laying it to rest.

june 20, 1999

[a]

"People are gay because it is cool to be gay nowadays."

Have you heard this? As gay life is mainstreamed into our apple pie society we hear the inevitable denial that it is real. It appears to some as a fad. We all love the newest “thing.” What happens when the fad is over? The media is fickle and interest in all things gay will decline with time.

It concerns me that people think being gay is a fly-by-night whim; something you choose to put on in the morning—like bellbottoms. In the 1970’s it was unheard of to be out unless you lived in large population centers such as New York, Los Angeles or San Francisco. In the 80’s only the older gays would dare leave the closet. Now in the 1990’s the prevailing group of out gays are in their teens and twenties, and they are coming out in Smalltown, Middle America. The media is, to a great degree, on our side right now. Exposure is everywhere. Seemingly every television sitcom has a gay character and many of the drama programs do too. Indie films with gay subject matter are prevalent. The word gay is no longer whispered. Time has made it easier to be oneself. Will this continue?

Being gay is not a choice, but you would never know it from the scant information provided. Gay pride has degraded to a big party instead of an opportunity to educate. Hollywood continues to portray us superficially but we giggle along with the rest of the country. Gay-LITE is easier to stomach I suppose. When seriousness is required, we have to be dying of AIDS to get screen time. On the day the fad ends, I’m not sure whether mainstream society will know who we are. Even worse, will we? Our “gay is beautiful and it’s here to stay” attitude must gain some depth or there will be serious egg on our face when we try to explain to the next generation what happened when the bottom fell out.

Somehow the hype has made it easier for us to escape our true lives. You may find the gay-is-cool fad to be comfortable. It was for me at first, but now I’m tired of others feeding from a generic image. In the 70’s a boy was supposed to have long hair—it was the fad. I had a crewcut because it was comfortable for me. While I am not uncomfortable being gay, there is some serious discomfort in my gay being. Just like twenty years ago, I’m not synchronized. Today, any hair length is acceptable. Will it take two decades for all shades of gay to fit in?

Somewhere in the county landfill, the orange shag carpet that adorned my bedroom in the 1970’s is rotting. That’s what happens to fads. When the Gay 90’s end, don’t get caught with your polyester pants down. You might be cast out of your own party.

[b]

People are worried about me. Dark has rolled into my essays and I'm losing my gay religion. Slowly, I've stripped the love from it. I'm in a rocky transition and I understand how non-inspirational I have been of late. I fear what newly-out people may be surmising from my current tone. I once promised to show you all of me, even the ugly. I've been doing that. With my current complexion, I revisited the experience of coming out.

The topic of coming out recurs often in my writing. It stands as the Holy choice in sexual orientation—not if you are gay but how are you going to be gay. For me, overwhelming desires for romance and to be loved completely by another man became priority. I knew that opportunity required exposure. I came out for love. From that solitary reason, the frustrations of repeated heartbreak have pressed me toward a different dimension of being out. I hardly realized it was happening.

Looking back, I regret trying to beckon love while still in the closet. It wasn't fair to expect another man to love me if I wasn't willing to be open and honest in all facets of my life. Instead, I would often hold out my heart without putting much soul behind it. Subconsciously I placed limits on love. If it came to choosing between being openly gay or keeping a partner, the partner would surely lose. I would meet a nice guy yet not have much to offer him beyond a dating friendship. True, I came out over time, but with each gain I still lost ground. The more comfortable I got with myself, the less comfortable I became with sharing my inner intimacy.

After one has been out for awhile, reasons begin to gel for coming out to friends or relatives who aren't gay. Next, more rationale develops and you dare to be just a tad more open—even to strangers. In fact, you start seeking opportunities to come out. It mimics an addiction because there is a high each time you speak the words "I am gay." Eventually coming out peaks and then diminishes. At some point a gay man is no longer in control of the closet. He can be outed to anyone by anyone. There is an infinite, logarithmic multiplier in effect. I no longer know who knows from who doesn't. Just as you cannot tell who is gay by their appearance, neither can I distinguish who is aware of my gayness by theirs. I define this as being an Outsider.

Giving up the freedom to choose who knows about me was a step toward a different coming out. I think the concern people have about me comes from my giving up the outcome of love. I replaced that coming out goal with a different, more universal objective. More visibility might significantly change the texture

of our surroundings. I wanted to build upon my Outsider status. I could be a mentor for those who struggle with being gay; a role model for those who believe it is sinful. Unfortunately, I seem to be a little late in making up my mind.

Suddenly, being gay is a novelty. For those not directly experiencing the Hell of coming out, gay culture has taken on a frivolity that cannot be penetrated by someone who wants to be serious about it. Some men aren't even bothering with coming out at all. Sex is plentiful and with access as close as the nearest internet connection, who needs to profess being gay anymore?

I started noticing these cynical trends in myself soon after I failed, twice, to get published in the local newspaper. I thought what I had to say was important and I believed it could make a difference. I'm beginning to understand that the gay community is basking in the glow of exposure while, simultaneously, the straight community is growing ever more saturated with gay publicity. On a macro level, gay is no longer shocking. At the micro level, no one expects it to be in their family or workplace or community. It only happens somewhere else. This haze blankets everything and is dulling our senses to what is important. Is it progress when gay life is an "okay" thing that has its place, but let's not ever discuss it at the dinner table?

I'm glad I became an Outsider, but I really didn't expect to be looking in on the gay community as well. I'm in limbo. Whatever happens from here, it is better than reversing my momentum. I might not be significant to one special person and I might not be significant to everyone, but at least I can be significant to a few. That alone is better than going back in the closet.

I am gay and always will be, but is there more to it? During this time ahead, floating in my new blankness, I will try to share more of myself and connect with even more fellow humans. Perhaps I will break away toward a third stage of coming out—one that heals. Neither love from a gay man nor significance in the minds of others are very good coming out-comes. It matters so very little whether anyone receives my offerings knowing I was the benefactor. I can just be without qualification.

I used to think only my Mom worried about me. I suppose it didn't occur to me that by exposing the more shadowy dimensions of myself, I might cause alarm. Life is so routine that we begin expecting from others that they remain unchanged from who we think they are at the point in time we stamp their personality on them. Be disappointed that I am not who I once was. Then, realize I'm moving on. This may not be my last overcast essay, but I promise not to linger in the Shakespeare-like

tragedy of it all. Mom may read this someday and I don't like it when she worries.

august 2, 1999

I know these feelings.

It's entirely possible that those are the four scariest combined words in the English language. For what follows this admission is often pain and anguish. "All good things must end," is a motto we self-fulfill repeatedly. Until, one day, here is the last place a youth wants to be because there are no more good things.

When a teen male takes his life, does even he, to the last second, really know why? It's naïve to think that there is a pat reason for such a final decision. Being gay in a world that doesn't accept you is a good place for someone to start believing they mean nothing. I've never met a young gay man who later took his life. I'm lucky, because I know it happens where I live. For a long time I've wanted to write something about gay teenage suicides, but what could I say?

I know these feelings.

None of us are immune from the moments of abject singularity. The times when nothing is level in an already twisting world. It must be irresistible when the absolute guarantee of death becomes the only shining star. I don't care what line must be crossed or what point marks the inability to return. I want to know why I can know these feelings yet be unable to prevent another death tomorrow or the day after. I want to be able to embrace someone who has lost his will and love him just as he is. How many men whose paths would have crossed mine failed to get to me? My loss is that of never knowing a door was shut.

How foreign we must be to our own selves to accept living in a society where the death of a boy down the street is just a headline. How simple it is to conjure up the excuse that he had problems. He copped out. We smugly go on living the lie that survival of the fittest is helped when the weak rid us of themselves.

I know these feelings.

Do you believe in gay? For one instant in time, can you leave your shell and see that the reality of life is far greater than you will ever be able to comprehend? For one second, can you see yourself as that young gay man? Would you kill yourself if this

image and truth were one in the same?

Life and death aren't so far apart that you don't have some say in both of them. To lose everything that is important to you all at once is a fear that you keep hidden deep beneath layers of guilt for having anything in the first place. It takes a hard look inside to see just how similar you are to that child of God who lost his faith by basing worth on the prevailing opinion of the populace. If gay is a choice, then you have no fear. If it isn't, then who is your God?

Righteousness is greed. To live in human form and Know The Only Way can be described simply as a miracle. May everyone bow to you. Do your children know you love them? Do your children know you love them even if they believe they are gay? One instant. One second. One chance to see the possibility that you weren't given all the answers in the Book.

You know these feelings.

Will you still bury your son?

august 27, 1999

David Dinwoodie
April 8, 1933
August 19, 1999

AFTER DAVID

So, here is death. Again.

When a storyteller passes, there is left a great void in the universe. I heard David's stories many times and, with each recitation, I saw deeper into his heart. I now wonder what stories I missed and will never get to hear.

I am thankful to have crossed David's path. My story of David began when I first attended a local Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays meeting in late 1996. I immediately fell in love with the group and David's magnetic presence was a primary factor for my return a month later. David's story was simple. His daughter was a blessing to him. From this, I learned that being an advocate for human rights requires only one element: Love.

about me. Especially since I had just shaved my head. David's acceptance was never less than absolute. Early the next year, David didn't hesitate to invite me onto the newly formed Board of Directors. Later, that summer, he wasn't the least bit discouraged when I met him for coffee to talk about some frustrations I had about where I was going within the group. I was questioning how well I fit on the board. David listened and appreciated my contribution without judgement. I stayed and less than seven months later, I began my first term as co-President of our chapter. David must have known that I would grow at my own pace and his gentle support helped me discover this myself.

I'll never know whether David purposefully showed me how to be more out. I am certain that you would not be reading this on my website without his being in my life. I saw courage in the way David lived his life and then found it in myself to share these words to the world. After David, I knew the way. I will do my best to pass along his gift by taking his lead. I am gay and I can say it. So many of us still can't and that is wrong. David's work, my work, our work must continue.

David, thank you for being a friend. I will miss being able to turn to you and hear your reassurance, your determination, your love. I will keep your story, knowing it will resonate for me and through me forever.

So, here is life. Again.

When we think of you David, there will be a surety that the last great man for our cause has been lost. And, he has. But, you were also our last great teacher. And, you taught us well. We will be okay.

I'll miss you David. Goodbye, for now.

september 11, 1999

Sometimes the mirrors in our lives aren't shiny pieces of glass. Today, someone I have never met reflected my image back at me. It gave me pause.

The Internet has opened so many doors, yet I often wonder how many it slams shut. I got a glimpse when Jason, a young man I chat with online, informed me that he is afraid to meet me in person because I am out of the closet. In other words, I am too out to be seen with. Before you condemn this to being his

problem, let me say that I don't feel it can be attributed to him only. Our American society has taken some big strides on gay issues, but we are missing some big marks.

We're at the end of the Millennium. I'm at the end of my rope...are you?

I may actually be dangling from the ends of two ropes. Given the scenario above, I am angry that older gay men are still modeling closeted behavior. The same chat room that I met Jason in perpetually contains at least one man who is married and looking for sex on the side. Still others are quick to point out that their sexuality is none of anyone else's business. This excuse apparently permits them to be closet sluts without contributing anything to the rest of us who put ourselves in the line of fire every day. I can't say it enough: being gay and being homosexual are two different things. The latter is a subset of the former. As long as those among us (who are old enough to know better) emulate the behavior of the homosexual, then we are doomed to make any progress. You and I are whole humans. Being gay is not a subset of our humanity—it is our humanity.

When it comes to being out, age makes a difference because security should evolve through a man's life. If you are tired of being ridiculed for being a schoolgirl, take inventory and ask why. I admit, it took me until my thirties to overcome the fear of being openly gay. I don't expect someone in their teens or twenties to be marching in parades and opening themselves up to hate. If they choose to do so, then they have my utmost admiration and support. We who are older should be paving the way and we're doing a lousy job. We celebrated Stonewall's anniversary this year, but are we living up to what that event stood for? Personally, I have maybe one or two older men I can consider heroes for the work they do for other gays. I have handfuls of young male friends who are heroic in my eyes, because they are more out than I am right now. That's a shabby statistic. Especially when along comes one young man who desperately needs a friend and I become a poor choice because of the bad, closeted examples that abound. Is it any wonder why I am mad?

I'm inching toward the end of a different rope as well. This represents another poor archetype for all of our youth today and it is much more difficult to tackle since it truly involves everyone, not just gays.

Why do we teach our kids to be selfish? Oh sure, "Johnny has a sister and they share." Great answer if you are talking about toys. We do not belong to a sharing culture. A typical, everyday event witnessed at my health club rang this loud and clear.

There is a Plexiglas partition between the weight room and the cardiovascular equipment where I work out. This particular morning a woman was burning calories on the stair machine when something subtle happened. I almost didn't notice. Her boyfriend came over and tapped on the see-through barrier to get her attention and then he waved at her. She smiled and gestured back and that was it. A cute affection shared between two people in love. Neither one had to think about what they were doing. It just happened. Sure, the same affection could have been shared between two men, but at what cost? Maybe no price would be paid at all, but the difference is that a gay man would have to think about his action beforehand. No mindless displays of devotion are permitted when we are in love.

I've been pushed toward the end of the rope by the blatant discrimination: The homophobia, the intolerance, the hazing and bashing, the religious rhetoric, the unequal rights. I'm depressed that I am being pushed off the end by the little divisions that come when people are unwilling to share in diversity. If, right now, one more...two more straight men would give up the notion that their masculinity is not at risk by allowing their brothers to love someone of the same sex, and to show it in public, then the sun can really begin to shine on a new day. When a society forces someone to think about how he is going to love, no one wins.

I guess the invisible minority needs to be a bit more visible before we can really celebrate a new beginning. It's going to take more of us to rip off the shrink-wrap that squeezes tiny minds. The "me" generations are over for you and I. We need to be gay. Say it and live it.

You know, not being one who was all that adept at trigonometry or geometry back in my school days, I think perhaps I have just stumbled upon the proof that I am not at the end of two ropes, but just one. It's the same topic. Being real. Gay or straight. Open your mind—it is the only way to be able to catch the rope being thrown. In the new Millennium things will only speed up and it's a long, long way to drop if you can't snare it.

december 25, 1999

Joy.

How many hours, days, years of our lives do we spend seeking this one emotion? Oh, how we cling when it appears—hoping it will last and last; knowing that it never does. I learned once that

joy should be experienced through the process of life and not sought as an outcome, for outcomes are rarely under our control. You may do everything right, yet the result may be less than the joy you expected.

If you believe that joy is derived only from hard work and good luck, then you will be scribbling down your New Millennium resolutions very soon. The goals you set will hopefully bring that elusive sentiment to you. I will forego the exercise because, this past year, for me, didn't work as I planned. Looking back, I realize that I played into the expectation trap. It took half the year before I broke out of this prison.

Going in, this was the year I was going to find love. Yes, love and the joy it brings was going to be the outcome in 1999. I had put in my time, 14 years without finding a lifetime relationship, and I was due. So what happened? Though hopeful, I was often closed to the idea of romantic love ever happening. And, in fact, it didn't happen. By the time I reached my birthday, the resolution was dead. Then, something happened this summer to remind me that it's hard not to be a participant in the process of your own life. Sometimes you can't love the way you want to; you love the way you are able.

My loving ability wasn't receiving much attention as spring turned into summer. It didn't help any that by June I was still in the midst of a personal inquisition. I reeled from the constant quizzing in my mind. Why is it that I cannot find love with one man? Why, on the rare occasion when I do meet a special person, must all good things come to an end? Why is all of this so easy for some, but not me? And on, and on. June came and went.

Perspective is a remarkable invention, if you can call it that. Perspective came back to me right after Independence Day. It was hot for the umpteenth day. I was at work. I opened the inbox to my personal email account. There it was.

The one man who most influenced my life this year had done so again simply by his name appearing on the "from" line of the email waiting to be read. I wrote about that first time in May: Jeremy was my last date. Jeremy, the perfect 22-year-old boy who made my Valentine's Day one to remember for all time. That was the end of the story as you know it. Here is the rest.

I stared at the screen in disbelief for some time before carefully opening and reading the message from Jeremy. Before he disappeared, Jeremy knew I was planning the gaywrites website and, precipitating this contact, had happened upon the last date essay. Surely he never expected to be the online subject of an

essay, but he affected me profoundly. I suppose it is unnerving to find your name sandwiched between someone else's personal thoughts. So, too, it was unexpected when Jeremy wrote to me on July 5th.

Jeremy asked if I remembered him and said he was sorry for leaving Colorado without notice. Then, he filled me in on what I had missed of his life the past few months, including that he now lives back home in Sacramento. I read his words over and over and they took me back to our date, when, in less than 24 February hours, I formed an unbreakable bond with a boy I had just met. Now, the bond has been renewed. His singular act of love redefined class to a new standard. This joy of reconnecting with a lost friend was indeed an outcome of his e-mail. But, even if Jeremy had never written, he would have stayed in my heart. For this is where real joy lives.

I immediately wrote back to Jeremy and we quickly renewed our friendship. We talk by phone every once in awhile and someday I hope to either visit him or catch up to him when he visits his nephews in Denver. In my reply to Jeremy, I thanked him for finding me and writing. A couple of things may have gone unsaid which I want to correct now.

Jeremy,
When your first sentence asked if I remembered you, a wave of emotions hit me with such a force I cannot describe. I was heartbroken that I would ever give an impression that I could forget you and, I was warmed by the courage you found in opening yourself to the possibility of being rebuffed by me. I would never reject you. Having you as one of my friends is joy itself. Thank you for your friendship and love. When I see you again, I owe you the biggest of hugs. I miss you lots.

My friendships work. Perhaps being gay is one of the reasons. If so, it is another blessing I am grateful for. My circle of friends is extraordinary and every one of them is uniquely real in a world that becomes less sincere every day. They face daily risks by being themselves in a society sometimes unyielding in desire for mass conformity. Putting your true self out to the world is a painfully scary event. From this root grow the men who make their way into my heart. They make the world bearable for me and I hope I do the same for them. From here on, I'll not overlook this special joy.

It is nearly 2000 and I've come full circle. I started the year writing of friendship and I return to that theme today. I think, maybe for the first time in my life, I have the right perspective on

love. Each hour, each day, each year...a lifetime of joy through fellowship. Let the word have new meaning for you today. No longer should you permit random circumstance to bring joy into your life. Know that it has been there all along.

copyright

All essays copyright © 2006-2007 by James Fred Farmer. All rights reserved.

No part of these essays may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system without written permission from the author: James Fred Farmer.

You are encouraged to share the website address with others and/or link to it from your website.